

women's asylum news

refugee women's resource project @ asylumaid

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Please send any information that you would like to see published in our next edition by 7 March 2006 (see email or postal address on back cover).

Late disclosure not dishonesty, new study suggests¹

To be granted asylum under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the asylum applicant has to show a well-founded fear of being persecuted in his or her country of origin for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. Since there is often little documentary evidence about the asylum seeker, credibility of the individual is key.

Late disclosure, or incidents described in later interviews of which no mention was made in the first, is commonly cited as a reason against an asylum seeker's credibility (see Asylum Aid, 1999). It is understandable that the addition of new information could be seen as evidence against the claimant's honesty; however, this assumption may fail to take into account other reasons for not disclosing at the outset.

The literature on refugees and asylum seekers suggests that a number of factors can influence an individual's

¹ The following article was written by Dr Diana Bögner. We are extremely grateful for her contribution. Dr Bögner completed the study entitled 'What prevents refugees and asylum seekers exposed to violence from disclosing trauma' in 2005 in the context of a doctoral thesis in Clinical Psychology (UCL).

willingness to disclose. A high proportion of asylum seekers have experienced torture and organised violence, which may lead to difficulties of trust in authorities and an attempt to avoid painful memories. Asylum seekers often do not know how much to reveal to British authorities on their arrival and thus conceal important details that would have helped them with their asylum application.

The context in which asylum seekers disclose personal experiences also needs to be considered; interview rooms can be small and bare reminding them of places where they were previously tortured. Furthermore, asylum seekers often come from cultures with different attitudes towards sexuality. Sexual violence and rape are often taboo subjects and can bring about feelings of shame. Women who have been subjected to sexual assault may be shunned by their community and family, should this be revealed, and therefore may not disclose it in their asylum interview. Psychological research has shown that feelings of shame and embarrassment are a common reason for inhibiting disclosure. Many refugees and asylum seekers also suffer from symptoms of post-traumatic stress and depression, and this could potentially impact on their ability to disclose and give a coherent account in their asylum interviews.

Discrepancies in asylum seekers' stories of an event are a common reason for adversely judging their credibility and represent a common reason for refusing asylum claims (see Asylum Aid, 1999).

A study by Herlihy, Scragg and Turner (2002) investigated consistencies in autobiographical memories in refugees who have been granted leave to remain in the UK and thus had no reason to fabricate their stories to influence the asylum process. They found that up to 65 per cent of the details of people's stories changed between interviews, which were between 4 and 30 weeks apart, and they concluded that inconsistent recall does not necessarily imply a lack of credibility. Furthermore, for people with high levels of post-traumatic stress symptoms the number of discrepancies increased with length of time between interviews. Although no causal explanation for the existence of discrepancies was provided, the authors suggested that the emotional state of the refugee at the time of the interview might have affected responses.

Despite the above literature and the reports from many asylum seekers that they find it hard to disclose personal information during Home Office interviews, there are no empirical studies investigating the factors that influence this. A study employing semi-structured interviews with 27 refugees and asylum seekers was therefore conducted by the present author to explore what prevents disclosure of personal information during Home Office interviews. Questions were based on issues that have been identified in the literature as potentially affecting asylum seekers' disclosure, including: personal decisions regarding disclosure (e.g. to what extent they felt they could open up), reactions towards people in authority (e.g. how did the officials make them feel), situation- and context-specific factors (e.g. the setting where

the interview was held) and culture-specific issues (e.g. whether any aspects of their cultural background had an impact on their disclosure). Participants were also assessed on a variety of psychological measures, including symptoms of posttraumatic stress and depression, and feelings of shame.

The majority of participants experienced the Home Office interviews as difficult and reported difficulties with disclosing personal details. Frequently cited reasons for this were negative emotions, such as feeling too traumatised by past experiences, and feelings of shame, especially for people who had been sexually abused. The interview data also showed that disclosure was not just based on personal decisions, but also related to interpersonal-, situational-, contextual-, and culture-specific factors.

For example, the attitude of the Home Office interviewer was an important factor in either facilitating or impeding disclosure. Other factors cited as aiding disclosure included meeting the interviewer before, having a trusting person in the room, explaining the interview procedures, and using female interviewers and interpreters for women, especially when the woman has a history of rape. Although the majority of participants expressed difficulties with disclosure, many expressed a willingness to talk about their experiences at the Home Office interview, but reported that they were not given the opportunity to do so or were prevented by the interviewer. In accordance with other studies, the present study also found a high incident of posttraumatic stress disorder and depression in this sample.

