

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 August edition by 24th August 2007 to Claireb@asylumaid.org.uk (for postal address see back cover).

FGM in Sudan – A Country Guidance Case

A new Country Guidance case on the issue of FGM has just come out of the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal.

The long debate over whether girls who are at risk of forced Female Genital Mutilation are entitled to Refugee Convention protection was settled by the House of Lords **K & Fornah** case¹. Hence, the Tribunal has shifted to a detailed consideration of risk on return in specific countries. The case of **FM (FGM) Sudan**² is the first full consideration of risk on return to Sudan. The Tribunal heard expert evidence from Peter Verney, who has written extensively on a wide range of issues in Sudan, and from Dr Omar Ali, a Sudanese Medical doctor. The Tribunal also considered the expert report of Dr Gruenbaum, a specialist on FGM in Sudan.

It is easy to see why this case was selected by the Tribunal to be a Country Guidance case. The very particular personal circumstances of the appellant and her children, both in terms of their previous immigration history and personal and family background, highlighted a wide range of potential risk factors and potential barriers to exercising the 'internal flight option'.

In summary, the main appellant A was the mother of four children, two of whom were young women aged 18 and 22. A was from the North of Sudan. A's husband worked for Saudi Airlines and hence was posted to various countries. A had accompanied her husband to Pakistan, where all of her children were born. In 1999, the family had

¹ *SSHD v K and Fornah v SSHD* (2006) UKHL 46, 18 July 2006

² *FM (FGM) Sudan CG* (2007) UKAIT00060

come to the UK via her husband's work. They had been granted Leave to Enter until 2002. A's husband later returned to work in Saudi Arabia while A remained with the children in the UK. A was refused an extension of leave and claimed asylum based on risk of FGM to her two daughters at the insistence of her in-laws.

A had herself been forcibly subjected to FGM as a child. Whilst in Sudan, A had been active in work around women's rights in general and against the practice of FGM in particular. She had come to the attention of the Sudanese authorities during a demonstration on such issues and had lost her job as a teacher as a consequence. Her husband was from a fairly prominent family in Sudan and a number of his extended family held positions of power and influence in Sudan. One brother-in-law was Minister of Tourism in the Sudanese government and another was a doctor and Senior Police Officer in the Police Hospital in Khartoum. In addition, her own maternal uncle was the Director General of the Kartoum Health Department.

Within the extended family, only A's children had not been subjected to FGM. Both she and her husband were 'progressive' in that they did not want their daughters to undergo FGM and wanted their children to be exposed to a more 'liberal' lifestyle. In the UK, they had adopted a 'Westernized' life-style and spoke little Arabic.

Whilst in the UK, A continued to be active in women's rights organizations and was involved in the Darfur Centre for Human Rights and Development.

Given these circumstances the Tribunal had to consider risk from a number of avenues.

The core findings of the Tribunal were as follows:

a) The Sudanese authorities are taking steps to tackle FGM. However, prosecutions are rare.

b) FGM is less likely to take place in a

family which is educated and/or in a higher social strata. However, *"it cannot be automatically inferred that a family of such a kind will be opposed to FGM. A specific finding on the issue will need to be made in each case"*. In A's case, all of the girls in the extended family had been subjected to FGM, despite the educated and high-ranking position of many of the male members.

c) Ultimately, whether a girl will be at risk *"will turn on the attitude of her family [and] the family in question will be the girls or young woman's extended family"*. Significantly, it was accepted that, *"the wishes of the parents are not decisive"* as even progressive parents may be forced to bow to extensive pressure from hard-line members of the extended family.

d) Outright abduction of girls by extended family members to perform FGM is unlikely. However, they are likely to seize opportunities to bring pressure to bear on the girls to submit to the process.

e) There is no evidence of risk from persons other than the family.

f) The Tribunal rejected that there would be increased risk to the girls of FGM being imposed as a way of 'bringing them back into line' from the authorities or from Islamic activists on the basis of their 'Westernised' life-styles. However, the Tribunal did accept that as in A's extended family, only her children had not undergone FGM. The introduction of the girls into the extended family *"is likely to lead to a desire on the part of the extended family to ensure that [they] are reintegrated"* through the imposition of FGM.

g) The Tribunal accepted that the powerful position of members of the extended family would render it even more difficult for A to invoke any kind of assistance from the authorities to try to protect her daughters.

