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Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Minister of State (Home Office) (Immigration)
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
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19 April 2023

Dear Mr Jenrick

We are a group of young migrants who are proud to have grown up in the UK and are members of the campaign group We Belong.

We know our colleague Chrisann Jarrett MBE, CEO of We Belong, wrote to you on 27 January 2023 (copy enclosed); and we wanted to add our voices to the concerns Chrisann raised and respectfully repeat her request for a meeting.

We would like to share our concerns about young migrants we know who are stuck in a limited leave to remain loop, despite your government's very positive changes to the Immigration Rules in 2022.

Background

In 2021, we published our 'Deintegration Generation' report (copy enclosed), highlighting how the lives and prospects of young migrants who have grown up in the UK were being blighted by the cost, length and precariousness of the 10-year path to settlement. We described how the limited leave process meant we were denied all the same opportunities as our peers, leaving us feeling stigmatised, and, in the words of We Belong member Michael, questioning: *'Will we ever be British enough?'*

The Home Office heard us and acted.

Your government agreed that young migrants who belong in the UK should not be held back by a decade of costly and complex Home Office renewals. The Immigration Rules were duly amended in June 2022, giving us a five-year path to settlement. The change has already transformed many lives - and will continue to do so. We know of dozens of young migrants who have been freed from the anxiety and dread of having to renew their immigration status every 30 months and are now able to plan their futures with confidence. As one of our members, Beth, puts it: *'Being granted indefinite leave gives me a feeling of emancipation. I*

can now pursue my goals and dreams without the fear of my immigration status being a hindrance.'

However, we have become increasingly aware that, within the cohort of young migrants your government wanted to benefit from the 2022 rule change, there are a limited number for whom the stability of settlement remains as far away as ever - despite the fact they are now eligible for indefinite leave to remain. These are young people who are reliant on fee waivers as they do not have the resources to cover the circa £2,600 cost of Home Office fees.

That is why we are asking you to extend the existing fee waiver scheme to cover applications for indefinite leave by people eligible for the five-year route to settlement.

As you will know, the recent House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee report, 'All families matter: An inquiry into family migration', also called for fee waivers to be available for indefinite leave applications.

Why we are asking for fee waivers

Fee waivers already cover limited leave (and children's citizenship) applications. By extending waivers to indefinite leave, you would be giving our friends like Ijeoma, Bhavik, Carrie, Anita (see below) and others, the chance to secure permanent settlement so they can get on with their lives.

As you will see from the examples, below, those stuck on the limited leave loop include students, solo parents, young people from low-income families, among others. What they all have in common is that the circa £2,600 cost of an indefinite leave to remain application is beyond their reach. As things stand, anyone who is reliant on a fee waiver will not be able to benefit from the rule change, as their only option is to remain on limited leave and continue making fee waiver and renewal applications every 30 months, possibly indefinitely. Almost by definition, these are young people from the lowest income homes, who may already be facing significant challenges in their lives.

1. **Ijeoma**, 28, arrived in the UK age 2. She is studying psychology at university and aspires to be a child psychologist. Ijeoma has held limited leave to remain for more than seven years, and is now eligible for settlement under the 2022 rule change. She has always previously funded her Home Office fees out of savings, but as a student, her income is limited so she will be reliant on a fee waiver for her next application (due in June 2023). She says: *'Being on limited leave to remain is just exhausting. Having indefinite leave, would honestly take away so much of the stress and insecurity that's on me, and finally make me feel I really do belong in the UK.'*

2. **Bhavik**, 25, arrived in the UK at age 6. He is on a Finance Graduate Scheme, where he works as well as studies towards his accountancy qualifications. He also spends time helping out his dad, who is disabled. Bhavik funded himself through his undergraduate studies and has held limited leave for seven years. His family faces financial hardship and without a fee waiver, he will not be able to apply for settlement. He says: *'If I had indefinite leave it would give me so much peace of mind and mean I can fully focus on my career and my future. It would also give me the ability to assist my family in getting a mortgage, as currently there are four of us renting a two-bedroom terraced house.'*

3. **Carrie***, 27, arrived in UK at age 7. She is mum to two British children, age 5, and 1. Carrie was in care as a teenager, but her local authority failed to regularise her immigration status. She found out she was undocumented when applying for her first job age 16, and has held limited leave for nine years. She was homeless when she contacted We Belong and waiting to be housed. Despite so many challenges, Carrie started a degree in law and

her own business in 2020. Without a fee waiver, she will be unable to apply for settlement, and fears being stuck on the limited leave loop indefinitely. *'I want to do the best for myself and my children and my ambition is to run my own business. But limited leave to remain makes many things harder - like getting a bank loan - plus there is the constant uncertainty, which can be overwhelming and has taken a toll on my mental health.'*

