

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

26 JANUARY 01

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)

Politicians join media at the RAM FORUM

Clive Soley MP, Chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party will share a platform with Liberal Democrat and Conservative Party spokespeople at the Forum. The session will be moderated by BBC Newscaster **George Alagiah**, a PressWise patron, with **Kamal Ahmed** of *The Observer* and **Dorothy Byrne**, C4 Commissioning Editor for Current Affairs.

FORUM preview for sensational new documentary

Channel 4 have agreed to lay on a lunchtime preview of extracts from 'Bloody Foreigners', an extraordinary account of life on the underside of the British economy, some of it filmed using hidden cameras. The film is scheduled for broadcast on Saturday 3 February.

RAM FORUM FILLS UP

Over 90 people are already booked in to attend the RAM Project Forum next Thursday. With only 30 places left to fill we need to hear from you NOW if you want to be there.

Apply with full details: Name, Organisation, Position, Postal address with code, Tel & Fax Nos. & Email address, to

You may also book by email:

ram@presswise.org.uk
or write to RAM, PressWise,
38 EBC, Felix Road,
Bristol BS5 0HE
£25 registration fee (inc.lunch)
Free places for refugees.
£15 Concessionary rates for students/pensioners/claimants.
Cheques payable to
'PressWise Trust'

Forum line up gets longer:

Among those joining refugee journalists at the Forum will be:
Yasmin Alibhai-Brown
Columnist, *The Independent*
Henry Bonsu BBC London Live
Abebe Gelaw
New Vision e-journal
Dr Marie Gillespie
Swansea Univ.
Colin Jacobson Reportage
Fazil Kawani Communications
Director, Refugee Council
Janet Lee Radio Authority
Prof Justin Lewis
Cardiff University
Susan Roberts, Press
Complaints Commission
Stephen Whittle
Broadcasting Standards
Commission
Gary Younge *The Guardian*

The format for the day will be a series of studio-style debates moderated by media professionals to generate information and informality. Participants will receive a fact-packed brochure, and there will be a room devoted to stalls. A full report of the event will be prepared, and will be available from PressWise.

See the next issue of the RAM Bulletin for details.

Training Day for Exiled Journalists

The PressWise Trust RAM Project in conjunction with the NUJ Black Members and Ethics Councils is planning a training day to introduce exiled journalists to the UK media. The course should take place at the Easton Business Centre, Felix Road, Bristol on Tuesday 27 February, depending on demand.

Spaces are limited but the one-day course will be free, and there will be help with fares. Book your place NOW
Call Anna or Elly on 0117 941 5889 or email ram@presswise.org.uk

Dispersal System doesn't work

Recently, the media has talked a lot about the Dispersal System and the Government's failure to get it right.

Introduced in April 2000, the initial plan was to disperse 65,000 asylum seekers across Britain within a year.

That figure was revised to 44,000 in October 2000.

Home Secretary Jack Straw believes that without the new measures, "asylum applications would have risen even more

quickly, as they have in some other European countries”.

But in a meeting with MPs recently he admitted he was largely powerless to reverse the trend.

“If you can predict to me what is going to happen in terms of political stability or instability in Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iran, Sri Lanka and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, I could then tell you whether I thought these pressures would continue,” (*Daily Mail*, December 22, 2000)

The way the media, local councils and refugee groups represent the issue is quite different. According to local councils and refugee groups thousands of asylum seekers returned to London after dispersal. According to the Refugee Council refugees and asylum seekers are rejecting dispersal, because “they are often sent to sink estates where they are too frightened to venture outside. Many of them are giving up their right to accommodation and squeezing into already cramped conditions with relatives [in the south] so they can reach proper legal support, pursue their claims with the Home Office, or simply feel safe.”

According to the *National Civil Rights Movement* asylum seekers and refugees “face problems of hostility from some sections of the local population. Since June 2000, doctor's surgeries in Leicester have refused to register any more refugee patients.”

Steve Hitchins, leader of Islington Council in London sees the system as a way to make life hard for refugees and asylum seekers.

“The Government has been completely wrong,” he told the BBC on 27 December.

“People don't come to this country to ‘look for a better quality of life’ as Michael Heseltine thinks. They come because their life is in danger in their country of origin and they don't have any other alternative.

“The situation created by dispersal system, not only makes asylum seekers homeless and at risk of racial harassment, it also puts their cases into question.

“Many cases have been dismissed without even being considered for what is known as “non-compliance.” This, they say, often means simply failing to return a complicated form, in English, within 14 days.

Detention or Punishment?

