

women's asylum news

refugee women's resource project @ asylumaid

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Please note that the next edition will also be a double issue. Please send any information that you would like to see published by 9 April 2007 at womenasylumnews@asylumaid.org.uk (see postal address on back cover).

Europe: New project to promote gender guidelines across Union

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) has set up a project aimed at obtaining European Union (EU)-wide gender guidelines to ensure the equal and fair assessment of women's asylum claims. A steering group was established in January 2007 comprising EWL, the Refugee Women's Resource Project (RWRP), Maria Bexelius (an expert on asylum issues from Sweden) and the European Office of the UNHCR. The project is within the context of the EU's harmonisation of the asylum system and the goal of establishing a single procedure for all EU Member States in 2010.

Introducing gender guidelines into national asylum policies requires strategies that can be developed throughout the whole of the EU. The focus of the project's work will be the EU Qualification and Procedures Directives. The project will show that transposing these directives into national law will not be sufficient to guarantee a gender sensitive approach and gender guidelines will be absolutely necessary to fully implement them.

The UNHCR's guidelines will be used to show how these can effectively be used to overcome these difficulties. The analysis of these two Directives and recommendations for the adoption of UNHCR's guidelines will form the basis of a publication to be used as a tool for lobbying at both the national and European level.

The project would welcome comments from WAN readers in EU countries as to whether you would find such a lobbying tool useful in your country. Please contact RWRP

Coordinator, Debora Singer on deboras@asylumaid.org.uk.

The project will consult with refugee women and NGOs prior to finalising its report, which will include case studies of the difficulties women encounter in claiming asylum.

related news

EWL has joined forces with the Coalition against trafficking in Women (CATW) in a new project to promote preventative measures in combating trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation. The project will support a number of women's NGOs working on issues of sexual exploitation in 14 countries in Eastern and Southern Europe and Russia. Its aim is to address gaps in existing anti-trafficking programmes and policies. Humantrafficking.org reports that the project has prepared a Resource Pack on trafficking and prostitution to assist project partners with clear and accessible information to enable them to carry out the project philosophy and goals. To find out more about the initiative, go online to www.humantrafficking.org/updates/462.

Other international news

Algeria: Women's rights under UN scrutiny

Yakin Ertürk, the United Nations Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, conducted a 10-day fact-finding mission to Algeria at the end of January. The mission focused on all forms of violence against women prevalent in Algeria and on the State's response to such violence. In her report, the Rapporteur raised concerns with regards to violence against women in both the domestic

and the public space.¹ She says it remains largely invisible due to social taboos and lack of institutional support available for victims. She points to Algerian women's unequal access to inheritance, which often leaves women destitute. In cases of divorce, only women with children are entitled to the marital home or its equivalent. However, this is lost, and so is custody of their children, if a divorced mother remarries. Major assets acquired during marriage are assumed to belong only to the husband.

In addition, the Special Rapporteur mentions the plight of women who have been systematically raped and sexually enslaved during the Black Decade of violence that marred the country. On one hand, Algeria adopted a National Charter on Peace and Reconciliation in September 2005 through a public referendum, which does not exempt from amnesty '*all persons implicated in rape, collective massacres and bombings in public places*'. On the other hand, the Special Rapporteur notes that it is unclear to what extent such an exemption has been applied to individual cases.

Furthermore, she highlights a provision in the Decree implementing the National Charter, which criminalises the '*use or exploitation of the wounds of the national tragedy to harm the state, its institutions, agents or international image*.' She contends this constitutes an impediment to freedom of expression for victims of torture and abuse. Lastly she writes: '*Questions also remain as to whether and how victims of rape and sexual*

¹ Source: United Nations, Press release, 1 February 2007, circulated by Human Rights Education Associates (www.hrea.org). Other sources: UN Press Release, '*UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women to visit Algeria*', 17 January 2007 online at: www.unhchr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/10C645A5F40BAE8CC12572660054FB29?opendocument; and Agence France Press, '*Violence against women still plaguing Algeria*', 8 December 2006, reported by the Middle East Times online at <http://metimes.com/storyview.php?StoryID=20061208-073759-9633r>.

enslavement during the Black Decade are to receive compensation.'

The Special Rapporteur welcomes the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women, yet to be adopted by the Cabinet, but calls for active measures to be taken to ensure women's rights are respected in practice. It also praised the Algerian government for successfully raising drastically the numbers of girls and young women in education in a decade only.

In 2005 Amnesty International presented a report to the United Nations drawing attention to '*the Algerian government's failure to protect women against rape, beatings, and widespread legal and economic discrimination.*'

AI's report states that according to an Algerian law enforcement agency, about 7,400 women filed complaints regarding domestic violence in 2005, which represents a 25 percent increase from the previous year. Many women suffer emotional and psychological abuse, but physical torture is more common. The organisation SOS Women said that domestic abuse was rising but due to fear many victims do not report it to the police. Instead they contact the organisation anonymously. SOS Women runs shelters and trainings for abused women to help them start a new life. The organisation is planning to raise awareness about women's abuse and distress in the National Assembly to be held in 2007.

West Bank and Gaza: Little protection from violence against women

According to a report by Human Rights Watch, the Palestinian police and the law have failed to provide enough protection for women who experience rape, honour killing, beatings and sexual abuse in Gaza and the West Bank.² The

² Sources: Donald Macintyre, '*Abuse of women still rife in Palestinian life, says study*', in *The Independent*, Gaza City, 7 November 2006, online at:

report highlights the fact that male relatives who commit gender-based violence benefit from lighter sentences whilst rapists are exonerated if they agree to marry their victims. In addition, under current legal provisions, incest charges on behalf of children can only be brought by male relatives. The law also requires mandatory prosecution for domestic violence but only if the victim is hospitalised for more than 20 days. In cases of sexual or physical abuse, traditional practices also lead victims to be returned to their attackers under the agreement of clan or tribal leaders, often with the police acting as a mediator.