- h) The Tribunal accepted that A's children were at serious risk of FGM on return and hence of persecution for a Refugee Convention reason. The Tribunal also accepted that, given A's abhorrence of the procedure, the imposition of FGM on her daughters would also amount to persecutory harm against her.
- i) The Tribunal considered that due to the very particular circumstances of A and her children, Internal Flight was not a viable option. Relocation to another part of the North could not be deemed safe as the powerful members of the extended family would be very likely to track her down. Interestingly, we see in the case a consideration of the viability of the internal flight option following the guidance set down in **AH Sudan**³. That case clarified that the starting point for a consideration of whether relocation was 'unduly harsh' was the comparison between conditions in the appellant's home area with conditions in the safe area. Thus, in this case a comparison of conditions in North Sudan was compared to those in South Sudan. The Tribunal noted that the South was Christian and following civil conflict, infrastructure was very poor. Weighing the practical difficulties of such conditions along with the traumatic impact on A's daughters of adjusting to life in Sudan, a country with which they had had very little contact in their lives, rendered such a move 'unduly harsh'.

FM (Sudan) is a valuable case as it recognises that despite authorities taking steps to reduce the rate of FGM, the strength of familial pressures means that this may not necessarily translate into reduced risk for a girl. It is also valuable in that it recognises that the individual circumstances of girls must be very carefully weighed in assessing risk on return and of the viability of the internal flight option.

³ AH (Sudan) IG (Sudan) NM (Sudan) [2007] EWCA Civ 297

RWRP news

Campaign for gender sensitive interviews - success!

For a woman-claiming asylum, disclosure of any experiences of rape or sexual violence at an early stage in the asylum process is essential for the fair determination of her case. In the criminal justice system it is recognised that women are more likely to disclose experiences of rape or sexual violence to other women. At present the Home Office gender guidelines state *"Every effort will be made to comply with a request for an interviewer or interpreter of the same sex as the applicant that is made in advance of the interview."*⁴

More recently the Home Office has agreed to a proactive policy of asking all asylum applicants at the screening stage whether they have a preference as to the gender of their interpreter. The UNHCR has recommended repeatedly that they do the same regarding Case Owners stating, *"Gender-sensitive interviewing and interpreting should be automatic and introduced with immediate effect, subject to genuine operational constraints."*⁵

Many NGOs have been campaigning in support of this recommendation. After the Home Office declined to follow the UNHCR recommendation for a fourth time in March 2007, informing the UNHCR that this was due to concerns about operational constraints. RWRP decided it was time to find out how real these operational constraints were.

RWRP found out that the ratio of female to male Case Owners is three to two, putting into question why the Home Office could not deliver on the UNHCR recommendation.

⁴ Home Office, 'Asylum Policy Instruction: Gender Issues in the Asylum Claim', October 2006, section 9, p. 12.

⁵ UNHCR, 'Quality Initiative Project, Fourth report to Minister,' January 2007, p. 51, recommendation 24.

RWRP raised the issue at stakeholders' meetings with strong support from the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture and ILPA. Two months after stating they would not be able to ask the gender sensitive question, Matthew Coats, Strategic Director of Asylum at the Home Office, responded to a question by RWRP at a meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees in June 2007, saying this was exactly what they were going to do. This has subsequently been confirmed in writing by Lin Homer, Chief Executive of the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA): *"We recognise that the earlier in the asylum process specific gender requirements are identified, the better for both the BIA and the applicant it will be. To this end we are taking steps to include a question during the screening process relating specifically to this issue."*⁶

However, the gap between policy and practice remains and RWRP is still awaiting confirmation of when this new practice will be implemented. Along with our colleagues in the sector, RWRP will continue to push for its implementation, as the opportunity for a woman to choose a female Case Owner could have a strong bearing on the fairness of the consideration of her case.

RWRP in Vienna

The RWRP Country Information Officer recently delivered a Master Class to Country of Origin Information (COI) professionals at the ACCORD COI Network III in Vienna. The workshop entitled 'Strategies for improving COI research in relation to women' addressed the difficulties in researching women's asylum and human rights claims. The workshop covered the following areas:

- issues raised in relation to women's cases and country of origin information
- types of gender related persecution and their impact on women
- research strategies for addressing gender related claims

⁶ Letter to Women's National Commission, 28 June 2007.

- improving access to country of origin information in relation to women

19 COI researchers attended, representing 12 different European countries, 14 attendees were government researchers and 5 were from NGO's.

The workshop provided a good insight into COI production in Europe and raised the level of awareness of gender issues amongst participants.

Sector Update

Misjudging asylum, rape and detention

The Black Women's Rape Action Project held a well-attended meeting in Parliament hosted by John McDonnell MP and Lord Avebury on 17th July 2007. The main focus was about a woman who had been separated from her baby whilst she was still breastfeeding – she was detained in Yarl's Wood whilst the baby and her other child were put into Social Services care. BWRAP and other organisations that they brought in were instrumental in getting her out of detention. Lord Avebury pointed out that the Home Office said they would only separate women from babies they are breastfeeding in exceptional circumstances yet he knew of two other similar cases.

