

RAM BULLETIN

Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Mass media Project

advice
information
research
& training
on media ethics



Promoting best practice in media representation of refugee and asylum issues

No.11 Aug 2001

Open letter to Lord Rooker

In the wake of the murder of Firsat Yildiz, PressWise Director Mike Jempson has urged Home Office Minister of State Lord Rooker to plough resources into improved communications for refugee organisations in dispersal areas.

In an Open Letter to the Minister, Jempson explains the RAM Project's concern with "the hostility and hysteria generated by ill-informed and sensational coverage".

He goes on: "Lack of reliable, accurate information has bedevilled the lives of those who have come to the UK seeking asylum - among them many exiled journalists who could themselves be playing an invaluable role in improving public understanding of the issues".

The letter calls for refugee groups to be funded for media work.

For the full text of the letter visit www.ramproject.org.uk, and send off your views to the Minister.

Spotlight on Glasgow murder media coverage

Asylum seekers protested outside the offices of the *Scottish Daily Record* in Glasgow this week about the newspaper's coverage of the murder of Firsat Dag/Yildiz.

Some coverage has clearly been based on speculation rather than fact. Local campaigners say this has only served to inflame the situation.

Michael Martin, Speaker of the House of Commons and MP for the part of Glasgow where Firsat died, has spoken out about some of the comments made in the media about the area.

RAM co-ordinator Terry Williams is talking to politicians, journalists, asylum-seekers and refugees and the organisations working on their behalf.

His report about the way the media has dealt with the murder, events leading up to it and what has

happened since, will be published in a special edition of the RAM Bulletin later this month.

Glasgow murder exposes media confusion

The murder in Glasgow of 22-year-old asylum-seeker Firsat Yildiz, and the instant angry response of refugees and their supporters in the area has sent the media into frenzy about who is to blame for what.

'MADNESS' shrieked Scotland's *Daily Record* (Tues 7 Aug) 'Refugees bring chaos to Glasgow; racist BNP yobs whip up violence - but boy could be a muggers' victim'.

Those were the just the front page headlines beside a picture of refugee protesters captioned 'Race hate backlash'.

The previous day 'BACKLASH: Race riots erupt after Turk is killed' was the front page headline, yet the *Record* had the temerity to run an editorial under the banner 'Hysteria only fuels racism' which ended 'Firsat's murder is bad enough. Don't make it worse. COOL IT!'

Elsewhere in the nationals the dead man, whose parents had yet to be informed of his murder, was described variously as a 'quiet' and 'non-violent' man, a 'Kurdish activist', and 'key figure in the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)'.

The *Daily Record* then jubilantly revealed (8 Aug) that he was actually 'a humble fruit and veg trader' seeking a better life - in other words 'merely' an economic migrant. As if that makes a difference when you are murdered.

Police and press had already begun to backtrack from earlier statements that this was an unprovoked racist attack.

Shock at the murder quickly turned to recriminations about the number being 'dispersed to Glasgow' - Why not Edinburgh? asked the *Glasgow Herald*.

One local resident told the *Daily Record* that the protest march was 'the last straw', claiming that young refugees took part in gang fights. He said locals were envious of the benefits received by asylum-seekers, a theme taken up by the media. Resentment about alleged 'preferential' treatment received by asylum-seekers became a stick with which the media sought to beat the local authority, refugee support agencies and the government.

The *Daily Mail* preferred to concentrate on the backlog of unaccompanied juveniles now being cared for in the Home Counties, but Tuesday's *Daily Express*, which gave little coverage to the murder and protest, did report that two Kurdish men had been set upon in Hull by 20 'yobs shouting racial abuse', and one had had his throat slit.

HANDLING THE MEDIA

Want to complain about negative media coverage?

Want to get more positive messages across?

Need help with media enquiries?

Call PressWise

0117 941 5889

We provide free advice,
and media training
at affordable prices.

