Written evidence from African Solutions to African Migration (ASAM) (EUR0023)

The future of Britain’s diplomatic relationship with Europe after Brexit’ inquiry

1 Executive summary

1.1 The African Solutions to African Migration (ASAM) campaign is an innovative, African-run, UK-based, non-profit, human rights and development organisation, which is working to promote African solutions to African migration.

1.2 Our overall objective is to reduce the adverse impacts of African migration on the individuals concerned, their departure and destination countries, particularly the UK.

1.3 Why?

1.4 We believe that, even with the best moral and political will in the world, the UK and the remaining EU 27 would not be able to absorb and resettle the millions of African youths, who may be forced by political and environmental disasters to flee to Europe in search of a better life in the coming decades.

1.5 This submission assesses what the FCO should do within a post-Brexit Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) to find lasting African solutions to African migration, which is increasingly becoming an international crisis.

1.6 To put the crisis in perspective, since 2015, some 15,000 African men, women and children have drowned, and 600,000 others rescued while making perilous journeys across the Mediterranean Sea, according to UN and other international humanitarian agencies.

1.7 Whether they are called ‘economic migrants’ or ‘refugees’ fleeing persecution, the causes of mass migration from Africa are so deeply rooted in a complex web of social, political, economic, environmental, developmental and cultural issues, that neither the UK, nor the remaining EU 27 would effectively handle separately after Brexit.

1.8 Moreover, the UK and all other EU member states are experiencing identical impacts of immigration. For example, anti-immigration parties and racial violence have sprung up, destabilising the established political order and community cohesion all across the European Union. Consider the following:

1.9 The United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP) and the 2016 vote to leave the EU, France’s National Front, Germany’s Alternative Germany, the Netherland’s Party for Freedom, Greece’s Golden Dawn, Sweden’s Democrats, Austria’s Freedom Party and Slovakia’s People’s Party. [i]
1.10 Crucially, African migration could have serious implications for international peace and security.

1.11 The Horn of Africa, a major source of African migrants, is located in the vicinity of the Red Sea, a strategic trade route between western Europe and the emerging markets in Asia.

1.12 A report by the Centre for International Relations and Sustainable Development (CIRSD) is instructive:

1.13 “There is one overriding truth about the Horn of Africa. It straddles a geographical space of such strategic importance that those who treat it with indifference will one day pay a price for their neglect...Whether the Western interest in counter terrorism, good governance, and economic growth can find common ground with the security concerns of the Gulf so as to sustain a momentum towards stability and coherence—rather than fracture in the Horn—is one of the great challenges that we collectively face and must meet.” [ii]

1.14 Consequently, a post-Brexit Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) should, as a priority, develop practical measures aimed institutional framework for the delivery of sustainable African solutions to African migration.

1.15 In the immediate term, the UK should recognise that the current EU policy of intercepting African migrant boats in the Mediterranean Sea and having their human cargo detained in Libya, or returned to Africa is neither humane, nor sustainable

1.16 Instead, intensified efforts should be put in creating UN ‘Safe Havens’ in Africa to accommodate rescued migrants until suitable resettlement arrangements are made.

1.17 In the medium to long term, imaginative steps should be taken to tackle population explosion, the primary cause of environmental degradation, conflict over limited resources, famine and ultimately mass migration.

2 Population growth and the vicious cycle of poverty and mass migration

2.1 According to the 2017 World Population Prospects report:

2.2 “of the additional 2.2 billion who may be added between 2017 and 2050, 1.3 billion will be added in Africa. Beyond 2050, African will be the main contributor to global population growth. The concentration of population growth in the poorest countries will make it harder for those governments to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, combat hunger and malnutrition, expand and update education and health systems, improve the provision of basic services and ensure that no-one is left behind.” [iv]
2.3 In a related developed, the 2017 United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) report ‘Dividend or Disaster’, has indicated that:

2.4 “High-fertility rates and rising numbers of women of reproductive age mean that given current trends, over the next 35 years nearly 2 billion babies will be born in Africa, and its under-18 population will increase by two thirds, to almost a billion children.” [v]

3 False solutions

3.1 This inquiry is taking place at a time when newspaper reports are indicating that “European policymakers have been desperately seeking solutions that would not just deal with those (migrants) already here, but prevent more from coming.”

3.2 According to a report by The Guardian. ‘How Europe exported its refugee crisis to north Africa’, this means:

3.3 “disrupting humanitarian rescue missions in the Mediterranean, offering aid to north African countries that commit to stemming the flow of people themselves, funding the UN to repatriate migrants stuck in Libya and beefing up the Libyan coastguard to detain African migrants pending their deportation”. [vi]

3.4 The same report also indicated that this approach follows the “creation in 2015 of an initial €2bn EU-Africa trust fund meant to prevent people from leaving in the first place.”

3.5 With corruption so rampant in Africa, government officials are likely to steal and divert most of the EU’s migrant trust fund to their bank accounts.

3.6 Even if the funds are properly utilised, it would take many years before their effects are felt on the ground in terms of improved access to employment, health services, education, housing, clean water and sanitation systems.

3.7 Moreover, as several tragic incidents in UK Immigration Detention and Removal Centres have shown, there are migrants who would take drastic steps to avoid being returned to their countries of origin. Some would have deliberately destroyed their national identification papers while others have committed suicide.