In a lively meeting which covered a wide range of issues for women asylum seekers, some of the other concerns raised were children being detained, vulnerable women being put through the fast track procedure, the lack of legal advice available to women in detention and the disbelief faced by survivors of rape. In the final speech from the eight strong panel, Anver Jeevanjee, an ex-lay member of the Immigration Appeals Tribunal, talked of judges disbelieving applicants' accounts of rape if there was a lack of evidence or late disclosure despite this being contrary to the UNHCR Gender Guidelines. He referred to the Early Day Motion asking for the Gender Guidelines for

immigration judges to have legislative backing.

Other news

Findings Available on Section 9 Pilot

Section 9 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 2004, refers to what happens to asylum seeker families with children under the age of 18 after they have been refused asylum and exhausted the appeals process. It states that all asylum seekers must take 'reasonable steps' to leave the UK and that failure to do so would result in the families' accommodation and financial support ending. Consequently, if families are left destitute, their children could be taken into care. Before section 9 was introduced, refused asylum seeker families with children under 18 would continue to be eligible for support and accommodation until they were removed from the UK.

From December 2004 – December 2005 the Home Office ran a pilot implementing Section 9 in Manchester, Leeds and London, involving 116 families. The pilot set out to test how Section 9 would work in practice before it was rolled out nationwide. The Refugee Council and Refugee Action monitored the pilots and in early 2006 reported a number of difficulties with Section 9, most notably the distress and confusion caused to families. Alongside this, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) has been critical of the policy as it contradicts current UK and UN child conventions.

After a considerable delay, the Home Office Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) recently published the findings of the pilot. They reported that many families absconded from their accommodation partly due to fears over Section 9. The report also acknowledged the difficulties Local Authorities faced implementing the policy. The findings conclude that Section 9 did not "influence behaviour in favour of co-operating with removal" and should not be used as a 'blanket' policy.' However, the document maintains that the principle of withdrawing financial and accommodation

support should be upheld if families do not co-operate to return to their country of origin. The report recommends that BIA Case Owners should continue to have the discretion to apply Section 9 in specific cases.

For the 'Family Asylum Policy: The Section 9 Implementation Project Report' see: <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/aboutus/newsarchive/childsafety>

UK News

Asylum Seekers' Difficulties in Disclosing Sexual Violence in Home Office Interviews

A new study, which explores the complexity of issues surrounding disclosing sexual violence at Home Office interviews has been published⁷. The research argues how late disclosure often affects a client's credibility and highlights that there are a range of psychological, personal and socio-cultural issues which may contribute towards this. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 27 refugees and asylum seekers exploring the difficulties people face with disclosure. The study also measured conditions such as post-traumatic stress, dissociative issues such as avoiding personal emotions, thoughts and feelings about certain events, experience of flashbacks and depression. The study reveals that 20 participants discussed their original trauma for the first time after entering the UK and only 13 discussed this at Home Office interviews. The article recommends supervision and training of Home Office and Immigration officials in recognising stress reactions, dissociative conditions and feelings of shame.

For news article see:

<http://www.medilexicon.com/medicalnews.php?newsid=75832>

⁷ Bogner D. Herlihy J. and Brewin C. 'Impact of Sexual Violence on Disclosure During Home Office Interviews,' British Journal of Psychiatry (2007) July 191:75-81

Full report can be found in the British Journal of Psychiatry (subscription)

<http://bjp.rcpsych.org/>

Women asylum seekers destitute

Louise France reports on the terrible conditions and circumstances of women asylum seekers who have become destitute in the UK. The article in the Observer highlights the stories of several women and discusses why they fled and how they have become destitute. Salima, who is from Uganda was raped and tortured. Her asylum claim was refused and now she is homeless, sometimes sleeping on the floors of friends' houses and often forced to exchange sex for food. She has been exploited and raped by a person who offered help and lives in a constant fear of being arrested and returned. Ivy, from Malawi who fled a forced marriage has also been refused asylum. She states how she hears people criticising asylum seekers for not working and she would like to work. Instead she is dependant on Red Cross handouts and has become a beggar. Debora Singer from RWRP at Asylum Aid argues how the 1951 UN Convention for Refugees does not recognise women's experiences such as rape, FGM and forced marriage and consequently they may not receive a fair hearing. The article explains that Government policy (Section 4) does state that some failed asylum seekers can receive food vouchers and shelter, however this is dependent on agreeing to return and some people are not eligible. Many campaigners believe that the government are driving failed asylum seekers into destitution as a means of forcing them to return to their country of origin.

For full article see:

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/magazine/story/0,,2131382,00.html>

Metropolitan Police Plan to Stop Female Genital Mutilation in UK

Female Genital Mutilation is illegal in the UK and can lead to prison sentences of up to 14 years. However, the Department for Health believe 66,000 women and girls in England and Wales have experienced FGM with some

being mutilated in London. London Metropolitan Police announce they will offer £20,000 reward to anyone who reveals information that leads to prosecution. This announcement coincides with a campaign launched by Forward, (an organisation specialising in FGM) who state that many young girls will go abroad for FGM during the summer holidays. Forward and the London Metropolitan police want to highlight how FGM is a form of child abuse.

For full article see:

<http://society.guardian.co.uk/crimeandpunishment/story/0,,2123583,00.html>

The Forward website is:

<http://www.forwarduk.org.uk/>

Sarah McCulloch, National Director for the Agency for Culture and Change Management argues against the Metropolitan Police reward. She states that there needs to be more sustained messages, campaigns, partnerships and training of frontline staff to change attitudes and behaviours and stop FGM.

For this response and further discussions around this campaign see:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,2127861,00.html>

Sex with trafficked women

Women's Minister, Harriet Harman stated in the House of Commons statement on the 17th July how Britain is an increasing focal point for trafficking, exploitative and abusive behaviour and forced prostitution. Government figures reveal that 85 per cent of women in British brothels are from overseas, compared to 10 years ago where 85 per cent of women working in brothels were British. To date, no men have been prosecuted for paying for sex with a woman or girl who has been forced into prostitution. Denis MacShane, former minister reiterated that the CPS and police have been "woefully inadequate" in dealing with men who add to the demand for sex slaves.

For full article please see:

<http://society.guardian.co.uk/crimeandpunishment/story/0,,2129023,00.html>

In this House of Commons statement Harriet Harman announced her three key priorities:

- supporting the care of older and vulnerable relatives by families, particularly as they bring up children.
- tackling violence against women and improving the way society deals with women who commit crimes.
- empowering black and minority ethnic women to build cohesion within and between communities.

For Harriet Harman's statement see:

<http://www.commonleader.gov.uk/output/page2052.asp>

The Women's National Commission has been asked to lead a public consultation on the three priorities outlined above. The Consultation document, published 17th July is available on the website, along with information on how to respond

<http://www.thewnc.org.uk/>

Life Sentence for 'Honour' Murderers

The father, uncle and family associate who were convicted of the 'honour' killing of Banaz Mahmod have been sentenced to life imprisonment. Banaz was an Iraqi Kurd, who was in a relationship deemed unsuitable by her family. Her body was found in January in a suitcase in Birmingham. The pre-sentence hearing revealed the full details of her ordeal where she was raped, tortured, experienced degrading sexual acts and strangled. Victor Temple, QC expressed how the defendants showed no remorse for the murder.

For article see:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/crime/article/0,,2130805,00.html>

The Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO) have an on-line '**Justice for Banaz**' petition. For further information see

<http://www.ikwro.org.uk/index.php?option=comcontent&task=view&id=55&Itemid=2>

New Laws On Forced Marriage

Legislation that plans to protect women from and prevent forced marriage has received Royal Assent. The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act will allow courts to make orders to remove a victim if a forced marriage is about to take place. The courts have discretion at the injunctions they can use so they can respond effectively. Lord Lester first introduced the Bill in November 2006. Organisations such as Southall Black Sister, Karma Nirvana, IMKAAN and Ashiana have campaigned on this issue and aim to put the law into practice.

For further information see:

<http://www.gnn.gov.uk/Content/Detail.asp?ReleaseID=303090&NewsAreaID=2>

UK conferences and courses

BMER Women: The Law and Violence – Where's the Justice?

Rights of Women

26 September 2007, Hamilton House, London

This one day national conference for women will examine recent and forthcoming laws affecting domestic violence, sexual violence and abuses predominately experienced by Black and Minority Ethnic Religious (BMER) women and women seeking asylum including forced marriage, honour crimes, FGM and trafficking.

Speakers and workshop leaders include Lord Lester, QC • Shaminder Ubhi, Ashiana • Yasmin Rehman, Metropolitan Police Service • Marai Larasi, Nia project and Women's Aid Federation of England • Heather Harvey, Amnesty International UK • Tania Pouwhare, Women's Resource Centre • Pragna Patel, Southall Black Sisters • Alison Stanley, Bindmans Solicitors • Jasvinder Sanghera, Karma Nirvana • Khatun Sapnara, Barrister and Chair of Ashiana • Anne Marie Hutchinson OBE, Dawson Cornwell Solicitors and Chair of Reunite

Venue: Hamilton House, Mabledon Place,
London WC1H 9BD
Women's organisations, Charities, CABx, Law
Centres: £100
All Others: £200
Rights of Women members receive a 10%
discount

For further details please contact Rights of
Women on email: conference@row.org.uk;
telephone 020 7251 6575/6; textphone 020
7490 2562; fax 020 7490 5377 or visit
[www.row.org.uk/pdfs/conf2007/conf-
flyer.pdf](http://www.row.org.uk/pdfs/conf2007/conf-flyer.pdf)

Accredited Domestic Violence course 10th September 2007, The Friends Meetings House, Wolverhampton.

