



Aylesbury Amnesty International Group

Monthly Group Meeting, 26th October 2016, 7.30pm

Friends Meeting House, 9 Rickfords Hill, Aylesbury, HP20 2RT

Present:

Carol Tarrant

Bob Corn

Fran Booth

Annelies Varsey

Sallyann Thilthorpe

David Barnard

Katherine Danflous

Henry Mayer-Gross

Apologies: Bronwen Lee, Jim Edwards

Carol welcomed everyone to the meeting – explaining that this evening's meeting was to be taken by David and Katherine, who have prepared a presentation surrounding the recently launched Amnesty International UK's Refugee Campaign 'People on the Move'.

1.0 Previous Minutes – Agreed.

2.0 Urgent Actions:

2.1 Letters had been prepared in support of the family of Emir-Usein Kuku (Crimea); the family of Aleksandr Polukhin (Russian Federation); and the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado (Colombia).

2.2 Everyone present signed the letters – Bob to post.

3.0 People on the Move:

David and Katherine gave a very rich presentation, which referred to the huge numbers of individuals globally who are being forced to flee from their homes – either internationally or within their home countries – mostly in connection with conflict, and the resultant displacement caused by destruction of their homes, or simply being forced to flee to avoid death, torture or imprisonment simply for being in a location which was being attacked in some way.

The basis of David and Katherine's talk is outlined in their 'Talk Plan', as follows:

Rich countries, poor welcome: This photo extract illustrates that most frequently, poorer countries are affording a welcome relatively to more refugees:

