

Firefighters sent to Greece for training

FIREFIGHTERS have been sent to Greece to learn to tackle bush fires - because of fears over global warming.

A team of 40 firefighters, including five from Greater Manchester, were packed off on the two-week, £473-a-head trip to the village of Rizomata - where temperatures hit a record 44C in the summer. They stayed in a camp and were drilled in dealing with grassland fires using local fire trucks and equipment. The trip was organised by fire chiefs in response to a government report which claimed climate change would lead to more hot summers in the UK, and therefore more severe grassland and forest fires.

One firefighter described the trip as a 'waste of money' last night, saying the Greater Manchester

force had decades of experience in tackling moorland fires. But Tony Ciaramella, Greater Manchester's assistant chief fire officer defended the Greek training course.

He said: "One of the ways we are improving both how we tackle grassland and forest fires and the safety of our firefighters when they are doing so, is to learn from those with far greater experience. "This training exercise gave us an opportunity to learn from and work with, European and other UK firefighters, through a nationally organised event."

Intensive The 'intensive' training trip ran for two weeks, with participants given training in tactics, ground skills and deployment of resources to combat wildfires.

Two of the five officers from Greater Manchester

who took part are in the Fire Operations Group, a specialist group of officers trained in dealing with the large scale moorland fires.

The remaining three were selected from stations where the crews have a high incidence of moorland fire fighting. A fire brigade management source said: "The five stayed in basic accommodation, there was an alcohol ban, and a 12 midnight curfew. It wasn't a holiday."

The training was organised by the Chief Fire Officers Association, in conjunction with the Greek government.

It followed a paper published in December 2006 by the Department for Communities and Local Government, which investigated the potential effects of climate change on fire and rescue services.

Qadir – An Afghan Odysseus

The Foreign Ministry's Secretary General for International Economic Relations and Development Cooperation, Mr. Theodoros Skylakakis, gave an interview on the occasion of the official premiere of the documentary "Qadir: And Afghan Odysseus", along with the Afghan Deputy Minister for Culture, Mr. Omar Sultan (at the Foreign Ministry's Kranidiotis Amphitheatre).



beyond of problems in the developing world

Specifically: poverty, armed conflict, displacement of persons and understanding of diversity.

A distant and mysterious Afghanistan is made more familiar. But this would be achieved by any travel documentary. The difference in this case is that the viewer sees the specific reasons for fleeing, experiences the anxiety of family members and the protagonist's nostalgia for the homeland; the viewer understands the conditions under which the migrant can return home permanently.

Many in Qadir's position would attempt to leave. And in order to return home, they would have to see prospects for a dignified, productive and safe life. A second key element of the film is that in spite of the trials documented, there are moments of humour and hope.

Encouraging voluntary return

Many migrants and refugees seek repatriation when certain conditions exist: peace, democracy, development.

In Western societies, citizens are informed more frequently of the arrivals and residency of immigrants in their countries, and much less often – if at all – of repatriation programmes. At the same time, those who return to help with the reconstruction and development of their countries can serve as a positive example for others.

Highlighting the importance to the developed world of investing in human

capital

Qadir attended a training programme in computers, worked as a teacher and interpreter for his compatriots in Greece, and used every opportunity and means available to him to gain experience, knowledge and skills that would be useful to him in the future.

Highlighting the importance of the double-positive approach: that of the host country to the migrant/refugee, and that of the migrant/refugee to the host country

Qadir found people in Greece who supported him. This fact worked positively not only for him and the host country, but also for his community.

Qadir responded to the help he received, sought opportunities and tried to assimilate, learning Greek, finding work and residing legally in Greece. He showed self-confidence, adaptability and flexibility. At the same time, wanting to help other people in his position, he volunteered with NGO programmes for supporting immigrants and refugees in Greece.

So this is a win-win situation, and – with the help of the seventh art – can educate, overcoming stereotypes and prejudices.

In this sense, the film is a bridge of acquaintance and familiarisation of Afghans with Greeks and the cinema. Through the power of the picture that travels the world, it portrays Afghanistan's cultural tradition, with a fresh perspective on this long-suffering country.

Changes to School Transport Subsidies

The NSW Teachers Federation has long called for changes to the subsidised transport system that transports students past their local public school.

The scheme is now costing \$500 million per annum.

"It is absurd that the NSW government funds students to travel considerable distances across Sydney and other parts of the state to attend private schools chosen by their parents without regard for cost to the government," said Acting President Bob Lipscombe.

"An inequity exists because NSW, unlike other states, has no restrictions on eligibility for the scheme other than to live more than 1.6 - 2.3km from one's school of choice.

"When considering changes, Federation calls on the Premier to ensure they do not disadvantage students from Public Schools by raising the minimum distance required for eligible travel," said Mr Lipscombe.

Meeting on the future of the Hellenic Studies & Research centre

A public gathering was organised in Melbourne, by La Trobe University to discuss with the local Greek community the institution that will replace the National Centre for Hellenic Studies & Research (EKEME). Discussions took place on the future of the centre's archives and the way the community have in the teaching and research of Greek issues.