



[25th January 2007- for immediate release]

Asylum Aid Press Release

Asylum Aid launches new resources to help newly-arrived women asylum seekers assert their rights

When women flee persecution and arrive in the UK to seek protection, nobody tells them about the Home Office policy on dealing with women's cases. But that is about to change. In an innovative new venture, the Refugee Women's Resource Project (RWRP) at Asylum Aid has produced leaflets in a dozen languages explaining the policy, specifically aimed at newly-arrived women asylum seekers.

This is part of a campaign launched by RWRP when its research last year showed that the Home Office was failing to implement this policy.¹ The campaign has involved targeting Ministers, Home Office officials and legal representatives. Now the target is the women asylum seekers themselves who RWRP believes will have the courage to ask for their rights under this policy, if they only knew what those rights were! The leaflets each come in one foreign language (Amharic, Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, French, Pashto, Somali, Turkish, Tigrinya, Urdu, Vietnamese) and English so that a woman can show it to her legal representative or Home Office caseworker.

The leaflets are being distributed through the Home Office Asylum Screening Units, the Inter-Agency Partnership and the Red Cross Refugee Units so that they can be accessed by women at the very beginning of the asylum process. They are available to download for free at www.asylumaid.org.uk.

¹ *Lip Service or implementation? The Home Office Gender Guidance and women's asylum claims in the UK*, Asylum Aid, March 2006 available at www.asylumaid.org.uk

Debora Singer, Co-ordinator of the Refugee Women's Resource Project, said:

"We were appalled when we discovered that the policy which many people in the sector had spent years campaigning for was not being followed. By reaching out directly to women asylum seekers we hope to empower them. In this way they might get their asylum claims determined with the fairness they deserve."

In another innovative project, RWRP has produced an audio CD about the Home Office policy on women's claims. The purpose of the CD is to raise awareness of this policy, and it can be used for training purposes. Entitled *Are you a woman seeking asylum?*, the CD is available for free from women@asylumaid.org.uk. It covers the following:

- The needs of women asylum seekers and how the Home Office is not implementing its own policy
- Three stories demonstrating women's experiences, spoken as if by the women themselves
- The types of human rights abuses women are fleeing
- A woman explains to another the procedures that should be in place when she goes for her asylum interview with the Home Office

[ENDS]

Notes to editor

1. Asylum Aid is a registered charity that provides free legal advice and representation to asylum seekers and campaigns for the fair treatment of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. The Refugee Women's Resource Project provides legal and asylum support advice specifically for women asylum seekers backed up by a programme of research, advocacy, outreach and training. In 2006 the RWRP won the Emma Humphreys Memorial Prize Group Award, in recognition of its groundbreaking work supporting women seeking protection in the UK. www.asylumaid.org.uk
2. The Home Office policy on dealing with women's cases, entitled the Asylum Policy Instruction on gender issues in the asylum claim (also known as Gender Guidance), was brought in by the Home Office during 2004 to overcome the fact that the Refugee Convention does not reflect women's experiences. The policy covers a range of issues that should be taken into account when considering an asylum claim. These include complying with women's requests for female interviewers and interpreters, recognising that women who have experienced sexual assault may experience memory loss and concentration difficulties, and recognising the forms of human rights abuses that women may have suffered, such as domestic violence or forced marriage.

3. In 2005 (the most recent year for which statistics are available), 29% of principal asylum applicants were female (7,385 applications out of a total of 25,710 applications). Source: Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 2005, Home Office.
4. To request a copy of the audio CD *Are you a woman seeking asylum?* email women@asylumaid.org.uk. Further background information and resources about RWRP's gender guidance campaign, including the translated leaflets for women asylum seekers, are available from our website:
http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/Press%20statements/gender_guidance_campaign.htm
5. For further information, please contact Debora Singer, RWRP Coordinator, or Melanie Gower, Policy & Communications Officer. Email deboras@asylumaid.org.uk or melanieg@asylumaid.org.uk, Tel: 020 7377 5123