

Women's ASYLUM NEWS

Refugee Women's Resource Project - Asylum Aid - Issue 28 Jan 2003

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Refusal to grant asylum to slave escapee overturned by Minister¹

Mende Nazer, 23, sought asylum in the UK after she escaped from her 'owners' (Sudanese diplomats) who kept her as a slave in their household in London.

The refusal letter, sent to her lawyers two years after her application, said that her treatment (forced, unpaid labour) would not amount to "serious violations of human rights (...). The Secretary of State does not believe that the alleged treatment you received whilst living in the UK would constitute persecution."²

The letter added: "Whilst slavery may exist in some parts of Sudan, the practice is not condoned by the Sudanese government." This statement is in total contradiction with the information available: According to Anti-Slavery International, "Thousands of people in Sudan have been abducted and forced into slavery. Despite the Sudan government's denial of slavery in the

country, it is an established fact."³

Ms Nazer's credibility was also questioned as the letter said she should have sought asylum as soon as she arrived in Britain (sic). She had been shipped over from Sudan to work as a domestic after being captured as a child by Arab slave traders from her village in the Nuba mountains and been forced into servitude in a wealthy Khartoum household. She worked as a slave for eight years.

Mende Nazer would have been deported if it were not for the campaign led by the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns and the intervention of Baroness Caroline Cox, Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords who is a prominent campaigner against slavery in Sudan. Immigration minister Beverley Hughes overturned the decision to refuse her asylum explaining, in a letter to Mende's solicitors, "*regrettably, the letter giving the reasons for refusing Ms Nazer's claim did not deal clearly with some of the issues regarding credibility or the objective country information on Sudan.*" Credibility and objective country information, as assessed by the Home Office, constitute major obstacles to asylum seekers - and in

¹ Extract from RWRP latest report on women asylum seekers and their claims in the UK. See our next issue, February 2003, for more details.

² Source:

www.ncadc.org.uk/letters/news28/mendenazer.html.

See also David Leigh, 'Diplomat's 'slave' can stay in UK', *The Guardian*, 12 November 2002, at:

www.guardian.co.uk. See www.ncadc.org.uk for update on the case in January 2003.

³ David Leigh, 'Home Office grants asylum to Sudanese Slave', *The Guardian*, 8 January 2003.

many instances women - obtaining protection in the UK.

Mende Nazer was granted asylum in early January 2003 after she had to resubmit her application.⁴ The fact that the widespread attention clearly shifted the decision in her favour is clear from the Home Office letter: *"In view of the widespread publication of her book and the high profile given to her claims both in Sudan and elsewhere, I am satisfied that Ms. Nazer would face difficulties which would bring her within the scope of the 1951 convention were she to be returned to Sudan. For these reasons it has been decided to recognise her as a refugee and grant her Indefinite Leave to Remain in the United Kingdom"*. The Minister also said the HO had not been aware of the book.

However, as her lawyer pointed out, the decision should not have been made on such basis. According to NCADC website, Alison Stanley of Bindman & Partners commented: *"I've rarely seen a case more deserving of asylum. Clearly, safety from persecution in the form of slavery on the base of race should be an inalienable right."*⁵

'In-Country' Asylum Seekers to be deprived of state support New rules - section 55 of the New Immigration and Asylum Act (2002) - linking access to welfare support and location of application have been introduced on 8 January 2003. According to the law that was approved by Parliament, single people and childless couples will receive no support - no food,

cash or accommodation - unless they claim asylum as soon as they arrive at a UK port.⁶ Home Office Minister, Beverley Hughes, said:

*"If people are genuinely fleeing persecution we expect them to claim asylum at the earliest possible opportunity – as soon as they arrive in the country. If they have been in the country for weeks, months, or even years, before claiming asylum, that casts doubts on the credibility of their claim. We will still consider their asylum claim and will do so quickly, but we are not prepared to support them at the Government's expense while we do so."*⁷

The rules state that asylum must be claimed 'as soon as reasonably practicable' in order for destitute applicants to be eligible for support. The only exceptions to the new rules will be: families with children, those with special needs, those claiming asylum in-country following a significant change of circumstances in their country of origin and those who can show they would suffer treatment contrary to article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

It is not clear however what will constitute 'special needs' or what evidence will be acceptable as proof that someone has just arrived in the country and claimed asylum at the first opportunity. The Inter-Agency Partnership (IAP) estimates that about 800 people per week could be ruled ineligible for any form of support.⁸

⁴ The information below is drawn from 'Mende Nazer Asylum Campaign' at:

www.ncadc.org.uk/letters/news28/mendenazer.html.

