

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

12 JANUARY 2001

THE RAM FORUM

Setting out ground rules for public debate during the General Election campaign

09.30 - 17.30

Thursday 1 Feb 2001

Abbey Community Centre
34 Great Smith St.,
Westminster, London
(Wheelchair accessible;
Loop system)

An opportunity for media professionals and refugees, and their support groups, to engage in a dialogue about coverage of asylum issues, and devise strategies to ensure fair and accurate reporting and allow the public to appreciate the human stories of those who live in exile.

Contributors include:

Kamal Ahmed *The Observer*
Cathy Aitchison Refugees on Line
Yasmin Alibhai-Brown Columnist, *The Independent*
Nazand Beghikani PressWise RAM Project
David Berry Soton Univ
Henry Bonsu *BBC London Live*
Zrinca Bralo National Coalition of Anti-deportation Campaigns
Liz Fekete IRR
Abebe Gelaw *New Vision* e-journal
Dr Marie Gillespie Swansea Univ.
Prof Ian Hargreaves Cardiff Univ.
Fazil Kawani Communications Director, Refugee Council
Susan Roberts Press Complaints Commission
Prof Theo Van Leeuwen Cardiff Univ
Sara Wajid *Black Media Journal*
Gary Young *The Guardian*

Five 60-minute sessions

WHO sets the tone of the debate? *Does the media lead or follow pundits, politicians or public opinion?*

Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat spokespeople have been invited to speak, along with senior newspaper and broadcasting executives, in the hope we can obtain consensus about ground rules for coverage during the General Election campaign.

What's to stop us? *The role of media regulators in public debate of controversial issues.*

All the media regulators have been invited to explain how they operate and what special rules, if any, apply to this issue.

When will it end? *Is a major tragedy required to put a stop to the new racism of hostility to refugees/asylum seekers? What evidence is there that hostile coverage affects public attitudes?*

Media academics analyse the consequences of sensational coverage and the use of emotive language.

Where do we fit in? *A chance for refugees and asylum seekers to express their views about how media coverage has affected their lives here and where they come from.*

Refugees explain what it feels like to be on the receiving end of hostile coverage both at home and in their country of exile.

WHY do sensational stories appear? *The conflicting priorities of news editors and press officers.*

The need for/lack of reliable facts and figures; the problem (for both groups) of having to be

reactive rather than proactive; the lack of refugee voices/understanding of what drives people to exile; the different ways in which different groups are represented by the media; use of language; creating space for rebuttals, etc.

BOOK NOW

(places are limited)

£25 registration fee (inc.lunch)

Free places for refugees.

£15 Concessionary rates for students/pensioners/claimants.

Cheques payable to
'PressWise Trust'

**Apply with full details:
Name, Organisation, Position,
Postal address with code, Tel
& Fax Nos. & Email address,
to RAM Forum, PressWise,
38 EBC, Felix Road,
Bristol BS5 0HE**

You may also book by email:

ram@presswise.org.uk

Tough on asylum-seekers - and tough on the causes of asylum-seeking?

Political parties fire opening salvos in Election battle.

Heated exchanges in the House of Commons on Mon 8 Jan are an indication that battle has already commenced between Labour and the Tories over who has the 'best' (for which read toughest) record and policies on asylum.

Home Office Minister Barbara Roche told parliament that over 42,000 people will have been deported from the UK when figures for the year 2000 are finalised. This compared with 26,000 deported by the Conservatives during 1996, their last full year in office.

Roche claimed that the Tories had run down the immigration department and put in systems that

“clearly did not work”, while Labour has “hugely invested” in the department to “enable effective enforcement of measures that we have introduced”.

“What sort of deterrent produces a doubling in the number of applicants since 1996?” retorted shadow home secretary Anne Widdecombe. “What sort of deterrent produces applications of which 89% are refused?”

Applications increased tenfold under the Tories, responded Roche, “All we have heard from her (Widdecombe) is her inhumane and unrealistic proposal to lock up every asylum seeker.”

“Asylum applications fell by 40 per cent, when the Conservatives introduced the Immigration and Asylum 1996,” argued Widdecombe. “Will the Home Office Minister “have the grace to admit that (Labour’s) 1999 Act is no deterrent and that the government’s record is a 100% increase in applications?”

Roche replied that asylum applications were rising under the 1996 legislation, while the average decision-making time when Labour came to power in May 1997 was 20 months, now it is only 11 months, she claimed.

