

women's asylum news

refugee women's resource project @ asylumaid

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the 29th March 2008.

'Motherland'

Juliet Stevenson speaks up for women in detention

On Mother's Day (Sunday 2nd March 2008), Women for Refugee Women organised a performance at the Young Vic Theatre, in central London to raise awareness about mothers and their children in immigration detention centres in the UK. Approximately 2,000 children and their families are detained in the UK every year. Families with children can be detained at any stage during their asylum process, or if authorities suspect they will abscond. Once detained, families often have no knowledge how long they will be detained for.

Entitled *'Motherland'*, the dramatic piece was performed by Juliet Stevenson, known for her roles on stage and in films such as *'Truly, Madly, Deeply'* and *'Bend it like Beckham'*. For *'Motherland'* her 13-year-old daughter, Rosalind, and half a dozen other actors including Harriet Walter and Paola Dioniscotti joined her. In preparing the script with Natasha Walter, Co-ordinator for Women for Refugee Women, Juliet Stevenson gathered material from visiting women in Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre in Bedford.

The performance focuses on the testimonies of three families. The script first includes their experiences in their home countries and then in the UK as their asylum claims are refused and they are detained for a number of weeks whilst attempts are made to send them back to their countries of origin. During this time one mother is separated from her baby who she was

breastfeeding. The accounts of the women's experiences highlight the inhumane treatment the women and their children receive at every stage.

These testimonies are interspersed with quotes from the Minister for Immigration and the Chief Executive of the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) demonstrating how they justify the detention of women and children using political rhetoric. In contrast, quotes from the Chief Inspector of Prisons and the Children's Commissioner are used to question the appropriateness of detention.

The dramatic performance was followed by speeches by two asylum seekers, Trudie and Angela from Uganda. In addition, Helena Kennedy QC, author of *Just Law* and *Eve Was Framed* and Helen Bamber OBE, founder of the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture (1985) and the Helen Bamber Foundation (2002) spoke. A musical performance of "*Mast Qalendar*" from the Helen Bamber Foundation's Music Group ended the evening.

Over 350 people attended the event. Initial feedback received after the performance stated the audience felt they were both moved and shaken by the testimonies. Describing the event after the performance, Juliet Stevenson said she felt it was very important to reach people who did not already know about the issues. Before leaving, those attending were asked to sign a Mother's Day card to be taken to the women currently detained in Yarl's Wood. The audience were also asked to sign a card to Harriet Harman, Minister for Women and Equalities, which included a statement asking for the end of detaining, deporting and making destitute women who are at risk of gender-related persecution.

Women for Refugee Women which organised the event, seeks to raise awareness of the injustices experienced by women who seek refuge in the UK by briefing journalists, organising events, lobbying policy-makers and providing a platform for asylum seekers to speak out for themselves about the injustices they experience. The event

proved so popular, two extra performances are to be held on:

Saturday 15th March (3pm and 7pm) at the Young Vic Theatre.

For tickets see: www.youngvic.org
Or telephone: 020 7922 2922

Proceeds from all the *Motherland* events will go to the Women for Refugee Women and to Yarl's Wood Befrienders who visit and support women and children detained in Yarl's Wood.

For further information see:
www.refugeewomen.com

RWRP news

RWRP at Asylum Aid is pleased to announce we are official 'information partners' for UNHCR's Refworld.

Refworld is a key website for professionals working in the field of asylum and refugee protection and is regularly accessed by UN agencies, academics, government bodies, judiciary officials, practitioners and NGOs. This website provides essential information and reports relating to country of origin, policy and national and legal frameworks. Refworld is continuously updated with information and reports.

Being Refworld 'information partners' allows RWRP at Asylum Aid the opportunity to provide information across a wide international platform.

All back issues of RWRP publications including *Women's Asylum News* are available on Refworld and all future publications will also be posted online.

For Refworld website please see:
<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain>

For back-issues of WAN please see:

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=publisher&skip=0&publisher=ASYLUMAID>

Sector Update

Changes to Section 4

Recent changes to Section 4 Regulations¹ have been introduced and result in extra vouchers being made available to pregnant women and new mothers. The new regulations means pregnant women can claim additional vouchers during their pregnancy, maternity vouchers for one-off essential items (e.g. cots and prams), additional clothing vouchers for dependent children and essential and exceptional travel costs (e.g. for health appointments.)

