

RAM BULLETIN

Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Mass media Project

Promoting best practice in media representation of refugee and asylum issues

7 DECEMBER 2000

BOOK NOW FOR THE RAM FORUM

Thursday 1 February
Abbey Community Centre,
Westminster, London

The PressWise RAM Project, Cardiff University School of Journalism, AMARC and the National Union of Journalists are organising a day-long series of debates about media representation of refugees and asylum-seekers.

Topics include:

Where do we fit it? A chance for refugees and asylum seekers to explain how media coverage has affected their lives here and in the countries they came from.

Why do sensational stories appear? The conflicting priorities of journalists and press officers from refugee organisations.

What's to stop us? Media professionals and regulators review the constraints that apply to coverage of controversial issues.

Do the media influence public opinion or does public opinion drive media coverage? Media analysts consider the evidence.

Who is to blame? Senior editors and politicians debate the danger of making asylum a key issue in the forthcoming General Election. Places are limited so if you would like to attend please book now by email to: ram@presswise.org.uk

There may be a small charge to cover refreshments.

Think of a number and double it

Time to complain? The *Daily Mail* surpassed itself on Wed 6 Dec by giving credence to an extraordinary claim by a housing

www.ramproject.org.uk

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

Launched to coincide with the second edition of the RAM electronic Bulletin, the website contains links to useful sites, copies of the RAM Bulletin, opportunities to post information and comments, and an expanded version of the COMMUNICATOR column, containing hints on how to make use of the media.

Please download the printed version of this Bulletin and distribute it locally to support groups and interested individuals.

- Email information or stories to Bulletin editor Nazand Begikhani at bulletin@presswise.org.uk

**COPY DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE
15 DECEMBER 2000**

If you know anyone who would like to receive the RAM Bulletin, send names, numbers, email and postal addresses to bulletin@presswise.org.uk

lawyer that 'A million refugees a year' enter Britain. The *Sun* followed it up by repeating the story next day.

Martin Maloney, who had spent two months working with Palis Solicitors, a London firm that deals with asylum and immigration cases, lost his job after writing an inflammatory letter published by the *Law Society Gazette* in November.

Maloney was commenting on an article by immigration specialist Urvashi Naidoo in which she explained why Britain needs immigrants (*Time for an Open Door policy*, 30/10/2000).

In his letter he calculated that if there are 600 organisations in London dealing with asylum and immigration matters there must be as many more throughout the UK. If they each see 600 clients a year that makes 'a million refugees' - providing you 'round up' the figures! (Do the sums)

The *Gazette* was quick to apologise and dissociate itself from this bizarre extrapolation, which came complete with offensive personal comments about clients who had sought advice from Palis Solicitors.

What can you do about it?

To make this 'old story' news the *Mail* and *Sun* linked it to P&O's discovery of people hiding in lorries in Calais en route for England, complete with photographs.

All familiar, sensational anti-asylum-seekers stuff, but does it breach the PCC Code of Practice?

Both papers will say their stories are neither inaccurate nor misleading (Clause 1) since they are merely reporting what Maloney has claimed.

The *Mail* quotes his remarks about eastern Europeans, 'tough-looking, lounging, grinning (with) few signs of terror on their faces (whose) fear of persecution is as nothing compared to their well founded fear of soap and water'. They may be offensive, but is reporting them a breach of Cl. 13 (Discrimination?)

Unless you are named or directly affected you are a third party' and the PCC usually doesn't entertain such complaints. However, as Sue Roberts points out below, the PCC does want to hear from you. A letter to the *Mail* criticising this type of snide journalism will not go amiss.

The apocryphal figure of 1 million interlopers will no doubt enter anti-refugee mythology, and responsible journalists would have taken apart Maloney's twisted logic and either ignored him or exposed it for the nonsense it so clearly is.

The Law Society Gazette regularly publishes useful articles on the issue of asylum and immigration, packed with verifiable facts and figures.

Check out the website:
www.lawgazette.co.uk

The PCC writes about press wrongs

Dear Editor

In your latest RAM Project Bulletin you quite correctly stated that the PCC received 168 complaints about alleged discriminatory reporting in 1999. We thought it might be helpful to your readers who are not familiar with the press Code of Practice to explain that this figure does not just cover complaints on reporting of asylum seekers but on all discriminatory reporting.

Clause 13 states

"i) The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to a person's race, colour, religion, sex of sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability.

ii) It must avoid publishing details of a person's race, colour, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability unless these are directly relevant to the story."

Of course, complaints from asylum seekers about press coverage can be raised under any other appropriate clause of the Code including accuracy and privacy!