In conclusion, asylum seekers often come from countries where they experienced or witnessed torture and organised violence, which means that they are in a vulnerable position when entering the UK. Disclosure is a difficult issue in this group; many need time to process past traumatic events and to establish a sufficient level of trust and confidence to reveal the potentially painful and shaming details of their experiences.

The current study indicated that disclosure is influenced by a multitude of factors, which can outweigh any individual's requirement to reveal personal details in their Home Office interview, and implies that late or non-disclosure in a Home Office interview does not necessarily signal a lack of honesty. This needs to be taken into account by an immigration system that requires asylum seekers to make a claim shortly after arrival. It is therefore of paramount importance that sensitivity is used when processing refugee claims and that immigration officials are aware of the needs of asylum seekers in order to avoid inducing further distress in this already highly traumatised group.

References

Asylum Aid (1999). *Still no reason at all. Home Office decisions on asylum claims*. London: Asylum Aid.

Herlihy, J., Scragg, P., & Turner, S. (2002). Discrepancies in autobiographical memories – implications for the assessment of asylum seekers: repeated interviews study. *British Medical Journal*, 324, 324-327.

Full results of the study are expected to be published later this year. Diana Bögner is a Clinical Psychologist and can be reached by email at: dianabogner@hotmail.com.

RWRP News

Is the Home Office gender guidance being implemented? Report launch

RWRP launches its latest research on Wednesday 15 March, 6-8pm at the Guardian Newsroom, 60 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3GA. The research's aim was to investigate the extent to which the Home Office Asylum Policy Instruction on gender issues in the asylum claim (gender guidelines) were being implemented by initial decision makers. The research forms part of RWRP's ongoing work to campaign for an asylum system which is gender-sensitive and enables women to access their rights to protection. All welcome.

UK News

Government climbs down on plans to put failed asylum seekers' children into foster care

The government is very likely to announce it will scrap plans to take the children of failed asylum seekers into care if their parents do not agree to voluntary leave the UK. According to *The Observer*, the plans include the withdrawal of all state support which would make it difficult if not impossible for many asylum-seeking parents to look after their children, as they would become destitute as a result.²

The government's 'u-turn' comes after reports that trials in several parts of the country had backfired as families went into hiding rather than seeing their children taken away from them and social workers refused to co-operate. According to a report by Refugee Council and Refugee Action, only one family in the trial was persuaded to go home.³ Discussions are now taking place between the Association of Directors of Social Services and the Home Office to find 'more humane alternatives' including the detention of more families due for deportation and the provision of benefits in exchange for a pledge to co-operate

² Gaby Hinsliff and Jamie Doward, 'U-turn on plan to take babies from refugees', *The Observer*, 29 January 2006 at http://observer.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,1697356,00.html.

³ The report entitled *Inhumane and Ineffective - Section 9 in Practice; A Joint Refugee Council and Refugee Action report on the Section 9 pilot* (January 2006) can be downloaded via weblink: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/publications/pub004.htm#section9.

when families are informed they are going to be deported.

UK events & projects

Refuge without borders: Stop violence against women

This event is organised by Kent Campaign to Defend Asylum Seekers and supported by Legal Action for Women on 1 March 5-7pm at the Boothroyd Room, Portcullis House, London SW1A 2LW (just above Westminster station, opposite Big Ben).⁴

In the week preceding International Women's Day an invitation is issued to MPs to hear from an All Women Platform. Asylum seeking women from Africa, India and Pakistan will speak about their experiences and their campaign to remain in the UK. Women from grassroots and voluntary sector organisations in various capacities will call for international protection for survivors of rape, forced marriage and other violence.

Women with compelling cases for asylum are refused in the UK because the Home Office say they do not meet the criteria for persecution under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Campaigners argue that the true sense of the convention is being distorted by a rigid interpretation of the law which does not recognise gender issues. In fact the Home Office frequently ignores its own gender guidelines. This meeting gives a voice to

⁴ The text below is an edited version of the event's announcement.

the women who refuse to '*go quietly*' and will hopefully provide a way forward for collective action. Your support is very important.

