

women's asylum news

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New report reveals shocking picture of women held in detention in the UK

A new research report, '*They took me away: Women's experiences of immigration detention in the UK*', highlights shocking testimony from thirteen women asylum seekers, who were detained by the UK Immigration Service for periods ranging from one week to 86 weeks.

Some of the women interviewed for the research had fled gender-related persecution (such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage, rape and trafficking) whilst others had fled gender-based abuse in the context of imputed political opinion or a country embroiled in civil war. Almost all had voluntarily made contact with immigration authorities for the purpose of seeking asylum: being detained in response was a profoundly shocking and disruptive experience as their accounts reproduced in a report by Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID) and the Refugee Women's Resource Project at Asylum Aid (RWRP) reveal.

Eight out of 13 spent several months or longer in detention. The Home Office commonly cite the need for detention as being in order to affect removal and to prevent absconding. Yet despite lengthy periods of detention in the majority of cases, removal from the UK was not the

outcome of their detention, even if several women did experience a number of attempts to forcibly remove them. Only one was successfully removed but the others remained to tell BID/RWRP that they experienced a disproportionate use of force and violence in the process. Their accounts do not suggest that serious attempts were made to employ alternatives to detention or to keep detention to the shortest period necessary.

"I was told they wanted to remove me to my country, that my country is safe. But my country is not safe, a lot of people are being killed there. ...Don't they see on television, the people at the Home Office, what is happening in my country? My brother, I don't know if he is still alive."

Main research findings

The women's stories show that they had suffered fear, uncertainty and a profound sense of injustice and bewilderment whilst in detention.

They were often unable to exercise their legal rights or secure legal representation to challenge their detention. They were not able to find out what was happening in their case and did not feel that their rights and entitlements had been explained in a language they could understand. One woman said:

"The information on bail is in the small print. Also, by the time you get the letter in detention, your state of

mind is such that you don't always take it in. They don't explain it to you."

Some were unable to address their physical and mental health needs whilst in detention, and in some cases, detention exacerbated existing physical and mental health problems. At the same time, their specific needs as women and mothers were not provided. Another woman summed it up:

"I saw people with babies weeks old - some as young as four weeks old. I also saw pregnant women, some during the first three months of pregnancy which is the worst stage. I think it's very bad to detain pregnant women and women with small children. They are psychologically torturing people and tearing families apart."

Only this month, RWRP read of the case of a young mother who was separated from her 18-month-old baby whilst detained in Dungavel.¹

In addition, women's daily lives during often prolonged periods in detention were characterised by frequent moves between centres and an overriding sense of frustration and depression.

Worryingly, the women witnessed or directly experienced the use of violence and serious ill-treatment during removal attempts:

"...the worst thing is the times when they take women to the airport. They are really scared and when they come

¹ See 'related news' below.

back they tell the stories of what happens.”

Evidence of violence used during removal attempts increasing

The women's accounts in *'They took me away'* are corroborated by increasing anecdotal evidence collected through the media but also professionals working in the field. In another new report released this month, *'Harm on removal: Excessive force against failed asylum seekers'*, the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture claims that failed asylum seekers are suffering systematic abuse as they are forcibly removed from the UK.

The charity based its report on its own medical evidence of 14 asylum seekers who said they had been abused during attempts to deport them from the UK after their claims to stay had been rejected. In 12 of the cases the doctors found evidence which suggested *"excessive or gratuitous force"* had been used (some were kicked and punched and racial abuse was also used). According to the charity, the incidents were examples of a *"practice of abuse"* which is *"extremely worrying."*²

Responding to the Medical Foundation's report, a spokesman for the Home Office said it was prepared to look into the

² The Institute of Race Relations (IRR) also published this month figures showing that, in the past 15 years, 34 asylum seekers took their own life rather than being sent back to the country they fled; four died accidentally whilst trying to evade deportation officials and one woman died when asphyxiated by officers who used '13 feet of tape to subdue and quieten her'. See IRR Press Release, *'Death trap: the human cost of the war on asylum'*, 4 October 2004, at www.irr.org.uk/2004/october/ak000007.html.

cases cited in the report but did not accept they were evidence of systematic abuse.³

Guidelines for immigration detention ignored

Both the account of the experiences of detention narrated in *'They took me away'* and other research suggest that guidelines for immigration detention contained in the Home Office instructions, the Operational Enforcement Manual, and the statutory Detention Centre Rules are not followed in many cases.

BID and RWRP therefore strongly urge the government to make fundamental changes to the legal framework for detention in order to comply with domestic and international human rights norms. We also strongly urge the government to adhere to existing guidance and rules in order to fully meet women's needs in their predicament both as women asylum seekers and women held in detention.

Lastly, we recommend that the use of immigration detention be considered in the wider context of the need for changes in the asylum system which address the quality of Home Office decision-making and improved country information; without this people who should be given protection in the UK will continue to be detained and experience

³ Steven Morris, 'Rejected refugees "suffering abuse"', Monday October 11, 2004, *The Guardian*, www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,3604,1324209,00.html. See also David Barrett, 'Assault Claim Deportees "Should Have Right to Stay"', PA News, 11 October 2004 available online at: <http://news.scotsman.com/latest.cfm?id=3610754> (source: asylumpolicy.info).

further trauma and bewilderment, similar to what the women in our research have so vividly and painfully described.

