

women's asylum news

refugee women's resource project @ asylumaid

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Please forward any information that you would like to include in the next edition of WAN to Claireb@asylumaid.org.uk by the 2nd May 2008.

Two Significant Asylum Aid Cases

Home Office Appeals: Dubious Grounds

Asylum Aid has recently represented two appeal cases that were both successful in the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT) court of appeal but then contested and appealed by the Home Office. These cases both highlight significant issues regarding the types of cases the Home Office are actively pursuing to appeal and the grounds on which the courts are granting the Home Office further appeals.

For both cases, the Immigration Judges concluded after the Home Office appeal that "the original Tribunal did not make a material error of law and the original determination ...shall stand". Moreover, this process raises major concerns in relation to the emotional and psychological impact this has on appellants whose successful appeals are contested by the Home Office.

This article will briefly outline two recent Asylum Aid cases. Both cases are very different however raise interesting issues regarding the interpretation of law. This article will discuss the Home Office appeal grounds, legal arguments used to maintain the original decision and key areas of concern.

Case details

Case A

Appellant A is a single young female, with no family, who was a minor at the time of her appeal. Her asylum claim was based on religious persecution in India.

The appellant fled to the UK with her mother in 2006. Her father had been murdered and her family had been targeted due to their minority religious faith in a rural village in India. On attempting to leave, the appellant was kidnapped and attacked by gangs of the majority faith. After escaping she reported the incident to the police who took no action. Upon arrival in the UK the mother claimed asylum and was refused. Upon being notified she had no further avenues for appeal, the mother absconded and the appellant claimed asylum in her own right.

The Home Office originally refused the appellant's claim for asylum, however in August 2007 the appellant's appeal was successful and she was granted refugee status. The Home Office then appeal this decision citing five apparent errors in law. The Court permitted these grounds and a reconsideration hearing to review the decision took place five months later.

The Home Office assertions included the Immigration Judge not applying Section 8¹ and not taking into consideration relevant Country Guidance Cases on India. Crucially, the Home Office also argued that although the appellant was a minor at the time of her hearing, she would be returned as an adult and therefore issues of return should have been assessed as if she were an adult.

¹ Section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Act (Treatment of Claimants) 2004 makes clear that certain behaviour by applicants can be viewed by the Home Office or the Court as affecting the truthfulness and credibility of their case e.g. making an asylum claim late

Following the reconsideration hearing, the Immigration Judge rejected the Home Office accusation that Section 8 should have been applied in the original determination. He stated this was not applied because, in his opinion "neither of the sub sections applied to this appellant andeven if it had of been, ...it could not have made any material difference to the assessment of the appellant's credibility" and consequently amounted to "no material error of law." With regard to applying relevant Country Guidance cases, the Immigration Judge agreed with the appellant's legal representative that it was inappropriate to rely on a case of an adult male in India, as the circumstances for a young, single woman with no family connections would be "significantly worse." The Immigration Judge quoted the original Tribunal by saying that if returned, "the reality is that [the appellant] would be destitute, without accommodation, without housing and with no one to turn to. The Tribunal has little doubt that it would be unduly harsh to relocate in India."

The Immigration Judge then dismissed Home Office assertions regarding the age at which the appellant would be returned to India. He stated "it is clear that an asylum claim must be considered as at the date of the hearing²... [therefore] the respondents grounds on the date of the appellant's age is not arguable".

The Immigration Judge concluded that "in all the circumstances there was no material error of law in the determination and the original determination shall stand."

Case B

Case B concerns a mother and her child from Kenya who are both HIV positive. The mother's initial leave to remain

² Ravichandran [1996] Imm AR97 and Saad, Diriye and Osorio [2002] Imm AR 471

application on human rights grounds was rejected however an appeal was submitted based on her son's specific medical condition. The son has a rare protein deficiency associated with HIV and the technology to assess and monitor his condition is only available in the developing world. A medical expert who was a witness for the 1st stage appeal confirmed the "exceptionality" of the condition and the "exceptionality of the treatment required." She commented "the appellant's son had a prospect of survival measured in decades with the right treatment in the UK." This treatment was not available anywhere in Kenya and any return would be "critical to his life expectancy". The Judge referred to the House of Lords decision in N³ and argued the child's "exceptionality lies not in the extreme condition and progress of the illness, but in the uniqueness and necessity of the particular treatment. This ...counters the floodgate argument since ...there are so few, if any other people who suffer from this particular problem."

