

## Join with students and youth against racism

The Student Assembly Against Racism actively campaigns against the rise in racism we face today.

The surge in support for fascism has included parties like the BNP stepping up their presence on campus. SAAR is campaigning to ensure students use their vote to stop the BNP in elections and is calling for 'no-platform for fascists' to stop the BNP being invited to peddle their racist filth on campus.

With ever-growing hostility towards Muslims, tackling Islamophobia on campus has become all the more urgent. SAAR is working to ensure that Muslim students are treated as equals: we support the Muslim student organisation FOSIS' campaign to ensure a prayer room in every student union and continue to oppose the ban on the hijab in France.

The forthcoming year will see the launch of 'respect not racism' events in student unions in partnership with the NUS Black Students Campaign and the Mayor of London, which builds on the hugely successful Respect festival. SAAR can help you put on an event in your college with advice, materials and speakers from anti-racism campaigns.

Tel: 020 7247 9907 or email: [contactsaar@hotmail.com](mailto:contactsaar@hotmail.com)



# Justice for Jay Abatan

Jay Abatan, a 42-year old black man, was attacked by a gang outside a club in Brighton on 24 January 1999. He died in hospital 5 days later after sustaining severe head injuries. Jay's brother Michael and a friend who were out celebrating with him were also attacked. Two men were arrested and charged with manslaughter but were eventually only charged with affray and Actual Bodily Harm to Jay's brother Michael by the time of the trial due to a lack of witnesses. The jury was not allowed to hear of Jay's death as the judge ruled that this would prejudice the trial. Almost six years on, no one has yet been tried for Jay's murder. This investigation was the subject of an inquiry by Essex police. The original investigating team was replaced by another team as a result of this inquiry. It was announced that the murder was being treated as a racist killing – two years after it took place. The family are now demanding to see the findings of this report.

For more information and to show your support please visit [www.justiceforjay.co.uk](http://www.justiceforjay.co.uk)

## Dates for your diary:

### October

● **Saturday 30th**  
**United for Justice - no more deaths in custody**  
 United Families and Friends annual remembrance march.  
 12.30pm assemble at Trafalgar Square.

### November

● **14th-21st**  
**Respect Week**  
 Cultural events and anti-racist discussions in colleges across London. For more information: [anneliese.midgley@london.gov.uk](mailto:anneliese.midgley@london.gov.uk)

● **Saturday 27th**  
**National Assembly Against Racism Annual General Meeting**  
 Members and affiliates only.  
 9.30am-5pm TUC Congress House, London.

ADVANCE NOTICE:

### February

● **Saturday 5th**  
**Unite Against Fascism conference**  
 For more information, contact UAF on 020 7833 4916 or email [unite@natfhe.org.uk](mailto:unite@natfhe.org.uk)

Make an anti-racist pledge today:

Join NAAR



The National Assembly Against Racism campaigns against racism in all its manifestations. With national black organisations playing a leading role — in alliance with the Jewish and Muslim communities, the trade unions, the student movement, religious groups and many others, NAAR has set about building a mass anti-racist movement uniting all those who believe racism must be fought and not appeased.

Name.....  
 Address.....  
 .....  
 Tel..... Email.....

Affiliation rates: Individuals waged: £10 unwaged/students: £3; Organisations Local unfunded: £15; National unfunded/regional/local funded: £25 National trade unions/funded organisations: £65. Please make cheques payable to NAAR and return to: NAAR, 28 Commercial St, London E1 6LS.

Tel: 020 7247 9907 Email: [info@naar.org.uk](mailto:info@naar.org.uk) Web: [www.naar.org.uk](http://www.naar.org.uk)

## Autumn newsletter

National Assembly Against Racism  
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European Social Forum  
 SPECIAL ISSUE  
 ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE

# Hijab: a woman's right to choose



Milena Buyum, Vice-Chair NAAR

The French law, agreed in February this year, to ban Muslim headscarves and other religious symbols such as the Jewish skullcap and the Sikh turban in state schools is the most reactionary piece of legislation that any European country has enacted since the Second World War. Under this law Muslim girls are subjected to state discrimination against their freedom to express their religious and cultural identity.

The hijab is the traditional headscarf worn by Muslim girls, nearly all of whom come from immigrant families. The ban is a direct assault on France's main minority communities. The French government's campaign to gain support for the ban was dressed up in a language designed to demonise these communities. Muslims were portrayed as political religious extremists who were trying to test the French Republic to its limit. Although in fact what is at stake is the headgear worn by a girl at her school, the image that was suggested was of a vast Islamic fundamentalist network whose goal is the destabilisation of France's democratic and judicial system.

In fact, the French Education Minister Francois Fillon said that 'last year

there were a little over 1500 girls who wore headscarves throughout the school year'. This discriminatory law was therefore introduced to marginalise and stigmatise the Muslim community rather than stand up to the alleged threat to secularism posed by the wearing of the hijab. The law achieved just that, dividing the anti-racist movement on this issue, and isolating Muslim communities even further.

At the time of the start of term, around 100 girls were refusing to remove their hijab. One 15 year old girl in Strasbourg shaved her hair in protest at the imposed ban. The schools are expected to carry out talks with the girls refusing to remove their hijab, and those insisting on wearing it are expected to be expelled from their schools. The new law is due to be

reviewed after being in operation for a year.

Since the introduction of the French ban, further restrictions are being implemented in several German states and in some schools in Belgium. More recently, members of the Italian Parliament from the far right Northern League have proposed similar restrictions in schools in Italy.

An international campaign was launched in July 2004 at the Hijab: a woman's right to choose conference in London, organised by the Assembly for the Protection of Hijab. The campaign will continue in the next year, with the strong support of the National Assembly Against Racism and Liberty amongst others.

For more information, visit [www.prohijab.net](http://www.prohijab.net)

### Extract from the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights report on Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims in Selected EU Member States published on 13 September 2004.

“The new law has been criticised by human rights organisations for violating freedom of religion. Commenting on the law, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights has noted that it is not at the discretion of a state to determine which religious manifestations are legitimate as long as they do not violate other people's basic human rights or do not endanger public safety, health or morals. The IHF is also concerned that the new law, which is apparently primarily targeted at the Islamic headscarf, will serve to mistakenly stigmatise all Muslim women wearing the headscarf as religious fundamentalists. Muslim organisations have reported that the stir surrounding the adoption of the new law has contributed to fuelling negative attitudes toward Muslims.”



## ID cards – a disaster in the making for black communities in Britain

Doug Jewell,  
Campaigns Co-ordinator, Liberty

“We will introduce identity cards and electronic registration of all who cross our borders. We have cut radically the numbers of failed asylum seekers; we will remove more each month than apply.”  
- Tony Blair 27<sup>th</sup> September

Tony Blair used his speech to the 2004 Labour Party Conference to once again raise the spectre of a National Identity Card scheme, this time tying it to the question of asylum.

His speech came directly after the Home Office announced that it would spend £15 million to develop technology using biometrics, unique identifiers that can prove people’s identity such as an eye scan, able to monitor and record everyone who crosses Britain’s borders. In the future this type of technology will be incorporated into a national ID card, which will cost a minimum of £3.5 billion. The government’s ability to deliver on this technology has to be in doubt. More important however is the impact on race relations the introduction of ID cards and the vast database behind them would have.

As we know from the experience of black communities in France and Germany, black people are many times more likely to be stopped and asked to produce their identity cards than the white population. In Britain, the disproportionate use of stop and search on black communities is set to worsen with the introduction of ID cards: an expensive and highly problematic way to increase racial division. The plan should be abandoned now.

# Fighting fascism and the far right



Sabby Dhalu, Unite Against Fascism Joint Secretary

Across Europe, far right and fascist groups are making electoral breakthroughs. The recent election successes in Germany and Switzerland, the growth of anti-immigration parties in Denmark and Holland, the advances by Haider’s Freedom Party in Austria and the shocking Presidential election result in France two years ago - where Le Pen received almost six Million votes in the second round - send out strong warning signals that fascism and the far right are a growing threat to democracy and the multicultural societies of Europe.

In Britain, the British National Party (BNP) received its highest national vote ever and only just missed getting elected in June’s European Parliament and Greater London Assembly elections. It is only in the last four years that the BNP actually started to make electoral advances and steadily increase its support in elections, having been defeated in the early 1990s in East London.

The BNP’s goal this year was to win seats in these institutions and they were stopped. However the BNP polled a high vote, over 800,000 votes in the European elections and over 90,000 in the London Assembly elections. Last month the BNP gained a councillor in London for the first time in eleven years, in Goresbrook, Barking, with over 50% of the vote. The BNP now have 23 borough councillors and 2 town councillors. This means that the united campaign established by Unite Against Fascism must continue - particularly in the run up to the next general election and forthcoming local elections.

It needs to be clearly understood that although they did not win the seats in the European Parliament and London Assembly, these were the highest votes for the far right in Britain since the Second World War. They indicate that if this trend continues, the BNP is on the verge of a major breakthrough into national politics. Indeed, had it not been for the surge of the UK Independence Party in June, and the campaigning work of Unite Against Fascism and others, it is likely that the BNP would now have four MEPs and a London Assembly Member. That would have given them a significant platform in national politics for the first time.

The BNP is winning more votes than ever before, is represented on more councils than ever before and is poised to make a major advance into national politics.

As France, Italy, Belgium and most other European countries show, it will be infinitely harder to reverse a major breakthrough by the far right once it has occurred, than to block it occurring in the first place.

