

RAM BULLETIN

Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Media Project

advice
information
research
& training
on media ethics



No 38, March 2004

Promoting best practice in media representation of refugee and asylum issues

EDITORIAL

Enough is enough

The decision taken by the NUJ, UNHCR, MediaWise and the RAM Project to issue guidelines to UK journalists about how they report on asylum seekers and refugees is a brave one, indicating that they are determined to put an end to the continuous persecution by tabloid newspapers.

This step complements the heroic stance taken by journalists at the *Daily Express* who have refused to write racist articles – as we reported in the last edition of the *Bulletin* – particularly in relation to the possible movement of East Europeans to the UK after EU enlargement on 1 March.

These are just two of the measures being taken to challenge the persecution of vulnerable asylum seekers by newspapers that are simply interested in increasing their sales. Lionel Morrison's article tracing several of our papers' racist pasts (see news section) shows that scapegoating outsiders, whether they are Jews, Ugandan Asians or refugees, is something that sections of the UK press have been doing for more than 70 years.

Action to combat inaccurate and negative coverage of asylum seekers and refugees has also extended to Europe, with Online/More Colour in the Media, MediaWise, the IFJ/EUJ and the European Network Against Racism joining forces to publish a hard-hitting report on the situation in Europe on 15 Mar.

Refugees and asylum seekers are just the latest in a long line of groups to be targeted and discriminated against by powerful media interests. It can be difficult for us to stand up for what is just and right, but if we don't, who knows who will be next?

Mohammed Elsharif
Guest Editor
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Watch's out – there's good news about.

It will be fascinating to see how the press and media handle the latest report from the Institute For Employment Studies (IES). It says that refugees make excellent employees – but employers are frightened to admit it.

The IES research confirms that employers are often impressed with the calibre of refugees' work, but it says that firms can be reluctant to publicise the fact they employ refugees for fear of negative publicity.

The research was conducted on ten employers that have recruited refugees, including a hotel chain, a construction firm and a bus company.

They highlighted the refugees' commitment, strong work ethic and productivity. One employer commented: "If that group of workers had not been there, would we have been able to maintain the calibre of the staff? Probably not."

Read the report at: www.employment-studies.co.uk/press/0403.php

Exclusive: Sun burnt again over asylum falsehoods

After its notorious Swan Bake story, you'd think *The Sun* would have smartened up its act. But Britain's largest selling newspaper has again run a story about asylum seekers breaking the law that the police say is simply untrue.

Under the headline 'Refugees in illegal motoring epidemic', *The Sun* claimed on 19 Feb that "six asylum seekers an hour are caught at the wheel in Wolverhampton without licenses, tax, insurance or MOTs."

The report, which originated in the city's *Express and Star* newspaper, implied that the police had been forced to recruit an Asylum Seekers Liaison Officer (ASLO) to deal with the problem.

But a Press Officer from Wolverhampton police has told the *Bulletin* that the story is wrong. "There were approximately six asylum seekers and refugees stopped over a

period of four to five hours during an operation," says Sarah Astbury. She adds that some 40 vehicles in total were stopped and – far from being an "epidemic" – the number of asylum seekers and refugees pulled over was "a fair proportion, given the nature of Wolverhampton's population". She also says that the ASLO has been in post since Sept 2003, so her appointment was not connected with the traffic operation.

Shameful racist history of several papers exposed

The first black President of the National Union Of Journalists has accused several UK newspapers of racism in their coverage of refugees and asylum seekers – and shown how they have taken a similar editorial line for more than 70 years.

Lionel Morrison, OBE, a South African who fled to the UK to escape apartheid, writes: "Racist and xenophobic articles and news reports are not new to our newspapers." He shows how reports about immigrants 'invading' or 'flooding' into the UK have been peddled by newspapers for the last 70 years – first against Jews in the early 1900s and then against Asians living in Uganda in the 1970s.

He adds: "Nearly 70 years later, the old double-talk is still being employed without embarrassment or question."

Read the full article at: news.amnesty.org/mav/index/ENGPO_L3017022004

New RAM leaflet out now

A simple guide to reporting refugees and asylum seekers has been produced by the RAM Project in association with the UNHCR and the NUJ. 25,000 copies have been printed

Order from anna@presswise.org.uk

No comment

David Blunkett wants to process Somalian asylum applicants by interning them in Tanzania first. The east Africa country, one the poorest in the world, is already home to 690,000 refugees (UNHCR figures for 2003).

