

SCOTTISH FAITHS ACTION FOR REFUGEES

Newsletter

Issue 1, June/July 2016

EDITORIAL

From David and Sabine,

Our first official newsletter, and it's a bumper of 4 pages to keep you going over the summer. The items had been carefully planned and chosen and then the conference happened, then the EU referendum took place, and here we are with 4 pages of news, events and videos.

Enjoy a little overview of our past conference as well as a reflection from David Bradwell in regards to the EU Referendum results and the implications of this on working with refugees. Moreover, the Weekend Club in Glasgow will be introduced, the Focus on Refugees Project, as well as the Meet Your MSP Initiative.

If there are any relevant items you would like us to share in our next newsletter, please email

schalmers@churchofscotland.org.uk

Until then, enjoy the read!



Maqsood Umeed, Dr Maureen Sier and Professor Alison Phipps

Working Together in Faith

Information and advocacy conference – part of the Refugee Festival Scotland 2016

Last week about 100 individuals, advocates, experts and people of faith gathered at the Working Together in Faith Conference in Edinburgh to examine and grasp policy, advocacy and practical action as they exercised their faith.

The scene was then set as delegates listened to the first hand experiences of someone going through the UK asylum process. Maqsood Umeed, an asylum seeker who fled persecution in Pakistan in 2012 and now lives in Glasgow spent nearly two years in college, taking part in every activity possible because he wanted to learn, and encourage his children to learn Scottish history so they better understood their new adopted home. Though not all his experiences in the last years have been positive, he says: "I appreciate and I am thankful for Scottish people who have supported and protected us. They welcomed us, fed us and have given us every opportunity to integrate into society."

Mr Umeed's talk was followed by Dr [Maureen Sier](#)'s presentation, director of Interfaith Scotland. She began with a refugee story from her own family and looked back at comments made by David Logan MP in a Parliamentary debate in 1938: "today, an opportunity is offered to the British nation to take its proper stand among the nations of the world to protect a minority".

She finished her presentation by quoting passages relevant to different faiths' appreciation of asylum and migration.

[Alison Phipps](#) is professor of languages and intercultural studies at the University of Glasgow and convenes GRAMnet (Glasgow Refugee, Asylum and Migration network). Opening up and sharing her home with asylum seekers for the last ten years, Alison movingly recounted how she came to foster her daughter and described the ongoing struggle navigating through the official asylum process. Alison noted that while the European Union has binding obligations to help in instances of mass displacement, few countries meet those obligations. The number of refugees Europe has welcomed is “pitiful and utterly pathetic”. She spoke about the need to “activate compassion” and infected delegates of the conference with an urge to do more and lay aside all excuses for inaction.

Parallel workshop sessions allowed delegates to find out about running Weekend Clubs for asylum seekers, refugees and new migrants, a workshop lead by Mohamed Omar from Interfaith Glasgow. Alison Phipps held an interactive session on hosting asylum seekers and refugees; on the “do’s and don’ts” as well as the fears and joys. Christian Aid talked about how we can influence the fluctuating media narrative about those seeking refuge in the run up to the UN Summit on Refugees in September 2016.

After lunch, further workshops examined the community sponsorship scheme (to allow individuals, charities, faith groups and businesses to support resettled refugees directly), the plight of refugees and internally displaced persons in Northern Iraq, and a quick masterclass in lobbying politicians on refugee issues from Naomi McAuliffe, Head of Amnesty Scotland.

Rev [Kathy Galloway](#) closed the conference with her reflection on the CTBI delegation of women who visited refugees in Greece which she led at the end of May. On her return she found herself in the situation of being asked by her four year old granddaughter “What’s a war, Granny?” Kathy was silenced – how could you possibly respond to such a question? The daunting nature of the refugee crisis should not put us off intervening.



“The challenge is not for us to do what we can’t. The challenge is for us to do what we can.”



One of the workshops at “Working Together in Faith” explored how we can practically help asylum seekers, refugees and new migrants with the example of the **Weekend Club** run by Interfaith Glasgow. The Weekend Club initiative is an interfaith response to the social isolation experienced by refugees, asylum seekers, and new migrants in Glasgow, especially over the weekend. This exciting project also addresses the need for opportunities for newcomers to get to know Glasgow; to better understand Scottish culture, history, and values; and improve their English in fun and relaxed settings.

