

RAM BULLETIN

Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Media Project

advice
information
research
& training
on media ethics



No 34, November 2003

Promoting best practice in media representation of refugee and asylum issues

PCC issues asylum reporting guidelines

Journalists are being discouraged from using the phrase 'illegal asylum seeker' under new guidance issued by the Press Complaints Commission.

The PCC points out that legally there is no such thing as an 'illegal asylum seeker', since an asylum seeker is someone seeking refugee status or humanitarian protection. An asylum seeker can only become an 'illegal immigrant' if he or she remains in the UK after failing to respond to a removal notice.

However, the PCC said that the majority of complaints it receives about asylum coverage are not upheld under the Code of Practice.

See *COMMUNICATOR* for full text.

Numbers game

The *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* (October 17) couldn't quite agree on their story about Lithuanian couple Vladimiras and Ala Anufrijeva, who are claiming asylum in Britain. The *Mail* said they had cost taxpayers £350,000, while the *Express* claimed it was £500,000.

The couple, who arrived in the UK with their family in Aug 1998, were reportedly dissatisfied with several temporary homes provided by London's Southwark Council, and sued the council for infringing their human rights. Among their complaints was that a staircase was too steep for their terminally ill grandmother to come down. All they asked was suitable accommodation to enable an elderly sick woman to move about. The grandmother died in Sept last year.

Their asylum claim has so far been rejected by both the High Court and Appeal Court and their legal bill alone stands at £100,000.

Lord Chief Justice Lord Woolf, Lord Phillips and Lord Justice Auld said in an Appeal Court judgement that while their asylum appeal costs are unconscionably high, "We have no reason to think the Anufrijevas were acting other than on

responsible legal advice. On this basis we make clear that we do not suggest they have acted inappropriately."

Spotlight on Euro media's coverage of asylum

A massive project looking at how the European media covers refugees and asylum seekers will take place this month - and RAM is at the heart of it.

RAM is co-ordinating the UK's contribution to the scheme. More than 50 organisations and individuals in Britain have already agreed to take part. Volunteers will be monitoring coverage in the national, regional and local media from November 17-24, and pooling the results with several other European countries.

The results will be published in a report released on a Day Of Action during March 2004 and will highlight the need for Europe's media to put balance into its coverage.

RAM's national co-ordinator Terry Williams has just spent two days in Amsterdam with European colleagues finalising arrangements. "This is the first time any organisation has mapped media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers across Europe," he says. "We aim to highlight problems and share between countries some of the positive experiences of working with the media."

If you want to find out more email Terry williams.t@blueyonder.co.uk

Big Issue campaigns for homeless asylum seeker

The Welsh edition of *The Big Issue* (October 13) is campaigning on behalf of a 50 year-old diabetic asylum seeker who has slept rough since arriving in the UK in 1999. Manmohan Singh fled from India after his family were murdered during the Indo-Pakistan war. Even though he almost died from a diabetic coma while sleeping rough, his application for asylum has been rejected by the Home Office. He is now appealing the decision. MPs and members of the Welsh Assembly have promised to take up his case.

EDITORIAL

Illegal Immigrant?

According to new guidelines issued by the PCC regarding the language used by journalists on asylum issues, 'illegal asylum seeker' is taboo but 'illegal immigrant' is okay.

Writing in the *Daily Mail* (October 27), Melanie Phillips jumped at the opportunity to brand the 50,000 failed asylum seekers who are likely to be given refugee status under the government's new amnesty as 'illegal immigrants'.

But the fact that they have had their applications refused by the Home Office and Immigration Appeals Tribunal does not necessarily mean that they are illegal immigrants.

The Home Office's system of assessing claims is far from satisfactory. Although most people who claim asylum use an immigration solicitor, Home Office interviewers speak only to the applicant, either directly or through an interpreter. The pressure on applicants is immense - even though they may be bewildered at arriving in a new country, they are interviewed for approximately two hours, and any hesitation in replies, or statements that contradict their original claims can result in refusal by the Secretary of State.

At appeal hearings, the applicant's case is argued by barristers but the decision of the appeal judges is heavily influenced by the list of countries the UK government believes it is safe for asylum seekers to return to - even though the individual's life may still be at risk there due to persecution.

The number of costly appeals could be greatly reduced if initial applications were dealt with systematically and thoroughly.