See also David Leigh, 'Diplomat's 'slave' can stay in UK', *The Guardian*, 12 November 2002.

⁵ See 'Mende Nazer Wins Fight for Asylum', January 2003, www.ncadc.org.uk.

⁶ Figures for the period July to September 2002 show that 68% of asylum applications made in the third quarter of 2002 were made by 'in-country' applicants:

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/. These figures reflect the trend in the last two to three years.

⁷ Source: www.asyluminfo.org, Thursday 28 November 2002.

⁸ See IAP News, No. 26, December 2002.

A new report to be published by RWRP next month shows that many women asylum seekers who had delayed their claims had very good reasons to do so: In addition to lack of knowledge about the procedures, fear of authorities and the wish to find a legal representative - common to all asylum seekers - women's priorities is also often to find safety for themselves and their children.

Women who had previously been dependents on their husband or partner's asylum application had also become 'in-country' applicants when they decided to make a claim in their own right, sometimes years after. In one case a woman who had very good grounds for seeking asylum was advised by the Home Office that it was better if she applied as a dependent.

Many in the sample went on to obtain refugee status or ELR (mostly after an appeal had been lodged or heard). Without any state support, these women may never have obtained protection in the UK under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Figures released by Minister Beverley Hughes show that the majority of people who had obtained refugee status during the period 1997-2001 had applied in-country than at port, except in 2000 (the rate range from 47% in 2000 up to 67% in 2001).⁹ From 1998 to 2000 the majority of people who were granted ELR were port applicants, although this changed in 2001 when over 63% of people who obtained ELR had applied for asylum in-country.¹⁰

The Refugee Council revealed that those who have been forced into homelessness

⁹ Parliamentary Question, 21 October 2002.

¹⁰ In terms of refusal, and with the exception of 1999, a higher proportion of refused applicants had applied in-country rather than at port.

are newly arrived into this country. Margaret Lally, Deputy Chief Executive of the Refugee Council, said: "*We are seeing clients who have been in the country for as little as 24 hours who are being turned down for support because it took them a day to claim asylum. ... It makes a mockery of what the government has been claiming.*"¹¹

The Refugee Council said that a 28-year-old Cameroonian - who arrived in Leeds just four days before claiming asylum on Jan 9 - has been sleeping on the streets since waiting for the Government to decide whether he is entitled to food and shelter.

New rules challenged in Court

Asylum seekers refused NASS support under the new legislation because they claimed asylum in country can now seek injunctive relief to ensure that their support is reinstated and continuing pending the final decision of the courts.

On January 16 2003 Maurice Kay J granted permission to seek judicial review for two asylum-seekers who have been refused asylum support by NASS under the new rules. The cases of 'M' (CO/151/2003) (Refugee Legal Centre and 'J' (CO/150/2003) (sols: Colin Henderson of Ben Hoare Bell solicitors) were ordered to be heard on the first available date after 30 January 2002.

NASS did not attend the hearing and were not represented.

'M' passed through an airport at night accompanied by her agent who had

¹¹ Source: '*Refugee Council's AGM hears evidence of Government action that has left victims of torture sleeping rough on the streets*' at: www.asylumsupport.info/victimsoftorture.htm ;

warned her not to claim. The Home Office decided that she should have claimed at port. 'J' entered hidden in a lorry and on the next day saw a solicitor who sent him straight to the immigration officer. The Home Office did not believe his story. The judge ordered that both claimants be referred to only by their initials and that NASS must continue to accommodate them pending judgment.

The issues raised on the claims are:

- a) does NASS have power to support asylum-seekers pending a decision on whether section 55 prohibits support? (NASS says not)
- b) what does 'as soon as reasonably practicable' mean?
- c) is it a breach of Article 3 (and or 8) ECHR to deny support to an asylum-seeker who has no other means of support?
- d) is there a duty on NASS to provide written decisions under section 55?
- e) is there a duty on NASS to provide written reasons for decisions under section 55?
- f) is it a breach of Article 6 to deny (as the Act does) a right of appeal on the facts from a refusal of support under section 55?

In another case 'S' (CO/152/2003) the judge stayed the permission application but ordered NASS to continue to provide support pending judgment in M.

Each of the applicants had been given accommodation under urgent interim injunctions granted ex parte on the papers or on the telephone. The court ordered NASS 'by its agent' (a named accommodation provider, eg Migrant Helpline) to accommodate the claimant.

Advisers with clients denied accommodation may wish to make similar applications seeking interim relief pending judgment in M and J.