The Haven, in Wolverhampton is running an
accredited course aimed at people working
on Domestic Violence issues or with an
interest in this area. The course covers:
domestic violence awareness; myths and
stereotypes; legislation and the criminal
justice system; good practice and equality
issues.

£75 Voluntary organisation and Charities
£99 NHS Trusts and public sector
£125 Central government and agencies

For further information please contact:
Andrea Cifuentes, The Haven
Wolverhampton, PO Box 105,
Wolverhampton WV1 1AA,
E-mail: ato@havenrefuge.org.uk
Tel: 01902 572128
Fax: 01902 572144

The Haven also offer bespoke courses in the
UK and internationally. Use the contact
details above for further information on this.

Refugee Mental Wellbeing Awareness 11th September 2007 London

The Refugee Council are conducting this
course aimed at raising awareness at the
mental health needs and issues many
refugees face. The course will equip people
with how to recognise some mental health
problems, how to help refugees access
mental health services and provide support
to refugees.

The course is aimed at professionals working
directly with refugees who do not provide
mental health support.

£99 for NGO and voluntary organisations
email: marketing@refugeecouncil.org.uk
or telephone: 020 7346 6737

International News Articles

Uganda: trafficking increasing

At the first regional anti-human trafficking
conference in Uganda, the United Nations
Office of Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) report
that human trafficking is increasing in
Eastern Africa. The conflict and instability
with the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) in the
Northern region is believed to contribute to
the state being the "worst affected by
trafficking in eastern Africa". The UNODC
claim women and girls are most vulnerable
to trafficking and often are forced into
prostitution and sexually exploited.

For full article see:

[http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?Report
Id=72856](http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=72856)

Related news

Burundians trafficked to Lebanon

Lebanon courts are investigating the alleged
trafficking of women from Burundi to
Lebanon. Many women believed they were
going to seek asylum in Europe but ended up
as domestic servants or forced into
prostitution. The article describes the ordeal

of a young woman who believed she was going to Lebanon for a 'good job'. Upon arrival, her name was changed, she was employed as domestic maid to a family, her salary was cut, there was no contract and she was repeatedly beaten and raped.

For full article see:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6241214.stm>

Iraq: Sexual Slavery

The Institute for War and Peace cites the personal accounts of women who have been trafficked around and from Iraq. The women revisit their ordeal of being sold by their parents on the hope of a better life, only to be forced into prostitution, domestic servitude and repeatedly raped and sold. The unstable situation in Iraq has allowed the trafficking of women into sexual slavery to rise. Current legislation in Iraq only criminalises the sexual exploitation of children and leaves many women vulnerable to abuse with no support including from the police or legal frameworks. The US State Department '*Trafficking in Persons Report*' states no traffickers have been prosecuted and more needs to be done to "curb the complicity of public officials in the trafficking of Iraqi women".

For full article see:

http://www.iwpr.net/?p=icr&s=f&o=336705&apc_state=henh

For full '*US State Department: Trafficking in Persons Report*', which include country narratives and a 'tier watch' analysis for over 150 countries see:

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/82902.pdf>

Togo: Enforcement of Anti-Trafficking Laws

Five child traffickers have been prosecuted and sentenced under Togo's new anti-trafficking laws. This is the first trial under the new laws (adopted August 2005) and it is hoped it will deter traffickers from recruiting, coercing, exploiting and abusing people for sexual and labour purposes. Widespread poverty in Togo means many

families are easily lured by the promises of a better life, professional training, education and paid employment. The reality is physical, mental and sexual abuse, brutal conditions and no protection. The sentences include: Soulé Lamania: 18 months imprisonment for trafficking five children to Nigeria; Anaheri Kasso: 12 months and a \$2,000 fine for trafficking three children; Yamba Kodjo: \$600 to help repatriate his sisters children who were trafficked to Nigeria; Kara, Pascal Bayobda: 12 months for rape and procuring a 14-year-old girl; Issa Ousoumanou Oukeni: two years for trafficking five children to Nigeria.

For full article see:

<http://www.ipsnews.net/africa/nota.asp?idnews=38235>

Sudan: Rape Laws

Rape in Sudan, especially the war ridden Darfur region, has been reportedly conducted on a massive scale. The current law on rape in Sudan exempts many groups from prosecution including the police, the military, border guards, social services and the Popular Defence Force, which includes many of the Janjaweed militia. Refugees International states that the current laws expose victims to further abuse, deny justice and provide no medical assessments or support to survivors. Alongside this, if a woman cannot prove she did not give consent she can be charged with adultery, the sentence includes 100 lashes or stoning. Refugees International urges the Sudanese government to reform the rape laws.

