



RCD Women's News

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Equal rights, equal opportunities: progress for all International Women's Day 2010

By Caroline Chandler – Asylum Aid

"Everybody should be the same - they should treat every single woman the same"
Cecilia, Cameroon

On 8 March 2010, people around the world will come together to mark the 100th International Women's Day (IWD) – celebrating economic, political and social achievements of women throughout history. The United Nation's chosen theme for this year is one of equality, opportunity and solidarity. There has certainly been marked progress in the search for equal rights and opportunity since the first IWD in 1911, yet there remains much to be done.

If we look at the eligibility of two fictional women – one a UK resident, the other an asylum seeker – a continuing lack of equality becomes painfully clear:

Angela is a 26 year old single British woman with no employment history. Throughout her pregnancy she was eligible for Job Seekers Allowance at £64.30 per week plus Housing Benefit. Eleven weeks before her baby was due she became eligible for Income Support at £64.30 per week plus Housing Benefit. She also received a number of grants, namely a Sure Start maternity grant of £500, a Health in pregnancy grant of £190 and Healthy start vouchers of £3.10 per week. Angela received free maternity care.

Malaika is a 26 year old single woman from abroad who was refused asylum in this country. She doesn't fit the eligibility requirements for 'hard case' support so she has no accommodation or financial support. She is not allowed to work. Six weeks before her baby was due she became eligible for no-choice accommodation and £38 per week in supermarket vouchers. She was not eligible for any grants. Malaika received a bill for more than £2,000 for her maternity care.

If you watch *Every Single Woman*, a short campaigning film, you will see Rahel talking about her difficulties when she was pregnant. Rahel left Ethiopia to escape government fighting. On arrival in the UK, her claim for asylum was refused and she subsequently found herself pregnant and destitute with nowhere to live. Much of her pregnancy was spent sleeping on the floor of Victoria station and begging for food. She explains "I haven't got any family around me, I haven't got any friends, you know, so it's really hard. They treat me like, in this country, even dog they treat it good. But asylum seeker no."

The *Every Single Woman* campaign, launched last December under the *Charter of rights of Women seeking asylum*, asks for a change of culture designed to produce a genuinely gender sensitive asylum system to ensure women asylum seekers receive a comparable standard of treatment to women in similar situations who are settled in the UK. It draws on the experiences of Rahel and others to underline this disparity of treatment. Great hope can be drawn from the marked improvement of the Police and Prison services in their treatment of women. We hope the UK Borders Agency will draw on the lessons they have learned and help us move a few steps closer to the United Nation's wish for 'progress for all'.

For more information or to get involved, please go to www.asylumaid.org.uk/charter

Publication – young people seeking asylum

The emotional well-being of young people seeking asylum in the UK is a report which presents findings from an in-depth study of the perspectives and experiences of children and young people arriving unaccompanied to seek asylum in the UK. The research is based on conversations with 54 young people from 18 countries, supplemented by interviews with key professionals working with this group. A summary can be downloaded at www.ioe.ac.uk/study/departments/tcru/16521.html or purchased at www.baaf.org.uk/res/pubs/books/book_ewb.shtml

Women's National Commission consultation

With a growing number of women only services being threatened by funding cuts, this survey provides an opportunity for individuals to let the Government know the value of women only services and why they think they are needed. You can complete the survey online at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/7BGXQLQ>. Take part

Funding news

Refugee Integration Awards Scheme (RISE) - England aims to unleash and encourage the potential of refugees as social entrepreneurs. Grants of between £500 and £5,000 are available to small groups of refugees and individuals to set up projects to help make their communities happier and to support refugees to achieve their full economic and social potential.

For more information visit <http://unltd.org.uk/template.php?ID=55&PageName=rise:refugeeawardsscheme>
Deadline for applications: **21 March 2010**

News - maternity payments for parents seeking asylum

Asylum seekers who are expecting a child or already have children and are receiving asylum support may be entitled to extra money. Asylum Support Partnership have produced a leaflet which explains what payments are available and what people need to do to receive them. The leaflet is available in 18 languages and can be downloaded from the Refugee Council's multilingual website at <http://languages.refugeecouncil.org/>

Refugee Council International Women's Day celebration event

International Women's Day is celebrated across the world annually on 8 March. This day is a symbol of women's united action for global equality and to inspire women to achieve their full potential. Many events on this day celebrate the progress made since the first International Women's Day in the 1900s; women have become Prime Ministers, can vote, go to university and have successful careers.

Refugee Council is celebrating this special day on Tuesday 8 March 2010 from 3pm-6pm at the Brixton Refugee Council day centre (240-250 Ferndale Road, SW9 8BB) and would like to invite all women, and any women with children to join in the festivities. During the day there will be inspiring speeches from women refugees, Elizabeth Ajith the Co-ordinator of Sudan Women Association, the Refugee Council Chief Executive and many others.

There will also be a variety of entertainment and activities including: cultural songs and dance, drama, poetry and games. There will also be an opportunity to taste an assortment of international dishes and most importantly to meet other women. Some travel costs will be reimbursed. To book a place, email **Anne Akaki** at anne.akaki@refugeecouncil.org.uk or call **020 7346 6771** by 4 March 2010. First come, first served.

If you would like to submit an article to *RCO Women's News* about your RCO's work, or would just like to share your experience, please email: development@refugeecouncil.org.uk.