Chair's Annual Report 2002 - 2003

One of the many challenges faced by NCADC is to maintain independence and image while securing financial viability to sustain our activities. This organisation was not created because we thought we were formidable campaigners, but because there was a real need out there for our existence. The past year has seen staff and management working relentlessly, with the help of our supporters, to ensure that NCADC not only survives, but also that its principles and traditions are maintained. We can all be very proud that despite the many difficulties we have been through in the past year, we are still here today and able to perform the duties as set out in our mission statement.

George Ekontang (middle) Here to Stay

Community Fund:

NCADC applied for a grant from the Community Fund. The aim was to increase the number of anti-deportation campaigns we support, help more people faced with immigration and asylum difficulties, fund the salaries of three existing staff and open a new office in the North East.

The application was accepted by the Community Fund in August 2002, after checking our constitution, working operations and accessing the aims and objectives of our project. Unfortunately the news was picked up by the hostile press and then came the unprecedented intervention from government ministers, who had concerns that we are:

Mende Nazer Here to Stay

Mehmeti Family Here to Stay

- a political organisation and not eligible for lottery funding;
- doctrinaire in our alleged absolute stance on deportations that they are all inhumane;
- employing staff who do not have permission to work;
- encouraging people to break the law in our opposition to deportation and immigration and asylum legislations.

We make no secret that we oppose any legislation which is detrimental to asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants; but as much as that is the case, we work within the law.

A review of the grant was ordered. We were disappointed, as the decision to award us the grant was made by an independent body. We did however offer full transparency and co-operation.

At the same time we received attacks of a racist nature from the media particularly the Daily Mail. These, together with the concerns above, accentuated unnecessary hysteria about us that we help and campaign for the undeserved, some of whom have allegedly been accused or convicted of terrorism. We were threatened with violence to staff and management.

We lodged all the attacks and threats with the police.

The Community Fund also received death threats, Lady Brittan in particular, following a Daily Mail campaign.

During a meeting with Richard Buxton, the Chief Executive of the Community Fund in London in October 2002 there was an agreement that the grant will go ahead but in return:

1) We cannot use the grant money to fund anti-deportation campaigns of those convicted of terrorism;

2) We cannot be doctrinaire in whatever we do.

Pete Widlinski appeared on BBC Newsnight in August 2002, to give NCADC's side of the story following national media and public interest on the award of the grant. Pete did extremely well to represent us during that time, not just on the very difficult and inquisitive questioning from Jeremy Paxman, but also overall as NCADC's media spokesperson.

To maintain our existence, it has meant significant changes to the way the Coalition works. But I can assure you now, we have not surrendered our principles that we are opposed to deportations and we will support those threatened by them.

We agreed to remove some of the articles on the website, as a gesture of goodwill, although we still stood by their contents.

We have also introduced disclaimers in articles posted to the website as well as those sent out on our e-mail bulletins. We have also introduced an internal website assessment system.

The award of the grant was also investigated by the Audit Commission who produced a report in April 2003 in which NCADC were found to have adequately complied with the procedures and criteria in place at the time of the application.

Crucially, our work was in fact commended by Richard Buxton, Community Fund Chief Executive. Speaking to BBC News Online on Wednesday 2nd April 2003, he said: "Much of the work the NCADC does is extremely valuable to refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom are very vulnerable people."

At this point I want to thank all those who have supported us in those difficult times: financially and in terms of letters of support.

We wish to note and applaud the support of organisations including Joint Council For the Welfare of Immigrants, Brent Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, Sandwell Community Development Project, Birmingham and Coventry NUJ, Refugee Action, Northern Ireland Multi-Cultural Resource Centre, Liberty, Camden UNISON, London Cycling Campaign, Churches Commission For Racial Justice, Bail For Immigration Detainees, Immigration Law Practitioners Association, North East Coalition For Asylum Rights, Oxfordshire Immigration and Nationality Project, the Zimbabwe Association, Faith Communities and many others. In this special mention I also include all those individuals including Members of Parliament, who wrote strong letters of support to urge the Community Fund to re-instate the grant. Your support has been an inspirational endorsement of our work, those we fight for and the issues we address.

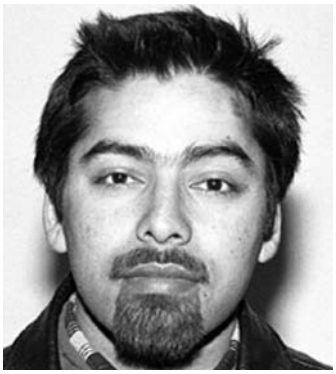
I have particular pride and admiration for the staff and management of the Coalition for the way we have worked and stuck together in securing the grant.