To apply, pregnant women or new mothers must fill in a new Section 4 application form available from accommodation providers or local One Stop Shops.

The Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) Section 4 team make the final decision on whether to allocate the additional vouchers. If a person is refused, there is no system for an appeal.

All pregnant women and new mothers currently receiving or applying for Section 4 vouchers should consult their local refugee agency.

It should be noted the provision of Section 4 vouchers is controversial across the sector with many agencies opposing the allocation of restrictive vouchers instead of cash. In addition, agencies continue to lobby over the allocation and practicalities of section 4 vouchers along with the amounts distributed.

¹ Introduced 31st January 2008

Keeping children Safe From Harm

The Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) is consulting on a Code of Practice for keeping children safe from harm. The Refugee Women's Stakeholder Group believes that this is an appropriate time to point out that children can be traumatised if they have to attend their parent's asylum interview, and therefore the BIA should provide childcare.

They are encouraging organisations to include this point in their response to the consultation. This is part of their campaign to persuade the BIA to provide childcare during substantive asylum interviews. So far, only the Cardiff office is doing this.

A draft response to the consultation is available from Debora Singer, RWRP Coordinator. Debora is also interested to hear from anyone who does include the childcare issue in their response to the consultation.

Please contact: deboras@asylumaid.org.uk

The deadline for responses to the BIA is 25th April 2008.

For details of the consultation see:

<http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/aboutus/consultations/keepingchildrensafe/>

UK News

Charities Attack 'Distressing' Asylum System

Refugee and children's rights campaigners have criticised a new government scheme, called the Clan Ebor project as "flawed, confusing and deeply distressing for parents and children." The Clan Ebor project was launched in West Yorkshire in June 2007 as a pilot scheme. The project is for families who have been refused asylum and aims to encourage their return to their county of origin. The pilot revealed that the project was giving incorrect information by telling families they needed to return despite them

having not exhausted the asylum process. Other families were informed that they must voluntarily return or face deportation to countries that at the time were regarded by the House of Lords as unsafe to return to.

The Children's Society and the Refugee Council have stated parents were asked to bring their children to traumatic and emotional interviews where they were told they needed to leave the UK.

The Clan Ebor project is run by the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) as part of a Home Office programme to encourage voluntary return "to people who have no right to stay in Britain". Families are sent a letter inviting them to an interview at the BIA office, where they are informed they must return or face deportation. The family is then given 30 days to confirm their decision to the BIA. Lisa Nandy, policy advisor at The Children's Society states: "families were told in the initial letter that they were coming for a review of their case, yet in practice were... informed of their return options and then... recalled to state which they had chosen". She said: "We have witnessed some very disturbing incidents. The process is very heavy handed. Parents have been forced to bring their children regardless of whether they think they can handle it".

Tim Finch, director of communications at the Refugee Council stated the project is "poorly thought-out and executed... the government really needs to invest its energy in the decision-making process, not in clumsy procedures like this."

The BIA reject the above claims and the charities assesment of the project. A BIA spokeswoman from Leeds said "the project had been designed to give families at the end of the appeals process a choice in how they leave the UK, as well as time to put their affairs in order and plan their future after return." Furthermore, following criticism from charities, children are no longer required to attend 'initial case conferences' .

For full article see:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/feb/18/immigration>

Children Trafficked to UK Vulnerable

NSPCC warn children who have been trafficked to the UK face further sexual, physical and mental abuse and exploitation due to gaps in child protection policies and an understanding of child trafficking. This article outlines concerns expressed by NSPCC that often government agencies do not believe children have been trafficked and then they are treated as adults and rejected from the UK. Zoe Hilson, NSPCC policy advisor states "We have concrete concerns that children are being dealt with inappropriately and are at risk of going missing or being returned without proper risk assessments". She continues, "Within the system there seems to be a culture of disbelief, often there is a presumption that separated children are over 18. It's hard to say whether there's a conspiracy, but it feels like the odds are stacked against them."

NSPCC fear that many vulnerable children who have been trafficked, including for forced prostitution, are being placed in immigration detention centres or being fast-tracked out of the UK. NSPCC believe there is much confusion and a lack of awareness from professionals regarding how to help trafficked children and what safeguards need to be in place. In 2006, Operation Pantameter 'rescued' 100 women who had been trafficked for sexual exploitation into the UK; 12 of the women were minors, 2 of whom were pregnant. "To this day, we do not know what happened to the children," states Nasima Patel, NSPCC Assistant Director.

