

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 13, Oct 2001

PressWise challenges PCC over prejudicial coverage

It is time Press Complaints Commission Chair Lord Wakeham reminded editors to avoid prejudicial or pejorative references to people's race, religion and colour, says UK media ethics charity The PressWise Trust.

PressWise Director Mike Jempson made his approach to the PCC as evidence mounts that Muslims in Britain, have born the brunt of the backlash to the atrocities in America, with attacks on mosques, physical assaults and verbal abuse.

"Clause 13 of the newspaper industry code is explicit about coverage that generates discrimination," he says, "But only named individuals are eligible to complain. Generalised derogatory references escape the code – an issue that PressWise has long campaigned about."

"Technically general complaints, about the misrepresentation of religious and ethnic groups fall outside the remit of the PCC," says Jempson. "However Lord Wakeham has issued timely warnings to editors in the past. It is time for him to do so again."

"The Ministry of Defence was quick to issue a D-notice warning to prevent revelations about military strategy to protect service personnel. The PCC should issue similar warnings to protect innocent people from violence here."

"Relatively few individuals have been singled out in the press, and those that have – by having their photographs appear alongside scare stories, for instance – may be unaware of what forms of redress are open to them," says Jempson.

"If there is to be some semblance of mutual support at a time when everyone's nerves are on edge, anyone concerned about the nature of media coverage should be

making their feeling know – to editors and the PCC."

On 19 September PressWise urged people to stay calm and complain rather than to keep quiet and give succour to bigots.

The Sun and *Mirror* have sought to quell public disquiet with editorials urging restraint, but the nature of much current coverage is likely to generate fear and hatred.

The Commission for Racial Equality issued its own warning: "Journalists and editors must balance news value with the need to portray all communities in the UK fairly and avoid coverage which is based on racial stereotypes or unfounded misconceptions."

The PCC reported a brief upsurge in complaints in the immediate aftermath of the 11 September tragedy – mostly about insensitive coverage – but says the number of complaints has dwindled.

Anyone needing assistance with complaints should contact The PressWise Trust on 0117 941 5889 or pw@presswise.org.uk.

Links to all the media regulators can be found on the Trust's website: www.presswise.org.uk

CALLING EXILED JOURNOS

The RAM Project and the Refugee Media Agency are developing training and work opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers with experience in the print & broadcast media.

**Simply send names, tel & fax numbers, postal & email addresses to RMA
c/o PressWise, 38 EBC, Felix Road, Bristol BS5 0HE
Tel 0117 941 5889; Fax 0117 942 5848; Email: rma@presswise.org.uk**

Exiled journalists launch website

Refugee journalists have launched a web site www.ukrma.org to provide news about their activities and information for journalists covering asylum and refugee issues.

The UK Refugee Media Agency – set up with help from the PressWise RAM project – hopes to open an office in West London with start-up money from a Home Office grant.

For more information contact Helene Lembanaka on pembe42@hotmail.com

Exiled journalists needed to investigate media

Article 19, the international freedom of expression group is looking for exiled journalists to interview refugee communities about media coverage.

It requires a short-term, part-time commitment, with some travel, all expenses paid and a modest fee.

Interested? Contact Bethan Grillo 0207 278 9292 or email bethan@article19.org

NUJ takes on Express bosses

The National Union of Journalists chapel (branch) at *The Daily Express* has voted to take the newspaper to the Press Complaints Commission over its infamous August coverage of asylum seekers.

The Express Chapel is backed by the NUJ Ethics Council, which protects and promotes standards in the media, and PressWise.

The Daily Express ran successive front page leads on asylum issues with sensational, emotive headlines over reports that were often quite reasonable.

The NUJ Ethics Council has also complained to the PCC about the way some sections of the Scottish media covered the killing of a young asylum seekers in Glasgow.

This action by the NUJ is an indication of how strongly the union believes that media coverage of asylum issues must change.

Media workers against war

Journalists in the UK were among the first to organise demonstrations

and public meetings in London urging the government to use diplomatic means rather than rely on warfare to deal with the threats from extremists.

Prime Minister singles out asylum seekers

Prime Minister Tony Blair's announcement that the Government plans to examine asylum laws to "prevent possible abuse by terrorists" could heighten hostility towards refugees and asylum seekers, especially in wartime. His statement on 'Breakfast with Frost' (Sun 30 Sept) came just days after he had made it clear that Muslims in the UK should have nothing to fear.

The singling out of asylum laws runs the risk of exacerbating the backlash against people only seeking safety in the UK.

The media have been quick to pick up on the asylum trail as a route used by those intent on doing harm in Britain.

Unsurprisingly anxieties have been expressed that the public may not respond to a media appeal for funds to help with the refugee crisis spawned by military retaliation. *Donations to Oxfam can be made via 0845 303 0023 or www.oxfam.org.uk/afghanistan*

Midlands voucher campaign hits media

Oxfam's campaign against the asylum voucher scheme prior to the Party conference season drew media attention in the West Midlands.

