

The National Newsletter of **STAR**

**STUDENT ACTION FOR REFUGEES**

Issue 28 Festive Edition 2005 !



# WHO STAYS? WHO GOES? WHO DECIDES?

**STAR NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2005**

**EMMANUEL JAL – FROM CHILD SOLDIER TO INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR**

Sunday afternoon. A time for relaxation. Not at STAR Conference! Sunday sleepiness disappeared as Sudanese rap artist Emmanuel Jal got the crowd dancing and singing in his own unique style. After the performance Emmanuel sat down to talk to Tim Finch about his experience as a child soldier and his life as an international music artist.

Emmanuel was born during the conflict in Sudan. Like many children who are forced to fight as child soldiers, Emmanuel does not know how old he is. However, he believes he was 7 or 8 years old when he was taken away from his home to become a soldier. He remembers a frightening and dangerous journey to Ethiopia where many died. 'My childhood was robbed from me' he said.

Emmanuel was 9 when he experienced fighting first hand. The child fighting squads he was part of were considered dangerous because they were hunting and burying livestock, terrorising and burning villages. The second battle Emmanuel was in resulted in defeat and his subsequent escape to Kenya and from the rebel army, where he was adopted by a British aid worker.

Despite being free of the army, Emmanuel still had a soldier's mentality and found it difficult to adjust to his stable, new, conventional and, most importantly loving life in Kenya. He remembers chasing the pets outside the house, kicking and



*STAR intern Amanda, a youth member and Emmanuel Jal*

even shaving them! 'It's hard to experience love when you've never had any' he said.

Emmanuel originally started writing and performing songs to cheer up his fellow school friends. Some people used to bring flour as a payment for listening to his unique style. It was during his time as a student at The University of Westminster that Emmanuel really noticed the interest in his work, and saw the potential in his talent too. His first single, 'Gua' went to the top of the charts in Kenya and Emmanuel became an overnight star, something he was (still is) rather shocked by.

Emmanuel's latest album 'Ceasefire' is an historic and symbolic collaboration between himself – from Southern Sudan– and Abdel Gadir Salim, an artist from Northern Sudan.

'If I choose to hate I'll die in pain and I won't achieve anything. If I choose to love, I'll make my enemy secure and he will no longer be my enemy'.

Emmanuel is still haunted by his experiences but despite such traumas he is enormously positive about his life and his future and believes 'The normal people [of Sudan] are for peace'.

So what does the future hold for Emmanuel now? He told us about an up coming collaboration with English artists on a new album as well as the inclusion of his adoption story in an up and coming movie. Emmanuel's rise is set to continue. So watch this space!

## **ACTION DAY 2006**

Thursday 23rd February is the date of STARs fifth annual Action Day; a day when all STAR members across the country can unite to raise awareness about asylum issues and strength in numbers makes a real difference! Action Day falls in the middle of Student Volunteering Week so check out your volunteering bureau for more details on STAR activities, and others too.

This year we are planning to focus on the STAR's Campaign for Unaccompanied Minors and are developing a number of fun and funky resources you can use to really get attention on the 23rd! The National Office will also be getting involved with some serious lobbying action!

More info to follow before Christmas

# STAR Conference 2005 – How was it for you?

## Views from some of our youth members...

**SOLOMON** – Saturday at STAR Conference and it was time to be active! The workshops were fantastic. For instance, the one on what it feels like for refugees who go back home. How hard it is for those who leave everything and the dilemmas they face.

I also had the chance to see a workshop by a group of young refugees and asylum seekers called Brighter Futures who talked about their own experiences from claiming asylum to awaiting a Home Office decision. They also pointed out the problems they face when they turn 18 and the huge changes it creates.

The Saturday night party was fun. You guessed it; I was DJ'ing with my friend Ash! We blasted the music. From people's reaction, I was pretty sure that the majority of you had fun!

Sunday was fantastic too. It was so touching to hear Emmanuel's music and his life story. It was so fascinating to hear how he has transformed from being a young rebellion, to a musician connecting music to a loving world.