Pearl Thevanayagam
Guest Editor

Talk about changes

The Campaign to Defend Asylum-seekers has called a special meeting in London to discuss the latest changes to Home Office asylum policy.

There will be help with travel costs, to ensure that the views of refugees and asylum-seekers are heard.

The meeting takes place in the Council Chamber at Camden Town Hall, Judd Street (nearest tube Kings Cross) on Mon 10 Nov at 6.30pm.

Contact: Alan Gibson
info@defend-asylum.org

Express story 'rubbish'

"Rubbish" is how charity Global Link described an article and editorial in the *Daily Express* (October 27) about its work.

The article, 'Lessons In How To Be A Refugee', claimed that school-children would be arrested, detained, fingerprinted and made to fill out immigration forms during a role-playing exercise to help them understand asylum issues. The *Express* said the scheme was a "scandalous waste of money" and quoted former Shadow Home Secretary Ann Widdecombe saying that it was "beyond belief".

The project is in fact an exhibition called 'Escape To Safety', designed to raise awareness of the problems facing asylum seekers. While pupils can choose to be fingerprinted and fill out immigration forms, Gisela Renolds, co-ordinator of Global Link, stated that pupils would not be 'arrested' or 'detained'.

The *Express* said in its editorial that the project was "nothing more than a crude and laughable attempt at political propaganda". The same could be said of its article.

A cycle of injustice

Exiled Syrian journalist Ghias Aljundi and PressWise Director Mike Jempson were among the speakers at an Amnesty International conference on the Middle East and North Africa on November 1 in London. The sell-out event, attended by some 60 people, examined the experiences that drive people into exile and the problems and issues that confront them here in the UK. The emphasis was on problem-solving and campaigning for change.

WANT TO BE A MEDIA TRAINER?

The RAM Project wants to hear from exiled journalists with experience of formal training. The plan is to provide a refresher course with a view to expanding the network of journalist-trainers who assist with PressWise media and ethics training in the UK and overseas.

Send your details to
ram@presswise.org.uk

A sense of place

The RAM Project will be well-represented at a four-day conference run by the British Council in Cardiff (November 24-28).

PressWise has organised a packed Media Day on Tues 25. In the opening session *The Guardian's* Gary Younge will ask panellists Asmet Elezovski (Macedonian Roma), Stephen Jukes (ex-Reuters) Veran Matic (Radio B92, Serbia), Simon Taylor (UNHCR), John Torode (UK) and Rahimullah Yousofzai (Pakistan) 'Who sets the media's agenda?'

Exiled journalists Ghias Aljundi (Syria), Miwanda Bagenda (Uganda), Max Kpakio (Liberia), Nick Medic (Serbia), Sandra Nyaira (Zimbabwe), Pearl Thevanayagam (Sri Lanka), will show RAM's *On The Receiving End*. The day ends with 'Messages for the media' from Jeremy Dear (NUJ), Ed Klute (Holland), Bernard Marguerite (Le Monde), Kirtsteen Tait, (ICAR) and Richard Tait (ex-ITN).

For more details visit
www.asenseofplace.org.uk

Blunkett ordered to stop secrecy over grants

Home Secretary David Blunkett has been told by the High Court to stop withholding information about support grants from asylum seekers.

So-called 'hard case' grants, which cover accommodation, are available to asylum seekers who have been refused asylum and have no appeal rights but are unable to leave the UK due to exceptional circumstances, or who are bringing a judicial review.

The judge decided that the National Asylum Support Service acted unlawfully in the cases of Iraqi Kurd Ibrahim Salih and Iranian Behnam

Rahmani by trying to keep details of the grants secret. "The individual must be able to know of his legal rights and obligations," said Mr Justice Stanley Burnton.

New leaflet on reporting

PressWise and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees are preparing a new leaflet on reporting asylum for distribution by the NUJ Ethics Council. Refugee organisations will be consulted about its content

Minister hears of RAM success

Home Office Minister Beverley Hughes heard first-hand about RAM's work when national co-ordinator Terry Williams spoke at a special Positive Images presentation in Leeds about all our efforts put balance into media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers.

Terry highlighted the successful media forums RAM organised earlier this year with the Refugee Council and National Union of Journalists (NUJ), which resulted in a report from the Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK - see <http://www.icar.org.uk/content/res/icpub/icarpubs.html>

Terry says: "The Minister was impressed with what RAM had achieved, and all of the activities worked on with other members of the Positive Images Group. We stressed that more needed to be done and outlined ways in which the Home Office can increase and improve its support for Positive Images work." *The Positive Images Group meets regularly in London and needs more representation from refugee community organisations. For info email john.donegan@leeds.gov.uk*

ON THE RECEIVING END

Exiled journalists tell their story and comment on the UK media. Riveting 15-min RAM video. Ideal for public meetings, schools and discussion groups.

Normally £12.50, but available to refugee community organisations and support groups **FOR ONLY £5** (incl postage and packing).

Send postal order or cheque made payable to The PressWise Trust, c/o RAM Project, 38 EBC, Felix Road, Bristol BS5 0HE.

Cut-out-and keep COMMUNICATOR

PressWise use-of-the-media Guide

CAMPAIGNING PRESSURE PAYS OFF

Regulator warns editors: be accurate about refugees and asylum-seekers

At long last the Press Complaints Commission has issued guidance to newspaper editors about the language used in stories on refugees and asylum seekers. The guidance, issued on October 23, follows consultations with refugee organisations and sustained efforts over almost three years to convince the PCC to take action.

The PCC was first publicly called to account for lack of action at the RAM forum in February 2001. Subsequently PCC officers took part in meetings organised by RAM throughout the country. But it was not until an Article 19 conference in London this summer that PCC Director Guy Black conceded that the PCC should issue fresh guidance. He was responding to recommendations made in the Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees (ICAR) Report about RAM's regional fora.

It is too early to know how much impact the guidance will have, but all those who have complained and campaigned should be congratulated. They include the RAM Project, the UNHCR, the Refugee Council, Refugee Action, ICAR, the Home Office Positive Images Group, numerous other refugee support groups and individual NUJ members.

Here is the full text of the PCC statement:

Over the past few years, the Press Complaints Commission has received increasing numbers of complaints – principally concerning discrimination – about the coverage of issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers.

The clear majority of complaints – including those stemming from partisan comment and campaigning – raise no breach of the Code of

Practice.

However, one discrete group of complaints – which fall under the broad banner of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Code – has led to a number of breaches, and the Commission thought it useful to draw this issue to the attention of editors.

Those breaches of the Code that have occurred – in a similar manner to the issue of the reporting of mental health, about which the PCC issued guidance in 1998 – appear largely to have arisen from misunderstandings about terminology.

The Commission is concerned that editors should ensure that their journalists covering these issues are mindful of the problems that can occur and take care to avoid misleading or distorted terminology. By way of example, as an 'asylum seeke' is someone currently seeking refugee status or humanitarian protection, there can be no such thing in law as an 'illegal asylum seeker'.

A 'refugee' is someone who has fled their country in fear of their life, and may have been granted asylum under the 1951 Refugee Convention or someone who otherwise qualifies for Humanitarian Protection, Discretionary Leave or has been granted Exceptional Leave to Remain in the country. An asylum seeker can only become an 'illegal immigrant' if he or she remains in the UK after having failed to respond to a removal notice.

Those groups set up to support and advocate on behalf of refugees and asylum seekers can provide further clarification to journalists if required.

Editors are, of course, already aware that pejorative or irrelevant reference to a person's race, religion, or nationality is already prohibited under Clause 13 (Discrimination) of the Code. Similarly, the Commission – in previous adjudications under Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Code – has underlined the danger that inaccurate, misleading or distorted reporting may generate an atmosphere of fear and hostility that is not borne out by the facts.

www.pcc.org.uk/reports/edit_detail.asp?id=20

MAPPING THE REFUGEE SECTOR

3: REFUGEE ACTION Helping refugees build new lives

Gordon Doh Fondo looks at the work of a key refugee support organisation

Refugee Action was set up in 1981 to provide a radical new approach to supporting the thousands of people fleeing persecution in Vietnam, Bosnia and Kosovo. Since then it has developed from just a handful of staff to become one of the largest refugee organisations in the UK.

It provides support and advice services in 22 counties in England, from Manchester, Liverpool and Leicester, to Nottingham, Bristol, Plymouth and Southampton.

Its services are for asylum seekers who have recently arrived in the UK, those settled in the UK and those who have received a decision on their claim.

Last year it gave advice or support to 28,794 asylum seekers and refugees from more than 60 different nationalities.