The crisis created by the dispersal system has led the Government to draw up secret plans to house increasing numbers of asylum seekers in prisons.

According to *The Observer* of December 31, Home Secretary Jack Straw has ordered the creation of 500 new places in prisons, including Liverpool and two London jails.

Eight prisons across Britain, including Belmarsh, Blundeston, Highdown, Holme House, Lincoln, Liverpool, Wandsworth and Winchester, have begun preparations to detain up to 500 asylum seekers as a “temporary measure” that will last at least until the end of next year.

And a new Detention Centre run by Group 4 is to open in May in former military accommodation at Yarlswood near Thurleigh, north of Bedford.

Each prison will be expected to hold about 50 immigration detainees alongside inmates on remand. According to *The Guardian* (23 Dec 2000) The prison service said the extra places were in addition to the 900 detainees already held in purpose-built immigration detention centres at Campsfield House near Oxford, Tinsley House at Gatwick airport and at Harmondsworth near Heathrow

Death by Rejection

A group of asylum seekers and refugee rights defenders have started the Leicester Civil Rights Movement (LCRM) following the death by suicide of Ramin Khaleghi on January 18.

Ramin was a 27-year-old Iranian asylum seeker who had been a political prisoner in Iran for a number of years before claiming

asylum in Britain. His claim was rejected his claim despite medical evidence of torture at the hands of Iranian police. One week after hearing the news, he took his own life (see RAM Forum brochure).

LCRM are taking up the cases of people suffering the absence of human support as a consequence of the Dispersal System.

For further information see:
Campaign Against Racism & Fascism

www.carf.demon.co.uk

National Civil Rights Movement

www.ncrm.org.uk

International Federation of Iranian Refugees (IFIR)

Web Site: www.hambastegi.org

Voucher's under scrutiny

'Token Gestures', a report on the effects of the voucher system on asylum seekers and organisations in the UK was launched in December 2000. Based on research conducted by the Asylum Rights Campaign, Oxfam, Refugee Council and Transport and it confirms that vouchers are inherently discriminatory, marginalising those that use them and making them targets for abuse and harassment in the community.

'Vouchers isolate and mark out the most vulnerable in society as uninvited and unwanted. In doing so they strike out at the heart of the concept of sanctuary.' says Nick Hardwick, Chief Executive of The Refugee Council.

Copies of the report can be obtained from Refugee Council and Oxfam

New Appointment at the Scottish Refugee Council

Sophia Marriage has recently taken up post at the Information and Press Officer for the Scottish Refugee Council. She comes from a research position for the Church of Scotland and teaching Islam, World Christianity and History for the University of Edinburgh, where she was also Project Officer for the Media and Theology Project.

Cut out and keep COMMUNICATOR

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 are being prepared for the RAM website: www.ramproject.org.uk

3. GETTING ON THE AIRWAVES

It is not as difficult or as daunting as you might imagine to get your message across over the airwaves. Local radio and regional TV companies are keen to broadcast local news and views and to 'discover' local personalities. Providing local coverage is part of their legal obligation, and it helps to strengthen their links to the area they serve.

RESEARCH

Your main task is to discover what sort of material is most likely to interest them, and which programmes your material might fit into.

When you planning a campaign, listen to **all** the radio stations and watch the **local** output on both BBC and commercial TV stations. Identify the programmes and reporters with an interest in your field. Ask yourself which programmes are likely to attract the type of audience you want to talk to. Magazine programmes may be better than news bulletins for reaching your chosen audience.

BBC and commercial TV stations run local news in the early morning, at lunch-time, in the early evening, and after their flagship national news programmes. Listings magazines (*Radio Times* etc.) and local and national papers carry details of broadcasting schedules. Contact the stations to find the names of programme producers and editors.

HORSES FOR COURSES

Don't waste your time and theirs by offering inappropriate stories to unsuitable programmes, but do think laterally. If your event is likely to cause a traffic hold-up, for instance, make sure the traffic desk, the news desk, and the 'What's On' slot know about it.

Radio is a cheaper and more versatile medium than TV. A good talker — with something interesting to say and an interesting (but audible) way of saying it — can hold an audience far better on radio than a 'talking head' on TV.

TV is a more costly and a more selective medium. It needs **visual** stories, and delights in unusual events that will attract a wide range of audiences. If your event is photogenic, give them plenty of notice so they can arrange for a film crew to attend.

a. LOCAL RADIO

Local radio stations are legally obliged to keep in touch with local affairs, and speech broadcasts are cheap to produce. They need you at least as much as you need them. They are always keen to interview local personalities about local, and national, events, and also welcome a chance to talk to visiting national figures.

