

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 29, June 2003

PCC ready to rethink on asylum coverage

There is room for change in the way the Press Complaints Commission deals with asylum coverage, PCC Director Guy Black told the Article 19 seminar on Refugees & the Media in London last month.

Responding to challenges from A19 research, the ICAR report on RAM activities, as well as from the Refugee Council, PressWise, columnist Roy Greenslade and refugees at the event, Black accepted that it may be time to issue more guidelines to editors and ensure there is more accurate use of legal terms, and even to rethink the industry's Code of Practice.

"This is good news, if a little late in the day" said PressWise Director Mike Jempson. "Complaints about inaccurate and inflammatory coverage have been falling on deaf ears, while anyone considered foreign has borne the brunt of the hatred stirred up by irresponsible newspapers."

PressWise and the Refugee Council are to co-ordinate follow up to Black's remarks.

A19 Report slams distorted coverage

The Freedom of Expression group Article 19 has spoken out against distorted and misleading coverage of refugee and asylum issues.

The interim report from their recent study 'What's the story?' contains a devastating analysis of Sangatte coverage in the national papers.

The views of refugees and asylum seekers were also gathered, by a team of exiled journalists as part of the research.

As part of the project Professor Terry Threadgold of Cardiff University also conducted analysis of TV news coverage which raised questions about accuracy and fairness in reporting.

Among the journalists present was media commentator Roy Greenslade, who followed up with an article *Lexicon of Lies* in the *Media Guardian* (19 May)

For copies of the A19 report visit

www.article19.org or contact

sara@article19.org.uk

See also

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/mediaquarian/story/0,7558,958622,00.html>

RAM film wins audiences

A film made at the RAM weekend seminar for exiled journalists looks set to reach significant audiences.

'On the receiving end', a 15 minute study of refugee experiences had its UK premiere at the Article 19 seminar on Refugees and the UK Media on 15 May. BBC editorial policy chief Stephen Whittle immediately asked if it could be shown it at a special meeting of senior editors in June.

The following day Home Office officials asked if it could be shown at the annual review of the work of its Refugee Integration Unit.

Meanwhile Omni Productions the award-winning company that made the film with PressWise, are seeking mainstream media outlets for footage from the 'Burwalls weekend' to recoup the £15,000 production costs.

'On the receiving end' is also to be shown at a seminar in Ljubljana, Slovenia to encourage journalists to reconsider how they cover refugee issues.

VHS copies are available from PressWise for £12.50 (inc p&p). Contact anna@presswise.org.uk

USE-OF-THE-MEDIA TRAINING

Refugee organisations that would like assistance with how to make best use of the media, or how to develop their own media strategies should call 0117 941 5889 and ask about PressWise Training. We specialise in providing professional training and support for those wishing to complain about any aspect of media coverage.

EDITORIAL

JUDICIAL COUNTERPOISE

A cursory look at the news for May shows that the asylum procedure is still being bungled and immigrants punished at a time when it is clear that xenophobic rhetoric is not a good bargaining political chip.

In an insightful article 'Mr Blair Should Stand Up for Asylum-Seekers', *The Independent* says "there is nothing that makes it impossible for an electorate to vote for leaders who suggest that that we have responsibilities to the dispossessed".

Not so, Blair and his cohorts seem to say.

There is Miss Baidnu Dassama from Sierra Leone. The Home Office lost her application file, and then refused her claim.

There are in-country applicants who continue to plod the streets destitute, stripped of their support by Sec. 55 of the amended Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act.

Then there is Blunkett, planning to bundle all asylum-seekers to Albania for screening. So murky has Britain's asylum policy become that Germany, of all countries, recently scoffed at Blunkett's planned "off-shore processing" of immigrants.

A rare noteworthy pro-immigration action from Parliament is that of rebel MP John Austin who has vowed to take up the cases of failed asylum constituents.

Enter the Courts. Justice Collins threw out Section 55 in the landmark case of the London 6. Mr Justice Bell slammed a life sentence on Neil Bond for slaughtering Mr Ali, an asylum seeker in Luton.

The Courts are thus the last bastions for asylum-seekers used and abused by a draconian system.

Our Justices should be reminded that they are now the only bulwarks against the ineptitude of Blair's creaking asylum machine.

They must rise up in unison and provide a weighty counterpoise to institutionalized xenophobia. After all, justice delayed is justice denied.

Gordon Doh Fondo
Guest Editor

Refugee TV launch in London

'Refugee TV', a station granted an ITC license this year to broadcast programmes on issues of interest to refugee groups, is being launched officially at an event to be held in the offices of Hammersmith and Fulham Council on 20 June.

The station is the brainchild of Mr Faqir Mayvand of the Afghanistani Arts and Culture Association. Mr Mayvand was involved with setting up the first TV station in Afghanistan, only to find it taken over and destroyed by the Taliban in the 1990's.

The June launch is endorsed by the National Union of Journalists whose General Secretary, Jeremy Dear, is speaking at the event. Other speakers include the Mayor of Hammersmith and Fulham, Charlie Treloggan. A hundred and twenty other guests, including delegates from the Home Office are expected.

Contact Mr F Mayvand at the Afghanistani Arts and Culture Association on 0208 881 0869 or 07950 578 065

Safe havens? – It's easy as A..B..C...

When PressWise Director Mike Jempson spoke about the RAM Project to journalists at a Red Cross seminar in Stockholm last month, the Swedish papers were full of detail and debate about David Blunkett's plan for 'safe havens' outside fortress Europe.

His idea is to set up transit camps to which putative asylum-seekers can be sent while the authorities decide which, if any, may be allowed to find refuge in Europe.

Our European neighbours are hearing more about this scheme than UK voters, as Britain tries to persuade EU governments to back the plan.

But the ones being kept most in the dark, are the countries which are expected to house the camps - Albania, Bulgaria, and Croatia (and possibly Ukraine, where some asylum-seekers have to share the rations of their military guards). According to one senior figure in the refugee sector, no-one has bothered to ask them yet.

Meanwhile newly-elected right-wing governments are warming to the idea say commentators, who believe

that as support grows the designated countries will have little option than to comply – if they want to join the European club, eventually.

It is not clear whether Albanian asylum-seekers will have to check into the Albanian safe haven before being allowed to leave the country.

Bristol Evening Post pats itself on the back

Following publication of the ICAR Report on the RAM Project regional media fora (see last Bulletin), the *Bristol Evening Post* devoted almost a full page to the plaudits it had received for positive media coverage of asylum issues.

It even carried a half page picture of the opening debate at the RAM weekend for exiled journalists at the Burwalls weekend in March.

The RAM Bulletin would like to hear other 'good news' stories about how local papers are responding to the challenge of reporting refugees and asylum seekers.

Contact ram@presswise.org.uk

Jobs in radio

Commonwealth FM in Bristol is looking for studio managers and radio producers to assist in the running and training of personnel for its community radio scheduled to run from Sat 4 to Sat 25 Oct 2003 at the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum. Expenses will be paid for Runners and Volunteers.

Contact Radio Team on 0117 925 4980 Lorraine Blakeman (Ext) 227 Carlton Romaine (Ext) 235 outreach@empiremuseum.co.uk or Mary Ingoldby (Ext) 220 mary.i@empiremuseum.co.uk

Writing opportunity

Val Brown, editor of the health and lifestyle magazine *Inbalance*, is looking for editorial by exiled journalists and is open to all ideas whether political, personal or otherwise.

Contact: vrb@inbalancemagazine.com

Reporters under the spotlight

A new website has been set up to tackle unethical media coverage of asylum issues. The Media Hatewatch UK project will be based at www.diversity-online.org

Co-editor Lionel Morrison says "we have made space on our web site for this project to deal with this abuse of coverage".

See also: www.diversity-online.org www.pcc.org.uk and www.journalism.co.uk/news/story620.html

14 year-year-old asylum-seeker lives like prisoner

Beriwan Ay, a 14-year-old Kurdish asylum-seeker is living in total squalor with four (4) other relatives.

Beriwan is one of several children currently held in claustrophobic detention centres across the UK.

<http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/this/britain/story.jsp?story=405183>

Afghans forcibly deported

Some 20 failed asylum-seekers have been forcibly deported to Afghanistan.

The deportation is part of a wider scheme to remove thousands more after the Government's voluntary scheme offering £2,500 in exchange for voluntary repatriation failed to cut any ice with the asylum-seekers.

So far, only 39 of the 17,000 expected to accept have taken the offer. Refugee Council officials have frowned at the move, which they consider premature especially as "the structure of law and order (in Afghanistan) is still being built up." http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/2980779.stm

TAKE YOUR PICK

"If you have been here some time, by all means tell us how you got here, what your circumstances are, the means of entry and what you have been doing since you reached this country and we will provide you with support". That is what our proposals provide, and I think that that is reasonable. People with families will be sustained and those with special needs will be supported. That is in the proposal. People who have been in this country for some time and have decided to claim asylum can continue with that claim, but there is no reason on God's earth why we should sustain them.

Right Hon David Blunkett,
Hansard
5 Nov 2002

"I for my part regard the Regulations now in force as so uncompromisingly draconian in effect that they must indeed be held *ultra vires*. I would found my decision not on the narrow ground of constructive *refoulement* envisaged by the UNHCR and rejected by the Divisional Court, but rather on the wider ground that rights necessarily implicit in the Act of 1993 are now inevitably being overborne. Parliament cannot have intended a significant number of genuine asylum seekers to be impaled on the horns of so intolerable a dilemma: the need either to abandon their claims to refugee status or alternatively to maintain themselves as best they can but in a state of utter destitution."

The Hon Mr. Justice Collins
High Court Decision
No. CO/0113/2003

Young African slaves in UK

The UN charity UNICEF has revealed that children are being trafficked into domestic service in the UK.

The victims, mostly West African girls, are lured by rosy promises and then forced into backbreaking chores for wealthy families.

<http://www.observer.co.uk/politics/story/0,6903,958311,00.html>

FACTS versus FIGURES

1. Back to work or to jail?

'Working immigrants will boost the economy,' announces Judi Bevan, grandchild of exiles from central Europe, in a column tucked away in the Financial Supplement of the Sunday Express (25 May).

'Like most immigrants (her family) tried to be net contributors to the economy,' she writes, concluding, 'We need to manage immigration ... we cannot let unlimited numbers (in)... (a) priority should be to process some of those already here, dig them out of the black economy (sic), give them visas and a decent wage and get them paying taxes'.

Compare this with the screaming headline on the newspaper's front page: 'ASYLUM WAR CRIMINALS ON OUR STREETS: Monsters hide their past to slip in as refugees'. For the most part it is a rehash of old stories (police claims of an asylum crime epidemic the previous week; the one war criminal referred to was deported years ago).

It does have a rather tired phone poll as an add-on. 'Is Britain too soft on asylum seekers?'
Phone 0901 565 5009, or text DXVOTEB on 82100 to vote NO

2. Criminal statistics

Not to be outdone, The Observer on the same day had its own 'probe' on immigration and crime entitled 'The ethnic connection'.

This 'special investigation' by Tony Thompson into 'Albanian pimps, Jamaican Yardies, Chinese Triads and Asian Syndicates' contains some intriguing statistics.

According to the figures given, for which no provenance is offered, one in every 62 Chinese in the UK is an active criminal, along with 1 in 150 Albanians, 1 in 283 Black Caribbean's, and 1 in 777 Indians, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis,

No comparative figures are offered for crime rates among British people, but recent figures for asylum applications are supplied for each category. These imply that 6 Black Caribbean, 8 Asian, 10 Albanian and 75 Chinese alleged criminals have entered the country as asylum seekers... What will the Express, Mail, Sun and BNP make of that?

Analyses of prison population studies in the UK and US usually explain disproportionate ethnic representation as a sign of bias in the criminal justice system.

Yet both *Observer* and *Express* seem happy to perpetuate the myth that minority ethnic groups have a propensity to commit crime.

3. Police chief under fire

Britain's most senior police officer, Chris Fox, has come under attack from refugee organizations after he declared that mass immigration was the major cause of "a whole new range of crimes" in the UK.

The Refugee Council expressed disappointment over Mr. Fox's comments, as earlier police reports had shown that the vast majority of asylum-seekers are law-abiding.

www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,3604,958750,00.html
www.observer.co.uk/politics/story/0,6903,958380,00.html

4. Asylum myths dispelled

Oxfam has produced a comprehensive report that dispelling myths about asylum-seekers in the UK.