The implications of this are that although the Home Office will not voluntarily provide accommodation or support until the judgement is given so asylum seekers will be forced to apply for a Judicial Review in order to secure support. Injunctions can be granted by a duty judge.

The judgement on a challenge to Section 115 which disqualifies asylum seekers from an in-country appeal if their claim is certified as clearly unfounded (restricted at present to Oakington cases from the new White List) is due next week. The judgement in the Czech Roma case R (ZL) c SSSHD was originally expected before Christmas.

Domestic Violence case has implications for Trafficking victims

In October last year, the High Court gave judgment in an important case for women asylum seekers and others subject to immigration control, who are victims of domestic violence in the UK. The significance of the judgment, however, goes further than this by pointing the way for other vulnerable asylum seekers to seek support from social services. Recent changes in the law on qualification for support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) mean this judgment has all the more significance.

In *Khan v Oxfordshire County Council* [2002] EWHC 2211 (Admin), Moses J considered the claim of a woman from Pakistan. She had been granted leave to

enter to join her husband, but the marriage broke down because of his violence. She had serious difficulties in escaping him, not least because his family were actively seeking to force her to remain with her husband. Indeed, they kidnapped her on two occasions. Despite this, she did manage to escape.

However, without her husband's support, she had no means to support herself. Her limited leave to enter would have precluded her from relying upon public funds.

She sought assistance from Oxfordshire County Council, who considered her application for support under section 21 of the National Assistance Act 1948. The Council wrote to her explaining:

“Under the provisions of that Act, Oxfordshire County Council Social Services Department has to consider whether your need for care and attention is significantly made more acute by your circumstances other than your lack of accommodation and funds.”

and concluding that she was not eligible for support. The issue before the Court was not the test, which the Council had applied. The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 defines who is a person subject to immigration control [see section 115(9)], and amended the 1948 Act so as to apply this test.

Therefore, if her need for care and attention arose simply out of the fact that she had no accommodation and no funds, the Council were correct that she was not eligible for social services support. However, the Court decided that the Council had wrongly applied the test in this

case. Firstly, the Council was wrong to consider the protection offered to her by an injunction against her husband and the police. Whether that protection was adequate or not, did not provide the answer to the test before the Council. Secondly, the Council was wrong in assuming that the history of domestic violence had no more relevance than providing the reason why she was without accommodation and funds.

The judgment concludes:

“As I have said, the local authority appear to have taken the view that, because domestic violence was the cause of destitution, domestic violence cannot have made the need for care and attention more acute and cannot have occasioned greater vulnerability. Whilst I accept the premise, I reject the conclusion... Domestic violence, whilst causing destitution, may equally make the claimant's need more acute.”

It is important to note that the Court did not decide whether the domestic violence she had suffered did make her need for care and attention more acute. That question was left for the Council to reconsider, although they were reminded that they would be required to provide support if the need was shortly to become more acute even if that had not yet been established.

It seems likely that this judgment will assist other women subjected to domestic violence in the UK, and forced to abandon their husband who is supporting them. However, they would still be required to show how it was that this violence meant they were in greater need. It may be that the risk of kidnapping or other reprisals, or the effect upon a woman's physical or

mental health, would show her to be more vulnerable.

However, at the heart of this judgment is a recognition that an individual's circumstances may well give rise to a greater vulnerability, which brings them within the ambit of the 1948 Act and eligible for support from social services.

They may be various other circumstances that would give rise to eligibility. Indeed, women trafficked into prostitution or other forms of slavery, who have fled their abusers, might make similar claims.

It would be wrong to attempt an exhaustive list of when a claim might succeed under the 1948 Act. However, as the Government seeks to squeeze more asylum seekers out of the limited protection of NASS support, it will be all the more important to consider carefully whether some individuals cannot in fact claim support from social services. Indeed, there may be advantages to those individuals that can.

Firstly, even if NASS would otherwise provide support, it is social services support that takes precedence. In other words, if a person is eligible under the 1948 Act, social services cannot refuse support by suggesting NASS support (see *Westminster City Council v NASS* [2002] UKHL 38). Secondly, an asylum seeker supported by social services may avoid unwanted dispersal.

However, it should be noted that Section 21 support from Social Services prohibits

local authorities from providing cash support.

Update on Domestic Violence

Concession¹² On 26 November 2002 the Home Office announced some changes to the immigration rules in relation to domestic violence concession.

