

REFUGEE CRISIS

Faith Leaders' Open Letter to the Prime Minister

We are leaders from Britain's major faiths: Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Zoroastrian. All our faiths compel us to affirm the dignity of all human beings and to offer help to anyone in need. As people of faith, we call on your Government urgently to revise its policy towards refugees. The best of this country is represented by the generosity, kindness, solidarity and decency that Britain has at many times shown those fleeing persecution, even at times of far greater deprivation and difficulty than the present day. We rejoice in the mosaic of different faiths and British communities that we now represent. We are proud that in May 2016, in a survey by Amnesty International, 83% of Britons said they would welcome refugees into their neighbourhoods and households.

In the face of the unfolding human catastrophe, there are immediate and viable steps that the Government can take to offer sanctuary to more refugees. We call on you to create safe, legal routes of travel, for example by adopting fair and humane family reunion policies for refugees. Under the present immigration rules, a British doctor of Syrian origin could not bring her parents from a refugee camp in Lebanon – even though they were refugees and she could support and house them. A Syrian child who arrived alone in the UK could not bring his parents from a refugee camp in Jordan – even if the child were recognised a refugee and even though his parents were themselves refugees. Families in these situations can currently be reunited only by resorting to desperately unsafe irregular journeys, sometimes ending in avoidable tragedies.

We urge you to do more to welcome refugees and to ensure that your Government adheres to four refugee principles. These principles have already been endorsed by over three hundred and fifty judges and lawyers; by the main humanitarian aid and refugee agencies; and by over a hundred and twenty-five economists. These four principles were the 'charter' of a

demonstration last September 2015 attended by 90,000 people. On 17 September, these four refugee principles will underpin another major demonstration in London in support of refugees:

1. The UK should take a fair and proportionate share of refugees, both those already within Europe and those still outside it.
2. Safe and legal routes to the UK, as well as to the rest of Europe, need to be established.
3. Safe and legal routes within Europe, including the UK, should be established.
4. There should be access to fair and thorough procedures to determine eligibility for international protection wherever it is sought.

All our faiths teach us to alleviate suffering and share with those in need; many of our members and congregants are already active in helping refugees. We call on the Government to do more.

224 Signatories

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[↑ Back to top](#)

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