

RAM BULLETIN

Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Mass media Project

advice
information
research
& training
on media ethics



No 12, Sept 2001

Promoting best practice in media representation of refugee and asylum issues

Ministers and media should invest in accurate information

The RAM Project was set up in 1999 as a modest attempt to staunch the flood of misinformation that is muddying the waters of rational debate and putting the rights of a minority at risk.

We formed sympathetic media networks in dispersal areas, launched the RAM Bulletin and website, ran the RAM Forum in February, helped to create the Refugee Media Agency to activate exiled journalists, and collaborated with refugee support organisations and the NUJ.

Yet despite acres of media coverage, both the British public and those seeking asylum here are still suffering from a lack of accurate information about the facts, figures and central issues in the refugee crisis facing the world.

What is required is sustained investment in information services - and a more open and thorough campaign to set the record straight, rather than offering knee-jerk reactions to xenophobia.

Asylum seekers and refugees have rights like everyone else - especially to know what will happen to them, and what humanitarian arrangements are in place once they are here.

British taxpayers have the right to know how the economy would benefit if their money were spent employing the extraordinary range of talents represented by those seeking refuge here rather than on punitive measures to keep people out or deport them to uncertain futures elsewhere.

We all have the right to know whether and how British foreign policy is dealing with the causes that drive people away from their homelands and families - war, natural disasters, debt, the impact of foreign investment, or the lack of it.

Three years ago the media ethics body PressWise warned that

making policy on the hoof - by reacting to sensational media stories - was a dangerous game that can have few beneficial consequences anywhere in Europe.

We take no satisfaction in being proved right by the murder of the Firsat Yildiz and the media hysteria that followed; the despicable abuse of the asylum issue by porn baron Richard Desmond to secure new readers for the *Express*; or the xenophobic furore led by the *Daily Mail* over UK asylum policies and French attitudes towards those seeking entry to Britain.

It is not too late for the Government and the Regional Consortia co-ordinating dispersal to recognise that much more time, money and effort needs to be spent on working with the media.

Lord Rooker has yet to reply to our letter, sent a month ago, calling for more resources to be invested in this approach. Meanwhile PressWise has renewed its efforts to get this message across

- by working with exiled journalists so that they can speak for themselves and their communities;

- by continuing to provide support to members of the RAM Project networks, who can supply journalists with accurate facts, and reliable contacts, positive stories and reminders about the contribution that earlier refugees have made to our communities;

- by encouraging local journalists to get accurate information through to the public about the men, women and children arriving in their area, and by producing challenging stories about the human, political and economic causes of the global exodus.

If you want to see a warmer welcome for those who have made the journey to these shores, get involved.

When people are fleeing for their lives, risking death to get here, and facing prejudice and hostility

when they arrive, the least we can all do is:

COMPLAIN about inaccurate or inflammatory media coverage;

WRITE to MPs about the spread of fear and prejudice it causes;

DEMAND to know more about Britain's role in the circumstances that are driving people to find a new life here.

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.*

Refugee Media Agency backed by Government cash

A Home Office grant of £6,800 will help develop the recently-formed UK Refugee Media Agency.

Over 30 exiled journalists worked with the RAM Project to set up the voluntary organisation. Now RAM has obtained funds from Home Office Minister David Blunkett to develop the group.

Project co-ordinator Terry Williams says: "This is good news. The money will help the group to set up an office, launch a web site and organise some training.

"David Blunkett has asked for a report on what we achieve. He will get that - and I hope he will consider further help for a group of refugee journalists who want to be part of changing media coverage and public understanding of the asylum issue."

Fury over Express 'asylum' headlines

Express journalists are among those horrified by the anti-asylum-seeker

headlines allegedly written as part of a 'crusade' by their new owner, Richard Desmond.

Starting with six front page splashes in a row, the Daily Express has sustained the crusade over three weeks, causing fury amongst refugee organisations, and consternation among responsible journalists.

Often the headlines have borne little relationship to the stories beneath them, some of which have delivered important information.

