



Home Office

Tom Pursglove MP
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Dame Meg Hillier MP
House of Commons
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Dear Dame Meg,

Thank you for your email of 17 June to the Home Secretary on behalf of a number of constituents about the UK sending asylum seekers to Rwanda. I am replying as the Minister for Justice and Tackling Illegal Migration.

Last year, more than 28,000 people put their lives in the hands of evil criminal gangs to make dangerous journeys across the Channel in flimsy boats and were rescued or intercepted by UK authorities. These abhorrent people-smuggling gangs packed small boats full of hundreds of people, including women and children, often at double their capacity, and sent them out to sea with no regard for human life, having taken their money. Thousands more arrived in other ways, such as in deadly lorry concealments.

Our asylum system is under extreme pressure owing to the challenges of the pandemic and the significant increase in small boat crossings we have seen. This is completely unacceptable and unsustainable, and the public are rightly and understandably fed up.

Decisive leadership is required to tackle the smuggling of people through illicit and criminal means; we cannot, and must not, allow this evil trade to go on. To date, global systems and conventions have failed to address this. We need new, innovative solutions and partnerships to put a stop to this. Right now, criminal gangs continue to profit from facilitating grave, life-threatening journeys across the Channel. This is simply unsustainable, puts lives at risk and diverts resources away from those who come to the UK through safe and legal routes.

Firstly, let me assure you that the Government remains committed to delivering an asylum system which is sensitive and responsive to all forms of persecution, including that based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and which supports individuals in providing all information relevant to their claim to facilitate fair and sustainable asylum decisions. This is why our caseworkers receive extensive training and must follow bespoke Home Office policy guidance. Cases are rightly assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Our New Plan for Immigration therefore sets out a bold new framework to fix our asylum system, tackle illegal migration, control our borders, and crack down on evil people smugglers. As part of this, we have entered into a world-leading Migration and Economic Development Partnership with Rwanda, which will help us to overhaul the UK's broken asylum system. It means those arriving dangerously and unlawfully in the UK may have their asylum claims considered in Rwanda, with a view to receiving the protection they

need there if their claim is granted. They will be provided for in Rwanda to build a safe and prosperous new life, supported for five years with integration support, accommodation and healthcare.

I want to be clear – relocating people to Rwanda is not a punishment. Those who seek safety will still be provided with it. However, they will no longer be able to pay people smugglers to go to a destination of their choice, while passing through what are undoubtedly safe countries. We need to break the highly lucrative and highly risky criminal enterprise that has been built around people crossing to the UK via dangerous means.

Indeed, I would encourage those with concerns to read the Memorandum of Understanding between the United Kingdom and Rwanda, which is available to the public on www.gov.uk. It shows that all asylum claims will be processed in accordance with the UN Refugee Convention, national and international human rights laws and will ensure protection from inhuman and degrading treatment, or being returned to the place people originally fled from. Everyone considered for relocation will be screened, interviewed, and have access to legal advice. However, to confirm who is, and who is not eligible, could further incentivise dangerous behaviours, but I can provide the assurance that decisions will be taken on a case-by-case basis, and nobody will be relocated if it is unsafe or inappropriate for them.

The partnership would not be possible without Rwanda's strong record on economic and social rights, promotion of gender equality and protection from discrimination based on sexuality, which is enshrined within the Rwandan constitution. It is also worth noting that the European Union and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) work in partnership to place individuals in Rwanda for the purposes of providing sanctuary, through the Emergency Transit Mechanism. This of itself speaks volumes about their assessment of Rwanda's track record of supporting asylum seekers and its compliance with its international obligations, including the Refugee Convention.

Likewise, I can assure you that every single relocation will be in line with our domestic and international obligations. All those in scope for relocation will be able to rely on their rights under Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, so as not to be transferred to a country where they would genuinely be at risk of inhuman and degrading treatment. As I say, decisions regarding relocation to Rwanda will be taken on a case-by-case basis and nobody will be relocated if it is unsafe or inappropriate for them.

Ultimately, the UK and Rwanda are determined to work together to tackle this pressing issue. The human costs are simply too high. As with all partnerships, we will have thorough ongoing discussions and raise any concerns, including on topics such as human rights, having worked closely to reach this agreement to protect vulnerable people seeking safety and opportunity.

Some have also mentioned the Australian model of offshore detention. The Australian approach is fundamentally different to the partnership we have entered into with Rwanda. Under our model, the relocated individuals will not be detained in Rwanda and, if they are found to be in need of protection, they will be supported, protected and integrated in Rwanda. They will not return to the UK.

Meanwhile, there are a range of safe and legal routes for those who wish to come to the UK. The UK has a proud history of welcoming those in need and that will of course continue. In the last year alone, the UK has provided support for people across the world, providing sanctuary to over 97,000 Hong Kong British Nationals and over 13,000 Afghans - and more than 120,000 people have been granted visas under the two uncapped Ukrainian schemes. Nobody should put their lives in the hands of evil criminal people smuggling gangs by making dangerous and irregular journeys.

For too long, we have seen horrific abuse of the system and by introducing the New Plan for Immigration, we are tackling it head on. This summer is likely to see another challenging period of migrants arriving by small boats, with all the grave risk that presents to life. It is unsustainable, unsafe and unfair - it has to stop and I make no apology for our determination on this. It is also by reforming the asylum system and taking bold, international action to address the global migration crisis, that we can ensure we can keep providing support and protection for those who need it, especially for those who are most vulnerable, through proper safe and legal routes.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to write and I trust that this reply is helpful.

With best wishes,

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tom Pursglove', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'T' and 'P'.

Tom Pursglove MP
Minister for Justice and Tackling Illegal Migration