



Women's Asylum News

Women's Project at Asylum Aid

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Lead Article

“Time to act” on double standards for sexual violence

On Tuesday 12 April, the Lords Select Committee on Sexual Violence in Conflict issued a [progress report](#) on the UK’s global sexual violence initiative. Charities working with refugees in the UK including Freedom from Torture and Asylum Aid say the Home Office is jeopardising the UK’s implementation of its high profile global initiative on preventing sexual violence. Against the backdrop of a downgrading of human rights in British foreign policy, the charities strongly support the initiative including an important protocol on the documentation and investigation of these crimes. But the Protocol illustrates a double standard that is developing between the principles that the UK is promoting abroad and its practice at home in the treatment of survivors of sexual violence who come here seeking sanctuary.

The Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative is perhaps the most dynamic example of human rights diplomacy in British history, so it is a shame that the Foreign Office has failed to win its argument on our own shores – at the Home Office.

A central thrust of the initiative is a need to challenge attitudes that foster sexual violence in conflict and support survivors to overcome their abuse and pursue justice.

To galvanise the international community and achieve this shift, founder William Hague recognised that a ‘big bang’ approach was required - combining political peer pressure at global summits with daring technical missions in conflict hotspots, digital innovations including a [‘hackathon’](#), and the stardust of Angelina Jolie-Pitt.

Unquestionably, this campaigning approach propelled the issue of sexual violence in conflict up the international agenda. Even states with atrocious records such as the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#) and [Sri Lanka](#), whose survivors we treat in the hundreds at Freedom from Torture, were incentivised to endorse a [declaration](#) pledging action to prevent sexual violence, punish perpetrators and provide support to survivors.

But the Achilles heel of the initiative has always been the UK government’s [double standard](#) on the critical question of ‘proving’ sexual violence.

While the Foreign Office rightly reminds the world that survivor testimony alone can be [sufficient evidence](#) of a crime of sexual violence, the Home Office often dismisses this testimony out of hand despite a [much lower standard of proof that applies to asylum claims](#).

A flagship of the initiative is a new [international protocol](#) for first responders on how to gather evidence to help survivors and ‘shatter’ the culture of impunity for sexual violence in conflict.

Freedom from Torture and the [Survivors Speak OUT network](#), a survivor-led activist group we support, jumped at the invitation to help shape the protocol, to support good practice internationally and in hope that the guidance would carry across to the Home Office in its response to survivors who come to the UK seeking protection.

In 2004, the Asylum Aid-led [Charter of Rights of Women Seeking Asylum](#), which Freedom from Torture is proud to endorse, launched a [‘Protection Gap’](#) campaign to encourage the Home Office to ensure that asylum standards are equal to the standards set out in the protocol.

The campaign has already achieved success, including adoption by the Home Office of a Women’s Asylum Action Plan containing a number of important commitments including a guarantee of a female interviewer to any woman who requests one at screening and inclusion of information on the impact of trauma on memory in a new credibility training programme for caseworkers.

But there is still a mountain to climb to improve the quality of asylum decisions for survivors of sexual violence, whether male or female.

Hardly a week goes by without a client of Freedom from Torture being wrongly refused asylum because their disclosure of sexual or other torture is disbelieved, even if they supplied independent medical evidence. This is devastating for survivors, who face a mortal fear of being sent back to their abusers, and bad for British tax payers who pay for poor decisions to be corrected via appeals.

Despite hard work by the Foreign Office to challenge distrust by other countries of survivor accounts of sexual violence, the level of evidence a survivor must present to ‘prove’ this abuse in the UK’s asylum system is [rising exponentially](#). In the 1990s, Freedom from Torture’s expert forensic reports were five pages but now they run to 20 pages or more as our doctors are pushed to provide ever more exhaustive analysis of why physical and psychological injuries are likely to have been caused by sexual and other forms of torture.

Still our forensic reports are rejected on the most spurious grounds, often because asylum caseworkers, including [gap year students](#) these days, prefer their own unqualified opinions on strictly medical matters. This is especially lamentable because the Home Office has an excellent [policy](#) to prevent these mistakes but an accompanying training package, developed with help from Freedom from Torture and the [Helen Bamber Foundation](#), has been left on a shelf to gather dust.

Home Office reluctance to accept the evidence - forensic or otherwise - of sexual and other forms of torture also manifests at the level of asylum country policy.

Freedom from Torture has been battling for years to ensure that country information and guidance on Sri Lanka, the top country of origin for those referred to us, reflects our analysis of who is at risk on return from the UK. Despite our voluminous clinical evidence - now totalling [66 forensically documented cases](#) - of Tamils tortured after returning to Sri Lanka from this country since the end of the civil war in May 2009, the Home Office has steadfastly refused to accept the risk category we have identified covering those with a real or perceived association with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, at whatever level and whether directly and/or through a family member of acquaintance. A new version of the guidance, expected shortly, is an opportunity for the Home Office to finally bring its policy into line with our research based on medico-legal reports prepared by our doctors.

Mistreatment of medical evidence by the Home Office and Tribunal has become a top concern for Freedom from Torture. In 2015 we held a successful conference ‘Proving Torture: An Ever-Rising Bar for Medical Evidence’ to discuss this problem with the President of the Asylum and Immigration Chamber of the Upper Tribunal, Mr Justice McCloskey, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Professor Juan Méndez, Freedom from Torture patron and member of the UN Human Rights Committee, Sir Nigel Rodley, a senior prosecutor of the ICC, torture survivors and many other distinguished speakers and delegates from the UK

legal and forensic medical professions (the Home Office declined to attend). Papers from the conference and a series of 'vox pops', featuring Debora Singer from Asylum Aid among others, are available on a [web hub](#) we created for the event.

This conference was a call to action for Freedom from Torture to work with others to reverse the rising evidential threshold in practice for medical evidence of torture in the asylum system and our team is hard at work now devising a major project. Please contact us if you would like to get involved or support this work.

The Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative shows what can be achieved when political will is marshalled to call out stigma attached to sexual and other torture and tackle the deep-seated aversion to believing survivors by government authorities all over the world. Accepting the evidence, clinical and otherwise, is essential for survivors to secure protection, realise their right to rehabilitation and contribute to efforts to bring perpetrators to justice. The Foreign Office has done a tremendous job of building momentum for change at the global level. The Home Office must follow this lead to ensure consistency between the principles that the UK is promoting abroad and its practice at home.

Sonya Sceats is Director of Policy and Advocacy at Freedom from Torture. Follow her on Twitter [@SonyaSceats](#) and Freedom from Torture [@FreefromTorture](#).

Sector Update

Victims of trafficking suffer from long-term mental ill-health

Women who have been trafficked for sexual or labour exploitation continue to experience high rates of mental illness including depression, anxiety, PTSD and suicidal thoughts, many months after leaving their traffickers. New [research](#) published in April by [King's College London](#) and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine confirms that mental and physical health complaints continued to affect the women participants at a high rate, despite them having left their trafficking situations an average of 16 months previously.

The survey looked at both women and men, trafficked for diverse purposes including forced labour, forced prostitution and domestic servitude, and found that while after an average of six months, 40% of men were still reporting high levels of mental ill-health, the women surveyed, who had been free from their trafficking situations for longer, 16 months on average, reported symptoms in nearly 80% of cases.

Beyond the mental health symptoms recorded, women also complained of on-going physical symptoms including headaches, stomach, dental and back pain, fatigue and memory loss. A high level of sexually transmitted infection was also implied through other reported symptoms.

While women trafficked into the sex industry had, in almost all cases, experienced rape, they had also experienced physical violence at very high rates. Meanwhile, women who had been trafficked into domestic servitude were likely to have also been forced into sex, with over half admitting to this experience.

