

CALAIS: SEPTEMBER 21st 2015

VISIT TO “JUNGLES” AND JULES FERRY CENTRE WITH PETER SUTHERLAND

Peter, UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Refugees since 2006, current President of the International Catholic Migration Commission, and former Attorney General of Eire, was visiting Calais. His current UN work is centred around the Mediterranean, but he needed to find out what becomes of exiles when they have moved north. We met outside the Jules Ferry Centre, a former children's holiday activity camp, run by a private company which would gladly take on larger operations if commissioned. It is well run, housing around 100 women and 20 children and provides a free daily meal, phone charging points, the services of a nurse, a weekly bath and laundry facilities for anyone who turns up – currently over 1000 daily. The women's accommodation is being doubled in size during the next few months and should then cater for all the potential female clients. Younger people from the “jungle” come in to the Centre to play ball games. (A group had been taught to play cricket and the cup that they had won at a tournament in Belgium had been donated to the Centre's manager to thank him for the encouragement given to sport!)



Origins

A new facility to cater for 1600 people will be built on the other side of Calais, and is planned to open by mid-January 2016 – probably the coldest month to come. This will still only cater for about 50% of the exiles, who all come from regions of great unrest such as Afghanistan, Syria, Darfur and Eritrea. Those working with them are sure that the vast majority are genuine refugees and deserving of asylum status. One quiet change among many during 2015 has been the addition of numerous Sudanese refugees from Darfur, who now account for about 60% of the jungle population. Most of this group wish to seek asylum in France, though quite a number are willing take risks to try to get to the UK while their cases are considered. (The French asylum process now takes about 6 months.)

Moderate Moslems

The majority of people in the “jungle” are moderate Moslems who have fled from countries where fundamentalists control the government. Signs of religious disagreement are very rare. Squabbles do arise, generally over petty matters that seem important in the confines of the camp, or due to action by bullies working for more power and money.

Sharing a Meal

While waiting near the gates of the Centre, I spoke to several “jungle” residents who were pleased to try out a few words of English, such as “Manchester United”. One invited me to join his companions in their cooking shelter and share their meal: a tasty bean and vegetable stew cooked over an open fire and accompanied by fresh bread. They also took the trouble to find me a chair, squatting being the usual posture. Some areas further inside the jungle were very muddy after a night's rain, with a few paths and doorways newly protected by duck boards and pallets.



Driving

To start with, driving to the gate of the Centre was a rather disconcerting experience. The kilometre-long access road bordering the full length of the “jungle” seems to be almost permanently lined with vehicles of all types and sizes which have brought people and supplies from the UK. (Note that random arrival with unplanned donations is not advised.) The occasional well-organised Dutch convoy would also pass by. Slow driving is essential as exiles carelessly wander the width of the road returning greetings with a wave and a smile. In a bizarre contrast, there is the occasional party of local French riding enthusiasts emerging from paddocks on the opposite side of the road.



Venturing Inside

It is rather intimidating to take the first steps into this uncertain world, but everyone is cheerful and welcoming. One character, carrying a complex fracture of the leg, claimed to be the sole Kosovan in town, seeking to get back to Cardiff where he had dwelt for several years.



My occasional venture a few yards into the jungle provided views of a French language school, a Moslem prayer tent and a few shops, one of them cannibalising old bicycles into spare parts for the construction and repair of new machines. All of the structures are exactly as seen in photos and TV news broadcasts, but nothing prepares you for the vast scale of the encampments that sprawl across an uneven grassy landscape of overgrown dunes with some sandy spaces. It was once partly occupied by industrial establishments and still contains sizeable pools of water: it has until now been largely forgotten by the citizens of Calais. It is possible to get

close to the other side of the jungle – known as “Jungle 2” by going underneath the motorway near one of its exits. Although without permanent water taps (just those on rigid hose pipes connected to hydrants) and with few sanitary facilities, this area exhibits more of a street system with some pathways wide enough to accept motor vehicles and with larger and better-established shops. This is where the well-publicised Church and Library are located.