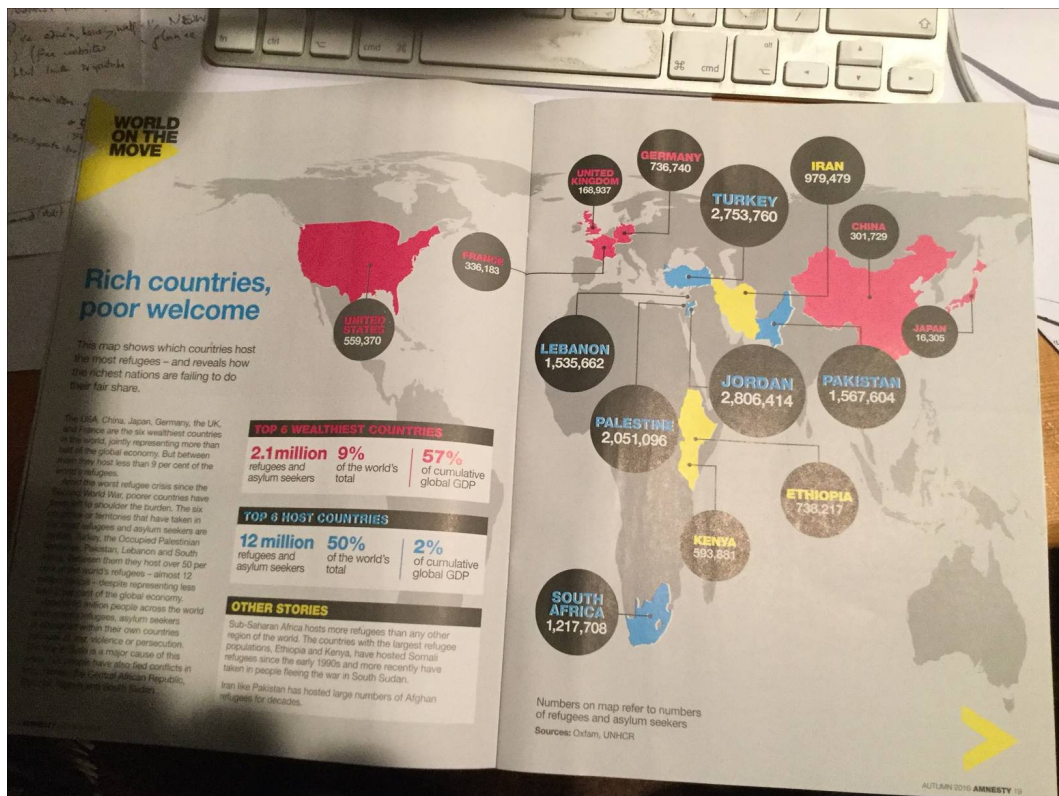
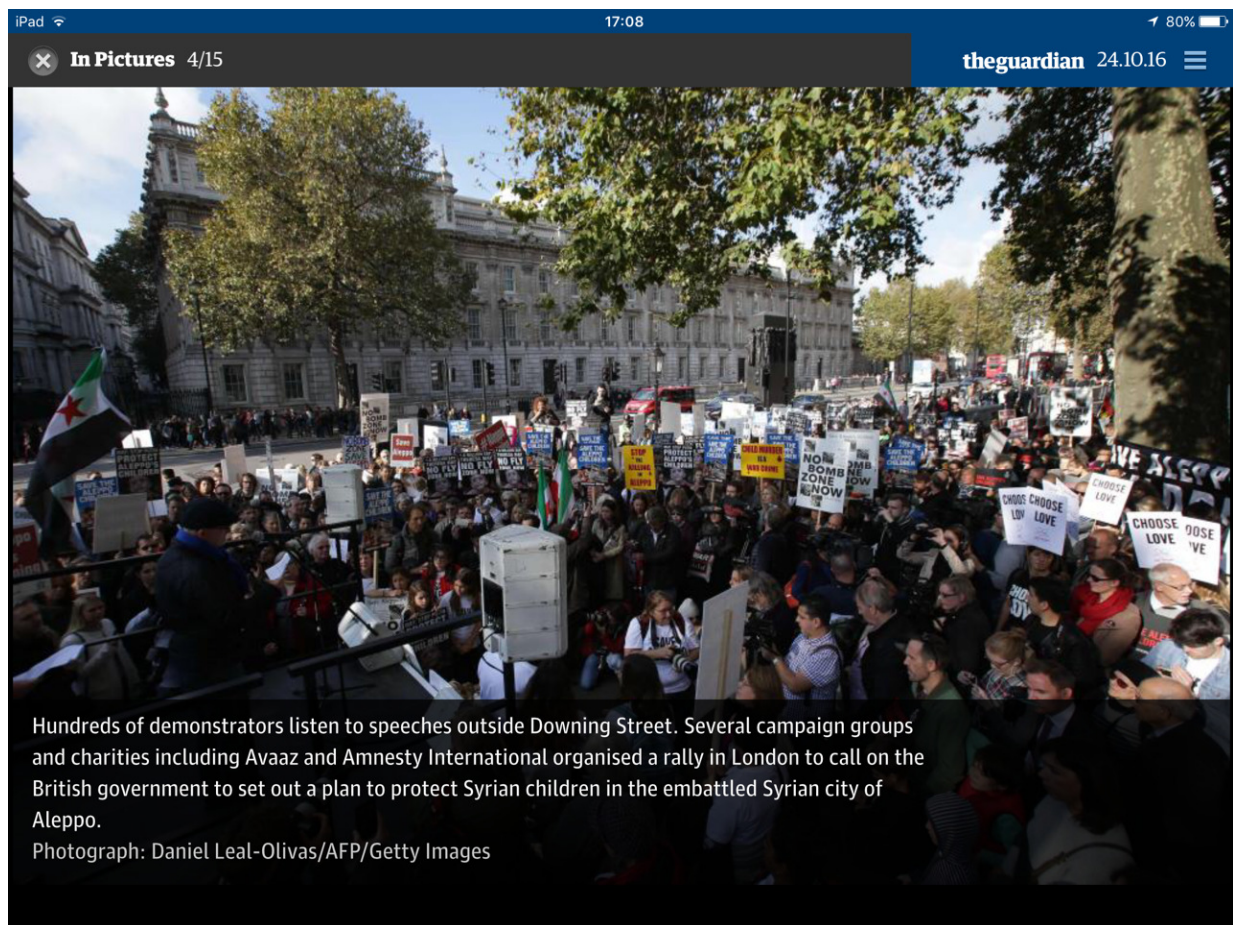