The report calls for better training for workers in the NHS to be able to recognise and report suspected cases of trafficking, so that the NHS could act as a strategic and operational part-

ner of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). 13% of surveyed NHS staff reported having come into contact with a suspected victim of trafficking, and this rose to 20% among maternity services professionals. However, 87% of NHS staff questioned said that they did not know what questions to ask in cases of suspected trafficking.

Victims of trafficking are unlikely to access NHS services while still trapped in their trafficking situation. The report cited barriers including fear based on irregular immigration status, lack of identity documents, as well as traffickers controlling their movement, as barriers to access to healthcare. The report also notes, however, the lack of understanding of NHS staff as to the rights of victims to access care, especially GPs as another barrier, and calls for a multi-sectoral, sustained support system for trauma-informed and culturally appropriate care.

NRM decision letters following positive or conclusive reasonable grounds decisions should be amended to state explicitly that the victim is entitled to free primary healthcare, and a 'Green: Paid or exempt from health surcharge' banner should be put on the NHS records of anyone making an application for leave to remain following a positive trafficking decision in order to avoid difficulties in accessing healthcare, the report argues.

Women disproportionately affected in the Syrian refugee crisis and by the EU-Turkey refugee deal

Women face particular risks at every point along the refugee journey, from war-torn Syria, to refugee accommodation in Germany, and at every point along the way, argues an [assessment](#) carried out by the Nobel Women's Initiative. A delegation of Nobel laureate women who produced the report after conducting field study are the latest to highlight the greater dangers specific to women in the current crisis.

Furthermore, with women and children making up [over half](#) of refugees entering Greece in 2016, they are the ones who will disproportionately suffer from the new agreement between the EU and Turkey to return all new entrants from Greece, according Liz Burnstein, Executive Director of the Nobel Women's Initiative. Quoted in [BuzzFeed](#), she argues that women, often with their children, are beginning to follow the men who departed earlier to Europe as conditions worsen and hope is lost in Syria and camps in the surrounding region. If these women are then returned to Turkey along the lines of the EU agreement with Ankara, they will be put at further risk of exploitation and sexual abuse, she said.

As the war in Syria continues beyond its 5th year, the resources and savings that refugees and displaced women have relied on are running out, the report states. With deliberate attacks being carried out on hospitals, women are unable to access healthcare, including pre and post-natal care, nor to bring their children to paediatricians. For these reasons, women whose male relatives had taken the dangerous journey ahead of them are now leaving Syria in greater numbers. Nor are they safe when in the camps in the region, where access to healthcare including sexual and reproductive care remains difficult, and where they are forced to depend increasingly on child marriage or survival sex to meet their basic needs.

For those women who choose to continue their journey to Europe, the situation remains more dangerous than for men, especially at 'bottleneck' points where European borders have been closed, and women are forced to camp out with little or no protection. There are also reports of sexual exploitation and rape committed by smugglers, especially for women

who cannot otherwise afford to pay the price of crossing borders.

Across the Balkan countries and even in Germany there is inadequate provision to safeguard women and children in refugee shelters from exploitation and sexual abuse, the report argues. Women on the move are not afforded protection against violent partners who they may be travelling with, and there is complete impunity for perpetrators of abuse.

The report calls for full access for local women's organisations to refugee accommodation centres in order to provide psychological support services to mitigate the mental health damage of the women's experiences. It further calls for 15% of all funding for the refugee crisis to be ring-fenced for the protection of women and girls.

Finally, the report advocates the inclusion of women in the peace process in Syria, arguing that their contribution is vital to bringing the end of this refugee crisis.

National News

Immigration Bill to introduce a 72-hour time limit on the detention of pregnant women

The Home Secretary Theresa May has confirmed her intention to place a [72-hour limit](#) on the detention of pregnant women held at immigration detention centres. Although a [House of Lords](#) vote on an amendment to the Immigration Bill demanding an outright ban of the practice, May argues that the 72-hour limit is necessary to balance the welfare of pregnant women with 'the need to maintain a robust and workable immigration system'. The announcement comes following pressure from the Government to change the law through the new Immigration Bill, which is currently passing through parliament.

