



The Cross-Channel Human Rights Initiative
L'initiative trans-Manche de défense des droits humains

DECLARATION

Who we are

We are French and British civil society, NGOs and Faith groups, supporting displaced people living in punishing conditions in northern France. We are united in a call for action by our respective governments to replace the current security-based approach at the Franco-British border with a humanitarian policy respecting the fundamental rights of all. We strongly urge our governments, using all necessary tools, including compassion and dialogue, to take urgent steps to make this a reality.

The context

First-hand testimonies, news and reports, repeat that forcibly displaced people stranded in northern France and dreaming of sanctuary in Britain find themselves in situations of extreme vulnerability. They face inhumane and punishing conditions, including considerable police violence. Tactics such as the use of tear gas, the systematic destruction of shelters, sleep deprivation and arrests appear to reflect a deliberate strategy to create a highly hostile environment.

The authorities have taken few measures to meet the basic needs of people on the move. In particular, too little is done to cater for the needs of children, women and families. Pushed deeper into the woods and dunes, living in ditches and on rubbish tips, exiles are relegated to the margins of society, out of sight, out of mind – but not out of our minds.

Despite this context, people work tirelessly to provide essential aid. For this offering of solidarity, they are regularly confronted with intimidation and obstruction from the authorities, as highlighted in a recent report from Amnesty International.¹

Vast British funds are behind this policy. Press reports² indicate that measures along the Channel between 2015 and 2017 cost about £100 million (€114 million), plus £44.5 million (€51 million) added in the 2018 Sandhurst agreement to "strengthen the security infrastructure".

The policy not only has extremely high financial costs, but also human costs. With very few safe routes of passage to the UK, people attempt ever more risky journeys across the Channel. We propose a fresh approach with an emphasis on our common humanity and the right to seek safety.

We lament the fact that there are very few legal routes for people on the move to seek asylum in Britain. We deplore the Dublin Regulation which prevents people from seeking protection in a country of choice, trapping them in a no-man's-land. We reject the rhetoric that denigrates people seeking refuge, strongly disagreeing with application of the term "illegal" to anyone fleeing conflict, disaster and persecution.

Our call to action

It is high time for real change, focused on finding constructive solutions that respect the fundamental rights of all seeking a better future or safe haven, and we call for an opening of hearts and minds to remember our common humanity. We are all worthy of the same opportunities in life; of love, understanding and protection in time of need. We look forward to working with others engaged in the area, to respect fully the human right to asylum and safe passage to the UK.

We call for an immediate end to inhuman and degrading treatment of people on the move, as well as to the violence used by the French authorities and tolerated, perhaps financed, by the British. These authorities should implement humanitarian provisions: access to accommodation, health care, food, drinking water, waste treatment and hygiene. They must support those committed to solidarity and use constructive terminology, unlike the hostile discourse that prevails today.

Finally, the right to asylum must be respected at the border. Safe and legal routes to enter the UK must be developed and the Dublin Regulation suspended to allow people to seek asylum in countries of their choice.

We demand unequivocal respect for the human rights and dignity of all who seek a better future or a refuge from oppression, persecution and conflict. We are convinced that a different reality is possible. We try to implement it every day, and call upon our governments to join us.

We firmly believe that a different reality is possible.

Our call is simple.

Stop investing in walls and start investing in people.

Organisations supporting this declaration

Anglican Chaplaincy & Refugee Project Officer (Pas de Calais)
Ven Stephen Taylor, Archdeacon, Maidstone, for Diocese of Canterbury
Southwark Commission for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation
Help Refugees Refugee Rights Europe Secours Catholique

L'Auberge des Migrants
Diocese of Canterbury, Kent Refugee Officer
Westminster Justice and Peace
Seeking Sanctuary

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¹ "France: Targeting solidarity: Criminalization and harassment of people defending refugee and migrant rights in northern France". Index number: EUR 21/0356/2019. Amnesty International, London, 5 June 2019. (www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur21/0356/2019/en/)

² e.g., Daily Express, 18 January 2018.