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## **Nationality and Borders Bill**

The UK has a proud history of helping people fleeing violence and persecution. As people are driven from their homes in the most desperate circumstances, the UK must always stand with people seeking safety. Unfortunately, I believe that the Government's approach to this long-standing obligation has been lacking in competence and compassion.

Earlier this year, the Government announced several proposed changes to the UK's asylum system including differential treatment based on how an asylum seeker arrives in the UK; harsher sentences; and unconscionable plans to hold asylum seekers in offshore hubs. The Nationality and Borders Bill seeks to implement these proposals and I voted against it at its second reading in the House of Commons in July this year.

As the UN has warned, I believe that the Bill and the Government's proposals are an open breach of the 1951 Refugee Convention. While I agree that we need address the increasing numbers of people crossing the English Channel in small boats, I fear the reality of the Government's proposals is that they will reduce support for victims of human trafficking and make the dangerous situation in the Channel even worse.

I am also concerned that the Bill does nothing to address the breakdown in the asylum system that the Government has overseen since 2010, with application processing times now appallingly slow. The share of asylum applications that received an initial decision within six months fell from 87% in 2014 to just 20% in 2019. I believe the Government should therefore commit to introducing legal targets for processing asylum claims so that they are dealt with in a timely manner.

We know that a lack of safe and legal routes leads to more people risking their lives by making dangerous journeys. Yet, despite noting the importance of safe routes, the Government shamefully closed the Dubs scheme after accepting just 480 unaccompanied children rather than the 3,000 expected. The Government should therefore commit to re-establishing safe and legal routes and help unaccompanied child refugees, while jointly working with other countries to tackle human trafficking.

More generally, we know that one of the key drivers of people fleeing their homes to seek sanctuary elsewhere is the impact of poverty, wars and persecution. I think it is therefore deeply regrettable that the Government took the decision to abolish the Department for International Development last year and to reduce the UK's funding for overseas aid.

As the Nationality and Borders Bill is considered in Parliament, I will be calling for meaningful action to support people, improve the chaotic and inhumane asylum system and bring criminal gangs to justice.

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