



THE QUEEN'S COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION 2016

Senior Runner-up: Esther Mungalaba, 19, Zambia

Let Them In: A Short Discourse Outlining How Complicated These Three Words Can Be

One warm, sunny, determination filled afternoon I sat down to pen my thoughts and feelings on Europe's migrant crisis. With my blue ballpoint pen in hand and a stack of plain papers laid ever so neatly before me, I began to try and bring to life, as eloquently as I could through text, my most honest and intelligent opinions on the matter. I took a deep breath for dramatic effect and a sip of tea every now and then. The choice of beverage made more for how serious it made me look and less for actual want because as I said in the beginning, it was a warm, sunny afternoon. Long story short however, it has been about a month since that day and I have not written down even one complete idea. What first was a short allegory, then a poem, and then an essay is now just a jumble of incomplete thoughts, sentences and unanswered questions. The Migrant Crisis was a more complicated subject to tackle than I had originally thought. Yes, the plight of most of the migrants is a dire one. Almost literally stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea, a trip across the Mediterranean in unsafe rubber dinghies and tiny fishing boats becomes the

far better evil for many of these men and women. Despite the fact that once they cross those treacherous waters into foreign land they become nameless and faceless numbers on a "Europe's Migrant Crisis" statistics sheet, these people leave all and sail on anyway. Because anything, it would seem, is better than the thick despondency that now enshrouds the places they once called home. I can only imagine the desperation that the majority of these migrants must so genuinely feel. The type of desperation that leaves you with no choice but to take the life you have worked to build for yourself and risk losing it as you journey across vast seas for the very first time with hopes of finding something better. These asylum seekers are men and women who had jobs, identities and a way of life. These asylum seekers are parents and children whose dreams and aspirations I'm sure did not include one day finding themselves crammed with a hundred other people in the back of a truck, left for dead in the middle of nowhere or in a rickety fishing boat looking to begin again in a new country, with a new language, a strange culture and a system

that did not have them in mind. But it would be extremely unfair to go on and on about the migrants and ignore the overwhelming position that the host countries have been forced into. The entire world is generally of the opinion that Europe should just let the migrants in. But I found this difficult to agree with because to me it felt like everyone was overlooking how hard it actually is to just let people in. Many of the countries that initially reacted to this crisis by increasing border security and putting up obstacles to block the entrance of the migrants were quickly condemned by the global community. Hungary, for example, built a 175 km long razor wire fence just as the inflow of migrants through its borders began to drastically increase, a move that was met with widespread outrage. But could there have been good reason behind such a reaction? I mean, you don't have to be a government official or a worker at the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to be able to appreciate the tremendous amount of pressure that such an influx of asylum seekers can put on a region, let alone a single country. The BBC reports that

the European Union received over 1.2 million first time asylum applicants in the year 2015 alone. What do you do with such numbers? Each application has to be assessed and accepted or denied individually. Where do all the people go while they wait for their applications to be processed? What will they eat? Do they have water? Are they warm? Are their children warm? What about sanitation? Are any of them injured or sick? Are there medical teams to offer them the vital assistance they require once they arrive? What about security? Not all these migrants may be in need of asylum. Some may be using the same migrant routes to go about their own sinister business. How do you screen all of them? And let's not pretend that everyone is even willing to lend a helping hand. Some countries are perfectly okay with turning a blind eye to this dilemma. Some are willing to put resources together and send aid to the places that are most affected by the crisis but are not willing to host the migrants themselves. A large portion of the refugee problem is left for a small number of countries to deal with. Germany alone reportedly received more than

1.1 million asylum seekers last year. All this could put any government into a serious overdrive. And there will come a time when providing asylum to these people will go beyond just the basics. The migrants will want homes. They will want to work and send their children to schools and colleges. These men and women will want security for themselves and their families. It simply does not end. I found myself getting frustrated because there seemed to be no winning side in this situation. I wanted to bring out the fact that the stress that all these movements put on Europe is very real and should not be taken for granted. But every argument I made against the mass movements, seemed so weak placed besides the reality of the migrants' genuine need. Then I realized that maybe there isn't supposed to be a "solution". Maybe this crisis is not a call to our analytical or strategic abilities. It had to take the loss of about 2000 asylum seekers at sea for the world to notice that this is not an issue you can put on hold while you discuss around conference tables whether or not your economies can accommodate more people. Yes, it is wise to

think before you act and to plan with your country's current situation and future in mind. But sometimes things happen that are beyond our best analyses, predictions and meticulous economic plans. All my youthful imaginings could not come up with a single feasible answer to this dilemma. Experts have analyzed and reanalyzed and may continue analyzing the situation. But lives are being lost while we take our precious time making the lifesaving decisions that are up to us to make.

This crisis is a call to our long forgotten compassionate sides. It is a call for selflessness, a very complicated concept for many including myself. It is a call to put our selfishness aside and for once, do something for others that does not seem to have anything in it for us. Not everyone is going to appreciate the great effort that goes into stretching out a helping hand in this crisis. Some may even take advantage of this opportunity and hurt the very ones who are trying to help. But still there is a great number that desperately need asylum. How can we turn those away?



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