For full article see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=72991>

For Refugees International full report '*Laws Without Justice: An Assessment of Sudanese Law Affecting the Survivors of Rape*' see:

<http://www.refugeesinternational.org/content/publication/detail/10070>

Related news

Thailand: Criminalisation of marital rape

The National Legislative Assembly in Thailand has approved a new law that makes marital rape illegal with a sentence of up to 20 years and a fine. The previous law only classified a person as a rapist if they forcibly had sex with a person who they were not married to. The new law is welcomed as a positive step forward. Campaigners however, believe more work needs to be done to change cultural, social and legal attitudes to encourage women to report rape. For full article see:

http://www.isiswomen.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=758&Itemid=204

Other international news

India: Woman accused of witch-hunt

Women's e news reports a 60-year-old woman in India fled her village after being accused of being a witch and subsequently village members tried to capture and burn her. 700 women died last year after being accused of witchcraft. The death and persecution of women for alleged witchcraft is particularly prevalent in rural areas of India, predominantly in northern and central parts. It is argued that many women are targeted if they have land, are assertive or if they reject sexual advances. The apathetic attitude of the police means many women do not report or believe they will get protection from them. The Free Legal Aid Committee who work in Jharkhand, one of the few states which has a law against witchcraft state less than 2 per cent of people accused of witchcraft are convicted. For full article see:

<http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3241>

India: Women Sold in Market

The Asian Human Rights Commission highlight that women are sold by their parents and bartered for in an open market in Rajasthan north India. They state that before a woman is purchased they will

undergo a public physical examination and then bartering for the woman begins. Women are predominantly purchased for either the sex trade or marriage and domestic servitude. Many families sell their daughters as they are considered a financial burden especially with the dowry system, which although illegal is common practice in Rajasthan. The marriage of a daughter involves paying the groom's family with land, ornaments and financial payments. In addition, it is now also common for in-laws to make further financial demands after the marriage otherwise their daughter will be subject to abuse or separation, which brings shame to her family. For full press release see:

<http://www.ahrchk.net/statements/mainfile.php/2006statements/1119/>

Egypt: Total ban of FGM

The Government of Egypt has announced a total ban on FGM stating any medical professional who conducts FGM in public or private will be prosecuted. The Egyptian government originally banned FGM nearly 10 years ago, however permitted it to be continued in exceptional circumstances. There has been a recent national outcry against FGM after a 12-year-old girl died during a FGM operation. 90 per cent of Egyptian women are reported to have experienced FGM.

For full article see:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6251426.stm

Jordan: Iraqi women vulnerable to abuse

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (WCRWC) report on the situation of Iraqi women refugees in Jordan. The Jordanian government do not recognise Iraqis as refugees and most continue to live in the country illegally. This fuels an exploitative and abusive labour economy. In addition, they argue that the continued violence, desperation and fear in Iraq have heightened domestic violence and abuse against women both in Iraq and in Jordan. The article also states that women refugees

receive little protection and psychological assistance. In addition, although refugee women are entitled to health care, this is often only available if a marriage certificate is provided. The WCRWC call for the US government to develop a 'comprehensive assistance strategy for Iraqi refugees.'

For full article see:

http://www.womenscommission.org/newsroom/press_releases/071107.php

DRC: Women civilians targeted in conflict

The International Red Cross report an increasing number of women and children are being deliberately targeted for rape, executions and abductions in South Kivu in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Violence and insecurity has recently increased in the area, leaving many families fleeing the region. The ICRC states they are "*particularly concerned about abuses committed by armed persons against the civilian population, usually women and children.*" A UN Security Council delegation is calling for a 'increased effort to end hostilities'.

For full article see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=73033>

Iraq: Women targeted

IRIN report that many women's rights activists and organisations are being deliberately targeted and receiving threatening letters from extremists. The article states that the last two years has seen many women give up their jobs and an increasing pressure placed upon women not to work. Haifaa Nour, President of the Women's Freedom Organisation states, "*I know my life is under threat and I might be killed at any time especially for refusing to wear a veil or other traditional clothes, but if I do so, I will just be abetting the extremists.*" The Ministry for Women's Affairs acknowledges the problem appears to be getting worse. Many NGO's now restrict female workers to stay in the office so as not to be targeted and kidnapped.

For full article see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=73392>

Sierra Leone: New laws for women

New Legislation has been introduced in Sierra Leone that recognises domestic violence as a criminal offence, protects women against forced marriage and permits women to inherit property. The Domestic Violence Law defines domestic violence as the "*physical or sexual abuse, economic abuse, emotional, verbal or psychological abuse, harassment, conduct that harms, endangers the safety, health or well-being of another person or undermines the privacy and dignity of another person.*" Together, these new laws should provide a legal framework to help women, the police and family support units to recognise and protect women.

