

FOCUS ON ATTITUDES TO REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS



JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE
UNITED KINGDOM

Challenge this violence and hostility by community building

Jesuit Relief Service UK condemns violent protests against refugees in Merseyside

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JRS UK condemns the recent violent protests against refugees in Merseyside warning that left unchallenged, “hatred may breed further cycles of violence, hostility and community fracture.” Fifteen people were arrested after members of the far right led violent protests outside a hotel accommodating asylum seekers on 10th February. Protestors were armed with hammers and fireworks, threw stones and set fire to a police van, in full view of residents of the hotel who were trapped inside.

“It is distressing to imagine the terrifying impact of this violence on those trapped in that hotel. People who have fled violence and war have already experienced significant trauma” said Sarah Teather, Director of JRS UK, **“now they will carry this new trauma too, which is to our shame”**.

JRS UK have repeatedly expressed concern about the implications of inflammatory language and the impact of rising hostility in legislation and policy.

“Rhetoric that seeks to divide society for short-term political gain has long-term and far-reaching consequences, hardening attitudes and emboldening racism. In the horrifying events in Merseyside over the weekend, we see its sour fruit.”

JRS UK called for people from diverse communities across the UK to find ways to work together to build a sense of welcome and community for all. **“Hatred and hostility tends to spread,”** Sarah said, **“We cannot afford to let this kind of scapegoating seep deep into our communities where it may jump from one isolated group to another.”**

“There are many people in Merseyside working to provide safety to refugees and many others up and down the country who work to build bridges and understanding between people. These protests should be a wake-up call though. The freedom for us all to live alongside one another in peace, safety and security is not something we can take for granted: it is something we have to work at. Neither can we leave it for others to solve. We all play a role in the building of community.

“It is time for people across sectors, faiths and politics to join together and play their part.”



**CARE 4
CALAIS**

On Friday evening we were in Knowsley to share friendship and solidarity with refugees housed in a local hotel that was being targeted by far right groups.

We went expecting a protest against refugees being housed in the hotel.

We were horrified when the anti-refugee side of the demonstration turned violent, with protesters fighting with the police and a van being set on fire.

Stories had been shared on social media about a man asking a school girl for her phone number. The police are investigating this and it should be left to them. An angry mob turning up to terrorise innocent others cannot be the answer.

We were deeply shocked and shaken at what we witnessed on Friday night. **Our greatest concern is for the continued safety of the people living in the hotel.**

The next day we went back to visit the asylum seekers at the hotel. We wanted to find out if they were ok.

The mood was muted. People were, naturally, disturbed. **The most common things we heard were, “We just want to be safe”; and “Please, can you help us move to another town?”**

The saddest thing I heard was from an Afghan man. “I wasn't safe in my country,” he said. “And I'm not safe here.”

We took what we could to cheer them up. Boxes of fresh fruit, lots of cakes, cans of lemonade. It was the gesture of friendship that mattered. The fact that some people cared.

But they are now trapped in that hotel.

They can't leave, not even to walk to the local shop to buy a snack. No wonder so many of them told us they can't sleep.

The situation is overwhelmingly sad. Every person in that hotel has had to leave their loved ones behind because of situations that they

cannot control. No one does that by choice.

Their homes have been bombed, their villages ransacked and their children have been persecuted. Some have been horribly tortured.

They came here to ask for our help, believing the UK to be a place of sanctuary. And they have been met with hostility and violence.

We do not know the actions of one person that have offended the local community. That is for the police to determine. We do know that the actions of one should not lead to the judgement of many.

If you believe that asylum seekers should not be housed in a hotel then write to our government and ask them to process their asylum claims. Then they will be allowed to work, get on with their lives, and provide for themselves. There is not a single person in that hotel who either asked to be or wants to be there.

The only way that we will find happiness in our own futures is to understand that the vast majority of people in the world, no matter where they are from, are just like us. They care for their families. They worry about the future. And they want the world to be a better place – for everyone.

We are raising money to take basic supplies to those in the hotel as many have just the clothes on their backs.

Donate to support asylum seekers in the Knowsley hotel:
<https://care4calais.enthuse.com/cf/3d0b/knowsley#!/>