

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 21, Oct 2002

Roma deportations – the truth?

Blanket coverage of the deportation of 48 Czech Roma on 19 Sept. put more than asylum policy under scrutiny.

Days after Home Secretary David Blunkett admitted his annual target of 30,000 asylum-seeker removals was 'massively ambitious', London's *Evening Standard* ran a 3-deck headline: 'The pictures Labour want you to see to prove asylum policy works: a group of migrants is kicked out.'

The identities of those boarding a charter flight at Stansted were obscured, but the *ES*, like later reports included criticism of the Government for infringing human rights and turning deportations into a media circus.

Challenged over the debacle, the Home Office press office pointed out a curious fact. Access had been granted at the media's request. Far from being a deliberate ploy to illustrate toughness, apparently this was an attempt to placate the media after ITN had near exclusive access to an earlier mass deportation. The Refugee Council, PressWise and others were quick to point out the deportees should be asked if they are willing to be photographed before the media are granted such access in future. Media management is a risky business.

'Get back home' - Blunkett

David Blunkett's call on asylum-seekers from Afghanistan and Kosovo to 'get back home' and rebuild their countries is 'devastatingly simplistic,' Habib Rahman of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants told London's free *Metro* paper.

The Home Secretary's recent 'get tough' announcements are regarded by some as an attempt to improve his standing in the media which has consistently criticised his policies.

'If these people are dynamic and well qualified - and I don't dispute they are - they should get back home and recreate their countries that we freed from tyranny,' Blunkett told *Metro*. 'I have no sympathy whatsoever with young people in their 20's who do not get back home and rebuild their countries and their families.'

Habib Rahman responded: 'Afghan people were fleeing the Taliban before. Now they are not safe because there are pockets of Taliban remaining and other people who would persecute them.'

'Go home' money for asylum-seekers

The Home Office has announced financial support for asylum-seekers 'wanting' to go home.

If implemented, the programme will give £600 to individuals and £2,500 to families mainly from war-torn Afghanistan where peace remains elusive in spite of international efforts.

The UN has estimated that some 40,000 Afghan refugees who returned to Kabul in the recent past 'live in destitute conditions in makeshift shelters in abandoned buildings in the city with limited access to hygiene and portable water supply.'

Letters to local papers and MPs could question whether the programme will put pressure on people to return home without regard for their personal safety and well-being.

Best plan attacked

Parliamentarians have strongly condemned a proposal to issue money to asylum-seekers for land purchases in their countries, reported *The Sun* (18 Sept).

The proposal by Keith Best, head of the Immigration Advisory Service, is informed by the thought of encouraging a return of asylum-seekers to their countries.

'If you are trying to send someone back to Afghanistan, you have to have an agency to find them accommodation and help them back into employment even if that means giving them a sum of money to buy a plot of land,' Best argues.

Some MPs have condemned the idea, saying it will encourage an influx of 'asylum cheats' into the country. But asylum-support groups believe Mr Best's proposal is a genuine move to empower destitute people who want to return home.

1 in 4 Scots 'racist' but W. Europe needs 1.4 million immigrants yearly

A quarter of Scots have admitted to being racist, a new poll commissioned by the Scottish Executive has revealed.

More than half of the people surveyed said 'they would be concerned if more people from ethnic minorities started arriving in Scotland.'

Seventy nine percent however said they 'believed themselves to be warm and friendly to those from other countries and cultures.'

Nearly 50 percent of Scots admitted witnessing some form of racist behaviour and almost 10 percent had been victims of racist abuse. The same percentage said they believed terms like 'Chinky' and 'Paki' were not racist.

Robina Qureshi, director of the charity Positive Action in Housing, said: 'We believe the poll underestimates the real extent of Scotland's racism. If a quarter of the population admits its racist, how many more are covertly racist?'

Scotland needs immigrants more than we realise. Western Europe needs 1.4 million immigrants each year (according to the UNHCR) to ensure its economic growth and pay for the pensions system which an ageing and shrinking European population cannot otherwise sustain.

