

## **STATEMENTS FROM A PUBLIC HEARING**

*The following is a shortened version of a transcription of a Public Hearing, held on Friday the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 2012 in The Trampoline House. The Public Hearing was the starting point of the campaign OUT OF THE CAMPS! which points in the direction of a more just and humane asylum policy in Denmark. The demand is that after six months, every person seeking asylum should have the right to live and work outside the asylum camps. The document is divided into key themes and is a selection of stories and thoughts especially from people living in asylum camps in Denmark.*

### **ON WHY SEEKING ASYLUM?**

“Normal life is when everyone is able to have what he or she needs: a land to cultivate, a school of own choice, a job, a family life, a woman or a man of own choice, a child, physically a good condition and an acceptable social status ... Let’s talk about the invisible thing, which guides us in our daily life and gives us great satisfaction and a sense of inner security: affection, tenderness, family dialogue, love, education, freedom of choice, participation in a society, being regarded as a human being, having a voice in society, protection of families. This is what all refugees want. This is what they deserve.”

“Around the world, people seeking asylum arrive in a state of anxiety, after surviving the horrors: wars, massacres, genocides, ambushes, earthquakes, famine, natural disasters, epidemics, harassment, imprisonment, rape, torture, insults, rejection by society because of their religion, ethnicity, tribe, sexual orientation or poverty. Let me mention drought, lack of care for a serious illness, lack of appropriate treatment for an illness or any handicap, but once they arrive to the country of asylum, the first thing that appears in their minds is: 'Finally it's over, I will live well.' Unfortunately it is an error to think this.”

“Of course we know that not all people who come here need protection. I know, I’m an African, I come from Africa. Some people try to come to Europe for a better life. Economic immigrants. We understand that. But not everybody. Because a few are coming as economic immigrants, they are taking that as an excuse to turn away everybody. That does not make sense. What we are proposing is: Try to listen to the cases. Take these people to a safe place. Interview them. You can always draw a line between who is an economic immigrant and who is an asylum seeker. Instead of just turning away everybody, bring them in and try to listen to the story of each person. Then you can decide what to do, what you think is best.”

“People are running away from Libya to live here, or wherever there is a problem. And you get them at the sea. You don’t talk to them. You try to turn them away. People are running away from their own lives. So what do people do when they are pushed back? Like people before told us, they try to jump overboard. So many people, hundreds of people, women and children get killed at sea. Just because they are trying to run away from a problem, and they think that is the only way of survival. This has to change: interception at the sea, trying to stop people to come into European borders.”

## **ON WAITING**

“I am from Sudan. They cannot deport people back to Sudan because it's dangerous and there is war. I cannot go back. I cooperate with the police. I do not feel like an active person. I get money to eat, but I cannot go outside, I cannot do anything. Now I have stayed for 2 years. I do not feel that I have a life. I cannot do anything. I do the same things every day. I can't make a family, I can't do anything. I don't feel I am alive.”

“Then going back to your room. Then waiting for lunch in the Sandholm cafeteria. Then going back to your room again. Then waiting for dinner in the Sandholm cafeteria. This day in and day out, not knowing when it will stop. And not going back to your own room, but to a room that you share with maybe 3 or 4 other people who maybe speak languages that you don't understand, who are maybe not able to sleep at night and are awake when you want to sleep.”

“It is very important that we get some maximum time limits. *One limit for a final decision.* You should not wait forever to know if you have a positive or a negative answer. The next definition should be - how long time can you wait after a rejection. As it is right now 68 people have waited for more than 10 years. And some have waited for up to 16-17 years. That is just insane!”

“The government has talked about moving people out of the camps after 6 months, and I think we all agree that this will improve things a lot. I hope that they will make something similar to the Swedish system. In Sweden people are living all over the country, in normal houses with normal neighbors, normal schools and everyday lives. It works in Sweden. They have more than 10 times as many asylum seekers per inhabitant than we do, so I am sure we can make it work!”

“We have to have deadlines! You go to an interview, they tell you they will get back to you in 3 months. You go back to your camp, you get your name on the post, you have to move away from there. Your case is finished. You wait one month. Two, three, four, five, ten. 1 year, 2 years.

We too have dreams. We have visions. It is better for the guys who are prisoners. After four months, maybe, your sentence is over, while we, in the camps, you stay there and you never know! Sometimes I think they even forgot about me, you know.”

“You never see letters, you never see anything. We need to have an efficient asylum system. They need to tell people: “it’s three weeks”, then I’m expecting a letter in three weeks. One week is allowed, maybe four weeks. But give me my answer! I need to know, so that I can think about my next day. Waiting forever just kills you more.”

## **ON ISOLATION**

“Loneliness is silent suffering. You are silent. You keep your suffering to yourself. There is great loneliness and isolation among people living in refugee camps.”

“It is a most common choice for the government to place a refugee camp far away in a forest or another abandoned location, far from all and every relation to life. People start living as monks during meditation or as lonesome elderly in a retirement home. A person who was rejected in his country, comes to be rejected a second time and is turned away from the circle of life.”

“When families are united after a long period of separation, it is not easy to take control. People have become strange to each other, things are beyond us, and people change. Time or that long period destroy everything. There may be no love anymore, no tenderness like before. Eventually we lose our lives forever. People who loved each other before the separation, are no longer able to love each other, nor to communicate.”