A General Election is expected early in May.

Report from New Visions

Media Coverage Under Scrutiny

1. The Season of Goodwill? Or don't let a good story get in the way of your prejudices

An example of solid investigative journalism (‘Asylum trail from Bosnia to Britain’) appeared in the *Daily Mail* on 18 Dec. It explained how ‘tourists’ from China, Iran, Iraq and Turkey were able to cross into western Europe from Bosnia in search of asylum or a new life.

The next day the paper applauded Home Office Minister Barbara Roche for relaxing rules to allow foreign workers with key skills to join the British workforce, but pilloried Iranian ‘homehunters’ who had been smuggled into the country.

And on 20 Dec a 2-page spread (‘Swaggering into soft-touch UK’) continued the campaign of vilification against ‘illegal’ immigrants and government policy.

Even experienced media analysts were amazed by the cynicism and hypocrisy displayed by the Mail’s pre-Christmas anti-asylum salvo.

2. Heseltine’s New Year resolution

In the 1 Jan *Daily Mail*, Conservative former Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine called for the European Convention on Human Rights and the Geneva Convention to be updated because “the world is very different” from the post-World War II, post-communist era - as if no-one faces danger anywhere any more.

He claimed “a very large number of those seeking asylum are cheats, quite deliberately making bogus claims and false allegations in order to get into this country.”

His article followed an interview on BBC Radio 4 in which he identified immigration and asylum-seekers (“many of whom are bogus”) along with a shortage of police officers as among the most serious problems facing government.

His remarks came as news broke the stabbing to death in Middlesbrough of asylum seeker, Mohammed Ali, a Kurd from Iraq, and a vicious assault on Cumali Sinangili, a Turkish refugee in South East London.

Nick Hardwick of the Refugee Council pointed out that Heseltine’s language “fuels ignorance, resentment and racial hostility against a backdrop of dramatically increased racially motivated attacks”.

For details see

<http://uk.fc.yahoo.com/a/asylum-htm>

3. Well, what do you know, Michael? Asylum issue won't make a difference in General Election, poll shows.

Playing the ‘asylum card’ is unlikely to make a difference to voting intentions, according to a Mori poll conducted for the *Mail on Sunday* (7 Jan 2001).

The survey challenges the expectations of some politicians, by demonstrating that 66% of voters expressed no support for any party as having the best policy on the issue (Tories 19%; Labour 18%).

However it did reveal that 44% of the British electorate want a bar on the admission of asylum seekers to the UK, and 59% think most are ‘economic migrants’ rather than people escaping persecution.

Two-thirds of those questioned opposed Labour’s dispersal scheme, and 60% approved Tory proposals to confine asylum-seekers to reception centres until their cases are dealt with.

Boosting refugees in Britain

Calls for a bigger role for refugees in Britain's economic, social and cultural life will be made at a European conference taking place in Birmingham on January 25-26.

Two hundred delegates to the event, organised by the Midland Refugee Council, the Scottish and Welsh Refugee Councils, Cardiff County Council and the Berlin Research Institute, will hear details of collaborative projects in England, Scotland and Berlin which are improving the lives of refugees.

David Forbes, of the Midland Refugee Council explains: “In this country, refugees are amongst the most ardent of students, trainees and job seekers. Yet statistics and direct experience show that they remain the most excluded from the job market. Captains of industry, here and elsewhere in the European Union, are crying out for imported labour in skills ranging from health to informatics.

“The European Commission has gone even further and has shown that the demographic structure of the EU demands a positive immigration policy. This means not only challenging xenophobic attitudes which, stubbornly, still survive in the European psyche, but also raising the profile of refugees as an important skills source.”

The RAM Project is to run a media workshop during the event and Regional Co-ordinator Terry

Williams will moderate the Thursday afternoon session.
Details from MRC on 0121 242 2200.

Booting out refugees from Britain

According to Home Office figures 3,880 people were removed from the UK in November, including over 3,000 refused entry at ports, bring the total for Jan – Nov 2000 to 42,320 people, not including their dependents.

At the end of November some 1,163 people were held in prison or detention centres.

The Prison Service currently makes 500 places available to the Immigration and Nationality Department for detainees.

Since coming to power in May 1997 the government has deported over 136,503 people.

Statistics from: Home Office Research Development & Statistics Directorate: All figures are provisional and subject to revision.

National Assembly Against Racism backs asylum seekers

A national rally against racism is to take place in London on March 24 - the UN Day Against Racism.

