

RAM BULLETIN

Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Mass media Project

Promoting best practice in media representation of refugee and asylum issues

OCTOBER 2000

Welcome to the new RAM Project Bulletin

This electronic newsletter will be distributed at least once a month to members of the RAM Project network.

Please download the printed version and distribute it locally to support groups and interested individuals.

The Bulletin will keep you up-to-date on project activities and share ideas about how best to obtain fair, positive coverage and obtain redress when things go wrong.

It is edited by researcher Nazand Begikhani, herself a refugee based in Bristol. She will depend upon RAM network members – that means YOU – to supply information about local media-related activities.

• Email your stories to Nazand at bulletin@presswise.org.uk

Each edition will include 'Communicator' – a page devoted to improving media skills; and 'The Peg Board' – a diary of events on which you may be able to hang stories in the local media. Nazand will also maintain the RAM website **online in November – wait for it!** (www.ramproject.org.uk);

**COPY DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE:
10 NOVEMBER 2000**

If you know anyone who would like to receive the RAM Bulletin, send names, numbers, email and postal addresses to bulletin@presswise.org.uk

Readers Digest survey proves the need for RAM

A Readers Digest poll has shown the pernicious impact of inaccurate and prejudicial media coverage on public perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers.

Face to face interviews with over 2,000 people aged 15+, conducted by Mori, revealed that

- 80% think refugees see the UK as a 'soft touch'
- 63% think asylum seekers get £113 a week (instead of £36.54); and most say
- 20% of the population are immigrants (4% is accurate), and that
- 26% of the population are from ethnic minorities (7% is nearer the mark).

Responding to the poll, which also exposed some of the myths generated by inaccurate and sensational press coverage, PressWise Director Mike Jempson said: "The launch of the RAM Bulletin and website are timely antidotes to public ignorance' caused by media misrepresentation".

He blamed politicians and some sections of the press for "generating hysteria and false impressions" about people who seek refuge in the UK.

"In a democracy it is the job of the media to

make sure the public have accurate information on which to base decisions about their lives," he said.

"The survey shows that the media is not doing its job well. The public does not know the true facts about numbers, costs and benefits, nor the human stories behind the statistics. With a general election looming and the asylum issue high on the political agenda, it is vital for the media to supply accurate and reliable information."

- To read the RD article in full visit: www.presswise.org.uk

PCC backs RAM Project

With complaints about discriminatory coverage on the increase, the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) has agreed to take part in the regional Communication Days organised by the RAM Project.

Sue Roberts, External Affairs Consultant for the PCC will encourage local groups to engage with the media on refugee and asylum issues.

She will explain how the PCC operates and how complaints can be made.

This welcome decision follows a meeting with

PressWise Director Mike Jempson in July.

In his Annual Report PCC Chairman Lord Wakeham says that the Commission's adjudications during 1999 have set out new standards on 'key areas including ...discrimination relating to asylum seekers' to guide editors.

Last year the PCC ruled against the *Folkestone Herald* for use of a picture of police in riot gear to illustrate a story about a raid which led to the arrest of six refugees ('The frontline in Folkestone', 20 May 1999). The photo had been taken at a quite separate event.

The Commission reminded editors of 'their responsibilities in covering such topics and of the danger that inaccurate or misleading reporting may generate an atmosphere of fear and hostility which is not borne out by the facts'.

The ruling followed a complaint that the tone of article was a deliberate attempt to foster prejudice.

The PCC reissued its reminder in March 2000 following complaints about *Daily Mail* coverage of asylum issues.

The PCC decided that the paper had not breached the industry Code of Practice, but recalled its previous

warnings that newspapers should not incite racial hatred:

'Discrimination has no place in modern society and the Commission would heavily censure most heavily any newspaper found guilty of racist reporting.'

According to *BBC News*, between 7 Sept. 1999, and 11 Jul. 2000, *The Daily Mail* ran more than 200 stories about asylum seekers and refugees. (*BBC News*, 23 Oct 00). The words 'floodgates' and 'swamped' appeared frequently, along with 'bogus', 'scroungers', and 'soft touch'.

In 1999, PCC received 168 complaints about alleged discriminatory reporting.

PCC website:

www.pcc.org.uk

PressWise assists with complaints to all media regulators

www.presswise.org.uk

BBC News:

www.bbc.co.uk/news

Refugees plan E-newspaper

An electronic newspaper, written and produced by a group of London-based refugee journalists, could be launched early in the new year.

The PressWise RAM Project and the National Union of Journalists have teamed up to help the exiled journalists get the idea off the ground.

