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Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP  
Prime Minister  
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United Kingdom  
[rishi.sunak.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:rishi.sunak.mp@parliament.uk)

CC: The Rt Hon Suella Braverman KC MP  
Secretary of State for the Home Department

The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP  
Secretary of State for Education

The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick  
Minister of State (Minister for Immigration)

**Via email**

26 January 2023

Dear Prime Minister,

**Children missing, trafficked and at-risk in Home Office hotel accommodation for separated and unaccompanied children seeking asylum**

We are writing as charities to express our grave concern that separated children seeking asylum are going missing, suspected of being trafficked and criminally exploited, from hotels where they have continued to be accommodated by the Home Office. This is despite urgent requests to Ministers and government departments to discontinue this practice and evidence that these children face significant harm.

There is no legal basis for placing children in Home Office hotel accommodation and almost two years into the operation of the scheme which is both unlawful and harmful, it is no longer possible to justify the use of hotels as being 'temporary'. It is a significant departure from the Children Act 1989 and established standards, including those identified in the Home Office's *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* statutory guidance issued under section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009, which requires prompt referral of children to local authority care. Moreover, the National Transfer Scheme, implemented through section 72 of the Immigration Act 2016, has the specific aim of ensuring responsibility for looking after unaccompanied children is borne by local authorities (not the Home Office).

Despite multiple warnings from charities to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, the Secretary of State for Education, Directors of Children's Services, OFSTED, and a report by the Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, it has now emerged that many of these children have gone missing from the hotels, targeted by criminal networks and likely now face exploitation and other forms of significant harm.<sup>1</sup> The latest information provided by your Minister on 24 January 2023 confirmed that 4600 children have been accommodated in

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<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/21/they-just-vanish-whistleblowers-met-by-wall-of-complacency-over-missing-migrant-children> and [An inspection of the use of hotels for housing \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

these hotels since July 2021 with 440 missing episodes and 200 children who have never been found.<sup>2</sup> The hotels are simply not safe.

While the use of hotels for separated children was initially characterised by the Home Office as “*emergency*” measure to be operated for “*the very shortest of periods*”, it has continued for some 18 months. Notwithstanding the unlawfulness of the practice and the hundreds of children that have gone missing and/or been abducted, the Home Office has repeatedly failed to commit to an end date for housing children in this way – despite a recommendation from the ICIBI in October 2022 to end these practices within six months.<sup>3</sup>

We request the end to this practice immediately with a commitment to an end date after which these practices will not be revived and an urgent independent inquiry given these significant matters of public concern following the reported failures to protect vulnerable children from harm.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia Durr, CEO, ECPAT UK (Every Child Protected Against Trafficking)

Enver Solomon, CEO, Refugee Council

Kamena Dorling, Co-Chair, Refugee and Migrant Children’s Consortium

Sir Peter Wanless, Chief Executive, NSPCC

Lynn Perry MBE, CEO, Barnardo’s

Melanie Armstrong, CEO, Action for Children

Dr Carol Homden CBE, Group Chief Executive, Coram

Anna Feuchtwang, CEO, National Children’s Bureau (NCB)

Mark Russell, CEO, The Children’s Society

Tim Naor Hilton, CEO, Refugee Action

Kathy Evans, CEO, Children England

Louise King, Director, Children’s Rights Alliance for England (CRAE)

Louisa McGeehan, CEO, Just for Kids Law

Carolyne Willow, Director, Article 39

Kerry Smith, CEO, Helen Bamber Foundation

James Wilson, Deputy Director, Detention Action

Rita Waters, Group Chief Executive, National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)

Fizza Qureshi, CEO, Migrants’ Rights Network

Jasmine O’Connor, CEO, Anti-Slavery International

Alison Pickup, Director, Asylum Aid

Catherine Gladwell, Chief Executive, Refugee Education UK (REUK)

Rita Gava, Director, Kalyaaan

Gisela Valle, Executive Director, Latin American Women’s Rights Service (LAWRS)

Caroline Coombs, CEO, Reunite Families UK

Stuart Hearne, Director, Islington Law Centre

Carolyn Housman, CEO, Children and Families Across Borders

Richard Hammond, Chief Executive, The Separated Child Foundation

Mia Hasenson-Gross, Executive Director, René Cassin

Simon Tyler, Executive Director, Doctors of the World UK

Siân Summers-Rees, Chief Officer, City of Sanctuary UK

Almir Koldzic, Director of Counterpoints Arts, Refugee Week UK

Paul Hook, Director, Asylum Matters

Elaine Ortiz, Director, The Hummingbird Refugee Project

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<sup>2</sup> <https://parliamentlive.tv/event/index/8cac9880-7e71-4dc9-8a3b-027b328865fd>