The '*concession*' was introduced in 1999 and allowed foreign national women who were staying in the UK on marriage basis to apply for settlement in their own right during or after the one year probationary period if they were trapped in an abusive marriage. Those women were required to prove that they were victims of domestic violence during this time or had left the marriage for the same reason and the '*proof*' required had to be in the form of court injunction or similar.

From 18 December 2002 the evidence as '*proof*' of violence has been extended and the policy has been formalised as a part of the immigration rules. According to the new policy the evidence required could be medical evidence, social services records or reports from women refugees. This means that it will be easier for victims of domestic violence, who because of fear of retaliation are frightened to get '*court injunction*', to leave an abusive marriage during the probationary period and apply for indefinite leave to remain.

Refugee & Mental Health: The need for a culturally competent and gender sensitive approach

 A series

¹² See also WAN Issue No 27 on protection for refugee women at risk of domestic violence in the UK.

of conferences on Refugee & Mental Health conferences in the last two years have highlighted the challenges faced by the Mental Health sector in working with refugee and asylum seekers: often refugees are survivors who live with the knowledge that others did not survive. Many also experience racial harassment in the UK, and physical and verbal abuse, in addition to financial harshness. The result is that the *“health of asylum seekers often deteriorates after their arrival in the UK”*. Thus there is a need to recognize that the *‘poor mental health of refugees is a reflection of traumatic experiences and loss – past and present – which are intrinsically social and economic in their nature’*.¹³

The conference in June 2002 highlighted the challenges faced by services, and the urgent need for holistic and preventative approaches, including the use of a culturally competent and representative workforce. The use of bi-lingual workers was deemed essential as it was identified for instance that language barriers can lead to mis-diagnosis and wrong medication.

It is crucial to adopt such an approach for women asylum seekers and refugee women as practitioners will be dealing with specific issues when they have experienced domestic violence or gender persecution. However, participants in the 2002 Conference workshop on *‘gender persecution and mental health’* also highlighted the need to take male rape into account.

¹³ Organised by Social Action for Change in collaboration with many other partners, they are: the East London Refugee Conference, 25 June 2001, *‘Borderline’* Refugee Mental Health Conference, 17-18 June 2002 and Refugee and Mental Health Conference, 28 October 2002.

Below, we present two specific projects that have taken up such a challenge.

The Language Therapy Project at the Women’s Therapy Centre WTC is a charity based in London that provides psychotherapy for women, as well as advice and information to women and to professionals working with women.

Since 2000 WTC has been running a *‘Language Therapy Project’* which currently offers psychotherapy in Spanish, Turkish and Hebrew. The project is made up, to a large extent, of migrants for whom English is not their first language. Many are women fleeing persecution or economic and political deprivations and have complex and multiple issues requiring on-going support.

The project clearly responds to a specific need as many clients have expressed the belief that they would not have been understood had they had to express themselves in English; many others without any English would not even have been able to begin the process. The Language Therapy Project constitutes a unique opportunity for women who would never normally be able to access direct therapeutic support, to begin to tell their own story in their own words.

The project is however coming to the end of its financial term of 3 year in April 2003 and there is no guarantee of further funding. RWRP feels strongly that the project activities should continue as mother tongue psychotherapy for refugee women and other women has proved an exceptional tool to begin to address the complex and often traumatic experiences involved in forced migration.

What is also crucial for refugee women and women asylum seekers is that WCT aims to provide a service for women by women which is gender-conscious and is based on a particular awareness of women's oppression and the social and political context in which women live.

WCT also aims to broaden access to psychotherapy services by the provision of workshops in community settings and at WTC. And to raise public awareness about women's mental health issues.

For Appointments on Referrals, contact:
020 7263 6200, email:
appointments@womenstherapycentre.co.uk.

The Women's Therapy Centre is based at
10 Manor Gardens, London N7 6JS. Tel:
020 7263 7860, email:
info@womenstherapycentre.co.uk or
website: www.womenstherapycentre.co.uk.

The Traumatic Stress Clinic – Refugee Service¹⁴ The Traumatic Stress Clinic, based in London, is a national service, which is managed by the Camden and Islington Mental Health and Social Care NHS Trust. The clinic was established after the Kings Cross Fire in 1987 and it was awarded a contract with the Department of Health in 1991. The clinic provides a specialist service for survivors of trauma across the age range. In addition to providing direct clinical services, it also plays a major role in research and teaching. The clinic has an Adult Traumatic Stress Service, a Child and

Family Service and a Service for Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

The Refugee Service provides assessment and treatment for refugees and asylum seekers who are experiencing psychological difficulties following traumatic experiences in their country of origin. Clients referred to the service come from many different countries and have experienced a range of traumatic events such as war, persecution, detention, torture, rape, separation and loss.