Copies of the full report are available at: www.biduk.org/pdf/women/women_in_detention_in_word_02Sep04.doc or www.asylumaid.org.uk/New%20RWRP/RWRP_RRP_Publicationslist.htm. For hard copies, please contact Bethany Collier on 020 7377 5123 or bethanyc@asylumaid.org.uk.

"I am comfortable [now], I am free. I can do whatever I want. I can check on my health, I am now like anyone else. Nobody can beat me anymore the way I have been beaten. But I would like to get respect, human rights in England. This is my big problem. ...I haven't received any letters yet; I don't know what is happening, they can arrest me at anytime. If they take me away now, I will die. ...It's as if I was still in detention."

related news ■ Young mother separated from her child whilst put in detention: A 16-year-old mother was separated from her 18-month-old baby after being detained along with her teenage brothers and sisters. Her baby is said to have been placed in temporary foster care. Scotland Children's Commissioner, Kathleen Marshall, commented: "*If that is the situation, it would worry me hugely. Fifteen and 16 year-olds are children themselves, and I would be very concerned if mothers and babies are being separated*". Positive

Action in Housing, whose staff have been investigating the detention of children at Dungavel, highlighted the absurdity of the situation: "*The authorities are now telling children that they can't have children at Dungavel even as they detain them. How perverse can you get?*"⁴

related publication ■ Jesuit Refugee Service-Europe, '*Detention in Europe: Administrative Detention of Asylum Seekers and Irregular Immigrants*', 1st October 2004, available online at: www.detention-in-europe.org.

related event ■ 'Terminal Frontiers, deportation, terror, and murder by paper': a digital art exhibition about asylum, is taking place at Q Gallery 9th October - 20th November 2004, 35-36 Queen Street, Derby, DE1 3DS, T: +44 (0)1332 295 858. For more see www.q-arts.co.uk.

Other UK news

Woman dedicated to female genocide survivors receives award
Following the Rwanda genocide which took place ten years ago, Mary Blewitt who lost 50 members of her family in the tragedy established the Surf

⁴ For the full story, see Stephen Naysmith, '16-year-old mother separated from baby at Dungavel', in *Sunday Herald*, 10 October 2004 at www.sundayherald.com/print45303. ⁵ Terri Judd, 'Honour for woman who dedicated her life to genocide survivors', in *The Independent*, 12 October 2004 at http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/this_britain/story.jsp?story=571234.

Survivors Fund.⁵ This year she received a Women of the Year award in recognition of her work dedicated to survivors of genocide. The Fund has helped survivors, and in particular widows of the genocide, deal with and recover from the tragedies of 1994, supporting a wide range of services for victims in Rwanda, and assisting survivors in the UK. On receiving the award, Ms Blewitt said: "*It makes me both sad and happy. It makes you happy to have someone acknowledge what you have done. But I also think, had there been no genocide I would not be here.*"

SURF is organising a petition to urge the British Government to put pressure on international pharmaceutical companies to reduce costs of antiretroviral drugs to make this vital treatment accessible to women survivors of the Rwandan genocide living with HIV/AIDS. For more on this visit online the petition at: www.survivors-fund.org.uk/contact/contact2.htm#

UK projects & events

New Refugee women's project to be launched in the East Midlands
Refugee Action's '*Women's Integration and Advice Project*' will run female-only drop-in centres in Leicester and Nottingham, offering confidential advice to more than 400 asylum seekers and refugees each year. Managed by a women's project officer and staffed by 18 volunteers, the centres will offer advice on everything from education and employment to finding a GP.

The centres will help refugee women access networks of support, develop much-needed friendships and integrate into their local community. There will be a crèche and interpreters at both centres. Refugee Action will also offer training to other agencies, such as health professionals, midwives and education providers, as well as voluntary organisations such as Rape Crisis, so that refugee women find it easier to use their services. The launch of the project, follows a successful pilot scheme run by Refugee Action in the region.

For more information see www.refugee-action.org.uk.⁶

Sexual Violence Action and Awareness Network (SVAAN)

The Sexual Violence Action and Awareness Network is a London-based Network of women who work with survivors of sexual violence or work with the issue of violence against women. Initiated by the Women's Resource Centre and the Lillith Project (see www.eaves.ik.com/), the Network is working towards ending sexual violence through sharing information and opening a debate about the state of the sexual violence sector in London.

Priorities will include lobbying for greater funding for the sector, specifically for more funding for women-run, community-based, and other specialist services; more funding for services for adult survivors of childhood

⁶ (Source: RA News Release, 'Refugee women's project gets go ahead', 13 October 2004).

sexual assault and incest; and the need for consultation with front-line services.

To complement the wealth of expertise held within this group, the network is keen to hear about anyone's experiences working in this sector and any initiative undertaken (e.g. campaigning) in order to publicise it. If you join the network you will receive regular e-news updates on the sector, and can attend bi-monthly meetings. For more information, contact Darlene at Darlene@wrc.org.uk on 020 7426 9648.