The charity has developed a number of independently funded projects that meet the specific needs of asylum-seekers and refugees. These include:

- The Youth and Community Project, funded by the Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, to work with young asylum-seekers and refugees in Liverpool;
- The Welcome Project, which assists and orientates newly-arrived asylum-seekers and refugees in Liverpool;
- The Vietnamese Oral History Project, which is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and

supported by the British Library, Museum of London and the Panos Institute. The Project enables elders in the Vietnamese Community to inform younger generations about their history;

- The Choices Project, which offers impartial advice to asylum seekers and refugees who are considering return to their country of origin;
- The Marketing Project, which is funded by the Community Fund and advises refugee community organisations on successful development;

REFUGEE ACTION FACT SHEET

Number of paid staff: 140
Number of volunteers: 80

Budget (2002-2003)
£18,442,833

Head Office
The Old Fire Station
150 Waterloo Road
LONDON
SE1 8SB
Tel: 020 7654 7700
Fax: 020 7401 3699

Website
www.refugee-action.org.uk

Communications Manager
Stephen Rylance

Press Officers:
Susie Renshaw
Rachel Watson

- The women's project, which supports and campaigns on behalf of women;
- The Well-being Project, which helps isolated asylum-seekers and refugees in Greater Manchester to develop a better sense of well-being.

Refugee Action runs on an annual budget of £18,442,833 (March 2002-April 2003) and employs 140 staff and 80 volunteers nationwide. It is currently seeking funding to extend many of its national programmes.

According to Stephen Rylance, Refugee Action's Communications Manager, a large part of the budget is spent on meeting the immediate needs of newly arrived people who need accommodation. Much of the remaining funds is used for long-term projects, such as those outlined above.

Steven says the work of Refugee Action is unique because it is regionally focused and works at grassroots level. He says the charity's one-stop shops have made it the frontline agency in dealing with asylum-seekers and refugees.

Refugee Action is also at the forefront of campaigning against biased media coverage. Stephen describes the charity's press office as "a robust round-the-clock team that responds quickly and effectively to media excesses".

He says the press office is "looking at innovative ways of getting around the polarization of the asylum debate. There is a lot of goodwill out there that we just need to tap into." The press office issues releases in reaction to government policies and is presently working on an ambitious three-year project with the BBC to highlight the challenges facing asylum-seekers and refugees.

During the last Refugee Week, the charity ran a series of club nights called Refuge in a bid to reach young people after it transpired from a MORI poll that a high percentage of young people are likely to be hostile towards asylum-seekers and refugees.

Refugee Action also publishes a wide range of documents, including *Refugees and Asylum-seekers: The Economic Argument*, which dispels some of the myths we see so regularly in the tabloid press.

For further information please visit Refugee Action's website:
www.refugee-action.org.uk

'PEG' BOARD

Help to set the media agenda by generating stories rather than having to react to theirs. 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.

Keep your media contacts informed about what is happening and why it is relevant for them.

Monday 3 November
7.30pm

POETRY CAFE

Exiled Writers Ink! present their regular monthly evening of poetry. Tonight sees the launch of their new magazine 'Exiled Ink!' and readings from Chinese poet Zheng Danyi. £2 members and unemployed refugees, £3 non-members
Venue: 22 Betterton Street, London WC2. Nearest tube Covent Garden
Please confirm attendance in advance to jennifer@exiledwriters.fsnet.co.uk

Wednesday 5 November
7.00 - 9.00pm

LOST IN TRANSITION: LIFE IN A NEW LANGUAGE

Organised by the Ruth Hayman Trust, the seminar draws on the experiences of three very different bilingual authors. Tickets £15
Followed by refreshments and book signing.
Venue: Friends Meeting House, 173 - 177 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ
For more info, visit www.ruthhaymantrust.com

Sunday 9 November INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST FASCISM AND ANTISEMITISM

UNITED for Intercultural Action, the European network against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees, are co-ordinating this day to

commemorate Kristallnacht and to celebrate commitment to the fight against intolerance now and in the future.

To get involved with your own activities, contact UNITED on info@unitedagainstracism.org

Sunday 9 November
7.30pm

KRISTALLNACHT MEMORIAL

Jewish Socialist Worker's annual Kristallnacht programme this year takes the theme 'Scapegoats'. Nick Medic, RAM Project Communications Officer, will speak on how immigrants can be beneficial to their host country's economy.
Venue: Byng Place, London
For more info, contact Ruth Appleton on 020 7482 2903 or appletonruth@msn.com

Monday 10 November 1.00 - 4.30pm

REFUGEE WEEK PLANNING MEETING

Refugee Council have organised this planning meeting to discuss next years Refugee Week, scheduled for 14 to 20 June 2004.

