



REFUGEE WOMEN'S news

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Women and War

Plus: Sudan Country Profile
A Report on AFRW's 7th Women's Day Celebration
Courses & Training & Let's Build Up

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Women in War-Torn Countries and the Work of the ICRC

Every minute, two people are killed in conflicts around the world. Women are involved in these wars in many ways. Some fight in armies and guerrilla groups. Many support their families while men are away at war. Women suffer from the violence caused by armed conflicts, but they are also involved in reconstruction efforts all over the world.

The work of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) addresses the specific dangers and suffering confronting women in wartime. The ICRC has consistently shown that international humanitarian law (IHL), which grants general protection to all war victims regardless of gender, provides extensive specific protection for women in war. If these rules were better observed, the suffering faced by women in war would be greatly reduced.

The following are extracts from three stories from the ICRC's work in the field. Each highlights the scope of women's experience of war and their various roles in rebuilding societies and promoting peace. Musu's, Manouri's and Luiza's stories can be read in full on the ICRC website at www.icrc.org/eng/women.

Providing a Voice for Sri Lanka's War Widows

Tens of thousands of civilians and servicemen went missing during Sri Lanka's conflicts in the south in the 1980s and in the north and east in the 1990s.

The horrors of war did not directly affect Manouri Muttetuwegama. However, in her capacity as a respected lawyer and human rights activist, she was appointed to chair several Presidential Commissions on the Disappearance of Persons.

She and the other members of the various commissions dealt with about 18,000 disappearances. Most of the people who spoke to her about the loss of a family member were women. "Widows were marginalised by their communities, orphaned girls were deprived of basic education, and thousands of female-headed families struggling to survive are still waiting to be counted in official statistics so that they can receive aid." "War is very much a men's thing", says Manouri, adding that women are often overlooked, also as possible contributors to peaceful solutions.

Throughout her work Manouri has been left "with enormous respect for the women of our country", as she witnessed hundreds of widows who turned themselves into breadwinners to sustain their families.

© ICRC / Marçal Izard



After the war in Sri Lanka: An ICRC delegate visits a woman who lost two of her sons. © CICR / Jon BJÖRGVINSSON.

Luiza's Story

Luiza graduated from Moscow State University to start a promising TV career as a journalist in Grozn: "I [was working for] a television arts channel. It's there that I learned the crushing news that nine members of my family, a pregnant woman and children among them, had been killed by a bomb in the middle of our village."

Grief, pain and sleepless nights followed. During that period, she came to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to ask for medicines but found a job as well that allowed her to live on. Starting with public relations, she moved on to mine risk education, a programme that Luiza believes to be crucial in a republic facing the terrible consequences of armed confrontations. Many are in need in Chechnya - there is hardly a person whose circle of friends and relatives has not been touched by these weapons.

"I remember meeting an elderly Russian woman in Grozny, who found an unexploded weapon stuck in the foundations of her house", says Luiza. It could have detonated simply from the vibration of a passing truck. In the end, the building had to be destroyed and she was weeping in sorrow and anger."

Luiza has been involved in mine action for more than five years now, travelling from one mine affected community to another, teaching them how to save themselves. No one has ever been able to explain to Luiza what happened to her family. She is still waiting for answers, grateful at least that her son is near and that she is able to support her family and make plans for the future.

© ICRC / Anastassia Issiouk

Musu's Story: Willing One's Way to Autonomy

In 1997, Musu's husband was brutally murdered by the rebels in the war in Liberia. In the blink of an eye, she became a single mother, without any money, in a country devastated by war.

Musu returned to her village, Sass Town, north of Monrovia in Bomi County, where she farmed small plots of land belonging to inhabitants in exchange for a share of the crop. But life remained precarious for her and her family. In 2000, she went to the Blamacee camp, where she at least had a roof over her head and her children could go to school.

In September 2004, the ICRC launched a market-gardening support programme for single mothers and widows, the aim of which was to encourage people to re-engage in a subsistence activity. Since

Musu had gardening experience, she was one of the candidates selected by a team of Monrovia-based agricultural specialists.

Musu has planted peppers, aubergines, cucumbers and watermelon on one half of a hectare, and sugar cane on the other, which she planned to resell to a rum distillery. "Work is a way to forget the problems caused by the war."

The energy Musu invested in this project enabled her to be more independent. Today, Musu is a responsible and organized manager of her own crops. The money she makes from crop sales will help her build a house close to her field and send her children to school.

© ICRC / Fabienne Garaud

EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

Armed conflicts in the past two decades have been overwhelmingly internal and marked by the divisive politics and ideologies that have transformed ethnicity in an effective tool of war. In contemporary conflicts, the process of boundary formation between 'us' and 'them' as well as of identifying 'the enemy within' is occurring at the communal level. That is where most of the physical violence and suffering occurs and that is why current wars generate massive refugee movements.

Processes leading to the eruption of violence and conflict, as well as internal dynamics of war, are always importantly gendered. They shape women's and men's lives, roles and relationships. The identity politics of wars constructed as ethnic strife assign women with 'honourable' roles as 'Mothers of the Nation' and 'Symbols of the Nation', transforming them into precious property to be controlled and 'protected'. With the escalation of armed conflict, women often become specifically targeted because of these roles. The increase in violence, justified as the 'defence' of the 'engendered' ethnic group, as in the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example, transforms women into symbolically important targets. In war, women's bodies become territories to be seized and conquered. In the process, their abuse tends to be sexualised, leading to the large scale rape and sexual abuse of women in war described here by Amnesty International on page 4, and in the cases of the Democratic Republic of Congo on page 6 and Sudan on pages 12 and 13. We should not forget, however, that men and their bodies are also often subjected to sexual violence and abuse in violent conflicts, as documented in The Bassiouni Report on the atrocities committed during the Bosnian war, for instance, but such instances are seldom reported or widely discussed. One may ask why? In a world marked by notions of 'The Nation' as virile and powerful and of dominant masculinity associated with power and heterosexuality, sexually assaulted men tend to remain invisible, because the very recognition of their existence would undermine these powerful constructions.

While women are victimised in war and often specifically targeted as women, they are not simply victims, but also agents. They are actively involved in violent, military actions, such as in Rwanda or Sri Lanka, as well as in promoting peace, such as in Afghanistan, Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sri Lanka.

Thus, when looking into women's experiences of war or their situation in different zones of conflict, it is important to move away from notions of women as victims, 'natural born nurturers' and of men as warriors and 'natural born rapists and killers'. Here, the stories from the Red Cross's field work on page 2 highlight the various ways in which women are involved in zones of conflict, and in rebuilding civil society after war.

There is some evidence that women caught in war situations often opt for 'bridge building' projects and involvement in the grassroots work of keeping open lines of communication across ethnic, religious or communal divides. Because women have not been exposed to masculine socialisation and the associated values of a male-dominated society, they may be more prone than men to become involved in non-violent forms of conflict resolution (and Cynthia Cockburn discusses women's non-violent forms of protest against war on page 10). The exposure to different types of socialisation is not only central to how women and men respond to war, and oppose it, but also to how they experience the displacement caused by conflict, and develop survival strategies in exile. While both women and men experience psycho-emotional disorganisation and individual identity crises in exile, there is evidence that women tend to reconstruct their core sense of self more successfully than men. Exile is an experience of loss of continuity as well as a process of (re)constructing one's life. Women's core identity in most societies is associated with their mothering and nurturing roles, whilst work, for example, only adds to the core of their identity. They are more likely, thus, to achieve faster a sense of a continuity of meaningful vital roles in exile than men, because they tend to be more open to whatever opportunities arise in the receiving society. The women that Dragana Savcic-Sanders worked with as a psychologist in the NHS (page 7) testify to this ability to respond positively to the help that is on offer and to make meaningful bonds with other women in exile as a way to rebuild one's own sense of self.

Maja Korac-Sanderson, Guest Editor

Maja is a Sociologist and a Senior Lecturer in Refugee Studies at UEL. Her interests include the displacement of people fleeing conflict involving ethnic divisions, gender aspects of forced migration, and problems of settlement and integration of refugees.

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On the front cover

On the front cover is a picture of women fleeing from the conflict in Vavuniya, Sri Lanka, © CICR/D. Sandsoni. We are grateful to the ICRC picture library in Geneva for permission to use this photograph.

WOMEN AS 'COLLATERAL DAMAGE'?

Although the 24-hour media are constantly bringing us images and reports on the brutality of war, there is a "hidden" human rights crisis for millions of women who are killed, maimed and raped in the dozens of conflicts that are taking place around the world today.

Their experiences are rarely reported in depth but the truth is that although we think of soldiers when we think of war, it actually has a disproportionate impact on women and girls - in places like Sudan, Congo, Rwanda, East Timor, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Kosovo. If you look closely you can see that in war men are viewed as the main 'actors' and women as the 'collateral damage' of war.

A recent Amnesty International report, "Lives Blown Apart", lays out the global picture, showing a pattern of systematic abuse of women's and girls' rights in conflicts from Afghanistan to Colombia and from Sudan to Chechnya.

Globally, an estimated 32 million women and children have been forced to flee their homes because of violence and human rights violations, including 1.4 million in Sudan, 2.7 million in the Democratic Republic of Congo and a quarter of a million in Colombia.



