

## A report from 'the Jungle' refugee camp in Calais.

Calais Returnee 2015-12-13 23:08

### An 'on the ground report' and description of the conditions of the refugee camp in Calais known as 'the Jungle.'

The temperature in Calais was unseasonably warm for November. Whether this was a seasonal/decadal anomaly and served to the advantage of the 6,000-8,000 refugees or possibly the effects of climate change, further reinforcing the bitterness of the resource wars, which had driven people off their land, to seek refuge from the corporate war mongers of the

Oil and gas industries as they defied international treaties and laws, marauding their way through country after country for share holder profit. Neither the UN or French Government had supplied a single tent to the refugees, who were escaping war torn countries like Darfur, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Portable toilets (like those you would find at a rock festival) were overflowing with excrement, inadequate in numbers, to cope with the demand from the refugees and families, arriving everyday at the camp. Litter and clothes were strewn around the site with rotting food in split bags stinking near water taps and wash points. Medicines sans frontier (MSF) collected bags from



collection points on a truck but struggled to cope with the increasing population and its Sanitation problem. . Nothing could or would stay dry in these conditions. The tents, independent and gallant as they were, couldn't defeat the elements, their thin neoprene cover, wholly inadequate against the on setting French Winter. One could reason that not only had the refugees been victimised but also abandoned by an uncaring global authority, which had set to ruin these people through neglect, greed and an uncaring attitude, as the end results of its mischief.

#### Donations, Volunteers and Aid Workers

Regardless of the hyped, media voodoo and the unfeeling attitude of a percentage of their fellow countrymen, the Aid workers and volunteers, from all over Europe, including, (France, UK, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Belgium etc) braved the penetrating questions of the Gendarme at the entrance and entered the camp daily to replenish the basic supplies of the impoverished refugees. Supplies came via generous donations from groups and individuals, which had been transported in vehicles from the European Community. Distributions were made in orderly queues formed automatically as the doors of the vehicles were opened. Veteran refugees shouted out 'Line, Line' in a resigned, authoritative manner with more than a hint of good humoured sarcasm, such was the abandonment to their circumstances. I spoke to refugees as they stood in line waiting for a handout. Most spoke good English. One polite man waiting patiently for a Jumper, thanked us for our dedication toward the refugees, explaining he was a police officer from Darfur and he had fled for his life, fleeing what he had described as a 'crazy situation' in his home country and his own personal death threats. People from Afghanistan, Syria etc and especially Kurds, told me despite the conditions at the camp, they were glad they had left their native lands, citing that they had feared for their lives and further assured me, through their honesty, that they hadn't turned up in France for a picnic.

#### Jungle houses and Music.

Deeper inside the camp, vestiges of normal life existed, such as a slightly lop sided Christian Church, made from wood and recycled materials. There was also a Library with books in Arabic and native dialects, also a community meeting room, which had both been set up by NGO's. Yet deeper inside the 'Jungle' was the Market place, where small entrepreneurial businesses had set up to provide for the needs of the refugees. A brightly painted temporary building of wood and polythene was home to the 'Young Afghan Restaurant,' where you could have a plateful of good food for three euro, a sheesha and charge your mobile too. numerous shops sold goods and foods, even the occasional Bar, where you could see a bubble wheel lighting up the inside of a temporary shelter with a sound system powered by a small generator pumping out African Reggae and Hip

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Hop, whilst young Africans sat inside drinking beer or hooch around plastic tables and chairs.

#### The Dome

The Dome is a geometric dome bought in the UK and shipped out and reconstructed in the Jungle. The Dome is approximately ten metres tall in the centre with approximately the same distance in diameter. It holds around 150-200 people and is used as an arts centre for refugees and visiting artists. Music, Poetry and Theatre as well as Painting by refugee adults and children are exhibited there. Meetings for groups and individuals with common interests are held there too. It holds the focus of the camp as an entertainment centre and is a vital piece of the camp facilitation.

#### Daytime in the Jungle.

During the day, people congregate at the water tap stand and wash, brush teeth, shave and collect water. There is no hot water and so there are no niceties or luxuries, just a degrading scene of people having to do what they would normally do in private, out in the open air, in full public view. There is a small road that runs through the camp, which is rapidly degenerating into a quagmire of mud. People slop through the mud in donated trainers, totally unsuitable for the conditions. They need boots which are in short supply. The people from Darfur use their sandals, (no socks) which are slightly better than shoes because of the ease of cleaning them, the Africans rinse their feet at the tap stand, which is cold and repetitive but slightly better than soaked trainers for most of the day. Vehicles laden with clothes, toiletries, tents and sleeping materials appear, drawing large crowds, who form orderly lines, gratefully and patiently awaiting any handout that they can receive. People go into the town (Calais) but they are not welcomed by everyone and feelings can run high and damage has been done. As the sunset begins, things change again in the Jungle.

#### The Night.

As the dusk envelopes 'the Jungle' new sounds begin to emanate from it. Young Africans sit in the Disco bars, made from wood and polythene, drinking beer. A generator hums, barely audible above the sound system playing Hip Hop and Reggae. Disco lights dance and bounce through the polythene walls, the silhouetted people sit at plastic tables. It was very comical, given the circumstances. I watched two Muslim men laughing so loud I thought they would be attacked by the other refugees. To them everything was absurd, Having been bombed out of their homes, after walking and travelling thousands of miles, they had then entered into a refugee camp with half naked African women, beer, drugs and Reggae. I talked to an Iranian man, during a musicians 'show night' in the 'Dome' who told me he had been 'clean' of a drugs problem in Iran for six years but had slipped whilst in the 'Jungle.' Outside in 'the Market' in 'deep jungle town' people sold unwanted, donated goods like Nike trainers and quality goods. There were many buyers for things and much noise in the market but everything was always good humoured. Simple bartering, also took place, (swapping of goods.) Just a little way on the up the street, Afghans showed the men of Darfur the steps to their dances and the crowd clapped and cheered as they danced.

#### Rioting and troubles.

Given that the refugees had adapted so well together, helped along with the NGO's, even so, the oppression of government policy toward refugees was always evident. This was never more so than during the night when the outside of the camp became besieged by police and cordoned off. My personal opinion is that the French were not the only guilty party, David Cameron's insistence that mediation should not be used in introducing 'obvious candidates' for screening and asylum to Britain, caused untold damage. Taking into account that two of the world's richest countries, couldn't cooperate to accommodate a refugee situation, not even to give a single tent, electricity or cooking facilities was bound to give vent to an overflow of anger. Families had choked on drifting tear gas, fired by the police in retaliation of stone throwers, who had tried to break the police cordon, to leave the Jungle, at night. I saw many people being overcome by tear gas, at least one man 'fitting' and a man hit in the leg by a tear gas canister. I couldn't count the canisters that were fired or the rubber bullets or sound grenades but there were many. Paramedics would not come onto the site without a police escort and the police wouldn't enter into the camp. A woman refugee, earlier in the day, who had fallen ill, had to be carried half a kilometre, to the entrance of the camp, to be met by a French Ambulance, to be then taken to hospital. News in December, suggests that the camp will reach a crisis point soon with the full onset of Winter. Europeans will know, to survive Winter is difficult enough in a building. Many elderly people in the UK die each year because of hypothermia, I would imagine a thin neoprene tent could be the last place that vulnerable babies, toddlers and elderly people will see this Winter, in the open dungeon, they call 'The

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Jungle'.

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