The event is chaired by Diane Abbott MP and speakers include: Begum X, Begum X Must Stay Campaign!, Cristel Amiss, Black Women's Rape Action Project, Debora Singer, Refugee Women's Resource Project at Asylum Aid, Farhat Khan, Farhat and Family Must Stay!, Hannana Siddiqui, Southall Black Sisters, Irene Manzila, All African Women's Group and Samina Altaf, Samina Will Stay Campaign! For more information contact Kate Adams, Kent Campaign to Defend Asylum Seekers, on Tel: 01227 266 858, Mobile 07940964551 Email kadams314@hotmail.com.

Conference: Trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation

More information is now available on this all day conference bringing together social work and community care professionals, NGOs, the police, Home Office, CPS, lawyers and academics with a direct involvement with the victims of trafficking, to learn and exchange insights and information. The aim of the conference is to help raise the profile of trafficking as an issue and to engender a greater understanding of how the system might better serve and identify these vulnerable individuals.

Discussion topics to be covered are:

- What is trafficking?
- The problems in identifying the victims of trafficking
- The need for immediate protection

- Providing more durable protection
- The way forward

Speakers include Debbie Ayiro (Executive Director, Africans Unite Against Child Abuse), Kathryn Cronin & Nadine Finch (Barristers, Garden Court Chambers), Katherine Henderson (Partner, Browell Smith Solicitors), Mike Kaye (Anti-Slavery International), Clare Tudor (Immigration Advisory Service, Glasgow) and Representatives from BAAF, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Police, Home Office, the Poppy Project, RWRP and the Refugee Council.

Date and Venue: Friday 10 March 2006
£85 + VAT Gray's Inn, 8 South Square,
London WC1R 5ET 9.30 am – 5.30pm (6
CPD hours). For more information
contact Naomi on 020 7993 7671 or go
to: www.gardencourtchambers.co.uk.

Photo exhibition on murdered women denied justice

An exhibition of black and white photographs by Carlos Reyes-Manzo on the murders of women in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico and in Guatemala City is taking place at the Oxo Tower Wharf, London South Bank, SE1 9PH, 16 February-5 March 2006 (Open daily 11am-6pm). This exhibition titled '*Impunity*' is part of an international campaign against violence against women. For a decade thousands of women have been abducted, raped, tortured and killed in Guatemala City and Mexico, and the authorities have failed to bring those responsible to justice. For more information and to take action, see Amnesty International at www.amnesty.org.uk/.

HIV/AIDS and law: theory, practice and policy

This is the second of a series of seminars to explore the impact of law and policy on people living with HIV/AIDS. Issues to be explored include:

- The Crown Prosecution Service's Consultation on Prosecutions for Sexual Transmission
- Immigration/Asylum Law and Access to Treatment
- Confidentiality: Clinical, Psychological and Legal Perspectives
- United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS: UK Report on progress.

The seminar is open to all and aims to bring together: people living with HIV/AIDS, academics, lawyers, clinicians, health promoters, voluntary and NGO sector workers, activists. It will take place at Birkbeck College, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1, 10 March 2006, 9.30 am – 5.00pm. The seminar is free but places are limited. To book a place contact d.monk@bbk.ac.uk. For further information and details of speakers visit: www.keele.ac.uk/depts/la/gslgroup/HIVAIDSseries.htm.

Refugee play reading

The V&A Museum Of Childhood in partnership with iceandfire theatre company are presenting a reading from '*I have Before Me a Remarkable Document Given To Me by a Young Lady From Rwanda*' by Sonja Linden followed by a question and answer session with her.

The play tells the story of two people from entirely different worlds who meet at a Refugee Centre in London: Juliette, a young Rwandan asylum seeker, determined to write a book on the genocide that killed her family and Simon, a middle-aged failing novelist, whose job is to help people write. The play follows their funny and touching relationship, inspired by the real life experiences of Rwandan refugees in the UK. The reading will take place on 8 March 2006 at 8pm at the Tab Centre 18-20 Hackney Road, London E2 7NS. Admission is free.

