



United Nations Human Rights Council, 32nd Session (13 June – 1 July 2016)
Item 9 General Debate; Follow up and implementation of the Durban Declaration
28 June 2016

Speaker: BHA representative, Cordelia Tucker O’Sullivan

Thank you Mr. President.

As humanists, we are committed to the building of a more open, free and equal society through an ethical approach based on humanism. We believe that refugees and migrants are first and foremost human beings [who hold human rights] and should be treated as such. The reality for those arriving into Europe runs counter to this, at times being met with attacks from far-right activists, alongside the rise of populist politics and xenophobia.

In Hungary, the government ordered the construction of a razor-wire wall at its border with Serbia, and introduced a law enabling the arrest and prosecution of any migrants attempting to cross.¹ Following this, authorities reported that they had arrested 200 asylum seekers at their border.² This happened against the backdrop of Prime Minister Orbán associating migrants with terrorists, and declaring that Hungary, in its pursuit of anti-migrant policy, was defending a ‘Christian Europe’.³

In Russia, government-led nationalism, strongly supported by the Orthodox Church, has successfully whipped up anti-migrant sentiment, with Russia granting asylum to a mere 2000 persons between 2011 and 2015, all while refusing to take part in any resettlement scheme.⁴

The government of the United Kingdom, against a backdrop of rising populism, agreed to accept only 20,000 Syrian refugees over the next five years.⁵ Following the referendum last week, there have been numerous reports of visceral anti-migrant abuses being directed at EU and non-EU migrants alike, including leaflets being distributed containing the words ‘No more Polish vermin’.⁶

The President of the Czech Republic called the surge in refugee numbers ‘an organized invasion’ claiming that it would be ‘practically impossible’ to integrate the Muslim community into European society.⁷

The Durban Declaration clearly condemns ‘violent nationalist ideologies based on racial or national prejudice’,⁸ yet this harmful trend has contributed to the rise of anti-migrant sentiment and has led to the pursuit of measures which are at odds with the right to seek asylum [as recognised in the 1951 Convention on Refugees.] We call on the Council to step up its efforts to combat populist nationalism, especially in member States.

Thank you.

¹ <http://act4democracy.eu/spip.php?article57>

² <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-15/hungary-arrests-200-asylum-seekers-breaching-border-laws/6778526>

³ <http://www.thenation.com/article/how-xenophobia-could-ruin-the-best-thing-about-the-eu/>

⁴ <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n19/daniel-trilling/what-to-do-with-the-people-who-do-make-it-across>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/07/uk-will-accept-up-to-20000-syrian-refugees-david-cameron-confirms>

⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-36633388>

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/18/integrating-muslims-into-europe-is-impossible-says-czech-president>

⁸ Paragraph 84 of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action