

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

Green Party
for the South East of England

Commissioner Ferrero Waldner,
DG External Relations
The European Commission
200 Rue de la Loi
B1049 Brussels
Belgium

March 8th 2007

Dear Commissioner,

The UK government has just deferred the date to review the 'Country Guidance' given in relation to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) ie the document that forms the basis for decisions concerning asylum claims. This alarming news has raised fresh concerns that considerable numbers of asylum seekers are returned by the UK to countries that are unsafe and unstable, often with poor records on human rights and a tendency to target those that have tried to leave.

In the case of the DRC, for example, human rights organisation working on the ground confirm that many returned asylum seekers are illegally imprisoned and that their families are subjected to attacks and intimidation. There have even been allegations that personal files are handed over to the Congolese authorities by those escorting asylum seekers back to the country. The impact on those that remain in the UK is devastating - for those with permission to stay and for those waiting on decisions about their status, fearful that a lack of news means their returned countrymen and women are dead.

We have corresponded previously about the discrimination faced by Ahwazi Arabs in Iran. Yet Ahwazi asylum seekers are also routinely returned to Iran and very little appears to be done to ascertain whether or not their safety is guaranteed. Indeed, NGOs, working with Ahwazi families here in the UK and in Iran, claim that returned individuals are routinely arrested and interrogated by the Iranian authorities.

I have taken these matters up with the UK Home Office only to be told that individuals would not be returned, to the DRC or elsewhere, if they faced any danger. They do not accept that data collection about what happens to returnees is necessary - either with regard to moral responsibility or in terms of providing useful information to supplement the 'Country Guidance' reports. Yet such work would be invaluable. It could either confirm that the data used to make decisions is accurate and the system is working, or provide vital evidence that the guidelines need updating. This failure to properly collate information about what happens to returnees is not confined to the UK - similar returns are made on an almost daily basis by other member states with virtually no ongoing monitoring of the consequences.

Given the European Commission's excellent network of offices and staff around the world, I am hoping some consideration can be given to ways of overcoming this worrying lack of monitoring. The Commission could deliver such a function, obviously with measures built in to ensure the consent of the returned individuals and through neighbouring countries as appropriate. Alternatively, funds could be made available for local or regional human rights groups to take on such a role, perhaps with some degree of Commission guidance or management.

I believe that the EU has a responsibility towards those people that seek refuge in our member states, whilst still respecting those aspects of asylum policy determined at national level. Yet a lack of coordinated follow-up work means this responsibility is not being adequately fulfilled. I would, therefore, very much welcome your views on this matter and your comments on what might be done practically.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline Lucas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.