4. **Anita***, 21, arrived in UK age 6 months. She is studying law at university and working part time. She has two younger siblings, age 16 and 13, who like Anita have held limited leave for more than nine years. The three of them live with their dad, who has been a victim of domestic violence, which the siblings have witnessed at times. The family has experienced homelessness and destitution. Without fee waivers to allow them to apply for settlement, the entire family will continue to live with the stress and uncertainty of making repeated limited leave to remain renewals indefinitely. Anita says: *'I've spent nine years on limited leave to remain, which is nearly half my life. My sister and brother and I all more than qualify for settlement, but that path is closed to us because of our financial situation unless we can get a fee waiver. Having the stability of settlement would make so much difference to all our lives.'*

(* these young people have asked us not to use their real names.)

We are also including with this letter a briefing paper that We Belong has prepared for MPs, which has further examples of young people in this situation, including a victim of modern slavery and a young woman with a serious heart condition.

Being stuck on a potentially endless limited leave loop will be devastating for those affected. It also risks undermining your government's intention behind the 2022 rule change, which was to give young migrants who have made their home in the UK the security of settlement, so they have an equal chance to thrive and pursue their ambitions.

We believe that forcing young people who need fee waivers to apply for limited leave when they are eligible for settlement also makes no sense in terms of public finances, and unnecessarily adds to the bureaucratic burden on the Home Office. The fees for limited leave and indefinite leave are all but identical (at around £2,600). If fee waivers were extended to indefinite leave applicants, when someone qualifies for settlement but can't afford to pay the fees, the Home Office would just have to issue a one-off fee waiver and process just one indefinite leave application. Whereas now, the Home Office will be dealing with fee waiver and limited leave applications from that same person every 30 months, possibly indefinitely.

We know from our previous constructive dealings with the Home Office that your department shares our belief that young migrants should have every opportunity to integrate and achieve, so they can contribute fully to their communities and wider UK society. We believe that extending fee waivers to indefinite leave applications is a simple change that would make a huge difference to the lives of those able to benefit and also bring significant wider benefits.

We would be very grateful to meet you to share more of our experiences and look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely*

Individual signatories:

1. Bhavik Patel
2. Oluwatobi Alepelode

3. Faiqa Mansoor
4. Amina Osman
5. Milana Bout
6. Abdullahi
7. Abraham
8. J. Conhye
9. Hillary
10. Harneet S
11. Grace
12. Musa Khan Salarzai
13. Faithia Jimoh
14. Mahmoud Hamid
15. Mahmoud Daabo
16. Keshon Devonte Smith
17. Muhammad Mahad Siddiq
18. Blessing Adeyemi
19. Joyce Amoo
20. Efosa Idumwonyi
21. Mistura Yakubu
22. Precious Opara-Nadi
23. Fatima Mujtabah
24. Olamide Ashadele
25. Audrey Edomobi
26. Oluchi Paula Apeja
27. Fortunate Olaleye
28. Ilsa Baloch
29. Kodou Gaye
30. Ghazal Seidi
31. Sultan Yussuf
32. Beso Alyan
33. Amzy Khaled
34. Opemipo Oyindamola Olaleye
35. Manh Dat
36. Momina Rameez
37. Iyabowale Fadare
38. Sikira A.D
39. Ayat
40. W.K.B
41. D.O
42. A.B
43. K.L
44. T.O
45. M.S
46. H.A
47. Wasanthi Manjula**
48. Chisungusho Mulenga
49. Tyrell Clue
50. Greatness Efe
51. Esther Adeleye
52. Isaac Adeleye
53. Oluwatimileyin Laura Ogunnaike
54. Tola Olgunleye
55. Motoloani RO
56. Semilogo RO
57. Yasmin

* Some signatories to this letter have chosen to use only their initials or first name, in order to protect their own or their family's privacy. Each of the signatories is a young person who is being supported by We Belong's London or Manchester office. Further details available from We Belong on request.

** New names are being added to the list of young migrants as others come forward asking to sign. We have also had very welcome requests from individual allies, community groups and other organisations asking to add their names, see below:

Signed by We Belong allies (individuals and organisations):

58. Rabbi Elli Tikvah Sarah (Rabbi Emeritus, Brighton and Hove Progressive Synagogue)

59. Dr. Marina Vishmidt (Programme Convenor | Lecturer at Goldsmiths University of London)

60. Chris Everett

Encs:

We Belong Deintegration Generation report

Letter from We Belong CEO Chrisann Jarrett, dated 23 January 2023

We Belong Briefing for MPs