

Briefing Pack

Stop Violence Against Women

'No Recourse' No Safety

Mass Lobby of Parliament

4th November 2009

09:30 – Shaftesbury Avenue
Cineworld (Trocadero Centre
at Piccadilly Circus)

12:45 – House of Commons

2nd Briefing: Mass Lobby of Parliament

A) BACKGROUND

Most of you have already received the first overview briefing outlining the no recourse rule and the plans for the mass lobby of parliament (see www.amnesty.org.uk/norecourse for a copy of that briefing).

As indicated previously, campaigning has been very effective and Government have listened to many of our demands. Indeed even at the time of writing, we know that Government are constantly updating and amending their work on violence against women. As a result this is a fast-moving area and one we should capitalise on right now and we need you to be involved so this briefing is to give you the most update information we can for the day.

Why are we doing the lobby?

As we get closer to a general election in 2010, we need to demonstrate to MPs that violence against women – *all* women needs to be addressed by all political parties.

The UK Government has clear **human rights obligations** to protect, respect and fulfil women's human rights. These obligations include the need to address violence against women in a strategic way, and in particular ensuring **all** victims of gender based violence can access the same support and protection, regardless of their immigration status.

Together we have been campaigning and lobbying with the women's sector for the government to uphold its human rights obligations on ending violence against women, and raised particular concerns about the lack of funding to provide support services for women, particularly for vulnerable groups notably those who have no recourse to public funds.

Last year, the UN Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women urged the Government to meet its obligations to end violence against women, raising particular concerns about:

- the absence of a comprehensive national strategy and programme to combat all forms of violence against women and girls
- the lack of adequate support and services for victims including shelters, compounded by the funding crisis facing NGOs working in the area of violence against women
- the fact that women with an insecure immigration status are not allowed to access public funds, with particularly negative consequences for victims of violence

UK political parties have been listening. In the last year, the UK Government have consulted on the need for a strategy entitled 'Together we can end violence against women and girls', and have committed to developing this by the end of the year. They have also committed to developing a

proposal to address the problems facing women with no recourse to public funds.

The Conservatives produced the policy paper 'Women in the World Today' and the strategy paper "Ending Violence against Women" where they recognize that women with no recourse to public funds are particularly vulnerable.

The Liberal Democrats passed a motion at their conference in September this year "Real Women Policy Motion", calling for an end to the no recourse to public funds requirement.

We need to make sure that the Government and political parties follow through on these commitments.

B) WHAT ARE WE ASKING FOR AT THE MASS LOBBY?

On 4th November, you will have the opportunity to meet with your MP to **ask for their commitment and action** to help victims of gender based violence, in particular we want:

- MPs to urge their party manifesto coordinator to ensure that the Violence Against Women strategy includes provision of funding for specialist services such as rape crisis centres and refuges and ensure this applies to **all** victims of violence including those currently subject to the **No recourse to public funds rule**.

Ask your MP to:

1) Write to their party's manifesto coordinator to find out about, and ask for, manifesto commitments to tackle violence against women and specifically on guaranteeing permanent, enforceable access to funding for **all** women (i.e. including those currently victims of the no recourse rule) in the jurisdiction fleeing violence in line with UK's human rights obligations.

2) Write to their local authority and find out what services exist and how much funding is dedicated to refuge and rape crisis centres in your area and how many women have been turned away from shelters because of no the no recourse to public funds rule. (tell them to go to <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/fairer-britain/map-of-gaps/> to find out about the state of services in UK.

3) Write to the Minister for Women to urge that any proposal to provide support for women with no recourse to public funds is a permanent initiative and covers **all** women who are subject to this rule.

Note:

In June, the Government suggested a pilot proposal which would only provide a maximum 20 days of funding conditional and backdated for women with no

recourse. Women's sector met with government and indicated that this would not solve the problem. We were delighted that the Government listened to us and promised to re-think this proposal. We believe a new proposal is being prepared that we think will have answered some of our most pressing concerns.