Slovak journalists expose TV journalists' Roma lies

TV journalists from the UK have been deliberately misinforming the public about Romany migrants, the Roma Press Agency claims. Kristina Magdolenova, PRA executive editor and agency journalist Ivan Hriczko, say they have seen TV journalists from the UK attempting to fabricate evidence and stage misleading interviews with Roma.

In an explosive article, they tell these journalists (whom they refused to name): "We have seen how unprofessional your working methods are. And that is why we do not trust you anymore."

Meanwhile a recent BBC report claimed that the Slovak government had 'sold' the idea of joining the EU by convincing Roma that they could find a better life elsewhere.

See www.rpa.sk/clanok.aspx?o=zc&n=1348&l=en

Roma invasion reports are 'silly' and 'hysterical'

Czech politicians have dismissed reports of mass migration to the UK following EU enlargement on May 1 as hysterical and silly.

"The fear about an influx of Slovak or Czech Roma to Great Britain after we join the EU is just media hysteria," Deputy Prime Minister Petr Mares told *The Prague Post* (12 Feb). Days earlier, Prime Minister Vladimir Spidla told reporters that the UK government's concern over the issue had been provoked by "silly media".

The Czech Government's Human Rights Commissioner Jan Jarab also told *The Guardian*: "The Czech media have picked up what's in *The Sun* – that the Roma will come over in large numbers. The effect is to encourage more people to go."

Migrants to invade Britain? (Er, no, admits small print.)

Sections of the UK press have been forced to concede that Britain won't be invaded on 1 May – even though they've still run scare-stories about it.

'We won't let immigrants get benefits,' thundered the front page of the *Western Daily Press* (24 Feb). 'We'll throw jobless migrants out of the country,' it continued inside, with

a boxout asking 'Will Britain be flooded with workers?'

The answer the paper itself provides is, er, no. It says Lithuanians find Poland more attractive, Estonians go for Finland; and the number of migrants from Slovenia, Hungary and Malta 'not expected to increase'.

The only country likely to provide more migrant workers is Poland, and all the *WDP* can say about that is "many may want to come here". What sort of newspaper tell you about things it believes are unlikely to happen?

Week of Action on media coverage about to kick off

The results of a pan-European survey of media coverage, by community organisations and official bodies, are to be announced in Brussels on Mon 15 Mar to mark the start of a Week of Action on media coverage of asylum organised by Online/More Colour in the Media with MediaWise, the IFJ/EUJ and the European Network Against Racism.

RAM launches the Week of Action at the Frontline Club in London, on Thurs 4 Mar, along with the new RAM leaflet on reporting refugees. Speakers include NUJ General Secretary Jeremy Dear and RAM's new Communications Officer Forward Maisokwadzu.

An impressive array of meetings, demonstrations and lectures will take place during the week, hosted by the NUJ Black members Council, NACAD, the Refugee Council, Exiled Writers Ink and others.

Full details are on the *Peg Board*

Little donkey apology in *The Star*

The *Daily Star* has published a partial apology over its front-page claim that Somali asylum-seekers had stolen and eaten donkeys from a London park.

A tiny item on 8 Jan it read: 'Our 21 August 2003 article 'Asylum-seekers Ate our Donkeys' implied that Somalis had stolen donkeys from Greenwich Royal Park for food. We accept that the suggestion may have been offensive to the Somali community, and have been asked to make clear that the Muslim religion prohibits such activity. We apologise for any offence caused.'

That's self-regulation for you.

RAM welcomes new communications officer

Greetings have poured in from exiled journalists welcoming Forward Maisokwadzu from Zimbabwe who joined the project as its new Communications Officer this month.

Forward, who has been freelancing for the *Voice of America*, *Sunday Times*, *Guardian* and *English to Africa*, says he believes the job is an opportunity to build a strong network of exiled journalists and empower them to resume their careers in UK.

He is also eager to work alongside UK journalists to challenge the negative reporting of asylum seekers and refugees.

RAM Project needed now more than ever

The RAM Project was set up in 1999 in response to fears that inaccurate and sensational media coverage was panicking politicians into making inhumane decisions about refugees and asylum-seekers.

Almost five years later, the Government insists that its policies are not being driven by unremitting tabloid media hype about the imminent arrival of up to 74 million (*Daily Express*) 'new' Europeans, including 1.6million Roma (*Daily Express* again). So why did the Prime Minister use a *News of the World* interview to promise a crackdown, and why was the latest drop in asylum figures leaked a day early to the Labour-supporting *Mirror*?

Meanwhile the British National Party pickets the NUJ, and new Tory leader Michael Howard wins headlines by berating the BNP while apparently sharing their enthusiasm for scape-goating asylum-seekers...

Clearly the RAM Project and its supporters are needed more than ever!

RAM out and about

Former RAM Communications Officer Nick Medic showed the video *On the receiving end* to an Indymedia event in Bristol on 25 Feb. MediaWise Director Mike Jempson explained the work of RAM to a conference in media coverage of conflict at the Conway Hall in London on 28 Feb.

EXILED JOURNALISTS SPEAK OUT**THE HIGH PRICE OF EXPOSING CORRUPTION AND OPPRESSION IN SUDAN**

Speaking out against the Government can cost journalists their lives in Sudan. MOHAMMED ELSHARIF describes how he and his colleagues fought for the truth

My experience of working in the Sudanese media is full of both pain and joy. The pain comes from the amount of sacrifices we had to make in pursuit of our right to practice free and independent journalism. Journalists can face extremely painful ordeals in Sudan, such as being forced out of their job and being made to leave their family and home, for doing something as simple as publishing the opinions of people who've been victims of government oppression and abuse.

No freedom of expression

Unlike in the West, journalists in developing world countries who speak out, rather than beating the government's drum or simply keeping quiet, become targets for intimidation, harassment, torture and imprisonment. Ultimately, such a stance might cost you your life. Every day, we have to bear the pain of the government controlling the media, and this was the very first fact I had to deal with as a junior journalist with the inspiration and determination to fight corruption and human rights abuse.

There is further pain in trying to find a media organisation willing to provide you with a free forum to express your opinion, particularly if this involves uncovering government corruption or other stories that will embarrass the state. For a newspaper, running such stories may result in closure of its offices or confiscation of that day's papers; but for the journalist it could result in intimidation, imprisonment and even death.

To do our job in such difficult circumstances, journalists practised high level of self-censorship. But at the same time we were trying to send subtle messages of criticism to readers or viewers - by using a play-on-words for example - and pointing to government corruption and oppression in other ways. It was a risky task because once you go too far in telling the truth and openly voicing what the oppressed people are feeling, you either have to leave the country or face up to the extremely serious consequences of your actions.

The choice...

Every journalist is faced with a choice: either respect his or her profession and fight for freedom of speech, or quit the job. For most of us, the latter is unthinkable because journalism is a career with many pains and sacrifices, and if journalists give up, who is left to fight for freedom and justice?

It is devastating to see corruption and dictatorships dominating our beloved country, to see our people's rights denied, and for us to put our families and ourselves at risk of visits from secret security officers. But in our position, there is no way that we can remain blind to rampant corruption, oppression and injustice.

The joy we have is fighting for an open and free forum for people who are determined to challenge injustice and human rights abuses. My mission alongside my colleagues was, and still is, to be the voice of those poor people who have nobody to back them and highlight their ordeal. Taking such risks, independently minded journalists in Sudan are quite rightly regarded as heroes and heroines.

Journalists' rights and obligations

The difference between being a journalist working in a dictatorship and police state, and one who is practising in a democratic system, is vast. Knowing that your article will be treated as a reflection of public opinion and might influence the decision-making process, thereby protecting the public and the country's real national interests, is a great taste of freedom that we lack in many developing countries. In democratic systems, the authorities consider a controversial article as an expression of your right to freedom of speech; whereas in a dictatorship, such an article is seen as a threat to national security and the journalist labelled as an agent for a foreign power.

Over the past few weeks, many newspapers in the UK have been publishing misleading and inaccurate articles to stop Roma coming to the UK when the EU is enlarged on 1 May. It pains me to see them using their freedom to write stories like this. UK journalists should remember that their colleagues in many developing countries are working under extremely dangerous conditions to expose the suffering of people who are being intimidated, abused and exploited by the powers that be - as many Roma are. With this in mind, perhaps they would exercise their precious freedom and power more responsibly.

*Mohammed Elsharif worked as a newscaster and journalist for **Sudan National Television** and wrote for national newspapers in Sudan.*

MAPPING THE REFUGEE SECTOR

7: Immigration Advisory Service

Providing free and independent legal advice to refugees and asylum seekers

Jahangir Hajipour outlines the work of this essential legal support service

The Immigration Advisory Service is the largest charity in the UK offering free legal advice and representation to immigrants and asylum seekers.