The report shows that contrary to press misgivings, most asylum-seekers come from war-torn countries. It also reveals that asylum-seekers, far from living in comfort, are often housed in squalid homes rejected by nationals on waiting lists.
<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/campaign/cutconflict/asylum/myth.htm>
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3013615.stm>

5. Government announces asylum drop

A press release from No.10 Downing Street reveals that asylum figures for the first quarter of 2003 have dropped by a third, from 8,900 in October last year to 4,585 in March.

The Government attributes the drop to the closure of Sangatte, changes in border controls and radical amendment of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act.

Home Secretary David Blunkett has pledged to press on with radical reforms including dealing with failed asylum-seekers who destroy or dispose of their documents to avoid removal.

<http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page3757.asp>

6. New Government statistics contested

The BBC has contested latest Government figures showing a sharp drop in asylum figures.

Online community affairs correspondent Dominic Casciani says the figure is far too complicated for a simplistic interpretation. He argues that figures plainly show that the highest numbers of asylum seekers are from nations experiencing war or significant human rights abuses.

The Refugee Council and others say that the Home Office does not adequately record further appeals.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/2807923.stm>

7. Blair's asylum policy 'to fail'

Heaven Crawley, an analyst with the Institute for Public Policy Research, has argued that Blair's pledge to half asylum figures by September is "doomed to fail".

Crawley said that the influx of asylum-seekers was in no way a function of the benefits regime or the legal system. She said any drop in figures would be due to 'creative accounting' by the Government.
<http://www.observer.co.uk/politics/story/0,6903,953479,00.html>

8. UK No.8 on EU asylum list

Current statistics show that in absolute terms, the UK is 8th on the EU asylum list, having just 1.8 applications for asylum per 1,000 of the population.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3013615.stm>

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<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3013615.stm>

Charity to sue Blunkett

Save the Children is planning a legal challenge against the Government for barring children of asylum-seekers locked in detention centres from attending mainstream schools.

The children's charity is accusing David Blunkett, the Home Secretary, of denying children the intellectual, social and cultural benefits of being schooled in the community by tutoring them in immigration centres.
<http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/this/britain/story.jsp?story=407204>

Refugee to sue Home Office

An Iranian refugee, Reza Garikani, has lodged a High Court petition claiming damages from the Home Office after he was shackled to security guards while in hospital.

Mr. Garikani, who has been in the UK for 6 years, was arrested after his claim for asylum was dismissed.

He has lodged a new asylum application together with his wife and their two children. If the High Court agrees, Mr. Garikani will sue the Home Office on grounds of breach of human rights.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/3028075.stm>

RAM Media Day on June 12

The RAM Project's 'Think London: Think Local' event has attracted over

70 applications. Only a few places are now left so please hurry if you wish to attend.

The event is designed to facilitate contacts between refugees, refugee groups and London local media. It is also hoped that through workshops and talks refugee groups will find out more on how to use the media. Subjects covered will be 'Writing a Press Release', 'Face to face Interviews', 'Organising a Media Campaign' and 'Working with Local Journalists'.

Contact Anna Kelson on anna@presswise.org.uk for details.

Palestinian refugee wins dismissal case

Khalid Jayyosi, a 28-year-old Palestinian refugee and IT supervisor working for a car company in Milton Keynes, has won an estimated £100,000 from his employer.

Khalid's password at work was changed to "suicide bomber" and his colleagues called him a bomb maker. In handing down his verdict, the tribunal noted that the company lacked "any clear, demonstrable commitment to equality of opportunity."

<http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/legal/story.jsp?story=408099>

Baindu's deportation must not stand

Baindu Dassama from Sierra-Leone is one of several asylum-seekers who have fallen victim to a flawed asylum procedure.

She now faces deportation after losing her claim for asylum, although the Home Office acknowledges mislaying her file. She is to appeal.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3023575.stm>

MP vows to fight for asylum-seekers

Rebel Labour MP John Austin, has vowed to continue to take up the cases of failed asylum-seekers in his constituency.

