

# Wales Peace Institute Consultation Response

December, 2011



## Background

1. The Welsh Refugee Council has over twenty-one years experience of working with refugees, asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers. It provides confidential and independent advice services across Wales, advocates for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, supports capacity building for refugee community organisations, and promotes good community relations. Its vision is to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers are safe, and that they get the support they need to rebuild their lives in Wales.
2. The Welsh Refugee Council's work is guided by the core principle that the right to seek asylum is a fundamental right. This year marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, an international standard that has provided the essential protection to save hundreds and thousands of lives since it was established.

## Consultation Response

3. We welcome the Petitions Committee of the National Assembly for Wales' decision to seek our views on the establishment of a 'Peace Institute' for Wales concerned with 'Peace and Human Rights' issues.
4. The Welsh Refugee Council believes that the Peace Institute for Wales is desirable as its peace and human rights-related research activities would be relevant to policy makers, voluntary organisations and the public at large.
5. Wales historically prides itself on providing a safe haven to people fleeing persecution, conflict and other forms of disaster in their countries. The Welsh Refugee Council welcomes the Welsh Government's commitment to refugees and asylum seekers, under the 'Refugee Inclusion Strategy Action Plan' 2011. There is however, a concern that the underlying factors, which force people to flee their countries in search of basic human rights in Wales, remains misunderstood by some individuals and groups within Welsh society. The lack of understanding about the main reasons why refugees and asylum seekers are in Wales, can, at times, causes some people to stereotype this category of vulnerable of people in Wales and has lead to difficulties in communities. This is fuelled in part by a media that all too often constructs asylum seekers as bogus or illegitimate scapegoats that are blamed for a plethora of society's ills.

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6. The establishment of a 'Peace Institute' in Wales could provide a respected independent and authoritative source of information about refugees and asylum seekers in Wales. That could provide a valuable contribution towards a mature and critical debate on asylum and protection in Wales. This may be achieved through the conduct of social research on refugee and asylum issues, and the dissemination of research findings across Wales and beyond through online communities, conferences and events.
7. The Welsh Refugee Council believes that the 'Peace Institute' in Wales should be an independent research institute, able to speak freely and offer constructive and insightful comment to Welsh Government on peace and human rights issues and international conflicts and resolutions, etc. While the UK Government is a signatory to various International Treaties, which do not naturally translate to debate within the Senedd. The Welsh Government has International obligations and reporting requirements that fall underneath these treaties regarding social justice and equality for all people living in Wales. A Peace Institute in Wales would be able to evidence how Wales is meeting these requirements and investigate possible routes for change within the socio-economic and political environment on issues such as hate crime, and conflict induced exploitation.
8. As suggested in this consultation letter, the Welsh Refugee Council would like the Petitions Committee of the National Assembly for Wales to ensure that the terms of reference for the establishment of the Peace Institute for Wales include particular clauses similar to the Flemish example in Belgium, which empower the Peace Institute to:
  - 'Conduct social research on the underlying causes of international conflicts or wars and their impacts on unarmed civilian populations';
  - Publish and disseminate its findings on peace and human rights issues to the Welsh Government;
  - Make recommendations on prevention and peaceful resolution of international conflicts; and
  - Make recommendations to the Welsh Government on issues that trigger hatredness toward individuals, including refugees and asylum seekers, on the basis of their race, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation in Wales etc.

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