

UN denounces British refugee crackdown bill as against international law

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A RNLI boat, with migrants onboard, is met by Border Force Officers and Police at the harbor in

Dungeness, Britain, September 13, 2021. (Photo by Reuters)

London, July 20 (RHC)-- The United Nations has warned that controversial British legislation purportedly aimed at deterring thousands of refugees from landing on the country's shores will have profound consequences for people in need of international protection.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's "Illegal Migration Bill" was passed in the parliament on Tuesday and now awaits the formality of "royal assent" from King Charles III to become law. The bill would outlaw asylum claims by all arrivals via the Channel and other "illegal" routes, and deport them either to their country of origin or a third nation, such as Rwanda.

The UN refugee and human rights chief Volker Turk condemned the passage of the bill as a "breach of international law" and warned it would expose refugees to "grave risks."

He said the legislation "is at variance with the country's obligations under international human rights and refugee law and will have profound consequences for people in need of international protection." The bill also set a "worrying precedent for dismantling asylum-related obligations that other countries, including in Europe, may be tempted to follow," Turk added.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi also condemned the passage of the legislation as a "breach of international law." "This new legislation significantly erodes the legal framework that has protected so many," said Grandi.

More than 45,000 refugees arrived on the shores of southeast England on small boats in 2022.

Prime Minister Sunak, who has vowed to "stop the boats," has insisted the Rwanda plan would have an important deterrent effect by showing that no one who arrives illegally in the UK will be allowed to stay.

Deportation flights to Rwanda are unlikely to start until next year at the earliest and will still hinge on a ruling by the Supreme Court on their legality later this year. The plan has also been criticized by some opposition politicians, lawyers and civil rights groups as inhumane, cruel and ineffective.

The Scottish Refugee Council, a charity that provides advice and services to refugees in the UK, said in a tweet that its "devastating to know the UK's illegal migration bill is now set to become law."

"It doesn't represent us or the society we want to live in. Our first thoughts this morning are with those directly affected. Please join us in solidarity with everyone seeking safety and justice," the council said. The Refugee Council, another leading charity supporting refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, described the bill as "terrible."

In a tweet on Tuesday, the council described the day as "a dark day for the UK's reputation as a protector of human rights and a grave moment for those seeking safety in an uncertain world. But the fight for a fair and humane asylum system goes on."

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