

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. 16, Jan 2002

Media regulator: asylum-seekers are not 'illegals'

The Advertising Standards Authority has ruled that it was racist, offensive and misleading for a polling company to send out a FAX headed 'Asylum-seekers' and then refer to them as 'illegals'.

The polling company's defence was that term 'illegals' was widely used in the press and they had not used it to refer to a specific race or ethnic group

The ASA was unimpressed and found against them

Where does this leave the Press Complaints Commission?

Although it has a clause (13) condemning discriminatory references, the PCC has always maintained that general references to ethnic or social groups cannot be dealt with under the complaints procedure.

It will only take complaints from and about named individuals – although the Lord Wakeham – who has stepped down as PCC Chair under a cloud of allegations about his involvement with Enron – has issued warning to editors about inaccurate and pejorative references to asylum-seekers and refugees.

In the light of the ASA ruling, and with former Privacy Commissioner Robert Pinker now chairing the PCC, perhaps the time is ripe to press for a more vigorous attitude towards coverage that encourages prejudice or incite hostility towards asylum seekers.

Contact PressWise on pw@presswise.org.uk if you need help with complaints.

White Paper imminent

The first of a series of regional media fora to discuss coverage of refugees and asylum issues has been postponed because publication of the government's wide-ranging White Paper on citizenship, asylum and immigration is imminent.

The event, organised by the Refugee Council and the RAM Project in conjunction with the Home Office Positive Images working party, was scheduled to take place in Leeds on 7 February.

It would have brought together refugees, support groups and media workers as happened at the RAM Forum held in London last year.

There are plans for similar events throughout dispersal areas. Watch this space for more details.

Jobs hope for refugees

The Government is to make it easier for employers to recruit refugees and help them make the most of their skills, according *Personnel Today*.

Immigration and Citizenship Minister Lord Geoff Rooker told the publication that the forthcoming White Paper will contain proposals for a skills database to ensure highly qualified refugees do not slip through the employment net.

The White Paper is expected to outline plans to reduce bureaucracy and remove uncertainty over the recruitment of refugees, an issue around which *Personnel Today* has been campaigning.

Exiled journalists needed in newsrooms

A £5,000 grant from the Stone Ashdown Trust and a collaborative project with the Creative Collective could help the Refugee Media Agency, supported by the RAM project, bring exiled journalists into mainstream UK media.

The grant was obtained by PressWise to assist the RMA create a directory promoting the skills of exiled journalists.

Discussions have started with the Creative Collective who are hoping that refugees will feature in the next round of internships they plan to negotiate with editors.

Last year the Collective placed six young Black journalists with *The Times*, *Big Issue* and several local papers for 3-month stints in newsrooms, under a scheme echoing the Chips Quinn initiative in the USA.

By linking the two projects it is hoped that editors may be persuaded to take on exiled journalists, giving them direct newsroom experience in the UK and creating opportunities for them to offer their colleagues an insight into life as a refugee.

New plans and new committee for RMA

A series of members meetings over the last two months has put the Refugee Media Agency on track for a successful future.

Khalafalla Hassan is the new Chair, with Max Jimmy as his deputy. Former Ugandan journalist Robert Egwea of the Refugee Arrivals Project has taken over as Secretary to allow Helene Lembanaka to concentrate on her own media project. Alpha Bah is now Treasurer. Abebe Gellaw has resigned from the organisation.

RAM project Co-ordinator Terry Williams will provide a similar service to the RMA which is considering a move from Acton to premises closer to central London.

An ambitious programme of activities and fundraising is to be undertaken, with plans to create an advisory panel of media experts to assist the organisation, and to work with a YMCA refugee project in London to develop training and website services.

The next Executive Committee meeting will be in London on Sat 23 February.

To contact RMA email the Secretary on egwea@hotmail.com

For the record....

Next time you write to a newspaper remind its readers that compared to the UK's 1.3%, Tanzania hosts 6

per cent of the world's refugees. The equivalent figure for Germany is 7.7 %.

