



## Who's saying what about Refugee Week?

Check out these statements of support from various actors, authors, politicians, musicians and activists.

[Have your say - let us know what you think about Refugee Week!](#)

---

"Refugee Week is important because it reminds us that refugees are not just statistics to be used and abused, they are living, breathing people. I am British, I was born here and I have no intention of leaving here, so I want to create a society here where compassion is built into our culture, in this society we will be so aware of the world around us that we will not need a Refugee Week. Until then this is how we do it."

**Benjamin Zephaniah, Poet**

---

"Refugee Week is a unique time when we can all celebrate the contribution that refugees have made over the years to the UK - both culturally and economically. Please do something to support Refugee Week- go to an event, find out more about the issue or just speak out for refugees when you can."

**Colin Firth, Actor and [Brightside](#) founder**

---

"Compassion has long been a part of British culture, and Britons are proud of our history of providing refuge to people seeking sanctuary and of the vibrant communities that refugees have helped to build.

Refugee Week is a celebration of the diverse contribution of refugees to our society, and a week with an important role to play in fostering greater understanding between all of our communities.

It is also a time when all those who continue to live in fear of persecution are at the forefront of our minds, and I know that Britain will continue to offer a safe haven to people fleeing desperate situations in the years to come."

**Prime Minister Gordon Brown**

---

The first good thing I hear about my country, the first suggestion that it is changing, I will go back - and quickly. It might take five years or even ten years but one day things will change. Everybody needs their country. At home you can be a star but then as a refugee you are looked at like a dog. I am a refugee but I am also a singer. That is my job and that is how I survive.

**Maryam Mursal, vocalist**

---

"Refugees of all background are made to feel a burden on this state. For centuries we have made the country creative, flowing, rich and exceptionally dynamic. Although they will still despise who we are, I am proud to be an exile who helped make this country what it is. I am even prouder to be one among millions of others who had to come here but who have never let their hopes and aspirations weaken in the face of prejudice."

**Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, Journalist**

---

"The British tradition of welcoming genuine refugees to this country is a great one, and I hope we continue to show this generosity of spirit in the future. Refugees who have come to this country have produced many of the things we regard as typically British, Marks and Spencer an excellent example. I hope Refugee Week is a great success."

**David Cameron, leader of the Conservative Party**

---

"As a former refugee myself, I am very aware of the difficulties people face when they arrive in this country, such as language problems, isolation and prejudice. All of these are helped through volunteering, because when you volunteer alongside someone, you get to know them a little bit, which helps to break down barriers. And together we'll aim to provide newcomers to this country with a bright and welcoming environment!"

**Cyril Nri, Actor**

---

"Refugee Week is a great way of celebrating the contribution refugees have made to arts, culture, economy and wider society. What better way of marking our commitment to a shared future together in an enriched United Kingdom. The positive and varied programme highlights not only the part played by refugees, but also reminds us of our proud history of welcoming them and the immense value of tolerance. Indeed, behind all the negative headlines live real people building for themselves new lives, fulfilling their potential, and improving our society for everyone. I send you all my best wishes."

**Nick Clegg, Leader of the Liberal Democrats**

---

“Our country has benefited hugely throughout its history from the contributions of those who have fled here to escape persecution. There is nothing new about this. We celebrate this year, for example, the 350th anniversary of the return of the first Jews to England after their expulsion in the Middle Ages.

Like those from all continents to whom Britain has been a safe haven before and since, they have repaid our hospitality by enriching our culture, our society and country.

Refugee Week celebrates this contribution. It also reminds us of the courage and resilience of those who must continue to leave family, friends and home to escape prosecution.

Britain and its people have a proud heritage of welcoming refugees. We must continue to do so. We must also provide them with the support they need to fulfil their potential and make their own full contribution to our society. I am delighted that we are again sponsoring Refugee Week and give it my full support.”

**Tony Blair, former Prime Minister**

---

“The stories of today’s refugees invite us to imagine ‘What would I do if that happened to me, now? Would I find the same courage to survive?’ Their stories also remind us of what human beings can do to other human beings. They challenge each of us to strive more actively for peace in our fragile world.