Based on the exceptionality of the son's medical condition, the appellant and her son were granted leave to remain under Article 3 European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) in October 2007. The Home Office however applied to have this decision revoked and reconsidered and their application was granted. The Home Office asserted that "the judge materially misdirected himself in law and he failed to apply the correct legal ratio as set out in N." According to the Home Office representative, "the appellant's son was not in the last stages of a terminal illness; he was in exactly the same position as the appellant in N." This argument implied the impending terminal condition of the son had to be proven in order to meet the threshold of Article 3 ECHR. The Home Office stated: "although it might be said to be a very harsh test, the reasoning of the Immigration Judge was not adequate."

³ N V SSHD [2005] UKHL 31

In March 2008, after being presented with the Home Office arguments during the reconsideration, the Immigration Judge concluded that the decision of the Immigration Judge in the first hearing was "sustainable." She referred back to the medical evidence exploring the health risks to the son and the impact his mother's deteriorating HIV condition would also have upon him. She confirmed, "Having considered the medical evidence and specialist treatment .. required, I have reached the conclusion that this was a decision open to the Immigration Judge and that he has in fact applied the test in N correctly". Therefore to conclude "the original Tribunal did not make a material error of law and the original determination of the appeal shall stand."

Both of these cases raise important issues in terms of the legal basis on which the Home Office are appealing decisions and being granted permission for reconsiderations.

Although the right to appeal is fundamental within the legal system, the issue the two cases above highlight is on what grounds the Home Office are pursuing and being granted reconsiderations. For both cases, the Home Office reasoning was dismissed and the initial Judge's findings held as having no error in law.

The frequency and extent of Home Office appeals held on questionable grounds is not known. Legal representatives and people working within the asylum sector should however monitor this situation more closely. This is not only because it raises questions about the Home Office and Court's appeals criteria and appropriate use of public funds but also, importantly, the effect on applicants. The additional stress and uncertainty that having a positive decision revoked and going through another hearing has on

applicants is considerable, especially for those who are vulnerable.

Sector Update

The Independent Asylum Commission launches interim findings

Since October 2006 the Independent Asylum Commission has been gathering evidence from across the UK as part of an independent review of the asylum system. Evidence was submitted through a range of public hearings, calls for written evidence, focus groups, a *Citizen Speak* consultation, video submissions and key stakeholder interviews.

The Interim findings report *'Fit For Purpose Yet?',* assesses whether the UK asylum system is effectively providing sanctuary and protection to people who need it. The report is divided into three main areas:

- Who needs sanctuary – includes an overview of the asylum process including initial decisions, the New Asylum Model, the appeals process, legal aid and accessing legal support
- How people who seek sanctuary are treated – includes application procedures and exclusions, use of detention and the detained fast track process (DFT) and treatment of people with additional vulnerabilities
- What happens to people who are refused sanctuary – includes support for refused asylum seekers, destitution and enforced and voluntary returns

The report highlights several key issues women asylum seekers face as they go through the asylum process in the UK. A specific section discusses the detention of children and families and

evidence around the detention of women, especially the physical and mental impact this has on pregnant women and women with small children. In addition, the report raises issues regarding the detention of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people who experience levels of homophobia in detention centres. Specific issues regarding the male bias within the asylum system and the impact this has on women's asylum claims are also discussed.

The Independent Asylum Commission concludes that the treatment of asylum seekers falls 'seriously below the standard of a civilised society'

This is the first of four reports. Further reports will be published in May, June and July and will cover a range of recommendations.

The full *'Fit For Purpose Yet? The Independent Asylum Commissions Interim Findings'* is available at:
<http://www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk/>

UK News

Illegal detention results in compensation

The case of a female asylum seeker who was illegally detained in the UK has resulted in a successful compensation claim. The High Court of Justice has ruled that the case highlights three major failings: the breaching of detention centre rules, contravening guidelines for victims of torture and access to a fair hearing.

The case involves a female asylum seeker who arrived in the UK and claimed asylum on the same day in December 2006. After being transferred to Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre under the Detained Fast Track (DFT) programme,

the woman was not given a medical examination within 24 hours, as is the policy. During her in-depth interviews about her asylum claim, she revealed she was tortured in her native Cameroon and disclosed the types of torture and beatings she received. Under existing guidelines all people whose claims are based on torture should be referred to the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture for further medical assessments and to ascertain whether there is evidence to support their claim. This did not happen and within 14 days of her arrival in the UK, the woman's asylum claim was rejected.