EDITORIAL**We're the same the whole world over...**

The 2001 census figures have been used to make Britons believe that the country will be overcrowded unless the problem of 'bogus' asylum seekers is addressed.

Britain's ageing population is on the increase, making the need for a youthful workforce imperative. With the number of children on the decrease, the need for migrants (from countries wrecked by socio-political and natural catastrophes) should be obvious.

The UK needs foreign human resources for sustainable economic growth – a younger generation of workers that will take care of the pension needs of the aged. No nation, in spite of its gains in all spheres of human endeavours, can afford to be insular.

The introduction of a Diversity Visa (DV) programme in the USA is proving to be an efficacious move in economic and global empowerment. Analysts consider that the thousands of people each year who gain access to America under the scheme are a key factor in the country's continuous economic advance.

It is also a way of linking the peoples of the world who need each other for world peace and the stability necessary for any meaningful development.

Foreign Secretary Jack Straw acknowledged to the Labour Party conference in Blackpool on 30 September that the issue of asylum seekers is one of 'human rights.' Precisely. Human rights is the greatest challenge if the world is to address global problems of insecurity, political unrest and security.

Maybe British policy makers should be taking note of the advantages the US have discovered through its DV scheme, and trying to convince the electorate instead of scaremongering about asylum issues.

Max Jimmy
Guest Editor

Local paper helps secure release of Daoud family

After a month of sympathetic and in-depth articles in the *Nottingham Evening Post*, a refugee family has been released from detention.

Anti-detention campaigners and refugee supporters welcomed the Daoud family of six outside the prison gate at Harmondsworth Removal/Detention Centre where they had been held for four weeks.

The family awaits a decision on its application for judicial review based on Articles 3 and 8 of the Human Rights Act.

Detaining pregnant women a 'crying shame'

A joint report by the Maternity Alliance, Bail for Immigration Detainees and the London Detainee Support Group has described as 'a crying shame' the detention of pregnant asylum-seekers and their babies by the authorities.

Women authors of the report said they suffered emotional and psychological distress as well as serious physical discomfort at the sight of pregnant women and mothers with babies being detained.

'The daily reality of their lives in detention was one of isolation, fear and depression; having to cope alone with pain and sickness; unreliable and seemingly unaccountable medical care with only ad hoc liaison with external maternity services and failure to provide essential interpreting, inadequate food, gratuitously petty rules on access to basic necessities such as baby milk and nappies,' the report states.

The report calls for the non detention of vulnerable persons in places where physical conditions including food and medical care are inadequate and an automatic mechanism for an independent review of each decision to detain a person and of the need to maintain detention.

Detaining refugees fleeing torture and persecution is been dubbed as 'cruel and a double tragedy' by refugee welfare organisations. *The full report is available from <http://www.biduk.org/info.htm>*

Census shocker

'The continuing influx of immigrants to Britain is set to push the population to more than 60 million for the first time,' announced the *Sunday Times* (29 Sept) in a story about the 2001 census.

This revelation was illustrated with a picture of grinning, flag-waving Asian women captioned: 'Britain's ethnic population is growing 15 times faster than its white equivalent', set against grim-faced crush of white commuters over the caption: 'packed: even more people will put huge pressure on transport, housing and the NHS'.

The story acknowledges that immigration can bring benefits but focusses on the downside, stressing pressure on housing, shortages of key workers and risks to the environment.

Respectable commentators provide ammunition for those who oppose the provision of safe havens for those fleeing persecution elsewhere.

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

www.ramproject.org.uk

Another asylum-seeker killed

An 18-year-old Edinburgh man has been arrested in Sunderland in connection with the death of an Iranian asylum-seeker in August, reports the September edition of the Student Action for Refugees (STAR) Bulletin.

Police also charged two other men for racially aggravated assaults in the city.

Iranian Tayman Bahmani who fled his country for Britain two years ago was fatally stabbed following a row between two

groups of white and Iranian men in the Hendon area of Sunderland. Police are treating the incident as racially motivated.