Responding to a letter from Home Office Minister Beverly Hughes asking him to stop bearing the cross of asylum-seekers, the MP said: "This letter will not make any difference to the way I take up these cases. I will

continue to do what I believe is right regardless of the cost"
http://www.newvision.org.uk/mp_will_fight_for_asylum_seekers.htm

Blair urged to support asylum-seekers

The Independent has urged British Prime Minister Tony Blair to stand up in defense of asylum-seekers.

The paper says "there is nothing that makes it impossible for an electorate to vote for leaders who suggest that we have responsibilities to the dispossessed".
http://argument.independent.co.uk/regional/columnists/yasmin_alibhai_brown/story.jsp?story=405381

Life jail for asylum murderer

The Luton Crown Court has sentenced a Mr Neal Bond to life for killing an asylum-seeker.

The victim, Mr Mustafa Ali, suffered the fatal injuries as his assailant stamped and kicked him. Mr Justice Bell accused the murderer, Neil Alexander, of "taking out [his] own unhappiness" on the victim.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/beds/bucks/herts/3024269.stm>

Council appoints hate-crime coordinator

Enfield Borough Council has appointed a hate-crime coordinator to help stem the tide of racial incidents in the area. In 2000 alone, 700 racial incidents were reported.

The new coordinator, Mrs Rasheeda Ali-Selvaratnam, works with the police community support unit, responsible for investigating all hate crimes.
<http://society.guardian.co.uk/labour/publicservices/story/0,11943,958962,00.html>

Mandela statue snubbed

Westminster Council's artistic advisers have described a giant statue of Mandela in Trafalgar Square as "aesthetically inappropriate".

The Council's comment, condemned as "racially insensitive" by London Mayor Ken Livingstone, has angered black and other minority groups, according to Belinda Robinson in *The Voice* (12 May, p.2)

*Cut-out-and-keep***COMMUNICATOR**

A PressWise guide for those wishing to help improve media coverage.

Back issues can be found at
www.ramproject.org.uk/communicator.php

MEDIA MONITORING**1. Sun bangles juicy asylum scoop**

Guest Editor Gordon Doh Fondo believes The Sun's ASYLUM EXPOSED was a magnificent if muddled story, skewed to satisfy the paper's xenophobic tastes.

I read this 'Major Sun Investigation' on Mon 19 May with admiration, and great disappointment. An otherwise fine piece of journalism was reduced to a mere platitude - that asylum-seekers get FREE accommodation and FREE food. It also insinuated that new arrivals should be starved to death.

No one can fail to admire the courage and bravado of journalist Oliver Harvey, alias Moldovan asylum-seeker 'Anatoly Tal'). Those who flee the Saddams and Mugabes come in the wings of planes, at the back of uncushioned containers, and on foot. Harvey hid 'in the back of a white van' wrapped 'inside a duvet... rather than risk suffocation'. That takes nerves of steel.

However, this self-styled undercover agent failed to take on board the physical and psychological torture experienced by asylum-seekers who have escaped death by a hair's breadth.

Harvey's investigation did prove one thing; however well you fake it no one can ever replicate the weight that asylum seekers carry with them.

He had contingency plans and probably credit cards tucked safely away; most asylum-seekers fee with more will than wallet, taking risks far too excruciating for a white-collar journalist to copy.

It took Harvey thirty-five minutes to get to his 'promised land'; it may take many weeks for some of those genuinely seeking asylum-seekers.

DEFINING TERMS

A definition of 'refugee' or 'asylum-seeker' (the difference is rarely explained in the UK press) might help *The Sun*.

Article 1 (2) of the UN Convention of 1951 defines a refugee as a person who, 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, **not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it**'. (my emphasis)

The emboldened passage is often left out but needs to be emphasised. It means, in essence, that all 'British' Zimbabweans fleeing from Mugabe's iron fist ARE asylum-seekers in the UK.

It follows that British nationals habitually resident in Iraq or Saudi Arabia who flee war or terrorism, ARE asylum-seekers in the UK. Yet the press never bothers to write about their situation or the free housing they receive on arrival. Are they more entitled to it by virtue of their colour and accent?

The Sun also needs to find out more about the rights and entitlements of asylum-seekers under international law.

ASYLUM BENEFITS

Harvey uses the word 'FREE' eleven times to refer to accommodation, food, transport and NHS care, given asylum-seekers.

