

English Supplement

Al-Muntada

of the Iraqi Association

www.iraqiassociation.org

IRAQI ASSOCIATION

PALINGSWICK HOUSE
241 KING STREET
HAMMERSMITH
LONDON W6 9LP
TEL: 020 8741 5491
FAX: 020 8748 9010

E-mail: info@iraqiassociation.org

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A dignified asylum system must be part of big society programme



While the coalition government outlines plans for big society programme, reforming our shambolic asylum system must not be excluded. Prime Minister David Cameron and his deputy, Nick Clegg, have unveiled a new document outlining the coalition government's plans for implementing the 'big society' programme. The government appointed Nick Hurd, the Minister for Civil Society, he will be responsible for putting the plans into place. He will be supported by Nat Wei, the founder of Teach First, who was appointed as the new government adviser on the big society agenda

and a member of the House of Lords.

This opportunity must not be missed to reform our notorious refugee determination system, which is dominated by bureaucracy and often blunders and failures, it should be simplified to reflect the current economic climate and restore dignity and respect into the process. The current asylum system is notorious for its complexity. Asylum seekers must navigate a refugee system with three different types of protection, each with a different set of criteria and rights and obligations. They are also subject to a multi-

judicial review. Throughout this lengthy process, those who sought sanctuary at our shores will become destitute on our streets. Equally, and most importantly, genuine asylum seekers will lose out.

In addition to its complexity, the asylum system has been criticized for its poor initial decisions. The asylum system is managed by the UK Border Agency (UKBA). Each case is assigned to a UKBA official or caseworkers who oversees the case from the initial interview and decision. Critics allege that these caseworkers are not adequately trained and are influenced by institutional biases. A high number of initial decisions rendered by the caseworkers are overturned and returned for rehearing. Although the UKBA has stated that its objective is to provide a system that is "fast, fair and firm".

Labour's record on tackling asylum applications is dismal and the backlogs of new and old cases are increasing. John Vine, the UK Border Agency's independent inspector, says that a special five-year exercise which began in 2006 to clear the legacy of 450,000 unresolved asylum cases is now unlikely to meet its July 2011 deadline.

The reform must protect genuine asylum seekers and deliver dignity and respect into the process. It should focus on: improving UK's asylum system, deliver quicker decisions on asylum claims and provide faster protection to those in needs. Provide regular adequate training of caseworkers at UKBA and those who decides the claimants' applications. Simplify the system and free the process from the red tape culture and the maze of bureaucracy. End unnecessary costly detention system and establish timely removal and assisted voluntary removal. Establish, recognise and work with refugee and exiled groups in this country, to exchange information and bridge a working relationship directly with exiled voluntary and community groups.

New ethnic minority MPs has nearly doubled



The number of ethnic minority MPs has nearly doubled, from 14 to 26, and includes for the first time a British Iraqi MP, Nadhim Zahawi, as a Member of Parliament for Stratford-on-Avon. Born in 1967, married to Lana and having two 13 year old boys, Zahawi has been active in politics and the political field for over 16 years. From 1994 - 2006 Zahawi was a local councillor in the London borough of Wandsworth, and in 1997 stood as a parliamentary candidate in Erith and Thamesmead where he pushed the liberal democrats into third place despite a predicted labour liberal two horse race.

In 2000 he co-founded YouGov and on its flotation became its CEO. YouGov is now one of the world leaders in political and business information gathering, polling and analysis. It employs over 400 staff on three continents and is listed on the London Stock Exchange.

Muslim women also won seats at Westminster. Labour MP Shabana Mahmood made history in Clare Short's former seat Birmingham Ladywood, along with Yasmin Qureshi, who won in Bolton South East and Rushanara Ali, who defeated Respect in George Galloway's former Bethnal Green and Bow constituency. Priti Patel, became the first female Asian Conservative MP in the safe Conservative seat of Witham. Labour remains the party with the most black or ethnic minority MPs - 16, or 6% of the parliamentary party, up 2% on 2005. Of the Conservatives' 148 new MPs, nine are from a black or ethnic minority background, 4% of the Parliamentary Party, up from 1% in 2005. Only the Liberal Democrats, of the three main parties, now have no ethnic minority MPs.

BBC RADIO



90 - 93FM

London based Iraqi musician Khyam Allami is the first recipient of the BBC Radio 3 World Routes Academy, which aims to support and inspire young world-music artists by bringing them together with internationally renowned figures in the same field. With the focus on Iraqi musicians, Khyam will be mentored by the celebrated Ilham al-Madfai.

During the nine month scheme Khyam and Ilham will feature in workshops, performances, concerts and recording sessions for BBC Radio 3. They will first meet on a three week trip to Damascus, Beirut and Amman where they will perform concerts and collaborate with a wide range of musicians, allowing

Ilham opportunities to pass on his extensive musical experience and cultural heritage to Khyam.

BBC Radio 3's World Routes programme will broadcast special editions on the 12th June and 7th August that will capture Khyam's and Ilham's musical journey.

Khyam will curate an afternoon dedicated to Iraqi culture on London's Southbank at the Celebrating Sanctuary festival on the 13th June, which celebrates the art of refugee communities. A BBC Radio 3 yurt will host the events consisting of live music, spoken word, workshops and discussions.

The 2010 World Routes Academy will culminate with a concert by Khyam and Ilham at the BBC Proms on 9th August at the Royal Albert Hall - a remarkable opportunity to see the results of this distinctive collaboration.

