



# Refugees for Justice

## Manifesto 30 June 2020

We are grieving for Glasgow, for the lives that have been lost, for our fellow citizens who have sustained awful injuries, for our fellow refugees and asylum seekers, for our City. But we saw this coming. We saw this coming, and this makes the pain unbearable.

**We are a group of refugees and asylum seekers in Glasgow**, with a simple, but very important question, to which we demand full answer:

### ***Why did the tragedy of Glasgow Park Inn Hotel happen?***

We do not deserve this. The City did not deserve this. None of the victims of this devastating tragedy deserve this. Staff members of Park Inn Hotel did not sign up to be detention guards, nor did the staff member of the Mears Group sign up and/or trained to be social workers or psychotherapists working with people who are fleeing persecution; people who are already traumatised, and further neglected by the system. The police officers who took the call did not know they would be involved in witnessing the serious injury of a colleague, or a fatal shooting. The neighbours and office workers on the street did not sign up for this. The asylum seekers who were injured in the hotel did not sign up for this. People come to Scotland for peace and sanctuary, not for violence.

So, why did this tragedy happen? What was the underlying causes of this devastating tragedy? We believe a broken, inhumane, and unjust asylum and immigration system that allows people to be treated this way, and allows our cities, communities and citizens to face such tragic consequences.

### **What happened to people who are asylum seekers during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The Mears Group is a private company contracted by the Home Office to provide accommodation to people who are asylum seekers in Scotland.

Following the COVID-19 outbreak, the Home Office allowed Mears to evict hundreds of people who are asylum seekers from their homes and move them to hotel rooms in Glasgow.

- Why did they move people from individual, safe shared houses and flats to hotel rooms? From spaces where physical distance and households could be maintained to spaces where they could not? How could this be justified and compliant with public health instructions when everyone else in Scotland was told to 'stay home' in separate households? A hotel is not a detention centre or direct provision. Why was this change made? And what was the company profit in removing all maintenance payments?
- How did they move people? What processes were followed? What assessments were done to identify and protect vulnerable people? What training was given to the staff who were to work in the hotels and reception?
- Following the moves, what were the living conditions for people in hotel rooms? What measures were put in place to ensure their safety and well-being? What support was available and accessible?
- What were the consequences of this on individuals and the city as a whole?

We have heard some previous answers to these questions from Mears, but we know that they are not true. We know because we have heard and seen the truth, daily, directly from our friends, our fellow asylum seekers and refugees in those hotel rooms. We have been trying, consistently, to raise their concerns with the authorities and the Mears group. We were ignored. We were told that everything was fine. We were frustrated in our efforts to protect the residents of the City of Glasgow, and that is why on Wednesday 17 June 2020, we went to George Square to protest and to tell the truth to the public. On that day in George Square, we were violently attacked. We were not listened to.

### **We will not be unheard anymore.**

Here are the headlines of what we know:

- In their shared houses and flats, asylum seekers were safer and better able to follow public health instructions to protect themselves and others from the risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19 than in hotels.
- Asylum seekers were evicted from their homes with no adequate notice. Some were given 20 minutes, or even less, to pack up and get into the car. Some did not know where they are being moved to and why. Some had washing on or were in the middle of cooking or shopping. Some were lied to and intimidated by Mears staff members. They were not given an option. There was no assessment conducted to identify and protect vulnerable people from risk of harm.
- Following the move, asylum seekers were neglected. They were put in inhumane and undignified conditions, with very limited access to support. Their little cash support was stopped. They did not know how to access medical support. They were forced into extreme poverty in the midst of a pandemic. They were distressed, isolated, and neglected and were not able to protect themselves. Their mental health deteriorated significantly.
- Adnan, a 30-year-old Syrian refugee, died in one of the hotel rooms earlier in May. It is reported that his mental health rapidly deteriorated after being moved from his home to a hotel room. A Scottish investigation led by the Crown Office is ongoing, and we respect that it will take some time for the full facts to emerge. We believe

Adnan could still be alive if he was not put in such distressing conditions, and if he could have access to adequate support.

- Badreddin, a 28-year-old man, who was here seeking asylum, was shot dead by police after he stabbed 6 people in the Park Inn Hotel. He was neglected, humiliated, and isolated. He was distressed the night before the incident. He expressed his anger and frustration to other asylum seekers in the hotel and this was reported to hotel staff. We believe he could still be alive, and this devastating tragedy could have been prevented.

We have hundreds of devastating stories and shocking testimonies, which **we demand to be heard**. We are presenting you with the simple facts coming directly from asylum seekers and refugees who we speak to, who have been trapped in those hotel rooms for months now.

