

Saving Sanctuary

The Independent Asylum Commission's first report of conclusions and recommendations: How we restore public support for sanctuary and improve the way we decide who needs sanctuary

Asylum is one of the most contentious issues in contemporary politics. It is never far from the headlines, yet reliable information is hard to come by and reports continue to surface about asylum seekers facing unfair treatment, unjust decisions and destitution.

Now, at last, a major report is being prepared by the Independent Asylum Commission, a body of private citizens set up by the Citizen Organising Foundation. Through a wholly independent initiative the Commission contains the experience and expertise normally only provided by a royal commission.

For the first time we are to have a truly independent review of the UK asylum system. The first of three sections (all appearing this summer) is now just out. It offers evidence together with recommendations for reform. It is fair as well as forceful and realistic as well as humane.

For eighteen months the Commission has travelled the country hearing hundreds of testimonies and receiving hundreds of submissions. It has obtained evidence from a wide range of organisations and individuals such as Government, the Refugee Council, Migration Watch and our own diocesan Guildford Refugee Action Group together with many refugees, three former Home Secretaries and members of the general public. In all those numerous encounters every single person has expressed a commitment to providing sanctuary to those fleeing persecution. So the question is not 'should we be providing sanctuary?' but 'how are we providing sanctuary?' In these findings the Commissioners address the question: 'is our asylum system fit for purpose yet?'

Please read the report. It is crucial the Church joins the debate and presses for those reforms the report identifies as crucial'. We owe this out of brotherly and sisterly kindness in Christ's name to those asking us for sanctuary and our active participation is necessary if the UK is to achieve a responsible caring role among the nations of the world.

Rev. Sir John Alleyne
Guildford Refugee Action Group, Department for Social Responsibility
20 May 2008

A copy of the report can be downloaded from www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk
To request a hard copy of the report please email: Chris@cof.org.uk or tel: 020 7043 9878