

Independent Asylum Commission

CONDUCTING A NATIONWIDE REVIEW OF THE UK ASYLUM SYSTEM

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE **CITIZEN** ORGANISING FOUNDATION

PRESS RELEASE

25/01/08

INDEPENDENT ENQUIRY ASKS THE PUBLIC: HOW SHOULD ASYLUM SEEKERS BE TREATED?

An independent enquiry into the UK's asylum system today launched CITIZENS SPEAK, the biggest ever consultation with ordinary citizens on how asylum seekers should be treated.

Since 2006 the Independent Asylum Commission has held hearings across the country to assess the positive and negative aspects of the asylum system in the UK. In mid 2008 the Commission will publish credible and workable recommendations for reform that safeguard the rights of asylum seekers but also command the confidence of the British people.

Now the twelve Commissioners, who include a bishop, three members of the House of Lords, an ex-immigration judge and a refugee, are asking ordinary people to tell them what they think. Through the CITIZENS SPEAK initiative the Commissioners hope to engage the voices that are often unheard or ignored in the national debate on asylum. The results will directly influence the final recommendations that Commissioners will present to Ministers and the political parties.

The consultation has been launched by the Independent Asylum Commission and aims to "give ordinary people a say on sanctuary in the UK". CITIZENS SPEAK will seek the views of the public through an open and active consultation in every region of the UK and test the nation's views and values on a number of key questions through interactive responses to local radio stations, interactive online tv channels, and People's Commissions held in communities in every region from Lands End to John O'Groats.

Launching the CITIZENS SPEAK website Sir John Waite, Co-chair of the Commission, said: "For the public to have faith in an asylum system, it has to reflect their values – they have to feel that they have been listened to and understood. Many consultations only hear from the experts – but it is as important to know how ordinary citizens feel about asylum as it is to know how the system itself is operating. It is a heart as well as a head issue, and so I say to those who have an opinion on asylum but feel their view is ignored – we are here to listen."

Jonathan Cox, the Independent Asylum Commission's Co-ordinator said:

“The Independent Asylum Commission wants to make recommendations that command the confidence of the British people. To do that, we have to understand the values that influence ordinary citizens’ thinking on issues like asylum. Many people feel that their voices are not heard when decisions are made about asylum – through CITIZENS SPEAK any member of the public can submit their views to the Commissioners and know that their voice will be listened to. This is not a consultation for experts. We want to hear from ordinary citizens and are as much interested in what they feel and think as what they know.”

For more information contact Jonathan Cox, IAC Co-ordinator, 07919 484066

Notes

- The *CITIZENS SPEAK* consultation (www.citizensspeak.org.uk) was launched on 25th January 2008 to find out how ordinary citizens would like those seeking sanctuary in the UK to be treated. The closing date for responses is 30th March 2008
- *CITIZENS SPEAK* has been launched by the Independent Asylum Commission to make sure that ordinary citizens get a say in the biggest independent public consultation on sanctuary in the UK in recent times.
- Anyone is welcome to host or participate in a People’s Commission. They can take anything between one and two hours and can require a minimum of five participants and the People’s Commission toolkit – email citizensspeak@cof.org.uk, call 020 7043 9878 or see www.citizensspeak.org.uk if you would like more details.
- The Independent Asylum Commission (IAC) 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. It will publish recommendations for reform of the asylum system in mid 2008. A full list of Commissioners can be found on our website, in the ‘About us’ section.
- 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. More information can be found at www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk