

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 17, Mar 2002

Home Office launches study of media impact on attitudes to refugees

An intensive investigation about the impact of media coverage on public perceptions of refugees and asylum-seekers is to be undertaken

Researchers from London's Goldsmiths College will work with local community groups to discover how attitudes are formed and changed.

The RAM Project and the Refugee Council are represented on the study steering committee for the study which has been sponsored by the Positive Images working group of the Home Office Refugee Integration Unit.

Internship programme seeks African, Asian and Caribbean journalists

Exiled journalist may be considered for Internships on national newspapers and magazines under a scheme pioneered by the Creative Collective.

The seven successful candidates will be paid for three to six month internships at publications ranging from *The Bradford Telegraph and Argus* to *The Financial Times*. There will be a bursary for living expenses, plus peer support and training.

The Creative Collective, a group of Black journalists keen to promote diversity in UK newsrooms, first ran a highly successful pilot scheme last year, based on a model developed in the US to promote diversity in newsrooms.

For details on how to apply, contact Joy Francis on interns@thecreativecollective.com

Ossam's story

Iraqi asylum-seeker Ossam Altaee has set up a web site to explain why and how he fled his home country, and to tell of his life in the UK after

the New York atrocity of 11 September 2001.

He hopes journalists will be among those who take up his story. Visit his website at www.geocities.com/ossam3 or www.osam3.tripod.com

NUJ back destitute Max

The plight of Refugee Media Agency vice-chair Max Jimmy has been taken up by the National Union of Journalists.

Max lost his entitlement to benefit after his asylum application was referred to the Termination Team of the National Asylum Support Service.

A Sierra Leonean journalist who fled to the UK after receiving death threats from rebel forces, Max surviving with help from Sierra Leone friends and press freedom organisations.

Offers of support for Max to ram@presswise.org.uk please.

Local campaign saves Farid

Campaigners saved an Afghan father of two from deportation – just 10 minutes before his flight was scheduled to take off. Farid Ahmadi fled with his wife and children to set up home in Lye, West Midlands, after being tortured by the Taliban.

Local people who backed the Ahmadi family succeeded in obtaining a judicial review which allowed Farid to stay. His children had been too ill to travel.

First ID cards issued

Asylum seekers in Croydon were issued with the first biometric ID cards by the Home Office in February, according to *Local Government First*.

The Application Registration Card holds the bearer's fingerprint, their picture and personal details.

Journo Viv joins STAR

Viv Jackson is the new youth outreach officer for STAR – the national Student Action for Refugees organisation.

The former news reporter says: "I am extremely excited about being at STAR. In my last job as a news reporter, I realised that refugees in Britain are often dangerously misrepresented and their hardship ignored.

"Now STAR's unique awareness-raising and practical involvement with refugees and asylum seekers can go even further in bringing about change.

More and more 16-18 year olds want to get behind the myths and learn about refugees."

Contact Viv at info@star-network.org.uk

Fire-fighters' fury at Yarl's Wood risks

The Fire Brigade Union says that asylum seekers being held at the fire damaged Yarl's Wood Detention Centre are still at risk.

There has been no improvement in the fire precautions, including no sprinkler system in place, no training for Group 4 staff and no evacuation procedure, according to the FBU.

Andy Gilchrist, FBU General Secretary says: "The detainees remaining in Yarl's Wood should be immediately released on temporary admission for their own safety."

As far back as October 2000, to *Beds on Sunday* reported warnings from the Bedfordshire Fire Authority, backed by the FBU, that Yarl's Wood was "a disaster waiting to happen".

New row over asylum 'villages'

Asylum support groups fear that the Government has not learned lessons from the failure of its original dispersal system.

Lack of information and inadequate media briefings hampered dispersal which met opposition because local communities were not prepared or involved in the process.

Now plans to set up eight new centres around the UK are already meeting opposition for similar reasons. The government appears to have lost the initiative by failing to offer a sound case for the centres.