Kavira stood up for her rights
Photograph © Amnesty International

Not only are women forced to flee their homes as a direct consequence of conflicts, but too often they then become victims of attacks by armed men, in which they are raped, abducted, sold as sex slaves and rejected by their communities. In Darfur, western Sudan, girls as young as eight and women of 80 have been tortured and raped by government-backed 'janjawid' militia. In South-Kivu in Congo 5,000 women and girls were raped in the five months to February 2003 alone, averaging 40 rapes a day.

Chilling stories are told by the survivors of these war-time sex crimes. Sanguina, who was raped twice during the bloody civil war in Congo, told Amnesty International: "In the community, they made such fun of me that I had to leave the village and live in the forest... I am hungry, I have no clothes and no soap. I do not have any money to pay for medical care. It would be better if I died with the baby in my womb."

During war women are abused by all sides to the conflict - from soldiers of the state's armed forces, to pro-government paramilitaries and rebel armed groups. In post-conflict situations women and girls have been violated by UN and other peacekeeping forces, staff of humanitarian agencies, neighbours and relatives. There have been numerous cases of sexual violence and exploitation in refugee camps in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. A man in Sierra Leone told interviewers that: "If you don't have a wife, sister or a daughter to offer the NGO workers, it is hard to have access to aid".

Given this catastrophic level of violence against women because of war all over the world the question must be asked as to whether women will ever be able to live in peace. There are signs for hope and change however.

Although initially many women are unable to find the strength to fight for justice many do find that strength. Kavira Muraulu, a Congolese farming woman, went to the community leaders in her small town and demanded that the soldiers who had gang raped her be prosecuted. When she was threatened and attacked again she still stood up and asked for justice, inspiring many other women around her.

In Colombia, a country with decades of fighting between armed groups and paramilitaries, women do speak out for their rights regardless of the intimidation, violence and even death they face from armed groups on both sides. Leonora Castaño, president of a group promoting women's land and human rights, the National Association of Peasant Farmers, Black and Indigenous Women of Colombia, has been the target of numerous death threats. Still, she campaigns for social, economic and political rights even though rape, mutilation and abuse of women and girls have been used to threaten and silence human rights campaigners like Leonora.

Kavira, Leonora and many other nameless women have forced society to acknowledge violence against them as a central issue. Hundreds of women in Liberia called for disarmament of the fighters who preyed on women throughout the west African country's 14 years of civil war. Rape has been widespread during Liberia's conflict, with all sides guilty of the crime.

And alongside the actions of brave individuals, organisations like Amnesty International are campaigning hard for more international support for the International Criminal Court (ICC) - and for it to deliver justice to women and girls. The ICC can prosecute rape as a war crime, and must be given the resources to do so.

Last year the ICC's Prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo began investigations into systematic human rights violations in Congo and Uganda. In both conflicts women have been horribly maimed, raped and murdered. This is where the two decades to 2004 have taken us: to the brink of a world where perpetrators of crimes against humanity can now expect punishment.

The historic decision of the Security Council in March 2005 to refer the crimes committed in Darfur, Sudan to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court is a huge step towards justice for victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in this war-torn region of Sudan. Tens of thousands of women and girls have been raped, tortured and forced into sex-slavery.

RESOURCES & REPORTS

While these are important breakthroughs, more is needed. Out of the hundreds of thousands of instances in Rwanda, only about 100 rape cases have gone through the courts. In East Timor 280 people are wanted for crimes against humanity - including rape - committed in 1999, but Indonesia refuses to cooperate with the general prosecutor and hand them over. It is the same story with Sierra Leone, where former Liberian president Charles Taylor is accused of having orchestrated rebel atrocities but is now sheltered by Nigeria.

On the other hand, the US's efforts to weaken the ICC, are totally unacceptable. It creates double standards of justice, contravenes the UN, the Rome Statute and other international laws. Amnesty International calls on all governments and all parties to the conflict to fully cooperate with the ICC in its important and complex task.

Amnesty International is calling on governments to publicly condemn violence against women and girls during war, and to issue clear instructions to their forces that violence against women will not be tolerated.

Another world is possible - we can build a world without violence against women.

Duska Bosnjak

Duska works in the Press Office of Amnesty International UK.

The report "Lives Blown Apart" is available from Amnesty International UK at <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engACT770752004>.

For more information about Amnesty International's campaign to Stop Violence Against Women please visit: www.amnesty.org.uk/svaw.

New guidance document on Women Facing War published by the International Committee for the Red Cross

This guidance document intends to translate the findings of the study into practical terms. Aimed at staff concerned with the planning and implementation of humanitarian programmes, this document is intended as a means of sharing ICRC's experience in this area with other organisations. It is an important tool which can be used to address women's needs on an operational level, illustrating best practices and lessons learned.

Designed for quick reference, the guidance document is divided into specific themes that can be consulted separately. These themes, which revolve around the needs of beneficiaries, include, among others:

- Personal safety
- Sexual violence
- Displacement
- Freedom of movement
- Food and essential household items
- Water
- Preservation of the family links
- Access to education and information
- Religious and cultural practices
- Social groups
- Legal issues

The problems faced by women in detention are dealt with separately. This section of the document helps the reader to recognize issues specific to women deprived of their freedom.

The guidance document is available online at www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/p0840

Women, Peace and Security

This study draws on the collective experience of the UN system. It analyzes the impact of armed conflict on women and girls; describes the relevant international legal framework and assesses its implementation; and reviews the gender perspectives in peace processes as well as in peace operations; humanitarian operations, reconstruction and rehabilitation, including DDR processes. The study includes recommendations for concrete action to ensure greater attention to gender perspectives in all these areas of work.

Available on the UN website at www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/

Forgotten Casualties of War: Girls in Armed Conflict

This new report by Save the Children reveals that a hidden army of more than 120,000 girls is working or fighting with armed groups around the world. The report shows that girls as young as eight are abducted and forced to live with armed groups. Some carry weapons, others serve as cleaners, cooks or porters. Almost all of them are forced to be sex slaves or "wives" of commanders.

Following their return to their communities girls are often ostracised because of their "immoral" experiences.

The success of DDR programmes (Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration - or DDR - programmes are now a standard response to post conflict situations), the report argues, is often measured by the number of weapons collected rather than the successful reintegration of former combatants. Girls told Save the Children for this report that they are in fact put off by the military orientation of such programmes because they highlight the fact that they have been in armed groups and so increase their vulnerability in the community.

Girls returning home are often seen as violent or dirty. With no other means of supporting themselves, many are forced into prostitution, making them even more stigmatised and isolated.

The report says girls identified a number of ways the international community could help better: through mediation work with the community and family to explain they were coerced into joining the armed group; by creating net works to provide emotional support; and with help in starting new livelihoods.

Find the report online at www.savethechildren.org.uk.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN WAR

Rape as a Weapon of Mass Destruction in the DR of Congo

Amongst the thousands of stories of rape that I encountered in my work in the war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo, the story of two young women from Bunia Town, whose names I cannot reveal for security reasons, stayed with me as particularly gruesome. I remember how it left me in tears at the trauma counselling sessions organised by the Department of Women & Children at the Centre for the Resolution of Conflicts (CRC) that I co-founded with my husband in the north-eastern part of DR Congo. During the humanitarian disaster of 2002, it was not easy to move from place to place in the country, because of the war. Food became sparse and very expensive. These two young women, accompanied by the husband of one of them, decided to travel to a village market about 10 km away in order to find food for the family. They were ambushed on the way and then detained for two weeks. During these two weeks, several militia soldiers raped them every day, in front of all the other prisoners, including the husband. When the militias realised that the husband was scared and reacting badly to the rapes, they killed him.

Several hundred thousands of women are victims of horrific atrocities in conflict situations everywhere around the world. Sexual violence against women in war is as old as armed conflict itself. However, this atrocity takes on a specific form today as rape has become a weapon of mass destruction in conflict situations. Rape is used as a tactic of terror not only to dishonour and to degrade women but also to humiliate entire communities. It is a terrible human rights violation. As a weapon it knows no age boundary. In some countries, like the DR Congo, the age of rape victims ranges from 1 to 80. In many situations, the victim is killed following the onslaught, so the act of rape can be erased by its perpetrators.

The consequences of rape are enormous. Rape is often called 'a silent killer', because it destroys not only a woman's body, but her psyche and spirit as well. Rape leaves a wound that is very difficult to heal. Physical healing itself is hard enough to achieve, especially in countries with poor health services, but the psychological trauma suffered by rape victims, and the shame they feel, is even harder to overcome.

Another consequence of rape is social ostracism: Victims of sexual violence are often rejected by their family, friends and communities because they are considered to have brought shame to onto them. Often, the victims of rape are obliged to

bear unwanted children. Their children, too, will suffer the trauma of rejection by society. Another deadly consequence of rape is the spread of sexually transmissible diseases. As many rapists in war-zones are HIV-positive, their victims often end up suffering from HIV/AIDS as a result of the attacks.

Women and girls are raped by combatants on their way to refugee camps and in the fields when they are collecting food. In refugee camps, young girls are sometimes forced into prostitution as they sell themselves in order to obtain food. This form of prostitution and rape then stops young girls from going back to school because of shame, rejection and trauma.

