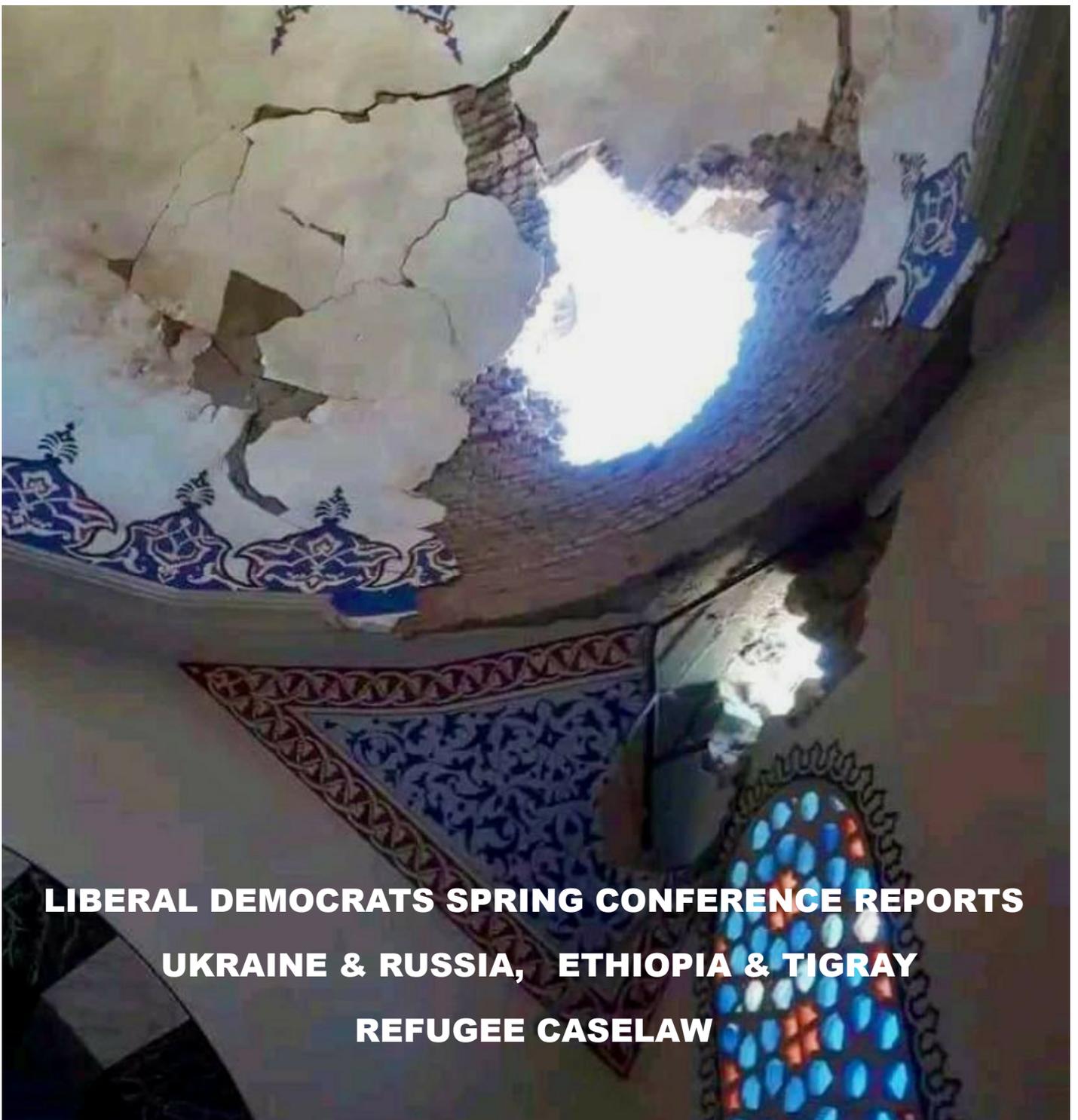




2022 no. 4 £6.50 (free to members)

INTERLIB

Journal of the Liberal International British Group



LIBERAL DEMOCRATS SPRING CONFERENCE REPORTS

UKRAINE & RUSSIA, ETHIOPIA & TIGRAY

REFUGEE CASELAW

EVENTS.

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5th May – Elections in a place near you – all out to give Johnson a jolt!

30th June-3rd July – 63rd Congress of Liberal International, Sofia, Bulgaria.

17th-20th September - Liberal Democrats Autumn Conference at the Brighton Centre.

1st-12th November - UNFCCC Climate COP 27 Egypt (Sharm El Sheikh)

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InterLib is published by the Liberal International (British Group). Views expressed therein are those of the authors and are not necessarily the views of LI(BG), LI or any of its constituent parties.

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Photographs: European Movement, Neil Midgley, Martin Plaut, Liberal International or as credited.

Cover Photograph: Damage by Ethiopian & Eritrean forces to the al-Nejashi Mosque in Tigray. Its dome, the minaret and tombs of Islamic figures were damaged, along with the nearby Orthodox Christian church of Saint Emmanuel. The al-Nejashi was built by the first Muslims to migrate to Africa during the time of Prophet Muhammad, fleeing persecution in Mecca and given refuge in Kingdom of Aksum. Local Muslims believe that 15 disciples of Prophet Muhammad are buried in the damaged tombs which they say is the oldest in Africa. It is a symbol of compassion and Christian-Muslim friendship. Why UNESCO have taken so long to designate the site is a mystery.



Where next for the Horn of Africa?

March 31, 2022 6:30 PM - 8:00 PM

A Zoom Event organised by Liberal International (British Group) in association with the Paddy Ashdown Forum.

Register Here

https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=yGsSWpvQ1kCVYZLQigoTgoiVfg2RIVhlqMoQ_VOVpbNURUdVOUI0UzhLQVBXRDJJQjVGOFGyRjAyWC4u

Date: 31 March, 18.30 - 20.00 (London Time)

Ethiopia: atrocities on all sides of the conflict, plus drought and famine.

Eritrea: Africa's North Korea and its destabilising influence on its neighbours.

Sudan: the early promise of 2019's democratic revolution is in peril.

The Nile: will the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam provoke conflict?

The Horn: are the global powers' military bases a force for stability or disruption?

Join experts as they assess the future of this strategically vital African region.

Speakers:

Jan-Christoph Oetjen is a German Member of the European Parliament from the liberal Freie Demokratische Partei. He was elected in 2019. His main work focusses on Transport and Tourism, Migration and Human Rights in Africa. He has previously spearheaded a European Parliament urgency Resolution on Human Rights breaches in Ethiopia in 2020 and on the humanitarian situation in 2021. His most recent resolution was on the political crisis in Sudan.'

Maddy Crowther is Co-Executive Director of Waging Peace, a charity that has campaigned on Sudan since 2004. She is also a wider Horn of Africa expert, giving support to the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Eritrea.

Rebecca Tinsley is a journalist and human rights activist. Her book on Darfur, *When The Stars Fall to Earth*, is available in English and Arabic. She founded the charity Network for Africa which provides mental health support in post-conflict communities.

Liberal Democrats' Spring Conference 2022 Motion

F25: A Sovereign Ukraine

Proposed by: 52 members

Mover: Layla Moran MP (Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs).

Summation: Peter Banks.

Conference notes:

- I. Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, assisted by Belarus, is being resisted strongly by the Ukrainian people.
- II. Overwhelming international support for a sovereign Ukraine, condemnation of Russia and imposition of sanctions.
- III. The bravery of Russians expressing opposition to this war.
- IV. Perception of Western disunity in recent years, exacerbated by Brexit.
- V. President Zelensky and his party "Servant of the People" joining ALDE.
- VI. The inadequate UK Government response in supporting Ukrainian refugees and sanctioning Putin's cronies.

Conference believes:

- G. Putin's actions challenge Ukraine's sovereignty, the rules-based international order and threaten Europe's security.
- H. NATO membership is open to any sovereign state that meets its values and fulfils its membership criteria.
- I. Sovereign states should be free to choose their own alliances and security arrangements.
- J. War crimes must be investigated.