A Home Office report confirms that people born outside the UK, including asylum seekers, contribute 10 % more to the economy in taxes and national insurance than they consume in benefits and public services.

That's the equivalent to a boost to the economy of £2.6 billion in 1989/99!

MP hosts asylum debate

MP Diane Abbott is to host an open discussion in the House of Commons Grand Committee Room on Government proposals for new immigration and asylum legislation.

The public meeting on February 6 (7-9pm) is being organised by the Defend Asylum Seekers Campaign with the support of the Asylum Rights Campaign.

Details from 020 7247 9907 E mail aa_r@compuserve.com

Articles wanted for NCADC newsletter

The National Coalition of Anti Deportation Campaigns are looking for contributions for their newsletter – ideally articles of around 650 words on the topic of migrants and asylum seekers. They cannot offer payment but full credit will be given to the author.

Contact John O at NCADC on ncadc@ncadc.org.uk

Conference on refugee support

A day-long national conference for voluntary and community groups supporting refugees outside London will take place in Birmingham on 16 February.

Influencing the media will be the subject of one of six workshops at the Refugee Council event at the city's Aston University.

A hundred places are available to community organisations, and unfunded groups will be able to claim travel expenses. Refugee Council chief executive Nick Hardwick will speak on refugee policy and the work of the voluntary sector.

"We are hoping to attract a cross-section of groups from all regions

to share experiences and discuss practical measures for strengthening and supporting voluntary and community groups working with refugees," says Nick. *For details please ring 020 7820 3078/9*

Arts record of asylum seekers

A Black Country theatre group has been given a £4,500 grant to record the experiences of asylum seekers in video, drama and song.

The Banner Theatre is running the 'Migrant Voices' project and will organise four projects starting in the borough of Sandwell.

Each of the four residencies will result in a 20 minute video intertwining video projection, drama and original songs.

There will also be a musical documentary project looking at the impact of globalisation in former industrial areas of the UK.

For information call Arts in Sandwell on 0121 569 4927.

RAM and the making of multicultural society

Sara Wajid attended a seminar in Rotterdam on behalf of the RAM project to discuss the role of TV programme makers in challenging negative attitudes towards minorities throughout Europe.

The British media is often cited for best practice examples and, it is seen as a leader in the field...

There was general agreement that the broadcast media need to recruit more staff from among ethnic minorities if substantive change for the better is to be achieved.

RAM backs Euro plan for media partnership

A European centre sharing information about the media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers and providing support may be set up in the Netherlands.

The Utrecht-based STOA is competing for substantial European funds for this project. Addressing a two-day planning seminar attended by representatives from media and diversity projects from several European countries, RAM Project Co-ordinator Terry Williams described RAM's work over the

last two years, exciting interest especially in our training workshops, tackling the damaging role of the national tabloid media, and the formation of an agency to support exiled media workers.

A website will be central to the operation of the European project and a pilot is to be launched to share information and good practice. Terry suggested a European 'rolling handbook' of good practice which can be changed or added to at any time. This idea was taken up and contributions will soon be available on the web site.

STOA, with 20 staff largely funded from the Dutch Government, co-ordinates OnLine/More Colour in the Media, a loose network of more than 70 organisations.

It has set up several transnational projects, and its long-term objective is to make all European media accessible for minorities and empower people to use the media to help create more open societies.

Contact STOA at Postbus 1234, 3500 BE Utrecht, Netherlands Tel +31-(0)30-2302240 E mail: info@stoa.nl

RAM challenges racism in the media

Kelly Jarrett of the Creative Collective represented the RAM Project at a seminar organised by United for Intercultural Action and AMARC-Europe, in Amsterdam in January to examine the potential for joint media projects in combating racism and discrimination

Are immigration advisors competent?

The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) is consulting the sector on its redrafted *Guidance on Competence*.