Tragically, even the UN peacekeepers who are meant to ensure the security of the population are committing crimes of sexual violence against women and girls on their missions. Owen Bowcott in *The Guardian* (25 March 2005) revealed how an internal report published by Jordan's ambassador to the UN assembly showed that tens of thousands of young girls and women have been raped or otherwise subjected to sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Peacekeepers would exploit the women's and girls' desperate need for food, money and other items. According to the report, they offered abandoned orphans small gifts - as little as two eggs from their rations - for sexual encounters. Of course the impunity of the perpetrators of sexual abuses against women is one of the causes of rape in zones of conflict.

We face the enormous challenge of changing the attitudes of entire populations if we want to stop sexual abuses. What can be done? As human beings, each of us has responsibility for taking action to stop this worldwide human rights violation. We all need to become a human rights activist in our own communities. We have power in our voice, as small as it could be. Let us therefore end the silence, lift up our voice and campaign against any kind of violence against women and girls.

Kongosi Onia Mussanzi

Kongosi is, with her husband Ben, co-founder of the Centre for the Resolution of Conflicts (CRC) in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In June 2001, her life came under threat and she was evacuated to the UK. She is currently studying for an MA in Peace Studies at Bradford University.



UNHCR estimates that the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo left around three million people dead.

Photograph © S. Salgado - ZRE

A SPACE FOR HEALING

Group Work with Women from War-Torn Countries

The issue of women and war brings out many memories of clients that I have seen over the years, working therapeutically as a psychologist in the NHS and for various organisations, such as Refugee Action, the Refugee Council and the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, where I volunteered as a caseworker several years ago. Stories of rape and other atrocities come back to me, but these are quickly and overwhelmingly suppressed by memories of the courage and resilience of these women. They endured extremely threatening and difficult situations in their home countries, and then continued to live in difficult circumstances here, in a society that often does not want them here and refuses to help them. And yet, they only ever expressed gratitude for their country of asylum.

Here, I would like to say a few words about my attempt to form an innovative way of working at secondary level of specialism within the NHS. My experience is that many psychological services, apart from very few dedicated ones, have difficulty in working with refugee clients, for many reasons. Sometimes it is the factor of the 'unknown' that causes anxiety – anxiety about not knowing how to work clinically with clients with severe trauma-related difficulties. Other times, it is the insecurity about working with an interpreter that causes problems, or even the fear that such 'work' may not be possible at all. The difficulty also comes from the sheer complexity of the issues that refugee clients face and have faced, and this can create a sense of inadequacy in the therapist.

One of the difficulties in the NHS is the constant struggle to find ways of managing waiting lists. Clinicians and managers alike are often very creative in finding ways around this, but they can never be avoided completely. On occasions, frustrations around this cause clinicians to assert that many refugee clients do not need therapy as such, because so many of them 'present' with difficulties that are clearly not only psychological – such as social and housing issues or legal ones. Coupled with increasing pressures to manage waiting lists and to offer short-term therapy, these, very real, worries can result in shifting responsibility for asylum seekers to another service provider. For instance, if a client needs 'support only', should he or she be seen by counsellors from the primary care services instead (e.g. counsellors in local GP practices)? Those who present clear symptomatology of a more complex psychological nature should,

surely, be seen by secondary services that deal with more complex 'cases' or even at the specialist level of tertiary services, which are the 'experts' in treating the most difficult problems. In my experience, when it comes to refugee clients, it seems that there is no clear referral pathway within the NHS. Therefore, many professionals at various levels of the service, and regardless of infrastructure, provide therapy for clients with similar difficulties.

Because of the difficulty to justify longer-term therapy, and also because of my personal interest in providing a different type of therapy to that which is one-to-one, I proposed forming a Refugee Women's Group in the service where I was employed. This was based in a London Borough with a population that is more than 50% of ethnic minority background and includes a relatively large proportion of refugee clients. It was hoped that the additional support offered by the group would help ease the pressure put on individual therapy in the sense of providing a space for women to address those issues that are not directly related to their 'symptomatology', such as existential questions that inevitably form a part of the experience of an uprooted person who might have experienced great suffering. In short, I was hoping to provide space for women to question 'the meaning of it all', and an opportunity to meet other women who have been through similar situations. Most women in the group had experienced violence at both the personal and the community level, such as sexual abuse, humiliation and other elements of violence. Many witnessed killings in the war-torn places they came from. At first I was unsure what type of group to form: A psycho-educational group? A support group? A group based on the discussion of common topics and experiences? Eventually, it was agreed to form an unstructured group with no pre-determined topics or educational elements, but with a clear mind to meeting the needs that are expressed in the group. We faced the challenge of meeting the language needs of very diverse women and were ultimately brave enough to work with several interpreters and health advocates.

After eight meetings we received good feedback about the value of the meetings from the women involved, and they were keen to continue with the group if possible. It was important for us to learn about the group process and its content – what was discussed during the process and what in particular was it that the women appreciated? It was somehow a

surprise to us that, even within such an unstructured group, the women actually talked about those aspects of their experiences that we as therapists would have suggested for them to talk about, such as their experiences as women in a war-torn country, their experiences of flight, and their life in the host society. Some women discussed more personal experiences of domestic violence and rape, of losses in the family, and of changing roles in the family and struggles with children as part of life in exile. The women wanted to bring food that represented their home countries to the meetings and were keen to share it with us, as well as recipes. We were happy to see that those women who had families and a support-network here offered friendship and support to others outside the sessions.

I have since left this particular service, but I am aware that, as a result of good feedback, the group programme continued with its work. For me, it was an experience well worth all the anxieties and the long period of development. We were aware that to form such a group we had to be proficient in dealing with different levels of distress of the women involved. The experience provided an important starting point in thinking about different styles of group work for women that can be done, both within statutory and voluntary services.

Dragana Savcic-Sanders

Dragana originally trained as a psychologist in former Yugoslavia and is a refugee herself. She has worked as a psychologist in the NHS for 7 years, and in the voluntary sector for several years. Her particular expertise is working with trauma victims. Currently, she is working independently, providing clinical services (individual and family therapy) consultation and supervision to different agencies and individuals.

Dragana is keen to hear from any community organisations who would be interested in setting up groups for refugee women. She can provide training on working with trauma victims as well as general guidance and support. She can be contacted on 020 7405 4897, or by email at dragana_savcic@hotmail.com.

THE WAR ON IRAQ

Women For and Against War

When we discussed the content of this issue, we decided that it was important to take a balanced approach and acknowledge that different women have very different access to power, and that their experiences of war will be shaped by this. Some women experience war as a daily reality, while other women have never experienced war themselves and yet are in a position of power which allows them to send troops into war.

In order to address this, we tried contacting several women who were MPs when the UK Parliament voted on the war on Iraq in March 2003. Unfortunately the timing was bad: We made initial contacts on 2 May 2005, when these women were very busy campaigning for the general election. We chased everyone up from 6 May onwards, but then everybody was busy too. The office of Harriet Harman QC MP reached us just in time to say that due to the election and moving back to Parliament, our message had not been picked up in time. Oona King's answering machine did not even take any more messages at that point...

The only MP (old and new) who did get back to us in time was 'our own MP' Diane Abbott (RWA is in her constituency), who has consistently voted against the war and also backed the rebel amendment on 18 March 2003. We are grateful for her contribution, which we print to the right.

Tessa Jowell, who was also just re-elected to Parliament, was another woman whose comments we sought. One of Tony Blair's most faithful allies, she has always had a pro-war stance. She once defended this by claiming that "we're now on the verge of having a democratic Iraq" (in an interview last February, available at www.cherwell.org), but according to a report in *The Times* (19 April 2005), the situation in Iraq today looks very bleak for women: A large number of women may have been elected to the new Parliament thanks to a quota, but more than 50 per cent of them belong to the cleric-backed United Iraqi Alliance which has called the implementation of Sharia "non-negotiable". One of these female parliamentarians is Jenan Al-Ubaedey, a former paediatrician now turned politician. On the subject of polygamy, for instance, she says: "If you don't allow your husband to take another wife, he'd have an affair anyway... I'd rather know my husband has another wife that I know."

Secular women fighting the conservative religious agenda in Iraq today are weakened by women such as Dr Udaedey. Nada al-Bayati, of the Women's Organisation for Freedom in Iraq, in the same article in *The Times* said. "How can you argue for women's rights when the women are undermining you?"

Other critics contend that the women's

quota in the elections has worked against women's rights because the male leaders of the Shia parties filled the list with women who would blindly support their reactionary agenda.

On the next page, Sawsan Salim from Iraqi Kurdistan paints her own picture of post-war Iraq. She travelled to the country after the war and shares her impressions with us.

But as we go to press on 12 May and cannot wait for more MPs to comment, we dedicate this page here to the millions who took to the streets in protest and said "not in my name".

