

This edition of the STAR newsletter was edited by STAR Communications & Events Officer, Hannah Blythyn. Special thanks go to James, Sheraz, Yvette, Jonathan and Joanna for their contributions.

Would you like to write for or edit STAR's newsletter? Tell the network about your STAR experiences, what motivates you to be involved with STAR or share examples of things you have done that have worked well. It's simple and you can get help from the team. Contact Hannah, Katherine or Natasha to have a chat about it. The next newsletter will be in time for freshers and the deadline is 5th September. Email: communications@star-network.org.uk or call 0207 840 4443.

The National Newsletter of STAR









STUDENT ACTION FOR REFUGEES

Issue 29 Summer Edition 2006



Football Vs the Failed States Index

With World Cup football fever gripping the nation, we thought we'd take an alternative look at some of the teams in this year's competition. Each country has been ranked according to their position on the 2006 Failed States Index, which uses twelve different indicators to rank 136 countries based on thousands of articles collected from regional sources. Here we highlight some of those rankings and compare them to where each country is ranked by FIFA.

<p>England FIFA football ranking: 9th Sharp and/or severe economic decline: 147th Security apparatus as 'state within a state': 115th Massive movement of refugees & IDPs: 90th Widespread violation of human rights: 124th</p> 	<p>Angola FIFA football ranking: 60th Sharp and/or severe economic decline: 92nd Security apparatus as state within a state: 58th Massive movement of refugees & IDPs: 14th Widespread violation of human rights: 36th</p> 
<p>Côte d'Ivoire FIFA football ranking: 32nd Sharp and/or severe economic decline: 4th Security apparatus as state within a state: 4th Massive movement of refugees & IDPs: 27th Widespread violation of human rights: 10th</p> 	<p>Brazil FIFA football ranking: 1st Sharp and/or severe economic decline: 129th Security apparatus as state within a state: 80th Massive movement of refugees & IDPs: 96th Widespread violation of human rights: 96th</p> 
<p>Serbia and Montenegro FIFA football ranking: 46th Sharp and/or severe economic decline: 54th Security apparatus as state within a state: 67th Massive movement of refugees & IDPs: 16th Widespread violation of human rights: 90th</p> 	<p>Togo FIFA football ranking: 58th Sharp and/or severe economic decline: 24th Security apparatus as state within a state: 27th Massive movement of refugees & IDPs: 64th Widespread violation of human rights: 27th</p> 
<p>Iran FIFA football ranking: 19th Sharp and/or severe economic decline: 126th Security apparatus as state within a state: 30th Massive movement of refugees & IDPs: 12th Widespread violation of human rights: 14th</p> 	<p>Ukraine FIFA football ranking: 42nd Sharp and/or severe economic decline: 97th Security apparatus as state within a state: 113th Massive movement of refugees: 92nd Widespread violation of human rights: 86th</p> 

For more info on the Failed States Index, go to: www.fundforpeace.org

Dates for your Diaries:

17th - 18th June	STAR Summer Training, Bristol	11th July	World Population Day
18th June	Celebrating Sanctuary	9th August	International Day of the World's Indigenous People
19th - 25th June	Refugee Week	12th August	International Youth Day
20th June	World Refugee Day	2nd - 10th September	Organic Fortnight
26th June	International Day in Support of Victims of Torture	21st September	International Day of Peace



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LGB AND IND!*

The reality of being gay and seeking asylum in the UK



Elizabeth's asylum claim has been refused. Elizabeth is a Ugandan lesbian who fled to the UK in 2004, having lived her life as a lesbian secretly for many years. One night after being out with friends at an underground gay club, she was visited at her home by several men she now believes to have been associated with the Ugandan authorities. She was bundled into a car and taken to a so-called 'Safe House' – unofficial Ugandan prisons where torture is regularly practised. She was held for 5 months, during which time she was repeatedly raped, whipped and beaten. She eventually managed to escape, and fled to the UK.

