

RAM BULLETIN

Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Mass media Project

Promoting best practice in media representation of refugee and asylum issues

No.14, Nov 2001

NewsWorld 2001 [Barcelona](#)

EXILE ON MEDIA STREET

The Challenge of Reporting Refugees

The PressWise RAM Project is putting media coverage of refugees and asylum-seekers centre-stage at the biggest annual gathering of the world's news executives, in Barcelona on 15 November.

PressWise Director **Mike Jempson** will speak at a special session chaired by **Ann MacMillan**, London Bureau Chief of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, with Iranian producer/director **Joe Ghavimi**, who worked undercover on *C4's Bloody Foreigners* documentary, **Rupert Colville** Media Relations UNHCR, and **Max Uechtritz** Director, News & Current Affairs, Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

They will examine the extent to which the rights of asylum-seekers, internally displaced people and refugees are catered for by the media, and consider how broadcasters can communicate the complexities of their amazing stories without losing audiences or exacerbating internal and international tensions.

50 sign up to RMA

Membership of the RAM-backed UK-Refugee Media Agency has risen to more than 50 people.

Later this month the RMA plans to open an office in Acton, London. It will act as a drop-in centre for exiled journalists. An extensive training programme for members is scheduled for the new year.

The project is being funded through a Home Office grant to the RAM Project. The RMA has been invited to join the Home Office's Positive Images working group which, like RAM, seeks to improve media coverage of asylum seekers and refugees.

RMA membership forms from Anna Kelson; rma@presswise.org.uk

Few editors sign up against Islamophobia

The *Daily Mirror* and the *Financial Times* are the only two national papers whose editors have so far signed up to a Pledge in support of religious tolerance and against Islamophobia launched in the House of Commons on 5 November.

Pledge organiser Sher Khan of the Islamic Society of Britain said he was still waiting to hear from some editors but the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* had both indicated that they would not. He says they agree in principle with the pledge, but also as a matter of principle they do not sign documents.

Nonetheless the newspapers did run headlines on the refusal of Tory leader Ian Duncan Smith to sign up. He preferred to issue a statement of support, and attend an evangelical Christian event instead of the Pledge launch at the start of Islam Awareness Week.

What a pity it took the atrocities in the US and the bombing of Afghanistan to galvanise opinion formers against Islamophobia.

You may wish to approach editors on your preferred national and local papers, radio and TV stations to see what stance they have taken on the Pledge – and keep challenging those who appear to be in breach of the spirit if not the letter of the pledge.

The full text can be found at www.isb.org.uk/homepage.htm
To sign up, or for more information contact info@isb.org.uk
Tel: 0845 087 8766

New Vision wins Award

Abebe Gellaw, founder of the RAM-backed NewVision website that gives voice to refugees, has been awarded £2,000 in the Champions for Change Millennium Award Scheme.

Abebe will devote £1,600 of his winnings to commission contributions for the website from refugee journalists. The remaining £400 will go on publicity and administration costs.

"I'm pleased that our efforts are now being acknowledged as worthy of support," says Abebe.

"I believe that refugees can unlock their potential if they are given all the necessary support to tackle social exclusion."

Contact Abebe on 07931 905 541
e-mail abe@newvision.org.uk
www.newvision.org.uk

Media opposition to war

Media Workers Against the War have relaunched the organisation that sought to consolidate opposition to previous conflicts in which the UK has been involved.

An extremely useful website has been established, and speaker meetings addressed by leading journalists have taken place, including pickets outside BBC Broadcasting House.

MWAW meets at 6.30pm every Monday night at the University of London Union, Malet St, WC1.
To join or for more information visit www.mwaw.org, or email info@mwaw.org, tel 020 7263 0200

BBC war guidelines aired

The PressWise Trust has published the instructions issued to BBC staff about their conduct in handling war reports during the current conflict.

Written by former Broadcasting Standards Commission Director Stephen Whittle, the guidelines can be viewed on the PressWise website.