The report states that only one percent of women lodged complaints of gender-based violence in a context where laws '*condone and perpetuate*' such violence. In 2003 85 rape cases were reported but only one man was convicted. In the Gaza and West Bank region 98 '*honour killings*' have been officially recorded since 2000.

DRC: Hundreds of thousands estimated raped

Two recent articles in the media have highlighted the brutal pandemic that has affected the Democratic Republic of Congo over the last decade alone: the rape of hundreds of thousands of women by all sides of a civil conflict that has ravaged the country, sometimes in the most horrific circumstances. Indeed, *Newsweek* reported in November that not only were women in DRC systematically raped by militias and government forces engaged in a civil war, but many had fistulas as a consequence of the brutality of the rapes – often gang-rapes – they endured.³ Fistula is

http://news.independent.co.uk/world/middle_east/article1961450.ece. And HRW, '*A question of security, Violence against Palestinian Women and Girls*', 7 November 2007, online at: <http://hrw.org/reports/2006/opt1106/>.

³ Source: Rod Nordland, '*More Vicious Than Rape*', in *Newsweek*, 13 November 2006, online at www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15704030/site/newsweek/.

a rare condition, which is an abnormal passage between two internal organs or from an internal organ to the body surface. According to *Newsweek*, in the Congo, doctors and medical staff have seen thousands of cases of women with a '*rupture of the walls that separate the vagina and bladder or rectum*'. In many cases of rape, the perpetrators choose to shoot their victims' vagina at point-blank range after the assault. In other cases, they insert various objects to damage the women's internal organs. Whilst all sides in the conflict have been identified as perpetrators, the worst are said to be from the Interhamwe forces accused of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and have sought refuges in DRC's Eastern forests since. Doctors say they can identify the perpetrators by the type of damage they observe on patients.

It is estimated that in four year of conflict only, 250,000 women have been sexually assaulted in the Congo mainly during attacks on their villages.⁴ According to *The Guardian*, statistics collected by Global Rights, a human rights advocacy group that partners with local activists, show that over 40,000 women were treated by health clinics, for serious sexual assaults in the Eastern province of South Kivu alone in 2006. A hospital in Goma, North Kivu, said it saw nearly 4,000 women in four years. However it is believed that these women are just a fraction of those attacked as many live in areas too remote to have access to health facilities. Whilst to a much lesser extent, rapes of men and boys have also been reported but most are being killed during the attacks.

After campaigning by women's rights groups, the DRC parliament recently introduced a tougher law: it criminalises rape and has allowed 10 prosecutions of soldiers or civilians in Goma in the last few weeks. Human rights groups also call for leaders of military groups

to be brought before the International Criminal Court in the Hague. Many however continue to rape and kill thousands of civilians with the knowledge that they will never be brought to justice.

related news On 2 January this year, UK newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* reported that UN peacekeepers and civilian staff were raping and abusing children as young as 12 in Southern Sudan. The paper said they identified more than 20 victims in Juba, South Sudan and that the abuse started within months of the forces' arrival two years ago. For full story, go online at: www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/01/02/wsudan03.xml.

South Africa: Gender-based violence endemic

The prevalence of gender-based violence is widespread in South Africa: between April 2004 and March 2005, 55,114 cases of rape were reported to the police.⁵ The number of actual cases is estimated to be much higher, as only one in nine women is believed to report cases of sexual assault, according to the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC also estimates that a woman is killed by her partner every six hours. Whilst apartheid has been recognised as a significant factor to explain the country's culture of violence, women's groups say patriarchal attitudes are also at the root of the problem. IRIN reports that '*a 2004 nationwide survey of boys and girls aged between 10 and 19 found that 58 percent did not view "forced sex with someone you know" as sexual violence; another 30 percent of all respondents agreed that "girls do not have a right to refuse sex with their boyfriend"*.' There is also evidence that some women are raped because of their sexual orientation.

Story circulated by network information source fjn_atrocities@yahoo.com.

⁴ Source: Chris McGreal, 'Hundreds of thousands raped in Congo wars', in *Guardian Unlimited*, Goma, 13 November 2006, online at www.guardian.co.uk.

⁵ Source: United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 'South Africa: Closing the gap on gender-based violence', Johannesburg, 19 January 2007, available online at: www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=57122.

The exceptionally high level of gender-based violence has been linked to the HIV/AIDS epidemic that is plaguing the country. A new sexual offences bill is expected to be passed in early 2007. The bill mandates public health facilities to provide rape survivors with a post-exposure prophylaxis (known as PEP), a course of antiretroviral drugs that can reduce the risk of contracting the HI virus from an HIV-positive attacker by as much as 80 percent if started within 72 hours of exposure. However PEP is made available only if the survivor presses criminal charges. Also the bill does not refer to other treatment or counselling services, raising criticism from advocacy groups who say it is a 'step backwards'.

related news

SA same-sex marriage law signed, see full story on BBC News online at:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6159991.stm>.

Liberia: Increase in women's reports of gender-based violence but few get justice

Government officials and International Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working in Liberia have witnessed a marked increase in reported cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence in the last year alone.⁶ IRIN reports that a government survey conducted in 10 of the country's 15 counties for the period 2005-2006, revealed that over 90 percent of the 1,600 women interviewed said they had experienced sexual violence including rape.

A law was passed in December 2006 making rape illegal for the first time in Liberia. It forbids bail and the crime carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. Under previous legislation, only gang-rape was a crime.

⁶ IRIN, 'Liberia: Health, justice lacking for abused women', Monrovia, 4 December 2006, at www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID=56612.

Despite the changes, IRIN highlights the release of a human rights report by the United Mission in Liberia which documents the failure from law enforcement forces, such as the Courts and the police, to fully prosecute perpetrators of sexual violence. On the other hand, many families are just happy to accept a payment from the perpetrator in compensation for the crime. The Female Lawyers Association of Liberia, which was instrumental in getting the law changed, calls for more lawyers to help with prosecution of cases.