The Refugee Council has been warning for years of the correlation between the 'constant reiteration of asylum-seekers as a 'problem' and the interpretation of this message on the streets,' the STAR bulletin reported.

What a lottery!

Media critics of lottery funding for asylum-support groups have claimed some unusual scalps. David Clark, deputy chief executive of the lottery firm, Camelot, is to go part time, and its head of external affairs, Sue Slipman, has been given a £220,000 pay off, according to the *Sunday Times*.

It is all part of 'cost-cutting exercise' because weekly sales of lottery tickets have fallen by £500,000.

Apparently market research has revealed unhappiness among the punters that £18 million of lottery funding has gone to charities helping refugees and asylum-seekers.

Camelot is determined to 'rebrand' its image by emphasising that the money goes to 'good causes' and supports local communities. The company believes that more people will gamble if they approve of the causes that benefit from lottery grants.

UN urged to probe refugee plight

The refugee welfare organisation, Bail for Immigration Detainees, (BID) has made an urgent appeal to the UN for investigation into the plight of asylum-seekers and migrants in UK detention centres.

The recent BID report claims 'children, pregnant women, the seriously ill, torture survivors and the mentally ill are among thousands of asylum-seekers and migrants each year who are detained indefinitely and arbitrarily in the UK.'

Tim Baster, BID's coordinator says, 'there are no safeguards to stop prolonged periods of administrative detention.

'People are detained indefinitely on the instruction of an immigration officer. Immigration officers refuse to give reasons for detention.

'The Legal Services Commission hampers access to the courts and the Government is repealing a legislation that promised automatic bail for applicants. The result is arbitrary detention,' he says.

Tamil Documentary

A Tamil journalist from Sri Lanka is looking for refugees willing to contribute to a video about the Tamil community in the UK.

Seevagan Poopalaratnam would also like to hear from members of other communities about their contact (good or bad) with Tamil refugees. Interviews will take place in London

Contact him direct by e-mail

seevagan@hotmail.com

if you are willing to take part in a video interview in London.

After Sept 11: TV news & transnational audiences

This international symposium in London (9-11 Sept.) attracted a host of speakers, journalists and NGOs from Europe and America.

Karim Karim from the Ottawa School of Journalism presented an fascinating analysis on the American construction of self and the representation of good and evil.

He noted that, in the first few weeks following the 9/11 attacks, no questions were asked in the national media about the huge gaps in US security. Instead the 'Utopian Myth' of America as the 'land of the free, just and good' was constantly repeated.

From day one, in every speech and press conference highlighting the goodness of 'self' (America), the term evil was used to demonise the 'other' (Islam).

Criticism of this approach was strongly discouraged – in particular any suggestion that US political and military action could in any way be a cause of the attacks, he said.

The US media stereotyped Islam as a 'perverted creed of assassins' who attacked the US as it was the 'brightest beacon of freedom'.

President Bush's perpetual discourse on good versus evil served as a powerful and effective

method of eclipsing inconsistencies and criticism, Karim claimed. This in turn justified the destruction of Al Quaida and bin Laden, bringing evil to justice while maintaining the unquestionable good of the 'American Paradise'.

Bruce Williams, Professor of Communications at Illinois University, offered a rather more hopeful picture of post-9/11 America.

He monitored Internet chatrooms and noticed a number of important differences to the normal discourse between ordinary Americans.

There was a huge increase in the diversity of opinions and debates as people took advantage of the wealth of information available on the Internet from worldwide sources.

Chatroom 'posters' were unafraid to link US foreign policy with the attacks, as they could not be silenced in the same way as mainstream media - where critics such as Susan Sontag were being labelled treasonous.

Bruce noted a general tenor of tolerance in chatrooms, including on sites run by the most extreme and racist groups.

He concluded that chatrooms provided a vital and open alternative to the closed discourse of mainstream media.

Another contributor to the Symposium was Bashy Quraishy who has provided this month's Communicator piece – see page 5

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RAM Bulletin should
reach
ram@presswise.org.uk
by 25 Oct 2002**

‘...MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD?’

