

RAM BULLETIN

Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Mass media Project

Promoting best practice in media representation of refugee and asylum issues

advice
information
research
& training
on media ethics



No 24, Jan 2003

Exiled journalist joins RAM Project full-time

Nikola Medic, a freelance journalist from Serbia who sought asylum in the UK in 1992, is the new RAM Project Communications Officer. His main task will be to help other exiled journalists gain work in the UK media.

His priorities are to develop a print and web-based directory of exiled journalists containing their stories and experience as a means of marketing their skills to the UK media. And to organise a residential weekend for exiled journalists to learn more about how the UK media industry operates (see below).

"I have learned the hard way just how difficult it is to survive as a freelance, especially when English is not your first language, and expectations are so different from what you have been used to at home," says Nick.

"Exiled journalists are astonished at the vitriol directed against asylum-seekers by some sections of the media here," explains PressWise Director Mike Jempson. "RAM's aim is to promote fair and responsible coverage. One of the best ways of achieving this would be get exiled journalists into the newsroom, working alongside and talking with their UK colleagues."

Nikola will work from the PressWise office in Bristol with Administrator Anna Kelson, and assisting Project Co-ordinator Terry Williams and guest editors of the RAM Bulletin.

Nikola can be contacted on ram@presswise.org.uk

Working in the UK Media: RAM Seminar for exiled journalists

Applications are invited from exiled journalist to attend a free residential weekend in Bristol, 28-30 March.

The event will be held at a Bristol University study centre and will include social and cultural sessions as well as

seminars on how the UK media operate, and training and work opportunities, developing media projects, the role of media unions.

Applicants will be encouraged to contribute their details to the Exiled Journalists Directory.

The 40 free places available will be awarded on a first come first served basis. Travel costs will be met once participants confirm their attendance,

For an application form contact Nick or Anna, ram@presswise.org.uk or call 0117 941 5889

Time for a change in the newsroom

'A largely white group of journalists (like the largely white police force) has found it difficult to forge contacts or gain trust in the black community, crime reporters will readily admit', writes *Independent* media columnist David Lister (7 Jan)

The same could be said for coverage of refugee and asylum issues, which is why the RAM Project will be working with the Creative Collective and the NUJ to try and persuade editors to take on exiled journalists to get some real insight into newsrooms.

You couldn't make it up

Yesterday was the last chance for asylum seekers to claim free housing and cash handouts ahead of a crackdown. So they didn't miss out, the Home Office put on coaches (with food and drinks for good measure) (*Daily Mail* headline, 8 Jan 2003)

This splendid example of the deep-seated humanitarianism for which middle England is renowned, appeared on the day winter bit Britain, and the Government's 'get tough' policy came into force. Those who might wish to inform the author of the piece about what it feels like to be in search of protection from war, persecution, environmental degradation or poverty might like to send her an email.

Contact j.butler@dailymail.co.uk

EDITORIAL

UNHAPPY NEW YEAR!

Season's greetings and best wishes, especially if you are an asylum seeker.

I am sure you need this since your Christmas stocking was full of unwanted presents.

The panicking UK government has given you a new law which will get many of you onto the streets and prevent your children from having education.

The European Union is setting the standards for your protection to the lowest standards ever, although they call it harmonisation.

Your protection is being moved further away from the legal safety net into the hands of politicians. At least, in the UK they still have word 'human' in it (humanitarian status).

Even your last resource to stop those standards becoming meaningless, the UNHCR, seems more concerned too look after themselves.

At the time of seriously eroding the Geneva Convention, the UNHCR's top official used the number of asylum applications in the UK to make a point about other states needing to do their bit. But, it only threw a spanner in the works for advocates of a balanced media coverage in the UK and provided food for hungry hyenas in the *Daily Mail*.

To me, sounds like: 'Unhappy New Year refugees'. All I can say to that is: Unhappy New Year to you too. With the prospects of an attack on Iraq becoming more imminent as days go by, I fear that the attack on asylum seekers and refugees by the tabloid press is even more certain.

So, sharpen your pencils you common-sense people! There may be a war around the corner.

Zafir Behlic
Guest Editor

Complaining is worthwhile

Following complaints from listeners, media regulators are to investigate Adrian Allen, a late-night radio show presenter at LBC, previously accused of racism, homophobia and sexism.

