**Joint statement on the need for routes to safety (WORKING TITLE)**

Following the tragic deaths of at least 27 people in the English Channel – including children – it is time for serious action. We cannot stand by and let this Government’s harsh rhetoric and ill-thought-out approach go unchecked.

This Government’s policy of grabbing cheap headlines and blaming the French authorities while paying them millions of pounds to build fences around the Channel ports has not worked. Now people fleeing conflict, persecution and war have paid the ultimate price. We know from the warehouses overflowing with donations for Afghan refugees that the public believes in the right to seek safety. That same public cannot stand for this.

Instead of trying to blame people seeking safety for its own failures, this Government must step up to its responsibilities and focus on saving lives.

For a start, parliamentarians must rethink the Nationality and Borders Bill. Not only will these new laws take a wrecking ball to the very principle of refugee protection, but we know they are unworkable. They will push desperate people further into the arms of smuggling gangs and will only inflame our international partners who we need to work with to ensure people seeking sanctuary can do so safely.

We also need a cast-iron commitment from this Government that it will not pursue its policies on offshoring or pushbacks, which will cause even more harm and make deaths in the Channel even more likely.

Above all, this tragedy shows how urgent it is for this Government to work with its international partners to create more routes to safety for refugees. This Government demands refugees take official routes, but for most people, these simply do not exist. Refugees are left with little option but to arrive here hidden in a plane or lorry or crammed onto a small boat.

We are calling on this Government to make a long-term commitment to:

* create a compassionate asylum system that treats all people seeking asylum in the UK with kindness and dignity
* resettle at least 10,000 refugees each year from around the world
* reinstate the Dubs Agreement to protect child refugees from exploitation
* expand family reunion so that more people can be reunited with their loved ones
* introduce a humanitarian corridor

We ask the Government to sit down with people who’ve gone through the asylum system, and their advocates, to create a new, more compassionate, and effective process which puts safety first. Now, if ever, is the time to do so.