In the meantime, very few specialist services are available in the country for victims of sexual violence and rape. Only one hospital, called Benson, in the capital Monrovia has a unit dedicated to such services available for free. Only Benson Hospital and Redemption Hospital, also in Monrovia, can issue certificates to rape victims. Many women and girls have to travel from all over the country to reach them, especially as, according to an IRIN's interview with a doctor, 'they do not trust the health clinics in rural areas'.

India: 20,000 girls estimated to be trafficked internally

At a meeting against trafficking organised for Indian senior police officials by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), South Asia, UN representative Gary Lewis stated that at least 20,000 girls are being trafficked in India, the great majority being trafficked from one state to another.⁷ Most trafficked women come from Andhra Pradesh (45 percent), Maharashtra, Goa, West Bengal and Bihar. He added that the rise in trafficking in women and girls was a result of economic- and in particular, farming-crisis in the country.

⁷ Source: Story circulated by fjn_atrocities@yahoo.com, original story: The Deccan Chronicle, 'UN official: 20,000 girls are trafficked in India', Hyderabad, 22 January 2007, online at: www.deccan.com/City/CityNews.asp#UN%20official:%2020,000%20girls%20are%20trafficked%20in%20India.

He pointed to the lack of experience amongst the police in anti-trafficking programmes, but the Director General of police vowed to fight the crime in a joint-collaboration with police forces from various Federation states.

Colombia: Organisation for displaced women under attack

The League of Displaced Women, an internationally recognised organisation that helps thousands of women and children displaced by violence in Colombia, was recently targeted in an arson attack that destroyed its premises in Cartagena.⁸ According to UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesman Ron Redmond, the organisation, who is a key partner of the UN agency in the country, had received frequent threats in the past. The destroyed community centre was used as a meeting place, community kitchen and for human rights training for the local displaced population. There were also plans for it to function as a school for some 140 children.

The centre had been built with the help of the UN in 2004 and more than 2000 people from all ethnic backgrounds had benefited from the League of Women and UN's partnership since they started to work together three years earlier. The work focuses on women's and displaced people's rights as well as housing and income-generating activities. The League of Displaced Women was nominated for the Colombian National Peace Prize in 2005.

Over 3 million people are estimated to be internally displaced in Colombia due to more than four decades of fighting among the Government, leftist rebels and right-wing paramilitaries.

⁸ Source: UN, 'UN refugee agency pledges aid to partner whose premises burned down', New York, 23 January 2007, online at: www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/45b5f2c34.html.

Slovakia: Legal provisions allow victims of torture and refugees to stay longer

Under laws amended by parliament that are effective since January 2007, people seeking asylum on the basis of death threat or torture in their country of origin are allowed to stay in Slovakia for at least a year with possibility of an extension.⁹ Victims of human trafficking are also allowed to stay longer in order to get a residence permit or to work.

International actions & events

International campaign against rape in Darfur

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) launched this global campaign to speak out against the widespread use of rape of women and girls as young as eight in Darfur since the violence in the region began in 2003. Systematic rape is a crime against humanity. Many reports have documented that women and girls are being raped when they leave refugee and internally displaced persons camps to gather firewood and water. The vast majority of these crimes are being perpetrated by the Janjaweed militias who carry out attacks with the support of and in concert with the Government of Sudan (GOS). PHR says that whilst the United Nations has tasked the International Criminal Court to investigate and eventually try war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur, this alone is not enough to ensure justice for victims of rape and sexual assault.

For more information on the campaign, go online to either www.globefordarfur.org or www.phrusa.org/research/sudan/action_darfur.html.

⁹ Source: AP, 'Slovakia amends law on foreigners', 7 December 2006, reproduced online at www.legislationline.org/news.php?tid=1&jid=45.

International day against FGM highlights medicalisation of practice

On 6 February, the United Nations Population Fund, joined people around the world in calling for an end to female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM or FGC).¹⁰ 3 million girls are subjected to the practice worldwide and up to 140 million women are estimated to have undergone it already. Contrary to widespread belief, it is not required by religion. As UNFPA writes, *'the practice violates the basic rights of women and girls and seriously compromises their health, posing risks during childbirth, and leaving lasting physical and psychological scars.'*

UNFPA says that an increasing number of people (men, women and young) now disapprove of FGM thanks to awareness campaigns. Prevalence of the practice has also decreased in several African countries, such as Kenya, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mali and Nigeria. But UNFPA calls for government to commit more to fund and programmes to end it altogether, through engagement with local communities, education and law enforcement measures.

Despite the above-mentioned progress, UNFPA is concerned with the medicalisation of FGM where parents turn to health-care providers to perform the mutilation in order to minimise health risks. Another concern is that FGM is practiced on *'younger and younger girls to the practice to avoid their complaints or refusal to participate.'*

¹⁰ Source: UNFPA Press release, Message of Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director, UNFPA, 6 February 2007, online at: www.unfpa.org/news/news.cfm?ID=927&Language=1.

International Women's Day, 8 March 2007

The theme of this year's event is *'Ending Impunity for Violence against Women'*. For information on more than 100 events already listed in 12 different countries, go online at: www.internationalwomensday.com/. The website also provides information on organisations, media and governments supporting the event and many other related links.

Canada: Institute on international women's rights

A women's rights institute in Toronto, Canada, which will take place in May-June this year, will expose participants to human rights standards set by the United Nations and enable them to deliver human rights education in their own countries and contexts.¹¹ Speakers will discuss the organising efforts of women as they advocated to establish important international milestones like the United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the African Protocol on Women's Rights, Security Council Resolution 1325, Beijing Platform for Action, and Women's Action Agenda 21. They will also explore the potential of these international conventions and policies as tools for social change, and highlight how they can be used to bring about real progress on the ground.

