**Sudanese refugees**

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On April 26, during Prime Minister’s Questions at the House of Commons, Scottish National Party MP Stephen Flynn asked British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to outline how a child seeking to flee Sudan would be able to find a safe and legal route to the United Kingdom.

Rather than answering the question, Sunak started talking about his government’s efforts to evacuate British diplomats and nationals from the country.

Pressed by Flynn to confirm whether his inability to answer meant that even Sudanese children could not seek refuge in Britain in a safe and legal manner, he digressed from the matter at hand further, and said: “We have invested almost £250 million in humanitarian support in Sudan over the past five years.”

Determined to move the discussion away from his government’s shameless refusal to welcome in Britain even the most vulnerable Sudanese nationals, Sunak added that Britain “has a proud record of compassionately supporting those who need our assistance”.

Later, during an interview with BBC Breakfast, Home Secretary Suella Braverman confirmed that the UK government’s priority in Sudan “is to help British nationals and their dependents”.

Asked why Sudanese refugees were not being given safe routes into the UK like Ukrainians were last year following Russia’s invasion, Braverman said: “The situation [in Sudan] is very different to Ukraine.”

As I have written about many times before, Vladimir Putin’s invasion inflicted unimaginable suffering on the Ukrainian people. Thousands have died and millions of others were forced to flee the indiscriminate violence of the Russian forces. The UK welcomed Ukrainians escaping Putin’s violence with open arms, establishing special programmes like the Homes for Ukraine, Family Scheme and Extension Scheme which gave them the right to live and work freely in the UK for up to three years with easy access to schools, healthcare and social welfare benefits.

Just like Ukraine, Sudan is now inundated with widespread violence and insecurity, more so in densely populated urban centres.

Since fighting erupted on April 15, at least 528 people have been killed and 4,599 injured, while the national health system is tottering on the brink of complete collapse.

To compound the situation, there are acute shortages of food, water and medicines amid constant reports of heavy artillery and air strikes in the capital, Khartoum.

So why does the UK government view the situation in Sudan as “different” to the one in Ukraine and prospective Sudanese asylum seekers as less worthy of British refuge than their Ukrainian counterparts? The answer is obvious to anyone who has been paying a little bit of attention to European attitudes to migration: the Sunak government does not feel compelled to help those escaping conflict in Sudan because Sudan is in Africa, and the Sudanese are Africans.

Like many of his recent predecessors, Sunak became prime minister on a promise to crack down on ‘irregular migration’. He made stopping migrants who arrive in Britain by crossing the English Channel in small boats – migrants who are overwhelmingly brown and Black – a political priority. His government even came up with a cruel, expensive and highly unethical plan to send thousands of so-called “small boat arrivals” to detention centres in Rwanda. Sunak also claimed his government would detain every single person coming to Britain “illegally” on a small boat, despite undoubtedly knowing that most asylum seekers around the world do not have a legal route to Britain and that a massive majority of small boat arrivals eventually succeed in their asylum claim and obtain legal residency.

The juxtaposition of the government’s ongoing crackdown on small boat arrivals, who mostly hail from Africa, East Asia, the Balkans and the Middle East, and its continued support for Ukrainians makes it crystal clear: some asylum seekers are more welcome in Britain than others. And this is not in any way a strictly British prejudice.

It must be remembered that after Russia invaded Ukraine, many African residents of the country struggled to find refuge in Europe. For no credible reason, some were even held in European Union immigration detention facilities across Poland.

With the Sudan crisis, we are witnessing a repeat of the very same discrimination.

Sunak’s Immigration Minister Robert Jenrick already said the quiet part out loud by linking the current conflict in Sudan with the much-derided small boat crossings into the UK.

“It is likely that in time there will be migratory effects of a crisis such as this,” he was quoted as saying during an event at the conservative think tank Policy Exchange. “Sudan, I believe, has consistently been in the top 10 countries of individuals crossing the Channel on small boats.”

When Russia launched an all-out invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, no government in Europe bemoaned the likely “migratory effects” of the crisis. No one tried to imply those fleeing the war may end up burdening their countries by becoming “irregular migrants”. The focus was firmly on getting Ukrainians in need to safety and giving them the best chance at living their lives freely and with dignity – as it should be.

International media worked to humanise Ukrainian refugees, ensured populations across the world were aware of their plight, and even held to account European governments who were too slow or inefficient in helping them at their borders.

This has not been the case for the victims of conflicts and wars elsewhere, from Palestine and Yemen to Afghanistan, and now Sudan.

Indeed, the Sudanese people, who have long been suffering from widespread violence and chronic economic struggles, are now facing a humanitarian crisis directly comparable in scale to the one in Ukraine. However, the grave situation in Sudan has not permeated the global conscience as quickly as the one in Ukraine, or to the extent that it should.

Excerpted: ‘Sudanese refugees deserve as much help as Ukrainians’.

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