Although not all refugees are traumatised or require mental health services, many people experience mental health problems as a result of their horrific experiences. The Traumatic Stress Clinic sees clients who are presenting with complex traumatic stress reactions including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, somatic reactions and traumatic bereavement.

Psychologists, psychiatrists, bicultural therapist and outreach workers from Asylum Aid staff the Refugee Service. Services are provided in the client's language of preference, with the assistance of interpreters and health advocates.

Clients are referred to the clinic via secondary mental health services such as a community mental health team. Refugees and asylum seekers may present with multiple and varied needs. Prior to commencing treatment, a thorough assessment is conducted to identify needs and decide on an appropriate treatment strategy. The clinic's treatment approach recognises that recovery occurs in stages.

During the first phase of treatment, the focus is on establishing a sense of safety, trust and control. At this stage, clients may

¹⁴ We would like to thank Mary Robertson, Consultant Psychologist, TSC, for this contribution.

present with psychosocial problems such as legal and housing difficulties, as well as distressing symptoms such as insomnia, severe depression and panic attacks. Intervention aims at stabilising the client by providing psycho education and support, medication where appropriate and psychological techniques to manage distressing symptoms. Caseworkers from Asylum Aid run advice sessions at the clinic for clients on their asylum applications and appeals, as well as their welfare benefits, accommodation and support needs.

Once clients are feeling more secure and are no longer in a state of crisis, they may start the second phase of treatment. This involves working through traumatic events using psychological therapies including cognitive behavioural therapies and testimony methods. The process of retelling their story in a therapeutic environment helps clients to integrate these events into their life story and results in a reduction of symptoms.

Traumatic events and adjustment to a new country often disrupts a sense of continuity and relationships. The final stage of treatment focuses on helping clients to see themselves as survivors, able to resume activities, establish relationships, restore family bonds and engage in new activities such as work or study. This may be done in individual therapy. Community based support groups and group interventions are very helpful at this stage.

In addition to providing direct clinical services, the Refugee Service aims to help towards disseminating models of good practice and to support mental health care and other professionals involved in providing services to refugees and asylum seekers. In pursuit of this aim, the clinic

offers consultation and supervision as well as education and training to other service providers. The clinic is also committed to building an evidence base for effective treatment approaches with refugees and asylum seekers and research is an important aspect of the work of the Refugee Service.

For more information about the Refugee Service of the Traumatic Stress Clinic, please contact Mary Robertson, Refugee Service Coordinator, Tel. 020 7530 3692.

The Traumatic Stress Clinic website www.traumaclinic.org.uk also contains very useful leaflets for health professionals and patients (e.g. 'Why Me? The aftermath of sexual assault') as well as links to institutions dealing with Trauma or Refugee issues.

IF YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND NEED HELP, YOU CAN CONTACT THE FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONS:¹⁵

- Traumatic Stress Clinic 020 7530 3666
- Victim Support 020 7735 9166
- Women's Aid - National Helpline 0272 428368
- London Women's Aid 020 7251 6537
- London Rape Crisis Centre 020 7837 1600
- National Anti-Stalking Campaign Helpline 01926 850089
- For Male Victims of Sexual Abuse - Survivors 020 7833 3737

¹⁵ Source: www.traumaclinic.org.uk/whyme.html

■ Brook Advisory Service 020 7708 1234

■ Local Family Planning and Sexual Health Clinics

■ Mortimer Market Sexual Health Clinic 020 7530 5055

Selected useful sources:

The UK Trauma Group website at www.uktrauma.org.uk/conferen.html provides information of general interest on trauma (disasters, serious accidents, violent assault etc) and on the various traumatic stress reactions, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The webpage lists conferences and training events.

Other useful sources include the Royal College of Psychiatrists website at www.rcpsych.ac.uk and the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies website at www.istss.org/.

International News

Women academics warn that North American 'Safe Third Country Agreement' will endanger women asylum seekers¹⁶ On 5 December 2002, Canada and the United States signed their Safe Third Country Agreement. The idea of such a deal which emerged in 1995 had been strongly opposed but after the event of September 11, the agreement was signed despite protests from more than 100 Canadian and

¹⁶ Source: CCRLIST@YORKU.CA, 15 January 2003. Shree Mulay, a professor in the Department of Medicine, McGill University, is also director of the McGill Centre for Research and Teaching on Women. Laila Malik is a research associate at the centre.

U.S. human-rights and refugee support organizations.