Corinna Ditscheid

Statement by Diane Abbott, MP about the War on Iraq

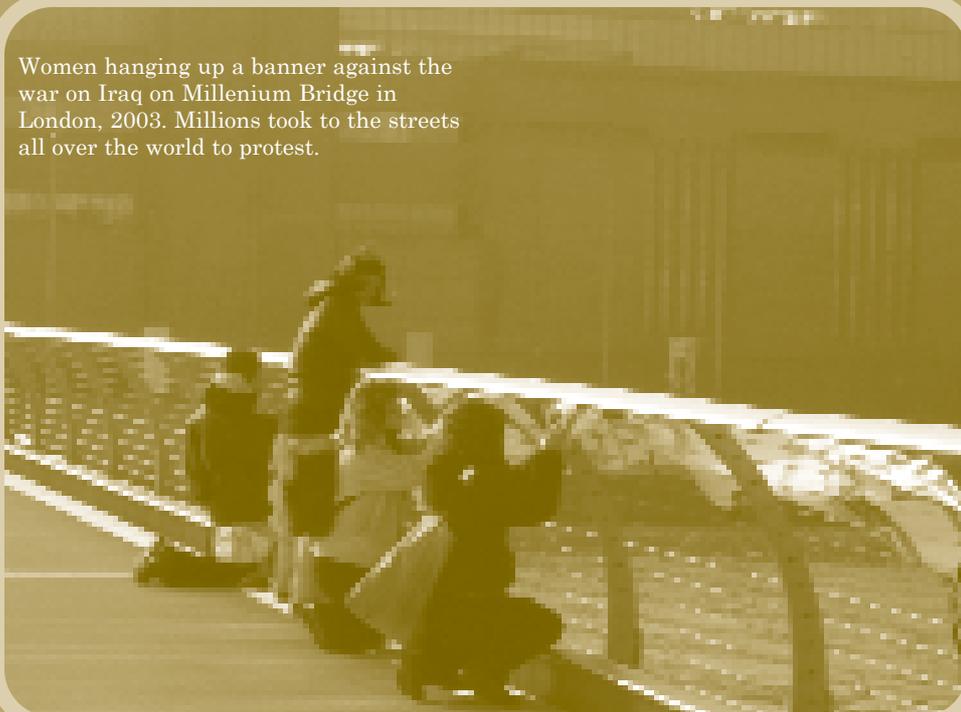
It is clear that war is not the way to fight terrorism. I have voted against the war in Iraq at every opportunity and I think it is a stain on the record of my government. It is now clear that there were never any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and that we went to war on the basis of a lie. I believe the war was wrong, illegal and caused unnecessary suffering. The war has left thousands of servicemen and women killed or wounded as well as incalculable civilian casualties.

War is always a tragedy and one that affects women and children disproportionately. Women are particularly vulnerable to gender-related violence including imprisonment, sexual assault and torture. The occupying forces must work towards minimising the negative implications of war on the safety of women and girls to promote their participation in post-war life in Iraq. It is of outmost importance to secure the physical security needs of women in order to afford Iraqi women their full human rights and guarantee them equality under the law. These women are now in a unique position to influence the future of their country but they need adequate protection and support to do so.

I deeply regret the suffering the men and women of Iraq have been subjected to and urge the international community to help the Iraqi people rebuild their country and work for peace in the Middle East and around the world.

Diane Abbott, MP, 10 May 2005

Women hanging up a banner against the war on Iraq on Millenium Bridge in London, 2003. Millions took to the streets all over the world to protest.



MY JOURNEY TO BAGHDAD

Iraq After the War

Chapter 1: 2003-2004

I would like to tell you the story of my journey from London to Iraq after the war, in late 2003 and early 2004.

After I had crossed the Turkish border, I reached Mosul city, which was 'liberated' by US forces. I could not recognize this city that I had not seen for 14 years. I felt the absence of safety and security and saw clearly that people's basic needs (such as medicine, jobs, food and money) were unmet. I was very surprised when I saw long queues of cars. When I asked why they were queuing I was told they are queuing for petrol. Imagine, a country with oceans of petrol, and people have to queue for it.

Later we crossed some US tanks on the street. Our driver slowed down, saying it was best not to follow them. Again I wondered, why? He said that if the tanks were attacked, they would not stop to consider who had attacked them but rather shoot everybody around them. He had witnessed this several times.

While we were driving through the city, I saw many children trying to sell chewing gum and cigarettes. They were on the street trying to work to survive.

I asked the driver how he felt about the new situation in Iraq. He told me he was very happy about the collapse of Saddam, but he was not happy about the United States presence in Iraq.

All this time I hardly saw any women on the street. When I did see women, they were all wearing veils. [...]

The next day, I went out with one of the local activists to visit the Kurdish people in Kirkuk who had been exiled by Saddam's regime 13 years earlier. After the war they came back to their homeland full of hope to have their land back, but they lost everything in the war and are now living under tents in very cold weather. In one camp I saw about 280 families, all living under tents. Children were playing with mud. There was a lack of clean water, electricity and food and there were not enough blankets to protect the children from the cold. There were many camps like this one in Kirkuk, which had been one of the richest cities in Iraq. I saw people living in poverty and suffering from hunger, and at risk of a civil war between the various groups of Kurds, Arabs and Turks.

I left Kirkuk with a friend to go to Baghdad. Our journey took about 4 hours. We passed through many checkpoints and saw many US tanks. The whole area was controlled by the US military. After 4 hours, I asked my friend when we would get to Baghdad. He said: "We are in Baghdad". I was really surprised because what I saw was terrible. The houses, the streets and the whole city were devastated. I had thought that I was passing one of Iraq's villages, not the capital city!

I saw very few open shops but many US tanks on the streets. Children were playing with stones, wood and dust and many were collecting plastic and bottles from piles of rubbish. Outside Baghdad I saw women selling vegetables in very cold weather. I saw burning houses and cars. I saw that many big buildings were destroyed. Traffic lights were not working.

It is not easy for me to say what I saw in Iraq. People were queuing in front of many buildings. When I asked what they were queuing for, I was told that they were queuing for their salaries which had not been paid in 3 months. I saw so many children on the streets! Later I found out they were orphans with nowhere to go and no one to take care of them. They suffered sexual and physical abuse everyday.

I saw demolished and burning buildings, and people were living in many of them. When I asked why people were living there I was told that these were makeshift camps: The buildings had been government buildings and now the people whose houses had been destroyed came to live there. They had no choice.

Through the OWFI, I knew that there were about 270 camps in Baghdad and I went to see some of them. Each camp contained 15 to several hundred families. Their living conditions were unbelievable: There were about 10 to 15 people living in small, dirty, damp rooms. There was a lack of water, electricity, medicine, petrol and gas. Children didn't have schools to go to. I noticed that many widows were living there; they had lost their husbands in the war and had no other place to live.

Chapter 2: Today

Today the situation of women in Iraq is even worse. Women can hardly be seen on the streets anymore, anywhere between Basra and Baghdad. Those women who do attend school or university must wear veils. Women are kidnapped for money, and the incidence of rape is on the rise. When families find out a woman has been raped, she is still at risk of being killed. The trafficking of women and children to neighbouring countries is also on the rise, and 'marriage for pleasure', or 'temporary marriage', is becoming a serious problem (one doctor told me his hospital is sometimes almost empty because all male members of staff go to nearby hotels for so-called 'pleasure marriages').

In the last 6 months many women were killed by Islamic groups in Mosul and other cities because they were working and they had been ordered to stop. Many Christian women have also suffered insults and been threatened by Islamic groups because of their faith.

In March this year, a group of Basra university students went for a picnic and were attacked by an Islamic group. One man was killed for defending a member of the group who was a Christian woman.

There is a complete lack of safety and security. There are many kidnappings and killings. The new constitution is based on Islamic Sharia law and honour crimes are still very prevalent. The female suicide rate is very high; every day one or two women are said to commit suicide, mostly by killing themselves. Yet the government shows no signs of taking responsibility for the situation of women.

Sawsan Salim

Sawsan Salim is a refugee from Iraqi Kurdistan living in London. She is a representative of the Independent Women's Organisation in Kurdistan, and Co-ordinator of the Kurdistan Refugee Women's Organisation in London. She can be contacted at sawsansalim@yahoo.com.

FEMINIST ANTI-MILITARISM

A Global Social Movement?

In London I belong to a women's group opposing militarism and war, part of the international network Women in Black. Recently I've started to be more analytical about our group in London, and about women activists like us in other countries. And so I've obtained some modest funding support to allow me to look deeper into feminist antimilitarism from a global perspective.

First I want to find out who we are and where we are...a kind of mapping. Because even in Women in Black we don't know for sure how many groups, and what kind of groups, there are in our network, in what countries and cities. And beyond Women in Black, we know even less about all the other groups and activities of women opposing war.

Then I'd like to see more clearly what is distinctive about our methodology, our approach. Is it different from mainstream antiwar activism? But above all I'm hoping to learn more about our analysis and strategies. How do feminists understand the problem of militarism and war? How much do we agree in this? What do we think we can achieve, and how?

On Methodology...

We can ask, why do some women want to organize with women? I think one reason is to do with the way we want to proceed in opposing war.

Women's organizations pursue their opposition to war through a whole range of different strategies: street demos, non-violent direct action, lobbying and electoral politics, press and media work, traveling to conflict zones, conciliation work, research, writing. But then, so do men do these things. But the women active in so many different ways seem to me to share, at least in outline, a certain preferred methodology for which, often after years of struggle, they have left the mainstream movements. We're looking for certain ways of relating and organizing that you can't rely on finding in the wider coalitions of men and women opposing war, particularly where they're dominated by certain parties and elements of the left.

For a matter of argument you could summarize the components of a feminist methodology of antiwar action as the following. First of all, I sense that women tend to connect war very directly to women's own everyday lives. Women's opposition to war and the war system doesn't derive so much from a political

dogma or line, as from rage and despair at the way militarism and violent conflict distort and damage everyday life. That's so clear in Colombia for instance, where I was recently. There the war is a terrible three-way conflict between guerrillas, paramilitaries and government forces that makes ordinary villages and urban districts into battlefields. It's the demilitarization of everyday life that women are demanding there.