Photo of Downing Street demo: Illustrating that there is significant support to increase the welcome which the United Kingdom should be giving to refugees:



Whence & Whither: (please follow the hyperlinks where highlighted)

<http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations> (interactive map around the Mediterranean Sea)
& <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

<https://www.facebook.com/aylesburyrefugeecare/> - video from Scottish Ref.
<http://www.unhcr.org/uk/statistics/unhcrstats/576408cd7/unhcr-global-trends-2015.html>

- Global Trends <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RstxqdwFlo>

Some UK refugee organisations:

	Income	Expenditure	Staff	Volunteers	Object	Work With
National:						
British Refugee Council	£4,600,000	£5,500,000	68	300		
Refugee Action	£12,400,000	£12,700,000	183	?	Asylum Justice. End Asylum Seeker and Refugee Poverty	£11.6m from Home Office
Freedom from Torture (Medical.Foundation)	£8,000,000	£8,500,000	124	200		
Asylum Aid	£1,000,000	£888,000			Legal advice, lobbying and campaigning	
More local ones:						
Kent refugee aid	£256,000	£198,000				
Refugee aid Kingston	£296,000	£300,000				
Asylum Welcome (Oxfordshire)	£326,000	£269,000				Asylum Seekers & Refugees in Oxon

Spreadsheet of data from the above: Refugee Numbers:

Table 1

			displaced internally	now in	now in	now in	now in	now in	now in		
	from		in addition								
	Syria	4,794,613 refugees									
	Mali	234,814 refugees		Niger 60,792	Mauritania 41,798	Burkina Faso 32,224					
	Ivory Coast	-257,866 returnees!									
	Nigeria	170,234 refugees	2,093,030	Niger 88,668	Cameroon 73,649	Chad 7,917					
	Yemen	180,501 refugees		Oman 51,000	Saudi Arabia 39,880	Djibouti 36,162	Somalia 33,579	Sudan 6,581	Egypt 6,231	Eritrea 2,485	Tanzania 154
	Horn of Africa: Somali refugees	902,604 refugees		Kenya 334,197	Ethiopia 254,812	Yemen 254,294	Uganda 38,068	Djibouti 12,363			
	South Sudan	1,058,816									
	Burundi pre- influx	14,340									
	Burundi post influx	311,864		Tanzania 179,907	Rwanda 81,473	Uganda 29,845	D.R. Congo 29,639				
	D.R. Congo	474,435		Uganda 222,650	Rwanda 73,207	Tanzania 62,505	Burundi 54,932	Kenya 27,485	South Sudan 14,743	Congo (Brazzaville) 12,223
	Central African Rep.	453,271 refugees	384,884	Cameroon 259,145	D.R. Congo 96,079	Tchad 68,743	Congo (Brazzaville) 29,304				
	Total registered in Liberia	20,090									
	Total registered in Ethiopia	761,302									
	Sea arrivals 2016 Italy	156,632									
	Sea arrivals 2016 Greece	169,243									
	Sea arrivals 2016 Spain	4,971									
	Mediterranean sea arrivals 2016 TOTAL	327,846	refugees from	Syria 28%	Afghanistan 14%	Iraq 9%	Nigeria 8%	Eritrea 5%	Pakistan, Guinea, Gambia, Sudan, & others each 3%		
	Mediterranean dead/missing 2016	3,740									

Katherine - What it's really like! Katherine spoke movingly of her experiences as a translator within the refugee environment, also where she has assisted in translating for individuals who have sought asylum after torture.

A reading of 'Bloody Do-Gooder':

'Someone trying to do good has been left confused after his intentions were used as an insult online. Simon Williams expressed sympathy for the plight of immigrants fleeing Syria, offering the opinion that maybe the UK could take a few more in to alleviate some of the suffering.

