

UK announces brutal policy to “offshore” refugees in Rwanda

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Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Home Secretary Priti Patel yesterday announced the details of their plan to “offshore” the processing of asylum seekers.

Building on their already draconian immigration system, most refugees and asylum seekers who are able to make it to Britain now stand no chance of receiving refuge. They will, within days of arriving, be flown 4,000 miles away to landlocked Rwanda in central Africa.

The Home Office said that those deemed to have arrived illegally will be refused asylum and detained in a former military base before being flown out on a “one way ticket” to Rwanda. The *Daily Mail* noted, “Once in Rwanda they will no longer be under the UK’s jurisdiction and subject to that country’s refugee rules, with no legal right to return to Britain.” If deemed by Rwanda not to have a legitimate asylum claim, they will be deported back to their home country. If found to have a valid claim, they will be allowed to stay in Rwanda for five years.

There is no limit to the number of refugees that can be sent to Rwanda, with Johnson boasting in his speech that the “deal we have done is uncapped and Rwanda will have the capacity to resettle tens of thousands of people in the years ahead.”

The offshoring system was pioneered by Australia, which began detaining asylum seekers in detention centres on the tiny Micronesia island country Nauru, and Manus Island in 2001. Thousands have been detained, with Australia making the operation permanent, despite a staggering \$12 billion being spent in just the eight years to 2021.

A central aim of the Rwandan deal is to deter any migrants and refugees headed for Britain, with the threat of being shipped to one of the poorest countries in the world.

Even before the first refugee is booted out of the country, Johnson has placed the Ministry of Defence in charge of policing the English Channel and detaining those attempting to land in Britain on dinghies and other flimsy vessels.

Johnson said that to “identify, intercept and investigate these boats, *from today* the Royal Navy will take over operational command from Border Force in the Channel, taking primacy for our operational response at sea... with the aim that no boat makes it to the UK undetected.”

The *Telegraph* reported a government source threatening, “You are going to be met by the Army. They will drive you to the airport and send you straight to Rwanda. That is where you are going to end up in the hope that would be enough to deter migrants.”

Rwanda has one of the most appalling human rights records on the planet. It is less than two decades since a war waged by an ethnic Hutu regime backed by France saw the extermination of between 800,000 and one million people, mainly from the country’s Tutsi ethnic minority.

Human Rights Watch says of the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front that it “continues to target those perceived as a threat to the government. Several high-profile critics have been arrested or threatened and authorities regularly fail to conduct credible investigations into cases of enforced disappearances and suspicious deaths of government opponents. Arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and torture in official and unofficial detention facilities is commonplace, and fair trial standards are routinely flouted in many sensitive political cases, in which security-related charges are often used to prosecute prominent government critics.”

The scheme has been at least three years in the

planning, with Patel making it her flagship policy to stop a few thousand people arriving annually via the dangerous English Channel route from claiming asylum in Britain. It is the basis of her Nationality and Borders Bill now passing through parliament that shreds the basic tenets of the 1951 Refugee Convention, requiring signatory countries to offer asylum to those fleeing war or persecution.

There were initial discussions within the Home Office about moving migrants to decommissioned oil platforms in the North Sea and old ferries off the UK coastline for processing. A host of countries and locations were considered for offshoring including Albania, Gibraltar, the Isle of Wight and another African state, Ghana. Sending refugees to the inhospitable volcanic Ascension Island, over 4,000 miles way in the South Atlantic Ocean, was also mooted.

Britain intends to offshore its anti-refugee policy on the cheap, with Rwanda receiving only around £120 million over five years as part of the deal. The poverty-stricken, war-torn country already accommodates 130,000 refugees. The BBC, which has “seen accommodation the asylum seekers would be housed in,” reported it is “thought to have enough space for about 100 people at a time and to process up to 500 a year.”

None of this matters to Britain. Johnson gave notice of a round-up of migrants who will be immediately deported, warning “from today, our new Migration and Economic Development Partnership will mean that anyone entering the UK illegally— *as well as those who have arrived illegally since January 1st*— may now be relocated to Rwanda.”

Johnson pledged that another half a billion pounds will be spent in escalating the repression of men, woman and children fleeing homelands devastated by imperialist wars and proxy wars supported by the UK, including in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya and Sudan.

The Royal Navy “will be supported with £50 million of new funding for new boats, aerial surveillance and military personnel in addition to the existing taskforce of patrol vessels, Wildcat helicopters, search and rescue aircraft, drones and remotely piloted aircraft.”

“People who do make it to the UK will be taken not to hotels at vast public expense, rather they will be housed in accommodation centres like those in Greece,

with the first of these to open shortly. At the same time, we are expanding our immigration detention facilities, to assist with the removal of those with no right to remain in the UK.”

Patel visited Greece last year to examine its anti-immigration infrastructure, declaring herself in awe of the repressive system in place, including a soon to be operational detention camp on the island of Samos.

No-one will be spared. The *Times* reported Thursday that it understood from a briefing the Rwanda policy would apply only to male migrants, but by the afternoon *Sky News* reported, “It’s been indicated that children and minors won’t be included, with some earlier briefing that it would be only single men, but we are told that’s not necessarily correct.”

The Rwanda deal was announced now, despite being in place for weeks, in an attempt to shore up Johnson’s support among his party’s right-wing base. But this could end up helping Patel as a potential challenger, given that both Johnson and his Chancellor Rishi Sunak received fines from the Metropolitan Police this week for participating in illegal parties during the pandemic. She has announced the ultimate “red meat” policy for the frothing right-wing layers in the Tory ranks. Bill Wiggin MP said of his desired immigration policy, “We want Ukrainians, we want Qataris, we don’t want people in rubber boats.”

Johnson appeals to these forces by declaring the initiative was “made possible by Brexit freedoms” he had secured. His government is prepared to fight any legal challenge by what he called a “formidable army of politically-motivated lawyers”.

The opposition Labour Party has no principled difference with the vicious persecution of migrants and refugees. Leader Sir Keir Starmer centred his opposition to the Rwanda deal on the criticism that it would be too expensive and is “unworkable”. Arch Blairite Chris Bryant tweeted, “Rwanda plan will cost more than putting them up in the Ritz.”



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