

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

4 May 2001

Hostile media coverage encourages racist attacks – police deny their own evidence.

Observer reporter Martin Bright is angry at Metropolitan Police denials of his story (22 April) that police perceive links between negative media coverage and assaults on refugees and asylum seekers.

Yet the Race and Serious Violent Crime Squad are monitoring newspaper coverage as part of a Home Office-funded research project which could confirm widely held suspicions that hostile media coverage gives rise to assaults. They are looking for patterns in London to those evident elsewhere in UK in outbreaks of racist and homophobic violence.

Anxious to keep out of the political row that has exploded since the Commission for Racial Equality brokered a pledge from party leaders to avoid inflammatory statements during the election campaign, the Metropolitan Police became tight-lipped when approached by PressWise about the study.

Yet the start of an election campaign is exactly the time to be making such connections.

If you have evidence of violent crimes against refugees and asylum seekers – report them to the police and insist that the details are logged.

Systems are in place to gather intelligence about racist attacks even if they are reported first by third parties. Many refugees and asylum seekers are reluctant to go to the police for fear that it may hinder their applications to stay in the UK may be affected.

If you can see a link between such violence and hostile media coverage, report that concern too, and make a complaint to the media regulators.

Unhappy with local or national media coverage of asylum or refugee issues

BUT DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?

Email/fax your concerns to PressWise and we can help you put the record straight or make a formal complaint to the media regulators...

Contact PressWise
on pw@presswise.org.uk
Fax 0117 941 5848

Monitoring media coverage in Scotland and Wales

Two excellent studies have been published recently dealing with media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers.

Asylum: the Truth behind the Headlines, published by OXFAM and compiled by Ceru Mollard, survey's the Scottish press.

Welcome or Over Reaction? Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the Welsh Media is published by Wales Media Forum and put together by Tammy Speers.

Both look at the coverage during the early part of the dispersal programme.

Articles in six Scottish newspapers were reviewed over a two month period, March-April 2000 were evaluated according to the language used, techniques employed, topic, tone and headline.

The survey found the asylum debate in Scotland had been based on false assumptions, pejorative statements, wrong figures, inaccurate information and exaggerated incidents.

According to the research, this appears to be the result of the negative editorial line taken by the monitored newspapers and the level of hostile public opinion towards asylum seekers.

This situation has created an atmosphere of hostility and xenophobia towards refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland.

The Welsh research, during the period April to December 2000, showed that local media 'covers the issue of asylum seekers without the hostility or hyperbole that can be seen in the UK-wide national media'.

However, it confirms that the asylum debate is framed as an 'official' issue dealing more with government asylum policies and procedures than with the human realities of refugees & asylum seekers. Refugee voices are hardly heard and the language in describing them is not free from the pejorative, 'particularly in areas outside Cardiff & Newport'.

Both reports offer recommendations to the media, the Home Office, political parties, the national and local governments, and NGOs which could shift the focus of the negative debate about refugees & asylum seekers.

They would like to see the Press Complaints Commission establish guidelines to encourage the media to avoid using false assumptions and negative language.

And editors and journalists are encouraged to seek accurate information and real stories about refugees and frame their discourse in a positive language.

The reports are available from Oxfam 01865 311311, and the Wales Media Forum, 029 2087 4041, email:

mediaforum@cardiff.ac.uk

In this edition of the RAM Bulletin, the cut-out-and-keep COMMUNICATOR column provides a simple guide to monitoring the way politicians and the media handle the asylum issue during both local and general election campaigns. See p.4

WHAT IS THE USE OF THE RAM BULLETIN?
Is it helping you to obtain fair and accurate media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers?
Help us improve its effectiveness. Cut and paste this questionnaire then complete it and email to bulletin@presswise.org.uk
Thanks

1. How do you use the RAM Bulletin?

- a. Read and discard/file it?
- b. Forward it others?
- c. Print it out and distribute it?
- d. Share it with media contacts?

2. What difficulties have you experienced in

- a. receiving the Bulletin?
- b. downloading the Bulletin?
- c. printing the Bulletin?

3. How many people in your organisation

- a. receive the Bulletin?
- b. read and use the Bulletin?
- c. I am not in an organisation.

4. What does your organisation do?

5. Is the Bulletin

- a. too long?
- b. too short?
- c. about right?

6. Should the Bulletin appear

- a. about once a month?
- b. more frequently?
- c. less frequently?

7. How would you rate the design and presentation of the Bulletin?

- a. Excellent
- b. Adequate
- c. Poor

8. Please rate the most useful items in the Bulletin (1 = top)

News section
 RAM activities
 Features
 The Communicator
 Diary dates
 Useful websites

9. Please suggest additional items that would improve the content of the Bulletin...

10. Please give an example of how the Bulletin has helped you in your work.

11. How would you rate media coverage of refugees/asylum seekers in your area?

- a. Non-existent
- b. Generally fair?
- c. Generally hostile?