It is organised by NAAR whose Secretary Lee Jasper says the event is a response to the rising levels of racism and hostility towards asylum seekers in Britain.

Meanwhile the NAAR's Speak Out Against Racism - Defend Asylum Seekers campaign aims to raise public awareness of the plight of asylum seekers and counter media hostility.

It also wants to stop political parties using the issue for electoral purposes, and has called for an end to the voucher system and forced dispersal of asylum seekers.

For details about the both the campaign and the rally phone/fax 020 7427 9907 or E-mail AA_R@compuserve.com

Body Shop campaigns on human rights of refugees

The Body Shop in the UK and Ireland has launched a campaign to encourage citizen action on human rights for refugees and asylum-seekers.

In the UK a postcard campaign directed at Prime Minister Tony Blair calls for an end to the voucher system, while in the Republic of Ireland the campaign focusses on the right of refugees to work and training.

Body Shop founder Anita Roddick recently hosted a day-long consultation with organisations concerned with the welfare of refugees and asylum-seekers, including members of the RAM Project network to discuss ways in which the plight of refugees could be better highlighted.

For more information contact your local Body Shop or visit www.think-act-change.com/

RAM PROJECT ACTIVITIES

1. Press officers' update

Media workers will get the chance to update their knowledge of asylum issues at a Refugee Council-organised seminar in Birmingham on February 6.

Press officers, communication managers and directors of statutory and voluntary organisations have been invited to the session at the Tally Ho! Conference Centre, Pershore Road, Edgbaston.

The RAM Project will help deliver the training.

Details about places at £75 each are available from tony.coleman@refugeecouncil.org.uk

2. Media group action on dispersal shock

A launch meeting on 14 December for a new media network in Glasgow sprang into action when news broke that the first of 2,500 asylum seekers were to arrive in the city that same night.

Called by the Scottish Refugee Council, the meeting was attended by representatives of Glasgow organisations working for refugees and asylum seekers. They heard news of the dispersal plans for the first time.

The Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) had been told only a couple of days earlier that 2,500 asylum-seekers would be arriving in the city over the next ten weeks.

Peter Barry from the SRC said the news had come as a shock - the City Council's Asylum Team would

not be in place until the end of January and no plan was in place for working with the media on this new development.

An Asylum Media Group was set up on the spot. RAM co-ordinator Terry Williams said: "The SRC set up an immediate meeting with Glasgow City Council to get the facts and then issued a release to the local media.

"This situation shows how easily things can go badly wrong. Lack of planning caused alarm amongst refugee groups. It is the type of situation which can generate bad media coverage.

"The creation of a Glasgow Asylum Media Group by RAM should go some way to preventing own-goals by the authorities in the future."

For information about RAM media training packages designed for refugees and asylum seekers and groups working on their behalf, or for help in setting up an Asylum Media Forum in your area contact ram@presswise.org.uk

Refugees in the picture

Terence Wright from the Refugee Studies Centre in Oxford has produced a study paper 'Refugees on Screen' as part of a research project 'Moving Images: the Media Representation of Refugees'.

His study examines media representation of refugees, with the emphasis on the visual image which he believes has been paid scant regard in previous studies.

It suggests that many 'standard' images of refugees conform to patterns already established in Christian iconography evoking familiar story-lines with which people are familiar.

He goes on to suggest that the refugee story in fiction film conforms to the 'Road Movie' film genre. He also looks at the structure of television news and the work of the Glasgow Media Group on the news reporting of migration, and outlines issues arising from recent technological and institutional changes in media practice.

The paper also identifies key topics for future research into media images of refugees.

Copies of the paper can be downloaded from <http://www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/rsp/Wright5.pdf>.

Cut out and keep COMMUNICATOR

3. Writing to Editors

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

a. Letters for publication

If a newspaper publishes an article or a news item that raises issues on which you have a viewpoint, consider writing a letter for publication.

Getting a letter published is a good way of airing issues and generating debate.

Address your letter to the editor and deliver it (by fax, email, post, or personally) as soon after the original item was published as possible.

Keep your letter short and to the point (preferably under 150 words... it can be done!)

Do not try to cover everything. Select no more than a couple of key messages that you want to get across.

Remember if your letter gets printed and others write in they can expand upon your original points. You can even encourage friends to write in, and you may then get a chance to respond if others challenge your point of view.

Think about your audience (the readership of the publication) and use language they will understand. The letters' page is always popular, and if you are a regular reader you will know what sort of letter is likely to get printed.