Campaigns:

Anti-deportation campaigns have continued to form the core of NCADC's activities in the last year. At the time when immigration controls have become sterner than ever before, NCADC has played a very key role in helping and supporting those faced by the scourge of deportation. It is important to note that in the past year, the organisation has reached and passed a remarkable landmark of 100 successful anti-deportation campaigns. That is a tribute to the hard work of the staff, the support of the management, determination of volunteers, but most significantly the courage of those facing deportation.

Winning Campaigns:

These include: Mary Njuguna fighting since 1994; George & Evelyn Ekontang; Lata & Devesha; Malela Family; Mende Nazer, victim of slavery in Sudan, whose case attracted wide support and sympathy; Farrokh Shiri and Gladys Ramirez.



On going Campaigns:

These include: The Ay Family Campaign, a Turkish Kurdish family who have had to endure the pain of detention at Harmondsworth and Dungavel Detention Centres for eleven months; Hussein Kassuja, who has been in the UK for 13 years; Tham Sarki, Nepalese national; Asylum for Visaginas Church Congregation; "My Name is Mercy Campaign"; and many more.

Lost Campaigns:

Unfortunately, some of the campaigns we supported and co-ordinated did not achieve victory and we extend our sympathy to the individuals and families affected. Farid and Feriba Ahmadi and their children, Afghan asylum seekers forcibly removed from a mosque in the Midlands and detained at Harmondsworth. The family were removed to Germany, despite wide spread national support and against the advice of a psychiatrist. It is important to point out that the family won the initial appeal to return to the UK, but the Home Office lodged an appeal and it stood, condemning the family to a plight of instability and poor health for the mother. Syed Nasir Wajahat, Pakistani journalist was persecuted by religious groups. His campaign drew support of his MP and local councillors.

We stay in solidarity with them in our hearts and minds, because during their campaigns they have become important in our struggle for justice; the unfortunate outcomes of their campaigns only strengthen our resolve.

Other Campaigns:

We are pleased to have worked with organisations such as: Campaign For Justice in the Yarls Wood Trial - NCADC is in total support to the detainees/ex-detainees facing trial regarding the fire at the Yarls Wood detention centre.

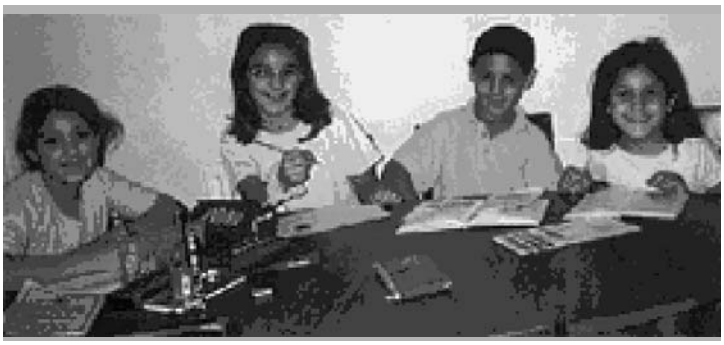
We have also organised a co-ordinated effort across organisations working in asylum and immigration not to work with NASS (National Asylum Support Service) as the scheme has resulted in punitive support and dispersal for asylum seekers.

Recruitment:

This has been one of the success stories of the organisation. 0ur delegated Selection Panel, headed by Bayo Omoyiola, appointed Allison Bennett to replace John Stewart for the London office, and Kath Sainsbury for the North East, both were contracted to start in May 2003.

The opening of the North East Office is to be hailed as a great achievement as it marks the growth and expansion of the organisation.

I take this opportunity to congratulate Allison and Kath on their appointment, and welcome them.



General Review of Work:

The delay in awarding the Community Fund grant was the major setback faced by the Coalition. Severe financial uncertainty stalled the publication of our newsletter and NCADC campaigning guide.

Pressure to Staff and Management followed the hysterical and unbalanced reporting from some sections of the media who criticised NCADC with unfounded claims such as support for alleged terrorists. NCADC offices and members of management have received racist mails and unwarranted media intrusion.

Achievements: Despite the worries over funding, our campaigning activities did not falter. We expanded the organisation with the new office in the North East. We increased the number of campaigns supported. The national meetings have continued to grow - our latest meeting in Manchester was the largest with 100 campaigns, supporters and sympathetic journalists. I also felt that the meeting was unique in terms of the heart-felt stories of the harshness of UK immigration laws. There was the story of a young mother made homeless with her children, with no financial support, being HIV positive with her medical provisions stopped, and cruelly still being threatened with deportation. It is heartless to want to send her home where she will inevitably meet her death.

The number of people aware of our activities has increased dramatically particularly since August 2002. There has been a great rise in the number of those accessing our website and our advertisement for recruitment drew interest as far and wide as Geneva and Bangladesh.