Newspapers and local radio followed up on an open letter signed by around 50 West Midlands refugee organisations, religious leaders and trade unions calling for cash to replace vouchers.

Interviews allowed opportunities to explain the campaign and present positive information about refugees and asylum seekers.

Suicides follow asylum refusal

Thirty-five year old Nassar Ahmed from Eritrea was found hanged in a house at Nelson, Lancashire, which he shared with another asylum seeker. He had fled the conflict in

Ethiopia, reports the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph*, and shortly before his death he was informed that his application for asylum had been refused.

A Kosovan asylum seeker whose application for asylum had also been refused, drowned in the English channel, reports the *Liverpool Echo*, after he had been put on board a cross-Channel ferry.

Campaign on mental health

Many asylum seekers have mental health needs as the result of experiences which forced them to flee their homelands. Others find their mental health is harmed by feelings of hostility and isolation.

Use the media on and around World Mental Health Day, 10 October, to highlight this issue. This year's theme includes growing concern about suicide.

If you want advice on how to get the best results contact RAM co-ordinator Terry Williams on ram@presswise.org.uk or ring 0121 588 6341

Use skills of UK refugees

The Sunday Express recently noted that more than 55 countries have been targeted by the Department of Education's recruitment campaign to bolster UK public services – with nurses and teachers high on the list..

A letter writing campaign to local papers and MPs could highlight the fact that thousands of educated and trained refugees already in the UK are prevented from working.

Why aren't they being targeted by the recruitment campaign?.

FREE training in asylum and immigration advice

Refugee community and voluntary organisations needing help with the complexities of UK immigration law and procedures can benefit from a series of free, accredited courses.

The courses are being organised around the country by a consortium of refugee support groups.

Applications must be in by 31 October. Spaces will be limited, and applicants must complete a questionnaire.

Contact Deirdre Gilchrist (020 7211 1584, deirdre.gilchrist@oisc.gov.uk) or Claire Redding (020 7211 1551

Arts focus on refugee life

Organisers of an arts event about life in London want hear from refugees willing to talk about how they arrived in the capital. The 'Welcome to the Story' event at the Institute of Contemporary Arts on the first Monday of every month offers Londoners the chance to tell their stories in the relaxed environment of the ICA bar. Says Andrew Missingham, ICA Director of Performing Arts: "London is such a dramatic place to live with such diverse people and experiences to draw on. Even if we only touch on a tiny fraction of the stories that are created and lived here every day, we're in for some astounding and surprising nights." *If you would like to take part contact the UK Refugee Media Agency via pembe42@hotmail.com or ring Terry Williams on 0121 588 6341.*

'Reporters sans bureau'

Reporters Sans Frontiers, which campaigns on behalf of journalists under threat around the world, desperately needs a new UK base. Its office near Marble Arch has been closed, because the US-funded Freedom Forum is retrenching operations after losing money in the Wall Street crash after 11 Sept. Offers of accommodation in London welcomed. *Contact pembe42@hotmail.com*

Remembering all victims of oppression

Prime Minister Tony Blair says Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January "promotes a democratic and tolerant society - one that respects and celebrates diversity and is free of the evils of prejudice and racism."

It is not just an occasion to remember the millions of Jewish people persecuted and murdered by the Nazis. It also reminds us that racism is still widespread – witness the growing numbers of people fleeing terror and oppression.

Now is the time to contact your local steering group and help plan events for the new year.

Details from Peter Smith 020 7664 3356.

Cut out and keep COMMUNICATOR

READING BETWEEN THE LINES

*You might be forgiven for imagining that David Blunkett had resolved all the anomalies and injustices in the current asylum process, judging from media coverage of his speech to the Labour Party Conference on 3 October, **Robina Qureshi**, Director of Glasgow-based, Positive Action in Housing, invites us to read between the lines.*

Assumptions are being made by some newspapers that David Blunkett is going to scrap **vouchers**, in fact he has given nothing away about the future of vouchers.

Around the time that Firsat Dag's murder drew attention to the plight of asylum seekers in Glasgow, *The Observer* proclaimed on its front page that Blunkett would scrap vouchers, later the story changed to 'reviewing vouchers'. All that he has now said is that he "hopes to earn the Party's trust when he makes his announcement of his overhaul of the asylum and immigration system at the end of October."

The solution is to end vouchers, restore cash and a right to a basic level of income equal to other citizens.

Blunkett states that he will end routine **imprisonment** of asylum seekers but open up more 'detention' centres, yet there is no difference between the two. In both security guards lock you up (women, children as well) behind barbed wire. You are allowed no outside contact to log complaints about conditions or make social links.

Blunkett has given nothing away about how **dispersal** will change. Will asylum seekers be given choice about where they are located?

If Firsat Dag, or any of the refugees who have been attacked after being dispersed, had been allowed choice about where to go - to seek support from relatives or contacts, or 're-disperse' individually themselves through housing associations or councils outwith the NASS contract - perhaps they would have been less easy targets for the racists in our midst.

Britain isn't getting any younger. It needs new young immigrant blood to make up for the forecast shortage of young people to look after the older generation in the decades to come.