For full article see:

<http://www.afrol.com/articles/25806>

Uganda: The suffering of women and children in Northern Uganda

Austrian NGO SOS Kinderdorf International, reports on the plight of women in northern Uganda where many women are widowed and have lost many extended family members as a result of the conflict. This places extreme difficulties on women to ensure the protection and survival of themselves and their children. Coupled with these difficulties, many women also have psychological scars after experiencing sexual abuse from rebels or being abducted and witnessing the murder of loved ones. Forced marriage to rebel leaders at a young age is also quite common and affects family ties.

For full article see:

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/fromthefield/sosaus/118457164575.htm>

Sri Lankan girl faces possible beheading in Saudi Arabia

Rizana Nafeek, a 17-year-old Sri Lankan has been sentenced to death in Saudi Arabia. It is reported her confessions were made under duress and she has received no access to lawyers. Rizana was sent from Sri Lanka to

Saudi Arabia by a job agency who added six years to her age so she could be a housemaid. Her job included all house chores and care of a four-month-old baby. Unfortunately the baby died whilst Rizana was caring for the child and she has been found guilty of murder. The Asian Human Rights Committee have provided legal fees for an appeal.

For full article see:

<http://www.asiantribune.com/index.php?q=node/6736>

Sri Lanka: Police imprisoned for torturing woman

A trial of almost six years has resulted in a police Constable and Inspector of Police being sentenced to seven years imprisonment for torturing a 25-year-old woman. Angalin Roshana was arrested and accused of stealing a watch. Although she denied the claim, she was held overnight and severely beaten by the police. In court, the Judicial Medical Officer (JMO) provided a medical report confirming injuries and assault with a blunt object, consistent with Angalin's claims. The Asian Human Rights Commission welcomes the sentence, but argues the punishment of a couple of individuals will not stop the use of torture by police in Sri Lanka. They call for 'genuine steps' to be taken to stop torture.

For full article see:

<http://www.ahrchk.net/ua/mainfile.php/2007/2505/>

Other international news

Afghanistan: 'Losing Hope: Women in Afghanistan'

IRIN launch a 19 minute on-line film '*Losing Hope: Women in Afghanistan*' charting the conditions of women in Afghanistan, paying particular attention to maternal mortality rates, patriarchal restrictions and threats for the future. The film argues that the position of women has not improved in recent years, with violence, kidnapping, rape and abductions occurring regularly. The film includes the story of a young girl who was married at 12 and subjected to extreme

forms of domestic violence and burning from her husband and mother-in-law.

For related article and film see:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=72775>

International Conferences and Workshops

4th International Gender Conference: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence – A Social Nightmare Provoking Action

17-21st September 2007 – Elimina, Ghana

The Gender Development Institute is organising the 4th International Gender Conference. This Conference aims to attract about 100 participants from around the world to share experience of human rights issues from a gendered perspective. The conference specifically aims to:

- create a forum to deliberate and share experiences on human rights issues from a gender perspective;
- to understand what sexual and gender-based violence is;
- increase awareness among men about the gender dynamics of sexual and gender-based violence.
- recognise gender based violence against men
- initiate a process of collaboration and networking between gender equity advocates and human rights promoters.

The conference is aimed at individuals and agencies (INGO/local NGO, civil society, UN, multi-bi-lateral) working in this field. It will include a range of presentations, workshops, panel and group discussions to share organisational, institutional and personal experiences and testimonies

For further details, including price and conference package see:

<http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/courses/41529>

or email: achd@africaonline.com.gh

New Publications - UK

'Obstacles to Accountability: Challenging the Immigration Detention of Families'

Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID) has launched a new report *'Obstacles to Accountability'...* The research outlines their experiences of providing advice, support and assistance to families with children in detention since 2001. The publication argues that meaningful alternatives to detention are not always considered; there is no clear policy and practice reflecting the best interest of the child; families are not always aware of and accessing their legal rights and there is limited accountability and implementation of child protection policies. BID call for the detention of families to end. The report was launched after the Border and Immigration Minister launched the *'Keeping Children Safe From Harm'* report and stated that policies concerning children need to be re-hauled.

For full *'Obstacles to Accountability...'* research report see:

<http://www.biduk.org/pdf/children/BIDFamilyHandbookFINAL.pdf>

Further information about The Border and Immigration Agency *'Keeping Children in the Immigration System Safe from Harm'* can be found at:

<http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/aboutus/newsarchive/childsafety>

'From the Outset: Why Violence Should be a Priority for the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR)'

London Metropolitan University's Child and Women's Abuse Studies Unit has published this report, which covers the current knowledge base around violence including: gender based violence, sexuality, race and religion. The *'From the Outset...'* research argues for violence to be a crosscutting issue for CEHR. The research highlights how women and girls are more susceptible to sexual violence and concludes with

recommendations for CEHR's work and priorities.