Asylum Support Appeal: Free training for RCOs

Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP) is offering a free two-day training course for refugee community organisations in London so that they can effectively help asylum seekers with their asylum support appeals when their NASS support has been terminated / withheld (please note these are NOT immigration appeals). The training takes place on 24 and 27 February in central Croydon and includes a visit to the Asylum Support Adjudicators. The course is free for RCOs who give advice to asylum seekers and who are members of ASAP (membership is free for RCOs). To find out if you can attend this training, please call ASAP on 020 8684 5873. Also visit: www.asaproject.org.uk.

Transformation - A group for adult women who have experienced violence

Transformation group will provide safety, and opportunities for women who have experienced any form of violence to explore issues around self esteem, self confidence, self care strategies, body image, shame, guilt and introduce them to life coaching techniques to help them move on. Transformation group will have holistic healing principles woven throughout. This group will be facilitated by experienced trauma therapists. Membership to the group will require a commitment of attendance at each session. Sessions start in February/March 2006 and run for eight weeks. Other groups will start later during the year. For information on venue, date and time, please contact Women and Girls Network on Tel: 0207 610 4678.

Free training for refugee women
account3, a women's training and development agency in Bethnal Green, is offering free training worth over £3000 to refugee women applicants to become driving instructors and be financially independent. For further information, please contact Toni Meredith or Angie Jackman, account3, 1-9 Birkbeck Street, London E2 6JY, 020 7739 7720, e-mail: tonim@account3.org.uk or visit online: www.account3.org.uk.

International news

Nigerian woman flees to protect daughters from FGM

A Nigerian woman who lost her appeal for asylum in Ireland seeks protection on the basis of the threat of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) on her daughters.⁵ Pamela Izevbekhai fled Nigeria after her husband's family insisted on the circumcision of two of her daughters. A third daughter had previously bled to death at the age of 18 months after her husband's family demanded the procedure. The family have resorted to attempted kidnap on a number of occasions. Mrs Izevbekhai has not seen her children since December when she went into hiding after her case was refused. In January, after a month living underground, she was arrested by immigration officers before being released from prison few weeks later.

Her case is now at the High Court in Dublin and revolves around the question of why her asylum petition was rejected despite evidence that both she and her children face danger in Nigeria. Her lawyers are arguing that this constitutes gross neglect. The Irish government claims her children are not at risk in their home country.

But Izevbekhai and her supporters say the decision was reached on the basis of inadequate country of origin information and misleading reports on female genital mutilation that have since been revised.

⁵ Women's eNews, FGM Leads Nigerian to Plea for Daughters' Asylum, 27 January 2006, at www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/2615.

Girl who killed in defence against rape sentenced to death in Iran

According to Amnesty International 18 year old Nazanin has been sentenced to death for murdering one of three attackers who were attempting to rape her and her 16-year-old niece. Nazanin was 17 at the time of the incident. She was sentenced by a criminal court after she reportedly admitted repeatedly stabbing the man to death. Her sentence is subject to review at the Court of Appeal. Amnesty reports that another child offender, sentenced to death for a murder which she denies committing, had her sentence upheld by the Supreme Court.

In 2005 Amnesty recorded eight executions of child offenders. There have been at least 18 executions of child offenders since 1990. This is in stark violation of Iran's commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to which it is signatory. Amnesty reports that an Iranian judiciary spokesperson stated that '*qisas*' (retribution – the sentence given where defendants are found guilty of murder) were a private matter, not a state matter.

In 2005, Philip Alston, the United Nations Human Rights Commission's Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, commented:

'At a time when virtually every other country in the world has firmly and clearly renounced the execution of people for crimes they committed as children, the Iranian approach is

*particularly unacceptable... It is all the more surprising because the obligation to refrain from such executions is not only clear and incontrovertible, but the Government of Iran has itself stated that it will cease this practice.*⁶

Benin adopts anti-trafficking law

The new law, which was unanimously adopted by the National Assembly of Benin on 30 January 2006, provides a clear definition of child trafficking which it also expressly forbids. Those charged with the crime could face a sentence ranging from 10 to 20 years of imprisonment, and a life-time prison sentence in case of aggravating circumstances, such as acts of violence and assaults, deprivation of food and care, or rape. The law also stipulates that employers of child victims of trafficking risk a fine ranging from 760 to 7 600 euros and a prison sentence of six to 24 months.

According to UNICEF, the adoption of the law follows previous steps taken by the country to fight child trafficking: In June 2005, Benin signed a bilateral agreement of cooperation with neighbouring Nigeria to *'prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons with emphasis on trafficking in women and children.'* Benin subsequently signed a multilateral agreement between nine West African countries a month later. 200,000 children are estimated to be victims of child trafficking every year in West Africa.