After this decision and an unsuccessful appeal, the woman also disclosed that along with the torture, she was raped whilst in detention in Cameroon. In April 2007 the woman had her first examination by the Medical Foundation who substantiated her claims and agreed that her physical scarring was consistent with her descriptions of torture. Upon receipt of the Medical Foundation report, the solicitor representing the claimant requested her release from detention. This did not happen. The Home Office rejected the medical report as grounds for a fresh claim and dismissed the medical assessment as "very selective." The woman continued to be detained for a further two months until a judicial review was granted.

In total, the woman was detained for six months and one day. The High Court of Justice ruling stated that the appellant should have been medically assessed within 24 hours of arrival in Yarl's Wood, which would have indicated injuries consistent with torture and would have resulted in a much earlier release from detention. The Judge also criticised the Home Office decision-making and their dismissal of the Medical Foundations report stating it was "not properly or rationally reasoned and that this manifest defect of reasoning on such a significant

issue invalidated the defendant's conclusions that there was no reasonable prospect of the claimant succeeding before an asylum Adjudicator".

The female asylum seeker has been granted £15,000 in compensation for being illegally detained. This case may have significant implications for other asylum seekers. A spokeswoman for Women Against Rape, a charity who worked closely with the woman during this process stated: "women, and often their children, suffer months imprisoned in terrible circumstances and many are sent back to the countries they fled, often never having had the help they needed to report rape, or to gather evidence needed to challenge the routine dismissal of rape as grounds for asylum."

For full article see:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/mar/10/immigration.immigrationpolicy>

Returns to Zimbabwe

The Independent reports on recent developments that affect more than 1000 asylum seekers from Zimbabwe. The article highlights the contradiction between the UK government's 'tough stance' on Zimbabwe at the same time as it embarks on a new programme to return 'failed' Zimbabwean asylum seekers.

The Independent reveals letters have been sent from the Home Office to over 1000 'failed' asylum seekers from Zimbabwe stating:

"Your claim for asylum has been refused...I am now writing to make sure that you know that the Border & Immigration Agency (BIA) is expecting shortly to be able to enforce returns to Zimbabwe. The Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT) has now found that there is no general risk on return for failed asylum seekers.....You have exhausted your rights of appeal

and have no other basis of stay in the UK. You should now make plans to return home"

MP's including Chris Huhne, Dianne Abbott and Kate Hoey have criticised this move. Donna Covery, Chief Executive of the Refugee Council states:

"we do not think it is morally acceptable for the Government to force people to return to Zimbabwe. There has been no improvement in the human rights situation there, which remains dire.... We know most Zimbabweans want to return when it is safe and contribute to rebuilding their country. We should be offering them a form of temporary status here allowing them to work and retain their skills so they're fully equipped when the situation has improved."

The article also covers the situation of a female asylum seeker from Zimbabwe who has recently received her letter from the Home Office. Rosa (pseudonym), together with her husband were both active MDC members. ZANU-PF gangs frequently visited them and in 2001 became increasingly violent. Rosa's husband disappeared, and she has not heard from him since October 2001. Around the same time, the gang returned and raped her. After receiving several death threats she fled to the UK, having to leave her children with her mother in law. Since 2006, her mother-in-law has also disappeared and Rosa managed to get her children to the UK. She states: *"When I got the letter I couldn't believe it. If I go back to Zimbabwe they'll kill me. The Home Office is just being cruel. Instead of helping people like me they are making our lives harder"*.

For full article see:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/britains-refugee-shame-796606.html>

UK conferences & courses

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 the brochure.

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

Upcoming courses include:

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

Finding Refuge: gender-based violence and seeking Asylum in the UK 30th April, Leeds

This half-day course will focus on the needs of asylum-seeking women who experience gender-based violence. The course explores the legal asylum procedure and gives participants an overview of the law that determines who should be granted asylum or human rights protection and how their claim is determined.

The training will cover:

- The legal framework for protection including: the 1951 Refugee Convention, the European Convention on Human Rights and the EU Qualification Directive
- Applying for asylum in the UK including: the New Asylum Model and Legacy Cases
- Financial support throughout the process
- The different types of protection given, refusal and appeals

Upcoming conferences in the UK include:

Violence Against Women: Histories, Methodologies, Activism and Research University of York

30th May 2007, York

The Centre for Women's Studies have organised this one-day conference to discuss current debates and research in the field of violence against women. The conference will cover issues relating to domestic violence, rape in war and war crimes, men and violence and representation of violence.