NSPCC is calling for all trafficked children to be assigned a legal guardian as soon as they are identified. Mandy John-Baptiste, who runs the NSPCC advice line specialising on trafficking states "if [the authorities] are in doubt, they're meant to treat them as a child; they're not meant to be fast-tracked. Lots of children are going missing because of the nature of the system."

For full article see:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/feb/17/childprotection.children>

Honour Crimes in the UK

Police Chiefs state that up to 17,000 women are at risk of honour related crimes each year in the UK. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) believe that the actual number of women at risk of murder, sexual assault, forced marriage, kidnappings and beatings in the name of 'honour' are actually 35 times higher than the quoted statistics.

The Home Office is devising a 'honour based violence action plan' to improve the response of the police and other agencies and "ensure victims are encouraged to come forward with the knowledge that they will receive the help and support they need."

Almost all victims in the most extreme cases of honour-based crimes are women. A recent report by the Centre for Social Cohesion states "many women felt unable to defy their families and therefore suffer violence, abuse, depression, anxiety and other psychological problems that can lead to self-harm, schizophrenia and suicide."

For full article see:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/a-question-of-honour-police-say-17000-women-are-victims-every-year-780522.html>

UK conferences & courses

Vulnerable Alone – Together Stronger (domestic and sexual violence)

17th March, Holland House Hotel, Bristol
South West Government Offices

This course is aimed at public and voluntary personnel working with people who have experienced domestic and sexual violence. This includes front-line, community, health and criminal justice representative as well as survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

The conference will include discussion on:

- An overview of national policy
- The role of the voluntary sector
- Domestic and sexual violence survivors perspectives
- Improved delivery of services

Vernon Coaker MP, Under Secretary of State for the Home Office will provide an introductory presentation.

For further information contact:

Domenic Gallagher

Telephone: 0117 900 1864

Email: dominic.gallagher@gosw.gsi.gov.uk

Advanced Domestic Violence Awareness Course

28th March, London

The one-day training course aimed at professionals in Islington will provide an advanced understanding of domestic violence.

The course will cover:

- A greater understanding of domestic violence including possible indicators and good practice when working with perpetrators
- A better understanding of some of the wider issues including forced marriage and honour killing
- How Islington's Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy Service and the

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference work

- An increased confidence in encouraging disclosure, assessing risk and working with clients to draw up an action plan.

The course costs £30 per person

For further information and booking selected training day please telephone Kim Robb on: 0207 527 3431 Fax: 0207 527 3098 or email: dvpt@islington.gov.uk

Courses offered by Rights of Women

'Rights of Women' have produced a 2008-training brochure, outlining all of the courses they are facilitating across the UK in 2008. For full list of courses and information please consult brochure.

All courses are for women only and aimed at first tier organisations and advice givers.

Upcoming courses include:

Pathways to Justice: BMER Women, Violence and Relationship Breakdown 13th March, Cardiff

The training will explore the remedies available to BMER women who are experiencing domestic violence and sexual violence. The course covers the law as it relates to relationship breakdown, divorce, financial matters and children. Specifically participants will discuss:

- Domestic violence injunctions
- Divorce and finances following marital breakdown
- Cohabiting couples rights after a relationship breakdown
- Parental responsibilities
- Meeting the needs of the diverse group including refugee and asylum seeking women.

Asylum and Immigration Law: protecting women from violence and securing their position in the UK

23rd April, London N1

This one-day course will provide an overview of the asylum and immigration process, with a particular emphasis on the needs of women and gender based violence.

The training will cover:

- The legal frameworks for protection
- New Asylum Model and Legacy cases
- Supporting women making an application for indefinite leave to remain under domestic violence rule
- Challenging no recourse to public funds

For further information, costs of courses and copies of training brochure Tel: 020 7251 6575/6 or email: training@row.org.uk

International News

Afghanistan: Girl Children Sold

IRIN report there has been three separate incidents of girl children in Afghanistan being sold by their parents. This article states extreme poverty is responsible for the actions of the parents and raises grave concerns about the safety and protection available to girls from poor families in Afghanistan. The three families involved are all from different provinces and all were unable to feed their children. All three girls have since been returned to their families and the families are now receiving financial support to care for the children. Currently Afghanistan does not have any laws relating to child abuse and the sale of trafficked children. Afghanistan is however a signatory to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child which maintains "the state must make every effort to prevent any form of abduction of children or sale of or traffic in children (Article 36)". Afghanistan's Independent and Human Rights Commission (AIHC) are calling on the government to

"tackle the sale and abuse of children by their parents in a systematic, transparent and legal way." The AIHC are concerned that "the publicity derived from the recent cases of girls being sold may provoke other vulnerable parents to sell their children, particularly girls, in a bid to gain sympathy and financial assistance".