A second methodological thing I think we have in common is principled non-violence. It means we are as much as is humanly possible committed to non-violent ways of righting wrongs. (There are huge implications here of course – a responsibility to find effective means of defending people who are under attack, like Palestinians.) Some of the mainstream peace movement has this principle too. But for women the non-violence means verbal and relational as well as physical non-violence, and the mainstream doesn't always practice that.

A third feminist methodology is 'prefigurative' tactics in which the 'means' don't betray the 'ends'. In other words, you shape your struggle to have the same form, spirit, relationships as the world you're struggling to bring into being. Which introduces an element of pleasure, inclusiveness and care.

Beyond this, I think our movement tends to identify problems rather than to identify enemies. For instance, we're always at pains to make it clear that doing things separately from men doesn't mean we see men as the enemy. Our Stop the War Coalition is often about hating: hating 'capitalists' or 'the USA' or 'the military'. I think the women's movement against war makes enmity itself the problem.

So far I've made study visits to Belgium, Turkey, Colombia, Spain, the USA, Serbia, India, East Asia, Sierra Leone and Italy. And as I go along I'm beginning to understand better how 'global social movement' is a great rhetorical ideal but it's not yet quite a reality. For it to become a reality, certain irreducible conditions are necessary. The first is good communication. The second is a broad agreement on principles and values. The third is putting our shared philosophy into action, making it a common practice.

On Communication

There are very serious impediments. Language is one...how do we effectively communicate between even the four or five major languages used among and between women antiwar activists, let alone the many others. Even within the Women in Black network internationally we find this hard and costly work, and we don't do it very well.

Then again, how often and how well do we communicate? In social movements, representations, words, images and symbols are vitally important. Local movements have a local effect. But to have a wider impact, our actions have to be transformed into electronic words and images.

It's not only between, but also within, the elements of the movement that we need the Internet. WiB for instance have no choice but to stay on-line because it's the only practical means of communication we have – as an international network it practically defines us. And here we add to the basic contradiction of the capitalist Internet a lot of practical problems. We're afraid of the disasters other organizations have encountered: working by e-mail can drown us in information, can create new exclusions, and precipitate drastic misunderstandings. Can we learn to handle global electronic communication in a feminist way?

Principles and Values...

I am finding that we do share many of these. But also that there are certain incoherences, issues that are not fully worked out between us. For instance there is a certain tension between peace and justice, and of course this is a well-worked theme within the mainstream peace movement these many years. In a world characterised by so much injustice and oppression, can we always deny the legitimacy of the use of force? Disagreements on this run through feminist discussions on women in the military, for instance.

Secondly, there's a certain incoherence I've come across while talking to women anti-war activists that has to do with nation. Or rather it has to do with ethn-national identity. I stumbled across this when I visited Women in Black groups in both Serbia and Spain, within a matter of days. It didn't surprise me at all that women in Serbia make opposition to national identities and nationalist politics

a central tenet in their activism, given the degree of ethnicization of those wars. All of us who knew women from that region during those years heard them struggling with their own "names". Am I a Serb because that's what they call me? Can I voluntarily renounce this name?

But when I was in various parts of Spain I heard women, also feminist, also antimilitarist, saying (and I'm freely paraphrasing here) "hold on a minute! Look, I'm a Catalan. During the Franco years we were banned from using our language, our culture was repressed. If I say now, "I'm a Catalan nationalist", that doesn't mean I condone violence, that I want war or separatism. It doesn't mean I tolerate Catalan patriarchy -- yes, we have here it too. It's just that we could do with your support in our struggle to maintain our distinctiveness, keep alive aspects of our culture and teaching the Catalan language to our children."

Putting Our Beliefs into Action

Finally, the question of whether we put our shared principles into practice... For example, we all believe militarism itself is the problem. But how much do we demonstrate and lobby etc. on militarism, rather than, say, opposing the immediate issue: eg. invasion of Iraq? We all believe that racist thinking makes war possible. But how much does our anti-war activism also involve anti-racist work, on a domestic and international front? We all believe that patriarchal power relations underpin the tendency to war inherent in capitalism and imperialism. We know that patriarchy generates and depends upon masculine cultures of violence. But how often do we speak out explicitly against militarized and aggressive masculinities as such?

Making an array of groups and projects into an effective global social movement with coherence and momentum calls for a lot of detailed work, sharing ideas, debating differences, comparing strategies and negotiating alliances. It is hugely privileging, in my work at the moment, to watch women trying to make these processes come into being, to make the movement a reality – something beyond a triumphalist slogan.

Cynthia Cockburn

Cynthia is a feminist researcher and writer working at the intersection of gender studies and peace/conflict studies. Visit www.cynthiacockburn.org.uk !



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Beginnings in Israel

Women in Black as we know it today began in 1988 in Israel. In 1987, 20 years after Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza, the Palestinian intifada began. In response Israeli Jewish women began to stand in weekly vigils in public places, usually at busy road junctions. Starting in Jerusalem, the number of vigils in Israel eventually grew to almost forty.



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Women in Black Vigils

Any group of women anywhere in the world at any time may organize a Women in Black vigil against any manifestation of violence, militarism or war. Actions often take the form of women wearing black, standing in a public place in silent, non-violent vigils at regular times and intervals, carrying placards and handing out leaflets. In addition to vigils WiB groups use many other forms of non-violent direct action such as sitting down to block a road, entering military bases and other forbidden zones, refusing to comply with orders, and "bearing witness". Wearing black in some cultures signifies mourning, and feminist actions dressed in black convert women's traditional passive mourning into a powerful refusal of the logic of war.



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Who are Women in Black?

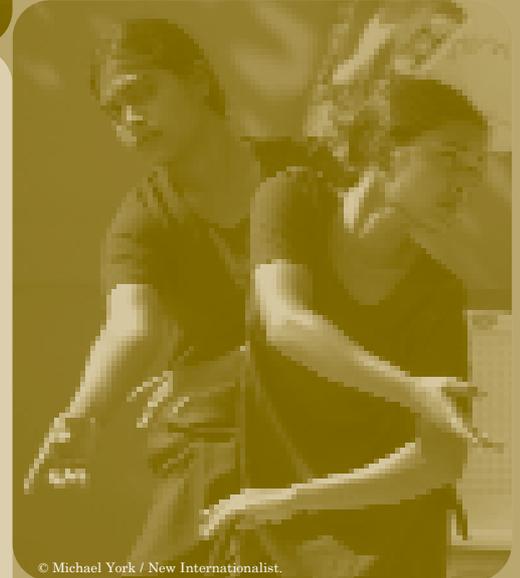
Women in Black is a world-wide network of women committed to peace with justice, and actively opposed to injustice, war, militarism and other forms of violence. An important focus of the network is to challenge the militarist policies of governments. WiB is not an organisation, but a means of communicating and a formula for action.



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AGAINST WAR:

The International Movement
of Women in Black



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Join a Group, or Start a New Vigil

For information, visit
www.womeninblack.org.uk.

The photographs on this page were taken by Michael York at a Woman in Black demonstration during the World Social Forum in India in 2004. © Michael York / New Internationalist. Re-printed with kind permission from Michael York and the New Internationalist. Thanks!
Visit www.newint.org!

COUNTRY PROFILE: SUDAN

Brief history

In ancient times, this area consisted of a number of independent states, including the well-known kingdom of Nubia. In 1820-21 Egypt, part of the Ottoman Empire, conquered and unified the northern part of the country but was unable to establish effective control of the south, an area of fragmented tribes and frequent attacks by slave raiders. When the Suez Canal was opened in 1869, Britain and France's interest in the region grew and, as Egypt had borrowed money from the foreign powers to build the expensive canal, in 1873 Britain gained control of Sudan, appointing General Gordon as governor. In the late 19th century, local Islamic leader Mohammed Ahmed ibn Abdalla proclaimed himself the Mahdi, or "expected one", and started a rebellion in the south to gain control of the whole region, capturing Khartoum in 1885. The Mahdi died shortly after this, but his state survived until overwhelmed by an Anglo-Egyptian force in 1898. Sudan was proclaimed a condominium under British-Egyptian administration in 1899, although the British formulated most of the policies and supplied most of the top administrators. Sudan remained under British control until 1953, when growing support for demands by the Egyptians that the British withdraw led the two governments to sign an agreement providing for Sudanese self-government and self-determination. Sudan achieved independence on January 1, 1956.

Independence & Civil War

The new republic faced problems from the start due to the vast differences between the northern and southern regions, which the British had kept separate from one another. Ethnically Arabs make up 39% of Sudan and Africans 61%, and 30% of the population are not Muslim, but the central government has been dominated by Arabs and Muslims since independence. When Sudan became fully independent, a civil war was already imminent due to unrest amongst the African peoples of the south about the growing political and economic dominance of the Arab peoples of the north. The Arab-led government reneged on pledges to southerners to create a federal system, leading to a mutiny by southern army officers that sparked 17 years of civil war from 1955 to 1972. In 1972, the Addis Ababa agreement was signed which granted southern Sudan a degree of self-rule and led to a ceasefire.