Mobile Domestic Violence Service in Harrow, London

Funded by Harrow Primary Care Trust and administered by Harrow Council for Racial Equality, the project will provide satellite services at specific community centres rotating in Harrow targeting hard to reach communities such as Black and Ethnic Minority groups, including refugees. The service aims to provide practical and emotional support through advice, prevention, support and intervention to all women and children suffering from domestic violence. A range of Asian and refugee languages is available. For more information contact Gurpreet, Domestic Violence Office, on 020 8427 6504.

RWRP to participate in STAR conference '*Refugee: One Label, Unique Lives*'

Besides a joint event with BID held at the House of Commons on 19 October 2004, RWRP will be presenting a workshop on '*Women in detention*' at the STAR (Student Action for Refugees)

National Conference '*Refugee: One Label, Unique Lives*' taking place on 30 and 31st October at Nottingham University. The two-day event is open to all students and young people aged 16+ (Price is £12; concessions available). For details on the programme and how to participate, contact STAR at 3 Bondway, Vauxhall, London, SW8 1SJ. Tel: 020 7840 4442 Fax: 020 7582 9929, youth@star-network.org.uk or visit online: www.star-network.org.uk.

Reminder: 'Old Stories, New Lives - Raising standards to tackle violence against Black and Minority women'

Is a conference organised by Southall Black Sisters and taking place at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, Westminster (nearest tube, Westminster), on Monday 15 November. To register, contact: Southall Black Sisters National Conference or call 0208 241 7033. For more details visit the following weblink: www.oldstoriesnewlives.org.uk.

'What has been the impact of violence in my life?'

is an evening of dialogue with Akina Mama wa Afrika taking place on Friday 26 November 2004. If you are a young African Woman, an older African Woman, an Asylum Seeker/Refugee, and a victim of violence, living with violence, a survivor, interested in the subject; if your life has been changed forever due to violence, then you are invited to an evening with Akina Mama wa Afrika to share your experience and tell what you think.

Venue: Akina Mama Wa Afrika, 334-336 Goswell Road, Angel Islington, London, EC1V 7LQ. Light refreshments will be provided. Booking is on a first come first served basis. Contact: Gloria Ogunbadejo, Mental Health/Domestic Violence Officer. Tel: 020 7713 5166, Fax: 020 7713 1959, Email: gloria@akinamama.org.

'If you Turn Away...'

A Conference on Developing Holistic Emotional Health Support Services for Young Refugees

This event is organised by Save the Children. Keynote speakers include Jeremy Woodcock, Director of Family Health Therapy training at the University of Bristol and Jocelyn Avigad, Principal Family Therapist at the Medical Foundation. The following workshops are planned:

- Extreme events, trauma and attachment
- Creative therapies
- Working effectively with Interpreters
- The stress of the legal/asylum process
- Setting up and running a drop in centre
- Understanding Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

Date: Wednesday 3rd November at Newcastle United Conference Centre, St James' Park, Newcastle 9.15am-4pm (Fee £25). Booking Forms available from Glenda McCall, telephone: 0191 222 1816 or email: g.mccall@savethechildren.org.uk.

Research and fund raising volunteers needed for the UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group

Following a successful case in the House of Lords in 1999, the law now recognises that fearing persecution for being lesbian or gay may form the basis of a claim for asylum. The Group has become increasingly concerned, however, by the lack of information available concerning the human rights situation for lesbians and gay men around the world. If you, or anyone you know of would like more information about UKLGIG's work, you can visit its website at www.uklgig.org.uk or contact admin@uklgig.org.uk.⁷

'The Corridor', a film by refugee woman Zoe Neirizi at the National Film Theatre

The Corridor tells the story of a young Iranian woman who becomes politically active in opposing Ayatollah Khomeini's regime in the 1980s. She is made to pay a heavy price, not only in terms of her immediate suffering, her torture and imprisonment at the hands of the regime, but the deeper pain of having her daughter, born in prison, taken away by the authorities, to be brought up by her husband's family. She is then forced to leave Iran and comes to Britain.

The Corridor takes us on a journey back into a confining past and forward into a more hopeful present where painful memories of exile and loss are

⁷ This information was circulated by Asylum Policy Info at www.asylumpolicy.info/volunteerletter.doc (September 2004).

ultimately transformed into hope for a better world.

Date and Venue: Sunday November 14, 2004, 1 pm National Film Theatre NFT 2, South Bank. Zoe Neirizi will be present to answer questions. Please contact Black Swan Films directly as this is a private event. Email: vernired@yahoo.co.uk; fax: 020 7263 5063; mobile: 07949 736 824.

Crossing Borders 27 August 2004 - 31 October 2004

In October, Corner House, in association with Manchester's European cultural institutions, universities, and a number of refugee networks, offer a season of films (many specially imported), guest filmmakers and events that explore immigration in European cinema. Across Europe, immigration remains a highly controversial issue. As each national cinema explores its own experiences they reveal certain differences and similarities in attitudes.

www.cornerhouse.org/seasoninfo.asp?ID=118.

UK courses & training

Leadership training course for Refugee Women

The Mosaada Centre for single women based in London is organising two residential weekend courses which provide leadership training, coaching and consultation to refugee women seeking to effect change within their community and professional

organisations. The training dates are 26 to 28 November 2004 and 25 to 27 February 2005. Contact Brenda Anthony on telephone: 020 7247 7111 or email: brenda@mosaada.org.uk.

