

Stop Dehumanising the Vulnerable

By [Sam Lees](#), Deputy Comment Editor (2015/16)

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Image: Michal Bělka

Last week, we heard that two of those responsible for the death of Aylan Kurdi had been sentenced in a Turkish court.

Aylan was a toddler from Kobani, Syria, immortalised in the photographs taken of his corpse after it had been washed up on a Turkish beach.

The traffickers had been charged with two crimes; human trafficking, and causing the deaths of five of their clients through deliberate negligence. They were sentenced only for the former, receiving four year sentences.

This result is a clear message that the Turkish government, for all its other faults, is accepting that it has a problem with people smugglers, and that it should hold its citizens responsible.

However, it also shows that the Turkish courts believe that abandoning refugees in an overfilled, unsafe dinghy in rough seas without any sort of safety equipment does not constitute deliberate negligence. If those being carried in the dinghy had been anyone other than refugees or migrants, then the court would doubtless have found the traffickers guilty of murder. Yet because they were refugees engaged in an illegal activity, the traffickers are being held to entirely different standards.

Sure, refugees know that their actions are dangerous, and that they are acting outside the law. But why are their lives being held to be worth less or to be of less importance than any other person's? We see this sort of behaviour time and again.

We see it in the treatment of refugees in the 'Jungle' camp in Calais.

We see it in the treatment of those fleeing from conflict in Darfur; refugees and migrants are being treated as less than equal to other humans, purely because of their status.

This should clearly never be the case.



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