



LEWES ORGANISATION IN SUPPORT OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

www.losrras.org

Lewes Town Hall, Lewes, BN7 2QS – email: info@losrras.org

Next Open Meeting:

Advance notice of LOSRRAS next open meeting – a break with tradition!

Academics and Advocates: how can research and action inform each other in Sussex?
8th May 5.30 – 7.30 pm at the Convening Space, Institute of Development Studies, Sussex University.

Lifts available – contact info@losrras.org. Tea and cake available from 5.00pm

Our next meeting will be held in collaboration with the IDS at Sussex University. The following academics will present their research areas, followed by a panel discussion with local activists:

Dolfte Lintelo (IDS) Wellbeing & Protracted Urban Displacement: Refugees and Hosts in Jordan and Lebanon

Mark Doidge (Brighton) Sport and leisure and their role with refugees

Elisa Sandri (Sussex) Makeshift Humanitarians: Informal Humanitarian Aid Across European Close(d) Borders

<https://www.ids.ac.uk/events/academics-and-advocates-how-can-research-and-refugee-action-inform-each-other-in-sussex/>

The Hummingbird Project: February's Open Meeting

Elaine Ortiz (founder and director) and Young Leader, Mohamad Aljaseem, talked about the support and solidarity this remarkable Brighton initiative provides to unaccompanied asylum seeking young people. The scope of what they discussed with Jane Lancashire, who introduced them, resonates with much of what LOSRRAS' aims.

Elaine explained her inspiration to go to the Calais camp in 2015 when, finding no-one effective on the ground, she campaigned to raise funds rapidly. She recounted stories of refugees with no shelter, who were refused local doctor and hospital care and of police beatings. Lots of volunteers quickly joined her: medical centres, schools and shelters were set up and lawyers established the rights of young people (many under sixteen - including some girls and a boy of eight) to join family members in the UK. They suffered constant eviction however and after the camp's demolition the majority were dispersed to other parts of France.

Now the Project provides specialist services for young refugees in Brighton, particularly in social relationships and mental health. Mohamad, a 'young leader' from this 'global social club', spoke of his family life in Syria three years ago and how the Project has restored his confidence, enabling a scholarship to Sussex University. He endorsed the trauma of negotiating the UK asylum system. With no restriction on the time a UASC waits for an initial interview, it can take eighteen months for some, with four to five years before a response. He said the Home Office often calls them liars – that they lie about the country they come from; written evidence of torture is demanded. Three local young people have committed suicide, five have attempted it. All the young people in the project would be persecuted if deported.

Elaine strongly condemned 'the institutionally racist' culture of the Home Office where 'change is needed from the top'. With only internal monitoring there is no power to implement the external chief inspector's recommendations. He has, however, given a proper hearing in Parliament to evidence from the Young Leaders, including Mohamad, and Hummingbird, with its increasingly professional status, is now working on how to hold the Home Office to account.

Regular finance is urgently needed, particularly for legal expertise for asylum claims, appeals against refusal, and to aid those stranded in Europe. To donate to the Project, please see: <https://www.hummingbirdproject.org.uk>

Why the name 'Hummingbird'? Mohamad ended with a story about the hummingbird who tried to put out a forest fire by collecting water from the river in his beak. When the bigger animals mockingly asked him why, he simply replied, 'I'm doing what I can' – the mantra of this great project.

Local news: Meeting with ESCC. Could you offer a home to a child or young person?

As many of you will know the 'Our Turn' campaign, led by Lord Dubs and some of the children of the Kindertransport, is calling for Britain to voluntarily receive 10,000 vulnerable refugee children over the next 10 years. This is a modest target that amounts to only 1,000 children a year and three children per local authority; and it is roughly equivalent to our existing commitments to child refugees that are unfortunately set to expire in 2020 and have yet to be replaced.

Surrey council has committed to this scheme and, with this in mind, LOSRAS recently met with the Leader of East Sussex County Council, Councillor Keith Glazier. We were keen to see if he would be willing to make the same commitment here. Councillor Glazier explained that although there is no reluctance to help these young people in desperate need, a severe lack of foster families in our area makes this proposition very challenging.

We also raised the fact that we were short of foster families at the open meeting held at the Phoenix Community Centre on 12/2/19. We provided flyers for anyone interested. These explained that applicants would be trained for, and asked to consider, all children for foster placements and not just those from overseas. Of course it is completely up to the interested parties whether they have a preference for unaccompanied asylum seekers or not.

