

**STATEMENT TO BE MADE BY THE CHIEF MINISTER
ON TUESDAY 8TH SEPTEMBER 2015**

Migrant situation in Europe

We have all been distressed by the plight of thousands of people fleeing desperate situations in their homelands. Jersey has a long history of responding generously to humanitarian need and we all want to see a long term solution to this crisis.

I have been speaking to my counterpart in Guernsey, Deputy Jonathan Le Tocq, and to our diplomatic contacts in the UK, as this crisis has been unfolding. Given the gravity of the situation and the breadth of concern expressed by islanders, it has been necessary to consider what Jersey can do to help.

Deputy Le Tocq and I have agreed that the Channel Islands should do what they can to contribute to the global refugee response. Before I explain the steps we are taking, I would like to remind Members of the aid Jersey has already provided for Syrian refugees.

Jersey's Overseas Aid Commission has been supporting Syrian refugees since 2013, and has donated £350,000 to date.

In 2013 the escalating violence saw more than two million children in urgent need of humanitarian assistance as millions of Syrian refugees became displaced in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq. The Commission awarded UNICEF £30,000 for medicines and winter clothing, Oxfam £30,000 for food, hygiene kits, clean water and sanitation; and British Red Cross £30,000 for blankets, mattresses and family food parcels. A further £60,000 was provided to Oxfam to help provide safe access to water and sanitation for nearly 600,000 refugees who had fled to Jordan and Lebanon.

The number of refugees more than doubled between January and October 2013, and by December the Commission was advised that at least 100,000 people had died as a result of the conflict, with an estimated 6.5 million displaced. The Commission therefore granted Save the Children £30,000, UNICEF £50,000, Oxfam £50,000 and British Red Cross £50,000.

In 2014 there were no applications from aid agencies for emergency help, but the Commission provided nearly £20,000 to transport 12,500 winter jackets collected by Headway for Syrian refugees in Jordan.

Members will be aware that Jersey does not have its own procedures for asylum seekers but is a signatory to the relevant Conventions and Protocols. The 1951 Refugee Convention was extended to Jersey in 1955 and the New York Protocol in 1996. These conventions stipulate that people should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach. As we do not have processes in place here to hear asylum claims, anyone eligible to claim asylum who reaches Jersey would be referred to the UK Home Office, where their claim could be processed.

That said, the Chief Minister of Guernsey and I are determined to do what we can to support the refugee relief effort and have been exploring the possibility of taking some refugee families here in the Channel Islands. Our officials have been liaising with the UK Home Office to take this matter forward and will continue to do so over the coming days.

This process is at an early stage, there are a variety of technical obstacles to overcome and the extent of the assistance we can provide would be dependent on a range of factors. However, I know islanders would want us to do what we can to help these desperate people and I am today announcing the creation of a refugee fund into which islanders can donate. Details of this fund will be provided in the coming days.

In the meantime, I hope Members will agree that it is important to officially state our willingness to help in this crisis - not only by continuing to provide aid to the agencies working in the region with the most vulnerable, but also by looking at what we can do to help here in the Channel Islands. I congratulate those involved in the Jersey Calais Refugee Aid Group and will meet them next week.

We maintain regular dialogue with Guernsey and the UK on a range of issues, including the ongoing crisis throughout the EU. Our officials will continue to work closely with officials from Guernsey and the UK to develop our participation in the global refugee response.

I will keep Members informed as progress is made. These are complex issues but we all share a common humanity and Jersey, I know, wants to play its part. Indeed, I am sure Members will agree, must play its part.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Standing Orders now provide for a period of 15 minutes within which Members may ask the Chief Minister questions that relate to the contents of his statement. Deputy Norton.

5.1.1 Deputy M.J. Norton of St. Brelade:

As the Chief Minister will be aware, this weekend I have been in dialogue with the local officials of the British Red Cross about this very subject. Could the Chief Minister confirm that their expertise on local shores will be most useful and that they will be in dialogue with this organisation?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I thank the Deputy for his question and indeed the British Red Cross and the Jersey branch have experience of dealing with such crises as shown by the fact that the Overseas Aid Commission have already made donations via them to alleviate some of the issues in the camps on the Syrian border. To my mind there are 2 areas in regard to this crisis. There are those individuals who have already fled to Europe and there are those who remain in the camps, and we must treat them quite separately for a number of reasons. British Red Cross and the Jersey branch have offered their support and I am grateful to receive it and will be working with them. I believe that they can help in both areas of that work, both in relieving the pressure in Europe and in supporting any families which might ultimately come here as well. Thank you.

5.1.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Thank you to the Chief Minister for this statement which I welcome wholeheartedly. Could I invite the Chief Minister to take a moment just to recognise the fantastic work that has been done by the Jersey Calais Refugee Aid Group? All of the Islanders involved in that have really done our Island proud by their immense response and how quick they have been in being able to gather aid. My understanding is that some of the Parish Halls in this Island are full now with bags that people have offered to donate there. Could I ask the Chief Minister to recognise that?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I thank the Deputy for his question and I endeavoured to do that in my statement. I am grateful to them. They are working in a way which government cannot because the issue in Calais and in the E.U. is an issue which needs to be dealt with by the E.U. and I personally support the work that they have done. They have been able to raise provisions in very short order and get them directly there. I note that the Jersey College for Girls is also carrying out a programme to do so and I hope that other Islanders will support that work and, as I said, I will be meeting with them next week.

5.1.3 Deputy A.D. Lewis:

Later on today the Chief Minister will be presenting P.64 - the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006 - which extends certain sections to Jersey. Would the Minister feel this was an appropriate time to review that more fully enabling us to perhaps act more unilaterally, in other words, on our own, with regard to asylum or does he feel that such a burden would be too much for our administration? Thank you.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I think the Deputy in his closing sentence to his own question hit the nail on the head. To me it is extremely important that we work in concert with the United Kingdom. They already have the facilities for making sure - and I use this word carefully - that appropriate refugees are handled and put through that system before they are given either humanitarian leave to reside or refugee status. We are only a small Island; we could not deal with the numbers who are moving as a result of this crisis. It is very important for us not to be seen as a point to access the United Kingdom which is why I have made the statement that I have today and why the crisis in Calais is serious. The E.U. need to find a solution to it but for us our response I think is the right one. Individuals in Jersey can support those in Calais. The Overseas Aid Commission have been supporting those individuals in the camps and this is us exploring whether we cannot go a little bit further from what we have already done and take some families from the camps on the Syrian border, albeit in very small numbers.