Desmond is said to be delighted to have at last found a topic with which to halt the paper's declining sales – sales went up with headlines like 'Asylum Invasion' and 'Asylum Out of Control' reinforcing fear and prejudice among the tabloid's readers.

But NUJ members on the paper have written to management protesting at this cynical exercise.

On August Bank Holiday the Express attacked asylum seekers who stay in the UK after initially being refused permission. Yet the law allows them the right to remain until any appeal has been heard.

Was it Desmond's sense of irony coming into play on Wed 5 Sept when his front page screamed 'Asylum Madness: Football Fans Ban – Home Office stops hundreds going to game,' when England were at home to Albania?

Crusade for fair media coverage - WRITE NOW!

The Ram Project is compiling a commentary for the media regulators about *The Daily Express* campaign, coverage of the killing of Firsat Yildiz, and media treatment of asylum seekers.

E-mail ram@presswise.org.uk or send your views to RAM, The PressWise Trust, EBC, Felix Road, Bristol BS5 0HE.

RAM in Wales

Project Co-ordinator Terry Williams will be among panellists facing questions on media coverage of asylum seekers at a seminar for press officers in Wales on Wednesday 19 September.

The media awareness day in Llandrindod Wells is organised by the Welsh Refugee Media Forum.

The event is for press officers from the statutory bodies as well as voluntary groups throughout Wales. *Details from Helen Buhaenko at hbujaenko@oxfam.org.uk*

Murder & the media

1. Complaints

People angry at the way parts of the media portrayed the young asylum seeker killed on a Glasgow housing estate are to take their protests to the Press Complaints Commission.

The Scottish *Daily Record* is singled out for criticism after it carried headlines such as 'Stabbed Turk Firsat conned his way in as an asylum seeker'.

The media ethics body PressWise is supporting the protestors, and condemns the inflammatory nature of much of the coverage, but suspects that the complaint may be rejected under the feeble terms of reference of the PCC.

At the time of the *Daily Record's* Aug 8 headline - 'Firsat invented a new identity as a Kurdish freedom fighter - in reality he ran a fruit and veg business' - the Turkish Embassy was releasing disputed details to the media. But what were Record readers supposed to conclude from its use of a photograph showing a young girl apparently 'arguing with Turks after Firsat's murder'?

2. NUJ probe

The Ethics Council of the National Union of Journalists is to investigate coverage of the killing.

Scottish members of the NUJ have been asked to submit their views, cuttings or tapes to the September meeting of the Council.

The NUJ has it has been running its own campaign in support of asylum seekers and refugees for more than 18 months.

Terry Williams, national co-ordinator for the RAM Project, is also vice-chair of the NUJ Ethics Council. He says: "Coverage of the death of Firsat Yildiz by certain sections of the media was appalling. The Ethics Council will want to know the extent of the problem and to confirm that none of our members were involved."

3. Vigil

Around 200 people attended a vigil in London for asylum seeker Firsat

Yildiz, stabbed to death on a Glasgow housing estate.

The vigil, organised by the National Assembly Against Racism and attended by members of Firsat's family, was broadcast live on the BBC *Newsroom Southeast*.

Lee Jasper, NAAR Secretary, told the gathering that the Government's dispersal policy had contributed to the rise of racism across Britain.

The PressWise RAM Project was represented by Abebe Gellaw from the UK Refugee Media Agency.

4. Succour

A top council officer has been appointed to try to reduce tension in Glasgow after the killing of Firsat Yildiz.

Dawn Corbett, Head of Corporate Policy, is now responsible for co-ordinating support services for asylum seekers in the city awaiting, reports the *Municipal Journal*.

Meanwhile Home Secretary David Blunket has frozen the settlement of asylum seekers on the Sitehill estate for a month.

Glasgow has already housed more than 4,000 asylum seekers as part of its contract with the National Asylum Support Service to find homes for around 7,500 people.

