

# UNESCO RILA CALABASH COMMENTARIES

## Welcoming New Scots into society from the day they arrive

Contributing to British Red Cross 150th anniversary essays for change in a time of crisis

By Alison Phipps

On 5 May The British Red Cross and Demos held the launch of “Communities of Humanitarian Thought: The Case for Change in a Time of Crisis” an essay collection bringing together leading thinkers from political and civil society to mark the British Red Cross’ 150th year and to outline a vision for the future.

Professor Alison Phipps, UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts provided the essay “Welcoming New Scots into society from the day they arrive”. The collection builds on our vision for a more resilient future to respond and recover from humanitarian crises, with concluding recommendations from the British Red Cross advocating for change.

I find myself, once again, in excellent company with my neighbours on either side of the essay written to Celebrate Communities of Humanitarian Thought produced to mark the British Red Cross turning 150. When the Red Cross was formed the Paris Commune was rising.

As conflicts continue around the world and social movements stumble and swerve in the face of many egregious violations of Human Rights it is a time of grave concern. The Red Cross, together with the sister organisation the Red Crescent, is synonymous with humanitarian Aid. In our own City of Glasgow the Red Cross found itself needing to invest in support for those seeking asylum once destitution and deprivation became serve issues of human suffering in the city. Over the years the Red Cross have developed a network of VOICES led by those with experience of the asylum system in the UK who have led on humanitarian, policy and advocacy work with the Red Cross for a number of years now.

My immediate neighbour in the collection of essays to be Godwin Akinyele one of the VOICES Ambassadors. Godwin tells the story – powerful story – that I know well as the epic story of bureaucratic delay and disbelief from the UK Home Office but also of the ways in which the myriad issues facing those seeking asylum mean that there is a large pile of issues to be addressed.

Ours are just those at the top of pile, he says, quoting the Nigerian proverb, *‘when the wind knocks down the trees in the forest, it is logical to clear the top of the pile first’*.



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UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration  
through Languages and the Arts,  
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My neighbour to the other side is our Scottish colleague Dr Sabir Zazai, CEO of Scottish Refugee Council. His own experience of arriving in the back of a lorry from Afghanistan after the war in Afghanistan over twenty years ago, is a powerful story as is his testimony and story of an extraordinary journey as advocate and leader to become CEO and also to be awarded an Honorary Degree from the University of Glasgow in 2019. No stranger to raising his voice of late, Sabir has had to stress the UK Governments New Plan for Immigration and asylum would have seen him unable to claim asylum, or to enjoy family reunion or to see his children attend school here.

My own essay in the collection Communities of Humanitarian Thought: The Case for Change in a Time of Crisis, which spans health and humanitarian responses and includes contributions from MPs and former MPs, activists and humanitarian workers from around the world, tells the story of my granddaughter and her love of Peppa Pig, and of jumping up and down in muddy puddles.

It follows the logic of the Human and Cultural Rights based approach to refugee Integration that is the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018-2022. The dimensions of the policy are each routed in human rights, and the Peppa Pig story is the outworking, with its joyful delighted shrieks in the January rain in her already many languages: *“Abay, Abay” “Look at me! Jumping in muddy puddles.”*

Without the respect of those rights and certainly without the humanitarian relief offered to her mother and our wider foster family then I know for sure that she would not be in my life, or jumping in those puddles. Integration, a difficult and rightly contested term, is the process of working out mutual belonging wherever we are, often intensified by displacement but still also ordinary, and that is what our struggles for human rights and cultural justice are about.

Watch the event at the [Demos website](#)

Read the 150th anniversary essay collection on the [British Red Cross Website](#)

Watch Alison Phipps summarise the collection on [Twitter](#)

Prof Alison Phipps is UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts, Co-Director of MIDEQ, PI Of CUSP N+ and Co-I on the New Scots Integration Delivery Project (2020-2022)

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