**Dr Beverley Naidoo, Author**

---

“I was born within spitting distance of the villages of East and West Haddon. My forebears have been tilling the soil and making shoes in Northampton for generations. That makes me the odd one out. Nearly everyone I know is a refugee, or the child of a refugee, or the grandchild of a refugee... So let’s stop talking about the contribution refugees make to this country as if it was something different from the contribution of others. There is no ‘us’ and ‘them’. We’re here, many of us, only because someone in our family was given asylum. Let’s celebrate this diversity, and fight to keep the doors open.”

**Mark Haddon, Author**

---

“Britain’s worsening record on the treatment of refugees doesn’t exactly make you proud. Perhaps living in such a prosperous democracy has dulled our ability to empathise. Perhaps we fear that people fleeing chaos and brutality will bring it here with them. There must be some reason why as a society we do so little and do it so grudgingly. We help only a tiny quota of people. Refugee Week helps to humanise the media myths, replacing distorted statistics with men, women and children who all have stories that can teach us how to live; a small voice, speaking our shared humanity.”

**Moira Buffini, Playwright**

---

“I am very pleased to support Celebrating Sanctuary, which is a great opportunity for Londoners and visitors to enjoy the talents and creativity of refugee artists and performers, and is a positive platform to help dispel the ignorance, fear and negative stereotypes that continue to surround refugee communities throughout the UK.”

**Ken Livingstone, former Mayor of London**

---

“It was amazing last year. I had a tremendous time meeting different people of different backgrounds and enjoyed the richness of the sounds of different cultures, Arabic, Jewish, European and African. You will have fun and when you go back home you will be delighted and enlightened, you will appreciate the beauty of the different colours of all races.”

**Emmanuel Jal, Musician**

---

“Refugee Week is a great opportunity for us, as Liberal Democrats, to restate our commitment to supporting those who seek sanctuary in the UK. We would like to see all parties taking a more positive approach to refugees. It is the responsibility of all parties in a liberal democracy to oppose those who vilify refugees and to celebrate the contribution of refugees to our economy, culture and society in general.”

**Menzies Campbell, former leader of the Liberal Democrats**

---

“There is a gratifying sense of the recognition paid to us during Refugee Week. Refugees are not simply here to work and claim benefits from the State. Whilst we are here, we very much want to be part of the Society and contribute in different sectors, for example, in Government policy like I have done. “

**Harris Nyatsanza, Leader of the United Network of Detained Zimbabweans**

---

“People still need reminding of the richness that can come from combining cultures. The English language is but one tiny proof of this; there are so many words in our rich tongue that have been acquired from around the globe.

And we do well to remind ourselves that people have always moved in waves, across towns, countries and continents. Most of us have ancestors that were refugees of one kind or another (some four hundred years ago my own were Huguenot protestants persecuted by the Catholic regime in France). And the refugees of one generation go on to become the fabric of a constantly changing society.”

**Jo Tatchell, Author**

---

“Receiving refugees is not the matter of somebody signing papers in some remote office. It’s the matter of making friends with new neighbours; it’s the matter

of turning strangers into a part of community and that's done most just by treating them normally, as part of a fabric of the life of this country, this community."

**Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams**

---

"Refugee week is a time when we can celebrate the contributions refugees have made and continue to make in Britain. Through the skills they have, the work they do and the cultural diversity they bring, they enrich our lives and our society. My own family had to flee to Britain when I was five years old and we have always felt extremely grateful to this country for welcoming us and giving us security."

**Margaret Hodge, MP for Barking**

---

"My family came to Britain as refugees after World War II. We were made welcome with great warmth and generosity, and I hope in my forty years as a teacher and writer I have repaid some of that initial kindness. Growing up in Britain gave me the freedom to be a rebel, access to a great canon of literature and humour, and above all, gave me the wonderful English language, without all of which I couldn't have written my novel A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian. It makes me very sad to think that England now is a less welcoming and tolerant place than the England I grew up in."

**Marina Lewycka, Novelist**

---

"Every refugee deserves protection and support, especially families with children. Please support Refugee Week in any way you can."

**Vanessa Redgrave, Actress**

---

"I think people feel it's part of what it means to be British to offer sanctuary to those who are being persecuted, tortured, subject to violence, fleeing conflict, fleeing famine. I think we are a tolerant and open-hearted nation and I feel that the best way to express that is to say to those who are really suffering if you got no other options left, we will offer you sanctuary."

**Nick Clegg MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats**

---