Conference calls on all governments to:

- xi. Demand total withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukrainian territory.
- xii. Impose the severest economic, financial, technical and cultural sanctions on Russia.
- xiii. Provide economic, military and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.
- xiv. End dependence upon Russian energy, fast-track the transition to renewables and investment in energy efficiency.
- xv. Create accessible routes to safety for all refugees displaced from Ukraine.

Conference further calls on NATO and its members to:

- p. Bolster its eastern flank.
- q. Raise defence spending to 2% of GDP and higher if necessary, including funding for cyber and other next generation threats.

Conference additionally calls on the UK government to:

18. Enable refugees from Ukraine to enter the UK without having to apply for a visa.
19. Seize the assets of shell companies owning UK property which are unable to name a credible beneficial owner.
20. Sanction Putin's associates, including seizing assets immediately and revoking golden visas and treat enabling of Putin's regime or sanctions-avoidance as grounds to refuse permission to enter the UK.
21. Rebuild British armed forces to be again capable of contributing significantly to NATO.
22. Restore the Overseas Development Assistance budget to 0.7% of GNI.

Applicability: Federal

Emergency motion submissions on other subjects than Ukraine were either out of order or have been accommodated as emergency amendments to other debates already on the agenda. The Federal Conference Committee exercised its power under Standing Order 4.4 a) to select one emergency motion among those of similar effects and has chosen this motion for debate. There was not therefore, an emergency motions ballot.

Conference Motion F25: A Sovereign Ukraine

Dr Carol Weaver

The International Relations committee put together an emergency motion, moved by Layla Moran, which *inter alia* called on all governments to:

- i. Demand total withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukrainian territory.
- ii. Impose the severest economic, financial, technical and cultural sanctions on Russia.
- iii. Provide economic, military and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.
- iv. End dependence upon Russian energy, fast-track the transition to renewables and investment in energy efficiency.
- v. Create accessible routes to safety for all refugees displaced from Ukraine.

(For full details see <https://www.libdems.org.uk/f25-ukraine>)

Layla's speech began by praising the Ukrainians who are beacons for us all. They are fighting for our ideals such as liberty and democracy. We are proud that President Zelenskiy and his party are joining ALDE.

Liberal Democrats demand more from this government, especially visa waiver for refugees. We are also putting pressure on ministers to add more sanctions including on Putin's cronies whose names she read out in parliament. They should not be given time to sell their assets.

We are demanding more is done about Russian interference in our government. Time to stop turning a blind eye in order to make a 'quick buck'. At least Lib Dem Lords have helped to scrap golden visas now.

Her speech was followed by many excellent contributions. Points made included the following:

6. We need to do more to counter Russian disinformation (Sam Cumber)
7. We need to do more for refugees (Suzanne Fletcher)

8. We turned a blind eye to what Russia did in Syria, yet this was a warning (Jonathan Brown)
9. Cutting Russia off from the world is the only way they will listen (Christopher Johnson)
10. Our national security will now be dependent on renewable energy (Oliver Jones-Lyons)

Edward Lucas also made an important contribution saying that those of us who gave warnings were patronised. We have been too greedy in this country and perhaps the US should be sanctioning western enablers.

There was disagreement on various topics such as whether NATO should enforce a no-fly zone over Ukraine. George Cunningham put his case forward saying non-intervention looks impotent. Phil Bennion responded that this had been subject to discussion at FIRC but ultimately was not included in the motion because of the obvious risk of escalation a direct military confrontation between NATO and Russia might entail. However, the situation might need to be reviewed.

There were also debates on Trident, appeasement and NATO provocation, mainly within the chat section.

The motion was passed almost unanimously with just one voter against the motion. Within chat, members seemed to think that this person might have accidentally clicked on the wrong box!

Dr. Carol Weaver

Dr Carol Weaver is an independent political researcher specialising in the Black Sea Region, the South Caucasus, Ukraine, the European Union and European Security. She contested Rutland & Melton in the 2019 general election.

Kira Rudik

On 21 February, LIBG discussed the future of Ukraine¹. Three days later, Ukraine was at war and today its future hangs in the balance. For most Ukrainians, it looks very bleak.

On day 19 of Putin's war, LibDem MP and Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Layla Moran invited Kira Rudik, MP for LI member party Golos ('The Voice'), to speak to the Liberal Democrat Spring Conference. More than 400 people tuned in when Kira spoke, for almost an hour, without script, from her home in Kyiv. In a moving address to her fellow Liberals, she described the horrors of the war and suffering of civilians, the indiscriminate bombardment and the death of the first child in besieged Mariupol from dehydration. She also spoke of the resolve of the Ukrainian people to resist and defend their country. Like many Ukrainians, she was issued with a Kalashnikov and handgun, and is training how to use them.

Incredibly, the Ukrainian parliament is still sitting in person - at an undisclosed location - on a regular basis. Kira described how MPs from different parties had put their differences aside and rallied together behind President Zelenskiy in this existential crisis.

When asked by Layla Moran what she needed most from the West, her answer was clear: a no-fly zone over Ukraine or, failing that, more military assistance and supplies; help with establishing humanitarian corridors and urgent supplies of food, water and medicines for besieged cities like Mariupol, and maximum pressure on Putin. She repeated warnings made by Zelenskiy and others that if Putin was allowed to destroy and annex Ukraine, he would press on further West.

Irina Von Wiese

¹ *interLib* 2022-03 and <https://youtu.be/fRRpNJYPNX4>

The 'Power Vertical' and the meaning of Z

Dr Carol Weaver

Imagine the authorities coming into your place of work or your university and telling you to get on a bus to go to an event. When you are on the bus you are told you are going to London, to Wembley Stadium, and when there you must shout 'England' and wave a flag. You are given either a flag of St George or a flag with a symbol on it that you do not really understand. However, it transpires that it is not a football match you are attending but a political rally, with your Prime Minister celebrating the annexation of neighbouring territory and speaking out about the denazification of one of your neighbouring countries.

This would be the equivalent of what happened in Moscow this week, on Friday 18 March, with Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin speaking and a Z symbol on many of the flags. Initially the symbol was just a military marking but now it seems to be a symbol of support for Putin and his war though he must know that the ordinary citizens bussed in might not be his supporters.

Comparisons must be made with the rallies of Hitler, Milosevic and Trump except that Putin's speech was short. The Z could be seen as a kind of swastika meant to induce fear. Certainly, this war would seem to us to be less about the denazification of Ukraine and more about the Nazi-like behaviour of Putin who is taking the suppression of truth and the spreading of lies to extreme levels.

The letter Z is appearing all over Russia which does not necessarily mean that all the people participating support Putin, just that they are being compliant knowing that many anti-war protesters are in prison. During the annexation of Crimea and the war in 2014, orange and black striped St George ribbons were displayed which seemed less sinister.

A Guardian report says, "A number of schools have also posted images of children standing in a Z formation. One image that has been circulating online since Sunday showed terminally ill children from a hospice in the southern city of Kazan forming a Z to support the invasion of Ukraine."

The same article also reports that those brave enough to oppose the war might end up with a Z painted on their doors (for example a member of Pussy Riot). Yet many Russians are trying to ridicule the letter online and are promoting the colours yellow and blue for Ukraine. On Saturday 19 March three Russian cosmonauts arrived at the International Space Station wearing yellow space suits with blue markings.



Destruction of Russian T-72B3M tank with "Z" by Ukrainian troops in Mariupol.

By Mvs.gov.ua, CC BY 4.0,

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=115887206> 7th March 2022.

Propaganda is 24 hours a day in Russia with many ordinary people choosing the easy path of believing it, especially if their teenage sons have been conscripted. Most ignore it and try to get on with their everyday lives which are becoming more difficult.

Due to the 'power vertical' structure Putin has built up, with the Kremlin having power over all institutions, and Putin making personal appointments, he cannot be easily deposed, if at all. Few get close to him and it is not even known for sure if he has a mistress, fiancée or wife or more children than his two daughters from his first marriage. Those around him who oppose or criticise are humiliated or put under house arrest. He has few advisors. There is a fear he might shoot the messenger. So, he carries on like a tsar with his war of glory, or a war criminal who accuses others of the genocide he might seem to be committing himself.

No-one knows what will happen next. Maybe the peace talks will give a result though Putin is unlikely to give in until he has Mariupol as part of Russia's land corridor to Crimea and effective ownership of the Sea of Azov.