12. Which RAM services would help you make a difference in the media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers locally?

- a. Use of the media training?
- b. Advice on how to complain?
- c. Setting up a media network?

13. Have you ever made a complaint about media coverage of refugees & asylum seekers to

- a. the PCC?
- b. the BSC?
- c. the BBC?
- d. any other media regulator?

14. What did you complain about, and what was the outcome?

15. What do you see as the main obstacles to fairer and more accurate representation of refugees & asylum seekers in the mass media?

16. What could the RAM Project do to help improve links between refugees & asylum seekers and the mass media?

17. What local and national newspapers do you read regularly?

18. What other publications do you read about refugees and asylum seekers?

eg, *In Exile* (Ref Cncl); *Refugees* (UNHCR); *European Race Bulletin* (IRR)

19. How often have you visited the RAM website

www.ramproject.org.uk

- a. Never
- b. Monthly
- c. More / less frequently

20. Please suggest someone else to whom the Bulletin should be emailed.

Refugees form media agency

Exiled journalists in the UK have set up their own agency to find work and run media training.

The London-based Refugee Media Agency aims to be the main

contact point for refugees and asylum seekers with backgrounds in journalism. Journalists running the New Vision web site, who have been supported by RAM and the National Union of Journalists, are closely involved.

Around two dozen refugee journalists have already joined the new organisation and further information can be obtained from Abebe Gellaw on The Refugee Media Agency is now looking for a permanent base in London and has set up an appeal for funds to promote its services.

Says Abebe: "The agency will strive to help journalists get into the media through employment or freelance work. We are seeking paid work for our members as a way of meeting our costs. "The agency recognises that refugee journalists in Britain need to understand the UK media and are talking to a London college about the possibility of setting up such a course.

"The New Vision web site will become a vital resource for the group as we will be able to provide information to existing and potential members as well as supplying details about asylum and refugee issues for the mainstream media.

"The Refugee Media Agency is just what we need in order to be able to respond to some of the outrageous coverage of refugees and asylum seeker in the UK media."

Visit the New Vision's website: www.newvision.org.uk/

Intolerance on the increase in the UK

'In the UK, the support shown for policies aimed at improving social coexistence between different ethnic groups is similar to the EU average.

'There is a lower level of acceptance where refugees & person seeking political asylum are concerned.

'Multicultural optimism is decreasing in the UK. In 2000, there is less agreement with the statement that it is a good thing for any society to be made up of different races, religion & culture.

'Furthermore, fewer people concur with the statement that a country's diversity in terms of race, religion & culture adds to its strength. At the same time, the demand for the repatriation of immigrants is increasing. In the UK, the percentage of missing values is high'

This is the worrying message of a detailed study conducted by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism & Xenophobia comparing changes in attitudes over recent years.

Attitudes Towards Minority Groups in the European Union reveals that 'nearly 39 percent of Britons who took part in the survey believed that legal immigrants who became unemployed should be forcibly repatriated... 15 per cent were totally intolerant towards minority groups while 36 per cent were passively tolerant'.

A similar message emerges from a study conducted in summer 2000 by the European Commission against Racism & Intolerance (ECRI). Slated by the *Daily Mail*, it has expressed concern at 'the appearance of racist or racially inflammatory material in the printed media and on the internet'. ECRI stresses that discrimination, racism & xenophobia are particularly acute against refugees and asylum seekers.

This is reflected not only in the 'local but also some national mainstream newspapers' and in the 'tone of the discourse resorted to in support of the adoption and enforcement of increasingly restrictive asylum & immigration laws'.

For ECRI the Code of Practice policed by the PCC is 'ill-suited to countering the publication of articles containing general racist assumptions and stereotypes against particular groups of persons'.

ECRI encourages 'the promotion of positive publications on ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and immigrants'.

Contact EUMC by email: information@eumc.eu.int or visit the website: <http://eumc.eu.int>

Refugees and asylum seekers Press Pack

A fact-packed handbook for journalists wishing to cover refugee issues has been produced by media researcher Tammy Speers, from the Tom Hopkinson Centre at the Cardiff University School of Journalism.

Tammy, who has played an active role in the RAM Project, as well as being media officer for the Asylum-seekers & Refugees Media Working Group in Wales, explodes myths, supplies data and information sources and explains the work of the UNHCR in the 46 page document which focuses on Wales but would be of value to journalists anywhere in the UK.

Police back positive media coverage to assist asylum seekers & refugees

In their 'Guide to meeting the policing needs of asylum-seekers and refugees' the Association of Chief Police Officers stress the importance of positive media coverage.

