

Dear Friends

As the better weather sets in our thoughts turn to all our friends who are still without proper shelter in Northern France. Since the recent clearance of the southern part of the Calais "jungle", many people are now in even worse conditions as they seek to survive crammed in to in the remaining part of the camp. The clearance has left the Eritrean Church 'high and dry' and no longer the focal point of the Eritrean community which it has been up to now.

The desperation continues - a sign of this is the recent hunger strike which ended just a few days ago. We also learnt that some migrants tried to find shelter in a disused warehouse in the middle of Calais, only to be brutally evicted a few hours later even though the owner had raised no objections.



We both managed to get to Calais last week with a car full of donated goods and saw for ourselves the extensive operation at the Auberge des Migrants warehouse where a large number of volunteers were doing their best to receive and sort goods for distribution. It is a daunting task to cater for the daily material needs of thousands of people and provide them with clothes, food, heating, lighting and personal hygiene items, let alone building and maintaining shelters. Money to buy essential items such as gas canisters is also needed.

We saw for ourselves the risk of the development of another mountain of goods which takes valuable time to sort. hence the importance of taking only the essential items listed on our website and labelling their boxes. You will find details for this warehouse at www.calaidipedia.co.uk/site/calaisaid/current-needs, and for the Care4Calais warehouse at <http://care4calais.org/donate-essentials/>



Teams are also dealing with many other demands, for example education, healthcare, transport and counselling. More volunteers are always needed.

Over the last month we have continued to receive offers of help and support from a variety of organisations and faith communities. While donations of individual items are not always possible to process - and we do our best to put people in contact with collection points - they tell a story of commitment tackling the injustice of the situation in Northern France, even in small ways. A group of friends in Munich have been regularly sending goods. A knitting group sends woolly hats every month. The proceeds from various Lenten lunches as well as a collection from a Methodist Men's Saturday breakfast club are just some of the gestures that have been made. A local bridge club has donated 15 packs of playing cards - items which are much appreciated !



Teams of riot police hang around in all sorts of places, not only parading around the margins of the devastated southern sector of the camp and preventing vehicle access (when they feel like it), they are also visible near the port and in the lanes that overlook the Channel Tunnel marshalling yard. When approached peacefully by visitors they can respond politely, but interaction with the exiles starts with confrontation and often escalates into violence.



Please keep raising the issues that we and others have highlighted over the plight of migrants with politicians and those in a position to influence policy. In spite of the helpful vote in the House of Lords last month calling on the government to admit unaccompanied minors with family connections in the UK, we are still awaiting tangible results and an initiative by the government - the problems will simply not go away.

At end of March, volunteers completed a full and comprehensive census of those remaining since the demolition of the Southern section of the camp. They found a total of 4946, including 1400 in the modified cargo containers and 170 in the Jules Ferry Centre for unaccompanied women and children. A deeply shocking finding is that 129 unaccompanied minors can no longer be accounted for. No alternative accommodation was provided during the evictions, the authorities made no assessment of their needs and put no systems in place to monitor them or provide safeguarding. There are now 374 minors in the main camp, 209 of whom are unaccompanied. There are a further 140 children in the containers, 85 of them unaccompanied. The average age of the minors exiled in Calais is 14.2 with the youngest aged 8.

In peace,

Phil and Ben.

PS Remember in your thoughts and prayers Ali Sarail, a young Afghan who died at the motorway parking area in Marck near Calais - he was hit by a passing lorry as he attempted to get on a lorry - it is reported that the driver did not stop. 'All human life is precious' ...