

##RAM Report out now

#THE long-awaited study of the Refugees, Asylum-seekers and Media (RAM) Project set up by the ethics charity MediaWise is now available.

NUJ President Tim Lezard and Peter Kessler, Senior External Affairs Officer with UNHCR are along speakers at the press launch of the report at NUJ Head Office in London on Mon June 6. It will also get a European press launch in Brussels on June 15.

Mike Jempson, MediaWise Director and manager of the RAM Project says: "We hope the Report will help other minorities who receive a bad press to adopt some of the approaches we have used, to improve media coverage and to give people more confidence in their dealings with the media".

The RAM Report details how this ground-breaking Project set about its task to promote best practice and to assist other organisations to develop successful communication techniques.

The RAM Project began in 1999 in response to growing concern about inaccurate and sensational media coverage of refugee and asylum issues. Freelance journalist Rich Cookson was given access to all RAM Project documentation in compiling the Report, which is designed to help others replicate RAM communication strategies when dealing with complex and controversial issues. It explains:

- * how and why the different elements of the RAM Project were developed;
- * easy-to-reproduce materials;
- * facts and figures;
- * comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the Project.

The RAM Report, funded by the Home Office Refugee Integration Fund, has a cover price of £15 but RAM Bulletin subscribers can order a free copy.

For a copy of the report contact:

di@mediawise.org.uk

##Sun sacrifices asylum splash for soccer

#LIVERPOOL football team's dramatic win of the European Champions' league not only sent English soccer-loving fans into jubilation but also forced The Sun newspaper to change its asylum lead story (Thurs 27).

Desperate to win back the affections of Liverpoolians, who famously boycotted the paper after its notorious coverage of the Hillsborough tragedy, The Sun immediately after hearing Liverpool's win in Istanbul shifted its first edition lead story about a 'Parasite' asylum-seeker's £25k benefit con onto page 9. Later editions ran with Liverpool's Istanbul triumph as the 'splash', but not before TV-watchers had seen the original front page on the Wednesday evening.

However, the UNHCR has pointed out to The Sun that it was incorrect to call the wrong-doer an asylum-seeker, since the offence she had already been granted leave to remain in the UK. Perhaps sanity will prevail, and The Sun newsroom will begin to appreciate that the public is sick and tired of anti-asylum stories.

##Government figures show fall in asylum applications

#THE number of asylum seekers arriving in Britain fell by 17% in the first quarter of 2005, according to recent figures released by the Home Office.

What is surprising is that the media, particularly the tabloid press, usually quick to run anti-asylum and immigration stories, ignored the news completely, except for the Daily Mirror (Wed 18 May). It carried the story but also pointed that the number of those being sent home was also down. Ten days after the HO released its figures, The Express carried an inflammatory story saying immigration is spiralling out of control. Under the headline '176,000 migrants from the EU in just one year' (Fri 27 May) lamenting of a number of Eastern Europeans heading for UK.

The News of the World (Sun 22 May) took a van-load of illegal immigrants to police and the Home Office in a bid to show how chaotic is the asylum system. But police set them free, angering NoW reporters who had wasted time and nearly £10,000 on their 'investigation'.

##EDITORIAL - Community service leaves asylum seekers vulnerable to exploitation

#Anti-asylum and immigration stories have always been in the news. However, the introduction of section 10 of Immigration and Asylum Act 2000 calling failed asylum seekers to do community service to get support has been less attractive to the media.

Although asylum campaigners have raised their concerns saying the exercise is tantamount to 'slave labour', none of these stories have been carried by the media, not even the recent demonstration in Liverpool where the first pilot scheme will be based.

The media are not obliged to carry each and every story but giving balance to the asylum debate will help the public understand fully the issues.

Among the organisations to implement the scheme to help failed asylum seekers is YMCA. Although YMCA have put in place some good guidelines that will protect asylum seekers under their scheme, it will only cater for an unspecified number of young people. What happens to the rest of the people is still a mystery. Will they continue to get support under Section 4 or with other organisations and private businesses will come forward and bid to run their own schemes?

Asylum campaigners rightly want to know what guidelines are in place to seal all the loop holes that can lead to 'slave labour' and exploitation of failed asylum seekers. The media must break this 'pregnant' silence, rather than ignoring section 10 after carrying a series of anti-asylum stories. Balanced reporting is a public good.