The whole conference was such a marvellous experience. It is an experience of a lifetime, an education, an occasion to socialise, as well as to have lots of fun. I really enjoyed the couple of days, and I like to say that STAR staff and volunteers did a great job!

**ORLANDO** – This year's conference was my first and I have to say it was pretty darn good! Some real highlights included the speech from Naaz Coker, Chair of the Refugee Council. Also the interview with international rap artist Emmanuel Jal, which many people found both entertaining and inspiring, as he performed and told his life-story; how he went from being a child soldier in Sudan to performing in Live8.

I found the workshop on 'Darfur: Protecting refugees' really informative on the background of the conflict and where things might go in the future. Another amazing workshop was 'How to Lobby' by Jonathon Cox. It provided a lot of really practical advice on how to be an effective political lobbyist, such as making your letters polite and personalised and the importance of organisation in a lobbying campaign.

If I were to describe the conference in a word it would be 'eye-opening'. I took away a lot of memories, experiences and information from the conference and look towards taking what I have learnt and putting it into action!

**SYEEDA** – I liked the workshops. It was kind of like learning something! The workshop on the UK's role in creating refugee movements was thought provoking and really got the participants debating many issues including the recent Make Poverty History campaign. The workshop leader made the point that you need to find the root causes of poverty in the first place, then you can make poverty history. You can cut the branches and the tree will still grow, but if you cut the roots, the tree will not grow. If we want to make poverty history we first must stop rich nations colonising poor nations, and involve those from the poor countries more to develop equality.

I attended the "How to answer difficult asylum questions", "The UK's role in creating refugee movements", "Brighter Futures young refugees speak out", and the "Zimbabwe" workshops. I was interested, I was moved by the titles of the workshop, so I wanted to know exactly what it was they had to say.

One thing I will take away from conference is the action session on how to answer difficult asylum questions. It was challenging and I got to hear different points of view about asylum seekers. I learned that some people don't really like asylum seekers, and that gave me awareness that not everyone will accept you when you say that you are an asylum seeker.

In the workshop about Zimbabwe I got to learn about detention. I didn't know how people were treated, how much pressure is on them and how there are no solicitors or someone to even to come say hello to them. So now when I hear someone is in detention I understand what they're going through.

Conference can't be summed up in one word, but a good start would be 'brilliant!' You get to learn different points of view from different people with different experiences.

## CONFERENCE RESOURCES AVAILABLE

The National Office has a number of resources available for all members on request. These include a conference report and workshop notes. Please contact the National Office to request your copies!

# IT'S NOT SAFE TO RETURN PEOPLE TO ZIMBABWE – OFFICIAL

A Zimbabwean failed asylum seeker has won his battle against deportation in a ruling that leaves the Government's policy of returning failed asylum seekers to Zimbabwe in ruins.

The Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT) case was seen as a crucial test on this issue.

The tribunal found that although the particular claim for asylum was unfounded, there was evidence that failed asylum seekers returning to Zimbabwe faced persecution.

The Zimbabwean, who cannot be named, won his appeal on the basis that as a result of having claimed asylum in the UK in the first place, he had a "well-founded fear of persecution" if he returned to Zimbabwe. In effect this means that no-one can be returned to Zimbabwe until conditions there change radically.

The Government has been told by the courts that all asylum seekers from that country should have refugee status – but it's trying to wriggle out of the ruling.

In the meantime, about 10,000 affected Zimbabweans in this country wait to see what will happen – and the Refugee Council is calling for them to have immediate access to benefits and the right to work. Most are still not receiving any state support and their skills are going to waste. They face destitution – when they could be supported to build their skills in the UK to become the real future of Zimbabwe.

**Bob Defee, Refugee Council**

***As this newsletter went to press there are still four Zimbabweans in detention with two of the four into the fifth week of a hunger strike – Source: United Network of Detained Zimbabweans***



*Demonstrators against returns to Zimbabwe outside the High Court in October*

## WARWICK STAR SPREAD SOME LOVE!

The STAR posters were up, the candles were lit, the ladies were seated at labelled tables and the bachelors could be heard mumbling chat-up lines in last-minute rehearsal; then the hooter sounded: 50 people began courting, and all to support the numerous destitute asylum seekers living in Coventry.