⁶ Amnesty International, Iran: Amnesty International calls for end to death penalty for child offenders, 16 January 2006, <http://amnesty-news.c.topica.com/maaeoQAabnyS8ce3IxWb>.

UNICEF hopes that the government will promote the law at the soonest opportunity. The international organisation said it will support its dissemination and translation into local languages.

Malaysia: Family law Bill unjust to Muslim women

The Malaysian government has held off adopting its controversial Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories) (Amendment) Bill 2005, in response to wide protest from women's groups, faith groups and NGOs throughout Malaysia. Women Living Under Muslim Laws who headed a campaign to protest against this unjust Bill have had unprecedented support and considers the Malaysian government's announcement a historic victory.⁷ Protestors argue that its amendments are extremely damaging to women, and were passed in absence of transparency and in mockery of the democratic process.

The five clauses that were objected to make polygamy easier (by changing the existing condition from *'just and necessary'* to *'just or necessary'*; increase a husband's power to divorce whilst his unilateral right to divorce remains intact (*'anywhere, anytime, without reason, and even through SMS'*); enable a husband to prevent a wife or former wife to dispose of property to protect his financial claim on the her property; remove the husband's

⁷ Women Living Under Muslim laws, *Malaysia: Family law bill unjust to Malaysian Muslim women*, 16 January 2006, [www.wluml.org/english/actionsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[156\]=i-156-507410](http://www.wluml.org/english/actionsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[156]=i-156-507410), retrieved 30 January 2006

responsibility for maintenance in case of polygamy or divorce whilst still enabling him to claim shared properties (*'harta sepencarian'*).

However the clauses are still valid in 11 remaining states in the federation of Malaysia as they have already adopted the Bill into their respective Islamic Family Laws.

Great Lakes: Women call for rape to be recognised as crime against humanity

Following a three-day workshop in Kinshasa (DRC), representatives of women's organisations in Africa's Great Lakes region have proposed that rape be a punishable offence treated as a crime against humanity alongside genocide and war crimes in national courts in the region.⁸ Although the actual number remains unknown, it is estimated that tens of thousands of women and girls have been raped in decades of civil wars that have ravaged the Great Lakes region. Evidence shows that they continue to be at risk even in *'post-conflict'* areas. IRIN reports gender expert Marie Ingabile as stating: *'Studies undertaken in all our countries have shown that rape has become a real epidemic in our region.'*

Only a day after her statement was reported, Patrick Lavand'homme, head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Goma (North

⁸ Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), *'Great Lakes: Treat rape as crime against humanity, women urge'*, Nairobi, 9 February 2006 at www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=51629&SelectRegion=Great_Lakes&SelectCountry=GREAT%20LAKE_S.

Kivu), Eastern DRC, declared: *'We are witnessing a quadruple increase in rape cases in the Kanyabayonga-Kayna axis [in North Kivu] this week, where victims have been treated by [Médecins Sans Frontières] MSF-France.'*⁹ Members of the army and rebels are held responsible for these crimes in the area where fighting erupted again mid-January. Up to 70,000 are estimated to be displaced as a result. Amnesty International says fighting between *'mayi-mayi'* militia and the government army has led to the displacement of more than 100,000 people in Katanga province.¹⁰

Many women experience health complications as a result of rape, including HIV infections and unwanted pregnancies in addition to being rejected by their families and suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. In this context, representatives of the Great Lakes women's organisations also urged their governments to compensate rape victims and pay for their medical and psychological treatment.

Rape was first recognised as a crime against humanity by an international court by the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in February 2001. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda also recognised rape as a crime against humanity. The Rome Statute

⁹ IRIN, *'DRC: Rape on the rise in North Kivu, as fighting displaces 70,000'*, Kinshasa, 10 February 2006 at www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=51637.

¹⁰ See Amnesty International Press Release, *'Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): Kinshasa must meet its responsibility to protect civilians'*, 8 February 2006. For further information on the situation in Katanga, please see the Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) February 2006 report *Forced Displacement and Cholera in Katanga, DRC* www.msf.org.

underpinning the International Criminal Court recognises rape and other forms of sexual violence by combatants in the conduct of armed conflict as war crimes and crimes against humanity when they are used in the context of widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population. In some cases they may constitute an element of genocide.

