**RAPAR**
The Manchester-based Human Rights organisation working with displaced people

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**Manchester father of three ends hunger strike following humanitarian visit from City Council’s Executive Lead for Children and Families**

***“Every bite I took, I felt guilty eating it knowing my husband was starving himself to death just to gain back his dignity” - Alma Senoussaoui***

***“On a humanitarian level, my colleagues and I wanted to visit Houcine and his family to ensure their welfare during what has been a difficult and traumatic time” - Cllr Afzal Khan***

After 29 days on hunger strike Houcine Senoussaoui, who alongside his wife Alma has been fighting for 13 years to achieve safety for their three children and themselves, agreed to resume eating. This followed an approach by RAPAR to Cllr Afzal Khan in his capacity as the Executive Lead on Children and Families for Manchester City Council.

Cllr Khan visited Houcine, Alma and their children at their home along with two Moss Side Councillors, Alistair Cox and Roy Walters.

Cllr Khan explained: “As councillors, we have no jurisdiction over asylum claims but, on a humanitarian level, my colleagues and I wanted to visit Houcine and his family to ensure their welfare during what has been a difficult and traumatic time.

“I am glad Houcine has chosen to end his hunger strike and will continue to follow his case with interest.”

Houcine started his hunger strike on 15th July, three days after the Home Office refused the family’s asylum and human rights claim. All their children were born here and their eldest, being 11, has his own British passport. But the Home Office said that Houcine could not stay in the UK because of a conviction handed down by an Italian court – even though the charge was undefended and Houcine has since been pardoned by the court in Milan. Houcine believed a hunger strike was the only option he had left to fight the Home Office’s continued refusal of his asylum claim and to publicise the injustice he had encountered.

After the councillors' visit, Houcine explained:“I am very grateful to the councillors that they have come to see us and shown their concerns and support towards me and my family. The 29 days without food was not easy but, compared to 13 years of home office torture, it was very easy. I have only 2 options: win my case or die here.”

The councillors reassured Houcine that they are aware of the case and want to do everything possible to support the family and the children until a resolution can be found.

Houcine's solicitor has submitted an appeal against the Home Office decision to reject the asylum claim. But currently, following drastic cuts in public spending on legal services, there is a delay of up to 16 weeks before appeals in immigration cases can be heard.

Alma, the mother of the family, is from Bosnia, where the couple first met.  While they were there, an attempt on their lives by the Algerian security forces resulted in serious injury to both of them, a miscarriage for Alma, and two years in a wheelchair while she recovered.

Now, Alma says: “The past month was the hardest month in my life. Every bite I took I felt guilty eating it knowing that my husband was starving himself to death just to gain back his dignity. I'm happy that he's going to be able to have dinner with us but at the same time I understand that there is a long way to go and the fight for justice has just begun. I would like to thank the councillors for visiting our house and offering their help and support. I'm very grateful to them.”

When they arrived in the UK in 2000, Houcine applied for asylum because of threats he received in Algeria and which continued when he and Alma lived together in Bosnia. The Home Office accept that, if Houcine is returned to Algeria, he would be subject to imprisonment and torture. But they say that, as Alma is a Bosnian national, he would be safe in Bosnia, and they expect all the family to return there.

However, the Bosnian state authorities operate a policy of returning those originally from Arabic countries to their countries of origin, without regard to their family, children or any ties to Bosnia. There are already many examples of this policy, increasing the likelihood that Houcine would be sent directly to Algeria immediately upon arrival in Bosnia.

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