For full *'From the Outset...'* research report see:

http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/documents/From_theoutset.pdf

New Publications – International

'Female Genital Mutilation: Religious and Legal Perspectives'

Womankind Worldwide have recently published this document that draws on the discussions and outcomes of a conference with the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights in Cairo, Egypt 2006. The report outlines the facts surrounding FGM, relays socio-cultural reasoning, country specific issues and counters religious arguments. This resource is aimed at international NGOs and community based organisations to assist local and international lobbying for the elimination of FGM.

For full *'FGM: Religious and Legal Perspectives'* research report see:

<http://www.womankind.org.uk/upload/Female%20Genital%20Mutilation%20-%20religious%20and%20legal%20perspectives.pdf>

'ASEAN and Trafficking in Persons: Using Data as a Tool to Combat Trafficking in Persons'

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) have recently launched the *'ASEAN and Trafficking in Persons...'* report. The research discusses issue around 'data' including what is data, the need for data and how is it collected. The research then explores country studies on trafficking in Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand, charting government sources and data collection practices. The final part of this study takes a practical exploration of lessons learnt, challenges to face and possible solutions.

For full *'ASEAN and Trafficking in Persons...'* research report see:

http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published_doc

[s/books/lowres%20asean%20report-complete.pdf](#)

'Research Agenda on Sexual Violence'

South African based Sexual Violence Research Initiative has published the '*Research Agenda...*' to bring together key pieces of research around sexual violence. The publication covers issues around the prevention of sexual violence, appropriateness of services, prevalence in conflict and emergency settings, human trafficking and FGM.

For full '*Research Agenda...*' research report see:

<http://www.crin.org/docs/agenda.pdf>

'Out of Sight: Child Domestic Workers and Patterns of Trafficking in Cambodia'

The IOM has produced this research to highlight the process and mechanisms of trafficking in three provinces in Cambodia. The study charts commercially and sexually exploited girls and women and child domestic workers to understand the factors that contribute to migration and trafficking.

For full '*Out of Sight...*' research report see:

http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/books/CDW%20report.pdf

Online Resources

ICAR have produced a briefing paper entitled '*Women refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.*' The document covers legal frameworks and gender issues, FGM and trafficking including the impact on the asylum process and UK policy and the detention of women asylum seekers. This paper is part of the on-line navigation guide (no.5) with the same name.

For briefing paper and navigation guide see:

http://www.icar.org.uk/briefings_womens

UNHCR has recently re-launched and revamped www.refworld.org. This online knowledge and evidence based resource aims to facilitate effective decision making in refugee status determination procedures. There is a specific Country of Origin section that lists some of the top countries and a separate section on 'gender equality and women' that includes a range of UN and UNHCR reports, legal documents, tools and links.

The Middle East Centre for Women Rights

has launched a new website. www.mecwr.org This website is designed to present the latest news of women's rights in Middle Eastern communities in UK and the Middle East. The site will also highlight laws and policies issued by the UK government regarding women. It is available in English, Kurdish and Arabic.

The Institute for Development Studies (IDS) and Eldis - HIV/AIDS Reporter, July edition

focuses on trafficking and sex work. This resource brings together new research and information on trafficking, sex work and human rights and lists recommended reading for work in this field.

For further information see:

<http://www.eldis.org/go/topics/resource-guides/hiv-and-aids/hiv-and-aids-reporter>

Also see Eldis Trafficking in Women and Children Dossier:

<http://www.eldis.ids.ac.uk/index.cfm?objectid=7714B1AB-CB1E-C341-C3067E0E57DF9F5F>

Noticeboard: events

Public hearings

The Independent Asylum Commission is holding the following public hearings to independently review the UK asylum process. A full report will be published in 2008 making key recommendations for reform based on the evidence presented.

- Leeds: **Asylum Appeals**, September 20th 2007
- Manchester: **Asylum Support and Destitution**, October 17th 2007
- London: **National Hearing**, November 29th 2007

For further information see:

<http://www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk/>

New web-based survey

Asylum Rights Watch

Since its launch in June 2007, Asylum Aids Asylum Rights Watch has received over 90 submissions from asylum seekers and people working with them.

The web-based survey allows people to share their experiences of the UK's asylum system with us. There are many people in the UK who come across examples of the unfair treatment given to asylum seekers, but who do not have opportunities to publicise these examples to the public or policymakers themselves. Asylum Aid has created the Asylum Rights Watch survey so people can share these examples with us. Asylum Aid will use the data collected through this facility as part of our lobbying, research and campaigning work.

Readers are reminded that they can still contribute to Asylum Rights Watch. The Asylum Rights Watch survey can be easily

accessed from the Asylum Aid website (www.asylumaid.org.uk).

All submissions sent before the end of September 2007 will be considered for a dossier of all the evidence, which will be launched in October 2007.

If you would like any further information or would like to help us publicise this forum please contact jamesd@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. We rely on the generosity of individuals to help us continue our work. Your support would be greatly appreciated.

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

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