The Guidance sets out the skills and knowledge advisers must have in order to provide immigration advice and services. Responses must be in by Mon 18 February. *Copies of the documents are available from www.oisc.gov.uk, or call OISC on 020 7211 1500. For more info, contact Policy Officer Frances Smith on 020 7211 1639*

Cut-out-and keep COMMUNICATOR

Part of a series of PressWise Guides to using the media which can be found on the RAM website www.ramproject.org.uk

COMPLAINING TO THE PRESS COMPLAINTS COMMISSION

Refugees are back in the headlines with a vengeance, and we can expect more of the same after the government's White Paper is published.

David Blunkett is the media's darling, and the pundits are predicting that his proposals will answer everyone's criticisms of past asylum blunders.

There will be a temptation to turn the media's (f)ire on those who remain unhappy with the treatment of those who seek refuge in the UK, and to build on perceived unease (post 11 September) that exiles are using the UK as a base for political and terrorist campaigns.

Following the unsuccessful complaint by Express Newspaper journalists about the headline policies of their boss, Richard Desmond (the porn baron who has apparently now applied to join the NUJ!), there will be some who think it isn't worth complaining to the PCC.

Whatever your criticisms of the PCC, and PressWise has plenty, it is very important to let Lord Wakeham know if you are unhappy about they way refugees and asylum seekers are represented in the print media.

The volume of complaints is an indicator of public concern, even if the industry's Code of Practice doesn't properly allow for the type of complaint you wish to make.

Here are some guidelines for those who want to make their views known.

1. Find out what the Code of Practice says – ideally your complaint should relate to at least one of its clauses. The Code can be found on the PCC website, which also explains the complaints process. www.pcc.org.uk

2. Please note that Clause 1.iii says: Read the article you are unhappy about carefully. Factual inaccuracies (and you must provide evidence to support your claims about accuracy) are covered by Clause 1 (iv): *Newspapers, while free to be partisan, must distinguish clearly between comment, conjecture and fact.*

3. There are a number of Clauses – on privacy (2), harassment (4), intrusion into grief or shock (5), and misrepresentation (11) – which might apply if the story concerns the plight of people living in fear for their lives.

4. Clause 13 deals with discrimination, but like all the other clauses it is supposed to relate only to the impact of a story on an individual. Groups of people ('refugees', 'Asylum-seekers', 'Afghans', 'Kurds', etc) are not covered.

PressWise has been arguing for years that there needs to be some room for 'class actions', since individuals may be put at risk if coverage encourages discrimination or hostility towards a member of a particular social group.

So make a complaint, and make this point.

5. Clauses 6 & 7 & 10 deal with stories affecting children.

6. Many of the clauses are covered by a much used 'public interest' defence. Consider what arguments might be used to counter this when making your complaint.

7. Write your complaint carefully and rationally, rather than allowing your emotions to take charge. Quote specific headlines, paragraphs or pictures/captions which you think may breach the Code, and offer an explain your concerns in detail.

8. Remember, the PCC has absolute discretion about which complaints it will countenance. It is not obliged to consider complaints from 'third parties' – those not directly mentioned in a story.

PressWise has long argued that the public generally have a right to receive accurate information – so everyone is affected by inaccurate information, especially about politically sensitive issues. Argue this case if your objection is that you are being misinformed as a member of the public.

9. Your complaint will be submitted to the Editor of the publication cited, who will have an opportunity to respond. You will be sent this commentary and may challenge anything in it. Your response will also go to the Editor before the PCC steps in to adjudicate if the complaint has not been resolved by then.

10. If in doubt, or if you need assistance, contact PressWise – and we will provide free advice. Please send us copies of all your correspondence, whether you have been successful or not.

The PressWise Trust
38, EBC, Felix Road, Bristol BS5 0HE
Tel: 0117 941 5889
Fax: 0117 941 5848
Email: pw@presswise.org.uk

'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.

Thursday 31 January
11.00 - 1.00pm

REFUGEES AND EXILES GET CREATIVE!

