

4 September 2015

MEDIA STATEMENT

MWNUK Urges British Values in Response to Refugee Crisis

Like many, MWNUK have been horrified by the current refugee crisis which just this week saw the body of Alan Kurdi, a young Syrian child being washed up on the shore of Bodrum, Turkey. Our heartfelt prayers go out to all the families and friends who have lost loved ones in these horrific circumstances.

While governments argue over numbers, MWNUK urges Britain to do more and live up to our legacy of compassion towards refugees. Firstly, we advocate the use of the word 'refugee' in the way it was first used in 1685 when 50,000 French Huguenots were given refuge in England after escaping persecution. It was also used in the 1930s and 1940s when thousands of European Jews were given sanctuary in Britain from persecution at the hands of Nazism; and was used in the 1970s when over 30,000 Ugandan Asians escaped ethnic cleansing and settled in Britain. It has also been used on many other occasions throughout history to describe those fleeing war and persecution.

In using the word 'refugee', we insist that the UK must uphold its legal obligations as a founding signatory to the Geneva Convention of 1951 which protects refugees, and under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948. In 2014, David Cameron outlined British Values as; '...a belief in freedom, tolerance of others, accepting personal and social responsibility, respecting and upholding the rule of law...' To not support these refugees is to deny the very essence of what makes us British.

We demand that the British government more tangibly manages this crisis better by supporting more refugees to settle in the UK; improving the asylum application process, so refugees are not forced to undertake life-threatening journeys to seek safe living conditions for their families; and by better developing longer-term policies to deal with the root problems in these war-torn countries.

Executive Director, Faeza Vaid said:

'I am reminded of the quote: "The way you see people is the way you treat them, and the way you treat them is what they become". If we are to see these refugees as fellow human beings and not 'resource-sapping migrants', we would treat them with the dignity accorded to all under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and they, in turn, would return the compassion that was shown to them ten-fold.

This is not optimistic thinking. The 'Kindertransport' was an organised rescue mission by Britain that took place 9 months before World War 2, which saw 10,000 Jewish children from around Europe rescued. Of these, four became Nobel Prize winners with many others making significant contributions to Britain.'

MWNUK urges you to also get involved. Here are a few things you can do:

- 1 Sign the following petition to Parliament. Or the many others lobbying policy influencers.
- 2 Write to your local MP/MEP ; (see <https://www.writetothem.com>)
- 3 Join social media campaigns; e.g. Tweet a picture of yourself/your family/colleague/friends with a sign saying #refugeeswelcome. Add it to your Facebook profile too.
- 4 Make a donation; to the many international humanitarian NGOs working on this campaign, or local individual efforts.

Notes to editors

1. About MWNUK

The Muslim Women's Network UK is the only national Muslim women's organisation in Britain with a membership of over 700 members. It is an independent network of women across the UK that shares knowledge, connects the voices, and promotes the needs of diverse Muslim women. See: www.mwnuk.co.uk And Muslim Women's Network Helpline (www.mwnhelpline.co.uk) 0800 999 5786

2. Media spokespeople from Muslim Women's Network UK are:

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