Article 13 of the 1951 Convention could not be more explicit: "*the Contracting States shall accord to a refugee treatment as favourable as possible and, in any event, not less favourable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances, as regards the acquisition of movable and immovable property and other rights pertaining thereto...*"

My emphasis on the key phrase ... Which means that if white people are fleeing from Mugabe to seek asylum in the UK, then the same accommodation and other related benefits ought to apply to them as it applies to Africans, Arabs or, as in the case in point, Moldavians.

The Sun declared (Wed 22 May, 2002, p.8) that '90% of asylum-seekers are conmen' seeking benefits.

The paper frowns at 'free hand-outs' to asylum-seekers. In other words a destitute asylum-seeker should pay rent and buy food and bus tickets with no money!

Section 95 (1) of the 1999 Immigration and Nationality Act entitles asylum-seekers to support on the grounds of destitution [95 (2) and 95(3) (a) and (b)].

The Sun may argue that Article 55 of the 2002 Act has superseded this provision, especially in relation to in-country applicants who fail to claim 'as soon as is reasonably practical' (whatever that may mean).

Recent court decisions suggest otherwise. Mr Justice Collins described this provision as "*ultra vires*" and "draconian". Ruling against it Lord Ellenborough said "*the law of humanity, which is anterior to all positive laws, obliges us to afford [asylum-seekers] relief, to save them from starving.*"

Where would *The Sun's* man Oliver Harvey have slept if he were not immediately granted accommodation? Would he have shared a phone booth with a homeless asylum-seeker or headed for the comfort of home or a 5-star hotel on expenses?

DUE PROCESS

I am no apologist for the Home Office but in fairness to them, it can be argued that the asylum process is

like other judicial procedures where rules relating to discovery and evidence apply.

Paramount, though, is the presumption of innocence. An asylum-seeker must be considered genuine until such time as the asylum procedure proves otherwise. The onus of proof rests with the Home Office.

Obtaining an ID card marked 'Employment Prohibited' and a tiny room with 'dirty sheets' does not sound to me like a good motive for seeking asylum.

Our man in the duvet had a healthy bank account, a passport (held by his friend Paul in case he was discovered) and a clear mind - not having abandoned his wife and family to a vengeful dictator. He ended his journey just when he would have started learning the harsh realities of asylum seeking.

He missed out on completing the exacting 21-page Statement of Evidence Form, and avoided the 13-day minimum (sometimes longer than 6-month) wait to be called for a Substantive Interview. He did not share the fate of Baindu Dassama from war-torn Sierra Leone, whose file was 'misaid'.

RUMBLED

Before the interview, a caseworker would have read up on the history, geography and politics of Moldova, and quickly rumbled Harvey's 'five minutes study on the internet'.

'Anatoly Tal' would also have found that the biometrics data held in his file had been checked against asylum databases all over Europe and the UK.

Could he not provide clear, concrete evidence that he was a journalist, his claim would have been refused. He would wait another two to six months to be called for appeal, after which he might have a deportation order hanging over his head.

Meanwhile he would live on a 'free breakfast of mango juice, toast and jam' in his "free accommodation," with no wife to return to, no child to lisp at his return, no company to share jokes with, and an uncertain future.

The authorities may not earn high marks for failing to detect a human bundle hidden under crates in a van driven by a UK national. But they acted on the assumption that Oliver/Anatoly was an asylum-seeker.

The port is not the place to decide whether or not he was genuine. The law has to run its course. Nor can *The Sun* draw conclusions from an isolated case. Let's see it get the same result 6 out of 10 times.

POISON PEN

The Sun found ink to fill a poisonous pen. An otherwise brilliant story, which could have been used for political leverage to spark off reforms, was presented to readers as another reason to hate asylum-seekers.

The Sun's feeble outburst of *mea culpa* does not mitigate the xenophobic tone of the article. But it does show that even an enemy of asylum-seekers can see their plight. Of 'Anatoly's' free room Oliver

says: 'the sheets were dirty but the mattress was comfortable enough'. Of those he met, he says, 'Many seemed to have suffered in their homelands'. And of the atmosphere, '[it] was a bit like a community centre on a housing estate'.

Not even a *Sun* journalist looking for a reason to witch-hunt asylum-seekers could ignore their shoddy living conditions.

