

‘Jungle is finished’ — The Demolished Refugee Camp In Calais, France



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One of the many tragic stories brought about by uncontrolled people movement has been the demolition of the refugee camp in Calais, France.

Referred to as ‘the Jungle’, it was located on the northern side of France, on a former chemical dumping ground near the port.¹ As it attracted many refugees from all over the world, the wasteland was transformed into a huge, functioning camp. Back in 1999, there was a reception centre named Sangatte opened by the French Red Cross, but it was closed soon after due to mass migration in 2002.² The original Jungle was established after Sangatte was closed but nobody knows where the name Jungle came

¹ Lisa Millar, "Asylum Seekers Attempt To Flee 'Jungle' Camp Amid Bulldozer Threats," *ABC News*, 18 January 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-18/europe-migrant-crisis-jungle-camp-in-calais/7094406>

² "Sangatte Refugee Camp," *The Guardian*, last modified 4 November 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/may/23/immigration.immigrationandpublicservices1>.

from.³ The refugees were mainly from Africa, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Pakistan. They fled from war torn regions with the hope for a better future.⁴

This Calais refugee camp was a symbol of Europe's failure to solve its refugee crisis. Those refugees in Calais were some of the world's most vulnerable people who lived on poisoned wasteland, locked out from the Western world and largely neglected by the French and British authorities.⁵ For the residents in Calais, the camp had become an embarrassment, an eyesore and a danger to public health. The camp had very basic sanitation; the residents expressed that living conditions in the camp were not so different from prison, and they were ready to leave.⁶ In an attempt to solve the migrant crisis in Calais, beginning in September of this year, the British and French authorities pursued a joint project to keep the refugees off the roads leading to the port.⁷ Giant fences were built; more police patrols were appointed at the checkpoints and more cameras and alarms were installed. All these actions were taken by the French authorities to minimise the number of refugees seeking dangerous and illegal routes to Britain.

The camp's closure drew international attention, creating much controversy while the French authorities attempted to handle the crisis. More than 7,000 asylum-seeking refugees were evacuated to different reception centres across France.⁸ In these reception centres, it is expected that refugees are to be provided the opportunity to claim asylum status in France and if found illegitimate, will face deportation. From the 22nd to 23rd of October, prior to the demolition of the Jungle, there had been a clash between the camp residents and the police over rising tensions brought on by the French authorities' decision to dismantle the camp.⁹ The French government's way of

³ "Introduction To Calais / Introduction A Calais," *Calais Migrant Solidarity*, last modified 5 November 2016, <https://calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com/introduction-to-calais/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Rayner Gordon, "Not One Child From Most Vulnerable Group In Calais 'Jungle' Brought To The UK," *The Telegraph*, 19 October 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/19/not-one-child-from-most-vulnerable-group-in-calais-jungle-brough/>

⁶ "Clashes In Calais 'Jungle' Asylum Seeker Camp As Eviction Deadline Looms," *ABC News*, last modified 24 October 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-10-24/clashes-ahead-of-calais-refugee-camp-closure/7960806>.

⁷ Aurelien Breeden, "Britain And France To Begin Work On Wall Near Calais To Keep Migrants From Channel Tunnel," *Nytimes.Com*, 7 September 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/08/world/europe/calais-jungle-refugees.html>

⁸ Amelia Gentleman, "Last Of Calais Refugee Children Evacuated As Camp Clearance Ends," *The Guardian*, 2 November 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/02/calais-refugee-children-evacuated-as-camp-clearance-winds-up>

⁹ "Clashes In Calais 'Jungle' Asylum Seeker Camp As Eviction Deadline Looms," *ABC News*, last modified 24 October 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-10-24/clashes-ahead-of-calais-refugee-camp-closure/7960806>.

dealing with the refugee crisis in Calais is a hot topic particularly leading up to the French presidential election in 2017; this was one of the main reasons why France pushed towards dismantling the camp.¹⁰

On the 27th of October when the French government announced the closure of the Jungle, bulldozers moved in to destroy the camp while there were still around 100 unaccompanied minors waiting in queues for buses to take them to reception centres.¹¹ For nearly a week those youngsters slept on streets near the demolished camp – unsheltered and unsure of their fate.¹² This issue raised concerns for the safety of the minors left in critical conditions.¹³ The British government aware of this situation, urged the French government to take immediate action.¹⁴

Children and teenagers who had previously been transported to reception centres are now waiting to be processed by British authorities.¹⁵ However, there is a feeling in the French government that Britain is not taking responsibility to share the burden.¹⁶ Before they were transported to juvenile centres across France, many of these unaccompanied children were left in limbo not knowing whether they will be able to seek asylum in the UK.¹⁷ Due to this sentiment, United Kingdom Home Office staff

