



RCD Women's News

Issue no: 13 September 2005

Yarl's Wood – women in detention

On 2nd September, the BBC reported that two Ugandan women asylum-seekers who were on hunger strike at Yarl's Wood removal centre, were admitted to hospital. The women have been protesting with a number of other female Ugandan detainees since July 2005 against their removal from the UK, legal aid and conditions at Yarl's Wood. A hospital spokesman said the two women were expected to be released from hospital once they had built up their strength with fluids. The Home Office would not comment on individual cases and said each application was considered on its own merit.

On 15th September Manuel Bravo, an asylum seeker from Angola, took his own life less than a day after being detained at Yarl's Wood with his 13 year old son, pending their deportation to Angola. Mr Bravo was the sixth asylum-seeker to commit suicide while in detention in the past 12 months. The high number of deaths among asylum-seekers held in British removal centres has prompted refugee groups to demand an urgent public inquiry. A spokesperson for the Refugee Council said: " This is both very sad and hugely appalling. It demonstrates in such stark terms the enormous failure of a system that seems to concentrate more on increasing the number of removals than it does on ensuring that people who need safety here are able to get it. It is vital that procedures are urgently reviewed to ensure this cannot happen again."

In May 2005, a fast-track asylum process was implemented for single women at Yarl's Wood to deal with asylum claims more "speedily." In its recent report, *United Kingdom - Seeking asylum is not a crime*, Amnesty International expresses concern that the vast majority of fast-track asylum claims are initially refused, citing that 99 per cent of initial claims at both Oakington and Harmondsworth were refused during the first quarter of 2005. There is concern that such a strict timescale makes a fair decision-making process almost impossible as many women may not feel ready or able in the time allowed, to disclose experiences of rape and torture vital to their case. For many women, this may be the first time they have ever spoken about their ordeal.

In her report, published in July 2005, the Chief Inspector of Prison's report found that "detainees at Yarl's Wood were twice as likely to report feeling unsafe as in other centres." The Refugee Council welcomes this report which urges the centre to take urgent action to ensure the safety of its resident women and children with "the need for more robust procedures" to support vulnerable women and those at risk of self-harm.

As part of its women-centred strategies, the Refugee Council will be working with other NGOs to try to develop better access to legal advice generally and for women in particular.

For further information: *A Self-Help Guide against detention and deportation* by Legal Action for Women at booksvideos@crossroadwomen.net; Bail for Immigration Detainees on 020 7247 3590; Amnesty International report: *Seeking asylum is not a crime* http://www.amnesty.org.uk/images/ul/d/detention_report_5.pdf; Report on Yarl's Wood Immigration Centre by HM Chief Inspector of prisons http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs4/YARLs_WOOD_26405_FINAL_edit.pdf

Gender equality: autumn consultations

By the end of 2006, all public bodies will have a duty to promote gender equality, similar to the duty to promote race equality in the Race Relations Amendment Act. It is important that women's organisations are involved in helping public bodies to deliver gender equality because they have invaluable expertise about gender discrimination, meeting women's needs and how to address them.

The Women and Equality Unit (Department of Trade and Industry) will be consulting in early October on the specific duties that public bodies will have to do, in order to meet their obligations under the gender duty. The Women's Resource Centre (WRC) is holding a **free** consultation event on the Gender Duty on **Thursday 13th October 2005**, 1pm to 4pm. This is a very good opportunity to discuss the proposal and to find out more about how you can contribute to this consultation.

For more information contact WRC on 020 7324 3030 or email: info@wrc.org.uk

Training

Woman's Therapy Centre

Understanding Women (exploring women's psychology)

For more information:

020 7263 7860 or email:

OYC@womenstherapycentre.co.uk

Middlesex University

Free English classes

For more information: 020 8411

6193 or email: david11@mdx.ac.uk

Refugee Council/Kurdish Community Centre

Free ESOL course

For more information: 020 7840

4488/020 8880 1804

Conferences

Working Families

Changing our World: Balancing Work & Home in the Voluntary Sector: 11th October 2005

For more information: 020 7253 7243 or visit:

www.workingfamilies.org.uk

Criminology in the Millennium

Race, Gender and Criminal Justice Process: 28th October 2005

For more information: 020 8204 9587 or email:

ruthchigwada@tiscali.co.uk, or visit:

www.criminologyinmillenium.co.uk

Rights of Women

Women and Violence: What's law got to do with it?: 3rd November 2005

This conference will focus on the issue of violence against women and the law's response to combat it. Focusing particularly on BME communities and asylum seeking and refugee women.

For more information: 020 7251 6575 or email: info@row.org.uk, or visit: www.rightsofwomen.org.uk

FEM 05 - A National Conference on Women's Rights

Sheffield: 5th November 2005

This conference will feature talks and workshops by leading women's rights organisations and activists. Free to all delegates.

For more information and venue details: 0114 270 1714 or visit: www.femconferences.org.uk

Events

Single Parent Action Network Annual Event

Ending Child Poverty in One Parent Families: 19th October 2005

Free to individual single parent and small group members of SPAN.

For more information: 0117 951 4231 or email: nat@spanuk.org.uk

Stop Violence Against Women - Amnesty International is asking people across the UK to imagine a world without violence towards women and girls.

Contributions will form part of an exhibition during the *16 days of Activism Against Violence Against Gender-Based Violence* on London's South Bank from 25 November. The exhibition will explore ways in which the world could be different if violence against women did not exist. Examples of contributions received so far from women include:

"Our daughters would no longer be mutilated by FGM" (woman from Kenya)

"I could be me, uncensored" (female university student)

For more information or to contribute online, visit: www.amnesty.org.uk/svaw/imagine