

# The Refugee Project

## UK foreign policies and investment create refugees and asylum seekers

The vast majority of refugees and asylum seekers are fleeing from conflict, or from social or economic oppression. In many cases, the British government, companies and taxpayers are directly or indirectly responsible. Their overseas investment and foreign policies can force people to leave their homes and then their countries.

These investments and policies are not just the obvious ones – waging war or allowing the export of weapons. They also include construction of infrastructure projects, such as hydro-electric and irrigation dams, oil and gas pipelines, and mines, and support for policies that privilege free trade above food security, health or human rights.

The Refugee Project – a UK coalition of groups and individuals concerned with environmental, human rights and development issues – believes that freedom of movement for all is a fundamental human right. It welcomes *voluntary* migration, but is resolutely opposed to *forced* migration. It opposes development policies and projects that involve *involuntary* resettlement. It objects to policies that give people no option but to move if they are to escape political oppression or economic deprivation.

Despite being forced to move, many people are refused asylum or refugee status if they manage to come to the UK and are denigrated as “welfare scroungers” or “bogus applicants”.. The US- and UK-led "War on Terror" is marginalising refugees still further as numerous legitimate political movements are labelled "terrorist". In the process, refugee communities in particular and dissent in general are being criminalised. Moreover, the UK government gives richer economic migrants, such as multinational employees, the privileged treatment, such as visas and tax exemptions, that it denies poorer migrants.

The Refugee Project focuses on the relationship between forced migration, and UK overseas investment and foreign policy. It aims to provide a platform on which refugees can voice their histories.

The Refugee Project aims to highlight:

- the social, political, economic and ecological causes of migration;
- how aid and development project and policies can create conditions which generate migration; and
- the discrimination and human rights implications of prevailing responses to such migration.

To endorse these aims and objectives, please contact The Refugee Project, Tel: 020 7250 1315, Email: [info@therefugeeproject.org](mailto:info@therefugeeproject.org), or sign and return the form below to: The Refugee Project, c/o 44 Ainger Road, London, NW3 3AT

Name:..... Signature:.....

Organisation:.....

Address:.....

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Tel: ..... Email:.....

### What you can do:

- **Organise a local meeting to discuss the issues – The Refugee Project will be happy to arrange speakers.**
- **Write a letter to your local paper drawing attention to the role that Britain plays in creating refugees and asylum seekers – The Refugee Project can supply background material.**
- **Write to your local MP highlighting the issues.**
- **If you are a member of a trade union, local council or other group, propose a branch resolution supporting The Refugee Project’s aims and objectives.**

## **CREATING REFUGEES**

### **Supporting repressive regimes**

Conflict and political repression are major causes of asylum seeking and enforced migration. The major customers of many arms deals backed by the UK (through its Export Credits Guarantee Department) are generally acknowledged to be repressive governments. Such arms sales send a message of international political approval to the recipient government. Well-documented evidence indicates that weapons exported with ECGD support have been used to suppress dissent.

### **Collaborating with oppressive security forces**

UK investments or exports to areas of conflict may perpetuate or exacerbate violence. This is particularly the case when UK company operations depend on collaboration with local paramilitaries or government security forces. In Colombia, security operations along BP's Ocesa pipeline have involved human rights abuses and generated refugees and asylum seekers.

### **Displacing people for "development"**

Many UK-backed development projects have caused pollution or destroyed forests. In the process, they have often restricted access to and control over environments that poorer people rely on for their livelihoods. The environmental degradation caused by large-scale hydro-electric and irrigation dams, for instance, invariably triggers a downward cycle of dispossession, poverty and immiseration as people are forced to move from the flooded areas. In India alone, anywhere between 20 million and 50 million people have been displaced by dams. Many of these dams were built by UK companies or were financially supported by the UK through bilateral aid or through the World Bank and other multilateral development banks.

### **Creating environmental refugees**

The UK's support for oil and gas development has longer-term implications. Global warming is likely to generate millions of "environmental refugees".. Some 100 million people may be forced to move by the middle of this century because of sea level rises, drought and adverse weather conditions. Yet the UK does not require assessments of the potential climate-change impacts caused by the projects and programmes it supports with public money. For instance, the burning of the Caspian oil transported by the proposed Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, which is being built by UK oil company, BP, will add an estimated 160 million tonnes of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere over the project's 40-year life-span. The UK government supported this pipeline (through loans from the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) without assessing its climatic impacts, nor the likely social and environmental impacts of any resulting climate change.

### **Increasing poverty**

Inequality is often a significant and root cause of conflict. This in turn is a major cause of forced migration. Poverty alleviation is a central goal of UK development aid. But the structural adjustment programmes imposed on many developing countries by the International Monetary Fund (in which the UK is a shareholder) have cut public funding for health and other social programmes, and thus increased poverty. International trade policies required by the World Trade Organisation, particularly those in agriculture, have exacerbated this trend.

**Creating 'terrorist suspects'.** Through the 'war on terror', the UK has turned entire migrant communities into 'terrorist suspects'. Its so-called 'anti-terror' laws have broadened the definition of terrorism to encompass various political activities, including those carried out against oppressive regimes abroad. On this basis, it has classified numerous liberation movements as 'terrorist', as a basis for criminalising any association with them in this country. It has also authorised greater police powers to investigate and detain anyone suspected of such involvement. In this way, a racist culture of suspicion is deployed to silence refugees and to protect the security of the oppressive regimes from which they have fled.