

Independent Asylum Commission

CONDUCTING A NATIONWIDE REVIEW OF THE UK ASYLUM SYSTEM

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE **citizen** ORGANISING FOUNDATION

Aims and objectives

Responding to public concern about the UK asylum system, to concern amongst people working in the asylum sector¹ and to concern raised by South London Citizens², the Independent Asylum Commission will conduct a review of the UK asylum system.

The Commission's approach will be informed by the principle that the asylum system should be fair, just and consistent with the UK's human rights obligations. The review will investigate the following questions:

- Are people who need protection able to access the UK asylum procedure?
- Does the asylum determination and appeals procedure provide protection to those who need it in line with the UK's obligations under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention?
- Are asylum seekers treated humanely throughout the asylum process up until and including a final decision on their cases and possible departure or removal from the UK?

The Commission's report will be sent to Government, the major political parties and other interested agencies and institutions, including relevant European institutions, with a view to informing the policies of the political parties in advance of the next general election.

Scope

The review will examine key stages and aspects of the asylum process including

- access to the asylum determination process
- the operation of the asylum determination process
- the operation of the asylum appeals process
- treatment of vulnerable groups in the asylum process
- detention of asylum seekers
- material support and accommodation for asylum seekers including those at the end of the asylum process
- the removal of refused asylum seekers.

¹ See, for example, Providing Protection in the 21st Century, *An independent panel should carry out a comprehensive and systematic review of the whole asylum system, based on an objective evaluation of evidence taken from all parties involved* (Asylum Rights Campaign, 2004).

² In 2004 South London Citizens began an enquiry, overseen by six independent commissioners, into the services and facilities of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate at Lunar House. Its report "A Global Service for Humane Citizens concludes, *Implementation of national policies on immigration asylum should be reviewed by a citizens enquiry.*

Working Methods

The Commission will set its own working methods. The Commission shall be holding a number of themed hearings across the UK where experts, practitioners, and asylum seekers and refugees will give evidence and testimony.

In addition, the Commission will have oversight of and draw upon research commissioned for the Review, including a call for written evidence, and can access other research as required. It will consider whether the UK can learn from the asylum procedures of other countries.

The Commission will be supported by a small secretariat based at The Citizens Organising Foundation.

Timetable

The Commission began work in October 2006 and will report by 28 April 2008. Should the general election be called earlier than April 2008, the Co-Chairs of the Commission may adjust the timetable.

Notes**1. Membership**

The Commission will be made of a high-profile non-partisan chair, or co-chairs, and commissioners who have diverse expertise and experience.

2. Reporting

Citizens Organising Foundation has asked for the Review and the Commission will report to the Foundation and its membership. Its report will be circulated to Government, the major political parties and to other interested agencies and institutions.