Laila Malik and Shree Mulay, two academics from McGill University, predict the lives of many asylum seekers who travel through the United States to reach Canada will be jeopardized, and in particular that of women asylum seekers: 'The agreement itself acknowledges that "Canada and the United States have different approaches to the treatment of claims based on gender-based persecution and in relation to those who arrive and make a refugee claim without appropriate documents".'

Although the United States has gender guidelines, women seeking asylum there are often denied protection according to Amnesty International and other human rights organisations (see also below): The refugee system in the USA has been 'long criticized by human-rights groups for violating international human rights and refugee-protection standards – a system that has now been shown to discriminate against South Asians and Arabs'.

The academics argue that returning asylum-seekers who have come to Canada via the United States will constitute refoulement,¹⁷ a violation of Canada's commitment to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Yet U.S. immigration officers can order asylum-seekers removed without further hearing or review - unless the refugees declare a fear of persecution or an intention to apply for asylum.¹⁸

¹⁷ 'a term used in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention that prohibits contracting states from expelling or returning a refugee to a territory where his or her life or freedom may be threatened', op. cit.

¹⁸ Each day about 4,000 asylum-seekers are locked behind bars in the USA in conditions no better than those for convicted criminals. Ibid.

These factors, they argue, will drive 'desperate individuals who want to claim asylum in Canada to risk dealing with people smugglers... 'The more women in dire straits are pushed underground, the more they will become vulnerable.'

The academics fear are compounded by a new report by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (USA) that documents the harsh and unfair treatment under U.S. law and practice that refugee women face when seeking asylum there.

"**Refugee Women at Risk**" tells the stories of 13 women who fled forced marriage, rape, forced abortion, domestic violence, and other gender-related violence and sought protection in the U.S., only to be detained, deported summarily, or otherwise treated unfairly.

"Because of unfair U.S. immigration laws, refugee women who seek asylum in the U.S. often face significant barriers in striving to win the protection they deserve," said Eleanor Acer, Director of the Asylum Program at the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights.

"When a woman with a gender-based asylum claim is barred from asylum because of summary deportation procedures or an unrealistic filing deadline, or when a woman fleeing from domestic violence is detained, and forced to choose between a lengthy separation from her young child and abandoning her claim for refuge, something is very wrong with our laws and procedures."

According to LHRC, the challenges that these women and other refugees face have only increased in the wake of government measures taken in the aftermath of September 11. They contend refugee women are at even greater risk of unfair detention, deportation or mistreatment.

The report is available online at:

www.lchr.org/refugees/reports/refugee_women.pdf .

461 honor killings in 2 provinces in Pakistan¹⁹

Pakistan's main human rights body, [Human Rights Commission of Pakistan](http://www.hrc.org/), revealed that at least 461 women were reported killed by family members in so-called 'honor killings' in 2002 in Punjab and Sindh provinces, up from 372 reported the previous year. The non-governmental organisation said the increase shows the need for increased protection for Pakistani women. It also demonstrates a lack of commitment from the military government despite repeated pledges to improve women's rights.

The conservative Balochistan and Northwest Frontier provinces were not included in the report, which suggests the number of actual killings could be higher.

Women in the Middle East,²⁰ also reported more honour killings in Jordan in the last few months whilst the killers were treated with impunity. A man walked out of court after killing his older sister, who had been divorced for over ten years, after a family member accused her of developing a relationship with a man.

¹⁹ www.peacewomen.org/news/1325News/issue15.html or http://unf-staging.groupstone.com/unwire/util/display_stories.asp?objid=30909, 11 December 2002.

²⁰ Issues No. 8, December 2002 and No.9, January 2002

New Kenyan President appoints ten women in government²¹

Three women were sworn in as Cabinet ministers and three others as assistant ministers following appointments by Kenya's new president, Mwai Kabaki earlier this month. Four women were also made permanent secretaries-that is, high-ranking presidential advisors.

"This is quite encouraging" said Beth Mugo, a new assistant minister for tourism and information, *"we hope to gradually achieve the one-third women representation we have been crusading for."*

The Ministry of Health will be headed by a 51 year old mother of three, Charity Ngilu, who began her professional life as a secretary. Linah Jebii Kilimo, 39 and a mother of five, is state minister in the Office of the Vice President. A banker for 12 years and an ardent crusader against female genital mutilation and other abuses against women, Kilimo was pulled out of school as a girl to baby-sit her niece before completing her education.

The second World Congress on Family Violence will convene in Prague, Czech Republic on 21-26 June 2003. In future, a WCFV will be held in every odd numbered year - next in 2005 in Montreal, Canada.

