

# Independent Asylum Commission

CONDUCTING A NATIONWIDE REVIEW OF THE UK ASYLUM SYSTEM

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE **CITIZEN** ORGANISING FOUNDATION

**PRESS RELEASE**

**16.10.07**

## **ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY GIVES FIRM SUPPORT TO INDEPENDENT CITIZENS' ENQUIRY INTO THE ASYLUM SYSTEM**

The Archbishop of Canterbury this week gave his firm support to the work of the Independent Asylum Commission at a two-hour private seminar at Lambeth Palace.

The Commission is conducting a national citizens' enquiry into the UK asylum system and is traveling across the UK to hear the experiences of those who have gone through the asylum system, and the opinions of the public at large. The Commission will publish its findings and recommendations for reform of the asylum system in 2008.

Five of the Commissioners chosen to lead the enquiry, including former High Court judge Sir John Waite, former Chief Inspector of Prisons, Lord Ramsbotham, the Earl of Sandwich, journalist and refugee Zrinka Bralo, and Canon Professor Nick Sagovsky of Westminster Abbey, presented the Archbishop with the evidence that they had gathered since the enquiry began in January 2007. They also outlined the issues that would form the basis of their report, which will make credible and workable recommendations for reform, in 2008.

The Commission is mandated to undertake its enquiry by the Citizen Organising Foundation, a coalition of faith and civil society groups who campaign for the common good. The Commission follows a previous enquiry by South London Citizens into the treatment of staff and customers at Lunar House, the headquarters of the Border and Immigration Agency.

Archbishop Rowan Williams said:

"This seminar on the work of the Independent Asylum Commission offered numerous invaluable insights into the workings of the asylum system and how they impact on real people, particularly women and children. It has come as no surprise to discover that aspects of the system are dehumanising and conspire, despite the best efforts of those who staff the system, to drive people underground and into the black economy."

"But I see signs of hope in the Commission's engagement with ordinary citizens around the country. Whatever their feelings on this controversial subject, no-one in

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Britain wants to turn away someone who is fleeing from persecution - and that tradition of offering sanctuary to the persecuted is the right basis on which the Commission can build its recommendations. I look forward to reading credible and workable recommendations for reform that improve the asylum system and ensure that people are treated with humanity and dignity.”

Sir John Waite, Co-chair of the Independent Asylum Commission, said:  
“As Commissioners we are tremendously grateful to the Archbishop for taking such an interest in our work and contributing so positively to our discussion.”

“His support, along with that of other faith leaders, faith groups and citizens across the UK, will be vital in ensuring the success of our work. We will be doing our utmost to listen to all sides of the debate before we publish our report and recommendations next year, and so I urge people to write to and email us with their views on this issue.”

The Independent Asylum Commission holds its sixth public hearing, on the theme of the destitution of asylum seekers, in Manchester on October 17th.

**For further details on the Independent Asylum Commission, contact Jonathan Cox, IAC Co-ordinator: 07919 484066.**

**For further information from the Archbishop of Canterbury, contact Marie Papworth, Press Officer:**

**020 7898 1280**

## **Notes for editors:**

- The Independent Asylum Commission is conducting a nationwide review of the UK asylum system.
- The IAC is independent of government and the voluntary sector, and is accountable to citizens.
- The Commission is keen to hear from any individual or organization who is concerned about the asylum system – from those who believe it is too generous to those who believe it is not providing adequate protection for refugees. Information on how to submit evidence can be found at [www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk](http://www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk)
- The Commission met with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Winchester, and other advisers for a two-hour seminar at Lambeth Palace on October 11th 2007.

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