We ask for those stories to be fully heard. **We ask for a safe, transparent, supportive and publicly accountable process to be put in place for people to talk about their experience free from any fear and intimidation**. This includes all staff members, service users, and members of the public who have been involved and affected.

In the past three months, asylum seekers have been consistently silenced, intimidated and threatened. People who seek asylum do not feel safe to speak out because they fear that it would affect their asylum claim. **We ask for specific steps to be taken and additional support to be put in place to ensure that people who seek asylum are empowered to talk about their experiences in an open and honest way without reprisal**.

We ask for all institutional and organisational agendas to be put aside, and we demand all parties to truly listen to what people have to say.

We all have first-hand experience of how people who seek asylum in the UK are routinely denied their basic rights. **We have serious concerns that the rights and humanity of people who seek asylum will be further denied in the process** of understanding what went wrong, and holding the people who were responsible to account.

## **We demand:**

1. **Those responsible for the inhumane treatment of people who seek asylum, and the policies and decisions that have contributed to the deaths and irreparable harm to the lives of our fellow Glaswegians to be held to account.**
2. **Additional steps to be taken and specific support to be put in place to ensure that people who seek asylum and have been accommodated in hotel rooms feel completely safe and supported to talk about their experiences in an open and honest way without reprisal. Any process of enquiry to be co-designed with people who have lived experience of the asylum process in the UK.**
3. **The UK asylum system that allows the abuse of human rights and the inhumane treatment of individuals to stop the abuse and make real changes for the better so that something like this never happens again.**

## Immediate actions that must be taken:

- a) People who are asylum seekers in Glasgow must be returned to their residential accommodation immediately.
- b) People's basic financial allowance (£5.39) must be restored immediately.
- c) The incident in Park Inn Hotel must be fully and independently investigated at every level of accountability to ensure that lessons are learned, this never happens again, and the failures of the system are exposed and justice done.
- d) The guiding principles of the process should be care of those affected, regardless of immigration status, and the pursuit of the truth.
- e) Witnesses of the incident should be protected, offered support and trauma counselling and their urgent practical needs met as with any other victims of crime or witnesses to criminal acts.
- f) The families and communities of all affected should be fully supported to understand what went wrong and how it will be prevented from ever happening again.

## Our message to:

***Our fellow Glaswegians***, you have made this city home for us. We make Glasgow together. We will fight for changes so that all humans are treated with dignity, the truth is heard about the system failures, and justice is served. We will not let you down.

***All the workers, police officers, residents, and neighbours of the hotel who were affected by this tragedy***, you do not deserve to go through this. We will be persistent to demand that you have all the support you need to recover, and all the space you need to make your voice heard.

***Scottish Government***, you have been progressive and positive towards us and we welcome your support. You have seen how the UK immigration and asylum policy results in gross human rights abuses in our cities. We ask you not to tolerate this anymore. We know that asylum and immigration policy is a reserved matter. But this is no longer a good enough excuse. We ask you to use all your powers to prevent human rights abuses in Scotland and to ensure justice for all. We ask you to ensure that new Scots who seek asylum enjoy the same rights and entitlements as every other person in Scotland.

***UK Government***, you have deliberately put people who seek asylum in adverse and inhumane conditions to make their lives as difficult as possible in the UK. You even have a formal name for this policy: "The Hostile Environment". You have put in place a system that allows gross human rights abuses. As we have seen, the consequences of this unjust system is ultimately faced by our cities and our communities and our citizens. This has to stop now.

***The Mears Group***, we demand accountability for the deaths and irreparable harm to the lives of people who seek asylum, refugees, our fellow Glaswegians, as a consequence of your decisions and your failures to act to protect the lives of those in your care. We will push

for a full and fair examination, by way of an independent inquiry or the scrutiny of a court of your failings.

We are launching ***Refugees for Justice*** on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2020, in response to the deep wounds our city has suffered as a direct result of inhumane treatment of people who seek asylum in the UK.

Our goal is simple: Justice.

If you want to support, please get in touch with us at: [refugeesforjustice@gmail.com](mailto:refugeesforjustice@gmail.com)

### **To get the latest update:**

Visit our website: [www.refugeesforjustice.com](http://www.refugeesforjustice.com)

Follow us on twitter: [@refugee4justice](https://twitter.com/refugee4justice)

Ako Zada

Dylan Fotoohi

Olivia Ndoti

Pinar Aksu

Roza Salih

Other members who have an outstanding asylum claim wish to remain anonymous in order to reduce the risk of a negative impact on their asylum case with the Home Office.

30 June 2020



# **Refugees for Justice**