3.8 For example, “Prince Fosu, 31, was found lifeless on the floor of his cell at Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre in west London on 30 October 2012. The Ghanaian national had arrived at the facility six days before his death, after he was arrested for running naked in the street and found to be in the country illegally.” [vii]

4 Unintended consequence – the alleged African slave markets in Libya
4.1 The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and several other reputable humanitarian agencies are reporting, with video images, indicating that hundreds of thousands of African migrants are being sold in Libyan slave markets.

4.2 In response, the UN Secretary General Mr. Guterres has reportedly said “Slavery has no place in our world and these actions are among the most egregious abuses of human rights and may amount to crimes against humanity,” [viii]

5 Message from Maltese Bishop Mario Grech

5.1 Maltese Bishop of Gazo, Mario Grech, might as well have been giving evidence before this Committee when he said during an inter-religious funeral service for 24 African migrants who died at sea in April 2015:

5.2 “We are in the presence of twenty-four unidentified dead human bodies but we know that many more, hundreds, lay in the great graveyard that the Mare Nostrum has become.

5.3 We know not their names, their lives, we just know that they were escaping from a desperate situation trying to find freedom and a better life.” [ix]

5.4 If African migrants are “escaping from a desperate situation trying to find freedom and a better life”, it is highly unlikely that the EU’s policy of intercepting migrant ships in the Mediterranean Sea will deter others from taking the risk, using a different route.

5.5 According to the IOM: “the number of migrants arriving on Spain's southern coast has more than doubled in 2017 from last year as they avoid passing through conflict-wracked Libya on their way to Europe.” [x]

6 Conclusion – the magic bullet is empowering women

6.1 An overwhelming body of research evidence shows that the one magic bullet that would tackle African migration is tackling population explosion.

6.2 The most effective way to achieve that objective is to empower African women, especially rural women to be able to decide if, when and how many children they wish to have.

6.3 A recent UNICEF report is note-worthy:

6.4 “Educating women is one of the fastest ways to reduce poverty and fertility. In sub-Saharan Africa, women with no education have 6.7 births on average. This falls to 5.8 for those with primary education and more than halves, to 3.9, for those with secondary education.
Conversely, if investments do not occur in Africa’s youth and children, the once-in-a-generation opportunity of a demographic dividend may be replaced by a demographic disaster, characterized by unemployment and instability. [xi]

7 Recommendations – action on migration and the causes of migration

7.1 The UK should pursue a double-edged post-Brexit policy aimed at

7.1.1 Settling, on a temporary basis, African migrants currently on their way to Europe, and

7.1.2 Tackling the root causes of African migration. To that end, the FCO should take the following steps:

7.2 Persuade its EU partners not only to end the arbitrary detention of African migrants in Libya, but also to close down all Libyan detention centres as a matter of urgency.

7.1 Use the UK’s influence in the UN Security Council to authorise the creation of UN ‘Safe Havens’ across Africa to accommodate the rescued African migrants.

7.2 If they are given protection and basic services, especially housing, education, health, water, sanitation and tools, the usually resilient and industrious asylum seekers would use the security and facilities in their ‘Safe Haven’ to grow enough food to feed themselves, with surplus sold to other famine-stricken regions of Africa.

7.3 In time, their children would become teachers, journalists, doctors, engineers and other professionals and export their skills to other African countries and Europe. Others would become world-class sportsmen and women. Still others would be trained for peacekeeping missions in other trouble spots in Africa.

7.4 These success stories would attract other Africans who feel politically and economically disenfranchised to migrate to the ‘Safe Haven’.

7.5 Such Safe Havens would offer the UK and its EU partners a dignified and humane way to solve the social and economic problems of African mass migration.

7.6 It would also enable failed asylum seekers to introduce in the continent a new sense of community and entrepreneurship based on the rule of law.

7.7 Provide easy access to Sexual and reproductive health education and services.

7.8 Offer cash incentive to willing families to medically limit the number of children.
7.9 Improve health, social welfare, and protection services to meet international standards; or beyond, in countries close to attaining them.

7.10 Fund Africa's skill educational, and vocational learning system aimed at enabling African youths to meet the needs of a twenty-first century labour market.

7.11 Invest in the slum cities where some 30 million Africans including children are living in poor conditions without housing, food, clean water, sanitation or security, according the UN Human Settlements (HABIAT).” [xii]

7.12 Faced with such harsh living conditions, many African slum dwellers are turning to violent crime, drug trafficking and people smugglers as their only escape routed from poverty.

7.13 And, with absolutely nothing to lose, it is mostly the Addis Ababa, Nairobi, Kampala, Kinshasa and other African city slum dwellers who are always involved in political violence. [xiii]

7.14 Finally, working alone and in tandem with the remaining EU 27, the UK should do more to assist Africa to create an atmosphere conducive to trade if the continent is to trade itself out of poverty.


[iii] 1m African migrants may be en-route to Europe, says former UK envoy - https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/apr/02/1m-african-migrants-may-be-en-route-to-europe-says-former-uk-envoy


[ix] Message by H.L. Msgr Mario Grech, Bishop of Gozo, during the migrants inter-faith funeral service  

[x] Migrants once again drawn to deadly Spanish route to Europe  

[xi] Dividend or Disaster: UNICEF’s new report into population growth in Africa  
https://www.unicef.org/zambia/media_20451.html

[xii] Slumscapes: How the world’s five biggest slums are shaping their futures  
https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-slums-united-nations-world-insight/slumscapes-how-the-worlds-five-biggest-slums-are-shaping-their-futures-idUKKBN12H1GK

[xiii] Life in an area mapped out as post-election hotspot; tales of Kenya’s slum dwellers  

December 2017