The Home Secretary confirmed his plans to introduce a new **work permit system**, but confuses economic migrants with asylum seekers. He treats refugees like potential criminals with all the talk of detention, work permits (suggesting refugees are really economic migrants) and the need to gauge the size of the black economy because he believes there are "hundreds of thousands" of illegal migrants working in Britain.

If you are seeking refuge because of persecution in your own country, which self respecting refugee is going to notify the authorities of an intention to leave by claiming a work permit, especially if they fear the authorities knowing their intention to leave in the first place?

And how do you apply for a work permit in a country like Afghanistan there is no British embassy?

Besides, which refugee would want to forgo their right to asylum under the Geneva Convention in favour of a lottery-style application for one of an annual quota of 40,000 work permits? Would their right to asylum still stand if they were turned down? Will we end up with a two-tier system with skilled asylum seekers getting in and the unskilled being told to stay away and die.

Perhaps David Blunkett would be taken more seriously if he had scrapped the rule that stops asylum seekers working when they first enter, and if he had announced a programme to utilise the skills of asylum seekers (doctors, engineers, journalists, technicians) who are already here.

Asylum legislation as it stands makes it almost impossible for genuine refugees to get in, so why the 'get tough' stance? The 'give them vouchers and bad housing' approach which is intended to deter asylum seekers from Britain is not working, the numbers trying to enter are increasing.

Blunkett should accept that we have a skills shortage and that asylum seekers have a role to play. If asylum-seekers are allowed to work and their claim fails, at least they can move on with a degree of financial stability, rather than letting them languish on sink estates exposed to violence and accusations of being scroungers.

Refugees have an economic role to play in Britain's future.

Robina Qureshi
Director, Positive Action In Housing
0777 332 1727 or 0141 353 2220

**It's YOUR
Bulletin**

The RAM Bulletin is distributed electronically to over 800 individuals and organisations every month. It is then passed on through E mail and hard copies to a wide range of networks.

If you want your story or letter published or details of an event to go into Peg Board section Email anna@presswise.org.uk now! Or ring Anna on 0117 941 5889.

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

Tuesday 9 October
6 – 10pm

**MIDDLE ASIAN
POETRY NIGHT**

Organised by the Afghanistan Culture and Arts Association
Venue: Hammersmith and West London College, London W14.
For more info, contact Mayvand Faqir Ahmad 07950 578065

Tuesday 11 October
2.00 – 4.00pm

**POETRY CAFE –
VOICES IN A
STRANGE CITY**

Workshops for refugees with Shireen Pandit.

Travel expenses paid, free refreshments.

Venue: Homeless Action in Barnet, Asylum Seekers Centre, 36b Woodhouse Road, North Finchley, N12
For more info, contact Jennifer Langer on 020 8458 1910 or jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk

Tuesday 16 October

**POETRY CAFE –
HOME IS WHERE THE
HEART IS**

Free creative writing workshops for all exiles. Travel expenses paid.

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

For more info, contact Shaun on the_habit_of_art@yahoo.com

Tuesday 16 October
5.30 - 7.00pm

**SPEAK OUT
AGAINST RACISM -
DEFEND ASYLUM
SEEKERS
CAMPAIGN**

Vigil at the Home Office. Speakers include Fazil Kawani (Asylum Rights Campaign), Tony Young (Dep Gen Sec, CWU), Andy Gilchrist (Gen Sec FBU), Simon Hughes MP, Maryam Namazie (International Federation of Iranian Refugees) and many others.

Please bring candles
Venue: Outside the Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, SW1

For more info, contact 020 7247 9907 or mobile 07879 612 234

Thursday 18 October
2.00 – 4.00pm

**POETRY CAFE –
VOICES IN A
STRANGE CITY**

Workshops for refugees with Shireen Pandit.

Travel expenses paid, free refreshments.

Venue: Homeless Action in Barnet, Asylum Seekers Centre, 36b Woodhouse Road, North Finchley, N12
For more info, contact Jennifer Langer on 020 8458 1910 or jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk

Tuesday 23 October
2.00 – 4.00pm

**POETRY CAFE –
WHERE THE HEART
IS**

Free creative writing workshops for all exiles.

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

For more info, contact shaun on the_habit_of_art@yahoo.com

Saturday 27 – Sunday
28 October

**STUDENT ACTION
FOR REFUGEES
(STAR) NATIONAL
CONFERENCE**

An opportunity to learn about refugee issues, meet like-minded people and be inspired to take action!

Open to all students.
Venue: Nottingham University

For more info, email info@star-network.org.uk or ring 020 7820 3006

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.

Article 19

www.article19.org

**Institute of
Contemporary Arts**

www.ica.org.uk

**National Union of
Journalists**

www.nuj.org.uk

**Office of Immigration
Services**

Commissioner

www.oisc.gov.uk

Oxfam

www.oxfam.org.uk

**Positive Action in
Housing**

www.paih.org

**Press Complaints
Commission**

www.pcc.org.uk

**UK Refugee Media
Agency**

www.ukrma.org

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

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