UN Official says Sudan should adhere to women's anti-discrimination treaty

Rachel Mayanja, Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, has addressed experts currently reviewing the application of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in several countries. She urged them to encourage Sudan's adherence to it as she argued that it had been a powerful advocating tool for women from other war torn areas. During the Committee's three week session experts will examine reports from Australia, Cambodia, Eritrea, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Mali, Thailand, Togo and Venezuela, who are all party to the Convention.

related information **Darfur faces further catastrophe** The UN High Commissioner on Refugees António Guterres informed the UN Security Council that the situation in western Darfur has deteriorated in the last six months and faces further catastrophe with '*violence and impunity*' being '*everyday occurrences*' in the area. Guterres says some insecurity has spilled over into Chad where some government

officials had been taken hostage. The situation in eastern Sudan was also deteriorating and developments are closely linked to tensions between neighbouring Eritrea and Ethiopia.¹¹ The conflict in Sudan has decimated thousands of families and women and girls have been particularly targeted for rape on a massive scale.

International actions & events

8 March is International Women's Day!

International Women's Day was established on 8 March in 1977 by the United Nations (prior to that it had been celebrated in Europe on 19 March since 1911) and provides an opportunity to celebrate the progress made to advance peace, justice, development and equality for women. It is also an opportunity to assess the challenges that remain and come up with practical solutions to bring about equality for all women. For a list of events in your country or area, go to the following website:

www.internationalwomensday.com/event/s/.

¹¹ UNHCR Press release, 'Guterres warns UN Security Council of possible "catastrophe" in Darfur', New York, 24 January 2006, at www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/news/opendoc.htm?tbl=NEWS&id=43d657784.

International Zero Tolerance to FGM Day: Make Female Genital Mutilation History!

On International Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Day on 6 February, the Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development (FORWARD) urged the international community and African governments to Make FGM History! In February 2003, the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC) adopted a '*Declaration of Zero Tolerance to FGM on the African Continent.*' Today FORWARD demands that African governments issue, review and implement laws and policies to protect African girls' and women's sexual and reproductive rights, in accordance with The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, which explicitly prohibits FGM.

FORWARD urges all stakeholders including governments, UN agencies, international and local NGOs and community based organisations to scale up the campaign to end FGM which violates the fundamental human rights of girls and women, including their right to life. On December 6th 2005 a four-year-old Sudanese girl, Enaam Abdelwahab, lost her life to FGM. In light of this tragic event FORWARD launched a campaign to urge the government of Sudan to ban all forms of FGM and called for increased mobilisation to eliminate FGM in Sudan. Between Zero Tolerance to FGM Day on 6 February, and International Women's Day on 8 March FORWARD aims to collect 6,000 signatures, one for each girl in the world that the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates is

subjected to FGM every day. The petition will be presented to the Sudanese Ministry of Justice. Help send a clear and united message to the Government of Sudan that FGM and the abuse of girls' and women's rights will not be tolerated in any form by clicking on the following link:

<http://new.petitiononline.com/dec62005/petition.html>.

For more information about FGM please contact FORWARD at Unit 4, 765-767 Harrow Road, London NW10 5NY, Tel: 020 8960 4000, Fax: 020 8960 4014 or website: www.forwarduk.org.uk.

'Campaign for the abolition of all legislation confirming inequality and imposing Islamic punishment on Iranian Women'¹²

If you are against death by stoning! If you are against forced veiling! If you are against prosecution and imprisonment of women! If you are against lashing a woman's body! If you are against any form of patriarchy! If you are against all the medieval laws of Iran's Islamic Republic of Iran imposing inequality against women! Join the great walk against anti-women laws in Iran's Islamic Republic on 8 March 2006!

For over 25 years one of the most anti-women governments of the world has ruled Iran. For over 25 years Iranian women have struggled against and resisted poverty and injustice in the political, cultural and economical aspects of their lives. Women have endured

¹² This is an edited version of the Campaign's announcement which can be found in full at www.karzar-zanan.com/english.html.

being lashed, stoned to death, jailed, tortured and executed, but they have not surrendered to the medieval laws of Iran's Islamic Republic.