The group is seeking funding and loans for the project and the NUJ has offered free training in

setting up, designing and running the 'E-newspaper'.

Abebe Gelaw, one of the journalists involved, says: "We decided to produce an electronic newspaper for reasons of economy as well as speed of distribution. Refugee organisations and supporters will be able to download, copy and distribute to their networks.

"We would like to hear from refugee journalists around the UK who would like to join us in providing news and information for refugees and asylum seekers all over Britain."

- For more information please email abe@britannica.com Or ring 07931 705619.

MEDIA COVERAGE UNDER SCRUTINY

a. RAM Forum planned

The RAM Project is planning to bring together refugees, support groups, media professionals, regulators and academics in London on 1 Feb 2001 to discuss the impact of media coverage on social and political attitudes.

Funds are being sought for the Forum, which is backed by the NUJ, Cardiff University Department of Journalism, AMARC, the NUJ and the Refugee Studies Centre.

- Watch this space for more details.

b. Mail under fire

A complaint is going to the PCC about the Mail on Sunday story (*'Asylum seeker claims £50,000 for 'humiliation' – How a young Algerian's case could cost the taxpayer millions'*, 8 Oct 2000) which ran a snatched picture of a woman who had offered accommodation to a refugee alongside a photo of her house, her car and a huge image of an armed Algerian terrorist.

c. Send in your cuts

PressWise is collecting examples of both good and bad practice in coverage of refugee and asylum issues in local and national media.

- Send cuttings, audio & videotapes to PressWise RAM Project, 38 EBC, Felix Road, Bristol BS5 0HE.

d. Australian research

A 2-year study by criminologist Sharon Pickering of coverage of refugee and asylum issues in two popular Australian newspapers demonstrates the danger of allowing stereotypes and prejudice to go unchallenged. Analysing the language used she shows that discourse about asylum issues relies heavily upon words that imply deviance and criminality and encourages exclusion. The message is clear – insists that journalists avoid pejorative language query the use of inflammatory terms by public figures.

- For more details contact spickering@csu.edu.au

RAM PROJECT ACTIVITIES

a. Media networks on the increase

More RAM Communications Days aimed at helping UK asylum and refugee groups in their efforts to improve media coverage are planned: Leicester (9 Nov), Sheffield (29 Nov), Glasgow (14 Dec) and Newcastle (15 Dec).

Dates have yet to be fixed for similar events in Bristol, Cambridge, Liverpool, Northampton and Nottingham.

The idea is to establish media networks and provide use-of-the – media training where necessary.

- For more information contact Terry Williams: ram@presswise.org.uk or ring Di on 0117 941 5889

b. Media workshops for students, social workers and anti-racists

PressWise Director Mike Jempson will be delivering a RAM Project use-of-the-media workshop for the Searchlight Educational Trust at its South West seminar in Bristol on 9 November.

During the last week in October he contributed to workshop on *'The Media, Prejudice and Community Support'* at a conference organised by West Sussex Social Services in Chichester, and former *Guardian* journalist Nick Cater ran similar workshops at 'Beyond Words 2000' the Student Action for Refugees annual conference, at Nottingham University.

c. Building support for asylum seekers in the West Midlands

RAM's Regional Co-ordinator Terry Williams is to chair a gathering of campaigners who support the human rights of asylum seekers and resist racism, in Birmingham's Council House on Thursday 2 Nov at 7pm.

Organised by the Birmingham Assembly against Racism, speakers at the event will include Kumar Murshid, from NAAR, Anne Pettifer (Jubilee 2000), Philip Williams (Refugee Council) and barrister Ramby de Mello.

• For more information Email AA_R@compuserve.com or ring 0793 628 357.

d. International angles

The RAM project continues to contribute to international fora about media coverage of refugee and asylum issues.

Mike Jempson is to address a conference on *International Media and Refugee Conflicts*, organised by the Finnish Refugee Council in Helsinki on 10 November. Nick Cater will represent the project at *4th European Conference on the Integration of Refugees* organised by the Greek Refugee Council in Athens on 1 & 2 December.

Trades unions support better deal for refugees

a. Follow up on the TUC

RAM media networks should be making links with local trades unionists for support and expertise, after trade unionists gave strong backing to RAM's campaign to change media coverage of asylum seekers at the Trades Union Congress in Glasgow during September.

RAM co-ordinator Terry Williams was a key speaker at a TUC fringe meeting, and spent three days lobbying trade union delegates and officers. He came away impressed with the level of support.

"Rank-and-file trade unionists clearly back the work of RAM and the more general campaign to provide a welcome and support for asylum seekers." He reports.