If you believe BBC coverage is in breach of the guidelines, or if you feel they could be improved, contact the BBC or PressWise.
Email.pw@presswise.org.uk

Government U-turn – the devil is in the detail

Government plans to scrap vouchers, issue ID cards for asylum seekers and accommodate them in reception centres have been welcomed by MPs and the media.

The *Express* even claimed the U-turn as a victory for its own brand of campaigning journalism!

The proposals may be a step forward, but refugees and organisations working on their behalf have expressed reservations. It will take two years to phase out the hated voucher system and assurances have been given that police will not be able to demand that asylum-seekers produce ID cards.

Reception centres will need to meet all the needs of asylum seekers - as well as being protected from attack. Asylum seekers will be able to come and go as they please - but the Government must also deliver a fair and fast programme of assessing application and appeals. *Commentaries on the Blunkett proposals can be found on the websites of the Refugee Council and NCADC, among others.*

Guarded welcome

Independent political commentator Don Macintyre gave a guarded welcome to the Blunkett proposals in a column headed 'Now we all understand what drives people to seek asylum'. (30 Oct 01)

Citing media images of Afghans fleeing their war-torn country, he hoped that public attitudes towards refugees would improve.

Supporting the stance taken by his colleague, and PressWise patron, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown the previous day, he argued that if the quality of the new review system and reception centres and the calibre of staff match the Home Secretary's rhetoric things should get better for those who seek safety in the UK.

He also welcomed the 'green card' proposals to offer work instead of pillorying 'economic migrants'.

But he ended with a warning. *'There was never a good reason for unjustly turning down genuinely based asylum claims. In a climate where we all know more about the dangers that drive people to desert their homes for distant countries, there is even less excuse.'*

Bosses express fury at journo's complaint

Lawyers at the *Daily Express* are preparing a response to complaints about the paper's infamous coverage of asylum seekers and refugees day after day during August.

A complaint was submitted to the Press Complaints Commission by the *Daily Express* NUJ Chapel and the Ethics Council of the National Union of Journalists.

Insiders claim the newspaper's bosses were furious when the PCC's request for a response landed on the editor's desk.

More details in the next Bulletin.

Basic necessities needed in Bristol

Bristol Race Equality Council newsletter has appealed to the public for donations of toiletries, food, toys, phone cards and other basic necessities to assist destitute asylum-seekers in the South West.

Over the last year about 500 people and their families have sought asylum in the region, and another 300 have been moved there under the dispersal scheme. About 400 of the total are housed in Bristol. Some fear abuse or attack following the stabbing of a young refugee not far from the RAM Project office earlier this year.

The situation is particularly desperate for those with relatives in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries.

For more information contact Elinor Harris, Refugee Action, Senate House, 36 Stokes Croft, B1 3QD Tel 0117 989 2100

Combating racism in Birmingham

RAM Co-ordinator Terry Williams is to speak about working with the media at a one day conference on responding to racism organised by the Searchlight Educational Trust at the Drum Arts Centre, Potters Lane, Aston, Birmingham, on 21 November 2001.

RAM ran a similar workshop at the SET's Bristol event last year. *Details on 020 7681 8647*

Welshing on asylum?

According to the *South Wales Echo*, 63% of people in South Wales believe Britain should no longer take asylum seekers.

Based on a survey of 1,000 people, the newspaper claims that over 40% say Britain has "taken enough asylum seekers and should no longer accept applications."

A further 23%, it claims, believe "Britain should not accept asylum seekers and those in the country should be encouraged to return home". However 36% agreed that "Britain should continue to take asylum seekers."

More than 40% of people under 20 and 56% of 20-40 year-olds felt Britain should continue to take asylum seekers. But larger proportions of the 40-60 year age groups believe Britain should no longer accept applications from asylum seekers, and just over half the over-60s feel Britain has taken in enough.

FACT: The overwhelming majority of the world's refugees are in the least developed countries. Africa hosts 27.5%, and Europe 17.4%. Some 4 million refugees are currently being accommodated by Pakistan.

Trouble-shooting... ...in Wales

The Welsh National Assembly has seconded Marilyn Enfield, currently deputy director of Race Equality First, to the Welsh Refugee Council (WRC). Her task is to sort things out at the WRC, according to the *Western Mail* which first highlighted problems at the Council earlier this year.