Plenary discussions will include:

- Three decades of well founded fear: where are we now in measuring violence against women

- Gender violence and conflict: revisiting violence and the social control of women
- Exploring emotion work and domestically abusive relationships
- Adjudicating sexual violence in armed conflict: The international criminal court
- Studying media in the context of violence against women

Confirmed speakers include: Prof Catherine Donovan, Prof Jill Radford, Prof. Liz Kelly, Prof. Jeff Hearn, Prof. Marianne Hester and Julie Bindel (journalist and activist)

For further information including detailed programme and costs see:

<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/cws/gsp/violenceconf.htm>

International News

Iraq: violence against women

The BBC report that since 2003 violence, abuse and discrimination against women in Iraq has become a 'national crisis.' The article presents findings from research conducted by an international NGO, 'Women for Women International' who surveyed 1500 women in Iraq. The research reveals that for two-thirds of the women questioned, violence against them had increased since 2003.

The findings also reveal that 76% of respondents said that girls in their family were no longer attending school and 68% of women described their abilities to get jobs as "bad." When asked what had contributed to the reported deterioration of women's conditions and rights, the most common answer was 'less respect for women than previously existed' and 'women are viewed as possessions'. Moreover, 44% of women interviewed stated that they did not believe that

decision-makers consider the concerns of women.

For full article see:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7282064.stm

For the Women for Women International research report:

'Iraq Country Report 2008: Amplifying the Voices of Women in Iraq' see:

<http://www.womenforwomen.org/iraqzainab.html>

Afghanistan: Rise in violence against women

The UN Population Fund in Afghanistan (UNFPA) has reported a 40% rise in physical violence against women and girls since March 2007. UNFPA indicate that this sudden rise in statistics could indicate more women are reporting violence than before, especially domestic abuse. However, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) believe factors such as "worsening insecurity...a growing culture of criminal impunity, weak law enforcement institutions [and] poverty.. [contribute] to increasing violence against women, such as rape and torture - and oppression". Suraya Subhrang, a commissioner on the rights of women at AIHRC said "despite over six years of international rhetoric about Afghan women's emancipation and development, a real and tangible change has not touched the lives of millions of women in this country."

Statistics also reveal there is a noticeable increase in the number of rapes, sexual violence, female suicides and self-immolation. Alongside gender-based violence, women also suffer and die from a severe lack of access to health services especially during and after pregnancy. At least 24,000 women die each year in Afghanistan through childbirth and diseases. UNFPA statistics reveal 70% of women in Afghanistan do not receive any medical attention during pregnancy, 40%

of women do not have any access to obstetric care and 48% of women have iron deficiency.

For full article see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=77156>

Pakistan: Domestic violence

IRIN report on the high prevalence of domestic violence experienced by many women living in Pakistan. The article outlines how many women see physical and verbal abuse by their husbands as a normal part of married life. Domestic violence is 'endemic' in Pakistan with research conducted by Human Rights Watch [1999] revealing up to 90% of women had experienced it. Nine years since this report was published, there is little evidence that implies the situation has changed for married women in Pakistan. Asma Jahangir, a lawyer, believes the regularity of domestic violence is linked to the "lack of empowerment of women in our society". Reinforcing the low social status of women in Pakistan are several laws that openly discriminate against women including the right to inherit property and traditions such as 'vani' where a woman is handed over for marriage to settle disputes.

The article argues that awareness about domestic violence has risen, as the issue has been discussed at provincial and national assemblies and the Ministry for Women's Development has been running 10 crisis centres in cities. However the Protection Against Domestic Violence of Women and Children Act, that was drawn up early 2007 is still to be passed.

In 2006, the Journal of Pakistan Medical Association published research that involved interviewing 300 women. 80% reported they had experienced some form of domestic violence by their husbands. Some women reported horrendously violent attacks. The Progressive Women's Association believe up to 4000 women

each year are attacked and burned by their husband or their in-laws. A recent high profile case of a mother of two, who aged 22 was severely burnt in an acid attack by her husband raises several issues regarding the prevalence and support available to women. I.A.Rehman, director of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan states: "such cases are not unusual in our society." The limited awareness of domestic violence, unfair legislative practices and a severe lack of 'safe houses' and shelters compounds the situation for women.