“So what are we saying? We are saying: Ellebæk is NOT for asylum seekers, it is for criminals. But people are suffering there who are NOT criminals.”

“Detention of minors, children, is just – I try to get a better word to say it – but it is just crazy. It’s abnormal. Young children, children who are 15, 16 years old, who are separated from their families. Having a lot of problems. You put them in detention. Why? Because they are here without papers, or because they are here to seek asylum?”

“What about those people who said they wanted asylum and were arrested in Kastrup and taken to Ellebæk for four months? Serving a sentence for nothing. Because they are here to seek asylum.”

## **ON SKILLS, RESOURCES AND HUMAN INTERACTION**

“It really takes courage and trust for people to build up relations and friendships. We should all think about in our daily lives to get people inside, into the local associations for instance. Practice your skills, practice your Danish, practice your Farsi if you're a Dane. Or whatever. But include people. And it can really be done anywhere if we want to.”

“We people in the camps are very frustrated and we feel like we are useless. Anyone in any country feels that he or she must be utilized. And not to be put to waste. We want to do something. We should be utilized somewhere. We need a promise from the government that they are going to do something soon, that they will take some positive action regarding our cases.”

“Our system is a system of exchange. You receive something and you have to give something. How can you be a part of this system if you are not allowed to put your resources into value? Everybody has these resources.”

“Most people in Phase 2 have lived here for more than 6 months, but the government hasn't enforced their promise yet. This is a problem, and we have discussed that the right to live and work outside the camps should include all the people in the camps, especially the people in Phase 3 who have been rejected. There are many people who are in Phase 3, and if we include them we are treating them as humans and give them their human rights. We should not allow this for some people and not for others. Maybe, I am wrong and saying words that might be impolite, but this is the reality for me and so many other people in the camps. I hope that no one is frustrated with me speaking for many people. If we help the people get their education, this would be very good, and it should not be specified on what they have to study. I am very glad, very happy that the government of Denmark paved the way for me and that I can study here and have a higher education and have supported me in different fields of study. I really appreciate that. But, I am the exception. There may be a few people here who are studying to get their higher education, but that is also a small number. We must not just think about two or three people, but so many others here.”

“We have a lot of people with skills and talents in the asylum centers. However, they cannot implement these skills and talents because they are stored in small and quiet places.”

”Thank you very much. I want to say that we people in the camps are very frustrated and we feel like we are useless. Anyone in any country feels that he or she must be utilized. And not be put to

waste. We want to do something, we should be utilized somewhere. That is a real factor that makes people sick.”

### **ON LACK OF HEALTH CARE**

“To be honest the health care system within the asylum camps is very bad. If you have a health issue and go to the doctor, the first recommendation from both the doctor and the nurses is: ‘Drink some more water.’”

“For example I had to see the dentist; and she told me to just eat with one side – the good side – of my mouth and wait until it is your turn. And then I go to get the bad side fixed, but then I have to come back to get the other side fixed, and it becomes a very time-consuming process. And while you wait the nurses will just prescribe you some painkillers.”

### **ON THE PROBLEM OF THE ASYLUM SYSTEM**

“If a person has a problem in his country and comes to Denmark, why does the government feel that his case is fake? Why don’t they believe him?”

“We are also human beings. We need family, we need relatives, we need friends. We are proposing, an idea, I think it is a reasonable proposal: Those who have families in European countries and want to seek asylum in that country, then you should be allowed to seek asylum in that country.”

“The problem starts when we come from Africa, or you come from Afghanistan, or Middle East and you try to get to Europe. We come by various means, we come by plane, by ship, we come by boat. We come through very dangerous paths to get over here for asylum, and the first thing that has been done in the past few years is to try and intercept, to put patrols at the Indian Ocean, at the Canary Islands, in Spain. To try to turn us back. “

“They need to establish a common European asylum system. For all of Europe. So that it can be integrated, so that things like family reintegration can happen. So we are just saying, like in Denmark, because Denmark is president of the European Union right now: do something. Start from here. Try to remove this problem that needs to be set right. So start here – we want to see changes in Denmark. They are saying that we will move out of the camps. We want to see those changes. We want to see cases being done at speed. We want to see changes as soon as we can.”

“There has to be access for NGOs, lawyers, counselors in asylum centers. For people who are

in prison, like in Ellebæk, who are going to be deported, or some people who have just arrived it is very hard to even contact a lawyer, because we don't have phones, we don't have any form of communication. NGOs who want to help should be allowed to have access. We are saying: regarding those people you are putting in prison, those who will be deported, maybe something else comes up, maybe they have new evidence for their cases. But how can they present this evidence if we don't allow lawyers, if we don't allow counselors, if we don't let NGOs in there to talk to them? Open up for NGOs, for lawyers. Give people these options!"

"The Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was signed and adopted by several countries in Paris, December 10, 1948 Article I says: 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'. Is this true? For some other people it's just a dream."

"People can only take our rights if we allow them. If we sit down, and allow governments to do whatever, governments can do anything. If we stand up, speak with our voices, with our actions, peacefully we can change something. This is a start. I challenge us. Let's go for it. This is our year. If it doesn't happen for us, if it doesn't happen for you and me, if we are deported or something, we will have done something, right?"