The institute, offered by the Center for Women's Studies in Education of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, will take place from 22 May to 29 June 2007. Applications must be sent in by February 15, 2007, to receive guaranteed consideration. For an application form and

¹¹ Source: International Women's Tribune Centre, Women's Globalnet #317.

more information, e-mail Pat Doherty at humanrights@oise.utoronto.ca; Or visit online: www1.oise.utoronto.ca/cwse/humanrights_07.htm.

related information

Call for nominations for 2007 Perdita Huston Human Rights Award Applications are invited for this \$10,000 annual prize that recognizes an outstanding advocate for women's rights in the Third World. This award honours the extraordinary life and activism of journalist and author Perdita Huston who worked tirelessly to give voice and visibility to rural women. In 2006, the award went to Dr. Sunitha Krishnan, the founder of an organization that fights trafficking in India by rescuing, rehabilitating and supporting trafficked women and girls. Deadline for nomination: 15 February. Full details at: www.perditahustonaward.com/. (Source: as above).

Symposium: The impact of political violence: communicating and witnessing

This event is organised by the Centre Primo Levi based in Paris, France, on 30 and 31 March 2007. The Centre is a network of five associations (Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture, Amnesty International-France section, Juristes Sans Frontières, Médecins du Monde et Trêve) who provide mental health and socio-legal support for people who have experienced torture. It will bring together academics, psychiatrists and other medical experts, international legal experts and interpreters who have encountered trauma in their profession.

Address: Maison de la Cité internationale universitaire de Paris, 17 boulevard Jourdan 75014 Paris. For more information on this event (in French) go online to: www.primolevi.asso.fr/colloques or write to email: colloque@primolevi.asso.fr.

Course on Asylum Procedures, the EU and International Human Rights

ELENA International Course on Asylum Procedures, the EU and International Human Rights Law, to be held on 4-6 May in Rome.¹² The closing date for registrations is 15 March 2007. In anticipation of the December 2007 deadline for EU Member States to transpose the EC Procedures Directive into national law, the course will examine:

- the Procedures Directive in the light of International Refugee and Human Rights law and EC Law;
- the impact of the Qualification Directive on the use of evidence in refugee status determination procedures, with a particular focus on the use of country of origin information and medical evidence;
- what EC law remedies are now available to practitioners?
- the impact of policies such as interception and fast track processing upon asylum seekers and refugees.

For more information visit ECRE's online at: www.ecre.org/upcoming_elena_courses or contact shuber@ecre.org.

UK News

Gender Guidelines no longer Appeals Tribunal policy

In September 2006 the Gender Guidelines produced by the former Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) were removed from the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT) website as their inclusion was said to have been an error. At a stakeholders' meeting in October, the AIT's President, Henry Hodge,

¹² Information reproduced from ECRE's Weekly Update (ECRAN), 2 February 2007.

explained that they are not, and have never been, the policy of the AIT.

The Immigration Appellate Authority Gender Guidelines¹³ were published in November 2000 in order for the IAA judiciary to incorporate an understanding of gender into the assessment of asylum claims.¹⁴ In particular the Guidelines emphasised how The Refugee Convention should be interpreted to reflect women's experiences of persecution, harm, political activity or resistance, and how these experiences affect their asylum claims. They also recognised the need for the asylum determination process to be sensitive to gender, by ensuring that practice does not discriminate (either deliberately or inadvertently) against women.

The IAA Gender Guidelines were seemingly transferred to the AIT when it was set up in April 2005. They have been referred to in a number of cases since then.

Research by Prof. Rebecca Wallace and Anne Holliday¹⁵ and by Women Against Rape and Black Women's Rape Action Project¹⁶ both provided evidence that immigration judges were not following the guidance. This suggests there is more of a need for such guidelines rather than less. In addition the introduction of the Gender Equality Duty, which all public bodies will need to comply with from April 2007, would suggest there is a need for such guidelines to ensure that women's cases are dealt with appropriately.

¹³ Available at

www.asylumsupport.info/publications/iaa/gender.htm.

¹⁴ See WAN Issue no. 6, January 2001, p. 2, online at www.asylumaid.org.uk/New%20RWRP/WAN/Issue%206%20Word%202000.doc.

¹⁵ See WAN issue no. 53, September 2005, p1, also at www.asylumaid.org.uk. An article on this research was published in the AIT Legal & Research Unit Update. The Legal & Research Unit Update is intended to be informative. Its content has not been endorsed by the AIT judiciary, and it should not be used as evidence in appeal cases.

¹⁶ See WAN Issue no.65, November/December 2006, p9.

RWRP is now consulting on the best strategy for taking this issue forward.

Sex trafficker sentenced to 21 years in prison

The escape of two women who fled sexual exploitation in the UK earlier this year led to the successful prosecution of sex trafficker Robert Amariutei in November 2006.¹⁷ The victims, who had been brought to the country in 2002 and 2003 respectively, went to the police after their escape. The police subsequently mounted a surveillance operation for few months before arresting the criminal in January 2006. The 27 year-old Romanian told his victims they would work in the hospitality industry. Instead when they arrived in the UK he raped and repeatedly beat them before forcing them to work in East London brothels and be subjected to rape on a daily basis as sexual slaves. In November, Snaresbrook Crown Court found that the Romanian operated with the complicity of his 22 year-old girlfriend, Raluca Mazilu. She was jailed for four years after being found guilty of two counts of controlling prostitution and two of sex trafficking.

Amariutei was sentenced to 16 years for the rapes and five years for the sex trafficking and controlling prostitution charges. The sentences are consecutive.

related news

The newspaper *Independent* reported in December on the case of a domestic worker who had been grossly abused by her employer whilst they prevented her from renewing her visa. See full story: The Independent 'Slavery in the UK', 27 December 2006, online at: <http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/politics/article2106018.ece>.

¹⁷ Source: The Times, 'Sex trafficker tricked women with job offer', 25 November 2006, www.timesonline.co.uk/newspaper/0,,175-2470229,00.html.