Sue Roberts

External Affairs Consultant, Press Complaints Commission

PCC website: www.pcc.org.uk

Broadcasters rapped for insensitive coverage

The Broadcasting Standards Commission has criticized a radio phone-in presenter for joining in with people who made abusive and offensive remarks in response to a caller who felt asylum seekers should be welcomed to Britain.

The BSC said the presenter should have intervened to moderate offensive language even though the asylum issue is contentious. The ruling followed a complaint from one listener to an edition of the *Adrian Allen Show* broadcast by Century 106FM in April 200.

In another important recent ruling the BSC upheld complaints against two TV programmes, *London Today & London Tonight* (Carlton TV) for unfairness and infringements of privacy following complaints from an Irish traveller, a Romani woman and the London Gypsies and Traveller Unit. The programmes were broadcast in November 1999, but the BSC ruling was only published in October 2000.

The BSC exists to investigate complaints about unfairness and inaccuracy and matters of taste and decency. Where necessary the BSC holds hearings to resolve complaints and meets travels costs.

For more information visit the BSC website: www.bsc.org.uk

PressWise provides free advice on complaints to all media regulators
www.presswise.org.uk

JOURNALISTS IN EXILE

1. New address for exiles' newspaper

Journalists planning a newspaper by and about refugees have a new e-mail address: newvision@avu.org

2. Free tickets

The One World Broadcasting Trust has made available a limited number of FREE places for exiled journalists at its evening debate on Monday 11 December *Angles On Asylum* at BAFTA, 6.30pm, at BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London W1 with Nick Hardwick, Yasmin Alibhai Brown, Dr. Terence Wright & Roger Bolton. To apply contact Cathy Aitchison on 020 8685 9928, Fax: 020 8648 8344, email: cathy@refugeesonline.org.uk

3. Networking across Europe

The European Red Cross Platform for Cooperation on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants (PERCO) has recommended that journalists specialising in refugee

issues should set up networks both nationally and across Europe and that guidelines for journalists writing on migrations themes should be drawn up and promoted at the European level.

For further information contact Neil Thorns: nthorns@redcross.org.uk.
Head of Press Office, British Red Cross, London SW1X 7EJ

UN Convention on Refugees and Asylum Seekers: 50 years on

1. Webcast concert

On 14 December a unique concert is being webcast to mark next year's 50th anniversary of the UN refugee agency, UNHCR.

The 90-minute show, 'Refugee Voices', is the claimed to be largest ever gathering of refugee musicians including Geoffrey Oryema, Keinaan, Rasha, In Mixed Company, Youssou N'Dour and a chorus and band of refugees from ten countries. The event will launch a public awareness campaign backed by politician Madeleine Albright, model Alek Wek and writer Isabel Allende. Details of this and other celebratory events can be found on website: www.unhcr-50.org,

2. Making things better

The 1951 UN Convention on Refugees and Asylum Seekers has one of the highest levels of international support with 139 states signed up.

Guy Goodwin-Gill, Professor of International Refugee Law, told the Refugee Legal Centre AGM in November that the challenge now is to make it more effective and relevant rather than blame it for an increase in the movement of people or the inadequacies of the protection system in the UK. He called for a more objective, less adversarial method of decision-making drawing on clear criteria and guidelines.

Reference was made at the meeting to the destructive role of the media, contributing to a culture of confrontation and disbelief. For more information contact the Refugee Legal Centre on

020 7827 9090, email: rlc@refugee-legal-centre.org.uk or visit their website: www.refugee-legal-centre.org.uk

MEDIA COVERAGE UNDER SCRUTINY

1. Refugee press coverage on the increase

More space than ever before is being devoted to newspaper stories about refugees and asylum seekers, according to Fazil Kawani, communications officer with the Refugee Council, which keeps a comprehensive record of press coverage.

At times as many as 50 (A4) pages of cuttings are received each day from national and local papers, and the Refugee Council expects its bill for cuttings to rise from £20,000 in 1999 to £50,000 for 2000.

2. The Future of Multi-ethnic Britain : Lessons from media reactions to the Parekh Report

"The racial temperature of the country can better be judged from reaction to the report than from the report itself". Gary Younge of *The Guardian*, one of the few Black journalists on UK national newspapers.

In its November newsletter the Bristol Racial Equality Council (BREC) published a useful analysis of media coverage of Runnymede Trust report from the Commission on the Future of Multi-ethnic Britain, chaired by the philosopher Bhikhu Parekh.

The report recommended 125 ways to develop a pluralist human rights culture in which people are treated equally but where differences are respected and celebrated.

According to BREC, most of these ideas went unheard after the media hijacked the report. Newspapers such as the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*, attacked it for claiming that the concept of Britishness has racist connotations.

Based upon misquotation of a small segment of the report this was taken up by other papers and public figures, and the public received the message that the government was planning to re-write the nation's history in an exercise of totalitarian political correctness.