For full article see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=76544>

Sudan: Sexual Violence in Darfur

IRIN report many women in Darfur have experienced sexual assault, abuse, violence and rape and are too afraid to talk about their experiences. The United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour called for an investigation into the widespread sexual violence in Darfur in 2007. Her visit recognised the crimes committed and the continued vulnerability for women and girls in Darfur, especially as they are often unaccompanied when collecting firewood and water for their families.

IRIN state that on the few occasions NGOs have reported and catalogued sexual violence against women, the government denied the crimes were committed. In May 2007, President Omar el Bashir said "it is not the culture of Sudan or the culture of Darfur to rape – it does not exist." Consequently, many NGOs refuse to discuss the issue of sexual violence, rape and assaults. An anonymous UN employee working in the field of sexual violence stated they were "terrified to death of talking about it. You never know what is going to spark a reaction from the authorities; it is better to be quiet and carry on working than to speak out of turn and be thrown out of here." Alongside government denials, the issue of rape and sexual violence is a taboo subject in Sudan and can often result in women and girls being blamed and rejected by their family and community.

The continued silence surrounding rape and sexual violence does have health consequences for women and girls who are

not accessing medical help including post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) that can help prevent HIV. NGOs working on issues of sexual violence are urging the government to acknowledge the problem.

For full article see:

<http://www.plusnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=76705>

Africa: Rape epidemic in war zones

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports that rape and sexual violence in African war zones has reached epidemic proportions. They report that conflict and disaster situations across the continent leads to a collapse of society and the erosion of social norms which results in "a licence to rape". UNICEF states rape and sexual violence is now not only committed by combatants but also by civilians. Women and girls of all ages are at high risk within these circumstances. Ms Johnson from UNICEF says, "things happen that are unheard of in other African communities suddenly happen in these situations, and that is why we call it epidemic proportions, because it takes a life of its own."

For full article see:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7242421.stm>

Egypt: attitudes to rape

In 2007 the story of an eleven-year-old girl who was raped by a 21-year-old man and did not disclose the experience until she was five months pregnant sparked an outcry in Egypt. Since this incident, there have been arguably more open discussions about rape in Egypt though there is still a long way to go to change attitudes and behaviours.

According to Egypt's Interior Ministry approximately 20,000 women and girls are raped every year implying 55 women and girls are raped daily across the country. Professionals working with women who have experienced rape believe the statistics to be much higher as many women do not report the crime for fear of "social disgrace". In addition, spousal rape is not illegal in Egypt, which affects the collection of statistics.

Engy Ghozlan of the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights anti-harassment campaign states, "It's hard to tell exactly how many women are raped because there aren't a lot of statistics. Most people won't come out and say it happened because it's culturally unacceptable."

Moreover, certain regions in Egypt practice 'honour killings' and a girl or woman who has been raped may get blamed by the perpetrator and be vulnerable for an 'honour killing.' Rania Hamid, manager of the family counselling unit at the Centre for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA) states: "There are problems of honour. Sometimes a brother or cousin may kill her, saying 'you wanted this, you encouraged this, you're not honourable, and what is that you are wearing'?"

At present there is still no indication that rape is decreasing in Egypt and the cultural stigma, fear and shame attached to women who have experienced rape, still exists.

For full article see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=76827>

Saudi Arabia: Women sentenced to execution for 'witchcraft'

Human Rights Watch are urging King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia to overturn the execution of Fawza Falih for 'witchcraft'. Human Rights Watch have written directly to the King and expressed their concerns over the "absurd charges that have no basis in law." Joe Stork, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch said "the fact that Saudi judges still conduct trials for unprovable crimes like 'witchcraft' underscores their inability to carry out objective criminal investigations..[this] case is an example of how the authorities failed to comply even with existing safeguards in the Saudi justice system."