MediaGuardian.com reports that the Radio Authority asked for tapes after three protests about his *Through the Night* show.

Allen has been reprimanded by the regulators three times for making offensive jokes on air, although complaints against him on three other occasions were not upheld. In June 2000, while working for Century 106 East Midlands, Allen claimed Romania was unable to field a football team because they were "all over here claiming benefit".

Two of the new complaints fall under the taste, decency and offence regulations and one falls under the balance, bias and fairness rules.

So, it seems that we can make a difference to how much racism is fed through the media after all. Complaining works if people take it seriously enough.

More information at: <http://media.guardian.co.uk/radio/story/0%2C12636%2C862875%2C00.html>

For help with complaints contact PressWise: pw@presswise.org.uk

Sponsorship for training in journalism

Every year the Scott Trust, which owns *The Guardian*, sponsors places for post-graduate training in journalism.

The Trust aims to 'provide an opportunity for those who would struggle financially to study for a career in journalism' and hopes these awards will 'encourage graduates from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds to apply'.

Applicants must supply

- a full CV with details of journalistic experience,
- a passport-sized photograph,
- an explanation in 250 words of why you wish to follow a career in journalism, and
- an interview of 400 words with someone interesting in your locality.

Closing date for the applications is 22 February 2003.

Send the documents in an envelope marked 'Scott Trust Bursary' to Neil Hodgkins, Department of Journalism, City University, Northampton, Square, London EC1V 0HB, or to:

Department of Journalism Studies,
University of Sheffield, 171
Northumberland Road, Sheffield S10
1DF.

Overseas TV coverage turns viewers off

Most of viewers in the UK don't engage with the news from the developing countries, says a study by BBC News and the UK Department of International Development (DFID).

Many of those interviewed for the research say that there is a lot of genuine interest for the issues in the developing world and that 'people want to understand those stories and why they matter'. However, they find it difficult to make a real connection with those issues, because news coverage provides little or no context, has no clear message, conveys too much information and uses jargon. The study also showed there are ways of making those stories relevant for the viewer's everyday life and that 'making this link is the most important factor in ensuring engagement'.

'*Making Sense of the World*' can be downloaded from: www.dfid.gov.uk/Pubs/files/makingsense.pdf

Ireland's own multi-cultural Metro

Ireland's first and only multi-cultural newspaper, Metro Eireann (or Irish Metro) will be available at your local newsagent – if you live in Ireland, but can also be accessed on the Internet.

Founded by Nigerian journalists Chinedu Onyejelem and Abel Ugba in April 2000, its mission is to become 'the primary source of news and information on Ireland's fast-growing immigrant and ethnic communities.'

Web site: www.metroeireann.com

United against racism!

Hundreds of activities are planned throughout Europe from 15-23 March to coincide with the International Day for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination on 21 March. The day was chosen by the General Assembly of the United Nations in response to the murder of 70 peaceful demonstrators in Sharpeville, South Africa in 1960. Activities range from demonstration and debates to film festivals and from special TV

programs to cleaning the walls of racist slogans.

Further information on how to join the campaign, order free posters and inform about your activity at <http://www.unitedagainstracism.org>

Challenge misinformation on the Internet

AsylumSupport.info argues that the Internet can redress misinformation propagated by agencies like Migration Watch UK.

They ran a search test on several key words (e.g. 'asylum seeker', 'Nationality', 'Immigration' and 'Asylum Act') and found that the search engines, in addition to the information provided by Migration Watch UK, picked up sites with counterarguments and more positive perspectives migration to the UK.

The Internet seems to provide an instant balance for researchers or casual surfers, provided they respond to propaganda by writing on-line and use the technology available. This particularly refers to 'tagging' and advertising of your site on the Internet.

Online forum about Information Society Summit

An online discussion forum has been opened for civil society organizations to make an input to the Final Declarations of the World Summit of the Information Society.

Aidan White, general secretary of the International Federation of Journalists, is moderating the discussion on Rights.

The forum, hoisted by UNESCO, is open until 15 January. The World Summit will be held in Geneva in 2003 and Tunis in 2005.