Guest Editor

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##Networks meet for autumn weekend 'retreat'

#THE RAM Project is organising a weekend retreat for members of the Exiled Journalists Network to be held in autumn. The event is a follow-up to previous events held at Burwalls, a Bristol University Centre, in 2003.

It will mark the formal launch of the EJM as an independent charity, and its website. Plans include a gathering of RAM Media Network members at the event, which could also see the launch of a report on exiled journalists in Europe.

Watch this space for more information or contact: ram@mediawise.org.uk

##Last call for exiled journos in Europe

#AS announced in the last Bulletin, the RAM Project is collecting information about the situation of exiled journalists throughout Europe.

We would like to hear about initiatives by state and non-governmental bodies including media unions, as well as the stories of individual journalists who have sought asylum anywhere in Europe. The results will appear in a special report to encourage the development of support networks for exiled journalists.

Please forward contacts and information to: ram@mediawise.org.uk

##RAM out and about

#THE RAM Project and MediaWise are to contribute to a special briefing session for journalists based in Brussels, organised by the Jesuit Refugee Service on Wed. 15 June. 'Aliens in the Media' is being supported by UNHCR, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and MediaWise among others, to help improve media coverage of asylum policy issues throughout Europe, and to encourage cross border collaboration by journalists.

The IFJ is to launch an award for best European media coverage of the issues. (More details in the next Bulletin).

In the UK, MediaWise Director Mike Jempson is among a panel of media experts to speak at a Refugee Week event in Brighton on 26 June, and he is to speak on media coverage of asylum issues at a conference on 'English-speaking Nations and the Mediterranean' organised by the Maghreb Review at Mansfield College, Oxford in July.

##London Mayor rewards good asylum coverage

#IN a move to both encourage and recognise good practice in media coverage of asylum issues, Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London has announced the 2005 awards for London's local press.

"Fair media coverage is important as context for the lives of London's asylum seekers and refugees, who are great contributors to London's development and diversity but are also

vulnerable to social exclusion and hostility,” said Livingstone inviting journalists to enter for the awards, which are supported by the RAM project.

“Balanced and accurate, rather negative, press coverage of asylum is key to good community relations. My vision is that London should be a fair, prosperous and safe city for all, including asylum seekers,” he said.

RAM Communications Officer Forward Maisokwadzo is among the judges, along with Lee Japser, Mayor’s Advisor on Equalities and Policing, Shami Chakrabati, Director of Liberty, Maeve Sherlock, Chief Executive of Refugee Council, Halima Ismail of London Refugee Voice, NUJ President Tim Lezard, and a representative of the Metropolitan Police Authority. The results will be announced in July
www.london.gov.uk/mayor/equalities/llpa

##Refugees offered homes and jobs in Scotland

#SCOTLAND’S first housing association for ethnic minorities has set up a pioneering project in Glasgow to offer homes and jobs to the city’s refugees.

The Access Apna Ghar Housing Association has designed the programme to offer a full range of support to young asylum seekers. The group of 18 to 30 year-olds will be given homes across the north west of the city and help to find jobs or places on courses that will lead to employment.

Dave Le Sage, director of the housing association, said: “Initiatives exist to welcome asylum seekers to Scotland to help fill the skills gap, but people often underestimate how difficult it is to find a decent home and a good job in a foreign city.

<http://www.eveningtimes.co.uk/hi/news/5039134.html>

##Campaigners challenge YMCA project

#CAMPAIGNING groups have expressed disappointment over plans by YMCA England to pilot a compulsory community service scheme for failed asylum seekers.

The Home Office scheme, set out in Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum (Provision of Accommodation to Failed Asylum Seekers) Regulations 2005, requires failed asylum seekers to “do community work” in return for food and accommodation.

Richard Solly, campaigns and information officer for the Churches’ Commission for Racial Justice, said: “Failed asylum seekers who reach 18 and above are dragged back to detention centres and forced to work for food and accommodation.”

YMCA England has confirmed it is in negotiations with the Home Office. In a statement, it acknowledged concerns about the scheme, but said there would be safeguards.

www.ymca.org.uk

www.ctbi.org.uk

##Exiled journos attend media training at Lincoln University

#FIFTEEN members of the Exiled Journalists Network took part in a two day course jointly organised by the RAM Project and Lincoln School of Journalism at Lincoln University 10-11 May.