However, any proposal is likely to be a short term pilot and may only be available to a limited group of women in this situation. We need to make sure that MPs support the need for a permanent solution available to all women in this position.

Follow up: Write to your mp thanking him/her for the meeting and reminding them of what was discussed, what you asked them to do and they agreed to. We will be establishing an Early Day Motion (more details to follow) on this issue and so you may want to urge them to sign this when you write your follow-up letter.

This is a really exciting time and we are close to achieving all of the UK goals of our Stop violence against women campaign. We really need your support on 4 November and in the coming months. Thank you so much for everything.

C) LOGISTICS

Preparing for the Day

Booking Appointments

If you have not already done so then please urgently book an appointment with your MP as soon as possible as this is the best way of guaranteeing that you will get to see them on the day. If, for whatever reason, you do not get appointment you should still come but will instead have to use the green card system explained below.

To book an appointment you first need to find out who your MP is, you can do this at www.theyworkforyou.com or at www.locata.co.uk/commons or <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/> by simply entering your postcode. This will provide you with contact details. Please note if you book your appointment on the phone ask them to write you a letter or send an email as written confirmation as this will make it easier when queuing at Parliament.

Please book your appointments for between 12:45pm and 4 pm. It may be possible to do it later but the earlier the better. We are anticipating queues later in the day.

If you have a pre-booked appointment with your MP, then **PLEASE LET US KNOW THIS WHEN YOU REGISTER** – this is to ensure you are at the right place in the queue at the correct time and will enable us to match you up with other activists from the same constituency. Please do be aware that whilst we will do our best to co-

ordinate times, it is not an exact science and we are unable to guarantee that you will meet the appointment time.

We also ask that you **tell us of your appointment time prior to the event** to allow for coordination of activists.

Green Carding

If you haven't been able to make an appointment to meet your MP, don't worry you should still come. You can Green Card them on the day.

To Green Card an MP, you go to the reception desk in Central Lobby and ask for a green card. You fill in your name, address and purpose of the visit. They insist on the address so they can check you are in the right constituency. It is essential that you give a clear reason for 'Purpose of Visit'. This is because if the MP is unable to meet you on the day, they have to write to you at the address provided to respond to your query. Once you have filled in the card and handed it back, staff will go and physically search for your MP. If your MP is found and comes to Central Lobby, your name will be announced over the loudspeaker.

Making Arrangements

- Work** Make sure, if appropriate, that you book the time off you may need in advance. Thank you for doing this
- Childcare** We will not be able to take care of children on the day so if possible make child care arrangements in advance; if you do wish to bring you child please do let us know in advance.
- Transport** If you decide to travel via one of our coaches make sure you book as soon as possible to ensure a seat. This will pick you up in the morning and return you at night. If you plan to make your own way please allow ample time for travel and see our maps at the back of this brief. Also remember to make arrangements to get to the coach pick up and drop off points in your local area.
- Extra Support** If you have any mobility restrictions or other special requirements let us know in advance so we can try to make appropriate arrangements.
- Tell Us** Make sure you tell us you are coming, who you are meeting and when.

What You Need to bring

It is highly advisable that you **pack lightly**; this is for comfort and security reasons as your bags will be checked by security upon entry into the House of Commons. Note: we will *not* be able to store anything for you on the day.

Camera - we also suggest you bring a camera if you have one so you can get a picture of you with your MP as a visual commitment to the campaign can be very valuable. Please note though that photographs are not allowed in some areas of Parliament, though this will be explained more thoroughly on the day.

Food – we highly advise that you bring your own packed lunch .

Comfortable footwear – this will be a fairly long day and will involve a short walk as well as a lot of standing. (Again if you have any problems with this do let me know).

Waterproofs – This is early November and some standing in queues outside, ensure you dress for the weather.

D) AGENDA FOR THE DAY

Signage

We will ensure that in your packs on the day and at all the various locations throughout the day there is clear signage for the Amnesty lobby, order of events, directions and locations of rooms.

Stewards

We will have stewards throughout the day who will be identifiable and should be able to help you. If you wish to assist as a steward especially if you are first aid trained, let us know as we often need more.