Also in the news:

UK to sign European Convention Against Trafficking

On 22 January, the British Prime Minister announced the intention of the UK government to add its signature to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. Victims of human trafficking in Britain will be given housing and medical advice, and a minimum one-month reprieve from deportation.¹⁸ Until now the government had refused to sign the Convention fearing illegal immigrants would abuse it. According to Home Office estimates, up to 4,000 victims of trafficking were forced into sexual slavery in Britain in 2003. The UK might sign the Convention by the end of March 2007, coinciding with the country commemorating 200 years from the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

related resources

Canada: Guidelines to assist for trafficked persons

In 2006, Canada released new guidelines for immigration officers to protect trafficked persons.¹⁹ Under the guidelines, trafficked persons are entitled to receive a temporary residence permit allowing them to stay in Canada for up to 120 days with no conditions attached. Trafficked persons have access to health-care and trauma counselling. The full text of guidelines is available at www.cic.gc.ca/manuals-guides/english/ip/ip01e.pdf

¹⁸ Source: Some information from Patrick Wintour, 'Trafficking victims to get housing and medical aid', in *The Guardian*, London, 13 January 2007, online at: www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,1989417,00.html

¹⁹ Source: Anti-Slavery International, Trafficking Network Update, January 2007.

Albania: New helpline for migration and trafficking issues

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM)-Albania in cooperation with the UN's Office for Drugs and Crime launched a helpline to provide information and counselling on regular migration and on trafficking issues. The helpline (local telephone number: 0800 1212) will also serve as a point of assistance and referral of trafficked persons.

related event

Human trafficking: The action plan - Chaired by *Newsnight* presenter Martha Kearney, panel members discuss what we should do to protect human rights, support victims and reduce demand. Venue: The Graduate Centre, London Metropolitan University, Holloway Road, Date: 7 March 2007. For more information, see:

www.amnesty.org.uk/events_details.asp?ID=307

Other UK events

Motion to support asylum-seeking victims of rape gets backing from MPs

According to Black Women's Rape Action Project and Women Against Rape, the Early Day Motion (EDM) 406: Rape and female asylum seekers, tabled by John McDonnell MP, has gathered 72 signatures since it was issued on 5 December. We are now anxious to make this over 100. If your MP is not on the list, please urge them to sign. The EDM lists essential demands, such as ensuring that women are able to speak about the violence they have suffered, have access to legal representation, appropriate medical care and other expert help. These demands, if implemented, would greatly increase the chances of women getting justice and protection. Getting MPs to sign this EDM

raises these issues in Parliament and will be of great help to our campaign to get rape officially recognised as torture and persecution. The easiest way to get in touch with your MP is via www.writetothem.com.

The EDM was issued to coincide with the launch of WAR's dossier: *Misjudging Rape; Breaching Gender Guidelines & International Law in Asylum Appeals*. The Dossier's research exposes the treatment by the courts and the authorities of rape survivors claiming asylum and how immigration judges flout the former IAT Asylum Gender Guidelines and international law in their rulings. For a report of the launch and/or to order a copy of the dossier, call 020 7482 2496 or see www.womenagainstrape.net.

Iraqi Women's rights organisations join forces to mark IWD in London

On International Women's Day, a network of several Iraqi women's rights organisations based in Iraq and the United Kingdom want to draw your attention to the plight of Iraqi women's human rights, including *'lack of adequate health care, clean water and electricity, unemployment, abductions, rape, sex trafficking, honour killings, violence at the hands of occupation forces, Islamist militias and insurgents, criminal gangs and families as well as sectarian killings and targeted assassinations terrorize the lives of thousands of women.'*

The network is planning a set of activities in London to *'express [its] solidarity ... and exert pressure on the current Iraqi government as well as the United States and United Kingdom to repeal Article 41 of the new Iraqi Constitution and recognise appropriate recognition of full equality between women and man regardless of ethnicity and religious background. This article replaces the present secular Personal Status Law with Islamic Sharia Law.'*

For International Women's Day, the network is planning to organise several events and actions: A conference with influential international speakers (activists & academics) to expose gender-specific violence and terror against Iraqi women, and to call for the abolishing of Article 41 in the current Iraqi Constitution; an exhibition of photographs and writings in space adjacent to the conference; the launch of a resolution in support of Iraqi women to be circulated amongst British and international policy-makers, the Iraqi government, NGOs, and the media; and a vigil and demonstration in Trafalgar Square to raise public awareness about the plight, struggles and demands of Iraqi women.

For more information, please contact: Nadia Mahmood, Co-ordinator, Middle East Centre for Women's Rights (MECWR), 32– 36a Rye Lane – Peckham, London SE15 5BS, Tel and Fax: 020 7639 1033, Email: mecwr2003@yahoo.com or check www.womenagainstviolence.org.uk.

FEM 07: A National Conference on Gender Equality

This free event on 10 March at Sheffield University Students' Union will include a session on refugee and women asylum seekers delivered by refugee women involved in Northern Refugee Centre's REACT (awareness raising) project. For more about the conference's programme and other details, see online: www.femconferences.org.uk.

Seminar on refugee community concerns' on gender issues

This seminar, organised jointly by the Refugee Council and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) on 15 March, offers an opportunity for open dialogue between refugee communities and the MPS, focusing on women in the community. Asylum-seeking and refugee women have many particular and different

needs and challenges. This event aims to raise awareness of gender issues in order to help refugee community organisations to deliver an enhanced service to women in the community. It will also identify gaps in current service delivery and explore possible solutions.

For more information about the seminar, please contact Kimonda Chesaina on 020 7346 1095 or email:

Kimonda.chesaina@refugeecouncil.org.uk.

related information

Developing gender-sensitive services

On 31 January the Refugee Council also ran a course entitled '*Developing gender sensitive service*' for organisations who would like or are currently providing advice and support to refugee and asylum-seeking women. It aimed to explain why organisations in the sector should be concerned about developing services that meet the needs of refugee women and how to ensure that refugee women are actively involved in the development of organisations' service delivery. The course aimed to develop an action plan supported by follow-up meetings. For information on the latter, please contact Penny McLean on 020 7346 1052 or email:

penny.mclean@refugeecouncil.org.uk.