In February *The Observer* reported: 'Thousands of asylum seekers are to be housed at eight centres throughout rural parts of Britain - thus doubling the population of some areas.'

'Plans to create 'asylum villages' in the countryside, part of Home Office moves to reform the asylum system, have provoked outrage among local residents and asylum groups who believe that the centres would be more suited to urban locations.'

Refugee organisations believe that asylum seekers will become isolated and institutionalised under the new scheme, and those who are allowed to stay will have huge problems integrating.

Out of step on arranged marriages

The *West Midlands Express* and *Star* broke from the media consensus that Home Secretary David Blunkett was right to suggest that Asian families in the UK should seek brides and grooms here rather than overseas.

Reminding readers that in Britain at least one marriage in three ends in divorce, its editorial asked: 'Is it any wonder that Asian families prefer their traditional system of arranged marriages?'

On-line petition for Iraqi Arab asylum-seekers

An online petition has been started to draw the attention of the Dutch authorities to the plight of a group of Iraqi Arab asylum seekers who have been waiting over 4 years for a decision on their asylum requests in the Netherlands.

They have been living in refugee camps without the right to work, and with no education for their children.

Read and sign the petition at <http://www.petitiononline.com/cornlii/petition.html>

Refugee artists wanted

Greenwich and Lewisham's Young People's theatre are looking for refugee artists to come on their Arts-in-Education training course. Two days of training on 10-11 April are followed by 10 half days work experience. They are especially looking for poets, visual artists and drama or theatre people. Contact Stella Barnes on 020 8510 0616 post-box@gvpt.co.uk for more information.

London radio station wants summer contributors

An arts-based community radio station is to broadcast from the Riverside Studios in Hammersmith, West London during July. Riverside FM will include live and pre-recorded programmes and features, and is looking for contributors to work as journalists, technicians, artists and reviewers. Application forms available from Helen Rowe 020 8237 1000 or wrg.riverside@twiza.demon.co.uk

Writers launch website

The long anticipated Exiled Writers' Ink! website is up and running, showcasing work by members.

The site also contains full details of projects, publications and an events' diary. Check it out at www.exiledwriters.co.uk

Arts volunteer needed

Exiled Writers Ink!, which provides a platform for the work of writers in exile, is looking for a volunteer to work on Monday and Wednesdays mornings or afternoons.

The project, based in Golders Green, North London, wants someone who 'knows the system' and has initiative. Travel and subsistence expenses will be met. Contact Jennifer Langer on 020 8458 1910 or jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk

Festival debate on Commonwealth

Journalists John Pilger and Eamonn McCann are among writers invited

to discuss the original concepts of the Commonwealth at a Liverpool festival in June.

Organised around the themes of radical writing, social justice and international links with local communities 'Writing on the Wall' takes will run from 17-23 June.

Co-ordinator Dave Cotterill says: "We are looking to invite journalists from Zimbabwe and other Commonwealth countries, and anyone who would like to take part can contact me direct." Dave can be reached on davycott@aol.com

Good news from Wales

A number of newspapers in North Wales have been producing positive stories about asylum seekers. The headlines include "EXPERTS READY TO WELCOME ASYLUM GROUPS"; "REFUGEES POISED TO FIND HAVEN IN NORTH WALES" and "ASYLUM - Oxfam seeks to end myths of 'cheats' ". More details to follow on the papers concerned...

APOLOGIES FOR BELATED ARRIVAL OF THIS BULLETIN

This Bulletin has been delayed because staff efforts at PressWise have been switched to survival mode. The PressWise Trust faces an uncertain future as funding for its core work begins to run out, along with funding for the RAM Project.

We are awaiting the outcome of several grant applications, and hope to continue our work with both the RAM Project and the RMA. We are also working on a project about reporting of suicide.

PressWise Trustees meet on 1 May to decide on how the organisation will function in the future. In the meantime, any suggestions or offers of help will be gratefully received.