<sup>3</sup> [An inspection of the use of hotels for housing \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) and [Response to a report on hotels for housing unaccompanied asylum seeking children, March to May 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Jonny Willis, CEO and Co-founder, Refugee Youth Service  
Sally Daghlian OBE, CEO, Praxis  
Emily Crowley, Chief Executive, Student Action for Refugees (STAR)  
Mark Goldring, Director, Asylum Welcome  
Emma Stevenson, Deputy CEO, Choose Love  
Lauren Scott, Executive Director, Refugees at Home  
Sarah Teather, Director, Jesuit Refugee Service UK  
Anna Jones, CEO, RefuAid  
Duncan McAuley, CEO, Action Foundation  
Andrew McCarthy, Head of Services, Bristol Refugee Rights  
Joanne MacInnes, Director, West London Welcome  
Dr Natalia Paszkiewicz, Project Lead, Da'aro Youth Project  
Rosie Carter, Director of Policy and Engagement, HOPE not hate  
Sara Robinson, Director, St Augustine's Centre  
Adrian Matthews, Trustee, Cambridge Refugee Resettlement Campaign  
Sheila Melzak, Director, Baobab Centre for Young Survivors in Exile  
Richard Williams, Chair, Sanctuary on Sea, Brighton & Hove City of Sanctuary  
David Brown, Chair, Birmingham City of Sanctuary  
Christopher Desira, Director, Seraphus  
Dr Rosie Riley, CEO, VITA  
Barbara Forbes, Coordinator, Birmingham Schools of Sanctuary  
Karen Pearse, Director of Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers  
Eleanor Brown, Managing Director, CARAS  
Rosario Guimba-Stewart, CEO, Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network  
Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Manager, Reading City of Sanctuary  
Nick Harborne, CEO, Refugee Support Group Berkshire  
Amber Bauer, Founder and CEO, forRefugees  
Celia Sands, CEO, South London Refugee Association  
Jackie Rosenberg, CEO, One Westminster  
Andy Elvin, CEO, TACT Fostering  
Stephen Skeet, Director, Volunteering Matters  
Dr Edie Friedman, Executive Director, The Jewish Council for Racial Equality  
Katharine Sacks-Jones, CEO, Become  
Robyn Kemp, Chair, Social Pedagogy Professional Association  
Lauren Seager-Smith, CEO, Kidscape  
Imogen Spencer-Chapman, Director of Services, Love146  
Angela Coton, CEO, Streatham Youth and Community Trust  
Owen Thomas, Managing Director, Future Men  
Leigh Elliot, Chief Executive, Children North East  
Emma Hutton, CEO, JustRight Scotland  
Alison Birch, Lead Practitioner, After18  
Lucila Granda, CEO, Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)  
Anna Pincus, Director, Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group  
Bronagh Andrew, Operations Manager, TARA Service  
Amber Ray, Communications Officer, Calderdale Valley of Sanctuary  
Liz Needham, Chair Board of Trustees, St Albans for Refugees  
William Nicholas Gomes, Director, The William Gomes Podcast  
Naomi Webb, Executive Director, Good Chance Theatre  
Dr. Nazee Akbari, Chief Executive Officer, New Citizens' Gateway  
Aderonke Apata, Founder & CEO, African Rainbow Family  
Shaqib Juneja, Head of Operations, My Family Group  
Maggie Jones, CEO, Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies UK (CVAA)  
Lara Oyedele, Chair of Hope Housing and CEO of Black on Board Ltd.  
Mark Simms, CEO, P3 Charity  
Lara Bundock, CEO, Snowdrop Project

Naomi Jackson, Development Lead, Social Workers Without Borders  
Denise McDowell, Chief Executive, Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU)  
Justin Humphreys, CEO, Thirtyone:eight  
Victoria Marks, Director, Anti Trafficking Labour and Exploitation Unit (ATLEU)  
Vivienne Evans, CE, Adfam  
Lucian Dee, Development and Communications Officer, Waterloo Community Counselling  
Vicki Felgate and Kayte Cable, Co-Founders, Big Leaf Foundation  
Lilian Geijsen, Director Europe, Ben & Jerry's  
Zehrah Hasan, Advocacy Director, The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants  
Sophie Wickham, Director, Action for Refugees in Lewisham  
Sonja Miley, Co-Executive Director, Waging Peace  
Mel Steel, Director, Voices in Exile  
Rebekah Lamplough, Trustee and Secretary, Napier Friends  
Beth Gardiner-Smith, CEO, Safe Passage International  
Sabir Zazai, CEO, Scottish Refugee Council  
Catriona MacSween, Service Manager, Aberlour, Scottish Guardianship Service  
Sally-Ann Kelly, CEO, Aberlour  
Andrea Cleaver, CEO, Welsh Refugee Council  
Huw Anslow, Coordinator, Welsh Refugee Coalition  
Steven Martin, Director, Channel Rescue  
Richard Littler, ED, Grooveschool CIO  
Jo Cobley, CEO, Young Roots  
Gary Bell, Chair of Trustees, South Yorkshire Refugee Law & Justice