Participants reported that they enjoyed the two days but pointed out that they could have learnt more if it had lasted longer.

John Tulloch, Head of Lincoln’s faculty of Media and Humanities said that a similar programme could be organised in future if funding is secured.

##Call to join RAM UK Media Networks Groups

#ORGANISATIONS working with asylum seekers and refugees interested in developing strategies on use-of-the media can join some of the regional Media Network Groups developed and supported by the RAM project across the country. Terry Williams, RAM National Coordinator can help to set up groups and offer the necessary training. Media Networks groups are important in helping to improve coverage of asylum issues. contact Terry on:

##EXILED JOURNALISTS SPEAK OUT - Asylum agony of BBC journalist

#THOMAS NGUANYI, a prize-winning Cameroonian journalist with the BBC World Service and a founding member of the Cameroon Association of Commonwealth Journalists, was

hospitalised in detention at Harwich International Port. On release from the hospital he went into hiding, and sent this message to the RAM Bulletin.

I ran into trouble last year with the Cameroonian military and Government officials, together with the South African journalist Farouk Chotia, covering the disputed Bakassi peninsula between Cameroon and Nigeria, and was accused of espionage. We were arrested and detained by the same military officers who transported us to Bakassi in a military boat.

Following pressure from the British High Commissioner in Cameroon, His Excellency Richard Wildash, who raised the matter with President Paul Biya of Cameroon, and pressure from the Committee to Protect Journalists as well as the Cameroon Association of Commonwealth Journalists, we were released. Although thankfully diplomatic pressure helped to secure my release, I still fear for my life should I be forced to return.

During my interrogation senior military officers branded me a spy, a threat to the regime and a supporter of the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC), an Anglophone pressure group calling for the two English-speaking provinces to secede. While I was still in detention in Cameroon, security operatives traced my residence in Douala where I was based and interrogated my family members. After my release from detention, I was advised not to sleep in my house since security agents had already located it. I therefore spent a few days in a Hotel with my colleague Farouk Chotia while my travel documents to the UK were being processed.

Thanks to assistance from the BBC World Service, I traveled to the UK on 21 July 2004. While here I learned from my family that security operatives were still questioning and harassing my family to reveal my whereabouts.

I claimed asylum on 20 August following persistent reports of harassment and torture of my younger sister, apparently by security agents.

However, my asylum claim was rejected. I applied for permission to appeal to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal but the application was again summarily rejected on the grounds that one of the newspapers I submitted was not translated from French into English.

The BBC tried to convince me to return to Cameroon and continue reporting, saying that if I'm re-arrested they will again come to my assistance to bail me out. But I know my country too well and do not want to become a willing guinea pig to test situations with my life.

The regime has adopted repressive measures against journalists and media houses that dare criticize its policies. Recently there were extra judicial killings of nine youths in Douala by a military outfit set up by the Cameroonian authorities and known in French as 'commandant operationel'. Despite huge public outcry nothing was done to shed light on how and why the youths disappeared. This is why I am too scared to return to Cameroon now.

The regime seems to have targeted me because I went to Bakassi with a colleague who was a foreign Journalist and probably because of some previous reports I did for the BBC World Service about deplorable detention conditions and police corruption and harassment in Cameroon.

I received anonymous calls threatening me after some of my previous reports were broadcast by the BBC. I have been working for the World Service for about four years now but I'm concerned that although they managed to whisk me off to the UK for security reasons, they did not give me adequate support for my asylum claim.

My fears of persecution by Government agents have been buttressed further by the fact that my younger sister was taken away, interrogated and tortured for failing to reveal my whereabouts.

From the on-going hunt for me, it is now clear that our release last year was only meant to separate my colleague and me, to deal with me later. It now appears to me that my release was also just a ploy to divert the media attention that was focused on the incident.

I have problems walking and I'm on medication. When I collapsed while still in detention it was probably due to stress and poor diet.

Cameroon has a history of political detentions. Human rights activities, political leaders and journalists have been targeted during the last few years, according to various Amnesty International reports.

Reporters Without Borders have also voiced concern about increasing levels of press censorship and imprisonment of journalists.