



[Fran Heathcote](#)

20 June 2024

## World Refugee Day

For World Refugee Day, Fran attended an event in Parliament Square in London to show support for refugees and displaced people.

Today I was proud to represent PCS and stand in support of refugees. The message from everyone today was unequivocal: we stand shoulder to shoulder with refugees, and we will continue to do so until their appalling treatment comes to an end.

This solidarity is going to be needed more than ever in the coming months. The far right is on the march here in the UK, and across Europe at a frightening rate. In the face of this rising tide of hate, it's up to us to be the bulwark against it. Where our enemies use incendiary language that enflame division, we need to be out in our workplaces and communities, countering this narrative of animosity with one of inclusion and a shared humanity.

So the question is, what does this fightback look like?

I'm immensely proud that PCS has been at the forefront of this resistance.

First, we took a stand against the despicable plans to turn back boats in the channel. Our members working in the Border Force came to their union, and we began a campaign of industrial and legal pressure, which forced the government to ditch the policy.

Then the government came back for another go, this time with the heartless Rwanda plan. Rather than opening our arms to the desperate and the vulnerable, this rotten government wants to kick them onto a one-way flight to a country 4,000 miles away.

But again, PCS members spoke up, and we fought back.

In a fight alongside refugee and human rights groups that went all the way to the Supreme Court, the policy was eventually deemed unlawful. I couldn't be prouder to say that thanks to PCS, not a single flight containing a single asylum seeker has left for Rwanda.

But as we know, this nasty government is relentless in its pursuit to punish refugees. The Rwanda bill is now law, and the Home Office has already begun rounding up asylum seekers and sending them to deportation centres. You can certainly tell there's an election around the corner.

PCS, its members, and this movement will not stand for it.

The lives of people who have been through hell should not be toyed with in a reprehensible election stunt.

There's an important update in the battle against the Rwanda plan. Yesterday, we served the Secretary of State for Defence Grant Shapps with a pre-action letter. We are officially putting him on notice of a legal challenge if he attempts to arrange for the Ministry of Defence to assist in flying asylum-seekers to Rwanda. Commercial airlines don't want anything to do with the Rwanda scheme and it's expected the Home Office will turn to the MoD for help. It's our view that any attempt by Shapps to assist with the flights would be in breach of domestic law, including the prohibition on torture or inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment.

We've won legal challenges before and I have no doubt we will do so again. Grant Shapps has seven days to respond and the clock is ticking.

As well as taking a stand against this rotten government's treatment of refugees, we've developed a ground-breaking policy that can put an end to so much of the suffering. Working closely with Care4Calis, we published our Safe Passage Visa Policy. This innovative plan would issue asylum seekers with a travel visa to enter the UK and they would then enter the asylum process as normal.

Despite what government ministers might say about their own plans, our safe passage visa is the only way to stop people getting in boats and making the crossing. There are so few legal routes available that people are forced to take ever more perilous journeys to get to the UK. This policy puts a stop to that.

Everyone should be immensely proud of the coalition of defiance we've built, and it's so important to remember that it's been a direct response to the relentless dehumanisation of refugees.

Suella Braverman, the former Home Secretary, likened refugees and asylum seekers to a "swarm" and a "hurricane". She even said she dreamed of seeing the first flight take off to Rwanda. Well I'm sorry, Suella, but PCS has turned your dream into a nightmare.

Elsewhere, last year the then immigration minister Robert Jenrick ordered murals of cartoon characters on the walls of a Kent asylum seeker reception centre to be removed. The murals, which included images of Mickey Mouse and Baloo from *The Jungle Book*, were removed because Robert Jenrick thought they were "too welcoming and sent the wrong message". He wanted to make clear the centre was a "law enforcement environment" and "not a welcome centre". The centre takes in unaccompanied asylum seeker children, and some of the lone children are as young as nine. It's an astonishing level of callousness that borders on evil.

The key point here is that these aren't the words and actions of fringe politicians. These are powerful and influential people. And in just a few weeks, after the Tory party is wiped out at the general election, these people will be fighting like rats in a sack for the party leadership.

Then what will follow will be a grotesque spectacle.: a sick and twisted game of top trumps, with candidates competing over who can dole out the most punishment and cruelty to refugees. But we will be there, we will always be here, fighting back every step of the way.

PCS will ensure the Labour Party doesn't forget the principles it was founded on, and when it gets into government, we are demanding nothing less than a total transformation, that treats refugees with dignity and respects the rights of our members in the Home Office.

We have a long and tough battle ahead of us. The conditions are ripe for the far right to continue growing and inevitably asylum seekers and refugees bear the brunt.

That's why all of us need to take to our unions, workplaces and communities a renewed commitment to keep fighting. PCS will be there, and I look forward to standing shoulder-to-shoulder with other supporters in that fight.