

# THE PICTURE THAT CHANGED CAMERON'S MIND

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**Beach tragedy:** The image of a policeman carrying Aylan Kurdi has shocked the world. © PA

Heartbreaking photographs of a drowned Syrian toddler have led the UK to announce it will take in more asylum seekers after months of refusal. How can one image change policy so fast?

Aylan Kurdi was born in Syria, a country in the grip of a brutal **civil war**. Now, the image of the three-year-old's dead body, limp in the arms of a Turkish policeman, has horrified the world.

Aylan's family lived in Kobane, and fled the town last year to escape militants from **IS (so-called 'Islamic State')**. The family and other migrants were crossing the Mediterranean, seeking asylum on the Greek island of Kos. When the boat sank, only nine of its 23 passengers survived, including Aylan's father. Among the dead are his five-year-old brother Galip, and their mother Rihan.

'My heart is broken,' said the local fisherman who discovered the bodies.

As the images of Aylan spread across Europe, Save the Children's chief executive said she hoped they would 'concentrate minds' in the EU, and force leaders to find a solution.

Last year the UN estimated that 6.5 million people had been displaced in Syria, and the British government has been criticised for only granting **asylum** to some 5,000 Syrian refugees since the civil war started. Prime Minister David Cameron said that he was 'deeply moved' by the images, but had

previously stressed that the UK was trying to bring peace to the region and that taking in 'more and more refugees' was not the answer.

Other politicians disagreed. Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron hoped the photographs would be a 'wake-up call' to Cameron, while interim Labour leader Harriet Harman wrote a letter to the prime minister, arguing for a 'moral duty to act'. The Mayor of London Boris Johnson also spoke of Britain's 'moral responsibilities' to Syrian refugees. By yesterday evening, Cameron appeared to have bowed to public pressure and agreed that Britain will now take in thousands more.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has estimated that 350,000 migrants have been detected at EU borders so far this year, and that more than 2,600 have drowned in the Mediterranean. But yesterday's photographs have sparked a fresh outpouring of protest on behalf of the migrants.

### *Worth a thousand words*

The photograph of Aylan has clearly become a tipping point in the debate. Yesterday a government petition reached more than 300,000 signatures, and **charity donations** soared. This is nothing to be ashamed of, goes one argument. A picture really is worth a thousand words (as the great American editor Arthur Brisbane said in 1911). Humans are visual creatures.

On the other hand, how can we be so superficial? Hundreds and thousands of stories have been published about the migrant crisis over the past year and we looked the other way. Now one single image has stirred the sleeping giant of public opinion. That's the truly shocking thing.

## WORD WATCH

### **Civil war**

In 2011, a series of protests quickly turned violent on both sides, as President Bashar al-Assad's forces tried to crush the pro-democracy rebels. Jihadist insurgents such as 'Islamic State' have since become involved in the conflict. So far, around 200,000 people have lost their lives.

### **IS (so-called 'Islamic State')**

IS extremists in the Middle East have caused devastation across Iraq and Syria, in their brutal quest to establish a 'caliphate' under Islamic law. The group has fought Kurdish militants over the northern Syrian town of Kobane since September 2014.

### **Asylum**

Since 2011 when the Syrian conflict began, Britain has granted asylum to almost 5,000 Syrians (including dependants). Since March 2014 in addition 216 have been resettled in a humanitarian scheme which targets those at the greatest risk.

### **Charity donations**

The Migrant Offshore Aid Station (Moas), which rescues migrants at sea, received €150,000 in 24 hours — 15 times more than its previous record. Later, the author Patrick Ness used his Twitter account to raise over £100,000 for Save the Children.