The House of Lord's vote and the home secretary's decision to implement a 72-hour time limit follows the review carried out by [Stephen Shaw](#), which called for a reduction in the numbers of persons detained under immigration laws, including an absolute ban on the detention of pregnant women. The new time-limit falls short of the absolute exclusion called for by the Shaw Report and the House of Lords. Some campaigners have received news of the time-limit with optimism, seeing it as a '[positive first step](#)'. More sceptical commentators however, are disappointed by the decision to defy the House of Lords vote by continuing to detain pregnant women.

Pregnant asylum seekers have multiple and unique health needs, as well as poorer mental health outcomes than the general population. Despite these difficulties, the healthcare that pregnant women receive in detention is inadequate. Medical Justice reports that immigration detention falls short of national maternity care standards and guidelines. Furthermore, although the primary purpose of detention is removal, only around 5% of pregnant women who are detained are later removed.

In her statement, the Home Secretary argued that while pregnant women should be detained only in exceptional circumstances, the Home Office should retain the discretion to hold them for short periods of time as a very last resort. The Bill also provides for pregnant women to be held for up to a week, but only with Ministerial permission. Medical Justice argues that even short periods of detention are distressing for pregnant women and disruptive to maternity care and calls on the Home Office to end the detention of pregnant wom-

en.

The charity Women for Refugee Women has [attempted](#) Freedom of Information requests asking for the Home Office to release the numbers of pregnant women detained, removed and released into the community, but have so far not been successful. Women for Refugee Women argues that without this information it is impossible to monitor whether the Home Office is complying with its standards for the length and urgency of detention of these women.

International News

Lebanese authorities break sex trafficking ring exploiting Syrian women

Sex traffickers are taking advantage of the catastrophic Syrian war and are exploiting Syrian women who are desperately trying to leave their country.

The Associated Press (AP) has [reported](#) that the Lebanese authorities have broken a sex trafficking ring which had exploited 75 Syrian women for nearly two months. The traffickers persuaded the young women to travel to Lebanon with them by promising them well paid jobs at restaurants and hotels in Lebanon.

As soon as they arrived in Lebanon they were locked up in two prison-like hotels north of Beirut. The traffickers tortured, sexually abused and forced the women into prostitution. They also found a doctor who would provide abortions if they became pregnant.

AP reported that the Lebanese authorities can do more to protect the Syrian women from being sexually abused.

Amnesty International's recent [report](#), "I want a safe place': Refugee women from Syria uprooted and unprotected in Lebanon," focuses on women refugees in Lebanon. It states that shortfalls in international assistance and discriminatory policies imposed by the Lebanese authorities are creating conditions that facilitate the exploitation and abuse of women refugees in Lebanon.

These shortfalls are "fuelling a climate in which refugee women from Syria are at risk of harassment and exploitation and are unable to seek protection from the authorities," said Kathryn Ramsay, Gender Researcher at Amnesty International.

Refugee Women from Djibouti Hold Hunger Strike to Protest Rape and Impunity

Ten refugee women from Djibouti went on [hunger strike](#) in Paris on 25 March 2016 to protest the impunity for rape by government soldiers in Djibouti. The women allege that government forces used rape as a weapon of war, targeting women perceived as sympathetic to rebel forces (the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy – FRUD), largely from the Afar ethnic minority group, and that 246 such cases have been recorded thus far. The women state that they initiated the hunger strike in the run-up to this year's Presidential elections in Djibouti (held on 8 April), with the hope that media coverage of the elections would enable them to draw attention to the very serious issue of impunity for rape in Djibouti.

Human rights abuses are [widespread](#) in Djibouti and often go unpunished, and opposition to the government is harshly repressed. Djibouti is a Party to the Convention on the Elimina-

tion of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (as well as other human rights treaties), and the government has a legal obligation to eliminate discrimination against women and to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and punish rape, particularly when committed by government agents. However, Djiboutian women face serious discrimination and gender-based violence in various aspects of life, and rape and other violence against women is often not reported or is settled within families or through traditional customary practices.

A spokesperson for the protesting women, Aïcha Dabalé (a refugee from Djibouti and women's rights activist who is married to the president of the FRUD, Mohamed Kadamy), called for the launch of an international investigation and demanded that the government of Djibouti acknowledge the rapes as war crimes. The Paris hunger strike [ended](#) on 12 April, having achieved the initial aim of drawing attention to the issues of rape and impunity in Djibouti. The Paris hunger strike also led to the establishment of a committee (which includes former French ministers) to investigate the women's allegations and sparked a similar protest by a group of Djiboutian women refugees in Belgium.

The government of Djibouti denies the allegations. The current President, Ismail Omar Guelleh, in office since 1999, was [re-elected](#) to a fourth term on 8 April 2016, in elections which some parties boycotted because the President had reneged on his previous promise not to seek re-election again. Human rights and opposition groups have observed that basic human rights and freedoms were repressed during the electoral period.

Publications

US: Transgender Women Abused in Immigration Detention

Transgender women face a harsh reality in immigration detention in the United States, including sexual assault, harassment, being held in men's facilities, lack of access to appropriate medical treatment, and indefinite solitary confinement. Human Rights Watch's (HRW) [report](#) of 23 March 2016, "'Do You See How Much I'm Suffering Here?': Abuse against Transgender Women in US Immigration Detention," looks at the cases of 28 transgender women detained in US immigration detention centres, some of them seeking asylum from persecution in their home countries. The report makes numerous recommendations for improving the treatment of transgender women and concludes that if the authorities cannot ensure safe, humane conditions of detention for transgender women, they should not detain them.

This conclusion may be equally applicable in other countries, including the UK. A December 2015 UNHCR [report](#) observes that LGBTI asylum seekers often face discrimination or abuse in reception and detention centres throughout Europe. The UK Lesbian & Gay Immigration Group (UKLGIG) has highlighted [concerns](#) about the plight of transgender persons and others fleeing persecution based on sexual orientation or gender identity held in immigration detention in the UK. The recent April 2016 [report](#) of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Global LGBT Rights discusses the fear that many LGBTI asylum seekers have of reporting discrimination or abuse against them whilst detained and the re-traumatisation of LGBTI persons seeking asylum in the UK. Numerous other reports have raised the issue of transgender women's rights in detention in the UK context, including the January 2016 [Shaw Report](#); and the [report](#) of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees & the All Party Parliamen-

tary Group on Migration of March 2015; and the 2014 [Vine Report](#) also.

The combined evidence of these reports points to the need for an investigation by the Home Office into the treatment of LGBTI asylum seekers (particularly transgender women) in immigration detention centres and increased use of alternatives to detention in cases where detention is likely to result in harassment or abuse or is unnecessary or disproportionate to any legitimate government aim.

UN Commission on the Status of Women: a missed opportunity

The UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) met in March 2016 and called on UN member states to "address sexual and gender-based violence as an integral and prioritized part of every humanitarian response". But it failed to provide strong language on the issue of refugee women and girls, reports [Open Democracy](#).

Recent reports by [Amnesty International](#), the [Women's Refugee Commission](#), the [International Rescue Committee](#) and the [Nobel Women's Initiative](#) demonstrate how refugee women and girls face sexual and gender-based violence at each stage of their journey and continue to face it when they reach European reception centres. Reports reveal there is near total impunity for gender-based crimes committed against refugee women. Women and girls suffer from unsafe infrastructure and accommodation, limited health and psychological services, and sexual violence committed by smugglers, security guards, policemen and local staff.

European states are failing to meet the minimum standards of gender-sensitive emergency response to prevent sexual violence. They have failed to establish reliable procedures to identify and support survivors of gender-based violence. It is difficult to estimate the number of cases of refugee women survivors of sexual violence in Europe, as there are hardly any reporting or justice mechanisms in place. [Guidelines for gender-based violence interventions](#) in humanitarian settings exist, but too often they are ignored. This includes even basic measures such as providing sex-separated latrines.