White flight

UK politicians apply double standards when British passport holders flee Zimbabwe according to *One World UK* news editor Sebastian Naidoo

He told *The Observer*: "The Government should stop scrambling to protect borders and turn its attention to protecting the vulnerable people who try to cross them. When its own citizens are at risk of persecution it leaps into action - as we can see with the evacuation plans for British passport holders fleeing Zimbabwe.

"But many others who've been victimised and manage to escape are forced into an illicit underworld of trafficking to bypass border controls.

"So we need legislation which re-opens borders with a 'presumption of innocence' test rather than the current presumption of fraudulence. All functions of the immigration service should be brought within the scope of the new Race Relations Act."

Cut-out-and keep COMMUNICATOR

Going on TV : Part 1

Q. How do I get ready ?

A. *You are always ready. You are only invited on TV because you know something others don't, or because the producer has decided that your views should be heard.*

Just make sure you know what the issues are; read the relevant report/s; and decide what two or three main points you want to make. Ask the researcher what sort of questions you are likely to be asked, and mentally rehearse your answers.

Now you really are ready.

Q. What should I wear ?

A. *On TV image is all. Audiences will form their first impression of you from what they see.*

Dress to suit the occasion — nothing too formal or too flamboyant — and make sure you feel comfortable in what you are wearing.

*You want people to **listen** to you, and not be distracted by unusual hair styles, high fashion, scruffy clothes, clashing colours, or flashy jewellery — especially large earrings that jangle or move and catch the studio lights.*

Q. Must I wear make-up ?

A. *If studio make-up is required (nowadays is it likely to be just a dusting with fine powder) it will be to your advantage.*

High colour, a shiny bald patch, or any gleam on your skin that might cause glare in the camera, could detract from your effectiveness on screen. Make up can also eradicate some of the more sinister undertones of a heavy 'five-o-clock shadow'.

TV also tends to 'f(l)atten' features, so don't be surprised if you look a little bulkier than you feel...

Q. Should I accept a drink ?

A. *Gone are the days when guests were liberally plied with alcohol before they went on TV; but you may be offered refreshments on arrival. Accept a non-alcoholic drink and visit the loo before you go on.*

Some people find that one small glass of wine helps to loosen the tongue, but alcohol can also loosen your self-control, especially if you are nervous...

*It will be hot under the studio lights, and your mouth will get dry. If you are taking part in a formal interview check that a glass of water will be on hand, and **sip** it only when you really need to.*

Q. Should I take visual aids?

A. *If you have a display or photographs (colour slides or black & white prints are preferable) that you think will help viewers to understand the points you want to make, or add something to your argument, let the researcher/producer know, and see them, in advance. They will probably want to create their own graphics — you should ask to see them before they are used, so you know they are not misrepresenting your views.*

*Remember cameras cannot do justice to crowded images or small writing - and viewers want to **see** things, not read them.*

*If you are taking graphics in they should be mounted on board, simple, clearly drawn and contain **all** the information needed to understand them clearly — a pie-chart without captions is a pretty useless visual aid.*

Q. Should I take notes ?

A. *You may find it handy to have a pad and pencil if you are taking part in a debate with several guests. Jot down in note form the main points YOU want to make, and the points made by others, with one or two key words to remind you how to respond.*

Don't shuffle your papers, and don't read out from them - just glance down when you need a reminder, preferably when the camera is not on you.

“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.

Saturday 8 September
2.00 - 4.00pm

HARINGEY LITERATURE FESTIVAL

Exiled Writers Ink! present a session with Amba Bongo, Ziba Karbassi and Alfredo Cordal.

Venue: Wood Green Library, High road, N22. Wood Green tube.

For more info, contact Jennifer Langer on 020 8458 1910 or

jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk

Tuesday 11 September

FREE TRAINING IN WEBSITE PRODUCTION

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

Venue: North Kensington
Contact: Ambrose Mann ambromann@hotmail.com or courses2001@refugeesonline.org.uk
More info

www.refugeesonline.org.uk

Thursday 13 September

Thursday 20 September

Thursday 27 September

10.30 - 12.30pm
REFUGEES GET CREATIVE!