The enemies of the UK are not asylum-seekers. They are the thousands of able-bodied men and women who sign on at the dole for decades and rip off the test of us by claiming benefits from the state; they are the journalists whose racist pens stir up a people to maim and kill innocent men and women who have fled for their lives.

Well done *The Sun*. A great story which has not advanced the asylum debate one iota. It just muddied the waters, and added to your reputation as the most xenophobic paper under the sun.

Gordon Doh Fondo worked as a sports reporter and presenter for the Cameroon National Television Corporation. Since January, he has been co-presenter of *In Site* on Channel 7 Television UK.

2. *Desperately Seeking...*

An excellent two-part documentary about what it really feels like to be caught up in the asylum process has been made by Westcountry film-maker Lizzie White for HTV (Carlton).

Screened only in the HTV West area, (second part on Tuesday 3 at 10.30pm) and focusing on refugees housed in Bristol, the film 'Desperately Seeking..' deserves a wider audience.

A surefire contender for an Amnesty Media Award, nominations can be made to Annabel Harris on annabel.harris@amnesty.org.uk

You could also help to get it networked by contacting ITV Network on 020 7843 8000 or writing to ITV Network, 200 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8HF

3. Asylum theme day at the BBC

The BBC has come under fire in *The Guardian* (31 May) for planning an hour-long interactive show called 'You, The Immigration Officer'.

A production unit in Manchester has been touting for successful and unsuccessful asylum seekers willing to have their stories told, with the audience invited vote on whether the Home Office made the right decision on their case.

There was an audible gasp from everyone present at Article 19's Westminster conference when PressWise Director Mike Jempson explained what was proposed, and now others have joined in the protest.

The programme is one of several being prepared for an 'asylum and immigration' theme day at the BBC in July. You may wish to contact your local BBC station to find out what their contribution will be. It might be a ideal opportunity to get some intelligent debate about the issues – especially if refugees and asylum-seekers are given a chance to air their views.

‘PEG’ BOARD

Use some of these forthcoming events to attract good coverage instead of having to react to negative stories. Remind your media contacts if they are happening near you. Let them know if any of the speakers has a local connection, or if anyone in your area is participating. Suggest they arrange an interview or send photographer/film crew.

Monday 2 June 7.30pm

POETRY CAFE

Exiled Writers Ink! present their regular monthly evening of poetry.

Women Writers Between Cultures - dedicated to Amina Lawal whose appeal in Nigeria takes place on 3 June.

Curated and chaired by Sigi Dlabal.

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

For more info, contact Jennifer Langer on jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk or 020 8458 1910

Wednesday 4 June 9.30am - 4.30pm

SUPPORTING REFUGEE DOCTORS

Organised by the Refugee Council, this conference aims to inspire a debate on and the development of a long-term strategy for supporting the needs of refugee doctors in the UK.

Venue: The Franklin-Wilkins Building, Kings College London, Stamford Street, London SE1 8WA.

For more info, contact Kate Walters on 020 7820 3049

Thursday 5 - Friday 6 June COMMUNICATING THE WAR ON TERROR

Presented by The Centre for Defence Studies in association with the Royal Institution. The events purpose is to examine critically our responses to the events of September 11 2001 with a view to answering the

question, 'Are we getting the balance right between being alert and being alarmed?' Speakers include Yosri Fouda (Al-Jazeera), Onora O'Neill (University of Cambridge), Richard Sambrook (BBC News), Dr Pat Troop (Health Protection Agency) and many more.

Venue: Royal Institution, London

For more info, visit www.terrorismresearch.net or call 020 7409 2992

Saturday 7 June INTERNATIONAL WRITER'S DAY

English PEN presents an all-day mini-festival of lectures and talks from a selection of international writers including Carlos Fuentes, Hanif Kureishi, Steven Pinker, Michael Burleigh, Toby Litt, Rachel Cusk, Monica Ali and Hari Kunzru.

Venue: Beveridge Hall, Senate House, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU

For more info, visit www.englishpen.org/events/pevents/internationalwritersday or call 020 7713 0023

Sunday 8 June 2.00 - 5.00pm ACROSS THE DIVIDE 2: WRITING IN THE FACE OF CONFLICT

Exiled Writers Ink! present an interactive event with Palestinian and Israeli writers. Also mixed creative discussion and writing workshops for Muslims/Jews/Israelis/Palestinians and all others.