More information at:

<http://portal.unesco.org/ci/ev.php>

Correction

In the article 'Journalists Divided Over 'Immigration Crisis'' in the December issue of the RAM bulletin we wrote: "...the Red Cross agreed to shut down its refuge for asylum seekers at Sangatte in France". As Will Slater of the British Red Cross pointed out to us, the decision to shut down the Sangatte centre had little to do with the Red Cross. It was reached in talks between the French and British governments. The Red Cross was informed of the decision and had to comply with it.

Journalists must speak out

RAM's new Communications Officer **NIKOLA MEDIC** introduces himself

At the beginning of my career in Serbia, I was thrilled that, after the excessive regulation and oppression of Communist times, you were free to write as your conscience dictates.

But, without any regulation, the freedom of the press in Serbia turned into something like the parliament of ancient Sparta. It is said that there all men of the city would assemble, speak at the same time and eventually the ones speaking the loudest would carry the day, never mind not having any arguments.

In the same fashion, those wielding the most political or financial power, were able to drown out the voices of their opponents in the post-communist Serbia.

I left Serbia. I wouldn't go into the Yugoslav army and I joined a friend in London who escaped earlier. We never knew that you could claim asylum, or there was something called social security.

We used up all our money and then went hungry. The hardship went on for a while, but I couldn't return. I remember reading in the papers of people from Yugoslavia coming to London and then throwing themselves under trains. It was a cheerless time, aggravated by the fact that my country was caught up in a terrible civil war and our side was in the wrong.

In such a situation, the idea that there are refugees out there deciding where to go on the basis that one country gives out £15 a week in food vouchers and £10 in cash, while the other might portion it differently, seems to me very remote from how things really happen. The truth is, I believe, that those who need to reach

asylum and safety often never make it.

For those who do make it, being a refugee in the UK is a hard work. The shame I felt was mostly shame by association – I could not condone the policies of the Serbian Government during the 1990's, nor could I understand the appeal of the nationalist policies to my fellow Serbians.

I was often reluctant to explain my circumstances, not only because people seem to think, like Nietzsche: 'Terrible experiences make one wonder whether he who experiences them is not something terrible'; but also because you attract a vacuous and unhealthy curiosity. I had someone ask me: 'Did you kill anyone in the war?'

It took me over five years to build my confidence and knowledge of English so I could try my hand at journalism again. I relished the experience from the start, particularly when I realised that UK journalism is 'ideas-driven'.

Editors are always after a good story. If you can put forward a good proposal you are almost certain to have your name in print. Almost, but not quite. I realised that being able to write a story or a proposal is only half the job. What remains is to sell it.

And this is where many journalists, re-starting their careers in the UK, flounder. Commercial publishing is a very competitive market and, apart from being a good writer, you need plenty of time and effort to sell your work.

The good thing, though, is that in such an environment your personal background matters much less than you think. The main thing is your ability to deliver the goods – on time.

I also realised that the best way back into print is to follow your journalistic instincts -

your curiosity. If there is a particular subject you know plenty about, be it fly fishing or skateboarding, then writing about it and offering it to specialist magazines is a way of building your cuttings file.

A good thing about publishing in the UK is that there is an outlet and fan base for every conceivable activity.

However, it was sobering to realise that, while there are many media outlets a good deal of which promote journalism of a very high standard, unsavoury writing sells best.

Until the early '90s in Yugoslavia journalism was a sombre affair – if not always dedicated to promoting truthfulness. Scandal-mongering was out, screaming headlines confined to the sports pages, and 'celebrity gossip' a diversion. In fact, no newspaper took pride in rampant anti-intellectualism or narrow-mindedness.

As an asylum seeker, I have realised how precariously societies are perched on the verge of war, calamity and disaster. More so in modern societies where this slide can be hastened by mass media and new methods of communication.

In propagandist articles you always find a peculiar mixture of biased opinion and threat - not a million miles from those tabloids that urge readers to 'vent their opinion'. In such cases issues get mixed up, emotions run high, and the media fray turns again into something like the parliament of ancient Sparta.

The majority of people fleeing persecution don't make it here. That is why the journalists who do, must shout very loudly on their behalf.