Tell, write and share your stories and poems in this regular Thursday workshop organised by Exiled Writers Ink! You dont need perfect English and travel expenses can be paid. Venue: Homeless Action in Barnet, Asylum Seekers Centre, 36B Woodhouse Road, North Finchley, N12. Finchley Central tube. Buses: 82, 134, 260, 263 241

Contact Jennifer Langer 020-8458 1910 or jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk

Wednesday 19 September
10.00 - 3.30pm

WORKSHOP FOR PRESS OFFICERS

Organised by the Welsh Refugee Media Forum
Venue: Gwalia Council Chamber, Llandrindod Wells

For more info, contact Helen Buhaenko, hbuhaenko@Oxfam.org.uk

Saturday 22 September
2.00 - 4.00pm

HARINGEY LITERATURE FESTIVAL

Exiled Writers Ink! present Voices of Exiled Women Writers, with Darija Stojnic, Choman Hardi, Vida Kashizadeh and Nazanin Rakhshandeh.

Venue: Hornsey Library, Haringey Park, N8 (behind the Town Hall, Crouch End)

For more info, contact Jennifer Langer on 020 8458 1910 or jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk

Monday 1 October 7.30pm
POETRY CAFE

Regularly organised by Exiled Writers Ink! this meeting for the Poetry Cafe features poets Rhaman Dedaj and Rudolf Marku - from Kosova and Albania.

Venue: 22 Betterton Street, London WC2. Nearest tube Covent Garden.

Contact Jennifer Langer on 020 8458 1910 or jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk

Thursday 4 October 10.30 - 12.30pm

REFUGEES GET CREATIVE!

Tell, write and share your stories and poems in this regular Thursday workshop organised by Exiled Writers

Ink! You dont need perfect English and travel expenses can be paid. Venue: Homeless Action in Barnet, Asylum Seekers Centre, 36B Woodhouse Road, North Finchley, N12. Finchley Central tube. Buses: 82, 134, 260, 263 241

Contact Jennifer Langer on 020-8458 1910 or jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk

Friday 5 October 9.00am

SUPPORT TRADE UNIONIST MIKE TAYLOR!

Mike Taylor, a member of Bristol Branch NUJ, was convicted of organising a rally at Heathrow airport to stop the deportation flight to Iraq of Amanj Gafor, a mentally-ill Kurdish refugee. This rally organised by the NUJ and the Transport and General Workers Union, is in support for his retrial.

Venue: Isleworth Crown Court, 36 Ridgeway Road, Isleworth, Middlesex (nr Isleworth BR/Osterley Tube)

For more info, contact Mike Taylor on 07714 757 984

Saturday 6 October 12noon - 5.00pm

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC)

NATIONAL MEETING

The meeting will bring together new and old anti-deportation campaigns to share their experiences and plan future strategy. Travel expenses for campaigns (including supporters) will be paid by NCADC.

Venue: St Paul & St Silas church, Lozells Road, Birmingham

For more info, and to confirm your attendance, contact John O on 0121 54 6947 or ncadc@ncadc.org.uk

Tuesday 9 October
2.00 - 4.00pm

POETRY CAFE

A new free workshop organised by Exiled Writers Ink! for the Poetry Cafe invites Refugees and Exiles to tell, write and share their stories about London. Travel expenses can be paid.

Venue: 22 Betterton Street, London WC2. Nearest tube Covent Garden.

For more info, contact Jennifer Langer on 020 8458 1910 or jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk

USEFUL WEBSITES

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.

Visit the new RAM Project website www.ramproject.org.uk for news, information, and contacts and links to useful websites

Have you written to your MP demanding an end to the voucher scheme? To find out the name of your local MP, call 020 7219 4272 or visit www.whereonearth.com/commons

Please download the printed version of this Bulletin and distribute it locally. DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE Monday 24 Sept Send information and stories to bulletin@presswise.org.uk

TIME FOR SATIRE?

How long will it be before there are more undercover journalists tracing asylum escape routes than genuine asylum seeker