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Department of Justice and Equality,  
94 St Stephen's Green,  
Dublin 2

Wednesday September 23<sup>rd</sup> 2015

Dear Minister Fitzgerald,

You announced on September 9th that four thousand migrants are to be accepted into the country. I wonder how the Government arrived at this pitifully token figure? Did you start with three thousand and decide you'd be laughed off the lectern as soon as you announced it? Was it literally the lowest figure you could get away with? It's actually just 2,900 new places on top of the 600 we agreed to take under the EU relocation programme and the 520 from the previous scheme. Is that it? Is that Ireland's big gesture? Are we to leave it to Sweden and Germany? Do they have more money there to deal with the assimilation of these refugees or is it just more humanity?

There are undoubtedly huge economic challenges still to be tackled in Ireland when we're just inching out of the fallout from the banking collapse and bail-out. We have to deal with the homeless problem as a matter of priority. Yet this is a refugee crisis unprecedented since the Second World War. The Syrian migrants in particular have no home state to return to - all infrastructure and security have been obliterated by the al-Assad regime on one side and Islamic State on the other - a mirror image of evil.

Ireland has over twice the land mass of the EU country in which I live and yet the Netherlands has three thousand a week seeking asylum in a packed country of nearly seventeen million citizens. 24,515 migrants sought asylum here in 2014 and up to August of this year, 17,115 people have applied. In that same period, 7,920 family members of these people were also granted residence under family re-unification rules. If Irish people like myself reasonably expect to live and work in any country of the world, I think we need to open our hearts to helping ordinary civilians and their children in truly dire circumstances to re-settle either temporarily or permanently.

A lot of these people are highly educated and skilled and could be paying back into the Irish economy in short order. Amongst the Syrians I've interviewed are an IT consultant, an architect, a tour bus driver, a secondary school teacher, a lawyer, a pharmacist and a silk-screen printer, but the fact that people's right to basic protections has to be argued in terms of their economic value sickens me to my stomach. If we help these people now, it may enrich us culturally and spiritually too.

I enclose an account of one Syrian man who made it to the Netherlands to start a new life: Louai's story.

We all want to be on the right side of history, but I don't think we need to have the ghost of Harold Pinter bellowing 'Shame on Us All' to tell which side that is.

Yours sincerely,

Nick McGinley