Whilst the adjudicator in Elizabeth's appeal recognised that homosexuals are persecuted in Uganda, he did not accept the term 'homosexual', and evidence relating to the treatment of homosexuals, applies to lesbians. They have also questioned her identity as a lesbian, because she had a child as a young woman, although this is common among British lesbians too. They show further misunderstandings about the nature of both underground gay communities, and of state sanctioned abduction, detention and torture. As STAR goes to press, Elizabeth is currently being held at Yarl's Wood Detention Centre, she has been served a removal order and is in danger of being removed to Uganda before her solicitor has a chance to submit new evidence.

Refugee status on grounds of persecution because of sexual orientation

For many years the Home Office withstood the idea that gay men and lesbians who faced persecution in their home country because of sexual orientation should be recognised as refugees. In March 1999 the House of Lords decided that gay men and lesbians who would face persecution in their home country constitute a social group, from which claims for asylum should be allowed. The Home Office should now accept that if a person does have a well founded fear of persecution because they are gay or lesbian then they can qualify for asylum.

A person applying for asylum needs to show that there is a reasonable degree of likelihood that if they were returned to their home country they would face serious harm because they are a gay man or lesbian. Serious harm must come from either government authorities or other sections of the population from which the government is either

unable or unwilling to protect them. Cases are typically refused either because the person applying for asylum is not believed or because the Home Office thinks the fear is not well founded.

Key issues facing gay and lesbian people seeking asylum in the UK

There are many specific issues that face gay and lesbian people seeking asylum. Under Section 94 of the 2002 Nationality, Immigration & Asylum Act, people applying for asylum from a list of countries which are considered to give rise to clearly unfounded applications for asylum are denied an in country right of appeal. Amongst those on this list, there are countries where it is illegal to be gay and where people are imprisoned for being gay. The most evident example on this list is Jamaica – the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal has recently held in a country guidance case that gay men are at risk of persecution in Jamaica and the Jamaican state does not offer any protection.

As things stand, there are no guidelines issued to Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) caseworkers or Immigration Judges on how to deal with sexual orientation claims in a sensitive and non-prejudicial way. According to the UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group, there is evidence that the absence of such guidelines leads to a making of insensitive and derogatory remarks concerning sexual practices and expressions of sexual orientation in IND refusal letters and determinations of Judges.

There is also concern surrounding the number of lesbian and gay asylum seekers who are detained under the Fast Track scheme. Applications for asylum based on sexual orientation are complex and experts believe that they should not be fast tracked. Additionally, witnesses have reported assaults on other gay detainees whilst in detention because of a person's sexual orientation.

Despite some improvements there persists a double discrimination against gay and lesbian asylum seekers. Under the asylum legislation of a number of EU members, countries that have questionable human rights records on gay and lesbian rights do not figure prominently on the agendas of immigration officials. In addition, because lesbianism isn't outlawed specifically in some countries which ban sodomy, UK authorities may assume that lesbian asylum seekers will be safe when they are returned home.

HOW YOU CAN HELP ELIZABETH

- Write to Liam Byrne MP, Minister for Immigration asking him not to remove Elizabeth and outlining her case. Write to the Home Office, 3rd Floor, Peel Building, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF.
- Visit Elizabeth's website www.elizabethmuststay.co.uk and sign her on-line petition.
- Join the Elizabeth Must Stay Campaign. Contact elizabethmuststay@yahoo.co.uk

*Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual and the Immigration and Nationality Directorate.

CAMPAIGN UPDATE – AGE MATTERS! GETS IN MOTION IN PARLIAMENT!

STAR's Age Matters! campaign is winning cross party support in seeking changes to the current decision making process for separated children seeking asylum. With the help of the Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, Neil Gerrard MP, STAR tabled its first ever Parliamentary Early Day Motion in June. The motion raises awareness of the rising number of age disputed separated children seeking asylum, the reasons for them seeking asylum and the failings of the current system. It calls on the government to take action and demonstrate, through replacing the present process of deciding the age of a separated child seeking asylum with an independent decision making body, that every child including those seeking asylum really do matter. STAR is calling for change because the current process of age assessment is subjective and difficult to make rigorous, with appearance often being used as a deciding factor. The system often results in numerous appeals, which consequently undermines its effectiveness and the reputation of UK asylum system with practitioners and public alike.