It emerged out of the former United Kingdom Immigrants' Advisory Service, which was established in 1970, so it has 30 years' experience in this field. It is publicly funded under the 1971 Immigration Act to provide free advice and legal representation to people appealing against the government's decision to turn down their asylum application.

Although it receives a substantial amount of money from government – some £10 million a year – it is completely independent of political control. IAS's director of operations, Michael Pickett says that the government has never interfered with its work. The organisation also has contracts with the Legal Aid Commission to take on work with asylum seekers, worth £2.5 million, which makes its annual budget £13 million a year.

IAS has its head office in London and 16 offices around the UK. They include an advice unit, a solicitors unit, caseworkers, a tribunal unit, a research and information library,

a legal research department and a training department. It has an office at Oakington Detention Centre, which is open seven days a week, and also has an overseas office in Bangladesh.

The organisation has grown from 70 staff 10 years ago to some 300 today. It is interested in employing refugees and individuals from ethnic minorities - all staff are fully trained, but are expected to be knowledgeable about human rights and understand the issues asylum seekers face.

IAS FACT SHEET

Number of UK staff 300

Budget : £13m

UK Head Office

3rd Floor, County House
190 Great Dover Street
London SE1 4YB

Tel: 020 7357 7511

Fax: 020 7403 5875

Website www.iasuk.org

External Relations Manager

Ms Karen Lesley-Lloyd

External Relations Officer

Ms Tina Rawal

The services it offers are completely free, though government rules on who qualifies for the service are about to change.

From 1 Apr, clients will be means-tested, and those deemed able to pay for legal support will not be offered free advice. However, the organisation's website points out that the charges it will levy "are based only on the cost to us of providing the service. We do not make any commercial profit out of the charges and we keep

them as low as possible for the quality service that we give."

IAS responds to enquiries from around the world via email and letters and provides advice face-to-face or over the telephone to 36,000 people a year. It also works on more than new 7,000 appeals cases every year – and about 75% of the cases it takes on are successful.

IAS has a large specialist library and publishes the three leading publications on immigration and asylum law: the quarterly *Immigration Law Digest*, fortnightly *Case Law Update* and *Index* (subscribers include all immigration adjudicators among others).

IAS is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee with a Board of up to 12 Trustees. They are all volunteers who are responsible for strategic planning, while the daily running is left to the Chief Executive, former Conservative MP Keith Best, and his managers.

The organisation also has an educational role. It monitors media coverage and takes every opportunity to comment on or correct misleading stories about asylum seekers. "The thing about the media is that it seems to be polarised," says Pickett. "According to the right wing media, all asylum seekers are economic immigrants and should not be allowed in - they are scroungers. With the left, it's the other extreme: all asylum seekers are genuine must be granted protection. The truth is somewhere in the middle".

IAS has engaged with local newspapers and broadcasters, especially those around detention centres, to help journalists understand the issues asylum seekers face and ensure that their reporting is fair, balanced and accurate.

'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 that 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.

March 3 - April 4

EXHIBITION: "FRAGMENTS FROM ANOTHER LIFE"

An exhibition from refugees, exiles and their stories, with photographic portraits by Rhonda Klevansky, writing and drawings by the sitters. Opening times: Wed - Sat 11.00am - 5.00pm; Sun 2.00pm - 4.00pm
Venue: Angel Gallery, Islington Museum, Islington Town Hall, Uppers street, London (Nearest tube Highbury & Islington Tube)
For more info, contact RKlevansky@compuserve.com or 020 7527 2837

Thursday 4 March 6.30pm - 9.00pm

ON THE RECEIVING END - EXILED JOURNALISTS IN THE UK

Organised by the Refugees, Asylum-seekers and Media (RAM) Project, an event to mark the launch of the new NUJ/MediaWise leaflet on Reporting Refugees, the European Week of Action (Mar 15-21) on coverage of refugee and asylum issues and the appointment of Forward Maisokwadzo as RAM Communications Officer. Speakers will include: Jeremy Dear (General Secretary, NUJ), Forward Maisokwadzo (RAM Communications Officer) and Terry Williams (RAM National Co-ordinator)
Venue: The Frontline Club, 13 Norfolk Place, London
For more info, contact anna@presswise.org.uk

Tuesday 2 March 8.00pm REFUGEE WRITERS ON TOUR

Organised by refugee Journalists, an event taking place every Tuesday of the month until June.
Venue: Millers Tavern, Riverside, Cardiff
For more info, contact Eric Ngalle on st02004288@uwic.ac.uk

Tuesday 11 March 6.00pm AFRICA AND INTERNATIONAL DRUGS CONTROL

Jointly organised with The Royal African Society, a discussion on Africa and international drugs control, chaired by Richard Dowden (Executive Director) with a speech from Dr David Anderson (Oxford University), followed by questions from the floor. Free entry, book in advance.
Venue: The Royal Commonwealth Society, 18 Northumberland Ave, London
For more info, contact susanna.darch@rcsint.org or 020 7766 9202

Friday 12 March 9.30am - 6.00pm IMAGES OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

Jointly organised by the Refugee Council and Friends of the Institute, a one day conference focusing on the way media images and representations portray asylum seekers.
Venue: The Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 28 Russell Square, London
For more info, contact jean.candler@refugeecouncil.org.uk or visit www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Saturday 13 March 1.00pm - 16.30pm PUBLIC MEETING

Organised by the National Union of Journalists and the Black Members Council, a public meeting to discuss the media portrayal of ethnic minorities and the rise of the far right. Chaired by Alex Pascall, speakers will include Jeremy Dear (General Secretary), Neil Hodgkinson (Editor) and Neil Taggart (Mayor) tbc.
Venue: Leeds Civic Hall (Banquet Hall), Leeds

For more info, contact NUJ on 020 7278 7916

Monday 15 March 8.00am ANNUAL STUDENT CONFERENCE

Warwick University will be holding its 2nd annual student conference on forced migration. The aim of the conference is to enable post-graduates to meet and share research, ideas and experiences. Discussion forums will be held throughout the day on various topics.
£15 conference fee on the door (lunch included).
Venue: University of Warwick, Coventry
For more info, contact k.amore@warwick.ac.uk or 024 7652 4869

Monday 15 to Sunday 21 March

EUROPEAN WEEK OF ACTION

A week of action about asylum reporting across Europe, with the RAM Project co-ordinating events in the UK. Activities will include the launch of new research on the way the media covers refugees and asylum stories on the continent and UK, and also a special meeting of the exiled journalists network and events at the National Union of Journalists annual conference.
For more info, or to get involved, email Terry Williams on williams.t@blueyonder.co.uk

Saturday 20 March
10.45am - 12.45 pm

CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF SLAVERY: A POLITICAL ECONOMY

Organised by Friends of Le Monde Diplomatique, the last in the series public discussions opened by an eminent guest speaker. Dr. Christien van den Anker author of "The political Economy of slavery" and Lecturer, will speak on issues of child labour, trafficking and migrant abuse on four continents. This will be followed by an open discussion with the public.
£3/£2 concessions. Free on production of membership card
Venue: In the Café at the French Institute, 17

Queensberry Place, London SW7

For more info, contact Friends of Le Monde Diplomatique on 0709 234 8726, email monde-diplo-friends@mondediplo.com or visit www.monedediplo.com

Sunday 21 March INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Annual, worldwide broadcast campaign Radio Voix Sans Frontières (RVSF) organised by the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC). Community radio stations and minority organisations produce programmes on anti-racism-related issues - and re-broadcast those produced in other countries.
For more info, visit vsf.amarc.org

Wednesday 7 April 6.00pm DOES UK FOREIGN INVESTMENT CREATE REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS?

Jointly organised with Ilisu Dam Campaign and The Corner House, Peace in Kurdistan, a discussion on a report co-produced by the Ilisu Dam Campaign and The Corner House, Peace in Kurdistan. Free entry, book in advance.
Venue: 18 Northumberland Avenue, London
For more info, contact susanna.darch@rcsint.org or 020 7766 9202

Friday 23 April 10.00am - 17.30pm

TRAINING DAY

Organised by the Immigration Advisory Service, a one-day event focusing on the latest developments in the area of asylum and immigration law. Experts will speak on related issues, speakers will include: Prof Stephen Castles (Director), Mark Symes (Solicitor) and Keith Best (Chief Executive) - followed by afternoon workshops.
Venue: Lakeside Conference Centre, Aston University, Birmingham
For more info, contact tina.rawal@iasuk.org or 020 7967 6000