UK projects

Free counselling for Black and Minority Ethnic women affected by gender violence

The Lilith Project is providing free one to one counselling sessions for service users supported by members of Lilith's Kalabash Forum. The counselling is intended to help

Black Minority Ethnic (BME) women affected by any form of gender violence and/or abuse.

The sessions take place every week at Eaves Housing for Women. The counselling is available to the Lilith Project's Kalabash Forum organisation members (places are limited). Further information on accessing this service for your client and/or to find out how to join the Kalabash Forum please contact Heather Vacciana on: 020 7840 7133 or via email: heather.vacciana@eaveshousing.co.uk.

New Project for asylum-seeking and refugee families in Kensington and Chelsea

Family Support Group is running a project which offers emotional and practical support to asylum seeker and refugee families living in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. The project (funded by the Big Lottery) now also includes migrant communities such as domestic workers or non-EU Eastern European families.

For more information, please contact Pamela Campbell, Senior Project Co-ordinator, on 0208 968 55 39 or email to pamellacampbellfsg@btconnect.com. Address: Canalside House, 383 Ladbroke Grove, London W10 5AA.

London: Free training available for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

AMANI TRAINING provides a range of training for local people ranging from basic skills through to high-level accredited vocational courses, including English for Speakers of other languages (ESOL), computer courses, and health and social care amongst many others. Refugees and asylum seekers are welcome to apply. All courses are free and a contribution will be paid towards childcare and travel according to eligibility. In addition its experienced and knowledgeable employment

advisors, working with local employers and the local authority, will help match suitable trained people to vacancies or to work placement opportunities. Places are limited. For more information contact Amani Training, Unit 17, Eurolink Centre, 49 Effra Road, SW2 1BZ, Tel: 020 7978 9670 or email info@amanitraining.com.

Refugee group fundraises for Afghan women's organisation

According to online news source *this is Exeter*, the Refugee Support Group Devon is appealing on behalf of an Afghan charity, the Revolutionary Organisation of the Women of Afghanistan, for donations including school provisions such as pencils, geometry sets and calculators.²⁰

The Afghan charity is a group of women devoted to humanitarian work based on the belief that '*society will only change for the better when women are able to enjoy full human rights.*' The charity provides shelter, education and healthcare for orphans and women in Afghanistan. Anyone who can help can send a cheque to Stroud Afghan Women's Fund, PO Box 66, Stroud, Gloucestershire GL5 3YR. Alternatively, pencils, sharpeners, geometry sets, pens, calculators, glue and felt tips for schools can be sent to Sadie Brinham, 79 Trinity Street, Burton House, St Austell, Cornwall, PL25 5LX.

²⁰ Source: *This is Exeter* (online) 'Cash Appeal for Afghan Women's Bid for Rights', 3 February 2007, at www.thisisexeter.co.uk/displayNode.jsp?nodeId=137199&command=displayContent&sourceNode=136986&contentPK=16556152&folderPk=79934&pNodeId=137002. Story circulated by Franklist.info at www.franklist.info

new publications

international

West Bank and Gaza: Authorities ought to address violence against women, report says

In a report published in November 2006, entitled *A Question of Security: Violence Against Palestinian Women and Girls*, Human Rights Watch said that the Palestinian Authority (PA) had not succeeded in establishing an adequate gender-based strategy to protect women and girls who were subjected to violence.²¹ It also said that the PA should have put the issue of violence against women on top of its security agenda and taken some practical actions to deal with it.

This report was conducted by a field research based in the West Bank and Gaza in November 2005 and early 2006. It has taken into consideration various cases of violence from spousal and child abuse to rape, incest and honour killing. The report also mentioned that criminal legislation applied in the West Bank and Gaza grants mild punishments for domestic violence perpetrators and this has prevented victims of such crimes to come forward to report any incidents. The report is available online at:

<http://hrw.org/reports/2006/opt1106>.

Belarus: Little support for victims of domestic violence, report says

In a report released in November 2006 entitled *Belarus Domestic violence – more than a private scandal*, Amnesty International (AI) claimed that thousands of women in Belarus have experienced domestic violence whilst

²¹ Source: Human Rights Watch Press release, 'Occupied Palestinian Territories: Authorities Must Address Violence against Women and Girls', Ramallah, 7 November 2006, at <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/11/07/palab14496.htm>.

benefiting from little help and modest legal safeguard.²²

According to the report, only about 3,000 women were registered as domestic violence victims in Belarus in 2005. Although the actual number of victims is believed to be higher, there are only three state-run crisis centres for abused women to go to in the whole country. The centres suffer inadequate funding and little support provision for the women. The report found many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are willing to help but fell short of doing so because of the government limitations on their working activities and funding.

AI says the issue of safety of domestic violence victims must be addressed as a matter of priority. It calls on the government of Belarus to fulfil its obligations under international law especially the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against women. The report can be found at:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engEUR490142006>.

related publications

A report by UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), published in August 2006, and based on a study of over 1,300 cases, reported to the Afghan authorities between January 2003 and June 2005, describes domestic violence as 'endemic' whilst perpetrators remain unpunished. According to the study, the great majority of violence in Afghanistan – 80 per cent - is committed by a male member of the victim's family and affects women from all social backgrounds, whether married, highly educated or in employment, or not.

In 2006, UNIFEM's fund to support initiatives in developing countries that are addressing gender-based violence was nearly four times higher than in 2004. For more, see www.unifem.org/news_events/story_detail.php?StoryID=544.

UNICEF, the United Nations body mandated to advocate for the protection of children's rights, launched a report highlighting that '*gender equality and the well-being of children go hand in hand*,' and recommended a raft of measures, from greater investment in girls' education to imposing quotas ensuring women are better represented in politics. See the 160-page *State of the World's Children 2007* report online at:
www.unicef.org/sowc07/report/full_report.php.

