

# Independent Asylum Commission

CONDUCTING A NATIONWIDE REVIEW OF THE UK ASYLUM SYSTEM

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE **CITIZEN** ORGANISING FOUNDATION

Dear all,

*Welcome to the 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](mailto:roxanne.abdulali@cof.org.uk). Please pass this email on to others who you think will be interested in our work.*

1. **FIRST PUBLIC HEARING AND ROADSHOW IN THE WEST MIDLANDS A GREAT SUCCESS**
2. **BISHOP PATRICK LYNCH JOINS THE INDEPENDENT ASYLUM COMMISSION**
3. **GOVERNMENT MINISTER “LOOKS FORWARD” TO REPORT OF THE COMMISSION**
4. **COMMISSION WEBSITE AND CALL FOR EVIDENCE LAUNCHED**
5. **FUTURE DATES FOR COMMISSION HEARINGS AND ROADSHOWS**
6. **HELP PROMOTE THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION**

## **FIRST PUBLIC HEARING AND ROADSHOW IN THE WEST MIDLANDS A GREAT SUCCESS**

At the first Public Hearing and Roadshow in Birmingham, Sir John Waite and his team of commissioners heard 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 took place on the afternoon of 31<sup>st</sup> January at St Anne's RC Church in Digbeth, Birmingham. Five refugees and asylum seekers shared their experiences of the asylum determination procedure, with evidence also given by local solicitors, police, refugee organisations and the West Midlands Strategic Partnership. The Public Hearing was well attended, with a lot of interest from local people – many of whom were shocked by the evidence they heard.

You can read a digest of the evidence given in our press release:

<http://www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk/files/02.02.07.pdf>. Unfortunately, despite a lot of initial press interest, the terror raids in Birmingham on the same day meant that we did not get the media coverage we had hoped for. Though the Hearing was picked up in the religious media

[http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/news\\_syndication/article\\_07024asylum.shtml](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/news_syndication/article_07024asylum.shtml) and in the trade press: <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2007/01/30/103083/independent-asylum-commission-kicks-off-asylum-seeker-public.html>.

The Public Hearing was followed by the first Independent Asylum Commission Roadshow – an opportunity to raise the profile of the Commission with a wider group of people in the West Midlands. During the evening, hosted by Birmingham CITIZENS, the 80-strong audience

were treated to food from the Horn of Africa, music from local young refugee band BUMP, a striking interview with Cissy from the Gambia about his life as a refugee in the West Midlands, a dramatic presentation of the issues facing asylum seekers by professional actors in 'Asylum Monologues', and an interview with Commission co-chair Sir John Waite who explained how citizens can get involved in our enquiry.

The Bishop of Stafford was the first person to sign the Independent Asylum Commission Charter – which gives people the opportunity to demonstrate their support for the Commission's work. He was followed by many of those who attended the Roadshow, who marked their support by adding their fingerprint to the Charter. The Charter will be touring the country collecting fingerprints as it goes!

The Roadshows are part of the Commission's mandate to be accessible and engage with a whole range of citizens – and received very positive feedback from those attending: "*many thanks for a very enjoyable evening*"; "*I attended the first Roadshow in Birmingham and was deeply moved*". We are busy planning similar events for London, Cardiff and Glasgow.

***The next Public Hearing and Roadshow is in London on 29<sup>th</sup> March. Please put the date in your diary!***

#### **BISHOP PATRICK LYNCH JOINS THE INDEPENDENT ASYLUM COMMISSION**

The Commission is delighted to announce that Bishop Patrick Lynch has agreed to join its citizens' enquiry into the UK asylum system. Rt Reverend Patrick Lynch is the Auxiliary Bishop for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark. He has worked extensively with many different migrant communities during his ministry and was ordained bishop in 2006.

#### **GOVERNMENT MINISTER "LOOKS FORWARD" TO REPORT OF THE COMMISSION**

The work of the Independent Asylum Commission has again been raised in the House of Lords – this time in a debate on Asylum Adjudicators:  
<http://www.theyworkforyou.com/lords/?gid=2007-01-31a.229.3>.

The Minister responding, Baroness Ashton of Upholland, said "*I look forward to the report that comes back.*"

#### **COMMISSION WEBSITE AND CALL FOR EVIDENCE LAUNCHED**

The Commission's website has now been launched and can be found at [www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk](http://www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk). The website contains information on the work of the Commission, dates of future events, latest news, how to get involved and contact details.

The Commission has also issued a call for evidence via the website. The call for evidence is open to anyone and we encourage you and your organisation to submit evidence under any or all of the categories listed. You can download information on how to submit evidence to the Commission on the website. Please read the instructions on how to submit evidence before you send it in. **N.B. Evidence should be submitted to [evidence@cof.org.uk](mailto:evidence@cof.org.uk) – not directly to Roxanne Abdulali or Jonathan Cox.**

#### **FUTURE DATES FOR COMMISSION HEARINGS AND ROADSHOWS**

The Commission will be holding six more 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. Detention, London, 29 March 2007
2. Vulnerable Groups, Cardiff, 22 May 2007
3. Removals, Glasgow, 5 June 2007

4. Asylum Appeals, Leeds, September 2007
5. Asylum Support and Destitution, Manchester, October 2007
6. Miscellaneous, London, November 2007

Please contact [jonathan.cox@cof.org.uk](mailto: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 see the 'Getting Involved' section of our website or email [jonathan.cox@cof.org.uk](mailto:jonathan.cox@cof.org.uk). At the Birmingham Roadshow there was a lot of interest in holding People's Commissions in communities across the UK – we will be developing this concept in the next few months. If you would be interested in getting involved in this project, please let us know

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

Best wishes,

Jonathan.

#### **Jonathan Cox**

Co-ordinator  
Independent Asylum Commission  
[jonathan.cox@cof.org.uk](mailto:jonathan.cox@cof.org.uk)  
[www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk](http://www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk)

*You have been sent this email because you have either asked to be kept informed of our work, or were invited to the launch of the Commission. If you would like to unsubscribe from this list please email 'UNSUBSCRIBE' to [roxanne.abdulali@cof.org.uk](mailto:roxanne.abdulali@cof.org.uk)*