However, Williams was repeatedly called a 'bloody do-gooder' by people who seem to think doing good is a bad thing. Williams told us, "They seem to be of the opinion that being a 'good' person is a 'bad' thing, at least from what I can tell.

"It's strange, because the more horrible you are to your fellow human beings, the more they seem to like it. As a test, I wrote 'send em all back where they came from!' and it got 253 likes in eleven minutes.

"If the comment thread is anything to go by its looking like the human race is now chock-full of arseholes who seem to revel in the misery of others simply because their own life isn't perfect."

However, Williams' stance was criticised online by Internet user Gary Watkins. He wrote, "You bloody do-gooder, acting like doing good things is a good thing. You probably want the Muslims to be treated like human beings and be given food and shelter. I bet you hate England and want all white people dead. Yes, you do, shut up!"

Auden's 'Refugee Blues', sung by Ted Slowik:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krubUqbYslc>

Say this city has ten million souls,
Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes:
Yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet there's no place for us.

Once we had a country and we thought it fair,
Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:
We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot go there now.

In the village churchyard there grows an old yew,
Every spring it blossoms anew:
Old passports can't do that, my dear, old passports can't do that.

The consul banged the table and said,
"If you've got no passport you're officially dead":
But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still alive.

Went to a committee; they offered me a chair;
Asked me politely to return next year:
But where shall we go to-day, my dear, but where shall we go to-day?

Came to a public meeting; the speaker got up and said;
"If we let them in, they will steal our daily bread":
He was talking of you and me, my dear, he was talking of you and me.

Thought I heard the thunder rumbling in the sky;
It was Hitler over Europe, saying, "They must die":
O we were in his mind, my dear, O we were in his mind.

Saw a poodle in a jacket fastened with a pin,
Saw a door opened and a cat let in:
But they weren't German Jews, my dear, but they weren't German Jews.

Went down the harbour and stood upon the quay,
Saw the fish swimming as if they were free:
Only ten feet away, my dear, only ten feet away.

Walked through a wood, saw the birds in the trees;
They had no politicians and sang at their ease:
They weren't the human race, my dear, they weren't the human race.

Dreamed I saw a building with a thousand floors,
A thousand windows and a thousand doors:
Not one of them was ours, my dear, not one of them was ours.

Stood on a great plain in the falling snow;
Ten thousand soldiers marched to and fro:
Looking for you and me, my dear, looking for you and me.

WH Auden

Katherine played a CD track: 'House with a Thousand Windows', written and performed by Romie Singh:

Just landed here in a very strange land,
Small bag in my hand,
Staring through the barriers,
People checking out who I am.
Feeling wet and cold, so alone,
Shivering to the bone.

I left the land I love in the grip of war
And I'm never going home no more.
I'm looking for a house with a thousand windows, thousand windows,
I'm looking for a house with a thousand windows, thousand windows,
With just one room I can call my own....

Whispers spread, rumours grow,
People fear what they don't know.
I left the land I love in the grip of war
And I'm never going home no more.
I'm looking for a house with a thousand windows, thousand windows,
I'm looking for a house with a thousand windows, thousand windows,
With just one room I can call my own....
The house with a thousand windows, it's my home.

Romie Singh

David displayed a slide which illustrated that there are 65.3million people world-wide who are displaced for a number of different reasons, 21.3million of whom are refugees, and 10million are stateless.

What should be done? Amnesty International UK has published a list of 'Eight ways to solve the crisis':

1. Opening up safe routes to sanctuary for refugees is one important solution. That means allowing people to reunite with their relatives, and giving refugees visas so they don't have to spend their life savings and risk drowning to reach safety.
2. It also means resettling all refugees who need it. Resettlement is a vital solution for the most vulnerable refugees – including torture survivors and people with serious medical problems.
Right now, 1.2 million people urgently need this lifeline.