Guest Editor **Max Jimmy**
explains why he sought
asylum in the UK

I came to the UK from the West African state of Sierra Leone in the summer of 2001 on a Commonwealth Press Union Fellowship.

I was still struggling to come to terms with what the world knows to be one of the worst civil and political unrests in recorded history.

While I was here I learned that persistent death threats were being made against my family. My elderly parents had already been forced to become refugees in neighbouring Guinea. My wife now lives in hiding, constantly on the move.

As a journalist for more than a decade, I have made many enemies by exposing the human agony that has accompanied the crisis in Sierra Leone.

In 1991 the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) started a devastating war that has made many innocent civilians (women, children, the sick and elderly) suffer unjustly.

The rebels have always been bitter about my reports which alerted the world to their merciless killings, abductions, arson, plunder and abuse of women.

At one massacre I covered in Kailahun District, women were raped and villagers herded into their homes and burned alive.

Since the start of the war the RUF have issued threats to newspapers by phone and letters signed by their ‘Commanders’.

In January 1999 they killed my former college friend Paul Mansaray, deputy editor of *Standard Times*. Rebels stripped him and his wife and children and shot them dead outside the church in which they had sought sanctuary.

Alongside the RUF war of attrition, the country has suffered from corruption in the government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. My attempts to expose this sleaze almost cost my life.

Under the noses of senior government officials, I was beaten by thugs and state security officials. I have been accused of smearing their reputations and trying to bring down their regime.

My persecutors include parliamentarians who bear me a grudge because I exposed corrupt loans they gave themselves to purchase luxury cars which they say was ‘to facilitate their work.’

I was called before parliament charged with contempt. A public outcry persuaded MPs to adjourn the hearing indefinitely, but the charge remains to be resurrected whenever they choose to ‘teach me an unforgettable lesson,’ as some have called it.

In a country where the arrest and incarceration of media workers often culminating in torture and death is a common phenomenon, to dismiss this possibility is at best naïve.

As an exiled journalist I have received support from Reporters Sans Frontiers, the International Federation of Journalists, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression, the Committee to Protect Journalists and Index on Censorship, as well as the National Union of Journalists.

My experience has taught me that refugee life is not easy. While some people show a lot of tolerance, a lot more view us with apprehension and disdain.

It is a double tragedy for people who have fled their country purely for reasons of safety –and that they cannot be helped to forget their traumas and fears by the people they flee to is worse than inhuman.

It shows complete insensitivity to human suffering and exemplifies the level of hypocrisy the human race has been reduced to.

The selfless actions of those who support refugees does not go unnoticed. Their efforts need to be emulated, so that a world of peace, love and tolerance can be built. That is why global partnerships and coordination must be built upon.

Max Jimmy, 34, began his career as a reporter on *Liberty Voice*, before moving to *Expo Times*, both based in Freetown. His last position in Sierra Leone was as news editor with *Unity Now*.

In the UK his work has been published by Index on Censorship and the *Leicester Mercury*, and he has made several radio broadcasts.

He is currently based in London and looking for work in the British media.

Cut-out-and keep COMMUNICATOR

INFLUENCING THE MEDIA FROM THE OUTSIDE

*Danish anti-racism campaigner **BASHY QURAI SHY**, who spoke at the recent London media symposium (After Sept 11) about the increasing Islamophobia of Western media, describes how ethnic minorities and their organisations can help combat negative coverage.*

As the media has become more sophisticated it has become apparent to NGO's that they must establish a dialogue with the media.

One cannot just throw stone at it from a distance and hope that one day it will hit the right spot.

To change this sorry state of affairs - where ethnic minorities experience unjust treatment in reporting and journalists feel that minorities are complaining without reason - a middle way must be found.

I have worked with ethnic minorities and the media for a considerable length of time. I believe that before NGO's ask the journalistic communities to change, we must look at our own lack of participation.

