

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

Green Party
for the South East of England

Rt Hon Joan Ryan MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
The Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

March 8th 2007

Dear Joan,

Thank you for replying to my letter to Liam Byrne about monitoring failed asylum seekers on return. I appreciate you taking the time to explain government policy, however, I do not feel that you adequately addressed all the points I raised.

To begin with, you made no mention of the fact that reports have been received about officials passing documentation to the authorities in countries like Iran and DRC about returnees. You will appreciate that returned individuals might distrust and fear those in positions of power, especially if they expect to be exposed to intimidation or abuse. Please can you explain the circumstances under which UK officials escorting failed asylum seekers may hold documentation relating to individuals, why papers submitted as part of an asylum claim would be passed to the authorities in another country, and what measures are in place to ensure that doing so does not place people at risk?

In the instance of Iran, the UK has not released details of any operational understanding in relation to the return of failed asylum seekers. How, then are those making life and death decisions about asylum seekers meant to assess potential risks? I cited evidence from human rights groups about the risks faced in DRC and Iran. Is the Home Office denying that this is the case? I note your comment 'we would not return them if we considered that they were likely to suffer persecution on their return' but that does not appear to rule out the possibility. Surely, if failed asylum seekers are mistreated on their return, this is something the government would want to know, so that it can update its Country Guidance, as appropriate? This would appear to be morally imperative as well as politically sensible.

Finally, I would like to point out that I am not in any way suggesting compulsory monitoring - I am more than mindful of the fact that in some instances this may put people at risk. I am stunned, however, that the Home Office can claim it is only sending people back to places that are safe, yet, simultaneously, point out that having contact with eg a representative of a third country or a human rights monitoring group may pose a danger. Does that not imply a potential breach of Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights, in itself? And if this is indeed the case, how are individuals meant to take up specific cases of ill treatment with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as you suggest?

I would welcome your further comments on these matters and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.