To find out what is involved in providing supported lodgings or fostering, what qualities ESCC look for in those who can provide help (e.g. a genuine interest in helping a young person; experience of caring for or working with young people; enthusiasm; patience; good communication skills, etc.) and what ESCC provide (e.g. full support and supervision, training, allowance, etc.) please use the links to find more information: www.eastsussex.gov.uk/supportedlodgings or text SUPPORT to 80011 www.eastsussex.gov.uk/foster or text FOSTER to 80806

Events:

Iranian food: If you would like to sample some of the best Iranian home cooking cuisine outside London, then visit Hillcrest Community Café, Newhaven, for delicious Iranian cuisine. Available every Friday from 9am-4pm. Cost £6.
Support the Iranian family, support the Hillcrest Centre!

Susie Ballentyne is participating in the 10k run on 14 April in Brighton and kindly donating the monies raised to LOSRAS. Anyone wishing to support Susie can donate via the following Justgiving weblink: <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/susie-losras>

More dates for your diary:

- Wed 20th March: 7.30 – 9 pm. **Thinktank at Christ Church**, Prince Edward's Rd. Lewes, led by Professor Avril Loveless who will talk about visiting people in immigration removal centres and explore moral and legal issues that the use of such centres raises for contemporary society.
- Fri 22nd March: 7.30 – 9.30 **The Refugee Crisis: What can we do?** A public meeting of Calais Action Brighton at Exeter Street Hall, 16-17 Exeter Street, Brighton
- Fri 29th March: 8.00 – 10pm **Headstrong Club** at the Elephant and Castle –talk by Professor Marie Dembour, Human Rights Today: the case of immigration detention
- Tues 7th May, doors open at 7pm. Amnesty Group film showing: **Balfour to Banksy** at All Saints, Friars Walk. Q&A with producer Miranda Pinch, free with suggested £5 donation to Amnesty.
- Sun 12th May: LOSRAS **Sponsored Walk**
- Sat 18th May: **Plant Sale** (please start planting seeds and bringing on cuttings in preparation for this popular Lewes event!)
- 8th June: Refugee Tales day walk **'Walk with us'** 6.5 miles for Falmer Station to Lewes.
- 17th -23rd June: **Refugee Week**
- Sat 6th July: **Refugee Tales Event**, Christ Church, Prince Edward's Rd, Lewes

Our April news mailing will give further details of the above events.

The Permanent Peoples' Tribunal

The Permanent Peoples' Tribunal is a civil society, Human Rights, tribunal which mirrors a court of law. It functions independently of individual states and is internationally recognised. It has existed since 1979 and applies Human Rights law to cases where evidence suggests an abridgement of such rights. Its sessions have a similar format to law courts where a complainant brings an action against a government and asks that it is judged by legal standards. The judges' panel is made up of 5-11 judges, half of whom practise human rights law, and the other half chosen from highly respected members of civil society. They hear testimony from witnesses, hear arguments from defence and prosecution, consider these findings and make recommendations. The goal of PPT is “recovering the authority of the people where the state or International bodies failed to protect their rights.” Complaints are submitted by individuals (or groups representing them). The PPT calls all parties together to make their arguments heard. So far, there have been 44 sessions held in different countries. One recent example concerned state crimes allegedly committed in Myanmar against the Rohingyas (September 2017).

Recently (November 3/4 2018), in London, there was a session on state organised crimes against humanity. This is the fourth tribunal that has challenged the way in which migrants and refugees are treated in Fortress Europe. It is now looking at the present government's hostile environment policy with a particular focus on its impact on the migrants' right to work in the UK. If, or when, they do gain work they should not be over-exploited and used as disposable units of labour.

Frances Webber from the IRR (Institute of Race Relations) opened the case as counsel for the prosecution. She highlighted how desperate people often die through such strategies as the withdrawal of rescue boats from the Mediterranean or survive in camps of unspeakable squalor, many destitute on city streets all over Europe. She argued that at the heart of Home Office policy is contempt for other races. Migrants are not only denied the right to work but rights to decent accommodation, family life and many health services such as ante-natal care. Migrants are subject to deportations and unlimited detention and are often denied access to legal help. The UK pays lip service to anti-discrimination policies but government ministers (not only rabble rousers and journalists) use the language of natural disasters or “infestation”, “floods”, “waves”, “swamps” or “swarms” to describe migrants. Government presents these policies as a rational response to the “problem” of migration but it is apparent they pander to the perceived needs of politicians to appear “tough”.