In Denmark we have used diverse methods to give our voice in the society. Keeping in mind our results, I would suggest that ethnic communities must:

- Divert their attention towards journalism as a profession. Convince parents and youth that journalism is a noble and good trade
- Show visibility by participating in media discussions on a professional level, not only on ethnic issues but also issues of common interests in the society
- Arrange courses for members to empower them with knowledge, give them tools to formulate their views and most important of all, encourage them to speak up
- Establish better contacts with those journalists who are willing to listen and invite media to hold discussions, seminars, conferences with NGO's on topics relevant to both minorities and the media

- Send the journalists a list of names of contact persons from different ethnic groups which can give their opinion if need be. It will save them time and they will use this source often
- Impart background information to the media. Many journalists are not used to inter-cultural, inter-ethnic and inter-religious thinking
- Start a "Study Group" to document, analyse and look at the media mistakes. Provide such data to journalists so that they can study it and hopefully use it
- Do not forget to compliment if you see a good TV programme, a well-researched article or even an informative radio programme. If criticism has to be dished out, this must be done within the bounds of reason, politeness and factual
- NGO's and ethnic minorities now have a good possibility of supporting the present network of alternative media on the Internet, establishing their own topic oriented websites and E-mail chain letters.
- Many European countries have grassroots TV-channels where local programmes can be made both in ethnic languages and host country's national language. Such TV programmes are public funded.

I am aware that it takes resources, energy, professionalism and a constant effort to convince the media to even listen to "outside" opinion, but it is the duty of ethnic minorities to be a partner of the media.

Getting in touch with the media is not an easy task, but NOT getting in touch has dire consequences.

Media coverage of 11th Sept events is a good example of the gap of communication between the western media and the Muslim communities.

Responsibility also lies on the journalistic community. Without their active participation in the process of integration and raising awareness level among the citizens, ethnic minorities will not be able to achieve acceptance and respect in the society.

Marginalization produces anger and victimisation.

Bashy Quraishy
Chief Editor, *Media Watch*
President, European Network Against Racism
bashy@get2net.dk

'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.

**Monday 7 October 7.30pm
POETRY CAFE**

Exiled Writers Ink! present their regular monthly evening of poetry. Nora Armani - Actress without Borders! - will perform from her show 'on the couch'. Born in Egypt of Armenian parents, educated in England and after years in the US, she is currently dividing her time between London and Paris. Tickets £1 members and unemployed refugees, others £3.

Venue: 22 Betterton Street, London WC2

For more info, contact jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk or visit www.exiledwriters.co.uk

**Tuesday 8 October 6.00pm
PUBLIC MEETING - NO SCHOOL APARTHEID!**

Co-ordinated by mothers with the support of Legal Action for Woman to protest the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill forcing asylum seeking children into isolated accommodation centres and out of mainstream education.

Venue: Moses Room, House of Lords. Nearest tube Westminster - wheelchair accessible.

For more info, contact kay@crossroadswomen.net or 020 7482 2496 or 07904 255 145

**Tuesday 10 October
10.00am - 1.00pm**

RACE RELATIONS AMENDMENT ACT SEMINAR

A women only seminar hosted by the Muslim Women's Resource Centre (MWRC), and conducted by the Commission for Racial Equality on the Race Relations Amendment Act
Venue: Network House, 311 Calder Street G42 7NQ.

For more info, contact MWRC on 0141 585 8026 or fax 0141 585 8017

**Thursday 10 October
9.00am - 5.15pm**

DEVELOPING COMMUNITY COHESION CONFERENCE

Hosted by The Runnymede Trust this conference marks two years since the publication of "The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain". The conference will focus on what community cohesion might mean for the communities of Britain.

Venue: Barbican Centre, London EC2
For more info, contact 020 7377 6622 or info@runnymedetrust.org, or visit http://www.runnymedetrust.org/comm_coh.html

Sunday 13 October 1.45 - 3.00pm

WORD WIDE

Kurdish poetry, music and art, featuring Rebwar Said, Dilawar Qaradaqhi, Choman Hardi, Nazand Begikhani, Kamal Mirawdali and Tara Jaff.