Sexual violence: weapon of war, impediment to peace

Forced Migration Review (FMR) No. 27 explores the challenges and opportunities for combating sexual violence in conflict, post-conflict and development recovery contexts.²³ This issue of FMR was produced in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Submissions were provided by 40 specialists from a wide range of humanitarian agencies and the Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. They highlight '*key issues and challenges, best practices, innovative programmes and recommendations*.'

This issue will be subsequently published in French, Arabic and Spanish. The full text of all articles in English can be accessed via: www.fmreview.org/sexualviolence.htm. If you would like to receive a hard copy for your organisation, or multiple copies for distribution

²² Amnesty international press release, 'Belarus: Domestic violence - more than a private scandal', 9 November 2006, online at: [http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGEUR490162006/\\$FILE/newsrelease.pdf](http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGEUR490162006/$FILE/newsrelease.pdf) (Index: EUR 49/016/2006).

²³ Information published by Forced Migration Review, University of Oxford Date - Jan 2007 URL Address - www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900SID/EK0I-6XT8RC?OpenDocument.

to partners and policy - and decision-makers, please contact the Editors (see below how to access details). Also if you are organising an event for International Women's Day on 8 March, FMR would be pleased to send copies for distribution to participants. Please contact FMR directly. Full details online at www.fmreview.org/.

new publications

UK

The Destitution Trap: Research into destitution among refused asylum seekers in the UK

Refugee Action's report published in November 2006 is based on a national research, which started in January 2006 and was set to explore the causes and effects of destitution among refused asylum seekers in the UK. The research findings are based on interviews with 125 asylum seekers and raise urgent questions about whether current government policy is sustainable. Refugee Action provides recommendations as a result. Find the full report online at:

www.refugee-action.org.uk/information/publications.aspx.

See also Down and Out in London: The road to destitution for rejected asylum seekers

published in November 2006 by Amnesty International. In this report, Amnesty International criticises the UK government's policy on rejected asylum seekers, which is forcing thousands into abject poverty. Amnesty believes that rejected asylum seekers are made destitute to force them to go home. It calls on the government to grant a temporary renewable status to rejected asylum seekers who cannot return to their country voluntarily or have been in the UK for many years due to a long asylum process. The report can be found online at:

www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=10682.

online resources

international

USA: Human Rights provides legal briefs on trafficking and forced marriage following appeal decision

Human Rights USA has used the recent decision of *Gao v. Gonzales* to file briefs in several forced marriage and trafficking-related asylum cases with the aim to advocate for '*widespread application of the principles advanced by the Second Circuit in Gao*'.²⁴ In *Gao v. Gonzales*, the Second Circuit recognised that women fleeing forced marriage were eligible for asylum on the ground of membership of a particular social group which it defined as: '*women who have been sold into marriage (whether or not that marriage has yet taken place) and who live in a part of China where forced marriages are considered valid and enforceable*.'

Human Rights USA intervened recently as co-counsel and filed a merits brief in two cases in November 2006 and February 2007: One is the case of a woman from Albania (P-C) who survived an attempted kidnapping in retaliation for her father's political activities. She fears she will be kidnapped again if returned to Albania and will be trafficked to Italy for sexual exploitation. The second is the case of a young woman from China who was forced to marry the director of her rural village (M-L-C). She was beaten by her father and raped by the village director when she refused. Her case was remanded by the Second Circuit because the Immigration Judge had failed to consider whether she was a member of a particular social group based on this forced marriage arrangement.

For a copy of these briefs, contact Monique Beadle, Refugee Project Director, Human Rights USA, 1725k St. NW, Suite 610,

²⁴ Source: Information circulated by network information: DVasylum_updates@yahoo.com.

Washington, DC 2006, Tel: (202) 296-5702,
Fax: (202) 296-5704, Email:
mbeadle@humanrightsusa.org. Human
Rights USA is also available to offer assistance
in forced marriage and trafficking-related cases
on a co-counsel or amicus basis.

IRC staff's Blog documents refugee women's experience in Darfur

Emily Holland, a staff member of the International Rescue Committee (IRC), is blogging from Darfur to document the daily experience of tens of thousands of Sudanese refugees, and in particular women, aided by IRC's humanitarian relief programs.²⁵ She writes: *'Who hasn't been profoundly affected by media accounts of women, men and children living in what the United Nations calls the world's greatest humanitarian crisis? ...My goal is to capture the daily experience of Sudanese refugees — especially the women — and the ways in which the IRC is helping them.'*

Read and share the Darfur blog online at:
http://ircblog.org/archives/1930_1321467639/205458. Also, see photos taken by women in Darfur online at:
www.theirc.org/resources/essays/APlaceofCal.html.

Online library on human rights abuses of sexual minorities and HIV+ people

This online library, also called the Asylum Documentation Programme, developed by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) documents human rights abuses in support of asylum claims all over the world from those fearing or fleeing persecution due to their sexual orientation, gender identity or HIV/AIDS status. The abuse they experience is multiple ranging *inter*

alia from discrimination, arbitrary arrest and detention, and forced marriage to forced psychiatric *'treatment'*, torture and murder.

IGLHRC, a US NGO based in New York which monitors abuses worldwide, has worked with asylumlaw.org, a non-profit project dedicated to using the internet to help lawyers and other accredited representatives worldwide prepare asylum cases, to make its online documentation available free to meet the needs of thousands of asylum seekers and their legal representatives.

The library is organised by 144 individual *'country packets'* that chart for each country various types of documentation, which may include court decisions, human rights declarations related to sexual minorities, expert opinions, newspaper articles, and reports on human right conditions for LGBT and HIV-positive people.

There are also three thematic packets: The Islamic World Country Packet illustrates the difficult juncture between Islam and homosexuality; the Lesbian Issues Packet created to further support the asylum claims of lesbians, who because they are women, may face other types of issues than male homosexuals; the Transgender Issues Packet to assist legal representatives and asylum seekers in front of an immigration judge or immigration authority who may be unfamiliar with transgender issues.