But we certainly know more than the ordinary citizens of Russia where the words 'war', 'invasion' and 'attack' have been banned by the media regulator and only state-sanctioned sources of information are permitted. A recent Facebook post by ALDE party Yabloko used *** as a symbol for one of the banned words.

Let's hope this *** ends soon and we are never ordered to Wembley.

Dr. Carol Weaver

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/07/why-has-the-letter-z-become-the-symbol-of-war-for-russia>

A Mathematical Equation for Hope and Resistance

The equation below has been sent to Ukraine via Poland, with the hope that the brave Russian people will adapt the Zs festooning their country with another message

$$Z = \Omega = \Pi$$

The Z being Putin's symbol for being pro-Putin.

Z = Ω omega, the last letter of the alphabet,

= Π = Putin

So, Z is the end of Putin.

Wendy Kyrle-Pope



European Movement Demonstration for Ukraine. Trafalgar Square 26th March 2022

What the Polish People would like Your Wallet to Know

Neil Midgley

I flew to Poland about ten days ago. I wasn't sure entirely what I was going to achieve when I got there – but I was fuelled by a tide of rage like I'd seldom felt before. Rage about the refugee crisis, and even hotter rage about the UK's apparent willingness to just watch it unfold on the news. Even from my velvet sofa in London, I could see that giving £25 to DEC was nowhere enough.

And here's what I discovered on the ground: far too much of the burden of the refugee relief effort is falling on the shoulders of ordinary Polish people. If you're nestling warmly in the belief that everything is being organised and funded by the Polish government and the EU, I'm about to blow a cold wind of truth for you: it isn't.

My old cleaning lady, Ela, had moved home to Poland last summer. She connected me with her daughter's



best friend, Kamila, in Jarosław – a town about 35km from the Ukrainian border at Medyka, where you'll have seen footage of refugees arriving by train from Lviv.

Kamila was (and still is) volunteering with a newly-formed charity called Unitatem. To call Unitatem a start-up doesn't do it justice – it's more of an upstart. It was founded, barely a month ago, by a 37-year-old local property developer I now know as "Patryc" (his full name is Patrycjusz Gawel). Recruiting his friend Kamil to help, Patryc started offering room and board to refugee Ukrainian women and their kids.

He started by turning over the rather handsome new house he'd just built for himself. With three weeks, Unitatem was operating over five sites, including a disused school and an old dormitory for an agricultural college. They are housing and feeding over 500 people, and want to scale up to 2,000 beds. They are already serving over 1,000 meals a day.

Kamil – who works for a British company, and speaks fluent English – is starting to make international contacts – Médecins Sans Frontières are now visiting each day to offer the refugees medical care, and watch this space for news of a chunk of cash that may soon arrive from the USA.

But it is not enough. Nowhere near enough. This crisis could go on for months, and Unitatem – which roughly translates as "We Are One" – will need reliable ongoing funding. In cold weather, their gas bill alone is the best part of £20,000 a month.

I set up a GoFundMe, and I've raised over £10,000 over the last five days to buy Unitatem an industrial washing machine. (Ukrainian women didn't just leave their husbands and their lives behind – their appliances are being bombed too.) My friends and contacts have been incredibly generous – but it's a drop in the ocean.

Using old contacts from my journalist days, I've got Unitatem onto BBC Breakfast, Sky News and LBC News. Hopefully we can build a compelling enough story for Brits to want to pitch in on an ongoing basis. So where do you come in? Well, I'm asking loud and clear for your help. I look at the gallery of powerful, well-connected people on the Radix website, and my face turns into the hatching-a-plot emoji. I don't know what you can do, but I know you can do something. Please, if you can offer me a practical conversation, email me at neil@neilmidgley.com

And do donate to my GoFundMe¹ or direct to Unitatem² (which is, as of last week, a registered charitable foundation in Poland).

The Polish people need our help, they need it to continue, and they're not getting enough of it through the existing channels. Will you help me to build a new one?

Neil Midgley

This article first appeared in Radix, 24th March 2022

<https://radixuk.org/opinion/what-the-polish-people-would-like-your-wallet-to-know/>

¹ https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-ukrainian-mums-wash-their-clothes?utm_campaign=p_lico+share-sheet&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_source=customer

² <https://polandwelcomes.org/>

Some Views from Abroad

We've asked some of a regular correspondents and friends how the Russian invasion of Ukraine has been interpreted in their countries. Plenty of work for the BBC World Service...

Egypt

Autocratic nations tend to help each other. I trust that our government doesn't mind the Russian's war, has a lot of political and economic relations with Russia that does not want to lose. For example, the Russian tourists that resumed last year and obviously stopped when the war began, in addition to the wheat import. Of course, Egypt imports wheat from Ukraine and receive a lot of Ukraine tourists but not comparable to the Russian tourists in terms of numbers and revenues.

The most important issue is Egyptians are not in favour of the United States so anything that may bother the US, Egyptians will be happy to support.

Mohammed Nossier

Serbia

The Ukraine situation is very sensitive here in Serbia. A civil society organisation called CRTA are doing a great job media monitoring to show the strong bias in the popular media in favour of Russia, a dominant narrative here. This is a country where a major tabloid ran with the front page "Ukraine attacks Russia"

Here in the south, the ethnic Albanian population are very understanding and sympathetic about refugees. While the Serbian authorities have already taken some refugees, the first ones have arrived in a recently refurbished migrant reception centre in the town of Vranje, which would have I guess, been expecting to house Afghans.

Milica Petrović

Turkey

Most of the people on the left in Turkey are supporting the Russians; I'm not talking to the m*****s.

A. Kurt

Liberal Democrats' Spring Conference 2022 Motions

F17: Tigray and the Ethiopian Civil War

Motion Passed by Conference

Proposed by: 11 members

Mover: Mover: Layla Moran MP (Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and International Development).

Summation: Phil Bennion.

Conference notes with concern:

- A. The ongoing civil war in Ethiopia, primarily between Ethiopian government forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which has resulted in:
 - i. The deaths of tens of thousands of civilians by airstrikes, massacres and starvation.
 - ii. The internal displacement of 4 million.
 - iii. At least 9 million in need of desperate help.
- B. The publication of the Joint Investigation by the UN Human Rights Office and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, which found that "there are reasonable grounds to believe that all parties to the conflict in Tigray have, to varying degrees, committed violations of international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, some of which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity".
- C. The humanitarian crisis and in particular the threat of mass starvation in:
 - i. Tigray, which has been particularly exacerbated by the de facto blockade of aid into the region by the Ethiopian government.
 - ii. Other parts of Northern Ethiopia, where the UN World Food Programme (WFP) was forced to halt aid distribution following the looting of warehouses by Tigrayan rebels.
- D. The horrific reports of the use of rape and sexual violence as a tool of conflict, by troops allied with the Ethiopian government in Tigray, as well as by TPLF fighters.
- E. The alleged atrocities committed by Tigrayan forces in Amhara and Afar including reports of summary executions.
- F. The highly concerning reports of mass detention of Tigrayans, by the Ethiopian government, on the basis of their ethnicity
- G. The refusal of all parties to the conflict to seriously engage with attempts, including those of the African Union and former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo to negotiate a ceasefire.
- H. The serious danger of the potential spread of ethnic violence spreading to and including areas of Sudan and Eritrea.

- I. That the UK's influence in the Horn of Africa, and therefore our ability as an actor making the case for a diplomatic solution, has been hampered by our exit from the European Union and the Government's decision to abandon the international development target of 0.7% of GNI.
- J. The planned Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) cut to Official Development Assistance (ODA) in Ethiopia, from £241m in 2020-21 to £108m in 2021-22

Conference reaffirms the fundamental liberal principles of equality, human rights, peace, democracy and the rule of international law.