...and Birmingham

The *Express and Star* reports that two people were arrested after an angry disturbance at the Refugee Council offices in Birmingham. Police escorted about 20 people from the premises after a sit-in following asylum seekers' concern about being moved from the West Midlands to other parts of the UK.

Student STARS!

Student Action for Refugees, now has more than 20 groups operating around the country - and another five in the process of being set up.

The RAM Project was at their recent AGM at Nottingham University and ran a media workshop. STAR members are usually among the first people to sign up for the events we organise.

They are keen to make the best use of the media and produce an excellent newsletter.

For more information, contact STAR at info@star-network.org.uk Tel: 020 7820 3006

CUT-OUT-AND-KEEP COMMUNICATOR

Going on TV : Part 2

Q. How relaxed should I be?

A. *Being too 'laid back' can come across as arrogance on screen. As the countdown starts to your item, take a deep breath or three and try to be calm.*

Sit up, sit still, and adopt a friendly, helpful attitude.

If you are sitting in an easy chair, try not to sprawl backwards — either sit yourself back in the chair and as upright as possible, or sit as comfortably as you can on the edge. If you are sitting at a table, place your arms on it and lean forward slightly.

If you are wearing a jacket, don't let it ruck up around your shoulders — the best solution is to pull it down at the back and sit on the tail as you take your seat.

Your demeanor will depend upon the nature of the subject at issue, but try to keep a smile in your eyes and your voice.

*Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself if the questioning gets hostile, **but don't lose you cool.***

Remember:

- *too stern a tone can be as off-putting, as anger or intolerance;*
- *over-confidence registers as arrogance;*
- *nervous fidgeting makes you look shifty.*

Q. Who should I talk to?

A. *Always respond to the questioner — it looks insincere if you direct your answers elsewhere.*

You are in conversation with the public through the presenter, whose job it is to ask the questions the public might want answers to.

Show other guests respect, especially if you want the audience to be sympathetic towards you — watch them with interest when they are speaking.

The audience at home may not like your adversaries, but you don't win arguments by being rude.

If there is a studio audience, acknowledge their presence and their reactions and show pleasure especially if you get a laugh,

or applause, but don't milk it, and don't 'play to the gallery'.

Q. Should I speak my mind?

A. *That is what you are there for — to inform, educate and entertain — but remember the laws concerning defamation (libel), contempt of court etc, still apply, so be careful about what you say, you may have to prove your case in court.*

Q. Should I ignore the cameras?

A. *The simple answer is yes, although sometimes it is difficult. You never know which cameras are 'watching' you, and they are quick to focus attention on idiosyncrasies — like nervous hand movements — so never forget that they are there.*

Few people can 'speak to camera' without looking glazed (because you don't know how to focus) and insincere, so avoid the temptation.

Remember that even the most experienced presenter can get caught addressing the wrong camera.

Q. How do I perform in a studio debate?

A. *Try to look alert and interested in what others are saying even when you think you are not on camera.*

Don't watch the monitors (which will usually be above you head).

You will be told how to signal your interest in speaking (usually by raising your hand), but most shows are fairly heavily 'scripted' and managed by the director through the presenter's earpiece, so the presenter knows who to call on next, (and what they are likely to say).

Try not to 'bully' your way to attention but keep an eye out for the floor manager - when the presenter is signaled that time is running out, try and seize the opportunity to get in a final point.

The last word always leaves a lasting impression.

'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.

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 or send photographer/film crew.

Friday 9 November 12.30pm SALFORD WELCOMES REFUGEES

Following a recent attack on a refugee hostel in Salford, the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers has organised this photo event. Messages of support will be read out and collections made.