Speaking at its launch co-author Robert Ayling, Deputy Chief Constable of Kent, said "The overwhelming majority of asylum-seekers are law-abiding citizens. It is vital that communities receive accurate messages and that irresponsible and inflammatory comments are avoided."

He said that ill-informed media coverage had "heightened local tensions and resentment of asylum seekers".

This guide explains the process by which the dispersal system can be managed. Written according to the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998, it identifies key processes that help the police to promote good community relations between asylum seekers, refugees and host communities.

In a chapter on Media Strategy it recommends the appointment of well-informed media spokespeople, inter-agency co-operation in dealing with media enquiries, early-warning systems about media interest and the promotion of positive stories. It also encourages the use of the PCC when wholly inappropriate or racist reporting occurs', and reminds

officers of Section 19 of the Public Order Act 1986 which prohibits material likely to stir up racial hatred.

The guide suggests that local authorities facilitate Asylum Seekers Media Groups to develop and co-ordinate a "countrywide media strategy", and stresses the importance of providing media representatives with accurate and consistent information.

ACPO also highlights the role and responsibility of the media in promoting a harmonious relationship between communities, since 'community safety is not just the responsibility of the police service'.

For further information, visit ACPO's web site: www.acpo.police.uk

SIGN OF THE TIMES ?

Dear Friends

I have a sticker in my car saying: 'Hands off Asylum Seekers, keep Racism out of the General Election'. It is a terrible indictment of Britain in 2001 that I should feel the need to display such a sentiment in the first place!

The present xenophobia has been whipped up by both politicians and the press, all seemingly intent in outdoing one another in their rabid reporting of the situation. I would be interested in any practical ways to help to rebalance the present dire situation.

Gill Sathanandan
Shrewsbury

Asylum Seekers - A Guide to Recent Legislation

The third edition of *Asylum Seekers - A Guide to Recent Legislation* has been produced by the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association in partnership with Resource Information Service.

It contains detailed information for those working with refugees and asylum seekers about the effects of the Immigration & Asylum Act 1999. Contact Resource Information Service on 020 7494 2408, email: ris@ris.org.uk

Cut out and keep COMMUNICATOR

DO-IT-YOURSELF ELECTION MEDIA MONITORING CAMPAIGN

The 'compact' to which the Commission for Racial Equality obtained the signatures of all the main political party leaders on behalf of prospective candidates canvassers and party members in national, local and European elections, makes it clear that while *'right to freedom of speech and public debate is essential, it should not be viewed as an absolute right without any limits.*

Equally fundamental is our human right to live in a just society, where racial, national or cultural differences exist, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance and respect... The right to free political expression must not be abused in the competition for popular votes by causing or exploiting prejudice and discrimination on grounds of race or nationality. There can be no place in our democratic process for those who seek to incite or encourage, blatantly or covertly, racial hatred, prejudice and discrimination between others. Elected politicians must represent everyone, not pitch one group against another for short-term political or personal gain.

To 'ensure that all political campaigns are conducted fairly and free from racial hatred and prejudice' the signatories undertook to:

1. *represent the interests of all my constituents, regardless of race, sex, colour, religion or any other discriminating factor, and promote good race relations*
2. *reject all forms of racial violence, racial harassment and unlawful racial discrimination*
3. *not publish, or seek to have published by others, or in any way endorse any material, including pamphlets, leaflets and posters, likely to generate hostility or division between people of different racial, national or religious groups, or which might reasonably be expected to do so*
4. *ensure that in any dealings with the public, including door-to-door and telephone canvassing, no words or actions are used which may*
 - *encourage, instruct or put pressure on others to discriminate; or*
 - *stir up racial or religious hatred or lead to prejudice on grounds of race, nationality or religion*
5. *make sure everyone involved in my (my party's) campaign for election pledges to abide by these principles, and call on all those involved in promoting or reporting political debate, especially the media, to do the same.*

They also accepted responsibility *'to ensure that every alleged breach is properly investigated by my party, and that appropriate action is taken against any candidate, party member or person acting on behalf of the party or a candidate, who knowingly fails to comply with these principles. This could include their removal from any formal role on behalf of my election campaign or that of the political party I represent, and a public disavowal by that party.*

Make sure politicians and the press stick to these principles during the election campaign

The local and general election campaigns will be the severest test yet of the extent to which the leaders of public opinion can be trusted to abide by these principles. That is where YOU come in.