Pre-Congress sessions will discuss child abuse, spouse or partner abuse (domestic violence) and elder abuse. Special emphasis will be given by the Committees to innovative solutions, best practices and research findings on cross-disciplinary

themes, target groups, determinants, specific communities or geographical regions. To find out more or participate, check online: www.wcfv.org

International conference on "Pathbreaking Strategies in the Global Fight Against Sex Trafficking",²² 23-26 February 2003 in Washington, D.C., will be held by the Department of State and the War Against Trafficking Alliance. The conference will highlight strategies from around the world that have been successful in the prevention and prosecution of trafficking, or in the protection of its victims. Workshops will be organized around practical themes such as "Effectively addressing the proliferation of trafficking in conflict situations" and "Victim assistance strategies that work."

New Publications/ Resources

New RWRP publications next month will include Domestic Violence Updates as well as new reports on Domestic Violence in Nigeria and India.

A report on women asylum seekers and their claims for asylum in the UK is also being published. Besides a profile of women asylum seekers, the report will describe the characteristics of their claims and the reasons why they were refused asylum by the Home Office at initial decision level. Procedural issues illustrated by case studies will also be covered.

If you would like the researchers to do a group presentation on their reports, please

²¹ Sources: www.womensenews and 'Cabinet line-up gives women key positions', www.nationaudio.com/News/DailyNation/04012003/News/News33.html.

²² Source: Trafficking Network Update, December 2003.

contact Diana Mills on tel. 020 7377 5123,
dianam@asylumaid.org.uk.

'Is it Safe Here?: Refugee women's experiences in the UK', (Dec 2002), a new report commissioned by Refugee Action, reveals that refugee women feel unsafe in the UK, have had to leave family behind – including in over a third of cases children – and feel isolated with no or little family links in this country. At the same time, they recognised that being able to communicate in English is key to their survival in the UK.

Another issue highlighted in the report is access to health with only half of women interviewed having access to interpreters when visiting their GPs and one in five saying that the first person they spoke to at the doctor's surgery was unhelpful. As a result, refugee women find it difficult to get their health needs met.

The report, written by Hildegard Dumper, recommends that minimum standards of personal safety and security for any accommodation provided to refugee women be introduced by the Home Office and Refugee agencies. It also recommends that the NHS, local authorities and department of health put in a system for a better protection of the health and well being of refugee women; in particular by increasing specialist counselling services especially outside of London and setting up a fund for GP services to use for interpretation and translation.

Refugee Action has launched a campaign '*standing up for women's safety*'. For details on how to pledge support, please email campaign@refugee-action.org.uk or contact the Head Office at 020 7654 7700.

'Missed opportunities: a skill audit of refugee women in London from the teaching, nursing and medical professions'²³ surveyed 231 refugee women in the Capital in order to document the presence of refugee women who could make a significant contribution to the current shortages in these professional fields. The research was also an opportunity for refugee women to describe their own experiences and offer their own ideas and suggestions to change. The current regulations prevent women asylum seekers to work until their claim is determined. If they are dependent on their husband or partner's for seeking protection in the UK, they are not allowed to work even if he is.²⁴

The research, produced by the Mayor of London in association with Refugee Women's Association, highlights the barriers refugee women have to overcome when trying to re-enter a profession they left behind when they had to flee their country of origin. Some of these barriers are gender-related and some are related to their status as refugees or asylum seekers. General and specific recommendations are provided to help identify strategies that will ensure refugee women's equal access to the teaching, nursing and medical professions.

Human Rights Watch documents 'unimaginable atrocities against women' in war in Sierra Leone A new report, released on 16 January "*We'll kill you if you cry*" reveals horrific abuses

²³ The report was written by Hildegard Dumper and published by Greater London Authority, December 2002.

²⁴ Asylum seekers who applied before July 2002 have the right to work although not their dependents.

against women and girls in all parts of the country. Women of all ages, ethnic groups and socioeconomic classes were targeted. The widespread sexual violence and systematic use of rape during the ten-year civil war was perpetrated by rebels, government forces as well as international peacekeeping forces.

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), *'these crimes (...) were generally characterized by extraordinary brutality and frequently preceded or followed by other egregious human rights abuses against the victim, her family and her community. The rebels abducted many women and girls, who were subjected to sexual violence as well as being forced to work.'*

HRW urged the Special Court for Sierra Leone (set up by the United Nations) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to *'make sexual violence and sexual slavery a top priority, and investigate and prosecute gender-related crimes as crimes against humanity or war crimes'*. The organization also called for a revision of the legal system in Sierra Leone to ensure that crimes of sexual violence are *'prosecuted in a sensitive manner'*.