Always provide your full name and address and phone number where you can be contacted - some newspapers like to check that you are who you say you are, or may want to suggest you modify your language if there is a risk of libel!

PLEASE NOTE

1. *If you have good reason to believe that publication of your name and/or address might put you at risk explain this in a footnote and ask that your name and address be withheld. Editors will normally respect this request.*

2. *If you just want the editor to think about an issue and you don't want your letter to be*

published write NOT FOR PUBLICATION across the top.

3. *It is in the absolute discretion of editors as to which letters are published/broadcast. There is no harm in asking why your letter was not used, but you would only have grounds for complaint if you have evidence of a sustained effort to suppress your point of view.*

b. Complaining to editors

If you are offended by something broadcast on radio nor television or published in print, don't be afraid to contact the editor of the offending publication or programme at once.

Editors may not like admitting to mistakes, but they don't like making them either.

Every broadcaster keeps a log of telephone calls received after a programme has been broadcast. The details are passed on to the editor/producer, and if enough people call you can be sure that the issue will be discussed in editorial meetings.

When you do make a complaint don't use abusive or threatening language – it is likely to be counter-productive. You may be upset, but using emotive language and accusations of extremism are unlikely to be taken as seriously as a reasonable and reasoned approach.

It will usually get better results — editors are only human — and puts you in a stronger position to complain if the response is unsatisfactory.

You are under no obligation to supply personal documents or information that others have no right to see, but if you have access to documentary evidence to support your view, say so – or refer the editor to a website where s/he can check your version.

Be clear about what you would like to see happen next. You may want a correction or apology published. If the editor agrees, make sure that you confirm the wording of the correction and when and where it will appear.

If you are not satisfied with an editor's response — including the length of time it takes to get a reply — refer your complaint to the appropriate regulator. (See www.presswise.org.uk for details)

Remember even if you make a complaint via the media regulators it will be sent straight to the appropriate editor for comment.

You can always contact PressWise for advice about how to proceed.

'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.

Thursday & Friday
25-26 January
European Conference
Venue: Birmingham City Centre, Grand Moat House.

Organised by the Midland Refugee Council in partnership with the Scottish and Welsh Refugee Councils, Cardiff County Council and the Berlin Research Institute. Sessions include a RAM Project media workshop. Contact: MRC on 0121 242 2200.

Saturday 27 January
1st Holocaust Memorial Day
For tolerance and against all discrimination.

Organised by Holocaust Educational Trust & others. Commemorative events will be held throughout the country – an opportune moment to recall current oppression which drives people to seek refuge. A national ceremony will take place in central London with Holocaust

survivors, a senior member of the Royal Family and leading political, religious and community figures in attendance.

In **Liverpool**, on Wednesday 24 & Thursday 25 Jan, the Plaza Community Cinema will show a film "Shindler's List" followed by a short talk from a Holocaust survivor.

In **Edinburgh**, from 23 Jan to 6 February, the Ann Frank Exhibition will be at the City Art Centre. In **Glasgow**, the "Other Time, Another Place" mobile exhibition will be at the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum.

The same exhibition will be at Nottingham Trent University from 23 Jan to 27 Jan.

Contact: HET on 020 7222 6822, email: hetrust@compuserve.com

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

Saturday 24 March
Rally against racism
Organised by the National Assembly Against Racism to celebrate the UN Day Against Racism.

USEFUL WEBSITES

www.ramproject.org.uk

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

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.

Body Shop Human Rights & Social Affairs Campaigns:
www.think-act-change.com/

Campaign Against Female Genital Mutilation
www.forward.dirco.co.uk

Carf: Campaign Against Racism & Fascism:
www.carf.demon.co.uk

Crosspoint Anti Racism: largest collection of anti-racism links on internet:
www.magenta.nl/crosspoint

Global Fund for Women:
www.globalfundforwomen.org

Internet Centre Anti-Racism Europe
www.icare.tr

Irish Refugee Council:
www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/

IRR: Institute of Race Relation:
www.irr.org.uk

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns
www.ncadc.org.uk

United
www.united.non-profit.nl

Yahoo update on asylum news
<http://uk.fc.yahoo.com/a/a/sylum-html>

PLUS:

The Guardian
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
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/

Happy New Year
and keep me posted.
Nazand Begikhani
Bulletin Editor
Email:
bulletin@presswise.org.uk

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 19 JANUARY 2001

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