Arrival 9.30 (slightly flexible)

If you are getting a coach with Amnesty you will be dropped off outside the Shaftesbury Avenue Cineworld at approximately 9.30. If you are traveling a long way arriving later it is not necessarily a problem though we do ask that you aim for 9.30 in case of any delays.

Registration – 9:30-10.30

Please try to arrive promptly as we will make an effort to match people up with others from the same constituency so you have moral support and to avoid the MP having to take multiple appointments however this can take a bit of time. This process will be quicker and easier if you have confirmed your appointments in advance to us.

There will be basic refreshments on arrival. You will be provided with an Amnesty folder containing the most up to date versions of briefings, Q and A's, feedback collation sheet etc in an Amnesty canvas shoulder bag.

Briefing – 11:00 11.45

At the cinema there will be a briefing with speakers and we will also build in time for activists to rehearse the points they wish to make to their MPs.

Parliament – 12:00

We will leave the cinema just after 12:00 and walk down to the House of Commons (this is a short 15-20 minute walk – if this will be an issue for you please let us know and we can try to make alternative arrangements)

Once at the House of Commons you will join the queue and if you do not have an appointment booked here you will fill out a green card

Please take great care on the walk to Parliament; stick to pavements and only cross roads when you have a green light. Stewards will guide you along the route.

Meeting your MP appointments between 12.45- 4pm usually 15-30 mins,

- It helps to meet your MP in a small team or delegation where a couple of people can present the facts and another can take notes. It is really important that you make a note of what the MP says - this will enable you and us to follow up on any promises or requests for further meetings or information.
- Make sure you leave sufficient time to listen to your MP's response. Always be polite and tolerant of differing views.
- However, if something comes up that you weren't prepared for, don't be afraid to tell them that you or someone from AI office will get back to them with the answer and not this down to act on.
- Be as specific as you can about what you ask them to do (see asks below)
- Be prepared for counter argument – (see the accompanying Q and A)

Feedback session immediately after the Meeting

After your meeting we will ask for feedback so we can find out what sort of success you had and what the main issues were. Feedback forms will be made available on the day and we have a room booked in Parliament to collect feedback. The room is booked from 12.30-5pm so will be available throughout the lobby.

Media, Facebook, Twitter, local publicity before, during and after

It would also be great if you would like to help promote the issue and the lobby through social networks and in your local media both before, during and after the event. The website will have ideas for letters to editor, local press releases, feature pieces you may want to do about your group's outing to parliament. Some of you may want to tweet about your plans or set up facebook groups etc Be inventive -tell people about this event especially those who will be most interested, local women's aid or refuge, local council officers and staff – it's open to all. If you are getting a media piece placed, let us know.

After the event

It greatly adds to the power of the lobby if you send a **follow up letter** thanking your MP for their time, state what you understood to be the outcomes of the meeting and remind the MP of any actions that he or she agreed to take. Also ensure that if you have promised to find out anything further for your MP, you have done this. Check the website for any updates in case there has been a development since you met with your MP and so that you can represent the entire and most up to date position of AI following any developments. Send us copies of any correspondence you receive from your MP on the issues

Thank you for your time and commitment and for your willingness to campaign. We know that you are already making a difference.

E) ANSWERING TRICKY QUESTIONS

Violence against women in the UK

Over 30 million women live in Britain. Each year, 3 million women in Britain experience rape, domestic violence, stalking or other violence. The home office's own figures indicate the cost of violence against women to the public purse as 6 billion a year and 23 billion year if you count emotional costs.

- One in four local authority areas provide no [specialised support services](#) in their area for women who experience violence.
- Ethnic minority women are especially poorly served. Of the 408 local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales, just one in 10 have a specialised service for ethnic minority women. These services are uniquely suited to deal with women facing a very particular set of circumstances, for example those fleeing forced marriage or female genital mutilation, or those with insecure immigration status (no recourse).
- Visit the end violence against women map and Equality and Human Rights Commission website Map of Gaps for more information about state of services for violence against women in the UK
<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/fairer-britain/map-of-gaps/>

What is the problem?