That breakthrough is not inevitable. But we will only succeed in stopping the rise of the far right in Britain if we have a sober and realistic estimate of how substantial the threat has now become. It will require a colossal and united effort by the labour movement, the Black, Asian and Jewish communities and everyone who supports democracy.

UAF and others who have campaigned vigorously against the BNP over the last year have stopped the BNP in their tracks, blocking their way to the national breakthrough they were seeking. This was achieved by mobilising the anti-racist majority to use their vote. As it was the case in Tower Hamlets in March 1994 when Beackon was defeated through a massive increase in the turnout and also nationally in June 2004, this is the only way to stop the BNP gaining a national platform.

To get involved in the campaign against the BNP, join UAF and its local groups across the country. For more information, visit [www.uaf.org](http://www.uaf.org) or phone **020 7388 4916**.

# Europe must stop building a fortress against asylum seekers

Denis Fernando, Co-ordinator NAAR

In recent years, European governments’ policies on asylum and immigration have restricted access and reduced asylum rights, undermining their commitment to the Geneva Convention, at the same time as the number of refugees globally have increased due to wars, famine and economic instability. These restrictions are at odds with the fact that the main countries offering refuge to the majority of asylum seekers worldwide are developing world countries such as India, Pakistan and Mozambique.

Despite this, European policy continues to focus on restrictions. For example, Italy has recently started deporting asylum seekers immediately back to Libya. Transit camps in Africa are being planned by British, German and Italian governments and armed guards patrol the Mediterranean to stop asylum seekers landing on Europe’s shores. This tightening of Europe’s borders has not deterred those fleeing persecution, rather making their journey to Europe more dangerous and often fatal. UNITED highlights over 3750 documented deaths of people trying to access Europe in the decade since 1993.

In order to justify these draconian measures, hysterical rhetoric is used often suggesting we are being overrun by asylum seekers. In September, Amnesty International raised concerns that “counter-terrorism and controlling illegal immigration have... been allowed to hijack the EU’s Justice and Home Affairs agenda.” They were concerned that policy tended to be defensive with little regard to root causes and combating labour exploitation. In June, Amnesty criticised the poor decision-making of the British Home Office, which lead to 1 in 5 appeals being overturned.

Asylum and immigration rights are being ground down for political gain and to appease racism. In the bidding war to demonstrate who can be “tougher” on asylum and immigration, mainstream political parties are always outflanked by the far right, who have grown across Europe in the last decade taking governmental seats locally and nationally. The issue of asylum has legitimised their extremist views at the ballot box. Their growth will continue unless the vilification of asylum seekers is halted. Tory leader Michael Howard whipped up a frenzy around “benefit shoppers” from Eastern Europe who were heading to Britain following the accession of these countries to the EU in May. The government responded by cutting benefits to new eastern European migrants. Yet this “flood” failed to materialise and new migrants were left without much-needed state support. Restrictive policies create a vicious circle of hostility both in the right-wing media and in policy against vulnerable communities. Most recently a Kurdish asylum seeker was murdered in Swansea in a racist attack, the latest in a series of similar murders over the last few years in Britain.

In order to respect the Geneva Convention and reverse this trend of regressive asylum policy, the benefits of migration need to be celebrated. In Britain, asylum seeker children have raised the standards of schools and migrant workers contribute £2.5 billion more to the economy than they take in benefits. As a leading exporter of arms and the fourth biggest economy in the world, our obligations to asylum seekers are obvious. Across Europe, political parties and governments must lead from the top, respecting the human rights of asylum seekers and showing the positive difference migration makes to our societies.

Help to combat the myths around asylum in the press – download our leaflet and letter-writing pack at [www.naar.org.uk](http://www.naar.org.uk)

## The truth about asylum seekers

- The majority of asylum seekers coming to Britain have come from countries experiencing civil unrest, war or instability, including Iraq, Somalia, Rwanda, and Afghanistan. Yet, in 2003 at least half, and in some cases the majority of applications from these countries were refused asylum initially. 50-83% of subsequent appeals were dismissed. In 2003, 4,500 Iraqis were refused refugee status or exceptional leave out of the 6,755 who applied for asylum. 83% of those who appealed were rejected.
- Welfare provision for asylum seekers in Britain is 30% below Income Support level. Asylum seekers are not allowed to work. An Oxfam/Refugee Council report showed that 85% experience hunger, 95% cannot afford clothes or shoes and 80% are not able to maintain good health.
- During 1992 –2001 the developing world provided asylum to 72% of the 12 million refugees worldwide, leaving the wealthier countries to help just 28%. Britain takes less than 2% of the world’s refugees. Asylum seekers in Britain represent just 0.1% of Britain’s population of 58 million.

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