Scots challenge media myths

A new Web site has been set up by the Scottish Asylum Seekers Consortium to support local authorities in their dealings with asylum seekers and refugees.

The Asylum Scotland site gives facts and figures about the sources and numbers of people seeking asylum. A quarterly magazine titled Asylum Briefing is also to be distributed to councillors and local authority officers in Scotland. Access the website site on www.asylumscotland.org.uk

RAM backs Refugee Media Agency

Thirty-five exiled journalists have joined forces in a new initiative to change media perceptions of refugees.

Supported by the RAM project, and launched during Refugee Week, the Refugee Media Agency (RMA) plans to work with the mainstream media to improve coverage of asylum and refugee issues, and will run media training courses to help members get to grips with the UK media.

The RMA is looking into ways of helping refugee journalists to find work placements and full-time jobs in the media.

RAM co-ordinator Terry Williams, who is helping the RMA to find accommodation and funding, says: "These journalists already understand the media and can help colleagues covering asylum issues in this country. Many of them need refresher training to bring their skills up to speed with UK media law and practice."

Most current RMA members live in the London area, but expressions of interest are coming from all over the country. The agency hopes to have its own website up and running soon.

The next meeting of the RMA is scheduled for Saturday 8 September at the Freedom Forum in London. *For the time being, exiled journalists wishing to join the RMA or attend the next meeting, should forward their details to the RAM Project on rma@presswise.org.uk.*

New Vision is big hitter

A website providing an online voice for refugees and asylum seekers has received well over 40,000 hits since its launch at the RAM Forum in February!

New Vision co-ordinator Abebe Gellaw says that this staggering level of e-traffic is clear testimony to the fact that people want to listen to the suppressed and neglected voices of refugees.

The site was set up with the support of the RAM Project and launched at our Refugees and the Media Forum in London. It is now part of the Refugee Media Agency.

Says Abebe: "New Vision signals the rise of a veritable voice for the

refugee community at large which as been denied fair treatment by the mainstream media.

"Anyone searching the web for information on refugees is likely to come across New Vision which echoes the voices of the marginalised in the UK."

Visit the site: www.newvision.org.uk
Contact Abebe: abe@abebe.net

MEDIA-WATCH

1. Holiday hint: Check for stowaways!

Newspapers are carrying stories warning drivers that they could be a 'soft target' for asylum seekers this summer. Officials warn this could result in a £2,000 fine.

Geoff Dossetter, of the Freight Transport Association, has advised holiday makers to check car boots and caravans - for stowaway asylum seekers - before returning from the Continent...

2. Punishment blocks

Under a Home Office crackdown, asylum seekers who fail to travel to an area allocated to them through the government's dispersal system will be made homeless and have their vouchers and benefits withdrawn within 48 hours. The rules have been denounced as 'totally inhumane' by a number of asylum groups.

The Guardian, 25 July 2001

Free training in website production

West London-based exiled journalists can enhance their 'on-line' skills at one of two courses run by Cathy Aichison of Refugees Online this autumn.

The 5-week courses are free and will happen on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings during Sept, Oct and Nov. Applications must be in by Monday 27 Aug.

Forms can be obtained from courses2000@refugeesonline.org.uk or ambromann@hotmail.com

Advocacy training for African refugees

The World University Service (WUS UK) is to host an advocacy training course for up to eighteen refugees from Africa.

It will take place during September and includes the chance

for refugees to meet and develop contacts with journalists, parliamentarians, civil servants and staff of human rights NGOs.

WUS UK is a charity working to access education for refugees. The course aims to help refugees enhance the development of open democracy in their home countries. *For more details call 020 7426 5825 or email: htrap@wusuk.org*

Union backs exiled journalist

A Pakistani journalist's campaign for asylum in the UK is being backed by the National Union of Journalists.

