

Amazed by Migration - The speakers view (NJPN Conference 17 - 19 July 2009)

Last weekend at the National Justice and Peace conference an array of speakers positioned the issues around migration before an open space technology day with everyone discussing the issues and putting actions in place. Here's what they had to say....

Don Flynn, of the Migrants Rights Network, called for faith groups, trade unions, citizens organisations and others working on migration to come together in solidarity. "There has been a generous response across the country to migrants. The big story is that refugees and migrants have found solidarity in local community and often the Church is the first friend available," said Don, who believes many of these groups work in isolation from others doing a similar thing down the road.

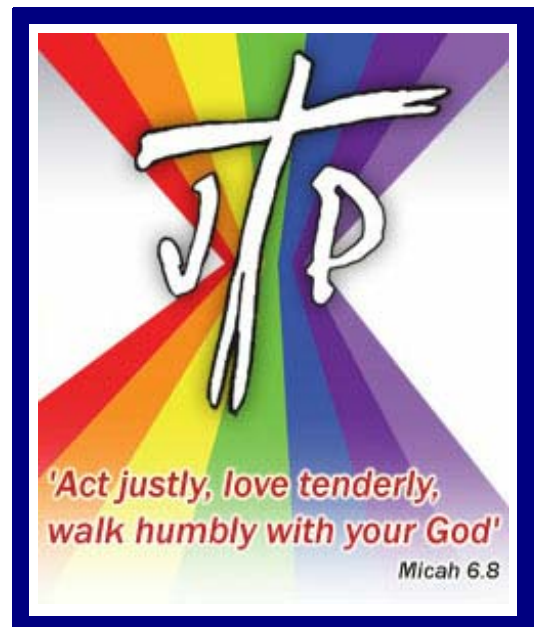
Don believes that there will be all to play for after the next election when policy agendas will be examined. He cited three areas to focus upon. "We have an asylum system that makes it impossible to recognise humanitarian need. The basic feature of asylum is to recognise those in need and the protection - that is missing," said Don

The second area is the problem being caused by the government points system for migrant workers coming to the country. The third area is to recognise the need for a regularisation for undocumented workers. "Whoever is elected, we must be on knocking on their door," said Don.

Mary Grey, Professor of Theology at St Mary's University College, Twickenham looked at migration in India, Palestine and Rwanda. In India between 300 and 350 million people live below the UN defined poverty line. There is also the caste system which discriminates against the Dalits (known as untouchables). Some 200,000 Dalits have come to Britain but they still face similar caste discrimination in communities here. Mary told how in Bethlehem people were imprisoned in their own land. "There are ongoing conflicts and all have implications for people living here in the form of the creation of refugees," said Mary, who called for the interconnectedness of the J&P network to be brought into play on the migration issue.

In Rwanda the scars left by the genocide of the mid nineties remain open. The Church was complicit in some of these massacres and has reparation to make.

Mary called for a recognition that the UK does not welcome asylum seekers, practices torture and colludes in rendition of people around the world. "God is vulnerable and with us in the fight for justice," said Mary.



Neil Jameson, founding executive director of the Citizens Organising Foundation and lead organiser with London Citizens, declared that the challenge was how we get from what the world is to what we want it to be. He told of a new campaign from London Citizens that aims to expose the usury being practiced via various debt agencies. This will begin next Wednesday with an action outside the Royal Bank of Scotland in London. Neil pointed out that the tax payer owns 60 per cent of RBS so it should be prepared to introduce a credit card with a maximum interest charge of 10 per cent.

Neil gave the history of other COF backed campaigns such as the living wage which came from Catholic parishes, where parishioners fed back that parish and family life were under threat due to adults having to do more than one job. "We said we could stand no more because of the impact on family life," said Neil who told how as a result of the campaign £20 million has been put in the pockets of poor people. "It means that some people can have holidays now who didn't before," said Neil.

Neil also paid tribute to the role of Catholic schools and parishes as the backbone of London Citizens. He told of the progress of the Strangers into Citizens campaign that seeks to get a regularisation for undocumented workers. "Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor went out on a limb in 2006 and now the new archbishop and Bishop Patrick Lynch are backing the call," said Neil who condemned the government's present approach to the undocumented as amounting to starvation, forcing people into destitution.

Migration Bishop Patrick Lynch believes that there is a political leadership vacuum on the question of migration which offers an opportunity for the Church to play an important role.

He outlined a world which had moved from industrialisation to technology and globalisation. "Companies and markets are global, the labour force is mobile and at the touch of a button millions of dollars can be sent from one side of the world to another. Many years ago Pope Paul VI in a document called *Octogesima Adveniens* spoke about the Church's responsibility to care for the casualties of social change. Migrants and their families are amongst those who suffer as a result of social change in our world today," said Bishop Pat, who outlined implications for migrants in the economic recession with rising tensions between British and overseas workers.

The bishop also highlighted how the introduction of the points based system (PBS) has already affected the pattern of immigration into the U.K. from outside the E.U. "It seems to me that national interest – economic and social – is the driving force behind this system leaving very little room for the consideration of other factors. It is anticipated that fewer and fewer unskilled workers from outside the E.U. will obtain entry under this new system and there is a growing concern that the PBS generally excludes poor migrants (skilled and especially unskilled and soft skilled) as they have to show that they have a certain amount of money in the bank before they arrive," said Bishop Pat, who urged the need to welcome and empower migrants.

"Our own experience with migrants and their families teaches us that welcoming and walking with always leads to empowering so that as people grow in knowledge and skills, in confidence and in hope, they themselves – individually and collectively - are inspired and empowered to reach out to and work for justice for their fellow migrants," said Bishop Pat. who underscored the Church's position with reference to six elements of the Church's social teaching on the subject.

Some interesting facts

- The BNP polled 943,000 votes in the recent European Elections.
- 56% of the vote in the European elections went to parties other than the Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democrat Parties.
- A report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission has found that it is a total myth that migrants go to the head of the council's social housing list.
- There are an estimated 750,000 undocumented workers in Britain
- A regularisation of undocumented workers would bring in £1.2 billion in extra tax revenue.
- It would take more than 25 years to deport all of the present undocumented workers at a cost running into several billion pounds.
- Other countries have employed regularisations with success, most notably Spain.

With thanks to Paul Donovan. Paul writes weekly columns in the Universe and Irish Post as well as contributing to the Guardian and Independent – to read more see <http://www.paulfdonovan.blogspot.com/>