Nikola Medic started his journalism career in Belgrade in the late 1980s. Since coming to the UK he has written for The Guardian, The FT, The Independent on Sunday, DJ Magazine and other publications.

Cut out and keep **COMMUNICATOR**

This PressWise guide is designed to assist those wishing to engage directly with the media to improve coverage of refugee and asylum issues. Other guides in this series can be found on the RAM website: www.ramproject.org.uk

A Campaigning case study: 'Standing up for women's safety'

In this issue we continue our coverage of successful campaigning and bring you a case study of the campaign currently run by Refugee Action, a national refugee agency.

ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

'Standing Up for Women's Safety' is a national campaign launched in December 2002. It asks the public, service providers and private and statutory agencies to join Refugee Action (RA) in improving refugee women's safety in the UK. Individuals are asked to sign a pledge of support for refugee women, available on RA's website, which is used to demonstrate to service providers and policy makers just how many people are calling for change.

CAMPAIGN DEVELOPMENT

The campaign was developed in consultation with asylum seekers and was rooted in their experiences in the UK. It was informed by research which comprehensively documented refugee women's experiences in the UK.

For this, refugee women were trained to collate the data from other refugee women. The campaign strategy and the production of materials were supported by professional campaign/design agency.

CAMPAIGN MATERIALS

It was a multi-media campaign, supported by leading creatives, some of whom volunteered their time (like *Vogue* photographer Andrew Lamb, the band Radiohead and social issues public relations firm The Forster Company).

Apart from the campaign leaflet, RA also themed its annual report to women's safety

issues and commissioned a short film about women's experiences.

Refugee Action's website was overhauled to tie into the campaign.

The campaign was launched at House of Commons.

WHO WAS INVOLVED

The campaign was developed and run by RA staff and trustees, refugees and public relations consultants. It was supported by a number of celebrities and other organisations as well as members of the public.

RESPONSE TO THE CAMPAIGN

Refugee Action received an 'overwhelming response to the call for pledges' and a good coverage in the local and regional media (e.g. *Leicester Mercury*, BBC East Midlands Today, Central News, BBC Radio Leicester, Century FM Nottingham, BBC Radio Nottingham, *Manchester Metro News*, *Manchester Online*, etc).

'Women who come to this country as refugees do so to find safety. It would be an appalling state of affairs if having given them refuge we found it impossible to give them the right to live in safety. We need to do everything we can to make sure that this is so.'

Sir Trevor McDonald OBE

A number of celebrities were approached to give short endorsements for the campaign and people like Emma Thompson, Anna Ford, Sir Trevor McDonald OBE, John Simpson CBE, George Alagaiah and Ken Livingstone responded very positively.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Make sure your messages are clear and relevant and dedicate time to talking to journalists about your story
- Campaigns need good, strong case studies - media want 1st person stories
- Involve staff in the campaign - they are vital local ambassadors
- Involve partners – they can disseminate info but also act as advocates for your campaign
- Campaign planning takes time: plan well ahead and be strategic
- Don't be overwhelmed - plan ahead and be excited by what you can achieve
- Celebrate successes

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 20 January 7.00pm
POETS AND PEACE**

Reading and performance of poems for peace at this time of imminent war. Poets include John Rety, Pat Arrowsmith, Dinah Livingstone, Jane Duran, Roberto Rivera-Reyes, Mary Michaels, Katherine Gallagher and Reza Hiwa. Supported by the School of Oriental and African Studies Stop the War Group, Spinning Room and Toriano.

Venue: School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG. Nearest tube, Russell Square.

For more info, contact Reza Hiwa on nreza@attglobal.net

**Thursday 23 to Friday 24
January**

**TRAINING IN MEDIA
SKILLS**

The Refugee Media Group in Wales in partnership with RAM Project is organising 2 training events in media skills. The training is aimed at spokespeople, workers and volunteers from the refugee sector and refugee community organisations. The cost of training is £30 per person and places are limited to 2 per organisation.

Venue: Swansea on 23 Jan, Cardiff on 24 Jan.