Parvaiz Akhtar Asim now lives in Leeds. He was arrested over 20 times before he fled to the UK. If he is returned to Pakistan he faces more intolerable pressure for doing his job as an independent journalist. *For information contact williams.t@blueyonder.co.uk*

Grants available for exiled academics

The Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA) wants to hear from exiles seeking funds to conduct research.

CARA is currently finalising awards for the coming academic year which can amount to as much as £8,000 per person.

The charity has been providing support for refugee academics since 1933. Minister of State Lord Rooker is to deliver a CARA lecture in London later this year. *For more details contact John Akker on 020 7836 8963; email: cara@academic-refugee.org. website www.academic-refugees.org*

Asylum book wins prize

A novel about the struggles of refugees seeking asylum has landed a top children's book prize.

The Other Side of the Truth by Beverley Naidoo took the prized Carnegie Medal which has rewarded a number of books tackling difficult subjects.

The author has criticised scenes she saw while researching her book as resembling the apartheid era in her native South Africa.

She has called on writers to tackle
issues such as race to give

youngsters a better understanding.

Cut out and keep COMMUNICATOR

Local letter-writing campaigns

One of the most effective ways of transmitting factual information and developing debate locally is to write to local (free and paid for) newspapers in response to articles or other letters from readers. (See Communicator 3 in the RAM Bulletin of 12 Jan 2001)

This can be particularly effective if it is co-ordinated - without 'giving the game away' by making it too obvious. Editors enjoy the cut and thrust of a lively letters page, but become very twitchy if they think the space is being abused by organised groups - and may well shut down correspondence or ban letters from 'known' conspirators'!

Nonetheless there is much to be gained from setting up a network of people willing to conduct a 'public conversation' through the columns of the local papers.

The Sheffield Asylum Media Group, set up by RAM a few months ago, is launching a local letter writing group to help counter negative media coverage about asylum seekers.

Members of the group have combined their experiences of writing letters to local newspapers for other community organisations to provide guidance for others who would like to try something similar in their areas.

- Meet regularly - about every four to six weeks - and have a hard-core of regulars who are willing to write letters about refugee issues.
- Make 'letter writing' a regular agenda item.
- Draw up a weekly rota of people who will take turns to buy local newspapers, check for colleagues letters which have been published and look for subjects to write about. Put the rota in the minutes.
- Remember that positive articles as well as negatives ones deserve a response and provide an opportunity for writers to present the correct information about refugees and asylum seekers.

- Keep a file of all letters which your group gets published and minute all successes. This encourages members of the group and attracts new recruits to the letter writing circle.
- Decide how you want to sign the letter. Do you want to do this as an individual or as a member of the group. Sometimes it is beneficial to mention the group - sometimes it is good for the newspaper readers to see that ordinary members of the public are concerned about particular issues.

The Sheffield group is co-ordinated by tireless campaigner and long-time RAM supporter Diane Gascoyne from the Northern Refugee Centre in Sheffield.

Says Diane: "This system spreads the cost and time needed to scan the newspapers and compose letters amongst members.

"Getting a whole range of names published gives the (accurate) impression that many members of the public are concerned about the asylum issue - not just one person with a 'hang up' about it.

"If something in the papers really annoys you (or really deserves praise) the person on monitoring duty can phone colleagues and encourage a mass response.

"The letters page of the local newspaper is one of the best read sections. Let's make sure that we use it to get positive messages over - rather than leave these pages to be dominated by negative opinions."

Diane Gascoyne can be contacted at the Northern Refugee Centre in Sheffield, tel 0114 275 3114; fax 0114 276 6807.

Let RAM know about your successes, and any difficulties you may have.

Remember PressWise was set up by 'victims of media abuse' and we are here to help with any formal complaints you may wish to make about inaccurate, unfair or biased coverage.

If you need help call us on 0117 941 5889.

'PEG' BOARD

Keep your ears and eyes open for events, which can provide you, and the media with a 'peg' on which to hang positive stories about refugees or asylum seekers.