The problem is that the no recourse to public funds rule means that some women (notably those who came on a spousal visa, on a student visa, from EU accession countries or on a temporary work permit), even those legally here and those living with even very extreme abuse and violence, cannot leave the situation even if they want to. This is because refuge cannot take them in unless they are receiving public funds like housing benefit and income support which are paid to the refuge to cover the costs of the women's stay.

Why doesn't she just leave?

This is just the problem - even if she finds the courage to leave, where does she go if the refuge won't take her in? She will be turned away because there are no funds to cover her stay in a refuge. If she is turned away and ends up going back to the abusive situation as the only roof over her head, then circumstances are liable to become much worse for her.

It is when a woman attempts to leave a violent situation that she is at the greatest risk and she is liable to be subjected to even greater violence for attempting and failing to leave and will be all the harder for her to try a second time to leave.

(NB bear in mind that even confident women familiar with systems and language in UK may phone up to 12 different agencies and suffer 35 escalating incidents of violence before she tries to leave)

Why doesn't she just go back to the country she came from?

In some cases the women do indeed return to their family and country overseas but this is not always an option and even if it is an option you need to be in a safe space for long enough to book your flight and organise that return. For many women in this situation however she may have children here in the UK. For others their family may see it as a shame and dishonour and burden on them for her to leave her husband and return to them – indeed in some cases she may be at risk of a so-called “honour-killing” in such circumstances. However, whatever she ultimately does – whether she goes back abroad or tries to remain here – the point is she is in a crisis and needs to get into a safe place away from the violence immediately for even a temporary period while she resolves her situation.

If anyone should pay for supporting these women, isn't it the governments of their own countries?

The UK is signatory to the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (UN CEDAW) by which we have agreed to provide access to safety and justice for all women in the jurisdiction who are fleeing violence. These women are in the jurisdiction of the UK and so we are in breach of our obligations in denying them effective access to safety and justice in this way.

Moreover the women we are talking about are being abused here in the UK by UK citizens who are legally and financially responsible for them. When these women come here, they have a “sponsor” a UK national who undertakes this responsibility.

How many people are we talking about?

By virtue of the fact that the women we are talking about cannot leave the violent situation because they have no access to money or support it is difficult to know for sure as they cannot come forward if there is nothing there for them. However, both women's sector estimates based on information from refugees receiving requests from such women most of whom they have to turn away and home office own estimates suggest there are some 600 such cases a year.

How much is this going to cost?

It costs a refuge an average of £10,000 a year (£830/month) to support a woman in their accommodation. In a straightforward case (not a woman with no recourse) the refuge aims to support a woman and move her out of the refuge within 6-weeks to 3 months (i.e. at a cost of less than £3000). However, currently the process for a no recourse woman can take a year and even 2 years. This would suggest that it would therefore cost significantly less and be resolved much faster if women fleeing violence were exempt from the no recourse rule.

Similarly both police and health service officers find that dealing with a no recourse case can take 2-5 times as much time and staff capacity as dealing with the same case without the no recourse complication.

N.B. the total cost of domestic violence per year according to the Home Office own figures is 6 billion a year taking into account public service costs like health, social services, policing loss of economic earnings etc and a staggering 23 billion a year taking into account the total emotional cost.

So do you want to abolish the no recourse rule and just let anyone and everyone live off public funds?

No. We recognise that the no recourse rule may have its place in legitimately limiting the demands on the public purse. But it is having an unintended but seriously

damaging impact on some individuals. We are only saying there needs to be a permanent exemption to this rule for this small but particularly vulnerable category of women and that this adjustment is proportionate and reasonable and necessary to meet our international obligations under CEDAW.

What's the government done about it – I thought they had a proposal?

Over the years, the government has recognised that it has an obligation to help such cases and they have taken a number of short-term or rather poorly thought through, if well-intentioned, measures to address the problem.