In fact the report had said Britishness has **racial** not **racist** connotations, in that most white people automatically associate Britishness with images of 'white' institutions and culture.

The distinction was either too subtle, or deliberately ignored and the totality of the report and its authors came under fire – 'sub-marxist gibberish' (*The Daily Telegraph*), which 'spits in the face of the British people' (Norman Tebbit in *The Mail on Sunday*) from 'a second-rate unrepresentative clique' (*The Daily Mail*). More alarming still was the effect this hysteria had upon Home Secretary Jack Straw who launched the report after the press had opened fire.

In an effort to distance himself from the criticism he apparently departed from a prepared speech and declared that he was "proud to be British", accusing the authors of "turning their backs on patriotism and leaving the field to those on the far right".

As the BREC analysis points out, this is a crude misrepresentation of the report's message. Meanwhile the Runnymede Trust reports that the sensational coverage had one beneficial result - over 5,000 copies of the document have been sold, ten times more than had been expected.

To order your copy of the Parekh Report see Runnymede website: www.runnymedetrust.org
For copies of the BREC newsletter email: bristolrec@compuserve.com
See also *Guardian* 11, 12 & 20 Oct: <http://www.guardianunlimited.co.uk>

RAM PROJECT ACTIVITIES

1. Glasgow Communication Seminar

A half day seminar aimed at challenging negative media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers is being held on Thursday 14 December, 10am- 1.00pm. It will be chaired by Peter Barry from Scottish Refugee Council. Speakers include Terry Williams from the RAM Project, Susan Roberts (PCC) and Ann Coltart (Glasgow Branch, NUJ). For more information contact Terry Williams: ram@presswise.org.uk

2. Bishop backs RAM

The Bishop of Leicester, Rt. Rev Tim Stevens, is expected to launch a new Asylum Media Group for Leicestershire early in the New Year.

His staff say the Bishop is keen to see improved media coverage of issues impacting on refugees and asylum seekers and welcomes moves to set up the media group.

Representatives of a number of asylum and refugee organisations have decided to launch a group after over 50 people attended a meeting called by RAM Project.

Senior journalists from Leicestershire will be invited to a lunch-time launch in January which the Bishop has been asked to host. For more information contact Rev Chris Oxley on 0116 235 2667, email oxley@leicester.anglican.org

3. Merseyside needs more

Merseysiders have set up an Asylum Media Group and are keen to expand its membership. Anyone wanting more information can contact the co-ordinator, Chris Worrall, by email: chris.worrall@refugee-action.org.uk

Lobbying via the web

Hi-tech communication is a feature of the Human Too Campaign for Fair Treatment of Asylum Seekers.

They are encouraging people to use a free online service - *FaxyourMP.com* - to lobby their MPs about the voucher system, currently under review by Minister of State Barbara Roche. Submissions must be in by 22 December.

Tories take up Labour pledge card idea

Watch out for evidence in your local paper that Conservative prospective parliamentary candidates have been reading their Central Office pack of tips on how to woo voters.

The opening pamphlet in the pack has a picture of William Hague one side and five Conservative commitments on the other. One of them is that a Conservative government will 'take tough action against bogus asylum-seekers'.

CUT-OUT-AND-KEEP COMMUNICATOR

2. Producing a press release

These PressWise Guides are designed to assist people wishing to play a more active role in improving media coverage of refugee and asylum issues. Fuller versions can be viewed in more detail on the RAM website: www.ramproject.org.uk

DOs

1. Use headed notepaper; give it a date and a snappy headline.
2. Type it, using double spacing if possible, but keep it short, simple and preferably on a single sheet.
3. Number the pages; end the first with '*more follows*'; start the second with a new paragraph; on the final page finish off with '*ends*'.
4. Try to get all the crucial information in the opening paragraph/s — including who, what, when, where, why/how.
5. Include a sensible, pithy '*quote*' from an identified spokesperson.
6. Provide contact name/s and 'phone number/s — make sure all your key people have a copy, and that at least one person is available outside office hours (with a copy of the release and any useful background information).
7. If the story is photogenic, give details of what, when and where photographs can be taken.
8. Add extra background information in a '*Note for Editors*'.
9. Check deadlines in advance — make sure your release arrives in time for journalists to follow it up.
10. Follow up with a 'phone call — if it hasn't been received, email, fax or deliver another copy at once.