"The Transport and General Workers Union campaign, led by General Secretary Bill Morris, has been a major influence in changing Government thinking about the voucher system."

• Trade union members wanting more information about how they can help the RAM Project should contact Terry on 0121 588 6341, ram@presswise.org.uk

b. NUJ asylum campaign

The National Union of Journalists, representing over 30,000 members, has launched a major campaign to change media attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees. The Union is urging its 30,000 members in the UK and Ireland to work with refugee organisations to report the real stories about asylum-seekers fleeing torture and

oppression and the problems which they face in Britain, as part of a major campaign to improve media attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees.

The NUJ is supporting the efforts of refugee journalists to launch their own electronic newspaper, as well as backing the RAM Project and its Forum in the New Year to address these issues.

• For more information contact Terry Williams: williams.t@cableinet.co.uk or ring 0121 588 6341.

UNTOLD STORIES

a. Taking money from refugees

Next time someone calls a phone-in programme or writes to the local paper complaining about resources wasted on refugees, you might remind them what is happening at the international level.

The failure of governments to keep their promises for refugees is having a savage effect. Last year they set the 2000 budget of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) at \$965 million, but have only provided \$815 million. To make good the shortfall of \$150 million, the UNHCR is having to cut spending on the care and protection of an estimated 26 million refugees. UNFCR staff contracts may not be renewed, and some of the 500 charities

operating in the frontline will lose funding.

Those hurt most will be the world's poorest and most vulnerable people, displaced by war, persecution, poverty and environmental disasters.

Meanwhile there is controversy about UNHCR priorities, a change of leadership, and yet more pressure from governments about refugee law.

On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Refugee Convention - signed up to by 139 states in 1951 to protect some 400,000 people who were then fleeing oppression - the UK is among those suggesting that it should be replaced, bringing fears that refugees will be left at greater risk of violence and discrimination, with nowhere safe to run.

• UNHCR website: <http://www.unhcr.ch>

b. 58 dead – the tip of an iceberg

Six Kurdish asylum seekers who suffocated to death in a truck were found dumped on the side of a road in southern Italy on Wednesday 18 October. The grim episode is reminiscent of one in Britain last June in which 58 Chinese people died. They were not alone.

UNITED for Intercultural Action, the Amsterdam-based European network against nationalism, racism and fascism has documented the deaths of over 2000 people who have sought refuge in 'Fortress Europe' since 1993.

For details visit: www.united.non-profit.nl and *Kurdishmedia*: www.kurdishmedia.com

c. Unfold the language – accentuate the positive

The language used by politicians and journalists to describe refugees and asylum-seekers or issues related to them can incite hatred, racism and xenophobia.

In the example below, by playing with words the newspaper appears to be indifferent towards the human reality of those who must rely on vouchers for food.

Angry refugees march over food

Supermarket bosses closed a Hull store after it became the target of protests by asylum seekers. The men converged on the Kwik Save shop on Beverley Road to highlight their anger about the Government voucher system...

Their actions resulted in the customers leaving the shop as the store manager closed down the tills and phoned police...

Hull Daily Mail, October 2nd, 2000

NOTES

i. Confusing headline

Who are we taking about here? The headline refers to 'refugees' but the story is about 'asylum-seekers' (and were they marching 'over food' or 'about food' (vouchers)? Simple mistakes can cause confusion in the minds of readers...

ii. 'Angry', 'target', 'converged'. 'anger'

All these terms suggest antagonism, and place the protestors in conflict with everyone else, although they were just

exercising a legitimate right to demonstrate about a perceived injustice.

iii. Don't shoot the messenger

The story does go on to explain the voucher system and quotes the views of an asylum-seeker from Sierra Leone. The message might have been communicated as powerfully and with less risk of alienating readers/shoppers, had the organisers of the demonstration made sure some concerned local shoppers took part and expressed their views to the press...

THE RAM PROJECT

Where did it come from, and where is it going?

The aim of the Refugees, Asylum-seekers & the Mass media (RAM) Project is to help improve the quality and accuracy of media coverage specifically by assisting refugees, asylum seekers and their support organisations to obtain fair representation.

The RAM project was set up by The PressWise Trust, a media ethics charity which provides advice and training for individuals, voluntary groups and media professionals in the UK and overseas.

Since 1993 PressWise has been receiving complaints about the way refugees, asylum seekers, Roma, and the travelling community are depicted and vilified in the media. A particular concern is that those on the receiving end of hostile coverage are rarely allowed to speak for themselves.