If a radio station wants to come and pre-record an interview:

- find out what they are after;
- welcome their interest;
- don't be afraid to decline if you are unhappy about their motives — you are under no obligation to take part.
- prepare yourself.

Once you have agreed to take part:

- spend time checking your facts and figures;
- note down the key points you want to make and try out different ways of expressing them;
- think of **brief anecdotes** based on your own or another's personal experience that illustrate the points you want to make. Human interest stories stick in people's minds and help to convince listeners that you know what you are talking about **and** have a just case.

*If you want to write a 'script' what you want to say, to give yourself confidence, make it no longer than 150 words. At normal pace we speak at 2-3 words per second, and you can say a lot in one minute. **BUT don't** read it out, learn it off by heart or over-rehearse. You will sound wooden, insincere, and less convincing — and get nervous about forgetting your 'lines'.*

Before the reporter arrives:

- make sure you can provide a quiet place for recording the interview (avoid traffic noise, crowded rooms and other people talking).
- if you have a tape-recorder, check it is working properly and set it up (openly) so you can keep an accurate record of what happens.

You have every right to do this but explain to the reporter (who may be nervous about your intentions) that you just want a record of what you say, your organisation wants it for training purposes, or even that you want to check that the broadcast version does not distort your views.

MORE ON THIS NEXT TIME

'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.

*Saturday 24 February
9.30am-5pm*

Two Years on from the Lawrence Report- Time to Stamp Out Institutional Racism

Organised by the National Assembly Against Racism with SERTUC & UNISON. Speakers include Atma Singh (NBA), Gloria Millis (TUC), Dr Richard Stone (Lawrence Inquiry Team), & many others.

Venue: TUC Conference centre, Congress House, Gt Russel St, London WC1. Contact: Sabby Dhalu on 020 7247 9907. Email: contactsaar@hotmail.com

Tuesday 27 February
Training Day for Exiled Journalists, Organised by The PressWise Trust in conjunction with NUJ Black Members and Ethics Councils

Venue: Easton Business Centre, Felix Road, Bristol BS5 0HE
Book your place NOW
Call Anna or Elly on 0117 941 5889 or email ram@presswise.org.uk

*Saturday 24 March,
1.00pm*

Hands off Asylum Seekers, Keep Racism Out of the General Election

Rally with speakers, music, dance, poetry and prose. Organised by the National Assembly Against Racism.

Venue: Trafalgar Square, London WC2.
Contact: Sabby Dhalu on 020 7247 9907.

Email: contactsaar@hotmail.com

Tuesday, 27 March

Halabja, The Forgotten Genocide

Organised by Exiled Writes Ink. Speakers include: Rebwar Fatah (Director of Kurdishmedia), Nazand Begikhani (RAM bulletin editor), Choman Hardi (Exiled Writes Inc), Rebwar Said (artist) & others.

Venue: Freedom Forum, Stanhope House, Stanhope Place, London W2 2HH.

Contact: Jennifer Langer on 020 8458 1910, email: Jennifer@exiledwrites.fsnet.co.uk

Wednesday, 25 April
Refugee Mental Well-being Awareness Training

Venue: to be confirmed. In partnership between, the Refugee Council, the Medial Foundation & Camelot Foundation.

Contact: Dr. Dieu Donne Hack-Polary on 0207 840 4352/4351

Wednesday 20 June
World Refugee Day
Loads of activities will take place – what are YOU organising locally?

For information call Karen Jennings on 02920666250

Sunday 24 June
Cultural Festival: Celebrating Sanctuary.

As part of the Refugee Week.

Organised by UNHCR, Refugee Council, Refaed, Save the Children, London Art. Venue: South Bank, Coin Street London SE1 9NR. Contact: Joanne Harvey on 020 7820 3105.

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.

Please note that the information of these sites are not controlled by RAM and may not represent our views

European Research Documentation Centre on Migration & Ethnic relations (ERCOMER)
www.ercomer.org/

Evelyn Oldfield Unit
www.evelynoldfield.co.uk

Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants
www.jcwi.org.uk

International Federation of Iranian Refugees
www.hambastegi.org/

Minority Rights Group International
www.minorityrights.org/

National Civil Rights Movement
www.ncrm.org.uk

UNHCR's 50th anniversary:
www.caja.org.uk

Plus:

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.globalfundforwomenn.org

Internet Centre Anti-Racism Europe
www.icare.tr

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

Nazand Begikhani

Bulletin Editor

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