DON'Ts

1. Never assume the reader will know all about your concerns.
2. Rambling prose and irrelevant details detract from the impact.
3. If you use both sides of a sheet of paper; the second side is likely to be ignored.
4. Avoid repetition, cliches, jargon, and abbreviations.
5. Never make claims you cannot prove, and avoid exaggeration — overstating your case is more likely to wreck than to win your argument.
6. Beware of libel. To issue a press release is to publish it — you could be sued.
7. Sloppy presentation, mistakes and bad grammar damage credibility — get a colleague to check for sense, accuracy, and spelling.
8. Ignore media interest in your press release at your peril — you sought their attention so return their calls.
9. Wit may win a smile, but irony seldom works — especially on strangers.
10. Never assume your release has been received until you've spoken to someone in the newsroom who has seen it.

**COMING SOON:
COMMUNICATOR 3
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

UNTOLD STORIES**Goodbye to Di**

After two years providing efficient administrative support to PressWise and its many projects, Di Fricker is moving on. Her hard work, unseen and often unnoticed outside the office, has been vital in getting the RAM Project off the ground and keeping it moving. She will be a hard act to follow.

BOOK REVIEW**Open Borders: The case against immigration controls**

Teresa Hayter (Pluto Press, 2000) £12.99. Hayter provides a voice for the marginalized and inspiration for action, to champion the cause of life without borders, a world without immigration controls. **NB**

'PEG' BOARD

Keep your ears and eyes open for 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.

Friday 8 December
Human Rights Day

Monday 11 December
6.30pm

Angles On Asylum

One World Broadcasting Trust event with Nick Hardwick (Refugee Council), Yasmin Alibhai Brown, Dr. Terence Wright & Roger Bolton.
Venue: BAFTA, 195 Piccadilly, London W1
For more information contact Nikki Weir on Tel: 020 7383 4248, Fax: 020 7383 4238

Thursday 14 December
6pm – 7pm

Candlelit Vigil

Hands off my Friend
Venue: steps of St Martin-in-the-Field, Trafalgar Square, London
For more information contact National Assembly Against Racism (NAAR) 28 Commercial Street, London E1 6LS
Tel/ Fax 020 7247 9907

Thursday 14 December
10am – 1pm

Challenging negative media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers

RAM Communication Seminar with Terry Williams (RAM), Susan Roberts (PCC), Ann Coltart (Chair, Glasgow branch, NUJ).
Venue: Glasgow Parish Rooms, 6 George Street Glasgow.
For more information contact PressWise on 0117 941 5889, fax: 0117 941 5848

Refugee Voices'

A webcast concert to launch a public awareness campaign in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the UN refugee agency, UNHCR. *Details of this and other events can be found on website: www.unhcr-50.org,*

Saturday 16th December
12.00 to 1.45

Asylum Seekers Doing Time but Committed No Crime

Picket of Harmondsworth Detention Centre

Bring banners, balloons, kites, & musical instruments
Venue: Harmondsworth Detention Centre
Colnbrook By Pass (A4 North of Heathrow) (U3 bus from Heathrow or 81 bus from opposite Hounslow West tube station.)
Further info: Raybarkley@tesco.net

Thursday 1 February

RAM Forum

Venue: Abbey Community Centre, Great Smith Street, Westminster, London
For more information contact PressWise on 0117 941 5889, email: ram@presswise.org.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.

A really useful media site

The Guardian newspaper has an excellent Special Report site devoted to refugees in Britain – and it couldn't be easier to access. Call up: www.guardianunlimited.co.uk

Bristol Campaign to Defend Asylum Seekers
www.geocities.com/bdasc

Equality Now
www.equalitynow.org

One World
www.oneworld.org/guides/migration/

Refugee Women Legal Group
www.rwlq.org.uk

Save the Children
www.savethechildren.org

[uk](http://www.uk)

Student Action for Refugees
www.star-network.org.uk

Student Assembly against Racism
www.saarnews.fsnet.co.uk

The Centre for Gender and Refugee Studies
www.uchastings.edu/cgrs

UK Home Office country Assessment
www.homeoffice.gov.uk/asylum_contents0.2html

Unifem
www.unifem.undp.org/index.htm

United Nations Development Programme
www.undp.org/toppages/discover/index.html

Women's Human Rights Resources
www.law-lib.utoronto.ca/diana/

PLUS

Amnesty International:
www.amnesty.org
Diversity Online
www.diversity-online.org
European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia:
<http://www.eumc.at>
Human Rights Watch:
www.hrw.org
Index on Censorship:
www.indexoncensorship.org
Institute of Race Relations:
www.irr.org.uk
Kurdishmedia:
www.kurdishmedia.com
National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC)
<http://www.ncadc.demon.co.uk/>
Press Complaints Commission:
www.pcc.org.uk
PressWise Trust:
www.presswise.org.uk
Refugee Council:
www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
Refugees Online:
www.refugeesonline.org
UNHCR:
www.unhcr.ch

Please keep me informed with details of your media successes and disappointments.
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