- Remind local candidates of the compact.
- Remind journalists that it is part of their job to challenge extravagant claims made by political candidates – including and especially pejorative statements about refugees and asylum seekers. They should demand to know the source of statistics, and refuse to publish unsubstantiated claims about asylum-seekers.
- Buy or read at least one national and local daily paper and one weekly local newspaper during the election period. (Perhaps you can arrange for a couple of people in your organisation to do this between them.)
- Scan each copy for stories about refugees and asylum seekers. (Make a note of whether these are related to the election campaign or not.)
- Collect headlines and pictures – what messages do they communicate?
- Categorise each story by topic (eg Housing - Benefits – Crime) and by tone (eg Positive - Negative – Balanced).
- Are refugees and asylum seekers or their support organisations quoted? If not, ask the editor why not?
- Make a note of the language used – is it 'loaded', does it rely upon myths and stereotypes, or is it neutral?
- Keep an eye on the Letters column – everyone is free to express their own opinions, but are all view points getting a look-in? Write your own letter if necessary
- Make a special note of any editorials/comment columns (which are usually exempt from PCC adjudication unless they are based on factual inaccuracies). Are they generally hostile or sympathetic to refugees and asylum seekers, or do they challenge policies instead (for a change)
- It is the function of a newspapers to publish information about controversial topics, but if you think a story contains factual inaccuracies, comment masquerading as fact, or material that encourages prejudice or discriminates against people – make a complaint to the Press Complaints Commission (see www.presswise.org.uk)

Send us a copy of your results, along with an explanation of how you conducted your monitoring exercise. PressWise is always willing to help those making complaints.

'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 26 May, 9.30am
Spring Conference & Rally:
Building a United Future,** organised by the National Civil Rights Movement. Speakers panel, book stalls, poetry & music. Venue: High Fields Youth & Community Centre, 98 Melbourne Rd, Leicester LE2 ODS. For further information contact Halima Mohammed on: 020 8574 0818, email: info@ncrm.org.uk

**Saturday 2 June 12.00-5.00 pm
Annual General Meeting of the
National Coalition of Anti-
Deportation Campaigns.** For details of central London venue contact Zrinka Bralo on 020 7701 5197, email: ncadc.London@appleonline.net.

**Friday 8 – Tues. 12 June,
The Power to Change: Action &
Awareness-raising against
Racism & Discrimination in
Europe.** Organised by UNITED for (inter) national anti-racist & human rights organisations from all over Europe are invited – only 70 places. Venue: Goteborg, Sweden. For further information, call UNITED on +31 20 6834778, fax: +31 20 6834582

**Saturday 23 – Friday 29 June
REFUGEE WEEK**
Do your local media knows what is happening locally during Refugee Week?
Agencies include Refugee Council, UNHCR, RefAid, Save the Children, Refugee Action, London Arts and the Arts Council of England. For more details contact Refugee Week Information Line on 020 7820 3055, email: Refugee.Week@RefugeeCouncil.org.uk

Wednesday 20 June INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE DAY

This day is being marked around the world and the UNHCR is organising a big event at the Statue of Liberty.

For more information call Karen Jennings on 0292 066 6250

**Saturday 30 June, 10am-6.00pm
International Conference on the
State, Civil Liberties & Secrecy.** Organised by Statewatch to celebrate its 10th anniversary. Speakers include: Prof Thomas Mathiesen (Oslo University) A. Sivanadan (editor Race & Class), Heidi Hautala, MEP (co-president of the Green/EFA) Aidan White (European Federation of Journalists) Venue: University of London Students Union, Malet Street, London WC1. For further information call: 020 8802 1882, email, office@statewatch.org
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.

Black Information Link Run by the 1990 Trust, a national Black organisation, this site includes sections on everything from art and culture, to the Stephen Lawrence campaign, and the environment. www.blink.org.uk

Chinese in Britain Forum
www.chinese-forum.co.uk

Commission for Racial Equality
<http://www.cre.gov.uk>

Ethnic Minority Foundation
www.emf-cemvo.co.uk

European Council on refugees & Exiles (ECRE)

ECRE is an umbrella organisation of 70 refugee-assisting agencies in 25 countries working towards fair and

humane policies for the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees.
www.ecre.org

European Parliament
The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights is available at the web-site of the EP: <http://www.eroparl.eu.int/>

Internet Centre Anti-Racism Europe
<http://www.icare.to>

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

Newcastle West: Tackling Racism Initiative
www.tri-west.org

Racial Harassment Organisation
www.racialharassment.org.uk

Refugee Womens Legal Group
<http://www.rwlg.org.uk>

Statewatch
www.statewatch.org

Plus:

European Roma Rights Centre
www.errc.org/

1st festival of photography in Asia
www.chobimela.org

Human Rights Portal for Bangladesh
www.banglarights.net

Immigration Law Practitioners' Association
www.ilpa.org.uk

Migrant Media
<http://homepages.poptel.org.uk/migrantmedia/docs/migrantmedia.htm>

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC)
www.ncadc.org.uk/

Relief Line
www.reliefline.co.uk

Refugee Education & Training Advisory Service (RETAS)
www.refugeenet.org/

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

**send information or stories to
Bulletin editor
Nazand Begikhani at
bulletin@presswise.org.uk**

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