Conference therefore calls upon the UK Government to:

11. Redouble efforts to pursue a ceasefire in Ethiopia
12. Work with permanent members of the UN Security Council, and other international partners such as the African Union to:
 - a. Push for negotiations to reach a sustainable peace.
 - b. Secure humanitarian access.
 - c. Investigate human rights abuses and war crimes.
13. Use Magnitsky sanctions against those who are perpetrating violence or preventing humanitarian aid for getting to those who need it.
14. Work closely with neighbouring countries in an effort to prevent spill over of ethnic violence to the wider region.
15. Urge all parties to provide safe passage to those fleeing the conflict and to create humanitarian corridors.
16. Restore the 0.7% of GNI target for international development spending including:
 - a. Urgently increasing funding for humanitarian relief, via independent agencies, in Ethiopia in 2022/23.
 - b. Providing Official Development Assistance (ODA) support for Ethiopian and Tigrayan refugees.
17. Prioritise the eradication of sexual violence in conflict, including by increasing ODA funding for such initiatives.

Applicability: Federal.

The FCC has agreed to make the following drafting amendments to the motion:

Delete 2. b) (line 49) and insert:

b) Secure unfettered humanitarian access for impartial international aid agencies.

Delete 2. c) (line 50) and insert:

c) Provide protection and support to impartial international human rights NGOs to enable unfettered access for the investigation of human rights abuses and war crimes, and if appropriate to refer the resulting evidence to the International Criminal Court.

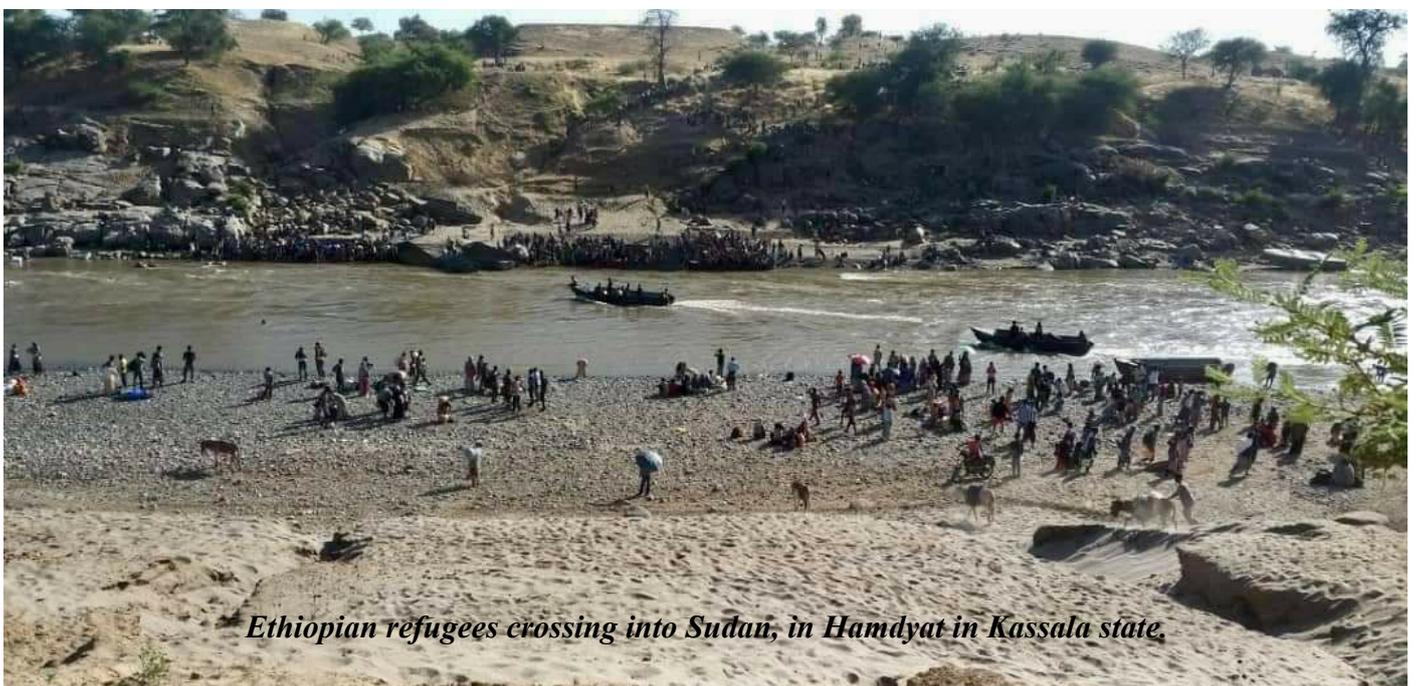
Tigray & the Ethiopian Civil War - the debate

First and foremost, as expressed before, we are delighted and amazed that this motion was on the agenda of the conference. Hastings and Rye Liberal Democrats submitted an amendment, the sections of humanitarian aid and NGO support being drafted in; they accepted that the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam had no demonstrable relevance to the motion (but how often do the Liberal Democrats debate Ethiopia – it remains a source of instability in the region, and may be linked – the Egyptians once said they would support rebel groups in Ethiopia because of their opposition to the dam, though it is not known if they have acted on this). More contentious was the amendment to strip Abiy Ahmed of his Nobel Peace Prize. The FCC rejected this because there is no mechanism for the Nobel Committee to do this. Hastings & Rye felt there was no reason why the Liberal Democrats shouldn't take another view on this, which might lead an otherwise worthy motion to the air of publicity. They did not participate in the debate, which was a shame, as they clearly had some expertise in the field. Had the FCC raised that particular issue, rather than the dam, they said, they might have submitted Martin Plaut's excellent briefing in *interLib 2022-03* for the retention of that part of their amendment.

The debate was passionate. Layla Moran, Liberal Democrat Foreign Affairs spokesperson, had spent part of her childhood between the ages of 5 and 8 in Ethiopia in the late 1980s, when the country was gripped in a brutal civil war and a terrible famine. Addis Ababa was full of displaced people and war wounded. She remembered being 6 years old and seeing children of her age and wondering how she lived a life that was just so different. History was repeating itself.

A humanitarian disaster is unfolding in the Tigray region. There are conflicting accounts of the origins of the conflict between the Ethiopian government forces and Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF), but what is not doubt is the suffering being inflicted by both sides. 4 million people internally displaced, 9 million people in need of desperate help, hospitals without medical supplies, people without food. Ethiopian forces have inflicted a de facto blockade of the region of Tigray, with humanitarian aid including food, fuel and medical supplies unable to get to those most in need. The World Health Organisation was not permitted to deliver medical supplies from July 21 to this February, and in January the Red Cross delivered its first shipment of aid since September; the shipment included surgical supplies and essential drugs to treat about 200 people. There are estimated 3.9 million people in Tigray in need of health services and intervention and a reported 5.6 million in the region in need of food aid and 900,000 in a famine-like situation.

Even more harrowing are the accounts of sexual violence. One survivor said they raped me one after the other, I don't know if they realised I was pregnant, I don't know if they realised I was a person. Leading



Ethiopian refugees crossing into Sudan, in Hamdyat in Kassala state.

figures in humanitarian agencies have reported that sexual violence is being used as a weapon of war in Ethiopia, soldiers inflicting physical and psychological damage on women and girls in an attempt to undermine the morale of their adversary. The Liberal principals of equality, human rights, peace and democracy, and of course the Rule of Law are fundamental to our identity as a party and where ever the principles of abrogated, be it on our doorstep or further afield it is imperative that we act in concert with international partners to uphold them.

The motion calls on the government to act with international partners including the UN Security Council and asks them to call for immediate negotiations, secure humanitarian access and investigate human rights abuses and war crimes. It is imperative that the international community works to ensure this ethnic violence doesn't spill over into the wider region. Magnitsky sanctions must be used against all who are perpetrators of violence or preventing humanitarian aid from reaching those most in need, and priority in aid efforts must be given to the eradication of sexual violence in conflict. But what would make all of these objectives so much more achievable, if the Conservative government hadn't cut our aid budget, so we stand for restoring the 0.7% of GNI target for international development spending, funding so desperately needed for humanitarian relief delivered by independent agencies must be increased. Millions of people are living in a state of acute food insecurity, made worse by the war with Russia and Ukraine, because of Russia's exporting of wheat. Internally displaced people and refugees need support as they are forced from their homes by the conflict.