How you can help

STAR has contacted MPs urging them to back the Early Day Motion but you can help by writing to your local MP at House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA urging them to back the 'Age Matters!' Age disputes for separated children seeking asylum EDM. Find out who your MP is by visiting www.locata.co.uk/commons and get more information on age disputes for separated children seeking asylum from www.age-matters.blogspot.com – blog your backing while you're logged on!

NO REVISION AS LIVERPOOL STAR FUNDRAISE FOR SOLA ARTS



May usually only means one thing for university students: exams (oh and deadlines). But we decided that some quality revision procrastination was needed and organised a fundraiser gig at Hannah's Bar – a Liverpool student favourite – in aid of the Liverpool based charity Sola Arts.

Sola Arts brings communities together by using the arts in workshops, training programmes and special projects to promote understanding across diverse cultures. A worthy cause! Posters were posted and we generously donated countless fliers to unsuspecting students. Nadia, Dom and Neilesh pulled multiple strings and ropes to get the whole thing sorted and the rest of us rallied the troops in support.

The big night arrived and Patrick was positioned on the door with a special pink 'Hello Kitty' tin to collect the pennies. The line up included local bands, plus an acoustic set and performance poetry. Happily we exceeded the venue capacity and the pretty pink pot over-flowed with coppers... raising a total of £400. Next year I am confident we shall be pursuing many more equally enjoyable and productive work avoidance tactics!

Yvette Stephens, Liverpool STAR

STAR UNITED IN BULGARIA

In late March I was given the opportunity to attend the United Against Fascism conference in Sofia, Bulgaria as the representative of STAR. As I arrived in Sofia after a ten hour journey via Budapest, I was greeted at the airport by two Bulgarian taxi drivers who bundled me into a taxi and drove me to the hotel where we were being put up.

The conference brought together nearly a hundred delegates from across Europe, all of whom worked with European NGOs. The diversity of the delegation allowed for exchanging of ideas and experiences between different groups and was facilitated by small working group sessions. The format of the working group sessions allowed for different delegates to tell us about the situations in their respective countries. It was a great opportunity to learn about the discrimination against the Roma people across Europe, as well as to hear some success stories of Palestinian refugees who had settled in Cyprus. The sessions also allowed for networking with many of the other representatives of European NGOs, these included a Maltese NGO that provides free legal services to detained asylum seekers as well as a journalist who writes about human rights abuses of refugees and asylum seekers in Moldova.

Each evening there was a 'political café' in which delegates were able to learn and air their views on topics of interest. One of the most memorable was the evening concentrating on the Israel-Palestine conflict in which a French NGO told us about their work with Palestinian children in the Rafah refugee camp. The conference also highlighted the changing geography of Europe and how many new asylum seekers were being pushed to the fringes of Eastern Europe where xenophobia was on the rise. Refugees and asylum seekers, often amongst the most vulnerable in society, are increasingly the first to be targeted by both fascists and politicians.

Through interacting with the various delegates at the conference it slowly dawned on me that our organisation, STAR, was unique in its mandate. No other organisation has so many young people actively making a difference to the everyday lives of asylum seekers and refugees like STAR does. Whether it be through lobbying, protesting or volunteering, STAR members form a vital part in the pan-European NGO community that seeks to create a fairer European community. With the expansion of the EU, along with greater regional cooperation on issues affecting refugees and asylum seekers, NGOs like STAR will need to work much more closely with our European friends. Through sharing experiences and learning from each other, we can ensure that we continue to do what STAR was set up to do by 'helping refugees everywhere'.

Sheraz Mumtaz, KCL STAR

FROM CARDIFF TO CAMPSFIELD

Not many people know much about Immigration detention centres, let alone what they're like inside, which is why we wanted to see one for ourselves. The nearest detention centre to us is Campsfield, just outside Oxford. All the detainees there are men, aged 18 and over. The trip took loads of planning but the management at the centre were very helpful, even if we were restricted to 4 people at the last minute. We eventually secured the date of 29th April and students from Cardiff University and Atlantic College STAR set off full of anticipation. After a two hour drive, we arrived at the centre.