IGLHRC says its country conditions library began in 1990 and has assisted over 6,600 people worldwide. For instructions on how to use the online tool, go to the following link:
www.iglhrc.org/site/iglhrc/content.php?type=1&id=138. For more on IGLHRC, visit www.iglhrc.org.

Related UK event UK Lesbian & Gay Immigration Group Next London General Meetings on 17 February, 17 March, 21 April. See more info at

²⁵ Source: International Rescue Committee, Monthly Update, 24 January 2007.

www.uklqig.org.uk/Asylum%20Support%20Project.htm.

UNHCR publications updated

In November 2006, UNHCR posted provisionally on its website the revised '*Collection of International Instruments and Other Legal Texts Concerning Refugees and Others of Concern to UNHCR*'. This new edition supersedes the last one issued in 1995 and features significant changes and contains over 240 essential universal and regional instruments and texts concerning refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR. UNHCR invites people to comment or provide corrections to the text. It can be found online at:

www.unhcr.org/publ/PUBL/455c460b2.html

***The Status of Women in Iraq* (English & Arabic)**

Women Living Under Muslim Laws has added the English and Arabic versions of this publication to its website to download. *The Status of Women in Iraq, An Assessment of Iraq's De Jure and De Facto Compliance with International Legal Standards* was published in July 2005 by the Iraq Legal Development Project of the American Bar Association. It covers thematic categories for which it provides detailed factual and background information: political participation, civil society and women in decision making; violence against women and the right to personal security; labour and economic rights; family and marriage; nationality; health; and education. Produced with the assistance of many Iraqi legal experts, the publication can be found in English online at: www.wluml.org/english/news/status-of-women-in-iraq-ABA-ILDP-2005-EN.pdf. And in Arabic at: www.wluml.org/arabic/news/status-of-women-in-iraq-ABA-ILDP-2005-AR.pdf.

How to make your voice heard in the EU, a lobby-guide for NGOs

The Civil Society Contact Group (CSCG) has published a training handbook titled '*Making your voice heard in the EU - A guide for NGOs*'. It is specifically designed for NGOs and activists that are in the process of establishing a European strategy. The handbook provides information on EU institutions, the way European NGOs work, as well as lobbying '*tips*', illustrated by examples of EU level campaigns. It also includes more specific links and contacts per specific areas of activity. The CSGC brings together seven of the largest European NGO platforms. Its aim is to represent the views and interests of rights and value based civil society organisations across the European Union on major issues and to encourage and promote a transparent and structured civil dialogue that is accessible, properly facilitated, inclusive, fair and respectful of the autonomy of NGOs.

The handbook can be downloaded in English, French, German, Hungarian and Slovene Latvian, Polish and Portuguese online at:

http://act4europe.horus.be/code/EN/actions.asp?id_events=120.

online resources

UK

Gender Guidance explained to Women Asylum Seekers

RWRP has produced a leaflet directed at asylum seeking women which explains the Home Office policy for deciding women's asylum claims. Download the leaflets free in English, Amharic, Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, French, Pashto, Somali, Turkish, Tigrinya, Urdu, Vietnamese, by clicking on the following link

www.asylumaid.org.uk/Press%20statements/gender_guidance_campaign.htm.

In addition, RWRP has produced an audio CD for training and awareness-raising purposes, covering the Home Office policy for deciding women's asylum claims and the consequences if this policy is not followed. The six tracks can each be used individually (15 minutes total). The CD is in English only and covers the following:

- The needs of women asylum seekers and how the Home Office is not implementing its own policy;
- Three stories demonstrating women's experiences, spoken as if by the women themselves;
- The types of human rights abuses women are fleeing;
- A woman explains to another the procedures that should be in place when she goes for her asylum interview with the Home Office.

Available free from women@asylumaid.org.uk.

Leaflets on Domestic Violence for Women Asylum Seekers

As part of their gender sensitive casework, Refugee Council has prepared leaflets in 14 languages to explain what domestic violence is and what women can do when they are faced with domestic violence. The leaflet is aimed at asylum seeker and refugee women but can be used by migrant communities as well. This A4 leaflet can be accessed through Refugee Council's multi lingual website. The top right corner states the language of the leaflet. You can access Refugee Council's multi-language site at

<http://languages.refugeecouncil.org.uk>.

Peterborough: Website launch to help African refugee community

Peterborough African Refugee Community Organization (PARCA) has launched a website for the refugee and asylum seekers community in Peterborough to help them access different services including advice on immigration, welfare benefits, education and health issues.

The website also includes the details of social and sports events. Through this website new comers to Peterborough can meet other refugees whilst getting information about the city and how to obtain help. For further details please visit PARCA's website at: www.peterborough-refugee.org.

Frank List for immigration and asylum related information

If you would like to send news, jobs and events items to our 5000+ subscribers please submit online via:

www.frankslist.info/newsjobsevents.

notice board

Grant available for refugee women seeking to requalify

The Elizabeth Nuffield Educational Fund provides grants to women studying to improve their employment prospects including women refugees studying for professional requalification; it also funds other projects that address the financial needs of adult women learners. For more information contact Suzanne Berry or Bernadine Chelvanayagam on 020 7631 0566 or email enef@nuffieldfoundation.org.

New addresses for IMKAAN and RAMP

From 22 January 2007, Imkaan, the organisation that supports Asian women and children experiencing domestic violence will move to a new address at: Tindlemanor, 52-54 Featherstone Street, London, EC1Y 8RT.

The Renewal Refugee and Migrant Project (RAMP) is now based at: 66B Serbert Road, Forest Gate, London E7 0NJ, Tel.: 0208 221 4420, Fax: 0208 221 4439.

women's asylum news

Produced by RWRP (for more information on this issue, please contact Sophia Ceneda)
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