Counselling courses for working within diverse communities

This is a series of integrative intercultural courses to provide participants with counselling skills appropriate within a multiracial context. The courses include '*Intercultural Counselling Skills*' (10 sessions), '*Attachment Theory and Working with Grief and Loss*' (10 sessions), '*Self-Development*' (5 sessions) and '*Working with Trauma and Abuse*' (5 sessions). The price ranges from £75 to £125 (concession £35 to £75). The courses which are accredited by the London Open College Network will start in November 2004 and will take place in Islington, London. For more information, contact 020 7383 5405 or email admin@traininglink.org.uk.

Asylum Seekers and Refugee Counselling Service

The Counselling Service at Liverpool Personal Service Society (PSS) has been working with Asylum Seekers and Refugees for over three years. Counselling was provided to 250 clients through interpreters or with English as a second language. All the Counsellors and Trainers working on the project are experienced in the field and are BACP accredited.

This workshop has been designed to meet the needs of those counsellors who

are intending to start counselling through interpreters or who have recently begun this type of work. The two-day workshop will run next on 1st – 2nd November 2004 from 9.00am – 4.00pm (cost £150). A certificate of attendance will be given on completion of the workshop. For more information contact: Lynn Learman or Angela West, Asylum Seeker and Refugee Counselling Project, PSS Counselling Service, 18 Seel Street, Liverpool, L1 4BE, tel: 0151-702 5555 or visit website: http://icliverpool.icnetwork.co.uk/2300community/latestnews.cfm?community_id=11023600.

New Capacity-Building training by the Refugee Women's Association 'Let's Build up' aims to meet the needs of refugee women's organisations and groups. The training project is designed especially for groups representing different cultures and gender. There are 12 topics in total with each topic lasting 2 days including managing a Women's Organisation; Recruitment and Staff; Strategic Development and Business Planning; Developing Fundraising Strategies; Project Development and Proposal Writing; Funding Applications; Producing Effective Publicity, etc.

If you are a women's organisation or group and are interested in participating in the programme, please contact Feride Baycan at RWA on 020 7923 2412.

Good practice in Volunteering and Asylum

The Volunteering and Asylum Project is running training days for volunteer

managers at venues across the UK. The days aim to share and encourage good practice in relation to volunteering and asylum. Venues this year are Birmingham, Peterborough, Nottingham, Plymouth, Cardiff, Swindon. In early 2005 there will be training days at Belfast, Glasgow, Newcastle, Canterbury, Brighton and Southampton. For more information, visit www.tandem-uk.com, email volunteering@tandem-uk.com, or phone 0113 2686222.

International news

Public gang rape leads to women's protest in Swaziland

About 1000 women held a public protest in September over the brutal public gang rape of a teenage girl in the city of Manzini, Swaziland. The girl was attacked by bus drivers and conductors who have formed vigilante groups to control the bus station area. Police did not attend the scene until 2 hours after the attack. The perpetrators have been charged with indecent assault. A spokeswoman linked the attack to the lack of rights for Swazi women, mentioning that women are not allowed to buy land, sign contracts or take out a bank loan independently.⁸

⁸ IRIN, 23/9/04, 'SWAZILAND: Women protest brutal rape' at [www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=43330&SelectRegion=Southern Africa&SelectCountry=SWAZILAND](http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=43330&SelectRegion=Southern%20Africa&SelectCountry=SWAZILAND) 23/9/04

German authorities failed to protect Afghan woman says US appeals court

A US appeals court has ruled that an Afghan woman who lived for 20 years in Germany should be granted asylum because the German authorities are unable or unwilling to protect her from racist threats and violence. "We grant the petition because Zakia's credible testimony compels a finding of past persecution and because the government has failed to rebut the presumption of a well-founded fear of future persecution," the court said. Zakia Mashiri and her family moved to a town near Hamburg in what was then West Germany in the 1970s and were subjected to attacks on them and their property by anti-foreigner mobs. They moved to the US where they had relatives and sought asylum. The court refuted the US government's claim that the family would be able to move to another part of Germany.⁹

Women still live in fear in Afghanistan, human rights mission says

Women are in increasing danger in Afghanistan, with many afraid to leave their homes for fear of abduction, according to researchers from Amnesty International who have just returned from a visit focussing on the situation for women. Activists for women's rights have been targeted for attack, and women persecuted by their husbands have nowhere to turn in an atmosphere of lawlessness where armed groups in effect rule most of the country.

Access to justice is limited by the judiciary's ignorance of national law as well as prejudice against women, with

⁹ Reuters, 22/9/04, 'U.S. Court Rules Afghan Woman Should Get Asylum', at www.reuters.com.

one judge apparently commenting that "From the waist down, a woman is the property of a man." According to Amnesty, the judiciary is corrupt, ineffective and subject to intimidation from armed groups. Amnesty is calling on the Afghan government and donors to urgently improve security, strengthen the rule of law and reform the criminal justice system.¹⁰

Authorities arrest FGM perpetrators in Burkina Faso

Police in Burkina Faso have arrested 14 people for carrying out FGM on girls aged between 2 and 10 years.¹¹ An anonymous tip-off to an anti-FGM campaign group triggered the arrests. Doctors reported that one of the girls would have died through loss of blood if she had not been taken to hospital in time. FGM is illegal in the country, but 70% of girls are still subjected to the procedure, according to Amnesty International. The offence carries penalties of a \$1500 fine or 3 months in prison – more if the victim dies due to the procedure.