To find out more about this incredibly important initiative watch this newly launched [video](#) and feel free promote it in your local community. This is an exciting opportunity to offer relevant and much valued help.

If you would like to make a donation to the Weekend Club or offer free event space, wish to join the volunteer organising group or have ideas, skills, or venues you think might be useful to this venture, please contact Mohamed Omar: weekendclub@interfaithglasgow.org



Brexit Reflection

By David Bradwell

What will Brexit mean for work with refugees?

The Scottish Refugee Council has said:

“Leaving the EU does not mean leaving behind our legal and moral responsibilities to people in need. The UK remains a founding signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, the main international treaty that protects the rights of people in need of safety. We need to remember this.

“Last year Scotland led the way in responding to the humanitarian crisis facing refugees. All walks of Scottish society stood and continue to stand in solidarity in welcoming other human beings who have lost everything and who are now trying their best to rebuild their and their children’s lives here in Scotland. We need to continue to be a beacon for how we treat those in need of protection and safeguard their rights.

“On a day of such uncertainty we welcome the First Minister’s words of reassurance that EU migrants living in Scotland are welcome, their contribution valued and that Scotland is their home. Scotland, where the majority voted to remain, is home to refugees who have fled in fear from hatred and persecution. We echo the First Minister’s call for unity and the imperative for solidarity across and amongst all communities at this time.”

The campaign and its aftermath have been dominated by questions of migration. Although internal EU migration for social or economic reasons is legally different from the humanitarian protection offered to refugees and those seeking asylum, the popular narrative about the referendum victory has been that now something needs to be done to make it harder for people to come to the UK. This hardening of attitudes coupled with a worrying reported increase in racist incidents means that the work of faith groups, wider civil society and political leadership to ensure that public discourse returns to civility and that the human rights and human dignity of every person, regardless of race, faith, nationality or immigration status is fully respected.

We can expect a period of uncertainty in political leadership followed by months or years of negotiation and considerable legislative effort to implement the decision to leave the EU...

Read the full reflection [HERE](#).

What can I do?

We are asked very often what local communities and individuals can practically do to respond.

We would like to highlight the [“Scotland Welcomes Refugees”](#) website to you, which seeks to coordinate the national response to the refugee crisis.

It is a focal point for anyone wanting to donate time, skills, goods, accommodation or other practical help to refugees arriving in Scotland, linking individuals and groups to local authorities.



At the conference Naomi McAuliffe, Head of Amnesty Scotland held a workshop on how to lobby politicians on refugee matters.

The [Meet Your MSP](#) initiative by the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO) would be a good opportunity to get started. This project encourages faith groups to build a relationship with their newly elected members of Scottish Parliament and be at the heart of decision making.

SCPO will provide ideas and information that will help you to organise such a meeting.

To find out more visit

www.actsparl.org

or email

info@actsparl.org



meet
your MSP

Take a look and bookmark

focus on refugees

a programme of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

- a website dedicated to covering the refugee crisis in Europe by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). The website aims to be a one-stop source of information covering news, policy, practical action and resources for those in the faith community interested in refugee and asylum issues.

The [focus on refugees programme](#) further seeks to:

- encourage and educate through examples of good practice, facts and documented experiences and
- provide opportunities for practical and prayerful action.

Be sure to check it out!

WCC speaks on behalf of forcibly displaced persons

28 June 2016

In a "Statement on the Forced Displacement Crisis," a call for the world's nations to "honour the letter and spirit of their obligations under international law, including human rights and refugee law and especially the right of asylum" was issued on 28 June by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Encouraging "churches and specialized ministries of the churches in their diaconal and humanitarian response to people on the move," the statement "acknowledges and understands the fear and uncertainty felt by societies, communities and churches in countries receiving large numbers of new arrivals." However, it continues, "in the midst of fear and uncertainty, as Christians we are called to remember our common humanity, the shared God-given human dignity of all, the 'Golden Rule,' the mission of caring for orphans and widows," as well as Christ's injunction to welcome the stranger.

More information:

[Statement on the Forced Displacement Crisis](#)

[WCC work on migration and social justice](#)

Upcoming events

Stay up to date and check out our [events page](#) on the website.

Upcoming events include:

Witness Bearing in Calais, University of Glasgow, 26th July 2016, 6pm to 7:30pm

MIRO Concert, Colinton Parish Church, Edinburgh, 14th August 2016, 3pm

Please don't hesitate to get in touch with us any time with questions, comments or other items you would like to pass on.

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