We are looking for volunteers



Would you like to join Iraqi Association volunteers team? Do you want to make a difference? Do you have a few hours a week? Email info@iraqiassociation.org

We welcome the end of child detention

The coalition government has made a welcome commitment to end child immigration detention. This announcement has been long awaited by both refugee communities and campaigners. It is now widely recognised that, as reported in last year's independent medical review (The mental and physical health difficulties of children held within a British immigration detention centre), even short periods of detention cause children and young people lasting physical and psychological damage including weight-loss, depression, self-harm and bedwetting.

There is also evidence to show that families with children are very unlikely to abscond while living in their own communities. Given this evidence, as well as the massive costs involved in detaining families in immigration detention centres, our new coalition government must honour its pledge to end child immigration

detention immediately. Detaining children is wrong and breaking up families is wrong. It is especially traumatic for young children. Last year around a thousand children were detained, which at any one time there were only 30 to 40 children in UK Borders Agency (UKBA) detention. This means it would neither be too difficult nor too costly to create individual packages to deal with their needs and to provide appropriate accommodation for them to live with their own community

Immigration detention of children is a symptom of the breakdown of a chaotic and inhumane system that is crumbling at its foundations. Restoring the integrity of the decision-making process needs to be a priority for the coalition government. Effective asylum management means dealing with applications promptly. If children are involved, it also means behaving humanely, keeping the family together



and under supervision - and if possible working and contributing taxes instead of living on benefit or going underground. A policy with common

sense is going to be more effective than a hysterical bipolar response to detain people for years on end at taxpayer expenses.

Iraqi Association activities and services since January 2010:

1. On 10th April a seminar was organised on Education, attended by more than 35 people. It was held in the borough of Hammersmith.
2. A session of workshop was organised in Hammersmith with London Ethnic Elders Group on 25th May on Prevention.
3. On 26th March, a seminar was organised on the Iraqi election, more than 45 people attended in the borough of Hammersmith.
4. A youth network event was held on 27 February attended by more than 120 young people
5. Young people's meeting held on 15th January and 10th February to facilitate concerns and needs.
6. Weekly sessions of advice and tailor made exercise, each session attended by 35 elderly users.
7. Recruiting, training and supervising 14 volunteers from the different age groups.
8. A press release issued on 5th May in Arabic on the terror attacks in Iraq on Christian students in Mosul.
9. A press release issued on 10th May in Arabic on the terror attacks in Hila Textile Factory in southern Iraq.

10. A press release issued on 18th March on the stolen votes of Iraqis in this country.
11. A press release issued on 26th March on the chaos of Iraqi election in the UK.
12. Published special edition, issue number 100 in March of Al-Muntada on Iraqi election
13. Received election message in March and an article from the former Foreign Secretary David Miliband MP was published in our community newsletter.
14. A visit from BBC news in May, interviewing users of our charity and community members.
15. Interview with various Arab satellite networks on the Iraqi election and reaction of the community to the disorganised voting process in the UK.
16. Campaigned to encourage British Iraqi to vote in the UK general election and issued 2 posters in 2 languages, it is posted on line.
17. Staff attended more than 8 networking and voluntary agencies meetings in relation to pour services and wider policy issues.

Service Statistics of our daily clients January – May 2010:

-All Age Groups (16 – 75+)

- Gender Breakdown of daily users:

Male: 619 Female: 390 Total: 1,009

Welfare	Housing	Health	Immigration	Education	Employment & Training	Advocacy	General
477	17	68	316	21	4	16	90



CEMVO blames racism for decline in funding for ethnic minority charities

A report, by the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations (CEMVO), says that 45 per cent of 173 black and minority ethnic groups surveyed have suffered cuts by local authority and other funders since the recession began. Gary Craig, a visiting professor in the school of social sciences at Durham University, says in the foreword to the report that failure to ensure proper resourcing of BME charities is a consequence of racism. CEMVO's report of the BME sector shows a sector not just under pressure but under attack," he writes. Of the charities that have had cuts, more than four out of 10 have incomes of less than £10,000 a year, according to the report. Thirty-nine per cent have suffered cuts from local councils alone, and the remainder have had funding withdrawn by councils, government departments and grant-making trusts. One organisation, Reach Africa, which runs training and mentoring programmes, said its income had halved since the recession began. "People have been coming to us asking for places on courses and we've had to tell them we're not doing them any more," said Alfred Komeh, director of the charity. Hashmukh Pankhania, chief executive of CEMVO, said: "That nearly half of all BME charities are now struggling is a scandal. BME charities should be benefiting from increased funding in 2010, not facing

cuts that will marginalise them and limit further the inadequate help already on offer." The report asks the Government to give ring-fenced emergency funding to BME organisations and interim payments to help them meet their obligations. It also says the help available to the sector needs better marketing. A Cabinet Office spokesman said the Government was committed to supporting all third sector organisations, including BME groups. "The Office of the former 'Third Sector' funds CEMVO to work specifically with BME organisations in England to build their capacity and to represent the voice of BME third sector organisations to government," he said. In 2009/10, CEMVO received £269,000 to carry out this work, including specific activities to monitor and help BME groups in the recession." The Government has a "schizophrenic" attitude towards BME organisations, according to a new book. The Pied Piper, co-written by Joy Warmington, chief executive of equalities and human rights charity Brap, argues that BME organisations are seen as niche suppliers to particular communities but have to compete in a commissioning marketplace against large charities. "Faced with this environment, the real challenge is to help BME organisations better define their role," it says.