An international conference on FGM held in Nairobi in September culminated in calls for African Union (AU) states to ratify and implement the organisation's Maputo Protocol on FGM. The protocol was signed by 53 African heads of state during an AU summit in the Mozambican capital in July 2003. It stipulates that

¹⁰ Amnesty International UK, 8/10/04, 'Afghanistan: 'Women Treated Worse Than Dogs' as Ignorant Judges Fail to Protect Victims and Punish Criminals', at www.amnesty.org.uk/news/press/15632.shtml.

¹¹ BBC News, 17/8/04, 'Circumcision arrests in Burkina', at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3574466.stm>.

FGM should be condemned and prohibited. Governments were urged to work with civil society on public information and education campaigns.¹²

South African police demand sexual favours and bribes in exchange of protection

According to a South African newspaper, *Cape Argus*, South African police are systematically abusing refugees from Zimbabwe, threatening to deport them back to Zimbabwe unless they co-operate.¹³ Police officers regularly arrest women, destroy their temporary asylum permits and take them to the Lindela refugee holding centre near Johannesburg. They then demand bribes or sexual favours in exchange for not deporting them. Men are also picked up and beaten if they refuse to pay bribes.

A police spokesperson said that allegations would be investigated if they were backed up with evidence. According to Zimbabwean Mayibongwi Nkosi, the refugees deported back to Zimbabwe are accused of betraying Mugabe while in South Africa. They are taken to militia torture camps where many are raped and some are killed.

Honduras: People abused and discriminated on the basis of sexual orientation

Lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people in Honduras have to contend with job losses, restrictions on education, arrest, attacks, violence and multiple killings, including abuses by police officers, according to Amnesty International. The San Pedro Gay Community is a group of LGBT people campaigning for human rights to be applied across Honduran society. They say that human rights violations increased in 2003 when the Honduran National Congress passed the '*Police and Harmonious Citizen Relations*' law, which granted further powers to the police.¹⁴

Lesbian and gay rights activist murdered in Sierra Leone

FannyAnn Eddy, founder of the Sierra Leone Lesbian and Gay Association and a lesbian rights activist, has been murdered. She was found dead in the Association's offices on 29 September, and it is feared that she was a victim of the type of hatred against which she campaigned.¹⁵ Eddy, founder of the Association, testified to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva about lesbian and gay rights in Sierra Leone earlier this year: '*We face constant harassment and violence from neighbours and others. ...Their homophobic attacks go unpunished by authorities, further encouraging their discriminatory and violent treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender*

¹² IRIN, 12/10/04, KENYA: Conference urges strong measures against FGM at www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID=43255.

¹³ Cape Argus, 5/9/04, SA police 'as cruel as Mugabe's militia', at <http://capeargus.co.za/index.php?fSectionId=1368&fArticleId=2213172>.

¹⁴ Amnesty International, 29/9/04, Honduras: transgender women living in virtual prison, at <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR370112004?open&of=ENG-HND>.

¹⁵ Human Rights watch, 5/10/04, Sierra Leone: Lesbian Rights Activist Brutally Murdered, at <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/10/04/sierra9440.htm>.

people.'

New Turkish Penal Code provides harsher punishment for range of crimes including sexual violence and trafficking

The Turkish parliament has approved a package of measures to reform the country's penal code. The penal code package includes harsher punishment for rapists, paedophiles, torturers, human traffickers and women who kill children born outside marriage. It also makes a crime of rape in marriage and sexual harassment.

Originally the measures included a proposal to criminalise adultery, which was strongly criticised both by Turkish feminists and those who claimed that such a move would distance Turkey from European norms. Women's groups claimed the law would be used against women — who they say could be imprisoned and lose custody of their children. They said the measure would encourage 'honour killings' in which family members kill girls or women deemed to have disgraced the family.

The Prime Minister initially defended the inclusion of the measure but the whole package was withdrawn and later passed without the anti-adultery clause following demonstrations outside Parliament and a warning by EU enlargement official Guenter Verheugen that the anti-adultery measure would create the impression Turkey's legal code is moving toward Islamic law. Now that these reforms have been agreed, a report by the EU Commission due later in October is expected to recommend

that Turkey is ready to start membership talks.¹⁶

Uzbekistan: Poverty leads to rise of women kidnapped into forced marriage say women activists

Women's rights campaigners in Karakalpakstan, an impoverished area of northern Uzbekistan, say that the growth in kidnapping of women leading to a forced marriage is due to worsening economic problems in the region. Kidnapping of brides has been traditional since pre-Soviet days as a way of the man's family avoiding having to pay the bride price. The more educated a woman, the higher the price to be paid to her family. However, one in five women are now forced by the practice into unwanted marriages — and may be subjected to rape. Forced marriage is illegal in Uzbekistan but activists say awareness of the law is low and it is difficult for women to resist traditional practices.¹⁷

Widespread human rights abuses continue in Indonesia

Human rights abuses are continuing in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD), a western province of Indonesia, according to a new Amnesty International report. Soldiers target those suspected of membership of the Free Aceh Movement

¹⁶ MSNBC News, 16/9/04, 'Turkey still weighing anti-adultery law', at <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/6018179>. and CBC News, 26/9/04, 'Turkey approves penal law reform, takes step toward EU membership' at www.cbc.ca/story/world/national/2004/09/26/turkeyreform040926.html.