Rubbish

All parts of the jungle are strewn with rubbish that goes uncollected because the inhabitants are only “tolerated” and not provided with services, despite the evident health hazards. In addition, the scarce blocks of portable toilets seem to go unserved. Apparently, occasional week-long missions of a dozen or more people have come in vans from Holland to make occasional site clearances.



Despair



There is despair among those used to seeing well structured tented refugee camps set up in disaster areas by agencies such as the Red Cross (invited by the sovereign nations concerned and encouraged by the UN). The *ad hoc* and chaotic structure of the Calais jungles (soon to be mud-baths as wet weather sets in) is reflected in the inadequate provision of fresh water and the failure to coordinate the good work that is being done by volunteers. It all seems rather like the first days after people are displaced, rather than a situation that has been allowed to develop – almost under the eyes of the relevant authorities, were they to bother to look in the right direction.

Government Inaction



Peter – tweeting occasionally as we talked with the Centre manager and jungle residents – said that the conditions were the worst he had ever seen and was appalled at the lack of concern shown by the French and UK governments. They do not admit that a problem exists and prefer to work on the long-term and difficult challenges of finding solutions to the problems in Africa. These do require solution, but in the meantime thousands suffer alongside the English Channel and governments bicker about where their asylum claims should be processed and who pays the bills.

Forcible Evictions

The “icing on the cake” of ill treatment was specially evident on the day of my visit. French police and security staff had forcibly turfed several hundred Syrian refugees out of a few locations that they had occupied within Calais and transported them to the edge of the jungle (without any shelter). A group staying on the fringe of the tolerated “Jungle” had their squat bulldozed and their belongings dumped at the roadside to be taken off to the rubbish tip where the property of others had already gone.

Phil Kerton, “Seeking Sanctuary”



Peter Sutherland @PDSutherlandUN

Tweets on 21 September.

Today I am in the camp in Calais. The conditions are appalling (about 3pm)

The camp is squalid and unacceptable. There are about 3000 in the camp and the majority are refugees. How can govs allow this to persist? (about 5pm)

They are in France but are determined to get into the UK. Why can't the two govs accelerate the asylum process together (about 7pm)

a) The ones deserving credit in Calais are the French and British mini charities who compensate for terrible government inaction

b) Intergovernmental agreements on migrants are all about security. A pity a portion is not spent on the poor migrants in particular in Calais (about 7pm)

a) The first thing the EU should do now is to help the front line States Lebanon turkey and Jordan by accepting resettlement of refugees.

b) The second thing is all the Member States should be reminded strongly that membership of the EU requires common values and internal solidarity

c) Common values require that asylum be given to refugees rather than meeting them with barbed wire and teargas (about 9pm)

Tweets on 22nd September

a) I cannot easily recover from the shock of Calais.the French and British governments should rapidly respond to the horrible conditions.

b) With the filth has come disease and the place is testimony to the desperation of the people in it. They deserve immediate action.

c) The Camp in Calais is a truly dreadful place. It is an indictment of society that it exists.Why have the media largely moved on? (about midnight)

Those wishing to take part in advocacy and campaigns regarding the worldwide refugee crisis will find useful suggestions and links to further information on the website of the Diocese of Canterbury, <https://www.canterburydiocese.org/refugee-crisis-five-ways-to-respond/>



Jungle Refugee Camp map

August 2015

Jules Ferry (Salam)

12:00 pm Shower + phone charge
17:00 pm Warm food

 Water Eau ውሃ أوبه ماء ማይ	 Toilet Toilette ትሽታት تشناب مرحاض
 Shower Douche ሰላላላ اورول طعام	 Food Repas ምግብ أتم دش መኣዲ
 Garbage Poubel ጥራጊ كثافت قمامة	 Overflow tent tente ጊንታ خيمه خيمة

Doctor
Docteur

دكتور
ሐኪም
طبيب

افغانستان
Afghanistan

Sudan
سودان

Eritrea
ኢርትራ
إرتريا

Calais

Police
788
پوليس
شرطة
788

School
école

ቀላም
مدرسه
المدرسة
መምህር

library
bibliothèque
ቤተ መጻሕፍት
کتابخانه
مکتبة

Languages:

- English
- French
- Amharic
- Pashtu
- Arabic
- Tigrinya

Calais