So as we sit here today, we all share the joy of belonging to a bigger, better-known and better-organised NCADC, than we were only twelve months ago.

Special Mention: I wish to extend special gratitude to our funders. We are grateful to the Community Fund and pledge to work with them with openness and readiness in management of the grant. The funding from Barrow Cadbury, Leigh Trust, Churches Commission For Racial Justice, Joseph Rowntree, Network For Social Change, Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit, Lesbian and Gay Foundation and others, have also provided us with much needed financial security.

The Coalition is equally grateful for individual donations, standing orders and individual loans, which have sustained our activities at the most bleak of times.

New Challenges:

The fact that we have a three-year project does not give us the comfort to sit back. We are working extremely hard to secure the long term future. We have recently employed Geoff Wilkins as a Consultant Funding Worker charged with identifying alternative funding for the Coalition. We place a lot of hope in that.

Legislation: With the introduction of harsher asylum and immigration legislation we envisage more difficulties for those seeking protection through the asylum system. The government commitment to detain and remove more asylum seekers is quite worrying and our hearts go to those who will be victimised by the government's desire to reach those targets. NCADC vows to assist and support those who reach for our help. We will also continue to work with various agencies to address the plight of asylum seekers in this country and campaign against unfavourable legislation. I think it will be fair to claim that we all have a common assertion that mankind and humanity are better served by building bridges rather than walls; and walls is the fundamental basis of immigration controls.

Chair's Visits to NCADC Offices:

During my visits to our offices in May 2003, I had the opportunity to talk to the staff on a one-to-one basis. For a national organisation, I felt those visits would be a tool to link up our national and regional offices and bring the management closer to the work and the environment of our staff. I was very impressed with the way the staff conducted themselves, often in difficult circumstances of work stress and daily pressure from the media. I do sympathise with our co-ordinators for the amount of racist mail they receive on a regular basis.

During the visits I assured the staff that the management committee will continue to offer full support and assistance in their work. I also made a commitment that it is the wish of the committee to continually improve their skills through regular training sessions.

Tribute To A Great Comrade: John Stewart

I wish to reiterate my tributes to John Stewart who has left as NCADC's London Co-Coordinator. As I said at our February national meeting in Manchester, John has been a very dedicated member of the organisation for eight years. He served initially as a Volunteer Treasurer in the management committee before taking up employment in a paid capacity.

John has been a very important part of NCADC for many years. We have admired his contributions to the cause we are pursuing as a campaigning organisation. Throughout his employment with the organisation, John has been extremely committed in his work, inspirational in achieving the aims of NCADC, and just wonderful during the many difficulties we have had in the past few months, namely with the grant delay from the Community Fund.

It is no secret then, and I am sure I speak for everyone in the NCADC, that John has left a lot to be admired by his fellow staff, management committee and everyone he has worked with and/or supported during his time with the organisation.

I take this opportunity on behalf of all in the NCADC, to thank him for his great service in achieving the goals of this organisation. We wish him the very best of wishes for whatever he intends to do.

Conclusion: During the time when our Community Fund grant was frozen, NCADC saw the real face of human network across voluntary organisations and individuals. They all responded with great and unique humanity at heart. As Chair I was highly impressed by the sympathy and compassion towards us as an organisation; but greatly moved as their efforts to help us re-gain our financial ability to operate is a reflection of their genuine defence for humanity and justice. In their hearts and minds, I am sure, was the plight of the many families and individuals who NCADC would not be able to support without funds. We thank you immensely.

Unity is a resource, and if that kind of spirit is repeated in the many campaigns in support of asylum and immigration justice, then that will be a major plus to the efforts of reprieving the suffering of many asylum seekers and immigrants in this country.

In terms of NCADC's work, I must reiterate the grand efforts of our co-ordinators. They have worked under a lot of strain but stood with distinction. They are truly exceptional heroes. The management committee have been a tribute to the organisation, so have our many volunteers and supporters.

As I step down as Chair of NCADC due to personal commitments, I would like to thank the staff and management for giving me the encouragement to take on the position and then their support to carry on the duties. It has been a wonderful experience for me and one I have enjoyed enormously. To my comrades in the committee I would like to say this: We have enjoyed what we could, and endured what we had. Most importantly, we have done both collectively.

My sincere hope is that the challenges upon us as an organisation will be a stimulus to achieving greater things. I will give my full assistance to the new Chair. I also promise to continue to support and endorse the work of NCADC.

When I accepted to become Chair of NCADC at London's AGM in June 2002, I pledged to take the organisation to a higher level. Recalling the wisdom bestowed upon me many years ago: "There are only two things wrong with humans, what they say and what they do". I don't know whether that pledge has been realised, but I say today that I had a lot of pride in working to realise it.

Keep going comrades: The greatest failure is the failure not to try.

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