¹⁷ Women Living Under Muslim Laws, 6/8/04, Uzbekistan: No love lost in Karakalpak bride thefts, at [www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[157\]=x-157-64561%20&cmd\[189\]=x-189-64561](http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[157]=x-157-64561%20&cmd[189]=x-189-64561)

(GAM) whilst GAM itself also commits serious abuses, including hostage taking. Women and girls are subject to rape and sexual violence and international human rights monitors are not allowed into the area. Many people have fled to neighbouring Malaysia where they face harsh conditions and sometimes forcible return. Amnesty is calling on Indonesia's president to initiate an enquiry into the abuses.¹⁸

Women's delegation reviews situation of urban refugee women and girls in Cairo, Egypt

A delegation from the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (WCRWC, USA) travelled to Cairo where it looked at the situation of urban refugee women and girls, paying particular attention to concerns of adolescent girls.

Among the issues the delegation examined were: the impact of UNHCR policies, guidelines and processes on the protection of urban refugee women and girls; the participation of refugee women and youth in addressing protection needs; the prevalence of gender-based violence and related prevention and response efforts; access to education and impact on livelihood opportunities; access to health care; and the progress of UNHCR's gender and age mainstreaming pilot project.

According to WCRWC's executive director, "*urban refugees are an often-overlooked and neglected population*

and very little is known about the specific concerns of women and children refugees in urban areas."

The delegation met with representatives of UN agencies, local nongovernmental agencies and with refugees themselves. It found that despite policies that appeared to provide access for refugees to education and health care, in practice minimal access was available to these basic services. In addition, large numbers of women and children from Sudan and Somalia, where widespread conflicts still prevail, are living in Cairo without international protection because their claims to refugee status had been denied. The Women's Commission will publish a report and undertake advocacy based on its findings. For more contact: info@womenscommission.org or visit www.womenscommission.org/.

Statewatch calls for EU's 'safe country' list to be scrapped

EU decisions on asylum are made '*with too little time, too little information, and no public debate*' according to Statewatch, a voluntary group which monitors the work of the EU in relation to civil liberties. Statewatch is calling for the EU's proposed '*safe country*' list to be scrapped, on the basis that states are divided on which countries should be included, and have also agreed to designate countries as safe even though they accept that human rights abuses occur (The Statewatch report is based on secret positions of 17 of the 25 member states of the EU). The list is part of the proposed asylum procedures Directive which is scheduled for adoption in December 2004.

¹⁸ Amnesty International, 7/10/04, Indonesia: Successful elections mask turmoil in Aceh (NAD) at <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA210422004?open&of=ENG-IDN>.

Tony Bunyan, *Statewatch* editor, comments: "The 'safe country of origin' principle is in contradiction to the human rights obligations of EU member states. ... To determine the fate of people fleeing from poverty and persecution on the basis of such a shallow process is an insult to any sense of humanity or moral responsibility, let alone legal obligations - the list should be scrapped."¹⁹

This report reinforces Asylum Aid's recommendation in one of its latest publications, 'Safe for whom: women's human rights abuses and protection in 'safe list' countries: Albania, Jamaica and Ukraine', that the so-called safe list be scrapped.²⁰

International events, projects & actions

UN marks 25th anniversary of CEDAW

Wednesday, 13 October was the anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women which was adopted in 1979. According to the UN which organised an event for the

¹⁹ Statewatch, 27/9/04, 'EU divided over list of "safe countries of origin" - the list should be scrapped', at www.statewatch.org/news/2004/sep/07safe-countries-prel.htm

²⁰ The report was published by Asylum Aid in June 2004 and can be found online at www.asylumaid.org.uk. To order a copy contact Bethany Collier on 020 7377 5123 or bethanyc@asylumaid.org.uk.

occasion,²¹ "there has since been significant progress in the recognition and implementation of the human rights of women. Laws have been strengthened to ensure equality, courts and judicial processes in many countries have been guided by the Convention's principles, and national institutions have been developed for the advancement of women.

Yet still no country in the world has achieved full equality for women both in law and in practice. Women in many countries continue to have unequal legal status with regard to marriage, divorce, property inheritance and nationality laws while traditions, customs and stereotypical attitudes towards the role of women and men in some societies are major impediments to equality and women's enjoyment of human rights."

16 Days of Activism against gender violence 25 November to 10 December 2004

16 Days of activism is an international campaign originating from the first Women's Global Leadership Institute sponsored by the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) in 1991. The dates (25 November, International Day Against Violence Against Women) and 10 December, International Human Rights Day) were chosen to symbolically link violence against women and human rights.

