



# Asylum and Refugee Network - QARN

## **Quakers and Refugees: past and present**

*'Refugees are the human face of international injustice'*

Michael Bartlet, former UK Quaker Parliamentary Liaison Officer

Quakers have always combined a global outlook with practical action on the ground. Quakers opposed the international trade in slaves and helped fugitives from the slave states. We look back in our history to the relief committees set up for refugees from the Franco Prussian war of the 1870s, and the South African war of 1899-1902. We remember Quaker support for children caught up in the Spanish Civil War, and our involvement in the Kindertransport, which rescued Jewish children from the concentration camps. British and American Quakers ran refugee camps in Europe between 1940 and 1948, and this work was recognised by the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947.



In the present century Quakers are engaged in many initiatives to support asylum seekers, forced migrants and refugees. We have seen the injustice they face on a daily basis and recognise that there is a need to challenge a system which is fundamentally flawed. In 2006 concerned Friends set up the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN) so that we could work together on joint advocacy and campaign for radical change to the asylum system.

*Illustration by George Sfougaras*

### **QARN's aims are**

- 1) To work to change the way that refugees and asylum seekers (whether recognised under the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees or not) are treated, to ensure that justice and compassion are the guiding principles.
- 2) To support each other as Friends acting under concern.
- 3) To keep Friends in our Meetings up to date with developments.
- 4) To work to convince British Quakers that a principled critique of current asylum policy should be part of our corporate Quaker witness, in keeping with our testimony to equality.
- 5) To guide Britain Yearly Meeting, now that Sufferings have accepted that asylum is a concern, to help them to work effectively for justice and compassion in our asylum and immigration system.

We hold four meetings a year in different parts of the country. These meetings are open to all members. The website [www.qarn.org.uk](http://www.qarn.org.uk), maintained by Sheila Mosley, is a valuable resource. QARN also has a Facebook page. The e-mail list offers an opportunity for members to exchange information, highlight urgent issues, and sign joint petitions.

### **QARN's campaigns**

We recognised that we could not campaign on every matter of concern, and decided to focus on specific issues. We began by joining with other organisations in a campaign to end the detention

of children. Following the relative success of this campaign we decided to focus on indefinite detention. The decision to detain men and women in immigration removal centres is an administrative one, it is not made by a judge and those detained do not know whether they will be held in prison-like conditions for days, weeks, months or even years. This is another form of torture for men and women who have fled killing and torture in their home country, and had hoped for a place of safety in ours. In 2012 QARN produced a statement calling for an end to indefinite detention. The statement was adopted by Britain Yearly Meeting and recommended for advocacy with MPs and others in influencing positions. QARN joined the Detention Forum, a coalition of organisations, campaigning for a time limit and alternatives to detention.

We have current concerns about the 'hostile environment' promoted by PM Theresa May when she was Home Secretary, the enforced destitution of those whose asylum claims have been refused, and the language used to describe people seeking safety on our shores.

QARN has made submissions to parliamentary inquiries into asylum, and immigration detention, and responded to Home Office consultative documents.

### **Conferences**

In 2015 QARN held a conference at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre. The conference was entitled Detention, Destitution and Deportation: gathering Quaker energy to speak truth to power. Speakers were invited from national bodies, Detention Action and Still Human, Still Here (now Asylum Matters), and from RAPAR, a refugee group active in Manchester. A second conference in 2017 was co-sponsored, with QPSW, QCEA and QUNO, enlarging our vision. We hope to have another major joint QARN event at Woodbrooke in 2019.

### **From the Forced Migration Programme to Sanctuary Everywhere**

QARN is a network of busy volunteers, and we felt that the growing Quaker concern for those forced to flee violence, repression and life-threatening poverty, needed support centrally. The post of Programme Manager for Forced Migration was created within QPSW, and the Sanctuary Meetings initiative was launched at Britain Yearly Meeting in August 2017. A Sanctuary Manifesto was approved at Meeting for Sufferings in December 2017. Now titled Sanctuary Everywhere, this programme is a valuable resource and opportunity for Friends. Some QARN members are championing the programme in their Meetings.

The men, women and children forced to flee their homes, who arrive here in search of safety, face a toxic media and many obstacles in the official processes. Quakers will continue to challenge the culture of disbelief, create a culture of hospitality, and work for justice and compassion in asylum and migration policy and practice. The QARN network, together with Sanctuary Meetings, provides a space for support and encouragement for Friends working for change.

### **Supporting QARN**

QARN is grateful for donations to meet the expenses of our campaigning work, our regular meetings, and conferences. We do not support practical projects. Please note that we are not a charity and cannot accept CAF vouchers. Donations should be sent to the QARN Treasurer c/o Sheila Mosley, Leicester Quakers, 16, Queens Road, Leicester LE2 1WP. You can contact us through the QARN email address: [info@qarn.org.uk](mailto:info@qarn.org.uk)