However, in 1983, when the government divided the southern region in three and imposed Sharia law (the Islamic legal code) throughout the country, including on non-Muslims in the south, southern opposition and militant insurgency revived. War continued until January 2005 when the Khartoum government signed a peace agreement with the southern-based Sudan People's Liberation Army. In April 2005, donor states pledged £2.4bn to bolster the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and help Sudan recover from the 21-year civil war (the longest on the African continent) that cost more than 2 million lives and made more than 4 million homeless. However, the peace agreement has not led to the settlement of the conflict in the western province of Darfur.

The Darfur Crisis

While the central government and southern rebels signed a peace deal in January 2005, a separate conflict, which began in early 2003, is still ongoing in the western region of Darfur.

In the past, groups of Arab and African ethnicity lived peacefully side by side in Darfur and did not identify themselves as "Africans" or "Arabs" but as Sudanese, or secondarily as westerners or Darfurians. However, with the government fighting the mainly African rebels in the south over its perceived favouritism of the ethnic Arab groups in Khartoum and the north, ethnic tensions increased in Darfur. The majority of people in Darfur are farmers of African origin, amongst whom the largest ethnic group is the Fur. While the African Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa groups complain of political marginalization by the Sudanese government, Arab groups have complained of political marginalisation by the Fur. Darfur is a very poor region. The settled Fur and other African population have farmed the most fertile parts of central Darfur for generations, while mostly Arab nomads from the desert areas of Northern Darfur have taken their livestock from the dry north to better water and grazing lands in the south every dry season. As the nomads have been moving into southern Darfur earlier and earlier they have come into conflict with the farmers, whose crops have been damaged by their herds.

In early 2003, an armed conflict started between the ethnic Arab Janjaweed militia, who mostly come from the most impoverished nomadic groups in Darfur and Chad, and two rebel groups called the Sudanese Liberation Army/Movement (SLA/SLM) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), whose members mainly come from the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa ethnic groups.

Instead of fighting only the rebels, it is alleged that the government forces have allied themselves with the Janjaweed in trying to force all people of black African origin from Darfur province. The militia are waging a systematic campaign against unarmed civilians belonging to the same ethnic groups as the rebels and eye witnesses have claimed that Sudanese military aircraft and armed forces have aided the Janjaweed in their brutal campaign of murder and rape directed at civilians and their villages.

Nearly 2 million black Africans have been driven from their homes in Darfur since the war began, and a further 200,000 have crossed into Chad. Hundreds of thousands of refugees are in overcrowded camps such as the giant settlement at Kalma in south Darfur, which housed fewer than 10,000 people this time last year but now houses 100,000. In March 2005, the UN announced that more than 180,000 have died from hunger and disease during the 18 month conflict. Estimates of the number killed vary, but the most conservative speak of around 80,000. A report by Human Rights Watch says that the Sudanese government is responsible for "ethnic cleansing" and crimes against humanity in Darfur:

"The Sudanese government and the Arab 'Janjaweed' militias it arms and supports have committed numerous attacks on the civilian populations of the African Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa ethnic groups. Government forces oversaw and directly participated in massacres, summary executions of civilians-including women and children-burnings of towns and villages, and the forcible depopulation of wide swathes of land long inhabited by the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa. [...] The government and its Janjaweed allies have killed thousands of Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa-- often in cold blood, raped women, and destroyed villages, food stocks and other supplies essential to the civilian population." (*Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic Cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan*, Human Rights Watch, Report, 7 May 2004).

Population: 34.3 million (UN, 2004)

Main Languages: Arabic (official), Nubian, Ta Bedawie, diverse dialects of Nilotic, Nilo-Hamitic, Sudanic languages, English

Area: 2.5 million sq km (966,757 sq miles)

Capital: Khartoum

Literacy: 46.1% (male: 57.7%, female: 34.6%, 1995 est.)

Main Ethnic Groups: Black 52%, Arab 39%, Beja 6%, Foreigners 2%, Other 1%

Religion: Sunni Muslim 70%, indigenous beliefs 25%, Christian 5%

Women in Sudan

In January 2005, the International Commission of Inquiry authorised by the UN concluded that rape and sexual violence have been used in Darfur by government forces and government-backed Janjaweed militias as a "deliberate strategy with the aim of terrorizing the population, ensuring control of the movement of the IDP population and perpetuating its displacement." (*Report on the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur to the United Nations Secretary-General*, 25 January 2005).

Reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have catalogued how dozens of women and girls have been violated during attacks on villages, including being subjected to multiple rapes by multiple attackers. This often takes place in front of husbands, family or the wider community in order to frighten and humiliate both the women and men of a village to force them to leave their homes. Human Rights Watch report that women have often been subject to ethnic or racial abuse by their attackers during or after the rapes, being called "slaves", "dirty black Nuba" or having their Fur ethnicity slurred. Pregnant women and girls as young as eight have not escaped sexual violence, and there are reports of some being abducted and held in sexual slavery for many months. Women who try to resist or men who try to protect them are beaten, stabbed or killed. Similar incidences of rape and sexual violence towards women and girls have been reported as taking place during or

following displacement from their homes. Women are particularly vulnerable because they leave the refugee camps to collect firewood, fetch water or visit the market as these are traditionally women's tasks.

On top of the immediate and very serious effects which rape and sexual violence have on women's physical and mental health, rape survivors in Darfur must also face the social stigma and shame associated with rape which can make women reluctant to report what has happened to them to medical workers. In any case there is a severe lack of medical support to deal with the injuries of rape survivors, as well as to treat any sexually transmitted diseases which can be spread through rape.

In the long-term, the stigma attached to rape means that survivors may be ostracised by the community, and unmarried women may be considered 'spoiled' and so unable to marry. Married women may be disowned by their husbands, particularly if their reproductive systems have been damaged by sexual violence so that they cannot fulfil their role as 'reproducers'. This means that survivors of rape are additionally vulnerable without the social 'protection' or economic support that men are traditionally expected to provide. The children of rape survivors are also likely to be ostracised and a child born as the result of rape may be considered a child of the 'enemy', a 'Janjaweed child', so that women can feel forced to abandon the child once born.

The reluctance of women to speak out when they have been raped is compounded by the fact that it is often government soldiers who rape them, as well as the lack of arrests and punishment of the perpetrators when sexual violence has been reported. For example, in March 05 the UN Secretary-General reported to the Security Council that: "there has been no meaningful investigation into the reported [...] mass rape of at least 30 women and girls in the attack on the village of Hamada (South Darfur) on 13 and 14 January" (*Report of the Secretary-General on Sudan*, 4 March 2005).

On a positive note, in April 2005 women from North and South Sudan together presented their recommendations for a gender-responsive approach to the implementation of the country-wide Comprehensive Peace Agreement to the Oslo International Donors' Conference. However, gender-based violence and rape are still taking place in Darfur, and will continue to do so until enough pressure is put on the Sudanese government to hold the perpetrators to account, and to protect women and girls from violence throughout Sudan.

The information on these pages was compiled by Miriam Philip from: allAfrica.com, Amnesty International, ArabNet, BBC News website, Guardian Unlimited website, Human Rights Watch, UNIFEM and www.womenwarpeace.org, www.sudan.net and Sudani.com.



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© UNHCR/L. Taylor

Even though life is tough for women in the refugee camps in Chad, on 8th March 2005 the women in the camp at Kounoungou refused to have their spirits broken. They seized the opportunity of International Women's Day to celebrate themselves and to highlight women's role in society and women's strength, which are so important to everyday survival. With the support of the Oxfam camp manager, the women of Kounoungou planned activities for themselves including dancing and entertainment. One woman said: "I cannot remember the last time I danced... this day has been wonderful, it made us forget our miseries."

Visit Oxfam's website at www.oxfam.org.uk for more information on the work they do in Sudan.

New Training Programmes

In May RWA launched a new series of training programmes for refugee women health professionals, funded by Job Centre Plus.

In Wandsworth and Hackney we are running 15 week programmes of Accelerated English combined with Job Search Skills for nurses and midwives and Health Care Assistants and Care Workers.

In Islington in June we will be holding a 3 week job search skills programme for refugee women doctors who are post PLAB 2.

These courses aim to support women with their professional language skills and in getting back into work in their chosen profession. All the programmes will be repeated in January 2006.

Goodbye!

Paula Castro, our volunteer for finance and administration, left us because she found a job with the computing company IBM. We thank her for her work and interest in RWA and wish her all the best for the future.

Juggling Work and Motherhood

I came back from 6 months maternity leave on 20 April 2005. I would like to thank RWA for the very generous maternity package they gave me, which allowed me to fully enjoy this time off with my baby daughter (how anyone survives in London on statutory maternity pay is a mystery to me, but of course I know that many asylum seeking women make do with much less still!). I am also grateful that RWA has allowed me to reduce my hours for a further 6 months, so that I can share childcare with my partner (who also works part-time) and avoid having to send my baby to nursery when she is still tiny.

I would like to say 'thank you' to my colleagues Ayse, Miriam, Sanaz and Simin for taking care of the newsletter during my absence. Special thanks are due to Miriam who started working on this issue before I came back and then finished it with me. I would never have met the print deadline so shortly after my return without her hard work.

Last but not least a very big thank you to everyone who contributed to this issue!

Corinna Ditscheid, Editor



Welcome!

RWA welcomes Moza Himid a recently appointed volunteer Finance Assistant. She is from Zanzibar and has been in the country with her mother for about 5 years. Moza recently completed the Computerised Accounts SAGE, Book-keeping.