The theme for the 2004 campaign is the impact of violence on women's health

²¹ Source: UN press release, 'Twenty-fifth anniversary of Convention to End Discrimination against Women to be marked at United Nations event', 11 October 2004, www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2004/note5895.doc.htm.

with a particular focus on the intersection of violence against women and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. For more details and a calendar of events internationally (yet to be posted online), go to the following weblink:

www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/16days/home.html.

Stop - International Conference Against Child Trafficking

The conference will be held 2-4 November in Osnabück (Germany) and is organised by Terre des Hommes, the aid agency focusing on children and development policy, and the Peace City of Osnabrück. It will provide a discussion forum for representatives from political life, the authorities, institutions, media and project workers. More info at www.tdh.de or call Claudia Ehlers: +49 (0) 541/7101-135 (source: European Women's Lobby Newsflash, September 2004).

related project ■ Churches Alert to Sex Trafficking Across Europe (CHASTE) CHASTE is a new charitable project which has been working for the last 6 months with women who are escaping the clutches of the traffickers and opening up some new possibilities for life as they recover from their deep and lasting trauma which this form of sex slavery entails.

CHASTE's work aims to focus on the following key areas: Training members of the church and forming supportive networks with churches and faith communities in countries of origin and destination to help combating

procurement and effecting rehabilitation and reintegration of the trafficked woman/child; undertaking research, particularly in the UK and Ireland, and providing protection through the Sanctuary Project, a new initiative responding to the imperative of safety which all those trafficked into the UK in enslavement to a trafficker or pimp for prostitution require. For more visit: www.chaste.org.uk/.

related action ■ 'Take Action: Protect the Rights of Trafficked Women and Girls in Post-conflict Kosovo In a new report, Amnesty International identifies Kosovo as a major destination for women and girls trafficked into forced prostitution since the July 1999 deployment of a NATO-led international peacekeeping force (KFOR) and the establishment of a United Nations civilian administration (UNMIK).²² Although the organisation recognises that international personnel no longer comprise the majority of the client base of trafficked women, it states that KFOR and UNMIK have failed to protect these young women. Amnesty International further writes:

"In 2003 there were more than 200 bars, restaurants, clubs and cafes where trafficked women and girls were believed to be working in forced prostitution. Between 15 and 20 percent are reportedly under the age of 14. Women are trafficked into Kosovo predominantly from Moldova, Bulgaria and Ukraine, the majority of them via Serbia. Increasing numbers of local women and girls are being trafficked within Kosovo and

²² Source: Amnesty International, *Women's Human Rights Bulletin*, October 2004.

abroad. To date, no trafficked women or girls have received redress for the damage they have suffered."

Join AI in urging the international forces based in Kosovo – and local authorities of Kosovo's Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG) to take essential steps to protect and assist trafficked women and girls. Details of who to write can be found on AI's online website 'Take Action' at <http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/action/index.asp?step=2&item=10927>.

UNICEF and Action Aid to finance survey on violence against girls in Malawi

The objectives of the survey are to determine the prevalence of violence against girls in schools, and to establish the form under which violence takes place, and who are the main perpetrators. The survey will also investigate whether girls report violence or not and where they report it. It will be conducted by the University of Malawi's Centre for Social Research.²³

Women's health needs assessment in Tibet

Women's Enews reports on this latest document produced by Circle of Health International following an assessment mission in Tibet. The document suggests that the high maternal death rate in Tibet is due to inadequate healthcare and sometimes harmful

superstitions. For more see Women's Enews online at:

www.womensenew.org/article.cfm?aid=1996.

new publications

international

'System of impunity: Nationwide Patterns of Sexual Violence by the Military Regime's Army and Authorities in Burma'

This report published in September 2004 by the Women's League of Burma (WLB) documents detailed accounts of widespread sexual violence and human rights abuses against women in all the ethnic states, as well as in central areas of Burma. Such abuses, it says, are systematically perpetrated by the regime's armed forces and authorities. WLB contends that sexual violence is part of the regime's policies of military expansion and consolidation of control over the Burmese population.

According to the accounts collected, women and girls from different ethnic groups report similar stories of rape, including gang rape; rape and murder; sexual slavery; and forced 'marriage'. WLB stresses that almost all the incidents took place during the last two years, "*precisely while the regime has been repeatedly denying the prevalence of military rape in Burma.*"

The report reveals that "*no woman or girl is safe from rape and sexual torture under the current regime*" whether they be in the civil war zones, the ceasefire areas or 'non-conflict' areas. Furthermore, the perpetrators benefit

²³ Source: Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), '*Malawi: Survey to study violence against girls*', 7 October 2004, at www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=43557.

from a climate of impunity whilst complainants are victimised, threatened or imprisoned.

The report includes recommendations and highlights that regional support for the regime is encouraging the continuation of widespread human rights violations in the country. A full copy of the report can be downloaded online at: www.womenofburma.org/Report/System_of_impunity.pdf

'Colombia: Scarred Bodies, Hidden Crimes - Sexual Violence against Women in the Armed Conflict'

is a new report on violence against women produced by Amnesty International and based on the testimonies of women who have survived sexual violence at the hands of the securities forces, paramilitaries and guerrilla groups in Colombia. According to the human rights organisation the voices of these women have rarely been heard, due to stigma and fear surrounding sexual violence.