Human Rights Watch also highlight the discrepancies in law including the confession being extracted under duress after detention for 35 days and severe beatings, for which she was hospitalised. In addition, Fawza

had her access to a lawyer blocked and her relative, who acted as her legal representative was excluded from many sessions.

For full article see:

<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/02/14/saudia18051.htm>

Namibia: Women forcibly sterilised due to HIV status

A recent workshop in Namibia for women living with HIV revealed that some women had been forcibly and unknowingly sterilised because of their HIV status. One of the women recently discovered she was sterilised in 2003 after going for a medical health check up. She says: "the nurse asked me if I was on any contraception but when I said no, she looked in my health passport and told me that there was no need because I was sterilised." The nurse later revealed this was a procedure practiced in hospitals to women who were HIV positive in order to prevent any children being HIV positive. Another woman stated that due to problems with her pregnancy she needed an abortion and was told: "If we can't sterilise you, then we can't carry out the abortion."

Dr Helen Nkandi Shiimi, Katutura State Hospital Superintendent denies such allegations stating: "maybe someone is just coming up with some funny idea. No one can do anything like that ...this was against the rights of the women"

The revelations during the workshop have prompted the International Community for Women living with HIV/AIDS (ICW) to begin a countrywide survey to investigate the extent of forced sterilisation to HIV positive women.

For full article see:

<http://www.newera.com.na/archives.php?id=19419&date=2008-02-12>

Kurdistan: Rise in 'honour killings'

The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) write of the current situations of 'honour killings' in Kurdistan. This article outlines the story of a woman who refused to marry a man chosen by her brother and was consequently forced to flee her brother's rage. A few weeks later the brother found her and their mother outside the refuge where she was staying and shot them both. Despite being shot seven times, the woman and her mother both survived the attack. Six years later, the brother has never been prosecuted and the sister is too afraid to leave her current refuge. The head of the refuge states "She gets up and screams at the slightest noise, fearing her brother will break in and kill her."

Human Rights groups believe there is an increase in 'honour killings' and domestic violence in Kurdistan and that the government is not doing enough to protect women. Statistically there has been a dramatic rise in reported 'honour killings' since 2005. Roonak Faraj, head of the Women's Media and Cultural Centre states: "Every day, more and more women are killed in Kurdistan while the authorities watch and do nothing."

Faraj believes patriarchal society and insufficient legislation to punish violence against women enforces a toleration of 'honour killings' if the defendant is deemed to have 'honourable motives.' Recently, more than 20 women's rights groups have lobbied the government to impose heavier punishments for crimes against women. The government has pledged reforms but Faraj states "actions speak louder than words"

For full article see:

http://www.iwpr.net/?p=icr&s=f&o=342738&apc_state=henh

Africa: Lesbians call for equality across continent

Lesbians across Africa have gathered at a conference in Mozambique to call on African governments to stop treating them like criminals. Homosexuality is illegal in 38 African countries. The Coalition of African Lesbians, who organised the conference believe homophobia is rife across the continent.

One participant at the conference told the BBC "I'm finding myself as an individual who is every day trying to get the people that I identify with... everyday having to educate them about who I am, but finding it difficult for them to open their minds and their hearts."

For full article see:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7266646.stm>

Egypt: Girls forced to sleep rough

IRIN have produced a short video film highlighting the plight of girls and young women in Egypt who are forced to sleep on the streets.

This video follows the story of 10-year-old Sayyida who has been living on the streets for two years and single mother Fatima, who with her small child has spent over three years homeless. Sayyida escaped from parental violence and fled to Cairo. She talks of the dangers living on the streets poses and that once someone tried to kidnap her. Single mother Fatma is suicidal and frequently tries to kill herself by cutting her wrists. Both girls attend a drop-in centre run by a local NGO during the day. At night-time however, when they face continuous harassment and abuse, they have no support and protection.

There are an estimated half a million street children in Egypt many of whom face violence on the streets.

To watch the short film see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=76577>

New Publications – UK

A Right to Exist – A Paper Looking at the Eradication of Specialist Services to BAMER Women and Children Fleeing Violence – Experiences of BAMER Refugees

**Anjum Mouj
Imkaan, 2008**

Imkaan is a national organisation providing services for Black, Asian minority ethnic and refugee women (BAMER) and children who experience domestic violence and abuse. This paper argues current funding mechanisms are not recognising or understanding the need for specialist care and support for BAMER women.