Christopher Johnson, of Gwynedd & Anglesey, expressed concern on the effect the war was having on local people, not only damaging their livelihoods, but also the horrendous way they had been treated by both the government and the Tigrayan rebels. The motion was important because it showed the way we care about everyday Ethiopians, many of whom were seeking refuge in surrounding countries such as Sudan. The racial profiling by the government makes it hard for ordinary Tigrayans. Ethiopian Airlines has placed Tigrayan staff on indefinite leave and does not allow ethnic Tigrayans to board aircraft. In addition to this, there is ethnic profiling going on, on both sides, with the government targeting Tigrayans and the Tigrayans targeting Amharans. This has got to the stage where Genocide Watch considers that Ethiopia has simultaneously reached Stage 4 in dehumanisation, 6, polarisation, 8, persecution and 9, extermination on its Genocide Scale¹. This is a highly complicated conflict in which both the government and the rebels have committed horrific deeds, which is why I'm not taking sides, nor is this motion taking sides. What this motion does do is allow us to work with our international partners to seek to find a solution to the ongoing crisis and a solution to peace that works for Ethiopia or for Ethiopians, who have nothing to do with this war and want some kind of stability back in their country, do not have to worry about being the victim of war crimes and to be able to rebuild their lives and livelihoods, especially for those who worked in the tourism industry, whose livelihoods have been decimated by tourists not coming in.

David Chalmers (North Devon & Chair of the Liberal Democrat European Group) spoke of the optimism two years ago when the Ethiopians were preparing for what they hoped would be free and fair elections. There was real optimism in the country at the future economic development of the country, at the opportunities for tourism and the growing influence of Ethiopia in Africa and the world stage. Abiy had just been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and whilst there were still refugee camps throughout the country from internal and external conflicts - notably the war with Eritrea. There was a general feeling of hope that the country was heading to a brighter future. I travelled extensively across Tigray - a province associated with many around the world with the famine of the 1980s but which seemed a distant memory. The vast majority of the population not having been born at that time. Politics in Ethiopia is dominated along ethnic lines rather than political ideology and in the midst of all this hope - there were signs of impending conflict as in the escalating disagreement between the Provincial government in Tigray and the central government in Addis Ababa, which might have been prevented from escalating into this dreadful civil war. Whilst investment from the rest of the world in the form of European factories and the sky scrapers being built in Addis Ababa to house the Chinese banks - was anyone really trying to diffuse the potential of war. Abiy was the poster boy for Africa of the future - and everyone turned a blind eye to his excesses. The UK's reduction in its aid budget has diminished our influence on the global stage and prevented us from being engaged in Ethiopia. Now with the humanitarian disaster in Ethiopia we are actually cutting back our aid.

Phil Bennion (Lichfield, Tamworth & Burntwood & chair of the party's Federal International Relations Committee) summing, said he went to Ethiopia three years ago. He found a country full of hope; there was a population explosion, but the economy was just about growing fast enough to keep the young people employed – a large number of highly educated people working in the tourist industry. Considering the hope, and the support for the changes that Abiy Ahmed was bringing along at that time, I found that the young people in Tigray were just as strongly supportive of Abiy as the young people in Amhara at that point. But even then, the youngsters in Tigray were saying that the TPLF Old Guard really did not like the fact that they had lost power. This is the source of the conflict; the TPLF had ruled the roost for twenty years when the Mengistu regime was removed, largely by them. This opening up and giving power to the other ethnic groups has irritated the TPLF Old Guard, it didn't necessarily irritate the Tigrayan people more generally. The loss of the tourist industry is really pertinent and is causing real, real suffering.

My driver, whom I became quite friendly with, showed up in a refugee camp last Autumn and I got a call from him for help. He was in a strange part of the country for him, in Bahir Dar, which is not where he was from and he was starving. He sent me a picture; he was really emaciated. I called on another friend who lived in Bahir Dar to find him, we got him out and got him fed, and thankfully now he's back to his family and his children in Lalibela. This is the sort of real human issues that have been brought up by this really needless conflict. When we went to Mekelle we found a modern, vibrant, prosperous city, but now its all lost and we have to try to help rebuild and find solutions. We know full well that the TPLF and the conflict between Amhara and Tigrayans as it has progressed in absolutely appalling. The use of sexual violence as a weapon is a war crime; the blocking by the government of the aid shipments into Tigray is an abomination. Whether it fully falls into the realms of genocide is complex. We have Isaias coming in, the autocrat of Eritrea, yet they are ethnic Tigrayan and they are working on the side of government.

¹ <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/genocide-emergency-ethiopia-1>

John Alderdice meets Israel's Liberal foreign minister Yair Lapid

Meeting in Tel Aviv on Thursday 17th February, Yair Lapid – Israel's Foreign Minister and Alternate Prime Minister and the Chairman of LI member, Yesh Atid – spoke with LI President of Honour, Lord Alderdice, who applauded the liberal leader's courage in and approach politics in Israel.

Lord Alderdice congratulated Mr Lapid on bringing his party into Liberal International and pulling together an unprecedented breadth of coalition government for his country. They held substantial discussions on Mr Lapid's work to address the historic divisions and challenges Israel faces, including specific short-term difficulties as the country prepares for the religious festivals of Passover, Easter and Ramadan which unusually all overlap in 2022.

Speaking after the meeting Lord Alderdice said: "Yair Lapid is a genuinely liberal leader who is bringing imagination, courage and creativity to Israeli politics. I well remember when his father, Tommy Lapid led the liberal Shinui party as an active member party of LI and we have missed the presence of an Israeli liberal party in our family. I was profoundly encouraged by our conversation today and look forward to continuing to work together with Yair, a liberal leader of global distinction."



Lapid has since condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and has said that Israel would not be a route to bypass sanctions on Russia imposed by the United States and other western countries. The state of the coalition in Israel makes diplomatic moves on Palestine unlikely in the short term, but Al-Monitor has reported favourably on Yair Lapid.

Lib Dem Friends of Palestine Fringe

Hopes that Amnesty International's report Israel's apartheid against Palestinians¹ would change the outlook for Palestinians were dashed at the Liberal Democrat Party Conference in March. Guest speaker Danielle Bett told a Lib Dem Friends of Palestine (LDFP) fringe meeting it would be quickly forgotten in Israel, and that the likely government response was "if that's how we are seen, we need to tell our side of the story better."

Danielle Bett, a Scottish Israeli currently living in Israel, is Communications Director at Yachad - Yachad Together for Israel, Together for Peace² the increasingly important UK-based voice for liberal-minded Jews. She was in conversation with the LDFP's Dr Ruvi Ziegler, law professor at Reading University and a specialist in refugee issues, and both brought a liberal Israeli Jewish perspective to the table.

They agreed that the Amnesty report would have more impact on Diaspora Jews than those in Israel, and that using the word 'Apartheid' in Israel deflects attention from the Occupation, provoking instead debate about the definition of the word, often ending with it judged inappropriate on the grounds that "Israel is not South Africa". As Dr Ziegler pointed out, the legal definition doesn't require a regime to mirror the South African experience. Danielle Bett said Yachad avoids labelling Israel's system as Apartheid, but felt Palestinians had a right to do so. She believes Israelis should feel uncomfortable when they hear the word, and should ask themselves difficult questions about the Occupation, rather than dispute the finer points of its applicability.

Events in Ukraine understandably dominated much of the Spring Conference, and were already (the LDFP fringe was held on 13th March) becoming a heart-breaking tragedy for everyone involved, but the fringe meeting also looked at the likely impact in Israel/Palestine of international condemnation of Putin's attempt to annex Ukraine. The Israeli government's tangled international allegiances had left it struggling for a coherent stance, but polls showed the Israeli people were much clearer; the majority sympathise with the Ukrainians and do not support the annexation. The Israeli population includes migrants from both Ukraine and Russia, but in many cases those who left Russia did so for a reason, and feel they owe it no allegiance. Unfortunately, widespread Israeli disapproval of Russia's actions in Ukraine doesn't map easily onto the annexation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), for two reasons; first, for most Israelis, the 'Palestine problem' is hidden behind a wall, so they don't see Palestine as an occupied country, largely because they don't have to think about it at all; second, the ferocity of the Russian invasion contrasts with the piecemeal encroachment of the West Bank by settlers; in effect, Putin's Russian army makes Israel look good.

Danielle Bette said that although the UK government has voiced criticism of Israel at times, it always fails to exert any real pressure on Israel, either to end the Occupation or to observe international law. She told the audience it was important to keep pressure on MPs and peers, and to try to change the attitude of indifference in Westminster.