This was Warwick STAR's Speed-Dating Fundraiser where we successfully orchestrated the dates of over 100 people. In addition, we held a raffle on the night (thanks to the prize donations of various stores and our own union), which paid for the free drinks of our speed-daters, leaving us with £520 for Coventry Refugee Centre food parcel service!

Money was, and still is, needed for the service, which distributes basic packages of food to destitute asylum seekers who have no other means of support.

All in all it was a fun night, and if we spread a little love while raising money, then Warwick STAR has exceeded itself.

**James Fisher, Co-President, Warwick STAR**

## LIFE IN THE OFFICE – STAR INTERN AMANDA SPEAKS OUT!

When the Boston University placement office here in London first contacted me about working for STAR, I have to admit that I had not heard of it. So I began to research the organisation, and the more I found, the more I felt drawn to work here.

Right away, I began helping with the preparations for the conference, which gave me the wonderful opportunity to work with each member of the national office in unique ways as well as meet some of the most dedicated volunteers I have ever met! I got to see just how much effort and hard work went into planning the event, and being able to participate in the conference itself was so rewarding. At the conference I met so many wonderful people whose passion and compassion for refugee and asylum issues has not ceased to motivate me each day.

I have learned so much during my two months at STAR. Most importantly, I have learned what a difference a group of passionate, driven young people can make when they come together for a cause they believe in.

I had read about organisations like STAR in the newspapers and heard about them on the television, but it has been a real treasure to actually be a part of this organisation for the past two months. I will never forget the people that I have met and the friendships I have made. But, most importantly, I will never forget what it felt like to leave work every day knowing I had made a difference in some way.

**Amanda Nelson, STAR Intern**

## WELCOME TO HANNAH STAR'S NEW COMMUNICATIONS AND EVENTS OFFICER!



Hi everyone – I am joining the STAR team just before Christmas and can't wait to get involved with such a dynamic organisation.

For the past four years I have been working for an MP in Westminster and before that I was Vice President

Campaigns at De Montfort Students' Union. Outside of work, I am almost half way through my term as Vice President of a Europe wide youth organisation.

After spending the last few years in the confines of the so-called Westminster village, I am keen to get out into the real world and working with you to deliver STAR's aims. It's fantastic that STAR is a youth and student organisation as with that comes enthusiasm and commitment that you often don't find elsewhere.

Over the next few months, I hope to meet as many of you as possible, to get your views and learn from your experience in relation to what events we should be having, what sort of campaigns and communications we should be creating and to develop a media strategy for the student, local and national media.

Here's to the new year and taking on the new challenges as a member of the STAR team!

## READING STAR TALK UP A STORM ON CAMPUS

We recently held a successful question time style debate and invited John Binama, a case worker from Reading Refugee Support Group, Nick Hildyard from The Corner House, and Leo Lester, President of Reading University's Conservative Society (and a candidate for the local elections) to discuss the title 'STOP THE ASYLUM INVASION – Is the UK too soft on asylum seekers?'

All the speakers brought with them some excellent points and experiences, in particular Nick Hildyard who we are hoping to invite back next term to find out more about his opinions on the 'hypocrisy of the British Government'.

It was clear that the majority of those who attended genuinely cared about the issues and people involved. Too many people assume most students are apathetic when it comes to politics, and we look forward to raising even more awareness of asylum issues on campus next term.

**Holly Johnson, STAR Chair, Reading University**

## STUDENT GRANT UPDATE

Congratulations to Liverpool, Leeds, Hull, St. Georges, Birmingham, Cardiff and Newcastle STAR groups for successfully applying for and receiving the £100 Cash for Cash STAR student activity grant. The grants will support a wide range of activities. We look forward to finding out how the activities went!

With Action Day fast approaching, STAR is launching second round of £100 grant scheme, open to all groups. Please contact Natasha at the National Office for an application form.

## HOBSON'S CHOICE FOR IRAQIS

5000 Iraqis have been given a difficult choice by the Government this autumn – sign up to go home to your war-torn country now – or face eviction and lose any state support.

