



IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE **CITIZEN** ORGANISING FOUNDATION

PRESS RELEASE

29/01/07

CITIZENS ENQUIRY CALLS FOR VIEWS ON ASYLUM

A national “citizens’ enquiry” is appealing for people with direct experience of UK’s asylum system to present their evidence at a public hearing in Birmingham on 31 January.

The Independent Asylum Commission is gathering first-hand evidence across the country in a series of public hearings. The evidence will be analysed in a report next year which will recommend a series of workable reforms.

The team of Commissioners, which includes peers, asylum experts and a former immigration judge, expects to hear from a broad range of local people who have seen at first hand the consequences of government policy.

Sir John Waite, Co-chair of the Independent Asylum Commission, said: “Though asylum is one of the most contentious issues in the UK, everyone can agree on one thing: the system is not working. Our job is to listen to the views from people across the country from a wide range of perspectives, and then make recommendations for reform that can be adopted by those who control the asylum system.”

The Independent Asylum Commission’s West Midlands Public Hearing at St Anne’s Roman Catholic Church in Digbeth will be followed by a Roadshow which is open to anyone who wants to find out more about asylum, the Commission, and how they can get involved in its citizens’ enquiry. The Roadshow will include food, drama, and music from a local refugee band.

Independent Asylum Commission

CONDUCTING A NATIONWIDE REVIEW OF THE UK ASYLUM SYSTEM

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The West Midlands hearing is the first of seven hearings across the UK. A team of Commissioners - including three peers, a former judge, and a senior theologian - will hear first-hand testimony from a range of local people who are concerned about the asylum system.

The West Midlands hearing will be hosted by *Birmingham Citizens*, a broad-based coalition of faith groups, trade unions and community organisations. The Independent Asylum Commission was set up following an enquiry into Lunar House, the headquarters of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, by *South London Citizens*, whose report, "A humane service for global citizens" was published in November 2005.

Ifath Nawaz, Co-Chair of the Independent Asylum Commission said:
"We are delighted to be starting our enquiry in the West Midlands – where many asylum seekers and refugees live and where some of the newest asylum policies are being piloted. I encourage everyone to get involved in this enquiry – whether you are an asylum seeker yourself, a local organisation who works with refugees, or a local resident concerned about the system."

The Commission is keen to hear from any individual or organisation 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.

Jonathan Cox, Commission Co-ordinator said:

"This is the first independent review of asylum policy. We are going out of our way to listen to all sides of the debate, all around the country, and I encourage

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anyone who has information about abuses of the asylum system or examples of inhumane treatment of asylum seekers to contact us via our website.”

For further details contact Jonathan Cox, IAC Co-ordinator: 07919 484066.

Notes for editors:

- The Independent Asylum Commission is conducting a nationwide review of the UK asylum system.
- The West Midlands Public Hearing begins at St Anne’s Roman Catholic Church in Digbeth at 14:30 on 31st January and the Roadshow begins at 18:45 on the same day.
- The IAC is independent of government and the voluntary sector, and is accountable to citizens.
- For more information see www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk
- Those wishing to give evidence at the Hearing or attend the Roadshow should contact Roxanne.abdulali@cof.org.uk or 020 7375 1658.
- Commissioners and those giving evidence will be available for interview by the media – please contact Jonathan Cox to arrange on 07919 484066.