She said Yachad doesn't promote Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS), but does support the targeted approach of the Liberal Democrats, who voted last September to ban all trade with settlers. She urged the

audience to continue to support human rights activity in Israel, and to keep talking to people inside or outside politics about the campaign for justice for all the people of Israel and Palestine, and didn't disagree with the suggestion that Israeli Jews are as trapped by the current militarised relations with Palestine as the Palestinians.

Finally, aside from the conference, we note that the Department for International Trade has a consultation, running until 11.45pm on 30th March 2022, on Trade with Israel³. A response



just reminding HMG of the Palestinian occupation would focus their minds.

Andy Daer

Vice Chair, Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine

¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2022/02/israels-system-of-apartheid/>

² <https://yachad.org.uk/>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/trade-with-israel-call-for-input>

Human Rights under constant threat in the Middle East, and Iran

Chris Doyle, Director of CAABU (Council for Arab British Understanding) gave a frank appraisal of the state of Human Rights in the Middle East when he spoke at the Liberal Democrat Conference on 12th March, saying “we do not live in a time when respect for human rights is in the ascendancy”.

His talk asked how liberal democracies should avoid complicity and keep Human Rights in the spotlight in their dealings with the Middle East.

He said we should celebrate “semi-positive” news, like Saudi blogger Raif Badawi being released from prison in Saudi Arabia after serving a 10-year sentence for advocating an end to religious influence on public life. He’d had to endure public lashings and now has a 10-year-travel ban. Basic human rights are still being widely abused, as are women’s and LGBT rights, and in many countries corruption and torture are a fact of life.

Western governments might give human rights a higher profile at home, but conflicts of interest can get in the way when dealing with repressive regimes. The UK can’t hold Saudi Arabia and the UAE to account over the war in Yemen while it profits from arms sales. And the UK’s human rights record at home is not always lily-white. British law courts are used by dictators and oligarchs to repress freedom of expression in their own countries, and until recently oligarchs were made very welcome in London.

Turning to the “Arab Spring”, a source of hope in 2011, but quickly dashed, he said it should not be written off as a failure. The Covid pandemic derailed a resurgence of the resistance movements in early 2019, and as Covid recedes we should expect to see more internal protests against repressive regimes. However, he accepted that outright war and simmering conflicts in countries across North Africa and the Middle East would hinder that process, and his list was daunting: Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Western Sahara, Egypt, Palestine, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, Iran. In Europe, Russia’s attempt to annex Ukraine by military might is rightly condemned, but sympathy for the Ukrainians could transfer to the Palestinians, who also face encroachment by a powerful neighbour.

Economic and other challenges faced by the international community damage attempts to improve human rights, by simply diverting attention. Liz Truss, the UK Foreign Secretary, flew into Tel Aviv a day after Amnesty International’s report into Apartheid practices in Israel was published, but she was there to discuss a new trade deal, not the oppression of the Palestinians described in Amnesty’s report. Public weariness in the US and the UK over the lengthy presence of troops in Afghanistan led to a rapid withdrawal last summer, endangering many lives and letting slip twenty years of progress over women’s rights.

The obstacles to better human rights in the Middle East seem daunting, and Chris Doyle called for greater efforts from those living in more liberal and democratic countries, but he said they would need to start at home, and make sure their own country adhered to the standards it aspired to, including welcoming refugees. Only then would they have sufficient moral standing to demand improvements in other countries.

Andy Daer

A Look at the UK Immigration Policy Through Recent Casework

Nicholas Chan

The UK immigration policy has come into public review since the debates on the Nationality and Borders Bill, itself a parliamentary bill highly geared towards asylum policy. The public focus is even much profound since the Russian invasion on Ukraine. Britain fell behind time in preparing a sanctuary for Ukraine. In the following cases, it reveals the main tragedy is the lack of political awareness how costs, monetary or otherwise, affects immigration applicants. Complicated Immigration Rules, casework preparation; and appeals, though at no fault of the applicant, is financial demanding to seek legal help. It begs the question, how is our immigration policy complying with equality - regardless of circumstance? It is also only right in that all applicants are fairly treated under the rule of law. We can investigate the issues with our immigration policy from the perspective through casework, and perhaps we can have future debates on how to lobby in tackling the issues.

Cost & Humane consideration

How humanitarian is the British National (Overseas) visa policy?

The Prime Minister has made a number of statements accounting the UK has a history of welcoming refugees and providing humanitarian routes is peaked in his ministry. In successive Prime Minister Questions on 2 March and 9 March, 2022; he told the house to reflect on the good his ministry has done such as providing humanitarian routes to relocate Afghans and Hong Kong Chinese. On Hong Kong Chinese, it will be assumed the Prime Minister meant the British National (Overseas) ('BN(O)') visa policy given that it is the only scheme offered for such 'relocation'. His answer to Angela Crawley MP on 2 March 2022 reads, "Look at the record just under my premiership. Look at what we have done to help people from Afghanistan. Look at what we have done to help the Hong Kong Chinese." Thus, we can deem the Prime Minister has meant these schemes are in the humanitarian context. Yet, it is worth considering, does the BN(O) visa meet the criteria to be considered a humanitarian policy? Does it always provide the refuge desired by any applicants with a BN(O) citizenship, or is a policy to fulfil a historic obligation and only meets halfway the desire of British sentiments and the needs of the people of Hong Kong?

We shall dive directly to see how the costs involved means it does not meet the criteria to be considered as entirely humane. It is of essence the scheme must be improved per opposition proposals. (*The case, before the application rejection, was handled by an organisation unaffiliated to the writer.*)

The applicants involved is a family unit ('family HK'). Family HK left on concern the child will not receive an impartial education since the promulgation of the HK National Security Laws. In the social context, teachers has been stripped from the accreditation without a panel hearing, and there is strong consideration to impose an oath of allegiance for teachers' accreditation. Family HK is a single parent family with little savings and moved to the UK to seek employment and residence under the Leave Outside the Rules ('LOTR') scheme for BN(O) citizens. The parent's perspective is he / she (hereinafter mentioned in muscular terminology simply as written expression) needs to leave before the end of the LOTR scheme. This gives the best chance for the child to continue studies and he can seek employment immediately upon arrival to pay for visa costs. The move was intentional and immediate for personal concerns that Hong Kong's situation is dire. However, since arrival in the UK, his financial difficulties remain. He was unable to seek gainful employment in the UK. The applicant then seeks to ask the Home Office to grant the waiving of associated visa cost or to grant an LOTR on humanitarian grounds to extend his Leave to Enter. Further, the parent's financial destitution has affected his mental health and is diagnosed by a GP.

After being passed on through a number of teams at the Home Office, and a 3 months period, Family HK applications were rejected. The following statement is part of the Family HK's rejection:-

“Undermine the purposes of the immigration system relating to the BN(O) route to settlement should you be granted leave to remain outside the rules on the family and private life route for a limited period of time in order to secure sufficient funds to be able to submit an application on the BN(O) route to settlement purely for the reason that you cannot meet BN(O) route as a result of a failure to secure employment within the first 6 months of arrival in the UK sufficient to pay the required fees.”

The rejection has also considered grounds of ECHR Article 8 and his health condition.

Per the statement, it will be worth noting much weight has been placed to justify a cost placed upon applicants of the policy.

A humanitarian response should surely allow one to flee immediately regardless of their financial situation. Surely, one cannot reasonably expect an applicant to remain in a conflict zone and achieve financial means before flight. Then, is it achievable to meet the financial cost and requirements within 6 months, i.e. the duration given to BN(O)s under LOTR to allow them to leave Hong Kong immediately?

The BN(O) fees are:-

	2.5 years visa, requires renewal to achieve pathway to ILR	5 years visa with pathway to ILR
Visa fees	£180	£250
* Immigration Health surcharge ('IHS')	£1,560	£3,120
Total	<u>£1,740</u>	<u>£3,370</u>

* Do consider that the IHS is subject to substantive cost increases. The 2019 GE campaign saw Boris Johnson’s ministry increasing it from £400 to £624 in a year.