Measures to date falling short include:

- a) The introduction of the domestic violence (DV) rule whereby if a woman meets certain criteria and makes a successful application for indefinite leave to remain on the basis of the DV concession then she can obtain support. This was a welcome step but did not address the fundamental problem that no funding was available for her to leave in the first place or for refuge take her in and so she is not in a position to ever make such an application. In addition the criteria were very unrealistic for such a woman to meet.
- b) The adjustment of the criteria to include evidence from women's sector NGOs to support a woman's case. This too was welcome but still didn't address the lack of funds available to enable a woman ever to be in a safe position to actually apply for that support.
- c) 2 bouts of short term emergency funding to support such cases. This was very welcome but the amounts were small, were soon exhausted and were one-off amounts or departmental under-spends and not an enforceable or sustainable system of support.
- d) A proposal whereby if a woman leaves, if a refuge takes her in, if she makes an application to remain, if the application is successful then the government will provide 20 days funding backdated and conditional to the refuge. After discussions with the women's sector, the UK government withdrew from launching such a scheme in acknowledgement that this did not address the fundamental problem that for a woman to leave and for a refuge to take her in the funds need to be immediately available.
- e) At the time of writing we understand the government is in discussions with the women's sector and amending proposals to try to come up with something more appropriate. We respect the fact that Government has listened to us and tried to work with us but urge that any proposal must be permanent, enforceable, resourced and available to all women who fall under this rule.

Why now?

Women's sector have been campaigning on this issue for years. The Government has made various attempts to address the issue but all fall short. AI and Southall Black Sisters jointly launched a report "No recourse – no safety" in April 2008. All 3 parties welcomed the report and the Government acknowledged this gap in protection to some women and said they were committed to providing a permanent solution to the problem. In July, the government met with women's sector to launch a proposal but listened to the women's sector when we said the proposal was inadequate and withdrew it. The government are now working with the women's

sector to try to produce a better proposal. It is clear therefore that there is a willingness on the part of government to address the issue and that they have really listened to our voices in this campaign. We welcome this but now as they are finalising proposals we need as many people as possible to turn out to tell the government exactly what we need that proposal to deliver and that we really support them in trying to address this problem once and for all and save lives.

What we want

After years of working on this issue, after several pilot projects, in view of our obligations under CEDAW and with women's lives at risk – we know that we need a once and for all solution to this problem that has to consist of an exemption to the rule for this group of women and adequate sustainable and enforceable funding to specialist women's services supporting such women.

A selection of information will be available via our website: www.amnesty.org.uk/norecourse. The information and materials available will grow as we approach the event so please be patient, all of the materials will go up there as soon as possible. All of these materials and most up to date developments will also be given to you on the day.

Transport

Amnesty Coaches

Coaches will be leaving from:

- Sheffield
- Manchester
- Leicester

Please book in advance to guarantee a seat by emailing norecourse@amnesty.org.uk with your name and which coach you would like a seat on. Please check with us concerning the coach pick ups as places may be all taken or indeed if there is no take-up we may have cancelled coach.

The coaches will pick up from as close to the city-centres as possible; we will give you more information on pick-up locations when you book your seat. We will also give you the number of the coach steward closer to the time.

Public Transport:

Rail – The Nearest railway station is Charing Cross though it is often easier to travel to your nearest London station and get the underground to your destination.

Underground Station – Piccadilly Circus (Bakerloo and Piccadilly Lines) You can check how the tube is running on the day online at Transport for London <http://www.londontransport.co.uk/tfl/> or by phone on 020 7222 1234

Buses – the 38, 19 and 14 all have stops in the area

By Car – Use of public transport is advised, as parking is scarce and expensive.

Both the Cinema and Parliament are also inside the congestion charge zone.