Venue: The Leeds Church Institute, 20 New Market Street, Leeds LS1 6DG
For more info, or to confirm attendance, contact Lucy Crompton on 020 7820 3105 or Lucy.Crompton@RefugeeCouncil.org.uk

Tuesday 11 November
9.00am - 4.30pm

REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Organised by British Institute of Human Rights (BIHR) and Joint Council of Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI), this conference examines the effects of the Human Rights Act of Oct 2000.

Venue: The Great Hall, King's College, The Strand, London WC2R 2LS
For more info, contact Carolina Gottardo (BIHR) on 020 7593 0043 or cgottardo@bihr.org, or Don Flynn (JCWI) on 020 7608 7305 or don@jcwi.org.uk

Friday 14 November GENDER, ASYLUM AND THE MEDIA CONFERENCE

Organised by the Refugee Media Group in Wales (RMGW), a conference which aims to share learning and best practice. Keynote speaker Dr Heaven Crawley, Director of Migration and Equalities Programme, IPPR
Venue: Thistle Hotel, Cardiff

For more info, contact Vanessa Bucolli at RMGW on BucolliV@Cardiff.ac.uk

Tuesday 18 November
9.15am - 5.00pm

MINORITY ETHNIC PUPILS CONFERENCE

Organised by Neil Stewart Associates, a one day conference to explore how equality of opportunity is provided for all pupils, whatever their background. Tickets from £160 plus VAT
Venue: Central London
For more info, contact Gemma Suter on 020 7324 4363, or gemma.suter@neilstewartassociates.co.uk

Friday 21 November 10.00 - 11.00am

GUIDE FOR JOURNALISTS IN SCOTLAND

Amnesty International Scotland present the launch of their Guide to Refugee and Asylum Issues for Journalists in Scotland.
Venue: Board Room, NUJ Offices, 114 Union Street, Glasgow
For more info, contact Michelle Lowe on Michelle.Lowe@amnesty.org.uk or 0131 466 6200

Saturday 22 November
MEETING OF MINDS

One-day conference looking at comparing the experiences of migrants across ethnic groups. Organised by Women on Ireland Research Network. Also poetry, music and oral histories.
Venue: Camden Irish Centre, 50 - 52 Camden Square NW1, London
For more info, contact Louise Ryan on L.Ryan@rfc.ucl.ac.uk or visit <http://researchservices1.qub.ac.uk/woireland/>

Monday 24 November
9.30am - 4.45pm

DELIVERING RACE EQUALITY AND GOOD RACE RELATIONS

Jointly organised by the Commission for Racial

Equality (CRE) and the Refugee Council, this conference will focus on the amended Race Relations Act 2000 (RRA). Tickets from £100
Venue: Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, Broad Sanctuary, Westminster, London, SW1P 3EE
For more info, contact Victoria Logan on 020 7820 3092 or victoria.logan@refugeecouncil.org.uk

Monday 24 to Thursday 27
November

A SENSE OF PLACE

Organised by the British Council, an event to examine 'displacement' and 'integration' in Europe. PressWise and the RAM Project are co-ordinating day two (25 Nov) on media. Exiled Writers Ink! are also involved on 26 Nov the arts, culture and education day.
For more info, contact info@asenseofplace.org.uk or 01280 821 292 or visit www.asenseofplace.org.uk

Tuesday 25 November DEVELOPING SERVICES FOR GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS

Organised in association with the Traveller Law Reform Coalition, a one day conference to look at the progress made to improve site provision and access to services for Gypsies and Travellers' groups.
Venue: New Connaught Rooms, London
For more info, contact Debbie Young on 020 7324 4364 or debbie.young@neilstewartassociates.co.uk

Sunday 30 November
RE-IMAGINING
DIASPORAS

A one-day symposium organised by the School of Media, Critical and Creative Arts at Liverpool University, to establish a research network and facilitate collaborative research. Registration £25 waged, £15 unwaged
Venue: Liverpool John Moores University, Dean Walters Building, MCCA, St James Road, Liverpool L1 7BR.
For more info, contact Clare Horrocks on clhorrocks@aol.com or 0151 424 6170