Frances Webber states that migrants who have a common experience in the way they are treated should be seen as peoples. It is a basic right of “peoples” to exist without discrimination. These inhumane immigration policies normalise bad treatment, human rights are systematically violated and the cumulative effect is a crime against humanity. She asked the tribunal not only to condemn but also to suggest how such resistance could be used in actions towards a return to human rights. Further sessions have presented evidence of lives damaged by such treatment but also of resistance and solidarity.

For more information, see <https://transnationalmigrantplatform.net/migrantppt/hearing-london>

LOSRRAS membership renewal

Many of you have paid your membership subs for 2018-19 (for which many thanks) but there are still quite a few subs that are outstanding. If this could apply to you and you would like to continue your membership of LOSRRAS as we hope you will, could you kindly contact belinda.kirby@btinternet.com or, if you don't have access to a computer, write to Belinda Kirby at **28 Prince Edward's Road, Lewes BN7 1BE**.
Many thanks.

Urgently wanted:

Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group currently needs men's trainers, size 8 – 10, medium jumpers, small and medium T-shirts, jeans (waist 32”) and travel bags. Collections at All Saints Centre, Friars Walk, Lewes, open Mon - Sat 9-11 am. Ring 01273 486391 for other times (if door shut, try office on the right side of the building). Please bring items in a carrier bag and put in black 'LOSRRAS' box inside entrance. Contact Val or Arnold Simanowitz on 01273 480011 with any queries.

Update: Lift The Ban Coalition

On 20th February Catherine West, Labour MP, tabled a bill in parliament to enable asylum seekers to work from six months after their asylum claim. Refugee Action, along with businesses, charities, trade unions and faith groups have formed the Coalition to enable asylum seekers to escape the trap they describe as '... gone from victims in one country to virtual prisoners in another'. Their subsistence allowance of about £37 per week denies them the means to integrate into a community, to travel or to study.

At present they can apply for work after twelve months but only for jobs on the Shortage Occupation List which could include classical ballet dancers or nuclear waste decommissioners: of little use to the doctors, engineers, mechanics, teachers, hairdressers, business managers amongst the generally well qualified who seek asylum in the UK.

Christine Jardine, Lib Dem MP, in a report on the Refugee Action website describes herself as 'part of a cross-party effort to give asylum seekers the right to work'. She introduced the new legislation in January and as a supporter of West, she says there will now be more time for MPs to learn of the arguments and put pressure on the Home Secretary to alter the rules.

This small change would make a big difference to asylum seekers not only financially but also to their mental health and hopes for the future. For more information, and to sign the petition: refugee-action.org.uk

Lifeboat: A powerful short film

Lifeboat puts a human face on the refugee crisis and provides a spark of hope for how civil society can intervene in a meaningful way. The film follows volunteers from a German non-profit who seek to rescue refugees who have left Libyan shores and are in danger from capsizing in the Mediterranean.

<https://www.shortoftheweek.com/2019/02/16/lifeboat/>

Request for volunteers

- LOSRAS is hoping to set up a visiting scheme to provide welfare support to foreign national prisoners in HMP Lewes. If you are interested in volunteering to visit someone once a week, please contact jean.gould1@gmail.com. Training and on-going support will be available.
- As you know Refugee Tales will be coming to Lewes and Alfriston at the start of this year's 5 day walk. There will be several occasions during June and July where any help with welcoming walkers, with teas and refreshments etc. would be welcome. Please contact sylvia.argyle@btinternet.com.

Erratum

Many apologies to long-standing friend and supporter of LOSRAS, Lou Glandfield, whose name we misspelt in our last newsletter, together with his band, Mangowiji.

LOSRAS aims to promote the welfare of refugees & asylum seekers in and beyond the Lewes District by:

- raising awareness of issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers
- providing practical help and responding to local issues as they arise
- advocating and lobbying to improve the rights of refugees and asylum seekers

Committee:

Chair: Jody Harris info@losras.org

Treasurer: Tony Sims

Membership Secretary: Belinda Kirby 01273 474935, belinda.kirby@btinternet.com

Members: Jane Andrew, Alison Bell, Jean Gould, Jane Lancashire, Gill Lipson, Jane McIntosh, Annie Ralph, Gill Tipping