

Last year this council commemorated the start of the First World War. It was supposed to be the war to end wars but it all happened again and again. And it happening now from Benghazi to the Hindu Kush, the same senseless slaughter caused by the arrogance, ignorance and self interest of politicians and others, who should, but don't, know any better.

Our own leaders condemn some murderous dictators while tacitly supporting equally obnoxious despots next door. They sell arms to anyone who serves their interests and bomb countries into anarchy and then walk away, without a thought of the consequences. The consequences, the victims are, as usual innocent civilians forced, in their millions, to flee for their lives.

I, like most people, have been appalled by the behaviour of some newspapers and self publicising politicians seeking to demonise these people. Comments like swarms, invasions, threats to our society are simply not true. These people are not economic migrants. Economic migrants turn up at Heathrow with suitcases full of money and are welcomed no matter how dubious they are.

These are refugees who have nothing and have nothing to lose. They are so desperate they risk their lives crossing the sea in rubber dinghies, and walk for 100s of miles to escape the carnage in their home country. There is a humanitarian disaster on our doorstep, and we should be taking a lead in dealing with it. What I have seen so far from central government and other areas is a refusal to do so. Apart from of course the usual publicity shots, promising little, delivering less, smiling sympathetically while doing nothing. Hug a husky all over again.

There are those who would argue it's not our problem – we can't look after our own people. We can of course - what's missing is the willingness to do so. Failure to help the unfortunate in our country is no excuse for ignoring the desperate on our doorstep. They won't go away if we close our eyes.

No-one is asking for us to take in all of them. But we should be taking our fair share in the spirit of decency and humanity and welcome them not begrudge them. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

This country has a proud record in helping refugees – we wrote the rule book. Between 1914 and 1918 we took in ½ million refugees from Belgium, 16,000 on one day alone. In the 1930s we took in Jewish refugees from across Europe. The same newspapers that now complain of a Muslim threat, complained then of a Jewish invasion. In the 1970s I was fortunate to work with refugees from Uganda. What all these people had, and have, in common is they were all desperate for the opportunity to escape and rebuild their lives. Not to live off us but to live with us and contribute to our society and they have done so. Helping them, for us, should be a matter of pride, not fear.

I am ashamed by the appalling behaviour of our press and the attempts by some politicians, most recently on Portsmouth city council, to make capital out of this. They do not speak for me, my country or my town. Their arrogance, ignorance and selfishness is not British, not Christian and not human. It has no place in our society.

This motion is about humility, understanding and above all charity to our fellow man. It's about this country accepting its responsibilities and taking a lead in discharging those responsibilities. And it's about this town playing its part like some many others in doing this.

I urge this council to follow the lead of others like Winchester, Southampton and Bournemouth and wholeheartedly support this motion.