The European refugee crisis reveals the stark contrast between the existing international gender-sensitive protection frameworks and guidelines, such as the [Istanbul Convention](#) and [CEDAW](#), [European reception directives](#) and the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action](#), and the reality on the ground. If women do not have access to female interpreters, safe rooms, access to sexual and reproductive health care and information on their rights and complaints mechanisms, the process is failing them.

The [CSW agreed conclusions](#) reflect the priority themes set for each year. In the context of the unprecedented levels worldwide of displacement in 2015, civil society groups expected that the CSW would make a specific call to ensure that humanitarian culture and structure responds to refugee women's and girls' needs. The CSW conclusions acknowledged challenges faced by refugee women and girls and the need to protect and empower them in two paragraphs of the preamble which were added right at the end of negotiations. However, the issue of access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care services is neglected. And while there is an acknowledgement of the risk of sexual and gender-based violence, more clarity is needed on host country responsibilities to prevent and protect

refugee women and girls in the post-flight asylum-seeking period within the host country context, for instance within the European context.

The CSW conclusions could have ensured a more comprehensive approach to sexual and gender-based violence for refugee women and girls. The term “addressing sexual violence” is too vague. More specific terms such as ‘prevention’, ‘protection’, how to ‘provide health and psychological support’ and how to prevent ‘impunity’ would have meant the opportunity afforded by CSW this year was not missed.

Refugee Rights Data Project: Calais survey reveals women at risk

Nearly half of women residing in the [Calais settlement camp](#) report that they never feel safe, and many have experienced violence by police and non-police citizens. The Refugee Rights Data Project has collected first-hand independent [data](#) regarding the situation in the Calais refugee camp. The data is intended to ‘plug the gap’ on information relating to the refugees and displaced people living in Calais. The research focuses on three key areas: demographic composition, potential human rights violations and future plans and aspiration and reveals the following about women in the camp:

- Women make up approximately 4.4% of those residing in the camp, with an average age of 29.5 years;
- 54% percent of the women originate from Eritrea, 19% from Iraq, 11% from Afghanistan, 8% from Iran and 8% from other countries;
- 73% of women surveyed had been living in the camp for three to six months at the time of the study;
- 46% of women stated that they never felt safe inside the camp;
- 41% of women reported having experienced violence within the camp and 45% reported experiences of violence by non-police citizens during their time living in the Calais camp, with 2.8% of all respondents stating that they had experienced sexual violence;
- 56% of women have experienced health problems in the camp.

The camp’s unhealthy environment was stated as the biggest safety hazard. Low food supplies and a lack of warmth and adequate shelter was seen to have a mental and physical toll on residents. Respondents also claimed to feel unsafe because the camp was at risk of demolition by French authorities. According to the survey, these fears were heightened at night when an absence of volunteers and adequate lighting made residents feel particularly vulnerable. Many of the survey respondents branded the camp as a ‘free for all’ with ‘no laws or protection’.

Training and Events

FORWARD: Understanding FGM

The Foundation for Women’s Health, Research and Development (FORWARD) is organising a one day accredited training course to increase knowledge, awareness and understanding for professionals on the practice of FGM.

The training is aimed at GPs, midwives, nurses, social workers and voluntary organisations involved in treating and supporting women and girls affected by FGM or at risk of FGM.

The course will take place on Thursday 26 May. For more information, visit <http://forwarduk.org.uk/civicrm/?page=CiviCRM&q=civicrm/event/info&reset=1&id=14>

Film screening: Falling at each hurdle, credibility assessments in women’s asylum claims



The Evelyn Oldfield Unit is holding a film screening and panel discussion featuring Asylum Aid’s film ‘Falling at Each Hurdle’. The event takes place on 24th May, from 14.00-16.00.

The film highlights the difficulties that women seeking asylum in the UK face with credibility assessments at their initial asylum interview, and features a discussion between Princess Onyeukwu, a woman with experience of the asylum system, with Debora Singer, Policy and Research Manager at Asylum Aid, and Catherine Briddick bringing the legal perspective. The screening will be followed by discussion with a panel of experts on women’s asylum issues.