In addition, there is a financial requirement to demonstrate sufficient funds to self-support and the applicants has no recourse to public funds in most circumstances. The 6 month financial requirement is £1,531.50 for 16-24 years old and £1,933.10 for aged 25 and above (at time of writing).

Family HK chose the minimum expenditure, which is the 2.5 years visa.: -

Average UK salary for 6 months, less taxes and NI	£10,122
Less rent (Outside London)	(£2,100)
Less visa cost for 1 parent and 1 child	(£3,095)
Less 6 months expense for family	(£3,464.50)
	<u>£1,462.50</u>

Therefore, with only £1,462.50 remaining; the applicants will not meet the financial requirements to have a savings of £3,464.50, prior to a BN(O) visa application, in the applicants’ circumstances.

As the above has demonstrated, it is simply impossible for families to flee on the BN(O) scheme without first being financially capable. Furthermore, any hindrance to access to funds, such as bank accounts being frozen by authorities, will harm any chances to flee Hong Kong using the BN(O) scheme. The inability to access funds is further demonstrated in the case of pro-democracy legislator Ted Hui. While Mr. Hui and his family managed to flee Hong Kong, they were the fortunate exiles. Mr. Hui left his frozen assets behind and is dependent on support from his extended family whom reside overseas.

It should be emphasised the BN(O) scheme is necessary. ¹Polling data shows the British public is positive in fulfilling a historic obligation. Meanwhile, a resettlement programme is also demanded by the pro-democracy Hong Kong politicians to provide HongKongers with a choice. However, the Government's scheme in the current form and amendments scheduled for October 2022, fell short of both expectation and what is necessitated. Almost all cracks could have been avoided had the government listened to the Liberal Democrat's Hong Kong Bill, which repeated the Right of Abode framework set down by Paddy Ashdown in the 1990s.

Finally, given the financial requirements, the practical inability to generate sufficient funds within the time frame provided by the Home Office, strict requirements any costs is required to be paid upfront and the Home Office's refrain from human rights consideration; the BN(O) is not an immigration policy that fully meets humanitarian nature.

Appeal Cost to Asylum Seekers

Administrative errors and asylum seekers

Asylum seekers face the prospect of huge expenditure on legal work. One first need to contemplate UK's immigration law is complex, and there are at least 8 ²main legislation in the area of claiming asylum. Also, an applicant will face further complexity if faced detention. That will involve Detention Service Orders and FTT procedures. Further, if financial and housing support is required, Asylum Support Regulations and Amendments are involved. It is an ordeal for an asylum seeker to defend himself and asylum applications applies an adversary procedure. Finally, translations for official documents are often requested by the Home Office. The casework cost stacks up quickly.

Of course, asylum seekers may have access to legal aid and charities. However, nowadays legal aid are paid at around £480 per case; which is insufficient compensation for the caseload. Next, on charities, because of the Home Office's bureaucratic nightmare charities coffers are drained.

To add to the insult, Home Office errors are often so unreasonable, it calls in question whether they are intentional. Casework for appeals, which are in itself Home Office errors, are additional costs to applicants.

We can take a refugee from Hong Kong as an account of Home Office unreasonable errors. The applicant applies for substantive support under S95 and was rejected on a basis his parents and sibling are residing in the UK. In fact, the applicant's parents have never travelled to the UK. More awkward is that the applicant's mother and sibling lack of suitable travel document to the UK. Firstly, the sibling never have had a passport. Predominantly, the applicant's mother's travel document is a HKSAR Document of Identity. HK residents who are not naturalised use the HKSAR Document of Identity for travel and they are subject to Visa requirements for Leave to Enter while HKSAR holders do not need prior entry clearance. As the mother has never sought a UK Visa, it would have made her prospects living in the UK with Home Office knowledge highly unlikely. Furthermore, there are extensive communication evidence that show parents and siblings are residents in HK. One would have thought the error could easily have been remedied by a verbal explanation from the applicant. After all, the Home Office can carry out secondary checks to corroborate their original beliefs. Nonetheless, the Home Office requires a written argument and additional evidence from the applicant. This is simply over bureaucracy considering the Home Office's administrative error very plausibly meet Wednesday Unreasonableness.

Administrative errors and successive inability to remedy misjudgements are more dominant in the case of R(DMA, AHK, BK and ELN) & R(AA) v Secretary of State for Home Department [2020] EWHC 3416 (Admin) ('The 2020 Judicial Review'). I was not involved with this case but investigation reveals a reflection of the repeated bureaucracy faced in my casework.

¹ <https://comresglobal.com/polls/hong-kong-watch-and-friends-of-hong-kong-uk-hk-poll/>

² 8 pieces as per Immigration Act 1971, Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc.) Act 2004, Borders Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009, Immigration Act 2014, Immigration Act 2016 and Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Act 2020

The applicants in The 2020 Judicial Review made Asylum Support for failed asylum seekers i.e. S4(2) claims under the Immigration & Asylum Act 1999, and the Court finds they faced unreasonable and discretionary delays in their application. The applicants have disability and protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. One applicant is seriously disabled with terminal illness and received no accommodation for 9 months. In addition, the Court found the Home Office to have provided inaccurate performance figures to the Court during the hearing. It is worth mentioning none of the applicants has either right to work or recourse to other public funds. More importantly, the defendant i.e. Home Office actually accepts it is their stated policy to provide housing support in 48 hours in cases of street homelessness or 5-9 days in other cases.

Disappointingly, such policy like the length of time accepted by the defendant is too often not met in my experiences. Lately, it takes 1 month to obtain a reply, favourable or non-favourable, from FNORC accommodation team, who are placed in charge of S95 and S4(2) support. So these experiences, in itself, will still be a breach to the acceptance made at Court in The 2020 Judicial Review'.

Similar to The 2020 Judicial Review, the Home Office first initiative is to blame applicants. In The 2020 Judicial Review, the defendant is to appropriate fault for applicant's missed pick-ups. From experience, Home Office communications are chaotic and sporadic. At times, messages are sent to the wrong entity. When messaged to the correct entity, the messages may sporadically varies from choice of email, letter with postal delay or SMS. There is no coherent communication strategy.

Applicants easily miss out correspondence with Home Office's incoherent communication strategy. Referring back to the HK asylum applicant, Home Office's text or mobile messages are often not capable to be received. Immigrants at detention centres, despicably named as Immigration Removal Centres, may have offered mobile phones to detainees. Though, phone coverage is terrible. Unless there is a sensible communication strategy, it is unfair to place the sole responsibility upon applicants to receive Home Office messages. That is also what the Court finds in The 2020 Judicial Review.

The applicants in The 2020 Judicial Review eventually received the accommodation support needed but the hidden cost remains. Judicial Reviews are expensive and usually costs in upwards of £5,000. Indeed, the applicants were fortunate to receive pro-bono through charities. Nonetheless, resources have diverted from further help to asylum seekers. Importantly, there is the human cost. Given the potentially prohibitive costs, how is equality before the law ensured? How are repeated Home Office bureaucratic attitude fulfilling the rule of law in considering immigration cases?

Summary

In the first case presented, it gives an impression on the Government's political desire to give itself undeserving credits. At worse, the humanitarian credits do not exists because applicants who lacks funds while having a case of human rights nature are not benefactors of the policy.

The second case involved cost attributes to asylum seekers who wish to seek sanctuary in the UK. Applicants are presented with repeated deadlocks. Additionally, there are persistent administrative errors. Tackling these problems involve time and costs whether it is directly upon applicants or entities assisting with asylum seekers.

The third case is a dominant case in the public domain and, along with on-going experience, I presented elements of the Court has made clear is still recurring. The hostile environment is not remedied a year after the Judicial Review at the Court.

The immigration environment is already hostile and further deteriorates with the presentation of the Nationality and Borders Bill. That Bill should not be given a supportive voice. Amendments should only undermine it by taking down provisions. There should be no attempts to propose an amendment, such as BN(O) amendments, which however good in original thoughts, may dignify a bill that should have no life in our compassionate society. A bad bill should remain bad and voted down without any proposal of good credits.

