

19 September 2005

Negative attitudes – meeting the challenge

Scottish Refugee Council Conference, 9.30 – 4.45, 20th September 2005, Gilmore Centre for Theatre & Television, Glasgow University, 9 University Avenue G12 8QQ

This year's Scottish Refugee Council Annual Conference looks at ways of challenging negative public attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees, through the media, arts, sport, and community development.

Although there is strong public backing for giving sanctuary to people fleeing persecution, hostility towards asylum seekers and refugees has reached record levels; with increasing incidences of verbal abuse and even physical assault.

Much of the hostility is based upon a lack of understanding of the reasons why people come to Scotland seeking asylum; fears about the impact that refugees may have on the economy, society and culture, and confusion over the differences between asylum seekers and other migrants. Negative reporting of asylum in parts of the media, and increasingly harsh government policies on asylum add to the problem.

The event will look at:

- **Public attitudes – what people really think and why**
- **Current government policy on asylum and how it affects public opinion**
- **How Scottish Refugee Council is challenging negative attitudes on asylum**
- **Developing new ways to effectively challenge negative attitudes and break down stereotypes.**

Scottish Refugee Council, Chief Executive, Sally Daghlian said:

“People who flee persecution to seek refuge in Scotland find themselves in a vicious circle of negative public opinion, hostile press and increasingly punitive legislation. This is very worrying and has serious implications for refugees. We need to use every means available to counter negative public attitudes and find new ways to explain why people come here seeking safety”.

For further information, please contact Andrew Dougal, Press & Communications Officer, Scottish Refugee Council on 1041-223-7927, mobile 07734-030763, or email andrew.dougal@scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk

ENDS

Notes:

1. Programme

- 09.30 Registration
- 10.00 Welcome & Introduction: David Walsh, Scottish Refugee Council Chair
- 10.10 The work of the Scottish Refugee Council & Current asylum policy: Sally Daghlian, Scottish Refugee Council CEO
- 10.30 Understanding public attitudes towards asylum: Miranda Lewis, Senior Research Fellow, IPPR
- 11.00 Break
- 11.15 A personal experience of changing attitudes in the community: Beltus Etchu, Chair of Greater Pollock Integration and Resettlement Network
- 11.35 Q&A
- 12:00 AGM
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1.10 Refugees on film – challenging attitudes through non-mainstream media: Gary Christie, Scottish Refugee Council Policy Officer & Lucinda Broadbent, Camcorder Guerrillas
- 1.30 Workshops
- 2.45 Break
- 3.0 Workshops
- 4.15 Plenary
- 4.40 Closing remarks
- 4.45 Ends

2. Workshops

Workshop 1 – The media in Scotland: looking at what is being done and can be done to influence public opinion through working with the media

Workshop 2 – The arts & sport: the role of the arts and sport in aiding refugee integration and challenging negative opinions of asylum seekers. **Old Firm Alliance members Greig Robertson of Celtic, David Stewart of Ranger's and Celtic Youth Academy coach Michael O'Halloran will participate in this workshop**

Workshop 3 – Community development: making the links at grassroots level. This workshop will examine how negative opinions can be tackled at local community level.

Workshop 4 – Challenging through other debates: This workshop will discuss what steps can be taken to influence negative views of asylum seekers through debates such as anti-sectarianism and anti-racism