Tickets £5 or £3 unemployed refugees

Venue: The Stanhope Centre for Communications Policy Research, Stanhope Place, London W2 (nearest tube: Marble Arch)

For more info, contact Jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk or 020 8458 1910

Tuesday 10 June BROADCASTING IN THE ARAB WORLD

Organised by the Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI), a one-day conference to discuss the war coverage in Iraq from the perspective of different broadcasting channels.

Venue: Regent Street Campus, University of Westminster, London.

For more info, contact Alison Sorrell on 020 7911 5968 or sorrela@wmin.ac.uk or visit http://www.comminit.com/vents_cal/2003/2106-event.html

Wednesday 11 June

EARSHOT MEDIA PRODUCTION COURSE

Earshot, a media training organisation, offers free training for unemployed people aged 16-26. During the 3-day course, trainees will learn, amongst other things, how to make and present professional programmes and gain general media skills.
Venue: Brighton, Sussex
For more info, contact Kathy White on 01273 323 040 or info@earshot.org.uk or visit http://www.comminit.com/vents_cal/2003/2106-event.html

Thursday 12 June THINK LONDON: THINK LOCAL

The RAM Project presents a one-day seminar to help refugees and asylum-seekers and people working on their behalf make better use of the Capital's media in the run-up to Refugee Week.

Venue: Lancaster Hall Hotel, 35 Craven Terrace, London W2 3EL. Close to Paddington and Lancaster Gate tube stations.

For more info, contact Anna Kelson on 0117 941 5889 or anna@presswise.org.uk

Monday 16 - Sunday 22 June REFUGEE WEEK

Refugee Week is a nationwide programme of arts, cultural and educational events that celebrate cultural diversity and promote understanding about the reasons why people seek sanctuary.

Venue: all over the UK!
For more info about events in your area and join to the mailing list, visit <http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk/>

Tuesday 17 June 7.30pm

BOOK LAUNCH

Launch of 'Between a mountain and a sea: Refugees writing in Wales', a collection of poetry, fiction, drama and testimony, featuring the voices of two dozen asylum seekers and refugees, and half a dozen other writers of Wales. Admission free, donations welcomed.

Venue: Dylan Thomas Centre, Somerset Place, Swansea SA1 1RR

For more info, visit <http://www.hafan.org/bookproject03.htm>

Friday 20 June 1.00pm - 2.30pm

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Somali women speak out in this powerful work of theatre created for Refugee Week.

Second performance 7pm, Saturday 21 June at Hampstead Theatre, box office 020 7722 9301.

Tickets £5 or £2 concession
Venue: Soho Theatre and Writers Centre, 21 Dean Street, London W1. Nearest tube Leicester Square or Tottenham Court Road.
For more info, contact jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk

Saturday 21 June 12 noon to 5.00pm

NCADC AGM

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns will be holding its AGM in Birmingham and is open to all campaigners and supporters. There will be a creche and lunch will be provided for all attending.

Venue: Carrs Lane Church, Carrs Lane, Birmingham
For more info, contact ncadc@ncadc.org.uk or 0121 554 6947

Monday 7 - Thursday 25 July FORCED MIGRATION SUMMER SCHOOL

This three-week residential course provides a broad understanding of the issues of forced migration and humanitarian assistance.
Venue: Refugee Studies Centre, Wadham College, University of Oxford
For more info, contact summer.school@qeh.ox.ac.uk

Sunday 13 July BRITISH 10K OPEN ROAD RACE

The Refugee Council are looking for volunteers to run the road race and raise funds through sponsorship.
For more info, contact abby.rudland@refugeecouncil.org.uk or 020 7820 3135

Wednesday 3 September 9.30 - 4.45pm

ROMA AND ASYLUM IN BRITAIN

A one day conference to examine the global issues and local concerns of Roma who have had to leave their home countries and enter Britain to claim asylum.

Conference fee £50, or £20 concessions.

Venue: The Fenwick Room, Castle Leazes Halls of Residence, Spital Tongues, Newcastle upon Tyne
For more info, or to book, contact Colin Clark on 0191 222 7497 or Colin.Clark@ncl.ac.uk