As this article is written, the bureaucracy nightmare for Ukrainians is unfolding. The pleasant change today is implementing electronic visa applications for Ukrainians who have a biometric passport and immediate family in the UK. It is a shame the Home Secretary has to be dragged at such lengths by people from all sides of the political spectrum to come to some compromise. And, the apparatus for such electronic visa measure was present all along. It has been extensively used by BN(O) visa & EU settlement schemes. It demonstrates if administrative faults are remedied at first hand, it will bring a much-needed positive note to immigration cases.

The UK Immigration Policy itself would have already put off a great number of talents who do not bother to deal with the expensive visa cost and tremendous paperwork. The UK itself is a magnet for talents as evident by EU migration. When the UK is in the European Union, freedom of travel meant paperwork is a simple report to the police station. Immigration policy only presents meaning when there are streamlined processes.

As for the humanitarian notion, the system fails it. The attitude is to drive people away and deter successful applicants. Perhaps left of the system is for refugees who can actually afford it. This certainly does not reflect the UK's obligation to the UN 1951 Refugee Convention.

There are no proposals presented here. The intention is to present an insight from casework experience. I consider this a more hands-on approach to consider exact changes for the mechanism. More importantly, there certainly is a responsibility between liberal minds to tackle the issue. The government under Boris Johnson is already at lost with reality in claiming the UK immigration policy is working and it welcomes refugees and people in need. The frontbenches further boost non-existent humanitarian credits such the case of the BN(O) policy. Similarly, refugees faced sets of problems; it is a shame to boost on non-existent help. If liberal minds fail to remedy the situation, we validate the government's inhumane response.

Nicholas Chan

The cases stated reflects cases that may be on-going and permission has been granted from the applicant(s). Identities, apart from published cases, are withheld for confidential reasons.

Nicholas Chan is moving from Psychology into Law. He is currently undergoing solicitor training with a focus on criminal appeals. In addition, he works extensively with Larry Ngan, founder of Liberal Democrats Friends of Hong Kong, on human rights advocacy.

63rd LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS

30 June – 3 July 2022, Sofia Bulgaria

Statutory deadlines:

- 21 April (not later than 10 Weeks) – Bureau jointly proposes a draft theme resolution and an explanatory memorandum at the initiative of the Rapporteur.
- 21 April (not later than 10 Weeks) – Submission of political documents (draft resolutions, world today resolution, bureau nominations, membership applications etc).
- 5 May (not later than 8 Weeks) – Political documents circulated to the LI membership, including amendment forms for draft and WT resolutions
- 26 May (not later than 5 Weeks) – Deadline for returning amendment resolution forms
- 9 June (not later than 3 Weeks) – Text of all resolutions and amendments circulated to LI membership 10:00am (local time)
- Thursday 29 June – Deadline for emergency resolutions

reviews

The Drag Explosion, by Linda Simpson.
Domain Books 2020 £45.00
isbn 9781734728545

The Drag Explosion is an exciting book of photographs and essays, an insider's account that documents a golden age of drag in the nightclubs of New York City from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s. Its author is the inimitable Linda Simpson, a drag queen, MC, and bingo caller who also edited her own underground magazine, *My Comrade*. As Linda explains in her book, in the early 1980s she moved to NYC from Minnesota, leaving behind years of 'being shamed for my sissy persona'. She would have the last laugh, however, discovering the drag scene as well as her own alter-ego, before going on to downtown stardom. Linda was a rare phenomenon of her time: whilst every drag queen was more than happy to pose in front of a camera, she actually owned one and used it to document the queens and their milieu. 'It wasn't until many years had passed that it dawned on me I had created a rather stunning time capsule. My photos are B.C. – before cell phones – when we lived in the Now and they evoke a particular freshness.'



As we were all aware at the time, 'the Now' had a liberating side as well as a dark side. Housing was cheap and plentiful; part-time and casual employment was easily available; further and higher education was free in the UK and in the USA it was more affordable than it is today. This social-economic context meant that people did not have to spend all their time working to earn money just to pay for the essentials. You could get by on a shoestring budget, living a bohemian life that allowed you lots of time to pursue artistic and creative pursuits, and hang out in the bars and clubs. This was a vibrant, diverse culture

that comprised black and white, middle and working class, all sexual orientations, drag and trans, young and old. The commonalities were a love of dressing up, kooky performance, downtown art, underground films (John Waters, Russ Meyer and Kenneth Anger were all heroes), music and dancing, booze and pills. Alongside this was a sense of enjoying being outside the mainstream, something that owed much to the energetic fallout from glam rock, punk, and new wave.

But on the other hand, the AIDS pandemic was raging. The morbidity and mortality rates were frightening: life-saving combination therapy had yet to arrive, so attending funerals was far too regular an occurrence. Empathy and practical support were in short supply from the mainstream culture, with 'victim' blaming endorsed by too many media commentators, politicians, and churchmen. This was because homophobia and transphobia were commonplace and normalised anyway, including bullying, targeted violence, and getting fired and evicted. Not surprisingly, lots of vivacious characters on the downtown scene were runaways who were ostracised from their genetic families. There were times when it felt you were living in a siege.

This siege mentality goes some way to explaining why the bars and clubs were so lively. These were places where marginalised people were free to enjoy themselves and experiment with appearance, behaviour, language, performance, music, art, and a range of intoxicants. The Pyramid Club blended disco with post-punk cabaret; the Boy Bar staged young new drag and trans performers, both lip synch and live; and large dance-orientated clubs such as Limelight and Tunnel hired drag queens to host bars and to generally add glamour and excitement. The premise of *The Drag Explosion* is that all this reinvigorated drag to such an extent that it crossed over into mainstream culture for a peak that lasted a few years. Suddenly drag queens began appearing on TV chat shows, and in pop videos, adverts, fashion spreads and catwalk shows, where they added some much needed cutting edge. Lady Bunny easily held her own on daytime TV, with her

skyscraper wigs, quick wit and social commentary. Zaldy appeared in a Levis commercial, looking femme real in the back of a yellow cab, applying macquillage before humorously breaking the spell by using an electric razor to remove a few stray hairs on her chin. Lypsinka walked for Thierry Mugler during Paris Fashion Week. The Connie Girl lit up George Michael's Too Funky video, again resplendent in Mugler. And of course Ru Paul became a *bona fide* pop star. Drag was hip and cool, and it was everywhere. And then after a few years it suddenly stopped. It was no longer novel, the overground jobs dried up -- but the drag queens carried on regardless, doing what they had always done: entertaining on their home turf. Nevertheless, a cultural shift had occurred, in that the general public had glimpsed a captivating netherworld that hitherto had been much harder to access. The queens had bravely beaten a path through the undergrowth while at the same time providing young LGBTQ people with an exciting new range of role models: the foundations had been laid for drag to eventually become more mainstream and for a greater acceptance and understanding of LGBTQ people.

Linda's photographs capture the excitement, daring and irreverence of the time. We see her friend Page in Baader-Meinhof drag, complete with beret and machine gun. In another image, a young topless male stripper has dollar bills shoved into his underwear by an admiring audience member. Further on we see Linda and her friend Glenda Orgasm in drag on the top deck of a packed bus, giving daytime sightseers an extra treat. And there are lots of images from Wigstock, the annual outdoor drag festival hosted by Lady Bunny. Premier voguer Willie Ninja is there, looking radiant; performer Billy Beyond looks Jean Harlow-esque;



Bunny herself blows a kazoo onstage, looking like she wandered into Wigstock from Woodstock. And everywhere there are people with coloured wigs and sequins, drinking beer, and enjoying themselves.

I asked Linda two questions about the book.

SB: What does your book say to those of us who lived through the era that it covers?

LS: For those of us who were going strong then, the book is a reminder that it was a very momentous period of time. It was filled with despair because of AIDS, but it was also a time of queer camaraderie and bravery. The drag scene was especially thrilling, morphing from an underground art form into a mainstream sensation. The book is a tribute to all of that creativity and resilience.

SB: And what does your book say to the younger generations?

LS: I hope *The Drag Explosion* informs young people that the drag scene that thrived from the late 1980s to the mid '90s set the pace for today's drag renaissance. Drag history is often muddled and the book helps set the record straight.

Cross-Dressed is Best!

Stephen Brogan

More on Linda Simpson and her book here: <http://lindasimpson.org/>

Zaldy's Levis commercial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DF-mbNVkT5I>

Lady Bunny: <https://www.ladybunny.net/>

