



# RCO Women's News

Issue no: 38, January/February 2010

## Ao Dais – traditional Vietnamese fashion lives on

By Susan Nguyen – Vietnamese Women's Group in London

In Vietnam, Ao Dai is the traditional dress for women; "Ao Dai" can be literally translated as "long dress", and is pronounced "ao yai" in the south and "ao zai" in the north. It consists of a long tunic style top and wide trousers. This traditional dress dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was worn by aristocrats. These days, it is worn by all women, from children to adults.

This traditional dress comes in many different styles, colours and material and is worn for different occasions in Vietnam. These include: weddings, funerals, school and work. The colour of an Ao Dai signifies a woman's status, age and also the occasion for which it is being worn. Vietnamese school girls can be identified because they wear white, unpatterned Ao Dais.

Ao Dais are also worn in other countries apart from Vietnam and are popular in the UK. During 'Black History Month' 2009, our organisation - the Vietnamese Women's Group - were asked to stage a fashion and dance show at Peckham Settlement, a charity in south London. We were asked to do this in order to show people how the Ao Dais is still worn today. It was a really successful event, and people were keen to find out more after the show.

The female cabin crew of Vietnam Airlines also wear Ao Dais as their uniforms, in red and white - white trouser and red tunics. For many people who visit Vietnam, their first contact with people of Vietnamese heritage is the staff that they meet on the plane. This is a good representation of Vietnamese fashion and traditional clothing, as they are wearing the women's national dress of Vietnam.

Many designers, such as Christian Lacroix, have been inspired by the Ao Dais and have used it in their European fashion shows, which is evidence of its versatility and integration into global fashion. Men wear a different variation of the Ao Dai, and it is also referred to as an Ao Dai. The difference is that the man's dress is only knee length and looser fitting around the upper body.

With a recent revival in Vietnam, and fashion shows like the one we organised for Black History Month, we are sure that the Ao Dai will continue to grow in popularity and influence fashion across the globe!

### *Modern women wearing the Ao Dai*



**The Vietnamese Women's Group** is an RCO based in South London, which provides women-focused services. They provide information, advice and guidance in education, employment, immigration, welfare rights, housing and health. They also offer study classes for young people and supplementary school classes.

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## New FGM initiative

**City Parochial Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Rosa** (the UK Fund for Women and Girls), three independent charitable organisations, have collaborated to establish a new UK-wide Special Initiative to fund community based, preventive work to safeguard children from the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Approximately £1million has been invested in 15 organisations throughout the UK over a three-year period. The initiative is supporting organisations based within practising communities - in particular, women's organisations. The projects will start in January 2010. The initiative's aim is to reduce the risk to girls and young women in the UK of undergoing genital mutilation in all its forms. For more information please contact **Maggie Baxter** on **07817 785 225**.

## New publication

Recently published by voluntary organisation **Rights of Women**, *Seeking Refuge? A handbook for asylum-seeking women* has been designed for asylum seeking women and the organisations that support them. The guide is extremely clear, comprehensive and, most importantly, makes constant reference to the specific experiences of women asylum seekers.

This is in direct contrast to the Government's strategy on ending violence against women, launched in November 2009, which only features asylum-seeking women in half a page of the report. We know that refugee and asylum seeking women are more affected by violence than any other women's population, due to the nature of conflict in their own countries, and the range of vulnerable situations this leaves them in. It is therefore very disappointing that the strategy has failed to address their needs. See Refugee Council press release at [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/news/news/2009/November/25112009\\_zz.htm](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/news/news/2009/November/25112009_zz.htm)

Nevertheless, it is very encouraging to see that organisations such as Rights of Women take the plight of women refugees and asylum seekers very seriously. Their handbook is user friendly and succeeds in clarifying the complexities of the asylum system. The guide is available free of charge to asylum seeking women and refugee community organisations. Visit [www.rightsofwomen.org.uk](http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk) to request a hard copy or to download the guide for free.

## Funding news

The **UIA Charitable Foundation** is a small grant-making trust, established to provide financial support to organisations that help people in need.

They support small organisations or groups where their modest grants will make a real difference and which deal with:

- \* Victims of domestic abuse
- \* Victims of drug and alcohol addiction
- \* Rehabilitation of offenders
- \* Third World poverty
- \* Third World human rights

Committee meetings are usually held twice a year, in March and September. Applications should reach the company no later than the beginning of February or August, but please note that receipt of an application does not guarantee that it will be considered at the next meeting.

They are a small charity and are rarely able to support requests over £1,000. For more information see [www.uia.co.uk/Home/About/Charitable-foundation](http://www.uia.co.uk/Home/About/Charitable-foundation)

## New Guide

*Seeking Support: A Guide to the Rights and Entitlements of Separated Refugee and Asylum Seeking Children* provides information on the asylum process; age disputes; children's services support; leaving care support; education; healthcare; and other topics, as well as links to other relevant organisations and resources. The guide is available to download free at [www.childrenslegalcentre.com](http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com) or copies can be ordered free of charge from the Children's Legal Centre: please phone **01206 877910**.

If you would like to submit an article to *RCO Women's News* about your RCO's work, or would like to write about a topical issue, please email: [development@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:development@refugeecouncil.org.uk).