For full article see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=77226>

Kenya: Displaced women still face threat of sexual violence

IRIN report the risk of rape and sexual violence is still extremely high for women and girls displaced since Kenya's post election crisis. Three agencies (UN Population Fund (UNPF), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Christian Children's Fund (CCF) recently conducted an assessment that reveals the extent to which women fear sexual violence and attacks in the displaced persons camps. The women raised several anxieties, primarily around insecure sleeping arrangements including sleeping outside or under a tent, and vulnerabilities posed by the design of the camps including lighting, water and sanitation services. The assessment also revealed that the camps do not provide adequate security checks resulting in men from outside the camps often entering the camps unchecked.

The agencies involved in the assessment reported that statistics on incidents of sexual assault and violence were difficult to confirm, however their evidence suggested sexual violence has increased and was being used as a mechanism to terrorise families. The agencies conclude that "perpetrators are exploiting the conflict by committing sexual violence with

impunity, and efforts to protect or respond to the needs of women and girls are remarkably insufficient." A series of actions to help eliminate gender-based violence in displaced/refugee camps have been recommended by the above agencies.

For full article see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=77199>

Yemen: Early and forced marriage common for young girls

IRIN report on the extensive nature and impact of early marriage for young girls in Yemen. The article quotes recent research by Save the Children Sweden, who analysed gender-based violence in Lebanon, Palestine and Yemen.

This article states some families are heavily affected by poverty and consequently agree to marry their daughters young to alleviate financial burdens. In addition, many families believe agreeing for their daughters to marry at such a young age will protect the daughter and the family's honour. The research argues however that in reality, the opposite occurs as there is a "strong relationship between early marriage and domestic violence."

The article argues young marriages and conditions for young girls contribute to Yemen being positioned as one of the least developed countries in the world for mothers, according to the 'Mothers Index 2007'.⁴ Yemen is also slipping in the UNDP Human Development Index.⁵ According to Suha Bashren, a policy and campaign officer from Oxfam "early marriage [has] a negative impact on development....When girls are married,

⁴ Of 33 least developed countries, Yemen is ranked 31, positioning it as one of the worst countries for a mother.

⁵ Yemen slipped from 148 to 150 in the UNDP HDI 2007

they face serious physical and psychological problems because their minds and bodies are not developed enough for them to become wives and mothers. In addition, the lack of education in reproductive health causes huge problems since girls do not get the support on how to negotiate with their husbands about their sexual life and how many children they would like to have." Similarly, Dr Husnia al-Kaderi, Director of Sanaa University's Gender-Development Research and Studies Centre believes "When they get married, girls are expected to quit school and engage in motherly activities. This is the reason why illiteracy among Yemeni women is more than 70 percent."

For full article see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=77454>

For full research report:

'Gender Based Sexual Violence against Teenage Girls in the Middle East: A comparative situation analysis of honour violence, early marriages and sexual abuse in Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Yemen'

Save the Children, Sweden see:

<http://www.scsmena.org/publication.htm>

DRC: Rape continues to go unpunished

Titinga Frederic Pacere, an independent UN human rights expert has revealed that rape and sexual abuse is "rampant in the Democratic Republic of Congo, but the majority of perpetrators, especially in the 'no law' zones go unpunished." Statistics reveal that between 2005 –2007 14, 200 women registered rapes in South Kivu province, however only 287 were taken to court. Pacere's assessment calls for an international jurisdiction for the DRC as state authority is not reaching all areas and insecurity dominates.

NGOs working on the ground, including Oxfam GB, report that rape and sexual slavery is a "systematic weapon of war" in the DRC and remains a daily threat for women. Their work indicates the high frequency of this abuse is contributing to further risks and increased prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Moreover, Yakin Erturk, special rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Council believes that raping women and sexual violence is "perceived as normal by local communities".

In October 2007 John Holmes, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordination wrote:

"Despite many warnings, nothing quite prepared me for what I heard last month from survivors of a sexual violence so brutal it staggers the imagination and mocked my notions of human decency...Sexual violence has been a particularly awful - and shockingly common - feature of the conflict in Congo."

For full article see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=77340>

In addition, a short film produced for Channel 4 News covered the situation in Kivu province. The film *'Horror of Congo's Forgotten War'* documents how gang rape is the most common weapon of war. The programme explores issues of sexual violence and rape of women and children, including a girl as young as two. The programme covers the circumstances of a woman who was kidnapped and held in sexual slavery for two years and is now incontinent due to the abuse. The film also talks to a woman whose husband abandoned her after she was gang raped, raising issues of how women are ostracised from families and communities.

