OPEN STATEMENT TO THE MEDIA

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Stop the war on asylum seekers

We the undersigned condemn utterly the hysteria about asylum seekers being whipped up by sections of the media. We are deeply concerned at ministerial statements which have encouraged the hysteria, and Tony Blair's pledge to re-examine Britain's obligations to international conventions on asylum.

War is the biggest producer of asylum seekers. For a government at the forefront of both pursuing armed interventions and arming international conflicts, scrapping this country's provision of asylum to those fleeing persecution would be absolutely shameful.

Sections of the media have tried to draw a link between asylum seekers and terrorists. Now politicians and even liberal church leaders are proposing to lock up thousands of innocent, desperate people for "security checks" because of the alleged actions of a tiny handful of individuals. Whole communities now run the risk of being branded as "criminals".

The Labour government is legitimising racism in order to divide us. It is an old, and often-repeated, trick used by desperate politicians. Asylum seekers are not to blame for a welfare state starved of resources, crumbling schools and hospitals, poverty pensions and inadequate housing.

The biggest beneficiaries of the media's hysteria and the government's racist policies are the Nazis. Nick Griffin, the British National Party's leader, has claimed the Home Secretary David Blunkett as his best recruitment agent. Blunkett's ever-toughening policies on asylum, far from marginalising the Nazis, have helped them score a fifth council victory.

The biggest victims of the hysteria and the racism are asylum seekers. Three have been murdered on the streets of this country in the past two years alone. Dozens have been severely beaten, hundreds abused.

Now government legislation is set to make asylum seekers even greater targets for racist abuse.

Blunkett's claim that multiculturalism in Britain is a "coiled spring" reeks of hypocrisy when his government is creating the conditions for increased racial tension.

His warning of "vigilante" attacks smacks of double standards when New Labour has criminalised asylum seekers.

We call on the government to honour its obligations to international agreements on refugees and asylum seekers, stop the racist persecution of asylum seekers and stand up to the racists and bigots instead of pandering to them.

We applaud the benefits of living in a multiracial and multicultural society and believe we are all beneficiaries of a society to which immigrants have made a major contribution.

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Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers

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