

# Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum

## ONE IN FIVE ASYLUM SEEKERS DESTITUTE

### Support the 48 hour Fast **against Destitution**

**Many asylum seekers in Britain have been made destitute because they have been denied any support to pay for housing, food and basic necessities under Section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.**

**January 2004 marks a year since the Act actually came into operation. For 48 hours a group of people in Nottingham will be fasting to show support for those people. Fasts are also planned in Cardiff, Leeds, Sheffield and Oxford.**

At the moment, this Section 55 denies all support to asylum seekers (without dependents) that fail to make their application for asylum as soon as “reasonably practicable” on arrival in Britain, and those whose appeal to remain in the country has been denied, and who have now come to the end of the appeal process. From July - September 2003, the Home Office denied any support to 2,810 applicants on the grounds they did not apply “as soon as reasonably practicable”. Section 55 has been interpreted extremely harshly, and as a result there has been an unprecedented rise in the numbers being denied assistance, resulting in many asylum seekers becoming homeless, and driven to begging on the streets. Two women had their application rejected as too late even though it was within hours of arriving in Britain. Under pressure, the Government has announced that they will use a 72-hour deadline for applications – completely inadequate when the whole process is unknown to asylum seekers.

Many asylum seekers arriving in this country have limited knowledge of the language and are unaware of the procedures that have to be followed when making an application for asylum. Many people have their application denied because they are unable to complete the large (almost 20 pages) Statement of Evidence form in English within 10 working days.

The Government is now trying to extend Section 55 to asylum seekers with dependents, who will not agree to their own deportation even though it could be back to countries they have fled in fear from. They then suggested that the children of those asylum seekers should be taken away from their parents and put into care as their parents will be destitute as a result of that planned legislation. The Government is using children to force asylum seekers to be deported. Continuing the attack on asylum seekers it was reported in December that failed asylum seekers will be barred from free NHS treatment.

The Government also announced it wants to reduce the right of appeal for asylum seekers. This is because even under the very restrictive legislation that exists appeals can be won. The latest figures show that the largest group of applicants in Britain are presently from Somalia and 39% won their appeal. This shows how poor the initial decision making is.

The results of the policy has been to force many asylum seekers (estimated at 19%) into destitution. In Nottingham there has been a large number of new applicants for food charity since October 2003. In the 4<sup>th</sup> richest country in the world, there are people who have to survive on

food parcels from the Methodist Church in Nottingham. That church alone has had to support at least 69 asylum seekers.

The Government, the other establishment parties, the media and the far right parties give the impression that there are many more asylum seekers in Britain than elsewhere. Yet 19 out of every 20 refugees and asylum seekers are not even in Europe. Even in Europe, Britain is only 8<sup>th</sup> in the number of asylum applications per head of population at 1.7 applications per 1,000 people.

These asylum seekers are the victims of the Government's attempts to placate the tabloid press and the extreme right parties. They are the most vulnerable section of the population who, in the majority of the cases, are fleeing from persecution in their country of origin.

Many people throughout Britain have chosen today to show their opposition to government policy.

### **If you would like to show your support:**

- **Sign the Petition**
- **Make a donation**
- **Join in the campaign against government attempts to scapegoat asylum seekers.**

Supported by Alan Simpson MP

### **Some examples from Nottingham**

1) O, a man from Iraq - has been in Britain for 9 months and never had any support because of Section 55. He only has the clothes he wears. He has been staying with friends and living rough. He received a letter telling him to sign on at the police station, and was frightened that he would be detained. This terrified him. He does not want to beg or ask for charity. He wants a life and if he cannot have one, has threatened to kill himself.

2) S, a young woman from the Congo - arrived in ill health and possibly pregnant. Because of Section 55, she had to register at one of Liverpool, Solihull or Croydon. NNRD Destitution fund helped her get to Liverpool (by the cheapest route). There, she was given another appointment a week later, also in Liverpool. An agency gave her emergency accommodation and money for food, but is not allowed to give her a train ticket. The attitude was: 'If she lives off bread and milk for a week, she can save for her ticket.' (It was since discovered that she is under 18, and should have been in the care of social services.

3) S, a Kurdish woman from Turkey who has 3 children. Her support was withdrawn in error after her application was refused, even though the legal process was still continuing. She and her children were left destitute for 3 months, before her support was re-instated.