

2014 Sanctuary Summit Communiqué
The Birmingham Declaration
The first Sanctuary Summit, 15th November 2014, Birmingham

Britain has a long tradition of offering protection to those fleeing persecution, many of whom have gone on to make a considerable contribution to our society. It also has a reputation for fairness and justice that is the envy of many other nations.

We believe that the great majority of British people are sympathetic towards those who come here seeking help and protection.

We have come together in Birmingham on 15th November 2014 in recognition that the position of refugees and migrants is aggravated in Europe and in Britain in an unprecedented way. We can no longer just watch in silence as millions flee Syria only to be warehoused in refugee camps and thousands drown in desperate attempts to reach the Western world across the sea. This is a matter of life and death.

We commit ourselves to work together to ensure that our great country continues to be a safe place for those fleeing persecution and a welcoming place for all people who come here to study, work or join family and who will work alongside us to build a just and fair society.

We commit ourselves today to a core set of principles and asks that will strengthen our collective efforts to protect the rights of strangers amongst us. Through these commitments we seek accountability and justice. We are asking our Parliament and our Government to take necessary steps to deliver that change.

These commitments tackle the causes and consequences of the very vulnerable position refugees and migrants find themselves in. They are within the scope of the international protection framework that Britain has been signatory to for decades.

Recognising that we all have a role to play, we are asking our Government to do all they can to ensure that:

1. All asylum seekers, refugees and migrants should be treated with dignity and respect.

We ask that the debate on immigration is conducted with care for the dignity of people who are vulnerable, who do not have a voice in the public domain and who have to suffer the consequences of inaccurate and inflammatory language. We appeal to all politicians and to the media to conduct the pre-election debate responsibly, sticking to the facts and bearing these principles in mind.

2. A fair and effective process to decide whether people need protection should be in place.

We ask for a high standard of decision making on refugee protection cases. After years of very public failure, we demand a system that is fair and efficient and ensures protection for those who need it. People should have access to good quality legal advice and representation during the process, publicly funded when they are unable to pay. Not everyone is entitled to refugee status in Britain, but they are entitled to a fair process to determine if they are in need of protection.

3. No one should be locked up indefinitely.

We seek an end to the indefinite detention of asylum seekers and migrants. No one should be deprived of their liberty with no judicial oversight. Indefinite detention is unacceptable, costly and ineffective. We ask for a reasonable time limit to be introduced and other safeguards put in place to ensure the lawfulness and fairness within the system.

4. *No one should be left sick or destitute in our society.*

It cannot be right that people are left destitute in modern Britain, banned from working but denied support. Until they are granted protection and can work, asylum seekers should receive sufficient support to meet their essential living needs while in the UK. We are asking that those whose cases have taken more than six months to resolve, or who have been refused but are unable to return home, should receive permission to work. All of them should be allowed free access to NHS services

5. *We should welcome the stranger and help them to integrate.*

People should integrate, and we should help them to do so. We are asking for support for asylum seekers to be welcomed and befriended on arrival. To help them integrate and participate in the local community they should be able to learn English, with free tuition provided where needed.

We make a commitment to take action on these principles and asks together and translate them into collaborative actions in our organisations and communities locally and nationally in the run up to the next general elections and beyond.

We commit ourselves to work strategically together. We will come back next year to check our progress against these principles and asks and make plans for what needs to be done in the future, together. Below are the first of what we believe will be hundreds of organisations signing this declaration.