This research paper highlights recent trends within the delivery of services and safe spaces for BAMER women within the UK. The paper discusses the affects of funding cuts, closures, take-overs and mergers and argues that specialist services are being lost.

The paper reviews the impact of the Supporting People's (SP) policy, introduced in 2003 and the National People's Supporting Strategy implemented by the Department for Communities and Local Government (2007). The paper outlines how these initiatives have altered the priorities and indicators with regard to domestic violence, consequently leaving the domestic violence sector with a precarious future. The paper also reports a level of confusion from SP officials and with SP processes that are resulting in the closure of essential services.

The paper outlines key case studies that have resulted in refuge, therapeutic and outreach services being cut, thus having a detrimental impact on BAMER women. The paper concludes with various policy and practical recommendations.

For full research paper see:

<http://www.imkaan.org.uk/dispatch/depot/papers/A%20Right%20to%20Exist%206.2.08.doc>

New Publications – International

Asylum Law and Female Genital Mutilation: Recent developments CRS Report for Congress

**Yule Kim
Legislative Attorney,
America Law Division
February 2008**

This research paper looks at how the federal courts and Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) in America classify Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as a form of persecution. The paper discusses legal arguments that can be applied for successful asylum claims. The paper covers prior case law and looks at women as a social groups and FGM as past and future persecution.

The recent developments within this area of law in America have resulted in contrary views between the federal courts and the BIA. The research demonstrates these differences with regard to women who have experienced FGM. The federal courts believe that women who have experienced FGM still have a basis for a well founded fear of persecution however, the BIA believe that if they have experienced FGM, they will not be persecuted again. The paper outlines that for the BIA "showing a past persecution must create a well-founded fear of identical future persecution". It is for this reason, the paper argues that the majority of women who have experienced FGM are likely to have their asylum claim rejected.

For full research report see:
<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RS22810.pdf>

Taking Stock: Afghanistan Women and Girls – Seven Years On

**Womankind Worldwide
February 2008**

Womankind Worldwide have published the fourth edition of their *Afghanistan women and girls* series. This report explores the situation for women and girls in Afghanistan seven years after the fall of the Taliban regime.

The report highlights that Afghanistan is still one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a woman, with some of the world's highest maternal mortality, domestic violence and suicides rates. The report states that 60% of marriages are forced and many women are murdered without justice and receive little protection from violence. In addition, women's basic needs are not met and progress towards protecting women's human rights has been unacceptably slow.

The report provides background information and statistics on a range of issues including violence against women; child marriage and forced marriage; trafficking, forced prostitution and abduction; rape and sexual violence.

The research report makes 50 key recommendations to: tackle violence against women, improve access to public health, education services and safe public spaces, prevent trafficking, address women's security and empower women.

Womankind Worldwide calls on the Afghanistan government to uphold its international commitments to women and for the international community to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325. This would ensure women in conflict zones are offered protection and their role in the peace process and their human rights are recognised.

For full research report see:

<http://www.womankind.org.uk/upload/Womankind%20Taking%20Stock%20-%20Spring%202008.pdf>

A Comprehensive Programme Addressing HIV/AIDS and Gender Based Violence

**MS Jansen van Rensburg
Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS Research Alliance (SAHARA)**

This research examines the impact of service provision programme targeted at women living with HIV/AIDS and who have experienced gender based violence in South Africa. The report highlights that nearly 40% of women aged between 20-29 in South Africa are HIV positive. In addition, gender based violence is reported to be extremely high in South Africa with one in every two women at risk of being raped in their lifetime, one in four women to be in an abusive relationship and a woman is killed by her partner every six days.

The report discusses how there is no noticeable decrease in domestic violence since the introduction of the Domestic Violence Act 1999. This is believed to be largely due to lack of enforcement, inadequate legal systems and lack of awareness of the Act by women. The report also states that women experience difficulties in disclosing their HIV status and this is compounded if they have experienced gender based violence where there is little awareness, understanding and specialist services.

The report outlines key findings and specific statistics on knowledge and attitudes of gender based violence, HIV/AIDS, support and care and relationships and sexual behaviour.