To watch: ***'Horror of Congo's Forgotten War'*** online see:

http://www.channel4.com/news/articles/politics/international_politics/horror+of+congos+forgotten+war/1881047

New Publications – International

“I am the lowest end of all”: Rural women with HIV face human rights abuses in South Africa

Amnesty International
March 2008
AI Index AFR 53/001/2008

This research report explores issues HIV positive women in rural areas of South Africa face due to discrimination based on their gender and HIV status.

The report reflects on previous work conducted by Amnesty International on this issue in 2006 and 2007 and analyses patterns of abuses committed against women at risk of, or living with HIV. The research includes the testimonies of 37 women who have all to some extent experienced violence, low social status, stigma and periods of hunger.

The report also reveals that the scale of violence against women in South Africa is persistently high and places women at an increased risk of contracting HIV. The research covers the damaging risks and long-term psychological effects sexual and gender-based violence have on women, alongside the discrimination faced by women who are HIV positive.

The disclosures of the women interviewed indicate that many rural women living with HIV are susceptible to sexual and physical violence. Many women felt that they had been unable to protect themselves against HIV as merely suggesting the use of a condom resulted in violent attacks and forced intercourse by their partners.

The report concludes with a range of recommendations to address economic and social inequalities that affect women. These include improved access to health services in rural areas, the prevention of gender-based violence and ensuring women's access to civil and criminal remedies with regard to violence against women.

For full research report see:
<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=country&docid=47e0cd192&skip=∓coi=ZAF>

‘UNHCR Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls’ **UNHCR** **2008**

The UNHCR have published this handbook as a replacement to the 1991 *UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women*. The handbook refers to all women and girls who are: asylum seekers; refugees; internally displaced; stateless or have integrated into new communities. The handbook outlines legal principles, current challenges and the responsibilities of governments and agencies working in the field of protecting women and girls.

The report covers: the effects of forced displacement on women and girls; the promotion of community and rights based approaches; how to identify, prevent and respond to risks and international and regional legal frameworks. The largest chapter explores the rights of women and girls and how to ensure their protection. This specific chapter explores current gaps, challenges and provides information on applying legal standards and guidelines.

This handbook provides practical guidance for people and agencies working with women and girls.

For full report see:

<http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/47cfae612.html>

'Safe Schools: Every Girl's Right'

Amnesty International

March 2008

AI Index: ACT 77/001/2008

This research report published as part of the 'stop violence against women' campaign explores the vulnerabilities and abuses girls encounter in and around school in an international context. The research demonstrates that gender-based violence is a key area of international concern with regard to the education of girls. The report argues that the high prevalence and continuation of violence against girls within and around school acts as a barrier to their education and is needlessly traumatising girls.

The research highlights the types of abuse girls are at risk of including physical, sexual and emotional. The report also discusses how some girls are more susceptible to violence and abuse than others including lesbians, girls from ethnic minorities and disabled girls. The report also assesses key areas where girls are particularly vulnerable to violence and abuse including their journeys to schools, schooling in conflict zones and within schools.

The report concludes with a discussion on international standards and frameworks with regard to the right to education and outlines key steps to stop violence against schoolgirls.

For full research report and associated campaign details see:

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=11222>

'Through the Eyes of a Child: Refugee Children speak about violence - A report on participatory assessment carried out with refugee and returned children in Southern Africa 2005-2007'

UNHCR

March 2008

UNHCR have produced a research report with children living in refugee camps and returnee situations in eight countries in Southern Africa. The research uses a range of participatory assessment techniques and draws upon children's experiences and understanding of violence.

The research indicates the refugee camps are different with regard to size, population mix and services available, however the children identified many similar circumstances and issues. The key concerns children raised during the research include: gender-based violence directed at girls including harassment and rape, forced marriages and pregnancy resulting from rape and high incidences of sexual assault. The report also cites key activities within camps (ie collecting firewood), which expose girls to particular risks of violence and rape.

As part of the participatory assessment children discussed the impact violence had upon their lives and their own recommendations. The report concludes with a 'lessons learnt' section that includes specific considerations and methodological reflections.

For full research report see:

<http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=16605>

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)
Asylum Aid, Club Union House
253-254 Upper Street
London N1 1RY
Tel: 020 7354 9631
Fax: 020 7354 5620
Email: Claireb@asylumaid.org.uk
Website: www.asylumaid.org.uk

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