

LIBERTY

PROTECTING CIVIL LIBERTIES
PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS

Summary of substantive policy discussions **at Liberty Council meeting** **March 2016**

The Policy Officer introduced a paper by the Office describing the continuing humanitarian crisis in Europe, with UNHCR statistics showing there are almost 7 million forcibly displaced people who have made their way to Europe over the past year, the majority fleeing war in Syria, and noted the range of human rights violations that have resulted from this flow of people.

Council expressed concerns about the failings in the UK Government's response to the situation, and supported proposals for Liberty to call on the UK Government to improve its response in four key areas: (i) proactively take a fairer share of forced migrants; (ii) implement the positive and stop exploiting the negative elements of the Dublin III Agreement; (iii) protect family unity; and, (iv) improve asylum processing in the UK.

Council agreed that a humanitarian crisis called for a human response, and that while debate surrounding the issue of immigration could be fraught, it was the role of the organisation to make the case for particular political and legal interventions based on the principle of the universality of human rights.

There was broad support to take steps to challenge the dehumanising and even demonising language sometimes deployed in this debate, perhaps making analogies with language used in the 1930s. There was also agreement that disingenuous arguments (such as the justification for declining to offer protection on the basis that it provides a "pull factor") should be contested.

In practical terms, Council suggested that particular thought be given to protecting unaccompanied children and looking at schemes used during recent humanitarian crises, such as the Somali Family Reunion Policy during the Horn of Africa Crisis.

Council observed that continuing war, climate change, and a range of other factors could have a significant impact on the flow of refugees in the future, and agreed that Liberty must continue to participate in these debates and give thought to how our policy recommendations may develop to reflect these changes offers the best 'counter-narrative' to so-called extremism.