It looked very much like a prison from the outside with a massive fence and loads of barbed wire. There was a protest going on outside, so we had to wait in the car for a bit before we were allowed in. We had an escort for the visit and were put in an education room, where the detainees get classes every weekday in English and computers. They could come in to do the activity and leave when they wanted to. I think they'd recently done an art workshop because there was a screen print of a bird in a cage on the wall.

We'd brought loads of magazines and coloured paper for them to make a collage but they seemed more interested in doing their own individual pictures and chatting to us. They were quite talkative and seemed pleased with the attention they were getting and the contact with the outside world. I chatted to several of them and they took it upon themselves to teach me some Arabic which was quite entertaining. Quite a few were asylum seekers but we weren't allowed to discuss their cases with them. Some were quite optimistic about getting out of the centre soon, others were worried about being deported.

Although our visit to Campsfield allowed only a quick glimpse at what life is like there, it was very interesting and we learnt a lot. The men in there were all different. They had different backgrounds, different personalities and were all coping with the situation in different ways. But they were all lumped together and had no idea what was going on. In prisons, the prisoners know why they are there and when they can get out. It just doesn't seem fair to add the anxiety of not knowing what is going on to the inevitable stresses of detention – both of which may be on top of traumatic experiences they have had in their own country.

Joanna Spooner, Cardiff STAR

No Place for a Child!

At the end of March the Refugee Council launched a campaign with Save the Children and other refugee organisations to ask the Government to "Stop Detaining Children Now!"

You would have thought that this was pretty uncontroversial as campaigns go – but here in the UK we do put children of asylum seekers in detention centres. Official figures published last showed that during the last three months of 2005, 540 children were released from detention centres – an increase of 19% on the previous quarter. Of these, almost 1 in 3 (29%) had been in detention for more than a week, with 25 children being held for between one and two months. So far thousands of people have sent

postcards or emails to the Home Secretary and if you haven't do it now! Log on to: www.noplaceforachild.org.uk.

Dr Reid has agreed to meet representatives of our campaign coalition in July to discuss alternatives to detaining children, so 10,000 campaigners making their views known to him in advance would certainly help!

You may have already made your views known to the powers-that-be. If so, please help us reach our 10,000 target and send the web link to any of your friends, family and colleagues so that we can send a strong message that a detention centre is no place for a child.

Jonathan Cox, Refugee Council

WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN...!

Did you know there was a STAR in Cairo? Throughout the year at the American University in Cairo (AUC), STAR has been involved with refugees in a number of different ways. Indeed, many of the AUC STAR members are themselves refugees.

More than 500 refugees have participated in AUC STAR's English, Arabic, essay-writing and handicrafts classes. Refugees have taught members of the AUC community Swahili and how to cook Sudanese, Ethiopian, Somali and Burundian food. AUC STAR has sponsored refugee film festivals and a soccer (remember, we're at an American University) tournament, where Egypt beat Sudan to win the championship and Burundi topped Liberia to take third place. AUC STAR members were also active in meeting with Sudanese refugees during last year's three month sit-in protest of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Currently AUC STAR members are working on developing an interactive website that will enable refugees to navigate Cairo's urban metropolis more successfully.

As the school year comes to close here in Cairo, we're preparing for our biggest event of the year: the celebration of World Refugee Day. The event will take place on 17 June and include performers and musical groups from different parts of Burundi, Ethiopia, Palestine, Sudan and Somalia. The day will also feature different cuisines, handicrafts and an exhibition of refugee artists' work. Different organisations that work with and for refugee communities will be on campus to distribute information about the services they provide. Last year's event attracted more than 3,000 and we hope to have as grand a show this year. If you're in Cairo in the middle of June, you should stop by.

James Pearce, Cairo STAR



EVENTS

This year saw STAR host our eighth annual Conference, our sixth Summer Training and our fifth Action Day...



Highs: International rapper and ex child soldier Emmanuel Jal talking, performing and getting everybody dancing and grooving on a Sunday afternoon in Nottingham; the commitment STAR members showed when

they stood on streets across the country in the freezing rain and snow to hand out (slightly soggy) campaign leaflets in support of refugees for Action Day.

What we've learnt: That bringing together student and youth members rocks!