Moza started with us on 14th April 2005 and will be working closely with the Finance Officer who will give her all the necessary support she requires in updating and improving her skills. Her length of volunteering with RWA in the first instance will be 3 months with a review for renewal.

Moza speaks Swahili and English very fluently. She loves music, reading, drawing, dancing and socialising. We welcome her and wish her a pleasant time with us at RWA.

Celebrating Refugee Women

A Report from AFRW's 7th International Women's Day

The day began with swirling snow and strong winds so congratulations to all the women who braved the weather to come and celebrate International Women's Day at Conway Hall in March! Simin Azimi introduced herself as chair and gave a warm welcome to everybody. She outlined the aims and background of Action for Refugee Women, a network of individual refugee women activists, women's groups, community organisations and refugee agencies.

The morning was focussed on 4 workshops: Detention, the Needs of Young Refugee Women, Trafficking and Honour Crimes. Delegates and workshop facilitators were to draw up key recommendations to report back during the plenary session.

Linda Faigbedzi from the Cambridge Refugee Support Forum facilitated the workshop on Detention, and discussed the problem of unaccompanied minors being detained and the tensions within families who are detained without any understanding of why. Linda also highlighted the need for help and assistance when residents are released from detention.

Arij Al-Soltan and Amani Al-Sitrawi from the Iraqi Women's League facilitated the discussion on the needs of young refugee women. Arij described her experiences of arriving in the UK aged 15 and her struggles with the education system and settling into British society. Amani talked about her educational achievements despite the odds and how important the support and understanding of the family is to young refugee women in the UK.

Anna Johansson from the Poppy Project (a home office funded agency to provide support to women trafficked into prostitution) ran the workshop on trafficking. Anna stated that up to 800,000 people are trafficked globally each year, most are women and girls used for slave labour, organs, domestic slavery and marriage as well as prostitution. The Poppy project has extremely limited resources and only has 25 places nationally. Women using the service have to be willing to talk to the police and to testify in court.

Diana Nammi, from the Iranian & Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation, and Sawsan Salim from the Kurdish Refugee Women's Organisation, led the group discussion on Honour Crimes, where the urgent need to keep lobbying governments to treat honour crimes as criminal was raised. Too often 'cultural relativism' is claimed in the UK but this is inexcusable when it comes to taking the life of a woman.

As the morning got under way more delegates arrived to join the discussions and over 100 women participated in sharing their stories and recommendations for improving the fate of refugee women and girls. Everyone gathered together in the main hall to present their key recommendations to the panel and wider audience.

Panel presentations were given by Anne Dawson-Shepherd and Baharak Pashmani of UNHCR, Aimee Bisimwa of the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture and Diana Nammi of the Iranian & Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation. These were followed by questions and answers.

After a busy morning, where many useful recommendations were identified and emotional issues and stories shared, everyone had an absolutely delicious lunch of freshly prepared Iranian and Iraqi food! Relaxation, dancing, music and mingling followed lunch and the day created a wonderful sense of belonging and solidarity amongst all.

Over the summer a report will be produced detailing the discussions and recommendations from the day and how AFRW will use these to advance the rights and happiness of refugee women and girls.

Zoe Burton
(from the Refugee Council)



LET'S BUILD UP

Training

Free Training in Financial Management for Refugee Community Organisations

The Evelyn Oldfield Unit is offering this three-day training course package to look in depth at the main aspects of financial management:

3 June: Budgets & Cash Flow Forecasts
9 June: Financial Record Keeping
20 June: Financial Management & Reporting

To book your place, telephone: 020 7700 0100 ext. 226. You can also email emad@evelynoldfield.co.uk or visit the website at www.evelynoldfield.co.uk.

Training on How to Register as a Charity

Training in Registering as a Charity
26 May 2005

Prices range from £15 to £40 with lower prices for member organisations. To find out more or register contact Hackney Voluntary Action:
W: www.hackneyvoluntaryaction.org.uk
E: info@hackneyvoluntaryaction.org.uk
T: 020 7241 4443.

Funding & Grants

Hammersmith & Fulham Refugee Forum Free Training in partnership with the Local Authority

Have your Say: Developing Partnerships and Representation Between RCOs and the Local Authority
8 June 2005

Training is free and open to staff, volunteers and management committee members of RCOs in any of the West London Boroughs. Places are limited and on a first come, first serve basis. For more information or to book a place contact the Refugee Forum on 020 7386 9060.

London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC) Training for Community Organisations

Writing Better Fundraising Applications
1 June 2005

Fundraising for Small Organisations
15 June 2005*

*This course is especially recommended for refugee community organisations! It will enable participants to identify specific sources of funding, examine the funder's requirements and put together a successful application.

Both courses cost £50 to attend. For more information and an application form, please telephone The Learning Team on 0207 700 8113 or email: learning@lvsc.org.uk.

The Wates Foundation: Aid to Ethnic and Immigrant Communities Programme

This programme aims to support activities promoting equality of access and the status of ethnic and immigrant communities in society, and to foster cultural, racial and religious cohesion in local communities. It typically funds projects delivering education, training and employment, counselling, information and advice, healthcare, therapies and other support to single and multi-ethnic or immigrant communities, including access to English where it is not a first language.

The Foundation makes grants in two financial categories; small grants (less than £10,000) and large grants. Applications for a Small Grant can be made at any time and a reply can be expected within three working weeks. There is also no closing date for applications for a Large Grant, but the next meeting of the Grants Committee which decides on applications will be in July 2005.

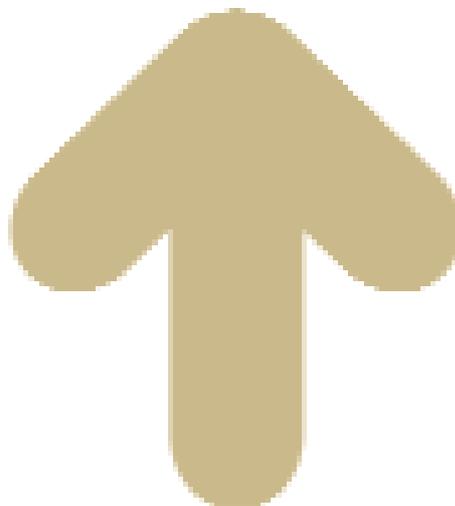
For more information or to find out about how to apply contact: The Wates Foundation, Wates House, Station Approach, Leatherhead, Surrey KT22 7SW. Telephone: 01372 861000. W: www.watesfoundation.org.uk, E: director@watesfoundation.org.uk

Abbey National Charitable Trust

The Trust supports local communities, particularly in those areas where Abbey has a significant presence, by supporting disadvantaged people through:

- education and training which will make a lasting contribution to the community;
- local regeneration projects which encourage cross community partnerships;

Support is focused in places where they already have a Community Partnership Group, including Camden. Outside of these areas the maximum donation given is £2,500. For more information or to apply contact Abbey National Charitable Trust, PO Box 911, Milton Keynes, MK9 1AD. Telephone: 0870 608 0104. E: communitypartnership@abbey.com, W: www.abbeynational.com/home/comm_inv/comm_inv-trust.htm.



Resources & Information

Free Budget Yourselves Software

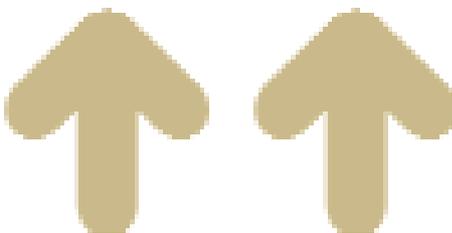
This recently updated software is designed to help smaller voluntary and community groups create and use budgets, and can be uploaded at no cost. The programme is from Funderfinder, who develop and distribute software to help individuals and not-for-profit organisations in the UK identify charitable trusts that might give them money.

For further information go to:
www.funderfinder.org.uk/budgetyou.php

Guide To Bidding

This guide takes the reader through simple techniques to devise fundable projects; written by Jenny Middleton and published by the Middlesex University Press, it is priced at £9.99.

For further information or to order, telephone: 020 8411 5734 or email: mupress@mupress.co.uk



Lloyds TSB Foundation

The foundation makes grants to charities to improve the quality of life for people in local communities. There are three funding programmes: The Community programme which most grants come under, the Collaborative programme which supports organisations in working together, and the New Initiatives programme. The foundation funds activities which fall within the broad areas of Social and Community Needs, and Education and Training, including advice services, community centres, lifelong learning, reading and writing skills, training and activities which encourage people to make a positive contribution to their community.

For more information contact Lloyds TSB Foundation, PO Box 46156, 3rd Floor, 4 St. Dunstan's Hill, London EC3R 8UL. W: www.lloydstsbfoundations.org.uk, Telephone: 0870 411 1223.

The Rayne Foundation

The foundation's areas of interest include Social Welfare and Development work, and Education. Under Education, they are interested in providing support towards the costs (fees or maintenance) of retraining in the UK for refugees who are professionally qualified abroad (although applications from or in respect of individuals are not accepted).