Help to set the media agenda by generating stories rather than having to react to theirs.

Keep your media contacts informed about what is happening and why it is relevant for them.

**Monday 13 August
4.00 – 6.00pm
VIGIL IN MEMORY OF
FIRSAT YILDIZ**

A peaceful vigil in memory of the 22 year old asylum seeker stabbed to death in Glasgow, and for an end to the inhumane treatment of asylum seekers.

Venue: Outside the Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate. Nearest tube station St James' Park.

For more info, contact Milena Buyum (National Assembly Against Racism) on 0207 247 9907

**Saturday 18 and Sunday
19 August
RESPECT UNDER ONE
SKY 2001**

Respect, formally Bristol Anti-Racist Alliance, together with the Easton Community Festival, present a weekend-long celebration of harmony and unity within the community.

Venue: Saturday 18 August, Easton Community Centre, Kliburn Street, Easton, Bristol from 12 noon, with a procession along St Marks Road at 2pm. For more info, or if you can volunteer as a

steward, contact Sarah Reeves on 0117 954 1409
Venue: For Sunday 19 August the celebration moves to Eastville Park, Eastville, Bristol, from 12 noon with live music, a dance stage and a poetry/theatre stage. For more info, www.thisisbristol.com or www.venue.co.uk

Tuesday 11 September onwards

FREE TRAINING IN WEBSITE PRODUCTION

Umubano Community Group and CoreSys Consult, with Refugees Online, are offering two free part-time courses in website production and online journalism for refugees and asylum seekers with journalism or editorial experience.

Venue: North Kensington
Application forms must be completed by 27 August and are available from Ambrose Mann ambromann@hotmail.com or courses2001@refugeesonline.org.uk
For more info, www.refugeesonline.org.uk

USEFUL WEBSITES

www.ramproject.org.uk

Visit the new RAM Project website for news, information, and contacts.

Journalists should always check their sources – and so should you. When quoting facts and figures always indicate your source. Authoritative information is vital if you want to be

taken seriously by the media. Here are some websites you might like to check out.
1st festival of photography in Asia

www.chobimela.org

Academic Refugees
www.academic-refugees.org

Article 19
www.article19.org

Asylum Scotland
www.asylumscotland.org

BBC Right to Refuge
www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/index.html

Birmingham Race Action Partnership
www.brap.org.uk

Black Information Link Run by the 1990 Trust, a national Black organisation, this site includes sections on everything from art and culture, to the Stephen Lawrence campaign, and the environment.
www.blink.org.uk

Chinese in Britain Forum
www.chinese-forum.co.uk

Commission for Racial Equality
www.cre.gov.uk

Ethnic Minority Foundation
www.emf-cemvo.co.uk

European Council on refugees & Exiles (ECRE)
www.ecre.org

European Parliament
The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights is available at the web site of the EP:
www.eroparl.eu.int/

European Roma Rights Centre
www.errc.org/

Human Rights Portal for Bangladesh
www.banglariights.net

Immigration Law Practitioners' Association
www.ilpa.org.uk

Internet Centre Anti-Racism Europe
www.icare.to

Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI)
www.jcwi.org.uk

Migrant Media
www.homepages.poptel.org.uk/migrantmedia/docs/migrantmedia.htm

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC)
www.ncadc.org.uk/

Newcastle West: Tackling Racism Initiative
www.tri-west.org

NewsWorld
www.newsworld.co.uk

New Vision
www.newvision.org.uk

Positive Action in Housing
www.paih.org

Racial Harassment Organisation
www.racialharassment.org.uk

Refugee Education & Training Advisory Service (RETAS)
www.wusuk.org/

Refugees Online
www.refugeesonline.org.uk

Refugee Women's Legal Group www.rwlq.org.uk

Relief Line
www.reliefline.co.uk

Statewatch
www.statewatch.org

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**DEADLINE FOR NEXT
ISSUE
Friday 24th August**