On 8 March 2006 the women of the '*Campaign for the abolition of all legislation confirming inequality and imposing Islamic punishment on Iranian Women*', will observe International women's day, by organising a great walk from Germany to Holland. Details of this walk, which will be concluded in front of the International Court of Human Rights in The Hague, will be announced in the near future. It is open to all women and men who oppose gender discrimination in any form. For more information contact:

zan_dem_iran@hotmail.com.

2nd Migrations World Social Forum 2006

This three-day event (June 22nd to 24th, 2006) will cover topics such as human rights, global migration, trafficking, asylum, integration, and public policies with '*sexual vulnerability*' a constant theme running throughout all the discussions and presentations.

The event is taking place at Rivas Vaciamadrid, Madrid, Spain and organised by CEAR (Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado), Servicio Pastoral de los Migrantes – Brazil and Grito de los Excluidos Continental. For more information see website www.fsmm2006.org/en/index.htm or contact by email: fsmm@cear.es, Tel: 00 34 915980535 or Fax: 00 34 915972361.

new publications

international

The Fleeing Garden: Kurdish Exiled Voices

This book edited by Choman Hardi and published by Exiled Writers Ink (2006) is a wonderful booklet of literature containing prose and poetry by established and new Kurdish writers. It is available from Exiled Writers Ink at £3.90 to include postage & packing. Address: 31 Hallswelle Road, London NW11 0DH or see website: www.exiledwriters.co.uk.

Human Rights Watch report 2006

The report cites new evidence that the US have deliberately used a policy of torture and mistreatment in counter terrorism activities, undermining the global defence of human rights. The report covers human rights developments in over 70 countries. To download or view a copy see: <http://hrw.org/wr2k6/>.

Migrants, Minorities and Housing: Expulsion, discrimination and anti-discrimination

According to a new report from the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC, January 2006), '*migrants face housing discrimination and disadvantage such as violent physical attacks aimed at deterring minorities from certain neighbourhoods and denying access to accommodation on the grounds of the applicant's skin colour.*' The report also concludes that '*integration of minorities in*

neighbourhoods can become heavily politicised.' The report can be found at: <http://eumc.eu.int/eumc/material/pub/comparativestudy/CS-Housing-en.pdf>.

new publications

UK

Research Findings on Women asylum seekers and refugees in West Yorkshire

This '*Findings*' published in December 2005 reports on a study of women asylum seekers and refugees in West Yorkshire, carried out through in-depth interviewing with 21 women asylum seekers and refugees from various countries and 21 key informants from the service providers. The research was part of a completed PhD study by Lisa Hunt. The findings reveal that '*informants noted a lack of consideration of the needs of women in policy, which developed in a "gender neutral" way, or was based around the assumption that most asylum seekers were male.*'

They also reveal that women asylum seekers saw domestic violence and dependency on a male applicant as problematic. Also some women were led into vulnerable and exploitative work practices such as prostitution due to insufficient access to financial support and strict employment rules.

For a copy of the *Research Findings* or more information, contact Lisa Hunt by email at lisahunt85@hotmail.com.

Dispersal of asylum seekers living with HIV

The National AIDS Trust (NAT) has published this report (26 January 2006) detailing its concerns on dispersal of asylum seekers living with HIV and the extent to which the new NASS (National Support Asylum Service) policy bulletin issued in December 2005, on dispersing asylum seekers with healthcare needs, has addressed these issues. At the same time, the NAT welcomes NASS's decision to revise its policy following consultation with the NAT, and other HIV-sector organisations, that raised concerns that asylum seekers living with HIV were being dispersed at short notice and without adequate arrangements to ensure proper care was continued. Many of these concerns have now been addressed by NASS. The NAT's report can be found online in PDF at www.nat.org.uk.

online resources

international & UK

Guide on researching violence against women

This guide published by PATH and WHO (World Health Organisation) draws on the experience of researchers from more than 40 countries, presenting methods of research on gender-based violence in low resource settings. Guidance is given on ethical considerations in researching violence against women, developing research strategies, qualitative and quantitative research methods, turning research into action and influencing policy makers.

To download a copy of '*Researching Violence Against Women: A Practical Guide for Researchers and Activists*' (PDF), go online to:

www.path.org/projects/researching_violence_practical_guide.php.

