

Catholic bishop urges Government to improve migrant assessment



The bishop with responsibility for migrants has called on the Government to recognise the desperation of the thousands of people caught up in the Calais crisis.

Bishop Patrick Lynch welcomed an assurance by the Home Secretary, Theresa May, that the international community would provide protection for those migrants fleeing conflict and would “pursue the callous criminals who encourage so many to make this perilous journey”.

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In a letter to the Daily Telegraph Bishop Lynch also called on the Governments of the UK and France to improve the assessment process for migrants.

Bishop Lynch recognised that the causes of mass migration were complex, but urged governments to work together and with faith communities in their home and host countries.

“Churches and faith communities in some of these countries are uniquely placed to offer care to those fleeing conflict, but also to help people, especially the vulnerable, to see through the human traffickers’ false promises,” he said.

His comments echo those made by the Anglican Bishop of Dover, who this week criticised David Cameron’s hostile and “unhelpful” language around the crisis.

Bishop Trevor Willmott, whose diocese includes the UK entrance of the Channel Tunnel, urged the Government not to lose sight of its humanity when trying to deal with the thousands of migrants still trying to enter the UK illegally by hiding aboard lorries bound for England.

“We’ve become an increasingly harsh world, and when we become harsh with each other and forget our humanity then we end up in these stand-off positions,” he told The Observer.

Responding to the Prime Minister’s description on Thursday of the migrants hoping to cross from France to the UK as a “swarm”, Bishop Willmott continued: “To put them [migrants and refugees] all together in that very unhelpful phrase just categorises people and I think he could soften that language – and that doesn’t mean not dealing with the issue. It means dealing with the issue in a non-hostile way.”

The Prime Minister on Thursday also revealed plans to use extra sniffer dogs and fencing at Calais, and a joint agreement with France to install extra CCTV, infrared detectors and floodlighting.

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Catholic charities are at the forefront of efforts to support to migrants in the Calais shanty towns. The Catholic charity Secours Catholique-Caritas France has pooled resources with Médecins du Monde, Solidarité Nationale and Secours Islamique to help migrants camped among the sand-dunes.

In Kent, a local charity Seeking Sanctuary is collecting foods, cooking utensils, crockery, books, games, toiletries and footwear for Secours Catholique, while London Catholic Worker has sent blankets, food and bicycles.

In this week’s The Tablet John Launson reports from Calais about the crises facing migrants in Calais, and how they are sustained by their faith.

The organisers of Seeking Sanctuary have appealed for parishes to collect goods for migrants. For more information, contact sanctuarysupport@aol.com.

Above: Worshippers attending an Ethiopian Orthodox church erected in the migrant camp known as the new Jungle in Calais, France. Photo: Yui Mok / PA Wire/Press Association Images

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