The report's findings suggest that the use of sexual violence, including rape forced abortion and genital mutilation, is widespread and *'an integral part of Colombia's 40-year-old armed conflict'*. According to the Director of AI's Americas Programme, Susan Lee, *'the bodies of thousands of women and girls [have been turned] into a battleground.'* Groups particularly at risk are those of African descent, indigenous and peasant women, shantytown dwellers, and the internally displaced. The various armed forces have also violently targeted groups deemed socially *'undesirable'*,

such as sex workers, lesbians and gay men, and those suspected of carrying HIV/AIDS.

The situation is compounded by the fact that the state has been unwilling to bring the perpetrators to justice whilst authorities even fail to record cases of abuse in official statistics or autopsy reports. For a full copy of the report, visit online: <http://amnesty-news.c.topica.com/maackkiabaLOice3IxWb/>

'Between Hope and Fear: Intimidation and Threats Against Women in Public Life in Afghanistan'

The 39-page report by Human Rights Watch (October 2004) details how warlord factions, the Taliban and various insurgent groups attack and harass women government officials, election workers, journalists and women's rights activists. See:

www.hrw.org/english/docs/2004/10/04/afghan9436.htm.

'Revisiting the Human Trafficking Paradigm: The Bangladesh Experience'

is a new publication by the International Organization for Migration. This 86 page document is the outcome of the efforts of the 30 representatives from various embassies, development partners, ministries, NGOs, research organizations and civil society, who made up the *'Bangladesh Counter-Trafficking Thematic Group'*. To download the full-text version or order a hardcopy please visit the IOM website at

www.iom.int/iomwebsite/Publication/ServletSearchPublication?event=detail&id=3691. Orders may also be sent directly to IOM, Publications Unit, 17 route des Morillons, 1211 Geneva, email: publications@iom.int.

'ICC : How Nongovernmental Organizations Can Contribute To the Prosecution of War Criminals'

This guide (September 2004) answers some of the frequently asked questions about the Court. In particular it explains how NGOs can contribute to the Court's work of prosecuting war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide at the international level. It does so by answering frequently asked questions about the International Criminal Court and the way NGOs can contribute to its efforts. However this guide does not provide a legal commentary or detailed explanation of the ICC crimes, nor does it tell the history of the International Criminal Court. It is available online in PDF file (26 pages). See: www.hrw.org/background/africa/icc0904/.

new publications

UK

New UK Wide Directory of Refugees and Domestic Violence

With over 400 entries, the UK Gold Book published by Women's Aid is the most extensive and detailed guide available designed to help women and children access refuge and domestic abuse support services. See www.womensaid.org.uk.

Online resources

international

New UNICEF child trafficking research hub

This site is hosted by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, the independent research arm of the United Nations agency dedicated to the protection of children and the promotion of child rights. It is dedicated to data collection, knowledge transfer and the development of methodologies related to research on child trafficking.

The Hub is intended for international researchers, policy-makers and operational personnel involved in counter child trafficking activities. It provides information about current research activities, effective research tools and emerging areas of concern. It also has a database of news and selected documents on child trafficking and a directory of experts and organisations active against child trafficking.

You can also register as a partner and receive the '*Child Trafficking News*' by visiting www.childtrafficking.org where all information on the portal and a database on documents, organisations and experts can also be found.

New resources link to global and regional UN meetings and processes

AWID (Association for Women's Rights in Development) has just revised and

added new resources to its Women's Human Rights Net pages.

- you will find regular updates of all the Beijing +10 process, the Millenium Development Goals and other UN conferences at www.whrnet.org/un_conferences.html.

- And you can find reports from groups around the world on latest advances within the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies at the following link: www.whrnet.org/treaty_bodies.html.

Online resources

UK

Somalia bundle now on the web

The bundle includes correspondence with the Home Office on the enforcement of returns to Somalia. For the full document in PDF go to this link: www.asylumaid.org.uk/New%20RWRP/Case%20research/Somalibundleoriginal%20version%202.pdf. (or go to the Research page section under 'Refugee Women's Resource Project' on Asylum Aid's website).

Photo exhibition 'A place of Sanctuary'

Currently on show at the Everyman Theatre, Liverpool, is now available for download online: It shows images of asylum seekers and refugees in Liverpool along with narrative text that gives context to the images. Go to www.fredchanphotography.co.uk (please note it may take a few minutes to download the exhibition).

Update of ICAR's signpost on films on refugees and asylum seekers

ICAR's signpost to films

www.icar.org.uk/pdf/sign006.pdf

Funding Bulletin for Refugee and Asylum related Projects

The October 2004 version of the Funding Bulletin for refugee and asylum related projects is now available in word document at:

<http://uploads.vli.co.uk/refugee/funding/oct2004.doc>

notice board

Certificate in Social Care Practice for Asylum-Seekers and Refugees (Young People)

run by University of Kent at Canterbury. There is the possibility of subsidised places. For further information, please contact: MASC, European Centre for the Study of Migration and Social Care, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7LZ, Tel: 01227 827875. Email: masc@kent.ac.uk or go online at www.kent.ac.uk. (Source: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/refed/>)

Please send any information that you would like to see published in our next bulletin by 16th November 2004 (see email or postal address on back cover).

women's asylum news

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