For more information and to apply contact The Rayne Foundation, Carlton House, 33 Robert Adam Street, London W1U 3HR. Tel: 020 7487 9650 or 9637. W: www.raynefoundation.org.uk E: info@raynefoundation.org.uk

The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund

In 2005 the Trustees are running a one year grants programme. Applications are invited for work with young people between the ages of 12 and 25 within three broad categories, including young refugees and asylum seekers. Grants range from £15,000 to £80,000 a year. The closing date for completed applications is 24th June 2005 at 5.00pm. For more information, telephone: 020 7902 5500 or email: memorial.fund@memfund.org.uk To download an application form: http://www.theworkcontinues.org.uk/grants/uk_grants.asp

Futurebuilders - Funding from the Home Office

Futurebuilders England is the Home Office-backed investment fund for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). It provides loan funding to VCS organisations involved or planning to become involved in public service delivery. Futurebuilders sometimes receives applications from small or medium sized organisations that demonstrate real potential and an interesting approach to public service delivery, but require more development before obtaining a full investment. Where that is the case they may offer a development grant of around £10,000, to support the development of the scheme or perhaps help develop the organisation's capacity. These grants are only awarded at Futurebuilders' discretion and any organisation in receipt of a development grant is expected to continue its investment application after spending the grant. For more information or to apply, go to: www.futurebuilders-england.org.uk.

Home Office Refugee Community Development Fund

This fund has been providing small grants to assist in the establishment and development of Refugee Community Organisations since February 2002. The Home Office is currently reviewing this fund and expects to produce revised guidelines and make a call for new applications in early June 2005. To find out about this, keep an eye on the Refugee Integration section of the Home Office's web-site at: www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/en/home/1aws___policy/refugee_integration0/funding.html.

Meet the Funders Day!

16 June 2005, 10.30am - 3.30pm
Vaughn House, 46 Francis Street,
London SW1. Tube: Victoria

The Refugee Council's Community Development Team with the Paul Hamlyn Foundation is inviting RCOs to this seminar which is free to all. Places are limited to 100 so book early by calling 020 7346 1162.

COURSES & TRAINING BY RWA

Accelerated English for Refugee Women

This 6 month course combines intensive language skills with basic IT and skills that can be applied in a work situation. It will lead to a Cambridge ESOL qualification.

This course will run in Hackney and Ladbroke Grove:

September 2005 - March 2006

4 days a week, 9.45am - 2.15pm
Canalside House, 383 Ladbroke Grove,
London W10 5AA.

October 2005 - March 2006

4 days a week, 9.45am - 2.15pm
Leroy House, 436 Essex Road,
London N1 3QP.

Accelerated English for Asylum Seeking Women

This 3 month course combines intensive language skills with basic IT. It can lead to a Cambridge ESOL qualification.

This course will run in Hounslow, in partnership with Refugees Arrival Project (RAP), and Eastham.

September - December 2005

4 days a week, 9.45am - 2.15pm
Exact venues to be confirmed.



Jobsearch Skills for Refugee Women Doctors

This course offers support and advice to refugee doctors looking for employment.

Participants will have the chance to meet with NHS professionals, learn about putting together a competitive CV and application form, practise interview skills and much more...

14 June - 4 July 2005

**Tues, Wed, Thurs and Fri each week
9.45am - 2.15pm**

Venue: Leroy House, 436 Essex Road,
London N1 3QP.

Certificate in Pre-school Practice (Cache Level 2)

This course qualifies you to work in the childcare sector. It includes a work placement so that you get hands-on experience of working with children. A good level of English is needed, but additional ESOL support will be given.

September 2005 - March 2006

This course will run in Hackney and in West London. An assessment day will be held at RWA in June / July.

And Coming Soon...

Job Search Skills for Refugee Women Nurses and Midwives
From October 2005

Business Start-Up
From November 2005

Job Search Skills for Allied Health Professionals
From November 2005

All our courses are free. We also pay travel expenses and contribute towards childcare costs or provide a creche. Eligibility criteria vary from course to course.

**Places are limited!
BOOK NOW!**

For information about our courses, call Lucy at RWA on 020 7923 2412 or email lucy@refugeewomen.org.uk.

Letter from a midwife who attended RWA's two-week Jobsearch Course for Nurses and Midwives in 2004

"On behalf of my fellow nurses and midwives, I take this opportunity to congratulate all the participants as we are marking the end of the course. The course gave us a boost as it enabled us to share our experiences and speak in medical terms again. We now feel motivated, especially with regards to joining the National Health Service, which was the main objective of the course.

All of us participants are grateful to RWA for identifying the main problem that makes it difficult for us to join the health profession in the UK, namely the recognition of qualification documents. CV writing is also a big problem for us, but as the saying goes, 'a problem talked about is a problem solved'.

We have a lot to offer. We have a lot to share. We have talents, we have skills, but all of this is locked within us.

Now, thanks to the course, we have the ability to write a CV, we know how to go about applying for a job, how to apply for NMC registration and attend interviews.

Special recognition is due to our facilitators: the NMC, NHS, the Royal College of Nursing, PRAXIS and St Thomas's Hospital. Special thanks are due to Lucy, Jasmina, and everyone at RWA. I also thank Zahra, our tutor and guide. She is wonderful. I thank the funders, for if they had not funded this course it would not have happened."

WHAT'S ON

Theatre | music | festivals | talks | campaigns
seminars | events | conferences

Refugee Week 2005

20 - 26 June 2005
Across the UK

Refugee Week celebrates the huge positive contributions that refugees and asylum seekers make to the UK, and promotes understanding about why people seek sanctuary. Hundreds of events will take place across the UK, including concerts, exhibitions and festivals, sporting activities, schools and local community events and seminars and discussions around key issues.

Free Refugee Week Events Include

Celebrating Sanctuary
13 June 2005, 2-7pm
South Bank, London

A free festival on the South Bank of the Thames celebrating the evolving and vibrant contribution of refugees to the cultural life of London and the UK. Featuring over thirty dancers, musicians, visual artists, storytellers and other performers, plus information, craft and food stalls and workshops. For info, call 020 7820 3055.

Women Only Days in Camley Street Natural Park

Every Friday
12 Camley Street,
London NW1 0PW

The London Wildlife Trust is currently running 'women only days' on Fridays in Camley Street Natural Park in Camden. Women's groups can make a booking to visit or take part in women-only group activities such as health walks or conservation work. Entry to the park is free and the rest of the week it is open to everyone.

For more information, call 020 7833 2311, email camleyst@wildlondon.org.uk or visit www.wildlondon.org.uk.

Conflict and Hope
17 June 2005, 5-7pm
City and Islington College, 444
Camden Road, London N7 0SP

A celebration of refugee achievement and awareness of issues facing refugees, including refugee students. There will be guest speakers (including Jeremy Corbyn, MP), student performances and a short film. Food and drink will be also available. For more information, call 020 7700 8636.

Celebrating Refugee Week
26 June 2005, 2-11pm
The Round Chapel, Hackney, E9

A group of African organisations based in the London Borough of Hackney are dedicating this year's Refugee Week to campaigning and raising awareness about chronic and terminal health conditions such as cancer, diabetes, asthma, alcohol and other substance abuse, HIV, etc among African refugees and other BME's in Hackney. For more information, contact Josephine Yanga on 020 7923 3401.

Refugee Women: A Photography Exhibition by Jenny Matthews

14 - 20 June 2005
Horniman Museum, 100 London
Road, Forest Hill, London SE23 3PQ

An exhibition to celebrate Refugee Week, showcasing work by one of Britain's leading photographers of social change and conflict. Matthews photographs document the lives of women displaced in some of the world's biggest refugee crises and illustrate the indomitable spirit of women. For further information contact the Museum's Community Education Team on 020 8291 8690.

Closing the Door? Immigrants to Britain 1902-2005

23 March - 21 August 2005
Jewish Museum, Raymond Burton
House, 129-131 Albert Street,
London NW1 7NB

This exhibition marks the centenary of the Aliens Act and looks at how, despite the restrictions on their right of entry, migrant and refugee communities have enriched and enhanced British society.

Reduced and Free Admission Tickets

The Museum is offering free admission to people currently having their asylum application assessed and a concession rate of £1.50 for all other refugees wishing to attend the exhibition. For the accompanying talks/events asylum seekers and refugees may attend for the concession rate of £4 (rather than the full fee of £5).

Talks and Events Related to the Exhibition

Asylum Seekers: Myths and Realities
2 June 2005

A discussion with Helen Bamber OBE, a former Belsen relief worker and founder of the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture.

The Media and Immigration
23 June 2005

A panel discussion with: Michael Skapinker from The Financial Times, Dr Christopher McDowell, Director, Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees and Nick Cohen from The Observer.

Immigrants and the Health Service
12 July 2005

A panel discussion on the role of refugee doctors, dentists, nurses in the development and maintenance of Britain's health services. Chaired by Baroness Julia Neuberger, former Chief Executive of the Kings Fund.

For more information, call 020 7284 1997, visit jewishmuseum.org.uk or email admin@jmus.org.uk.

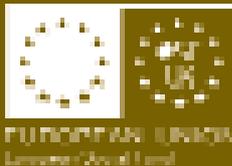


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Disclaimer:
The views expressed in the Refugee
Women's News are individual and not
necessarily those of RWA.

The Next Issue:
Refugee Children
The next issue of Refugee Women's News
will be out in July 2005, so we're
looking forward to receiving your
correspondance by **15 June 2005**.



Comments:
Any comments, suggestions and
information that you would like to be
published in Refugee Women's News
should be sent to Corinna Ditscheid.

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57, Account Number 50236748 .