Venue: Outside Salford Advertiser Offices, Church St Eccles Precinct

For more info, contact manchester@defend-asylum.org

Friday 9 November 9.00pm – 2am

MUSICAL AND CULTURAL EVENING

Organised by Birmingham Artists Against the War. Venue: Drum Arts Centre, 144 Potters Lane, Aston, Birmingham

For more info, contact artistsagainstar@hotm.com

Friday 9 - Thursday 15 November

FIRST ANNUAL KURDISH FILM FESTIVAL

Festival bringing together feature films, documentaries and shorts, from all over the world, made by Kurdish film makers or about Kurdish issues. There will also be discussions with film makers, panels and workshops. Venue: Rio Cinema, 107 Kingsland High Road, London E8

For more info, visit www.riocinema.org.uk

Saturday 10 November 2.00pm

HUDDERSFIELD ANTI-WAR DEMONSTRATION

Assemble St George's Square beside Huddersfield railway station

For more info, contact Tom Twiss through plug@stopit.org.uk or tel 07949 079 239

Saturday 10 and Sunday 11 November

INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL FOR PEACE, JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Organised by the National Civil Rights Movement. Confirmed speakers include Tony Benn, Michael Mansfield, Herman Ousley, Martin Narey, Gareth Peirce, Gary Younge and many more.

Venue: University of London, Malet Street, London WC1
For more info, visit www.ncrm.org.uk/festival/

Wednesday 14 November 6.30 - 9.00pm

'THE LINE'

A collaborative exhibition of paintings, animation, poetry and music with Andrea Tierney, Saadi Yousef and Ahmed Mukhtar. Exhibition will then run until 28 November.

Venue: Kufa Gallery, 26 Westbourne Grove, London W2 5RH

For more info, contact Andrea Tierney a.tierney@virgin.net

Wednesday 14 November 7.30pm

COALITION AGAINST RACISM PUBLIC LAUNCH Unite to stop the BNP in Oldham

The public launch of a campaign to stop the BNP gaining council seats in next May's local elections. Venue: Queen Elizabeth Hall, Oldham Civic Centre
For more info, contact the National Assembly Against Racism on 020 7247 9907

Thursday 15 November EXILE ON MEDIA STREET The Challenge of Reporting Refugees

The RAM Project session at the biggest annual gathering of the world's news executives – NewsWorld 2001, in Barcelona. Chair Ann MacMillan, London Bureau Chief, CBC; Iranian producer/director Joe Ghavimi; Rupert Colville, Media Relations, UNHCR; PressWise Director Mike Jempson; and Max Uechtritz Director, News & Current Affairs, ABC. Venue: Salon Safir, Fira Palace Hotel, Barcelona.
For more info, check out www.newsworld.co.uk

Sunday 18 November 12 noon

NATIONAL DEMO TO STOP THE WAR

Called by Stop The War Coalition and supported by CND.

Venue: Hyde Park, London
For more info, telephone 07951 235 915 or visit www.stopwar.org.uk

Monday 19 November 7.30pm

VOICES OF EXILE

Premiere of a major choral work by Richard Blackford with the work of exiled writers. Venue: Festival Hall, Belvedere Road, London SE1. Nearest tube Waterloo
For more info, visit <http://www.rfh.org.uk/>, to book tickets call the box office on 020 7960 4242.

Wednesday 21 November 10.00 - 5.00pm

RESPONDING TO RACISM

Organised by The Searchlight Educational Trust, speakers include Terry Williams, RAM co-ordinator. Venue: The Drum Arts Centre 144 Potters Lane, Aston,

Birmingham
For more info, phone Searchlight on 020 7681 8647 or e-mail community@searchlight.demon.co.uk

Sunday 2 December 7.00pm
SEPT 11th AND ALL THAT: 'Can the horizons of the intellect traverse the landscapes of devastation?' Celebrated writers, exiled and non-exiled will present and discuss their work related to Sep 11th, followed by exiled 'artists' in the broadest sense grappling with this painful and difficult subject. Tickets £5, £2 for refugees. Venue: SOAS, University of London, Brunei Gallery, Russell Square.
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. Here are some websites you might like to check out.

Islamic Society of Britain
www.isb.org.uk

Media Workers Against the War
www.mwaw.org

New Vision
www.newvision.org.uk

UK-Refugee Media Agency
www.ukrma.org

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