

Independent Asylum Commission

CONDUCTING A NATIONWIDE REVIEW OF THE UK ASYLUM SYSTEM

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE **CITIZEN** ORGANISING FOUNDATION

Dear all,

Welcome to the first Independent Asylum Commission newsletter – the best way to keep up to date with all the latest news and developments from the Independent Asylum Commission. If you have been passed this email and would like to subscribe to fortnightly updates and invitations to Independent Asylum Commission events, please email 'SUBSCRIBE' to roxanne.abdulali@cof.org.uk. Please pass this email on to others who you think will be interested in our work.

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YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND THE COMMISSION'S FIRST PUBLIC HEARING AND ROADSHOW IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

The Commission is collecting evidence for its review of the asylum system via three methods: public hearings; a call for evidence; and academic research. The Commission is delighted to announce that it is to hold the first of its seven themed public hearings in the regions and nations. At the first Public Hearing and Roadshow in Birmingham, Sir John Waite and his team of commissioners will be hear evidence from a wide range of people affected by or working in the asylum system, focusing on the asylum determination process, and the impact of asylum on the West Midlands.

The Public Hearing takes place between 14:30 and 17:30 on 31st January at St Anne's RC Church, Alcester St, Digbeth, Birmingham.

You are cordially invited to join Sir John for the Independent Asylum Commission Roadshow from 18:45 on the same evening (31st January) at St Anne's Community Centre, Alcester St, Digbeth, Birmingham (near the RC church). The Roadshow will be a chance for the public to find out more about the work of the Commission in a relaxed and accessible way – and to find out how citizens can get involved in a citizens' enquiry. There will be soulful music from local young refugee band BUMP, an interview with a local asylum seeker about what life is like for them in the West Midlands, a dramatic presentation of the issues facing asylum seekers by professional actors in 'Asylum Monologues', and an interview with a commissioner. We would very much like you to join us – so please email roxanne.abdulali@cof.org.uk.

And if you are coming – or even if you are not – please invite a friend, particularly if they don't know much about the issue of asylum. The Roadshows are part of the Commission's mandate to be accessible and engage with a whole range of citizens - from those who believe that asylum seekers are not being treated humanely to those who believe our asylum system is too generous.

COUNTESS OF MAR JOINS THE INDEPENDENT ASYLUM COMMISSION

The Commission is delighted to announce that the Countess of Mar has agreed to join its citizens' enquiry into the UK asylum system. Lady Mar will add further gravitas to the Commission as a cross-bench member of the House of Lords, and the holder of the original Earldom of Mar, the oldest peerage title in the United Kingdom. But she will also bring the benefit of her experience of sitting on the Asylum and Immigration tribunal, the panel hearing immigration appeal cases, for over two decades. She resigned from that role recently when she became disillusioned with the system.

COMMISSION WELCOMED IN PARLIAMENT

The work of the Independent Asylum Commission has been welcomed in Parliament during a debate in the House of Lords on the human consequences of current immigration and asylum law and practice and to possible improvements in the systems of assessment, care and support.

The Earl of Sandwich, the Countess of Mar, Lord Hylton and Baroness Richardson of Calow all welcomed the work of the Independent Asylum Commission in their speeches. You can read the debate here: www.theyworkforyou.com/lords/?id=2006-12-14b.1667.1

The Commission has also been welcomed by Damian Green MP, Shadow Immigration Spokesman for the Conservative Party:

"I look forward to the work of the Independent Asylum Commission. This is a vital area of public policy and it is important that independent evidence is collected to inform and influence the politicians who make the decisions. I congratulate the Citizen Organising Foundation on this initiative."

Nick Clegg MP, Lib Dem Home Affairs Spokesman said:

"I welcome the work that the Independent Asylum Commission is planning to do. It is important that the asylum system in Britain upholds its proud record of granting safe refuge to those fleeing persecution."

"When one in five asylum decisions are overturned on appeal it is clear that the present system has a lot of problems. Any fresh thinking on how to deal with these problems is worthy of our consideration."

COMMISSION WEBSITE TO LAUNCH ON 31ST JANUARY

We apologise for the delay in the launch of our website – it has been delayed due to technical difficulties. In the meantime there is a holding page which you can access at www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk. Please add this to your list of favourites as after its launch on 31st January the website will be the main source of information on the Commission and its work, and will be regularly updated.

The Commission's call for evidence will be issued via the website soon after its launch.

FUTURE DATES FOR COMMISSION HEARINGS AND ROADSHOWS

The Commission will be holding seven themed Public Hearings and Roadshows. The dates have not been fixed for all of these yet (details will be on the website when they are definite), but we are following this provisional schedule:

1. Asylum Determination Process, Birmingham, January 2007
2. Detention, London, March 2007
3. Vulnerable Groups, Cardiff, May 2007
4. Removals, Glasgow, June 2007
5. Asylum Appeals, Leeds, September 2007
6. Asylum Support and Destitution, Manchester, October 2007
7. Miscellaneous, London, November 2007

Please contact jonathan.cox@cof.org.uk for more information.

HELP PROMOTE THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission is keen to hear from as many individuals and organisations as possible while it is gathering evidence – particularly those affected by the asylum system personally or those whose communities have been affected by the asylum system.

Please help us reach these people by circulating this information to individuals or networks who might be interested and encourage them to make contact with us.

If you would like to get involved in promoting the Commission's work more generally, please email jonathan.cox@cof.org.uk.

I hope you have found this Newsletter interesting – we will be in touch again in a fortnight.

Best wishes,

Jonathan.

Jonathan Cox

Co-ordinator

Independent Asylum Commission

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www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk

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