

Some very odd things are going on at the British Home Office. On Wednesday 27th October a senior official of the UK Border Agency (UKBA) Phil Douglas is to devote a whole sixty minutes to address a meeting in London to explain the recent announcement by Immigration Minister Damian Green of an end to the moratorium on sending back failed Zimbabwean asylum seekers (see: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/news/wms-zimbabwe.pdf>

and

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/media-centre/news/enforced-returns>
).

Zimbabweans throughout the UK have naturally expressed interest in attending the meeting but have been puzzled why a report about the UKBA's Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe in August is suddenly no longer available on the UKBA website. It has also disappeared from the website of the UNHCR. Fortunately the Vigil captured it in case it does not reappear and it can be accessed on our website (see: <http://www.zimvigil.co.uk/Campaign-News/>)

In a letter to Zimbabweans Mr Douglas quoted this report in support of the UK government's change of policy (see: <http://www.zimvigil.co.uk/ZimVigil-Diary-Entries/uk-government-letter-to-zimbabweans-in-the-uk.html>)

). He left many questions to be answered. Here are some:

What's going on at the UK Border Agency?

Written by Administrator

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1. Why in your letter to Zimbabweans do you speak of 'the indiscriminate violence which marred the elections of 2008'? This is a complete travesty of the truth. The violence was not indiscriminate: it was directed by Mugabe and his thugs against the MDC.
2. In your letter, you say 'There is no doubt that political persecution and abuses of human rights persist in Zimbabwe. However, these abuses are more targeted than previously and not all Zimbabweans are equally affected.' What is meant by 'more targeted' – targeted at opponents of Mugabe? Some of these opponents are in the UK trying to get asylum - the very people you propose to send home.
3. If it so safe to send back Zimbabweans why has one of the Vigil inspirers, Roy Bennett, recently taken political asylum in South Africa even though he is supposed to be the Deputy Minister of Agriculture?
4. The Archbishop of Canterbury's office says two Anglican bishops in Zimbabwe have been threatened with assassination and may have to flee the country. Will the British government send them back to Harare?
?

The sudden inaccessibility of the little-publicised report – running to more than 100 pages – seems to be more than a coincidence. It is indeed a damning report – but damning for the UKBA's case. The message of the report is quite clear – there is continuing violence, torture, intimidation and fear – and everyone expects it to get worse in the elections Mugabe wants within eight months. The UKBA's intention to resume deportations flies in the face of its own report. The decision is simply bizarre.

The report speaks of seven Zimbabweans returned safely but the report makes clear that they didn't let on that they had claimed asylum in the UK

. Later in the report (4.6) an organisation in Zimbabwe is reported as expressing concern that those who have claimed asylum would be considered to be disloyal. If

Britain

goes ahead with mass deportations of failed asylum seekers they will not be able to hide like the magnificent seven when they reach Zimbabwe

.

The biggest puzzle of all is how the UKBA can announce this change of policy while three judges are still considering the Zimbabwe country guidance case. These three judges have indicated that their deliberations are unlikely to be completed until the beginning of December and, subject to appeals, their ruling may be pushed back to January or February.

The Home Office statement of 14

th

October said that there would be no forced removals of failed Zimbabwean asylum seekers until the court decision. This will be just a few months before the elections – when everyone expects violence . . .

The Tribunal judges will surely note 3.59 in the UKBA report: no safe hiding place for political activists with a sufficiently high political profile and 3.69: Zanu PF believes in violence.

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They might have to look at the Zimbabwe Vigil website to see the report.