The RAM Project was first mooted in 1998, but funding only became available in 1999 when Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT) backed Phase 1 of the project, in which PressWise consulted and surveyed refugee support groups across Europe. Organised a Communication Day in the West Midlands. Provided media training and established a communication network between national and local organisations.

The JRCT and the Barrow Cadbury Trust have joined forces to support Phase 2, which started in the summer of 2000.

It includes Communication Days in dispersal areas to bring together parties interested in helping to improve media coverage by establishing communication networks.

Appropriate media training is provided to network members. RAM is run by a part-time team including

journalist **Terry Williams** (regional co-ordination), a member of the NUJ Ethics Council; **Hildegard Dumper**, (national liaison) a consultant specialising in gender and refugee issues, and journalist **Nick Cater** (international co-ordination).

Researcher **Nazand Begikhani**, edits the RAM e-Bulletin and will also maintain the RAM website, on-line in November 2000. PressWise Director **Mike Jempson** (project manager) handles complaints about aspects of media coverage.

Di Fricker (Trust administrator) provides administrative support. RAM is a collaborative project seeking not to duplicate but to strengthen and supplement the activities of others dealing with the media, including the National Union of Journalists, Refugees On-line, Diversity On-line, the AMARC Open Door project, and UK and European groups more directly involved in work with refugees and asylum-seekers.

• Visit our website: www.presswise.org.uk

CUT-OUT-AND-KEEP COMMUNICATOR

*First in a series of PressWise Guides
to assist people wishing to play a more active role
in improving media coverage of refugee and asylum issues.*

1. Setting up a media network

Combined action by the many refugee and asylum-seeker groups and support organisations in the UK can change the tone of media coverage and create positive news. Small groups struggle to get their voices heard - but by working together we can make positive headlines!

Helping set up such Media Networks is a major part of the work carried out by the Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Mass media (RAM) Project. The work taken on by such networks will depend on the number of active numbers and resources.

Here are some ideas.

Size of group

Local media usually forms a cluster of newspaper, radio and TV stations in particular areas.

Bring together people from refugee and asylum groups, which operate in that area. Some might prefer to operate networks within the area covered by one of the dispersal consortia.

Involve people who **want** to work with the media. There will be enough jobs for everyone - so delegate. Set up an E-mail contact list for your group.

Contact RAM if you would like us to organise a Communication Day or media training – all we need to start with is at least one month's notice and a list of contact names and addresses.

Monitoring the media

Check the stories that are being carried in local newspapers and on radio and TV. Get your Media Network members to monitor the papers they normally read and the programmes they usually listen to and watch.

Put out a swift response to negative reports - and praise good coverage.

E-mail responses to all group members so other local organisations can support this activity.

Building contacts

Local journalists will usually do their best to provide a balanced coverage. But they need your help.

Journalists depend on the information you can provide about what is happening in the area - and they will want to speak to refugees and asylum seekers.

So start work now on identifying and preparing people who are willing to talk to the media. Build up a list of good media contacts. Find out what journalists need and explain how they can help.

Training needs

The majority of smaller refugee and asylum organisations are unlikely to have anyone who has been trained in media work. Find out who wants it - and identify experienced people who can deliver such training in your area.

Contact RAM if you need advice: ram@presswise.org.uk

Better briefings

Prepare a media pack containing facts and dispelling myths. Include local contacts from asylum and refugee organisations and send to journalists. It may be helpful to send such packs to other community figures such as MPs and councillors. This will help prevent inaccurate statements being repeated in the media and encourage positive comment. The Refugee Council should be able to help with this.

National Union of Journalists

Most journalists in the UK belong to the NUJ. Call the NUJ HQ 020 7278 7916 for contact names and numbers of branches in your local area, or just call the local papers and ask to speak to the 'NUJ MOC or FOC' (NUJ 'shop stewards' are known as 'Mothers' and 'Fathers of Chapel')

Remember - many journalists are equally concerned about the hostile coverage of asylum seekers.

To find out more about the NUJ's 'Refugees and Welcome Here' campaign, call RAM Regional Co-ordinator Terry Williams on 0121 588 6341.

COMMUNICATOR 2 WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

Print off, photocopy and distribute this page to network members, and build up a do-it-yourself use-of-the-media training kit.

‘PEG’ BOARD

The media always likes to 'hang' stories on a 'peg' – so it helps to keep your ears and eyes open for national or local events which can provide you, and the media, with a reason for running a positive story about refugees or asylum seekers.

See how you can use some of these forthcoming events to attract good coverage, instead of having to react to negative stories.