Venue: Irish Centre, Blacks Road, Hammersmith, London W6
For more info, contact choman@choman.fsnet.co.uk

**Tuesday 15 October
10.00am - 3.00pm**

ASSISTING REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS - THE LAW

Positive Action in Housing present a one day training course to introduce participants understand the basic issues involved in working with asylum seekers and refugees.

£50 including lunch and refreshments.

Venue: Positive Action in Housing, 98 West George Street, Glasgow G2 1PJ

For more info, contact Nasreen Uddin, Project Manager on

nasreen@paih.org or 0141 353 2220

**Thursday 17 October
8.00pm**

POETRY IN THE HOUSE

Featuring Yan Lian, Choman Hardi, Richard McCane, Negar Hassen-Zadem

Venue: Lauderdale House, Highgate Hill, Waterlow Park, London N6 5HG

For more info, contact choman@choman.fsnet.co.uk

**Saturday 19 October
10.00am**

DEMO - ASYLUM IS A HUMAN RIGHT!

Organised by Kent Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, CAE Paris Committee Anti-Expulsions, Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers and Barbed Wire Britain. Calling for an end to racist immigration laws and arbitrary detention, to keep Sangatte open and defend the acknowledged human right to seek asylum. Venue: Dover Immigration Removal/Detention Prison, The Citadel, Western Heights, Dover, Kent, CT17 9DR.

For more info, contact Tom on 07890 939 253 or goldfish1967@hotmail.com, or Jon on 07789 961 744 or jon@margate.demon.org.uk

Saturday 19 October 6.30 - 9.00pm

4TH RICKY REEL MEMORIAL LECTURE

Organised by Justice for Ricky Reel Campaign and the Royal Borough of Kingston. Lakhvinder Ricky Reel was racially attacked on 14th October 1997 in Kingston Town Centre. When the police finally started their investigation he was found dead in the River Thames yards from the attack.

This year's annual lecture will be addressed by Yasmin Aibhai Brown, award winning writer, commentator and journalist. Venue: The Guildhall, Kingston

For more info, contact Sandeep Garcha on 020 8843 2333 or tmg@monitoring-group.co.uk, or Suresh Grover on 07958 174451

**Wednesday 23 October
HOW CAN WE POSSIBLY
FORGET?**

One-day conference in Copenhagen to reflect upon causes and effects of forgotten humanitarian crises around the world. Funded by the European Commission (ECHO) in connection with the Danish EU Presidency, the objective is to inspire the main players to reflect upon their own roles, and ultimately to raise public awareness.

Venue: Luftkastellet, Copenhagen.

For more info, or to sign up (by 15 October), contact www.forgottencrises.dk, tel +45 33 73 50 00 or fax +45 33 32 84 48

**Tuesday 29 October
7.30pm**

POETRY

INTERNATIONAL

Supported by the Svenska Institute, Apples and Snakes and London Arts, 'Babel' is a performance of new poetry by bi-lingual London writers. Featuring Ruth Padel, Eva Runefelt and Ales Steger, and in the second half of the show Zena Edwards, Choman Hardi, Fatimah Kelleher and Khan Singh Kumar.

Tickets £7.50, conc £5
Venue: Purcell Room, South Bank, London SE1
For more info, contact the box office on 020 7960 4242 or visit www.rfh.org.uk/poetryint

**Thursday 31 October
9.00am - 4.00pm**

VOLUNTEERING AND ASYLUM CONFERENCE

Organised by Tandem Communications and Research, a conference for people managing volunteers who are refugees or work with refugees and for groups and organisations that want to develop this area of work.

Statutory and private sector rate £60, charity rate £30, also a limited number of bursary places for groups with little or no financial income.

Venue: Thackray Museum, Beckett Street, Leeds
For more info, contact Kate or Nasim on 01924 302 269. To download conference leaflet and application form visit http://www.tandem-uk.com/vol_asylum.htm#conf