A regular workshop on Thursdays from Exiled Writers Ink! Talk, make or write - stories, poetry, memories about here and there. Final Performance at the Questors Theatre on Sunday 31 March at 7.30 pm

Local travel expenses paid and refreshments provided.

Venue: Committee Room, Questors Theatre, 12 Mattock Lane, Ealing, London W5. Nearest tube Ealing Broadway

For more info, contact Nathalie on 07803 125 064

Thursday 31 January
11.00 - 1.00pm

REFUGEE ACTION AND DERBY UNIVERSITY RESEARCH LAUNCH

The results of Derby University's research, commissioned by Refugee Action, to identify gaps and suggest improvements in services for refugees in the East Midlands.

Full copies of the report will be available online www.refugee-action.org
Venue: The Concert Hall, Queens Walk Community Centre, Queens Walk, The Meadows, Nottingham
For more info, contact Gail Pringle on 0116 261 4846

Friday 1 February LOBBY IN SUPPORT OF LATA AND DEVESHA

After 18 months of campaigning Lata and Devesha's appeal will finally be heard. Because of legal technicalities the appeal will fail. Although the Adjudicator will find against Lata and Devesha, he can make a recommendation to the Home Secretary that Lata and Devesha should stay.

For background information, visit <http://www.ncadc.org.uk/letters/news21/shah.html>
Venue: Immigration Court, Aldine House, New Bailey Street, Salford M3
For more info, e-mail Lata.and.Devesha.camp@ncadc.org.uk

Wednesday 6 February
7.00 - 9.00pm

PROPOSALS FOR NEW IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM LEGISLATION - PUBLIC MEETING

MP Diane Abbott will host an open discussion at the House of Commons. Organised by Defend Asylum Seekers Campaign with the support of the Asylum Rights Campaign.
For more info, contact 020 7247 9907 or aa_r@compuserve.com

Saturday 9 February
12.00 - 5.00pm
NCADC NATIONAL MEETING

This meeting will bring together families and individuals who are campaigning/fighting

against deportation. It will enable them to exchange experiences and plan future strategies. Anyone facing deportation should try to attend. Travel costs of those facing deportation will be paid by NCADC (cheapest route, anyone travelling by rail should purchase tickets at least 15 days in advance). There will be a crèche and lunch will be provided free.
Coach from London provided, ring John Stewart on 020 7701 5197 to book a seat.
Venue: Methodist Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester
To RSVP or for more info, contact NCADC on 0121-554-6947 or ncadc@ncadc.org.uk

Thursday 14 to Sunday 17 March

INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR THE CULTURE OF PEACE LONDON FORUM

An international conference addressing the cultural root causes of conflict, violence, terrorism and war, it will examine the means for conflict resolution through cultural bridges, and explore ways for building a culture and literature of peace.
Venue: The Royal National Hotel, Russell Square, London
For more info, contact 020 8958 6272 or spiroark@aol.com

Saturday 22 March
10.00am - 6.00pm

CONFERENCE TO DEFEND ASYLUM SEEKERS

A conference to arm activists with the arguments, build greater co-ordination across campaigns, and support organisations and others working with refugees, migrants and asylum seekers.
Costs (including crèche) Asylum seekers - free,

Individuals - £10 (£5 unwaged), Trade union delegates - £20.
Entrance includes an evening social of music and dance.
Venue: Cross Street Chapel, Unitarian Church, Cross Street, Manchester M2
For more info or to book, contact 07905 566 183 or info@defend-asylum.org

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.

National Coalition of Anti Deportation Campaigns

www.ncadc.org.uk

STOA

www.stoa.nl

The Creative Collective

www.thecreativecollective.com

The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner

www.oisc.gov.uk

Visit the RAM Project website for information, contacts, news and views
www.ramproject.org.uk

COPY FOR NEXT BULLETIN SHOULD REACH
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By 15 Feb