The prevalence of gender-based violence against women and girls is also documented in the conflict in Northern Uganda (between the Lord's Resistance Army and the government forces) where displacement and abduction have made women and girls more vulnerable to rape, sexual slavery and other human rights violations.²⁵ An estimated 50% of women

and girls who manage to escape are infected with the HIV virus. They suffer from trauma and fear of re-abduction but there is little assistance available to support them outside of under-funded services provided by local and international NGOs.

For a full copy of *"We'll kill you if you cry"*, go to: <http://www.hrw.org>

Two new reports on Trafficking

(from Trafficking Network Update, Dec 2002): Martina Vandenberg's recently published report, ***"Hopes Betrayed: Trafficking of Women and Girls to post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina for Forced Prostitution"*** documents the direct and indirect involvement of local Bosnian police officers in trafficking. The report can be accessed at

www.hrw.org/reports/2002/bosnia/

The International Human Rights Law Institute of DePaul University College of Law has published the findings of a two-year study on trafficking of women and children for commercial sexual exploitation in Belize, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. ***"In Modern Bondage: Sex Trafficking in the Americas"*** can be obtained from the IHRLI by e-mailing ihrli@depaul.edu=20 or tel: (312) 362 5919. The report should also be available online www.law.depaul.edu/ihrli.

Forced Migration Online at www.forcedmigration.org includes specially commissioned research guides; a digital library of full-text documents; complete back runs of key journals; a searchable web catalogue with descriptions of relevant web-based resources and links to those resources; a directory with contact

²⁵ See Shravanti Reddy, 'Operation Iron Fist likely to increase violence against women and girls', *Digital Freedom Network*, 6 December 2002, at www.dfn.org/news/uganda/iron-first.htm.

information for relevant organizations; a news feed with regularly updated headlines

Updated regularly, it is designed for use by academics, students, researchers, librarians, practitioners, policy makers, the media, information providers, forced migrants themselves or anyone interested in the field of forced migration.

For further information please contact: FMO, Refugee Studies Centre, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, 21 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LA UK; e-mail: fmo@qeh.ox.ac.uk, Tel.: +44 1865 270261.

Rights of women launches new website www.rightsofwomen.org.uk was launched in December 2002 and features details of the advice line, downloadable information sheets and other resources for those seeking help. There are special features giving legal advice on domestic violence, divorce, and child contact.

Designed as a friendly and useful first stop for women who may need legal help, the website also features downloadable copies of research and policy papers, and a downloadable poster for the advice line. For more contact Bethan Rigby, Rights of Women on tel: 020 7251 6575/6 or go to www.rightsofwomen.org.uk.

Notice Board

● **Community links** is currently researching projects for inclusion in the next Community links **Ideas Annual**. The aim is to celebrate contribution made to their own and the wider community by asylum seekers, refugees and those who work with them. The idea behind the Ideas Annual is that *'the sharing of good projects between communities generates new*

ideas'. Community links hopes to be able to focus on the key messages of refugees as dedicated and important providers of services to their own communities.

If you know of any good examples of projects working with, or substantially led by refugee or asylum seeker communities please contact richard.mckeever@community.links.org.

● **Asylum-Seekers.org** is a web developing company from Finland that set a non-profit project to help to asylum seekers and refugees. An online forum *'Refugees International Discussion Board'* aims at facilitating communication amongst asylums seekers and refugees across the world, including exchange of news, information and advice.

The company is collecting *'refugee concerned information'* on the net about organizations who help refugees and asylum seekers worldwide, for their website - www.Asylum-Seeker.org. You can send them your website link and a short description of your organization if you are interested to take part. Help from other organizations/ individuals on the development of the project as well as on the provision of advice through the website on asylum seekers and refugees rights and procedural issues is also sought.

Promote refugee rights and show your support for asylum-seekers this new year: Wear your Asylum Aid t-shirt

To order, visit www.asylumaid.org.uk/Fundraising/t-shirts.htm or phone us on 020 7377 5123

Thank you for your support!

If you want to subscribe to our free bulletin 'Women's Asylum News' by post or by email, please contact Peggy Saint-Auret on 0207 377 5123 or at peggysa@asylumaid.org.uk.

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)

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- Right to vote at the AGM election
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- Access to member- only section of website
- Up to date campaigning information emailed directly
- Invitations to Asylum Aid events, e.g. open evenings
- Buy copies of Asylum Aid's reports at a reduced price

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