

# General Election 2010

*A guide to lobbying in the General Election 2010 for STAR groups*



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## The Election

The next General Election must be held before 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2010. The most likely date is Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> May, the same day as the local elections.

The election is an opportunity for you to raise important issues for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK and gain commitments from future members of Parliament.

Asylum and immigration has been a hot political topic in recent years with each political party keen to show how tough they will be in government. Refugees and asylum seekers are often talked about in extremely negative terms using false or misleading information.

### You can help to:

- ★ **check that candidates stick to the facts**
- ★ **keep the debates positive**
- ★ **encourage positive statements of support from future MPs**

This election will see a large number of new MPs. We want to show them that their constituents care about providing protection to people fleeing war, torture and oppression.

## STAR's position

STAR's aim is to improve the lives of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. We therefore support policies that will further this aim.

STAR encourages all political parties to hold policies that will have a positive impact on refugees in the UK and discourages any party from holding policies which will be harmful.

In the General Election we want your STAR group to:

- ★ praise and encourage any party or candidate for advocating positive asylum policies and keeping to the facts in debates
- ★ criticise parties or candidates for negative asylum policies and spreading false and misleading information

## The Legal Bit

As a charity STAR must be independent and ensure that we have a balanced approach to political parties. We must not give support or funding to a political party, candidate or politician.

But we *can* support specific policies advocated by political parties if it helps reach our charitable aims (helping refugees in the UK).

This means that your STAR group should not:

- ★ state that STAR supports any particular political party
- ★ campaign or fundraise for a political party

*You can just ask STAR national if you're not sure about an activity you're planning.*

## Key Election Questions

STAR national is working with other large refugee organisations to make sure we can be effective in promoting the rights of asylum seekers and refugees in the General Election.

We've put together a list of key questions for you to ask parliamentary candidates for the best chance of getting them to make valuable commitments:

### **1. Do you support the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees and the responsibility of the UK to protect victims of persecution?**

The 1951 UN Convention is the basis of refugee law. It defines who a refugee is, outlines their rights and requires that the UK does not return people in fear of persecution. 147 countries have signed up to the Convention and no one has ever withdrawn from it.

In recent years some have suggested the UK should withdraw. Therefore it is extremely important that MPs state their commitment to the Convention and its basic principles.

For more information: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html>

### **2. Do you support an end to the detention of children seeking asylum?**

Every year the UK locks up over 1,000 children who are seeking protection in the UK. The detention of children is damaging, expensive and unnecessary.

STAR believes detaining asylum seeking children is immoral and is campaigning with The Children's Society and Bail for Immigration Detainees to end this practice.

For more information:

[http://www.star-network.org.uk/index.php/young\\_people/index/outcry](http://www.star-network.org.uk/index.php/young_people/index/outcry)

### 3. Do you think it is acceptable that asylum seekers are made to live on just £5 a day?

In October 2009 the government cut the support given to asylum seekers while they wait for a decision. A single adult is given £35.13 a week. Asylum seekers are not permitted to work so must rely on this amount for all their needs. A British citizen over 25 on Income Support receives £64.30, almost twice as much.

STAR is campaigning for the government to provide support to all asylum seekers who otherwise would be destitute from their application until they have integrated into or left the UK. STAR is asking for asylum support rates to be set at a minimum of 70% of Income Support and no less than £45 a week for single adults.

For more information:

[http://www.star-network.org.uk/index.php/news/comments/take\\_action\\_to\\_raise\\_asylum\\_support\\_rates/](http://www.star-network.org.uk/index.php/news/comments/take_action_to_raise_asylum_support_rates/)

## What you can do

Here are a few ways you can make an impact in the election for refugees and asylum seekers:

1. **Write to your local candidates** – ask them to support STAR's Key Election Asks (see above) and either:
  - a. respond to your letter
  - b. discuss them in a meeting with you
2. **Get a photo** – ask if the candidate will stand with your group and a banner or wearing a STAR t-shirt. Take a photo, put it on your website and send to STAR national!
3. **Invite all candidates to a joint meeting / hustings** – make contact with student groups with similar asylum and human rights concerns, such as Amnesty and Medsin. Organise a joint meeting at your university with all the candidates, giving each group involved a chance to ask questions related to their concerns.

Things to do:

  - a. Set a date (before election week which will be too busy)
  - b. Invite candidates from main parties in your constituency (Labour, Lib Dem, Conservatives, Green, UKIP)
  - c. Get permission from candidates or agents as they need to check any election campaign expenditure
  - d. Send candidates information with STAR's Key Election Questions, asking that they prepare a short statement, etc
  - e. Appoint a strong Chair for the meeting – ask STAR national to provide someone with good knowledge and the ability to facilitate passionate discussions
  - f. Prepare sheets for audience to write questions for the candidates and agree questions to ask as backup

4. **Attend other public meetings (or ‘hustings’)** – go along to a public meeting and ask the candidates one of STAR’s Key Election Questions (see above)
5. **Ask candidates to be a Friend of STAR!**
6. **Feedback to STAR national** – it’s vital that we make the most of this opportunity to find out about the new MPs and start to build a relationship which will be valuable when advocating for refugees over the next 5 years.

After any contact with a candidate please let us know:

- a. who you contacted
- b. how you contacted them (letter, meeting, etc)
- c. what questions you asked
- d. how they responded (positive, negative)
- e. any commitments made by you or the candidate
- f. any photos!

Please send your feedback to [students@star-national.org.uk](mailto:students@star-national.org.uk).

7. **Follow up after the election** – you or other members of your STAR group should try to follow up any discussions or commitments made by successful candidates after the election (reminding them of promises, discussing local issues in more detail, etc).

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### Contact STAR national

Phone: 020 7729 8880 (ext. 205)

Email: [students@star-network.org.uk](mailto:students@star-network.org.uk)

Web: [www.star-network.org.uk](http://www.star-network.org.uk)

Source: Amnesty International UK ‘General Election 2010 Pack’