Contact pw@presswise.org.uk

'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.

**Saturday 30 March
12.00 - 2.00pm**

STOP THE LIES!

Demonstration at Yarl's Wood Detention Centre. Why did Lord Rooker say that the centre is for failed asylum seekers when his own figures contradict this? Why did David Blunkett say that detainees prevented firefighters gaining access, when the firefighters themselves say it was Group 4? Why have Group 4 been congratulated for their dedication and courage when eyewitnesses say that fled the scene? Why was there no sprinkler system and no fire drill? Venue: Yarl's Wood Detention Centre, Twinwoods Road, Clapham, Bedford MK41 6HL. From Bedford take A6 north towards Kettering, pass through Clapham village, at the roundabout turn right - Yarl's would is one and a half miles up the hill at the top.

For more info, contact NCADC on 0121-554-6947 or ncadc@ncadc.org.uk

Sunday 31 March 7.30 pm

VOICES IN A STRANGE CITY

Exiled Writers Ink! presents a performance of work complemented by a multi-media range of music and images with post-performance discussion.

Refugees £2 Others £5. Funded by the London Boroughs Venue: Questors Theatre Studio, 12 Mattock Lane, Ealing, London W5. Nearest tube Ealing Broadway. For more info, contact Jennifer Langer on 020 8458 1910 or jennifer@exiledwriters.fnet.co.uk

Monday 8 April 7.30pm

AN EVENING OF BOSNIAN AND HERZEGOVINIAN WRITTEN WORDS

The Poetry Café presents guests including Etela Pardo (actress from Sarajevo) reading from tales from old Sarajevo by Isak Samokovlija; Fahrija Hodzic, poetess from Sarajevo; Mirza Fehimovic, writer from Sarajevo and many other artists.

Venue: 22 Betterton Street, Covent Garden, London WC2 For more info, contact Jennifer Langer on jennifer@exiledwriters.fnet.co.uk

Monday 15 April 10.00 - 2.00pm

MIN QUAN LAUNCH

The launch of the first ever race monitoring and campaign group involving UK's Chinese community.

Official and Government sources have always claimed that the Chinese community does not suffer racism or that it never complains about it. However the work undertaken by the group proves beyond doubt that not only does this community suffer brutal attacks but that its grievances are never properly addressed nor acknowledged. As importantly, perhaps, when individuals and organisations in the community challenge racism, their contribution remains hidden, unsupported and unrecognized. Speakers include Imran Khan (civil rights lawyer), Saffron Burrows (actress and activist), David Yip (actor and writer) Venue: Church Hall, St Anne Church, 55 Dean Street, Soho, London W1 To book a place or for more info, contact Sandeep Garcha at TMG on 020 8843 2333, or tmg@monitoring-group.co.uk.

Sunday 18 May LITERATURE OF EXILE SEMINAR - CONTRIBUTORS WANTED

Exiled Writers Ink! and Index on Censorship are organising a one day Seminar on the literature of exile with creative and academic strands. The seminar seeks to explore some of the themes and issues related to the literature of exile, and papers are invited from practitioners, community groups,

academics, semi-academics and so on. Venue: Soho Theatre and Writers Centre, Dean Street, London W1

Please send an abstract to: jennifer@exiledwriters.fnet.co.uk for consideration by the committee. More details to follow..

USEFUL WEBSITES

Journalists should always check their sources – and so should you. When quoting facts and figures always indicate your source.

Authoritative information is vital if you want to be taken seriously by the media. Here are some websites you might like to check out.

Arab Iraqi Asylum-seekers petition

<http://www.petitiononline.com/cornlily/petition.html>

Exiled Writers Ink!
www.exiledwriters.co.uk

Ossam Altaee's story

www.geocities.com/osam3 or www.osam3.tripod.com

Visit the RAM Project website for information, contacts, news and views
www.ramproject.org.uk

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ram@presswise.org.uk
BY 19 APRIL 2002