Iraqi communities across the UK are once again facing destitution as the Government uses this threat as a deliberate tool to drive people back to a country everyone knows to be unsafe.

Local agencies – including the police – are protesting that community relations are threatened by the increase in people without any legal resources. However the government has pressed on with its policy which gives Iraqis who have not been accepted as refugees three weeks to sign up or ship out of their accommodation. As pre-warned by refugee agencies, the result has been that most recipients of the letter have disappeared rather than face removal to a war zone.

All this is happening while hundreds of Iraqis have already gone back, when they themselves get news that it is safe in their area. The Government has no proper monitoring system, so simply uses its power to enforce so-called "voluntary" returns.

And now the Government has upped the pressure even further by re-starting enforced returns to northern Iraq.

Meanwhile, the media reports of continuing bombings and serious political instability across Iraq.

For further details watch the Refugee Council website

Pre-Christmas campaign actions to help the Iraqi community fight against destitution are being planned. Check with STAR or the Refugee Council for details in your area.

**Bob Defee, The Refugee Council**



## HERE'S TO YOO!

I am Zuhra Bahman and I am your new Youth Outreach Officer. Before joining STAR I worked at British Red Cross, working in Schools and Community Education Department and studied

at LSE. Prior to that I worked with Afghan refugees in Pakistan and worked with refugee community organisations and education charities here in the UK. So working on refugee rights and with young people runs in my blood!

My first encounter with STAR was during the STAR Conference this year where I met some of you and had a thoroughly enjoyable time. I am now looking forward to getting to meet and talk to each of you in more detail as I'd like to spend my first few weeks understanding all of your activities and figuring out best ways to support you.

Throughout my time at STAR I would like to help make the organisation a key player in the field of youth work and join in all of its inspiring and very crucial work. I'm very proud of becoming part of STAR, which I respect as a democratic and focused organisation so full of initiative and energy.

P.S. My first name is pronounced "Zora"!

## THE MUSICAL TALENTS OF SWANSEA PERFORM IN AID OF STAR!

Our first event this academic year took place in October with an evening of live acts in aid of the Welsh Refugee Council, a relief fund for destitute asylum seekers, and Asylum Justice, who offer a free legal service for asylum seekers.

Hannah, one of our longest serving STAR members, managed to turn the second floor into an Arabic tent for a cosy night lit by candles. Before we knew it, the place was packed with locals as well as students, with everyone looking forward to a great evening.

The crowd enjoyed the brilliant music of four of Swansea's musicians (including Swansea University's Athletic Union president!), played acoustic in an intimate and uplifting atmosphere. It was clear everyone loved it. Thanks also go out to Global Culture Collective and DJ Nkonu. They were amazing.

We raised just over £500; money we know will make a difference to the lives of a lot of people. Together we can change the myths about refugees and asylum seekers!



*Crowds enjoy an evening of live music organised by STAR in aid of local refugee charities*

**Bessie Pollozhani, Swansea STAR**

## UPDATES TO THE IMMIGRATION, ASYLUM AND NATIONALITY BILL

The Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Bill (affectionately known as the IAN Bill) will soon become law. The Bill is mostly about immigration, but has some nasty elements including some counter terrorism measures that were added after the July bombings.

One of the nastiest bits of the Bill could exclude people from refugee protection in the UK. The 1951 Convention already allows governments to exclude terrorists from refugee protection. However, the UK Government is trying to incorporate that into UK law but is using a worryingly broad definition of terrorism that could be used to deny refugee protection to people who need it.

For instance, because Nelson Mandela was once involved in armed political resistance with the military wing of the ANC he could be denied refugee protection in the UK under the IAN Bill. Similarly, people who have disrupted the electronic system of a totalitarian regime, or caused damage to property by pulling down a statue of a dictator could also be denied refugee protection. And if the new Terrorism Bill gets through without changes, anybody considered to have 'encouraged terrorism' could be excluded from protection too.

The Government has not made clear why this measure is needed, and the UN High Commission for Refugees has urged the Government to change its mind – but don't hold your breath...