For more info, or to reserve a place, contact Vanessa Bucolli (Asylum Media Co-ordinator at Refugee Media Group) on 02920 874 681 or bucolliv@cf.ac.uk

**Saturday 25 January
1.30pm**

**SOLIDARITY MARCH IN
CANADA**

As the end of a three month stay on deportations draws to an end many non-status Algerians who have lived in Montreal for an average of four years risk being deported to Algeria where an ongoing civil conflict has taken more than 150,000 lives. Organised by the *Action Committee for Algerians and 'Sans Papiers'.

For more info, contact cassdz@hotmail.com
To sign the online petition, visit www.tao.ca/~sans-statut/petition.shtml

**Tuesday 28 January 9.30 -
4.00pm**

RCO CONFERENCE

Representatives from 7 Refugee Community Organisations, with support from Refugee Action, Refugee Council and the Midlands Refugee Council are organising a regional conference in Birmingham. The conference will look at community development needs of refugee community groups in the Birmingham area and will bring together refugee groups, funders and support agencies. One of the issues likely to come up will be dealing with media. If you have examples of good practice and know of training available for RCO's please contact the organisers.

Venue: The Irish Centre, 14 High Street, Digbeth, Birmingham B5 4NX
For more info, contact Sarah Giles on 0121 693 9989.

**Tuesday 28 January
6.30pm**

**BIRMINGHAM MEDIA
FORUM**

Organised by the RAM Project, in partnership with Refugee Council, Refugee Action and NUJ, a forum to bring together asylum seekers and refugees, organisations working on their behalf and journalists to debate how to best turn the tide of negative coverage.

Food and wine from 6.30pm.

Venue: The Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham

For more info, or to reserve a place, contact Anna

Kelson on 0117 941 5889
or anna@presswise.org.uk

late January 2003

IMPACT OF CHANGE

Refugee Council is organising three conferences in London, Birmingham and Leeds to explore the impact of the new Asylum and Immigration Law. It is aimed at all providers of services to asylum seekers and refugees and will be a combination of high profile speakers, networking and workshops. Speakers at the conferences include Beverley Hughes MP, Freda Chaloner, Director of NASS, Nick Hardwick, Chief Executive, Refugee Council.

A choice of eight workshops will be available: equality in service provision, information, community safety, community development, regionalisation, and citizenship.

For further enquiries email marketing@refugeecouncil.org.uk or call Claire Forrest on 020 7820 3049.

**Monday 3 February 7.30pm
POETRY CAFE**

Exiled Writers Ink! present their regular monthly evening of poetry. An evening in support of the struggles of Asos Hardi in Kurdistan with Kurdish Artistes Kamal Mirawdali (poet), Rebwar (slide show of arts), Nawroz (singer) and Tara (harpist) tbc. Chaired by Choman Hardi (poet).

£1 members and unemployed refugees, £3 non-members
Venue: Venue: 22 Betterton Street, London WC2

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

**Monday 10 February
9.00am - 5.00pm**

**IMPROVING REFUGEE
HEALTH SEMINAR**

Organised by MEDACT, a seminar for hospital and public health doctors, nurses, GPs, therapists, mental health workers and other health professionals involved in providing health care services to refugees and asylum seekers. Fee £60 including lunch and coffee. Registration forms can be downloaded from

<http://www.medact.org/tbx/docs/ACF49F5.doc>
Venue: Cavendish Square, London

For more info, contact Moyra Rushby on 020 7272 2020 or moyrarushby@medact.org

**Saturday 22 February
9.30am - 5.00pm**

UNITE AGAINST RACISM

Organised by the National Assembly Against Racism (NAAR), a one day national conference in the tenth anniversary year of the murder of Stephen Lawrence. The conference will bring together black communities, trade unions and many others in opposition to all forms of racism. Speakers include Doreen Lawrence, Cllr Mozaquir Ali Burnley, and many more.

Registration fees £10 organisations, £5 waged individuals, £3 unwaged. Venue: TUC Conference Centre, London, Nearest tube Tottenham Court Road.

For more info, and to register, contact NAAR on 020 7247 9907 or 020 7247 3146.

USEFUL WEBSITES

Department of International Development (DFID).
www.dfid.gov.uk

Media Guardian
<http://media.guardian.co.uk>

Metro Eireann
www.metroeireann.com

United Against Racism
www.unitedagainstracism.org

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)
www.unesco.org

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www.ramproject.org.uk

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