**RAPAR**

**A Manchester UK based Human Rights Organisation**

**22nd March 2016**

**Press Release, for immediate release.  With three pictures and one video link**

**"An act of wanton barbarism":**

**Burning of Refugee's Legal Centre in Calais 'Jungle' is Condemned**

* **"An act of wanton barbarism..."*London Islington Councillor and Congolese Refugee, Michelline Ngongo***
* **"The fire happened the day after the press conference where we profiled the responsibilities of the French and British Governments..." *Marianne Humbersot, Coordinator, Calais Refugee Legal Centre***
* **"The attack and burning of the Legal Centre at the Calais Jungle is a shameful assault... to be strongly condemned." *Mark George QC, Head of Chambers at Garden Court North in Manchester***
* **"France, as a country that prides itself on democratic values and human rights principles, by permitting this action, is guilty of the same human rights abuses that it attacks other countries for abusing!" *International Lawyer, Dr. Esohe Aghatise, Turin***
* **"As I was walking in the morning I saw it was burned.  I hope they have a plan to make a new centre." *Said (not his real name), Afghan interpreter stuck in Calais***

**It was the work of the Legal Centre, torched last Thursday, that brought four unaccompanied young children from Syria from Calais to Britain last month.  One of the last standing structures in the southern zone of the refugee camp, its destruction has provoked outrage among legal and political representatives both here in the UK, and in Europe.**

**Mark George QC,  reacted to the news as follows:**

***"The attack and burning is a shameful assault on the ability of some of the most vulnerable people in Europe to access legal advice about their most basic human rights and, where appropriate, their potential asylum rights in the UK or elsewhere in Europe, and is to be strongly condemned."***

**RAPAR's current casework includes two young Afghan men, now stuck in the Calais camp after fleeing their homes last summer because of their former employment as interpreters for the British forces in Afghanistan (See 27th February 2016 Channel 4 News item :**[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-i-oxaAyxM**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-i-oxaAyxM)**).   Their UK-based solicitor, Shaista Raja describes how, for all its residents, burning their legal centre means;**

***“these displaced people have been further fended off and denied access to basic legal rights which belong - without presumption or cost of privilege - to all human beings.”***

**Speaking with RAPAR, the Centre's coordinator Marianne Humbersot, has described that the workers have suffered*“many intimidations over the last weeks”,* going on to point out that the fire occurred the day after their press conference profiling*“the responsibilities of the French and British Governments towards protecting minors; police violence against migrants; and the tragic conditions created through the expulsions of people from the southern zone.”***

**MEP Julie Ward, who first visited the camp  in December last year as part of a Stand Up To Racism delegation from the North West, has described how the Calais Refugee Legal Centre was established to fill the vacuum left by the State, when it did not step up to assume its responsibility.  Now she is demanding to know*"what arrangements have been made to provide an alternative facility?"***

**And as Islington Councillor Michelline Ngongo, herself a refugee from Congo who has visited the camp on a number of occasions explains:**

***"The volunteer lawyers of the law centre succeeded in bringing the four young refugees from Syria into the UK last month: too deliberately burn it down is an act of wanton barbarism."***

**Further afield, and following her direct questions about Calais to Laurence Rossignol, the Junior French Minister for Family Matters, during a United Nations event in New York last week, Turin based International lawyer Esohe Aghatise observes:**

***"France seems to have forgotten its proud revolutionary history of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity and is letting xenophobic rhetoric cloud its judgement.  As a country that prides itself on democratic values and human rights principles, by permitting this action, it is guilty of the same human rights abuses that it attacks other countries for abusing!"***

**RAPAR is now publicly asking the Calais Head of Police Delphine Brard to explain the role of the security services, deployed under her command, who have been captured using violence to evict everyone living in the area around this legal centre in its destruction.**

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***“these displaced people have been further fended off and denied access to basic legal rights which belong - without presumption or cost of privilege - to all human beings.”***

**Speaking with RAPAR, the Centre's coordinator Marianne Humbersot, has described the workers suffering*“many intimidations over the last weeks”,* going on to point out that the fire occurred the day after their press conference profiling*“the responsibilities of the French and British Governments towards protecting minors; police violence against migrants; and the tragic conditions created through the expulsions of people from the southern zone.”***

**For MEP Julie Ward, who first visited the camp  in December last year as part of a Stand Up To Racism delegation from the North West of England, the Calais Refugee Legal Centre was established to fill the vacuum left by the State, when it did not step up to assume its responsibility.  Now she is demanding to know*"what arrangements have been made to provide an alternative facility?"***

**And Islington Councillor Michelline Ngongo, herself a refugee from Congo who has visited the camp on a number of occasions, is unequivocal:**

***"The volunteer lawyers of the law centre succeeded in bringing the four young refugees from Syria into the UK last month: to deliberately burn it down is an act of wanton barbarism."***

**Further afield, following her direct questioning last week in New York, about Calais, to Laurence Rossignol, the Junior French Minister for Family Matters, Turin based international lawyer Dr. Esohe Aghatise says:**

***"France seems to have forgotten its proud revolutionary history of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity and is letting xenophobic rhetoric cloud its judgement.  As a country that prides itself on democratic values and human rights principles, by permitting this action, it is guilty of the same human rights abuses that it attacks other countries for abusing!"***

**The Calais Head of Police - Delphine Brard - commands the CRS security services who have been filmed and photographed using violence to evict camp residents.  RAPAR is now publicly asking her to explain the role of the CRS in the destruction of this Centre.**

**ENDS**

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Julie Ward's unabridged statement about the burning

I have visited the Calais Jungle Camp twice since December 2015, most recently on February 15 2016, when I was shown the Legal Centre. I have spoken with dozens of dispossessed people (including many women, children and unaccompanied minors) who have found themselves living in the camp, unable to move on to join family and friends in the UK, and with no desire to submit themselves to further trauma back in their war-torn countries or in other parts of continental Europe where too many of them have sadly been victims of violence and racism.

The Legal Centre, with its group of qualified and experienced volunteers, has been a key component of the  infrastructure in the camp, manned by compassionate and committed European citizens who wish to uphold the EU's fundamental values and ensure that relevant authorities do not flout human rights in their dealings with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The recent and inexplicable destruction of the Legal Centre by fire raises many questions at a time when areas of the camp have been subjected to heavy-handed clearance and increased presence by the CSR, in what appears to be a campaign to break the social ties between those living in the camp.

The camp residents are not without rights although their capacity to act is limited by lack of finance and poor language skills. Negotiating the world of officialdom in a foreign country puts them at an immediate disadvantage. Hence the crucial role played by the Legal Centre whose painstaking work is to be applauded.

I condemn, therefore, what appears to be a systematic campaign by the CSR to frustrate the invaluable work of volunteer aid organisation's including those engaged in legal processes. Vulnerable people fleeing from conflict should be given protection and access to services rather than be subjected to callous inhumane treatment and denied their rights. When the state will not step up to assume its responsibility we see all too often that civil society steps into the vacuum. This is exactly why the Legal Centre at the Calais Jungle Camp was established. At the very least I expect an independent inquiry as to how the fire in the centre started, and what arrangements have been made to provide an alternative facility.