For full research report see:

<http://www.sahara.org.za/index.php/View-document-details/296-A-comprehensive-programme-addressing-HIV-AIDS-and-gender-based-violence.html>

Combating Child Sex Tourism

ECPAT International February 2008

ECPAT International has produced a report covering key questions and answers in the field of child sex tourism. The report covers issues around child trafficking, child pornography and child marriage and outlines a regional overview across the Americas, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe and the CIS.

The report summarises international treaties and legislation that should be in place to protect children. The report also recommends mechanisms and codes of conduct to combat the commercial and sexual exploitation of children.

For full report see:

http://www.ecpat.net/EI/PDF/CST/CST_FAQ_ENG.pdf

Events

Celebrating international women's day – 8th March

A full range of events, activities, workshops, performances and discussions to celebrate international women's day across the UK can be found at:

<http://iwd2008.wordpress.com/>

Women in Iran Under Oppression Saturday 8th March 14.30-17.00, Norfolk Place, London

This free event will launch a year-long programme of celebrations to mark the courage and achievements of women in Iran living under oppression. Roya Kashefi, Human Rights Committee ACI will present 'the situation of women in Iran today.' The afternoon will also consist of poetry

readings, panel discussions and music performances.

For further information see:

<http://www.aciiran.com/iwd.htm>

or contact Roya Kashefi, telephone: +44 (0) 20 7328 8415

Million Women Rise Collective Demonstration 8th March, Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square, London

The Million Women Rise coalition is organising a demonstration to mark International Women's Day. The demonstration is to promote women's right to live free from violence and/or fear of violence. The day will include a march and several speakers.

Million Women Rise believe violence against women is a global pandemic. Women and girls of all ages, from all classes, from all ethnic backgrounds, regardless of their immigration status, their sexuality or their disability, experience it. Violence devastates the lives of women, their families, and their communities. It also threatens to undermine efforts to bring about long lasting and peaceful development. This campaign and demonstration is to strive to end violence against women internationally and for female emancipation and liberty.

For further information see:

<http://www.millionwomenrise.com/>

or contact: millionwomenrise@gmail.com
telephone: 07862 113308

The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo

**Lisa Jackson, 2007, documentary
Winner of the Jury Prize, Sundance Film
Festival 2008**

**Monday 17 March 18.30, Ritzy Cinema,
Brixton, London SW2**

**Wednesday 19 March 18.30, ICA
Cinema, The Mall, London SW1Y**

The Human Rights Watch film festival in London will show the UK premiere of *The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo*

Shot in the war zones of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the film sensitively yet unflinchingly brings to light the plight of women and girls caught in that country's intractable conflicts. A survivor of rape herself, Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Lisa Jackson travels through the DRC to understand what is happening and why. The filmmaker will be present at both performances.

For further information and for other film listings see:

<http://www.hrw.org/iff/2008/london/films.html#8>

Asylum Rights Watch Update

In June 2007 Asylum Aid launched its Asylum Rights Watch survey in order to collect testimonies of asylum seekers' in the UK. The web-based survey allows people to share their experiences of the UK's asylum system with us.

A summary report of the submissions received by the Asylum Rights Watch project can be accessed at:
www.asylumaid.org.uk/publications.php?id=67.

From the information gathered we also compiled a supplementary submission to the Independent Asylum Commission

Asylum Rights Watch is an ongoing project and we are continually seeking information about your experiences of the asylum system in the UK. Visitors can make as many submissions as they like and we welcome further contributions.

The Asylum Rights Watch page is accessible from our homepage: www.asylumaid.org.uk. Any individual who has experiences of the UK's treatment of asylum seekers is encouraged to use the Asylum Rights Watch survey. We are particularly keen to hear from those who may come into contact with the asylum system through their work, such as healthcare professionals, teachers and social workers.

The information we receive will add to evidence we gather from our own casework services, and will help us to document the effects of recent asylum policies. This information will be used to strengthen our existing lobbying, research and campaigns work and identify priorities for future work.

All submissions sent before the end of April 2008 will be considered for a dossier of evidence that is being compiled and will be launched in May 2008.

For more information about Asylum Rights Watch, or if you would like to help publicise this project, please contact:
carmelo@asylumaid.org.uk

women's asylum news

Produced by RWRP (for more information on this issue, please contact: Claire Bennett)
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Asylum Aid provides free legal advice and representation to asylum-seekers and refugees, and campaigns for their rights. We rely on the generosity of individuals to help us continue our work. Your support would be greatly appreciated.

A gift of just £5 each month could support our free legal advice line.

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