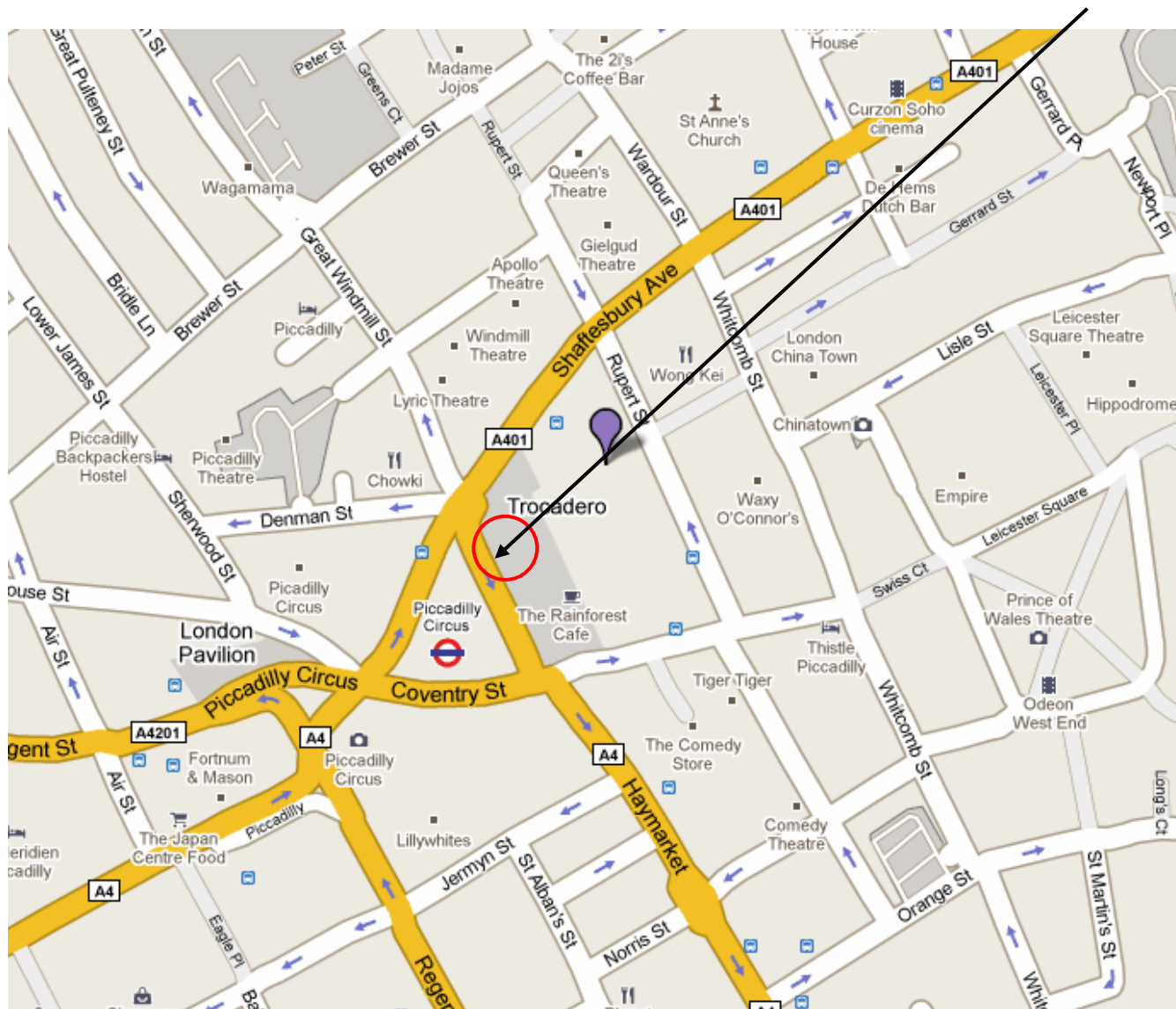
LOCATION MAPS

Shaftesbury Avenue Cineworld

in the Trocadero centre, special cinema only entrance off of Great Windmill Street; stewards will be outside to guide you in.

