



Ms Alphonsine Kabagabo  
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Dear Ms Kabagabo,

Thank you for your letter of 30 April to the Home Secretary on behalf of more than 70 representatives in the refugee sector highlighting your shared concerns about the impact of the New Plan for Immigration on women seeking asylum. I am replying as the Minister for Immigration Compliance and Justice. I shall address the issues you raise in turn.

### **Treatment of asylum-seeking women who arrive by irregular routes**

Illegal migration from safe countries undermines our efforts to help those most in need. Controlled resettlement via safe and legal routes is the best way to protect vulnerable people. Our resettlement schemes purposefully target those in greatest need of assistance, including women and girls at risk, providing them with a safe and legal route to the UK. Since 2015, the UK has resettled over 25,000 vulnerable refugees around half of which are women and girls. Those who fear persecution should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach and not put their lives at risk by making unnecessary and dangerous journeys to the UK.

The UK will continue to work with the UN and other international organisations to provide a safe and legal route for people fleeing persecution in their home countries, enabling them to start new lives in the UK. The Home Secretary will also have the ability to grant a humanitarian route to vulnerable individuals in immediate danger and at risk in their home country.

The Government has a statutory obligation to provide safe, secure accommodation to asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute. As part of our New Plan for Immigration a greater number of asylum seekers may be housed in dedicated reception centres with food and other essential living items provided on site, rather than being accommodated in flats and houses, as is usually the case now. However, although flats and houses are the most common way in which we accommodate asylum seekers who cannot support themselves, our providers already have considerable experience of managing full-board accommodation and ensuring that appropriate services are available. We will build on this experience as work progresses to establish the reception centre model and thereby contribute to the reform of the asylum system set out in the New Plan. The proposals are not designed to act as a means of detaining asylum seekers in the way suggested in your letter.

The Government also recognises that female refugees in particular face multiple challenges to integrating in the UK, including high levels of trauma. The New Plan will provide access to a tailored, holistic package of support which will enable refugees to integrate into the UK and rebuild their lives here.

### **‘One-stop’ process**

We have to stop meritless claims which overwhelm the system and are designed to delay removal. We hope by encouraging people to bring forward all issues up front – on asylum, human rights and modern slavery matters, we will be better able to ensure victims are identified and supported as early as possible. Of course, there may be reasons, including trauma, for an individual raising issues at a later date and these will be considered.

We are committed to ensuring that vulnerable individuals, for example victims of modern slavery, are identified as quickly as possible and provided with appropriate support. These proposals therefore seek to provide a space, with the provision of legal aid to support individuals, to bring forward any protection grounds.

We also recognise that some victims of exploitation may be fearful of coming forward to talk to the authorities. This is why we are working with a range of organisations including charities that work closely with refugees, and local authorities.

### **‘Well-founded fear of persecution’ test**

The new ‘well-founded fear test’ will ensure that those who genuinely require protection in the UK are granted protection. Setting out a clear and robust test will help us better serve those people who come to the UK in genuine need of protection. Assessing asylum claims is necessarily complex, but by setting out a clear test in statute for decision makers and the Courts to apply we will be able to assess claims with consistency and greater transparency, which is a desirable law reform for all those involved in the asylum process. Those who are not refugees but would face a breach of their human rights upon return will be granted a form of protection in the UK.

### **Fast-track appeals process and accelerated claims and appeals process from detention**

Immigration detention is an important part of the system. It encourages compliance with our immigration rules, protects the public from the consequences of illegal migration and ensures that people who are here illegally or are foreign criminals can be removed from this country when all else fails. Detention is not a decision that is taken lightly and when we do make the decision to detain someone, their welfare is an absolute priority. We are confident that the shortfalls of the previous process can be addressed and rectified, with sufficient safeguards and flexibility built-in.

### **Modern Slavery**

We are committed to ensuring that the National Referral Mechanism effectively supports genuine victims of modern slavery to recover. In doing so, we want to ensure that victims receive appropriate protections and support.

We also intend to separately review the ‘reasonable grounds’ test to ensure we are best able to identify victims, and reduce opportunities for the protections afforded by the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) to be misused. We will engage stakeholders in discussions on this issue as this work moves forward.

You also raised concerns around the proposed public order exemption, and specifically that this would deny women who have been victims of trafficking gaining access to the NRM. I would like to reiterate that any decision to withhold a recovery period for an individual will be underpinned by our priority to safeguard victims. We will carefully consider each individual case to ensure that people who genuinely need protection and support receive it, but it is right that we should be able to withhold protections from serious criminals and people who pose a national security threat to the UK.

Full details of all proposals will be confirmed following analysis of feedback from the recent consultation. I would like to reassure organisations working with women asylum seekers that we stand by our moral and legal obligations to help innocent civilians fleeing cruelty from around the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Philp', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Chris Philp MP**