Saving lives

3. World leaders also need to put saving lives first. No one should have to die crossing a border, and yet almost 7,000 people drowned in the Mediterranean alone in the two years since the first big shipwreck in October 2013.
Thousands of people fleeing persecution in Myanmar suffered for weeks on board boats while Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia bickered over who should help them in May 2015. States can stop this by investing in search and rescue operations and immediately helping people in distress.
4. And whether they travel by land or by sea, people fleeing persecution or wars should be allowed to cross borders, with or without travel documents. Pushing people back and putting up massive fences only forces them to take more dangerous routes to safety.

Stop trafficking and racism

5. All countries should investigate and prosecute trafficking gangs who exploit refugees and migrants, and put people's safety above all else. Survivors whom Amnesty met in Southeast Asia said traffickers killed people on board boats when their families couldn't pay ransoms. Others were thrown overboard and left to drown, or died from because there was no food and water.
6. Governments also need to stop blaming refugees and migrants for economic and social problems, and instead combat all kinds of xenophobia and racial discrimination. Doing otherwise is deeply unfair, stirs up tensions and fear of foreigners, and sometimes leads to violence – even death.
In Durban, South Africa, at least four people died, many were seriously injured, and over 1,000 mainly Burundian and Congolese refugees forced to flee after violence and looting broke out in April and May 2015.

Start funding 'broke' United Nations properly

7. "Financially broke" is how Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, described UN agencies in September 2015. Wealthy countries quite simply aren't keeping their high-profile promises to fund aid for refugees abroad.
For example, the UN has received less than half the funding it needs to support Syria's 4 million refugees. This is now forcing 80% of refugees living outside camps in Jordan to do dangerous, degrading jobs or send their children out to beg.
South Sudan's forgotten refugee crisis has been met with a pitiful 18% of the money needed for absolute basics like food and medicine.
People are dying while governments spend billions on border control. They urgently need to guarantee full funding to alleviate refugee crises worldwide.

Asylum is a human right

8. The world has a very short memory. In the aftermath of World War II, most countries agreed to protect refugees through the 1951 Refugee Convention, and through UN agencies like the UNHCR.
Barbed wire fences and chronic underfunding have left that vision of a better world in tatters. By ignoring the warning signs, world leaders have allowed a huge, global humanitarian crisis to unfold. Ultimately, it will be resolved by ending the conflicts and persecution that forced people to flee in the first place.
But no one knows when that will be. Meanwhile, we need radical solutions, visionary leadership and global co-operation on a scale not seen for 70 years. That involves setting up strong refugee systems: allowing people to apply for asylum, treating their refugee claims fairly, resettling the most vulnerable of all, and providing basics like education and healthcare.

None of these eight solutions are impossible to achieve, if politicians listen to the millions of people saying "I welcome refugees", and put solidarity and compassion above petty wrangling over who should host a few thousand refugees.

What can WE do?

Aylesbury Refugee Care - <https://www.facebook.com/aylesburyrefugeecare/>

20 July · 'We are considering application to resettle refugees in the Aylesbury Vale Area, using the government 'full community sponsorship' scheme published 19 July 2016. We are seeking help with all of the following needs.

- + meeting family at airport
- + providing a warm welcome and cultural orientation
- + providing housing (for two years)
- + providing English language tuition
- + providing support towards employment and self-sufficiency
- + funds for all of the above.

If you can help please contact Ahtiq Raja or Margot Hodson or Jocelyn Chappell, and let us know, or leave a comment below.

Thank you.'

The Group assembled for a photograph of us holding the AIUK 'Refugees Welcome' placard, with signatories on an associated AIUK poster.

David and Katherine were thanked warmly by the Group for giving such a well informed and full presentation! An anxiety to build upon the information was expressed by everyone – we should discuss this further to take it forward!

4.0 Any Other Business:

David tabled a letter from Lloyds Bank in connection with Interest Rates – Bob to forward to Jim Edwards, our Treasurer, with a request to meet to discuss updated our Bank Account signatories; Bob will send a request to Jim.

5.0 NEXT MEETING: 30th November 2016 at 7.30pm, Friends Meeting House, 9 Rickfords Hill, Aylesbury HP20 2RT – Annelies will lead the 'Write for Rights' Campaign.