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Syrian Refugees Demand Dignity

While many people in Britain have welcomed refugees with open arms, Syrians frequently continue to be treated with hostility, contempt and disrespect.

It emerged this month that asylum seekers in Middlesbrough felt under threat because the doors to their houses were distinctively painted red, leading to the launch of a Home Office investigation. Pressure from the asylum seekers and campaigners has now led to the doors being re-painted in a range of colours.

In Cardiff, properties owned by Clearsprings Ready Homes, a private company contracted by the UK Home Office, forced asylum seekers to wear coloured wristbands to show that they were entitled to food. We are pleased that this policy has been reversed after public pressure, and will remain vigilant against such discriminatory practices.

In 2014, it emerged that HSBC was freezing the bank accounts of Syrians for no other reason than their nationality. This had an extremely negative effect on refugees, who found their accounts frozen at a time when they were extremely vulnerable. Members of the British Syrian community continue to campaign against this discrimination.

The discriminatory treatment of refugees is not just a British problem. In Denmark, Switzerland and Germany, refugees now face having their property seized. In Bavaria refugees are only allowed to keep belongings worth less than £578, while in Baden-Wurttemberg the figure is as low as £270. These policies make it much more difficult for refugees to start new lives.

These discriminatory practices are unjustified and unjust.

The people of Syria have made clear their demand for dignity and freedom in their country, and it is tragic that they are faced with inhumane and illiberal treatment when they come to seek refuge in Europe.

The government constantly reminds us that it is important for refugees to integrate in the country that has offered them asylum. But this is a two-way process, and refugees cannot be expected to feel like a part of British society if they are not treated with the same respect, dignity and decency as British citizens. Integration and discrimination are mutually exclusive.

We call on the British government to exercise greater vigilance towards discrimination against refugees.

We call for an end, too, to the government's negative rhetoric about refugees, which contributes to an unwelcoming atmosphere and legitimises discrimination.

We will continue to campaign for the rights and dignity of Syrian refugees. We will continue to make sure that the voices of Syrians are heard.

Refugees are not a crisis. We are human beings.

Signatories:

Dr. Haytham Alhamwi – Rethink Rebuild Society • Dr. Mohammad Tammo – Kurds House
Abdullah Hanoun – Syrian Community of the South West • Dr. Amer Masri – Scotland4Syria
Dr. Mohammad Alhadj Ali – Syrian Welsh Society • Abdullah Allabwani – Oxford for Syria
Dr. Sharif Kaf al-Ghazal – Syrian Association of Yorkshire • Amr Salahi – Syria Solidarity UK
Mazen Ejbaei – Help 4Syria • Dr. Bachar Hakim – Syrian Society in Nottinghamshire
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