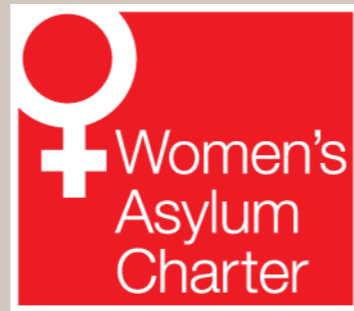
For further information or bookings email volunteer@evelynoldfield.co.uk or visit <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/credibility-issues-in-womens-asylum-claims-film-panel-discussion-tickets-25353465899>

WGN: Recovery from sexual violence course

Women and Girls Network is running a course on gender responsive trauma focused approaches for engaging in women’s recovery from sexual violence. This course runs from Thursday 21st June to Wednesday 22nd June.

To register visit <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/gender-responsive-trauma-focused-approach-for-engaging-womens-recovery-from-sexual-violence-registration-24682687583#tickets>

Charter of Rights of Women Seeking Asylum



Endorsements: 364

Google Group Membership: 180

“STILL WE RISE”: Women Asylum Seekers Together Manchester -share pain, laughter and love in song, dance and drama

How does it feel to leave everything behind and run, fearing your life, into the unknown? How does it feel to find yourself again in words, song and dance? Fear, anxiety, faith and hope come together in STILL WE RISE, devised and performed by Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST) Manchester

A touring, multi-disciplinary and multi-media roadshow, and WAST's first independent production in -STILL WE RISE –women express their stories of loss, terrifying state-imposed insecurity and the love and hope they find together in STILL WE RISE, a perception-altering, collaborative performance and roadshow.

It features the WAST Nightingales Choir (Winners of the Liberty Human Rights Arts Award 2015) singing new, vibrant songs of activism with messages of hope, support, and challenges to policy makers for the inhumanity of the asylum system, the new immigration bill, and the holding of women arbitrarily captive in 'Immigration Removal Centres' such as Yarl's Wood, Bedfordshire.

WAST women give spirited performances, changing the perceptions of asylum seekers and engaging the audience to laugh, cry, empathise and finally to dance with them in celebration of their resistance, resilience and their hope.

Audiences will and have seen the bravery and vibrancy of the group, whether setting out to free themselves of painful experiences, communicating direct messages to the audience or simply enjoying a break from the tension and stress in their lives by performing with their friends.

The roadshow, managed by the renowned writer and director Lydia Besong, and directed by Magdalen Bartlett, brings 20 women together who have found each other through the WAST self-help group in Manchester, now in its 11 year. The performances, premiered at Z-arts in Manchester in April before touring to Bury and Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Lydia Besong says: *“My journey from Cameroon to acceptance as an asylum applicant by UK authorities was a long and difficult one, but the support I gained from WAST and discovery of writing as a way to express myself helped me so much. STILL WE RISE empowers women to make sense of what they have been through and are still going through. They also feel that, by communicating these stories, the British public will gain better understanding of the pain they feel in leaving their lives behind, how challenging the process of asylum is and that it is love and hope that helps them to keep going.”*

