

*11<sup>th</sup> February 2005*

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### LABOUR INCREASES PRESSURE ON ASYLUM SEEKERS

Scottish Refugee Council is very concerned about the provisions of the five year strategy on asylum and immigration and the effects that these may have on those fleeing from persecution and seeking refuge in the UK.

Key changes to asylum rules in the plan include; increased security at points of entry, including the introduction of fingerprinting of all visa applicants, replacing indefinite leave to remain for recognised refugees with a temporary period of five years, after which the applicant can be removed if the government judges that it is safe for them to return home; increased use of detention, monitoring and tagging of failed applicants, and finding ways of returning unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Scottish Refugee Council Sally Daghlian said:

*“We welcome the commitment to the importance of the 1951 Convention on Refugees, but many aspects of the plan are worrying and likely to undermine that commitment”.*

*“Refugees are people that the government itself has recognised as needing our help and protection. They have often experienced severe trauma including the death of friends and family, imprisonment and torture. They should be allowed to rebuild their lives without the threat of return hanging over them. Given the small numbers of refugees in the UK, it is shameful that we cannot provide more security. Whilst the government has a right to remove rejected asylum seekers from the UK, they must be treated humanely and with dignity. We need to have confidence that the decision making processes are fair. The emphasis on speed, removals, fast-tracking and detention are likely to lead to mistakes and do not address the problems inherent in the current asylum system”.*

*“We are particularly concerned over provisions for the removal of unaccompanied children. Many of these children have lost their families and their safety could not be guaranteed. Children should be treated as children.”*

*“The proposals will confirm in the public’s mind that asylum seekers are a threat to the UK. It is sad that the government is contributing to public fears, rather than confronting the popular myths and misconceptions. The number of asylum seekers coming to the UK has dropped considerably and Britain is 74<sup>th</sup> in the league of refugee hosting nations. The government must focus on making the asylum system work and to meeting its obligations as a key member of the EU, the United Nations and a signatory of the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees”.*

**ENDS**

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