¹⁰ James Glenday, "Calais Jungle: Tension Between UK And France Over Border Asylum Seeker Camp," *ABC News*, 17 September 2016,

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-09-17/france-uk-tension-over-calais-jungle-asylum-seeker-camp/7851600>

¹¹ Lisa O' Carroll, Alan Travis and Mat Heywood, "Calais: fears grow for dozens of children amid chaotic camp shutdown," *The Guardian*, 27 October 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/26/operation-to-clear-calais-refugee-camp-finishes-ahead-of-schedule>

¹² Lisa O' Carroll and Alice Ross, "Calais: Refugee Children 'Sleeping Rough' After Camp Demolition". *The Guardian*, 27 October 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/27/calais-refugee-children-sleeping-rough-demolition-charities-france>

¹³ Lisa O' Carroll, Alan Travis and Mat Heywood, "Calais: fears grow for dozens of children amid chaotic camp shutdown," *The Guardian*, 27 October 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/26/operation-to-clear-calais-refugee-camp-finishes-ahead-of-schedule>

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Hayden Smith and Jack Hardy, "Calais Jungle: 14 unaccompanied teenagers arrive in Croydon before demolition of refugee camp," *Independent*, 18 October 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/calais-jungle-unaccompanied-teenagers-croydon-migrants-refugee-camp-crisis-a7365856.html>

¹⁶ Rowena Mason, "May Declines To Make Extra Commitments To Take More Calais Child Refugees," *The Guardian*, 30 October 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/30/therea-may-declines-francois-hollandes-request-take-more-calais-child-refugees>.

¹⁷ Amelia Gentleman, "Last Of Calais Refugee Children Evacuated As Camp Clearance Ends," *The Guardian*, 2 November 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/02/calais-refugee-children-evacuated-as-camp-clearance-winds-up>

helped to process the applications for asylum in both France and Britain. Others assisted in general care.¹⁸

Before the camp was dismantled, a group of charities and NGOs attempted to stop the deportation of refugees into different centres. They believed such a decision was not a good solution to the crisis in Calais. The French administrative court however, rejected the lawsuit filed by a handful of NGOs and charity organisations against the action to dismantle the camp¹⁹. The court ruled the case on the basis that dismantling the camp would put an end to the suffering of refugees in the Jungle.²⁰

So why were these refugees so interested in Calais? The answer is that the geographic position of the camp was a lure for anyone seeking a better life in the UK. The road from the port of Calais leads to the southern side of England where gangs can smuggle people onto lorries or trucks and then into the UK. Many of those who cannot afford to pay the smugglers try the dangerous way of breaking into the tunnel that separates France and Britain.²¹ Truck drivers reported increased numbers of violence and threats, as traffickers seek to get their human cargo into Britain.²² There are many reasons why those refugees choose such a dangerous route to Britain; one is that they may have family there; others are after the generous welfare offered by the British government; and then there are those who believe there is a chance for better employment in Britain.

Unfortunately, despite the demolition of the Calais refugee camp, each day there are new refugees who arrive in different parts of France. Just last week, on November 4th, the French government cleared out 3,850 migrants who have been living on Paris city sidewalks.²³ This should signal to the French government that the dismantling of

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Peter Walker, "Aid Group Request To Delay Calais Migrant Camp Closure Rejected By French Court," *The Independent*, 18 October 2016.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/calais-migrant-jungle-camp-france-french-court-reject-delay-aid-group-a7367651.html>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Lisa Millar, "Asylum Seekers Attempt To Flee 'Jungle' Camp Amid Bulldozer Threats," *ABC News*, 18 January 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-18/europe-migrant-crisis-jungle-camp-in-calais/7094>

²² Jessica Elgot, "Lorry Drivers Warn Of Escalating Violence With Refugees In Calais," *The Guardian*, 30 November 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/30/lorry-drivers-refugees-calais-warn-escalating-violence>

²³ Angela Charlton, "French Clear Out Makeshift Migrant Camp Along Paris Canals," *Washington Post*, 4 November 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/after-calais-french-authorities-clear-migrant-camp-in-paris/2016/11/04/a36f6f3e-a255-11e6-8864-6f892cad0865_story.html

refugee camps is no solution for France's refugee crisis. To prevent refugees from creating another 'Jungle', the French government should perhaps create a clear and organised path for asylum before refugees arrive in France or at least make the turn over shorter, once the people are already there.

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