WAST members performed “How I Became An Asylum Seeker”, written by Lydia Besong and
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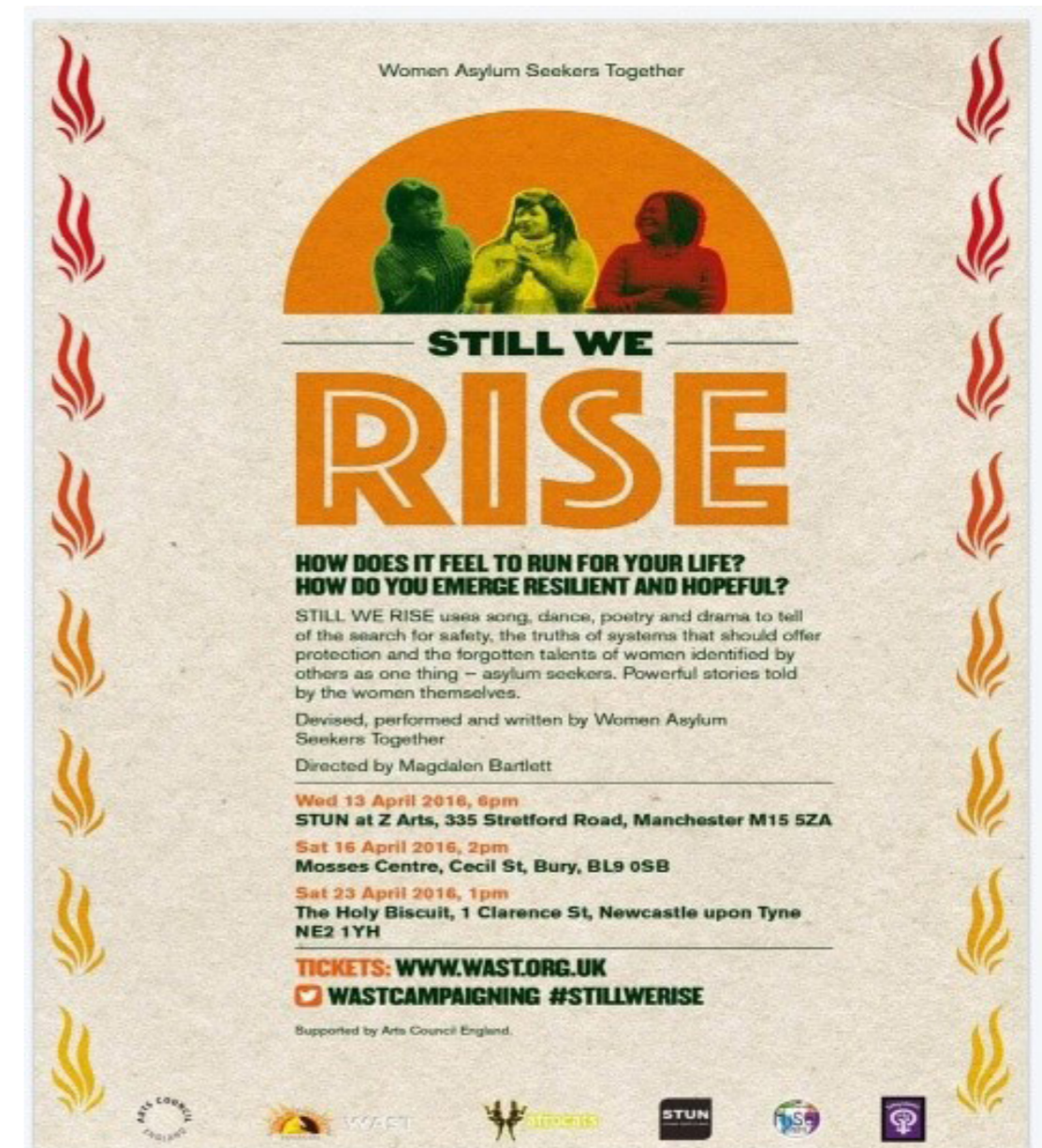
developed in partnership with Community Arts North West (CAN) in 2010. STILL WE RISE follows those landmark performances, allowing a broader range of voices to write a script with no rules, gathering together poems, songs, choreography and more. STILL WE RISE sees WAST instil their founding principle to a touring arts production, of giving women asylum seekers a safe, women only, secular space to meet with each other. Founded in 2005 by Farhat Khan, herself fleeing a life of abuse in Pakistan and granted asylum in 2006, WAST is made up of woman from disparate backgrounds including people of all religions and none who come together and find both practical and emotional support, as well as developing campaigns to support individual asylum cases or challenge unfair application rules, regulations and procedures.

Link to Promo <https://vimeo.com/163425662>

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STILL WE RISE is supported by Arts Council England.



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