Website dedicated to Roma

The European Commission has launched a new website dedicated to resources on the Roma. This site aims to provide information on the EU's activities in support of the Roma, Gypsy and Traveller community across Europe. Users can access a range of information on the different policies, programmes and initiatives of the EU to promote social inclusion and combat discrimination against Roma. See http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/roma/index_en.htm.

Booklet for destitute asylum seekers

The Red Cross has produced a new booklet to help destitute asylum seekers. The organisation estimates that in the last year they have aided 33,600 destitute asylum seekers in England, in comparison to 25,000 the previous year. The booklet is an '*induction*' for those who are destitute and lists services they can access in London. The Red Cross is particularly concerned about destitute women with babies. If women give birth after a failed asylum claim, National Asylum Support Services are able to absolve themselves of responsibility.¹³

¹³ For more details see Diane Taylor and Hugh Muir, 'Red Cross aids failed asylum seekers', *The Guardian*, 9 January 2006,

Copies of the booklet can be obtained by contacting the British Red Cross, Information Resources, 44 Moorfields, London EC2Y 9AL. Tel: 0870 170 7000 or email information@redcross.org.uk.

notice board

BID is recruiting volunteers

BID is seeking to recruit volunteer casework assistants in its London, Oxford and Portsmouth offices. Download an application form in Word format at: www.biduk.org/pdf/jobs2006/AppFormAssistant.doc; and job pack at: www.biduk.org/pdf/jobs2006/VolunteerPack.doc.

ECRE Vacancy for Refugee Stories Media Officer

ECRE is looking for a Media Officer to join an exciting and ambitious project that is gathering stories from refugees in 12 EU countries. The stories will be used to support ECRE's advocacy work on key policy issues affecting the daily lives of asylum seekers and refugees. The project also aims to provide an opportunity for refugee voices to be heard in the public debate on asylum and immigration. The closing date for applications is Friday 17 February 2006. To apply, please download an application pack at www.ecre.org/involved or email cmassey@ecre.org or telephone: +44 (0)20 7377 7556 ext 204.

<http://society.guardian.co.uk/asylumseekers/story/0,7991,1682085,00.html>.

women's asylum news

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Asylum Aid provides free legal advice and representation to asylum-seekers and refugees, and campaigns for their rights. Registered as a charity no. 328729. To support Asylum Aid's work, please complete and return the form below to Asylum Aid, FREEPOST LON18836, London, E1 6BR (however, using a stamp will save us money)

Membership Form

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

Email _____

I would like to become a **MEMBER** of Asylum Aid

STANDARD

UNWAGED

£4 / month = £48 / year

£20 / year

Benefits

- Receive a copy of our annual report free of charge
- An invitation to attend Asylum Aid's AGM
- Opportunity to stand for election to the board of trustees
- Right to vote at the AGM election
- Free subscription to our quarterly newsletter
- Access to member- only section of website
- Up to date campaigning information emailed directly
- Invitations to Asylum Aid events, eg. open evenings
- Buy copies of Asylum Aid's reports at a reduced price

I would like to become a **FRIEND** of Asylum Aid

STANDARD

UNWAGED

£2 / month = £24 / year

£10 / year

Benefits

- Receive a copy of our annual report free of charge
- Free subscription to our quarterly newsletter
- Invitations to Asylum Aid events, eg. open evenings

I wish to make a gift of £ _____

Asylum Aid - STANDING ORDER FORM

To: The Manager, _____ Bank,
(Address of Bank) _____

Please pay **ASYLUM AID** the sum of £ _____ each

month/quarter/year (delete as appropriate) until further notice

and debit my account no. _____

sort code: _____ starting on (date) _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

[FOR OFFICE USE] To: NatWest Bank plc, PO Box 3AW, 104
Tottenham Court Rd, London W1A 3AW. Sort Code: 56-00-31,
account no. 63401711

Gift Aid Declaration

Asylum Aid
Registered Charity no. 328729

If you are a UK taxpayer, Asylum Aid can claim back 28p for every £1 you donate, making your donation worth almost a third more at no extra cost to you. Please complete and return this declaration.

Name _____

Address _____

I would like Asylum Aid to treat my donations as Gift Aid donations (please tick)

Signature _____ Date _____

Your declaration covers all donations you have made to Asylum Aid since April 2000 and any donations you might choose to make hereafter. You must have paid as much tax (or more) in this year as we will reclaim on your donation