ASYLUM IN THE UK

Asylum has not been far from the front pages again this year. With a new Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Bill being passed earlier this year, as well as implementation of the first stages of the governments five year New Asylum Model, it has been another busy year for asylum rights campaigners...

Highs: Tony Blair publicly announcing the government's continual support for the UN convention on Refugees despite growing pressure to withdraw from it.

Lows: The continual priority placed on increasing removals as the answer to the UK's asylum policy problems; Refugee Children still being excluded from the UN Convention on the Rights of the child.

THE YOUTH NETWORK

Highs: Youth members strutting their stuff at the National Youth Convention in Chester; welcoming three first ever youth groups to STAR at Canterbury College, Atlantic College, Wales and Lambeth College; young people sharing their experiences and their amazing acting skills and enthusiasm in outreach activities with other young people in schools across the UK.

What we've learnt: That youth members have proved the notion that young people are lazy jobs in need of an ASBO is unfounded!

THE NATIONAL OFFICE

Highs: Welcoming new staff to STAR to support the expanding network

What we've learnt: That chocolate, cake and indoor football vastly improves STAR staff performance!



From left to right: Natasha, Student Outreach Officer; Hannah, Communications & Events Officer, Katherine, Chief Executive and Elizabeth, Volunteer Summer Training Organiser

THE STAR REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2005/6

It's been a roller coaster ride for STAR this year, but with many more ups than downs. In the final STAR newsletter of this academic year it's a perfect chance to look back over the amazing contributions STAR members, staff and supporters have made over the last twelve months as we head towards another fun filled year. **Scream if you wanna go faster!**

CAMPAIGNING

'Under 18? – you can't vote and you can't drink but you can be put in detention, denied a place in school, forced to find your own place to live and ways of supporting yourself – if you are a young unaccompanied asylum seeker and having your age disputed...' That was the position STAR asked its members to imagine being in when we launched our Age Matters! Campaign at Conference 2004. Almost 2 years later and the campaign has come a long way...

Highs: Action Day student members getting over 1700 people to sign letters to local MPs about Age Matters! Organisations like save the Children and Refugee Council supporting the campaign; Getting STARs first ever Early Day Motion tabled in parliament!

What we've learnt: That February weather is not conducive to great outdoor campaigning activity!



VOLUNTEERING

In the last year STAR groups and members have supported an amazing 76 different volunteering projects!

Highs: Swimming and dangling from ropes deep in the Surrey countryside at St. Georges, STARs week long adventure camp with over thirty refugee children; Cardiff STAR managing to persuade the management at Campsfield House to let them visit detainees.

What we've learnt: That student interest in volunteering with refugees needs dedicated support (coming soon at the STAR National Office!).

NEW AND OLD STAR GROUPS

Hellos: In the last year STAR has happily welcomed Reading, Cambridge, Oxford, Southampton, and Northumbria universities, Bristol UWE, London School of Economics and the College of Law, York as new or returning STAR group members.

Goodbyes (sob!): Well, not a goodbye, just an adieu (!) to Exeter, York, Manchester, Coventry and Goldsmiths university groups.

AND WHAT NEXT?

IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE SOME EXCITING DEVELOPMENTS AT STAR.

HERE ARE JUST A FEW TO WET YOUR APPETITE!

Hosting the Search for a STAR event in Parliament

Meeting MPs at an Age Matters! fun-size lobby in Parliament

Launching a new and exciting campaign at Conference on 28th – 30th October

Welcoming new staff, volunteers and interns as the STAR National Office expands and moves to bigger office space

Blogging and podcasting our way to an all new, singing and dancing STAR website

Taking STAR to EuroPride in the summer sun

AWARENESS RAISING

This has traditionally been the part where STAR members have let loose with their creativity. This year was no exception...

Highs: Some really original and well pulled off activities including Cairo STARs month long football world cup which saw Egypt beat Sudan in the action packed final; love blooming at Warwick STARs speed dating fundraiser and a lot of shivering at Glasgow STARs (Winter!) sleep out.

What we've learnt: That young people respond positively to refugee issues when they're presented in a fun and funky way.

