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News

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Rudd tells MPs: we were wrong over Windrush citizens

documenting a growing scandal over the past five months affecting an unknown number of people who arrived in the UK as children from the Caribbean as children (often on parents' or siblings' passports) but never formally naturalised or applied for a British passport.

Because new immigration rules mean individuals are increasingly required to show documents proving a right to be in the UK before they can take up work, rent properties, access healthcare, or claim benefits, many have lost their jobs or been made homeless or refused urgent healthcare. Some have been sent to immigration removal centres or threatened with deportation.

Rudd's colleague, the immigration minister Caroline Nokes, earlier appeared to suggest people had been deported in error back to countries they left as children. Rudd said she was unable to confirm whether this was the case and had asked Caribbean diplomats whether they were aware of mistaken deportations.

Rudd's announcement came after the prime minister was forced into an embarrassing U-turn over Downing Street's refusal to schedule a meeting requested by 12 Carribean heads of government to discuss the problem at the Commonwealth heads of government meeting (Chogm), which opened in London yesterday.

The rebuff was described as "most unfortunate" by the Barbados high commissioner just before the meeting began. Within hours, Theresa May's official spokesman announced she had agreed to set up a meeting after all. He added that the prime minister "deeply values" the contribution the Windrush generation have made, but the outrage over the initial refusal overshadowed the opening of the conference.

The decision to back down on the refusal to hold a meeting followed anger from politicians of all parties on this issue. Over 140 MPs from all parties sent a letter to May, expressing concern about the incorrect classification of many Commonwealth-born, long-term British as "illegal immigrants" and calling on her to find a "swift resolution of this growing crisis".

The communities secretary, Sajid Javid, said he was "deeply concerned" about the Windrush scandal, adding "this should not happen to people who have been longstanding pillars of our community."

Rudd's announcement came in response to an urgent question called by Labour's David Lammy, who said it was "inhumane and cruel" for so many in the Windrush generation "to have suffered so long in this condition"

"This is a day of national shame and it has come about because of a hostile environment policy that was begun under her prime minister. Let us call it as it is. If you lay down with dogs, you get fleas, and that is what has happened with this far-right rhetoric in this country," he said.

The shadow home secretary, Diane Abbott, expressed scepticism about whether the new Home Office team would really resolve the problems faced by hundreds of people. "How much confidence can people have in the special team when people with lawyers have been unable to resolve their situations?" she asked.

Satbir Singh, CEO of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, welcomed the new team. "The Home Office must commit to a system which treats affected people with fairness, humanity and flexibility," he added. "We've witnessed the culmination of years of government policy explicitly designed to turn us into a hostile society and which have made the Home Office an island of inhumanity and incompetence."

Still waiting for justice

One who could benefit from the Home Office's announcement of a dedicated 20-strong taskforce to deal with cases of Windrush-era British residents with immigration issues is Richard Stewart.

He was 10 when he moved from Jamaica to London in 1955 to live with his older sister, who was working in the UK as a nurse. In 1966, he was signed up to play cricket for Middlesex.

More than 50 years later, he is facing problems with his immigration status because he does not have a British passport. "I've always thought of myself as British. It does seem unfair."

How the story unfolded, pages 6-7 →
Journal **David Harewood** *Page 4* →

Refugee turned volunteer among first Obama fellows

David Smith
Washington

The Obama Foundation has announced the first 20 Obama fellows, including two from the UK, who will take part in a two-year non-residential programme aimed at bringing together leaders who are "creating transformational change on many of the world's most pressing problems".

The announcement, made via the Guardian, is the latest step in Barack Obama's political afterlife. The former president has spoken out against Donald Trump's policies on only a few occasions, keen to avoid the criticism that he is leading the "resistance" or crowding out other Democrats. He is also writing a presidential memoir.

But he has long taken a particular interest in the next generation of leaders in the US and around the world. Speaking at a conference in Japan last month, he said he aspired to create "a million young Barack Obamas or Michelle Obamas" who would pick up the baton in what he described as the "relay race that is human progress".

The fellows, chosen from 20,000 applicants from 191 countries, are engaged in areas including healthcare, organising communities, technology and the arts. Their work includes helping deaf children have equal access to literacy tools and treating addiction.

Obama said: "These 20 leaders, representing 11 countries, are tackling some of the toughest challenges in their communities. They are doing the hard work – not for recognition, often without enough resources – because they have a vision of the world as it should be: a little more just, less isolated, more connected."

He added: "The foundation will facilitate hands-on trainings, leadership development, coaching and personalised plans and strategies to help these leaders scale [up] the work they've already started."

One of the fellows is Zarlasht Halaimzai, who came to Britain as a refugee from Afghanistan aged 11. After training in psychotherapy, she visited the Calais refugee camp and was struck by the lack of volunteers who could speak refugees' languages. She is the co-founder of the Refugee Trauma Initiative (RTI), which gives psychological help to refugees traumatised by war, torture and displacement.

▲ *Zarlasht_Halaimzai, once a refugee, set up the Refugee Trauma Initiative*

Halaimzai, 36, applied for the fellowship on the last day before applications closed. "I'm thrilled to be part of it," she said from northern Greece, where the RTI does much of its work. "It feels exactly the right thing for me."

The Obamas had been a personal inspiration, she recalled. "When he was elected it was the first time I felt, as a minority in the UK, that I could shoot for the stars because the precedent had been set. Their commitment to empowering people and changing things in a creative way is great."

The foundation said selection weighed factors such as geographic diversity, commitment to the foundation's values and existing work.

They also include Alex Smith, who is founder of North London Cares and South London Cares, which help fight loneliness by connecting elderly people and young professionals.

Koketso Moeti, a civic activist in South Africa, struggled to apply because she lacked an internet connection. A friend stepped in and she hit the button with just minutes to spare.

Applications for its 2019 fellows class will open in the summer.