Remind your media contacts if it is happening near you. Let them know if any of the speakers has a local connection, or if anyone is going from your area. Suggest they arrange an interview.

Thursday 2 November
7pm, **Birmingham**
Assembly against Racism (BAAR)

Speakers Kumar Murshid (NAAR), Anne Pettifer (Jubilee 2000), Philip Williams (Refugee Council), barrister Ramby de Mello.
Venue: Birmingham Council House

For more information contact 0793 628 357

AA_R@compuserve.com

Saturday 4 November
11am assemble at **Embankment**
Speak Out against Racism - Hands around the Home Office

March to Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1
Speakers: Ladislav Balaz (Roma Europe), Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, Jeremy Hardy, Dr Evan Harris MP, Owain James (President NUS), Lee Jasper, Fazil

Kawani (Refugee Council), John McDonnell MP
Contact: *The Refugee Council* 0207 820 3000

Monday 6 November
Annual General Meeting of Refugee Council

Venue: London House, Mecklenburgh Square, London WC1N 2BA.
Keynote speech by Dennis McNamara, UNHCR Special Envoy to the former Yugoslavia and Albania
Contact: 020 7820 3032
jason.jackson@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Monday 6 November
Anti-Racism: From Words to Implementation

Third National UK Roundtable Against Racism & Xenophobia.
Venue: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, King Charles St. London SW1A 2AL
Speakers: Mike O'Brien MP, Beate Winkler (Director of EUMC), Sue George (Race Equality Unit HO.), Caude Moraes (MEP).
Contact: 020 7932 5272
secretariat@cre.gov.uk

Tuesday 7 November,
6-8.30pm

Celebrate the achievements of Refugees Online with Lyndall Sachs (UNHCR), Emily Buchanan (BBC), Gladys Jusu-Sherrif (Sierra Leone Women's Forum)

Venue: Freedom Forum, Stanhope House, Stanhope Place, London W2 (Marble Arch tube).

Book your invite from cathy@refugeesonline.org.uk
k Tel: 020 8685 9928

Thursday 9 November
International Day Against Fascism and Anti-Semitism Commemoration of the "Kristallnacht" pogrom, 1938.

What activities are you organising that might win media coverage? To find out what people in 29 European countries are doing see the **UNITED** website:
<http://www.united.non-profit.nl>.

Friday 10 November
What Price National Security - how free is the British Press?

Index on Censorship conference with David Shayler (former MI5), John Wadham (Liberty), Stephen Dorill (author), Tony Geraghty, Richard N. Taylor (*Guardian*), Rupert Allason (former MP, aka Nigel West).
Venue: The Freedom Forum, London W2.
Contact Henderson Mullin 020 7278 2313.

Monday 11 November
Angles on Asylum, Seminar organised by One World Broadcasting Trust.
Contact owbt@oneworld.org

Wednesday 22 November,
2-6pm

Refugee Legal Centre Annual Conference
Speakers: Prof. Guy S Goodwin-Gill (RLC President, Institute of European Studies, Oxford)
Venue: Great Hall, King's College, Strand Campus, London WC2.
Contact: 020 7378 172
manders@refugee-legal-centre.org.uk

Friday 1 & Saturday 2 December
4th European Conference on the Integration of Refugees

Venue: Athens, Greece.
For more details contact:
Tel: 00 301 3802 508,
email: gcr-29@gcr.gr

USEFUL WEBSITES

Authoritative information is vital if you want to be taken seriously by the media. The RAM Bulletin and website will try to keep network members informed about useful sources of data and stories.

Here are some websites you might like to check out – they could provide you with helpful background material for when you are being interviewed, or when issuing press releases.

Journalists should always check their sources – and so should you.

When quoting facts and figures always indicate your source.

Amnesty International:
www.amnesty.org

Diversity Online
www.diversity-online.org

European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia:
<http://www.eumc.at>

Human Rights Watch:
www.hrw.org

Index on Censorship:
www.indexoncensorship.org

Institute of Race Relations:
www.irr.org.uk

Kurdishmedia:
www.kurdishmedia.com

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC)
<http://www.ncadc.demon.co.uk/>

Press Complaints Commission:
www.pcc.org.uk

PressWise Trust:
www.presswise.org.uk

Refugee Council:
www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Refugees Online:
www.refugeesonline

UNHCR:
www.unhcr.ch

Please let me know what you have found most and least helpful in this Bulletin. Don't forget, I am relying on you to keep me up-to-date with your successes in the media so that others can benefit... Good luck.
Nazand Begikhani

The RAM Project is funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Barrow Cadbury Trust.