The Refugee Council is working to amend the law in the House of Lords so that refugee protection in the UK remains intact. Watch this space for updates on the progress of the IAN Bill.

You can read more about the IAN Bill at:

[www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/infocentre/asylumlaw/parliamentary\\_briefings.htm](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/infocentre/asylumlaw/parliamentary_briefings.htm)

**Johnathan Cox, Refugee Council**

## A NEW STAR GROUP, LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

We kicked the year off with a fabulous film festival, co-sponsored with UNICEF and the Film Society. There was very high participation for the screenings of *Turtles Can Fly* by Bahman Ghobadi, *Hotel Rwanda* by Terry George, and *In This World* by Michael Winterbottom.

King's College STAR has been kind enough to let the LSE STAR join them on their weekly volunteering outing to the Katherine Low Settlement. Additionally, our web officers have done a fantastic job developing the LSE STAR blog (<http://lsestar.blogspot.com/>) where members can post ideas, stories, and keep up to date with STAR activities both on campus and around London.

We will be finishing this term with another film festival marking Human Rights Day (Dec 10) and a Holiday Dinner. For next term we have some great events planned: a photo exhibition, a Refugee and Asylum-seeker Speaker Series, and a trip to a refugee camp in Slovenia.

The London School of Economics STAR Committee

This edition of the STAR newsletter was guest edited by STAR Student Outreach Officer Natasha. Special thanks also to contributors; Sol, Syeeda, Orlando, Holly, James, LSE committee and Bessie

Would you like to write for or edit STAR's newsletter? Tell the network about your STAR experiences or about what motivates you to be involved in STAR! It's simple and you can get help from the team. Contact Natasha, Zuhra or Hannah to have a chat about it.

We will be producing the next newsletter mid-term so the deadline is Wednesday 1st March 2006. **Give it a go!**

Email: [info@star-network.org.uk](mailto:info@star-network.org.uk) or phone 0207 840 4443

## Are we thinking what you're thinking? STAR Annual General Meeting, taking it forward

STAR members were given an opportunity to put questions to STAR staff and the National Management Committee at the AGM, which was held at Nottingham University during the Conference.

These are exciting times for STAR. Although the organisation has faced financial difficulties in the last year, we now have a positive funding base upon which we can build. Thank you to Nigel for all his hard work as Treasurer, it has been invaluable!

Staff and the Management Committee are working hard to consolidate STAR's existing work as well as to ensure STAR develops into an even more dynamic and effective organisation. STAR members' views currently feed into the decision-making process in lots of ways, such as, via regional representatives and staff, consultation and the AGM.

However, it was agreed that the organisation's democratic structures need improvement. As a result the STAR network will be consulted more widely over the coming year. Issues that will be discussed as part of this consultation will include under 18s being on the Management Committee and making voting rights of youth and student members more inclusive.

A big thank you was made to former Management Committee members, Clare Graham, Jonathon Ellis, Imran Hussain and Claire Arnott who have all worked exceptionally hard for STAR and have now stepped down... and a big welcome was extended to Hannah Ward and Emma Saunders as new members! STAR members were encouraged to think about joining the Management Committee. It's never too late – please contact the National Office if you are interested!

### STAR'S REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

There have been a few recent additions to STAR's regional rep family! We welcome Amy Norris from SOAS STAR as the new rep for **London and the South East** and Jessica Oddy from Liverpool STAR as the new rep for the **North West**. Both are long standing members of STAR and are there to support your work, develop links with other STAR groups and are your main STAR contact.

We currently have a vacancy for Regional Rep in the South West. If you would like to know more, please contact Natasha.

### Dates for your Diaries:



5th December – International Volunteer Day  
10th December – Human Rights Day  
18th December – International Migrants Day  
23rd February 2006 – STAR National Action Day  
20th – 26th February 2006 – Student Volunteering Week

24th – 26th February 2006 – **SPEAK** Network annual national gathering, London  
27th February 2006 – **SPEAK** Network Day of Action, London



6th – 19th March 2005 – Fair Trade Fortnight  
8th March 2005 – International Womens Day

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