W1D 7DH

020 79306196

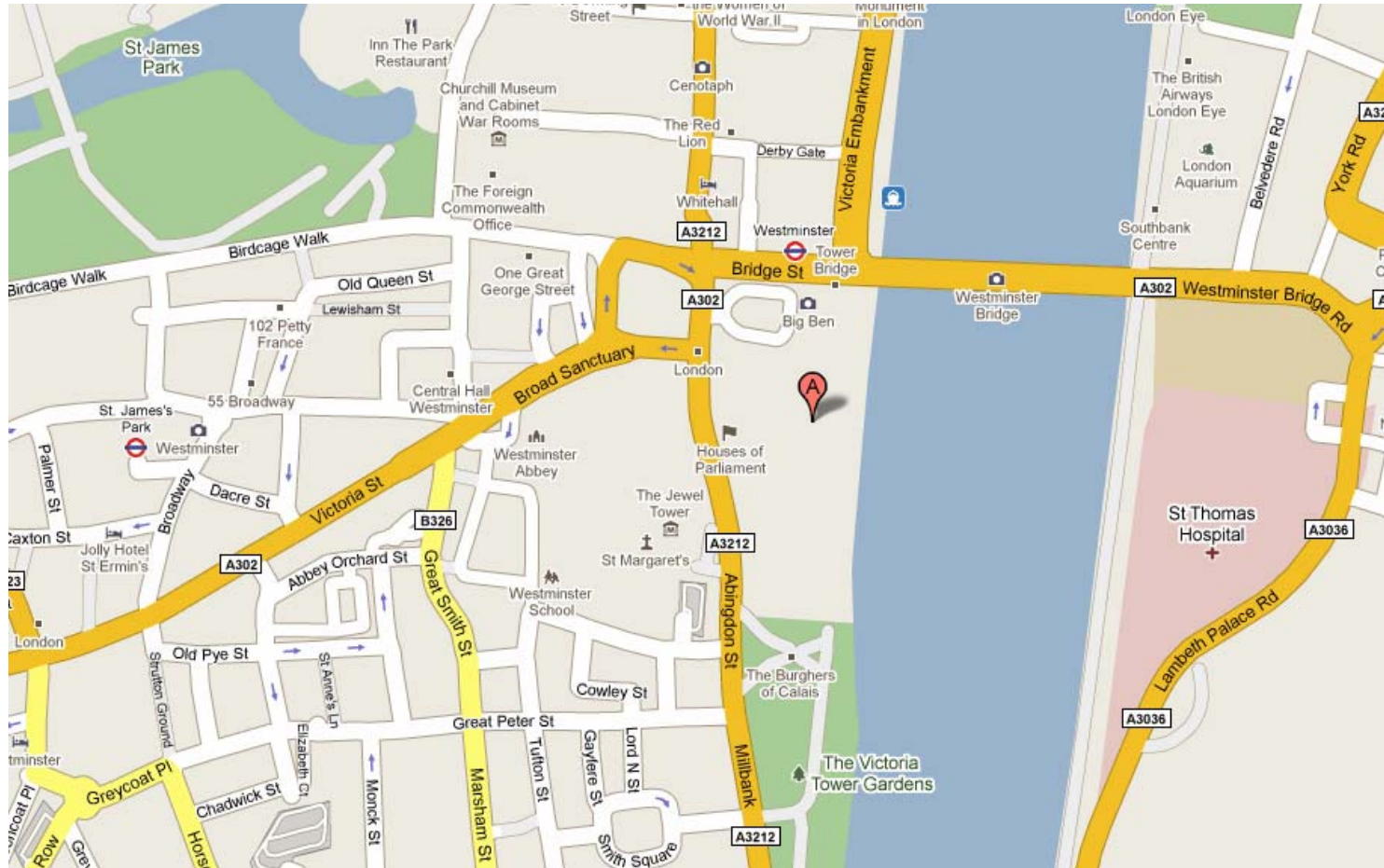


House of Commons

Parliament Square, London, Westminster, SW1P 3

NOTE: there are **public toilets** at the Westminster underground station (SHOWN ON THE MAP)

There is also a Café Nero near the Westminster underground station



Note: Stewards will be located along the route to provide guidance and can be identified by their high-visibility Amnesty branded jackets.



Coach Pick-ups