

Social media and asylum seekers



Lem Lem Hussein
Abdu facing
deportation from
Sheffield

Once upon a time the only way individuals could get their story out to the wider public was through the newspapers. Now Facebook Twitter and the Web mean that their story can reach audiences all over the globe. Governments need to know that ordinary people have a voice now and cannot just be shuffled off in secret.

Take the case of Lem Lem Hussein Abdu a sixty year old disabled woman from Eritrea. In 1978 her village was burned down and her family was murdered. Lemlem fled to Sudan and then subsequently to Saudi Arabia, where she obtained a position as a domestic worker. In 2000, her employers stopped paying her wages and abandoned her in England, with no money and no identification. Lemlem claimed asylum but has been refused. She was due to be deported this week to Ethiopia. Local protests have highlighted her plight. In the old days, no one outside Sheffield would have heard of Lem Lem. But with Facebook, online forums and Twitter, people all over the UK and in other countries know her story.

Consider the story of Charles Atangana, a member of the National Union of Journalists, who is in exile from his home country, Cameroon. An economics reporter, he wrote an article critical of the government and he and his wife were stripped and beaten. He has been living in Glasgow for 6 years and has worked with the Citizen's Advice Bureau. The NUJ is fighting a fierce campaign against his deportation.

They have been sent to Immigration Removal Centres. LemLem has just been released from Yarls Wood while her case is considered and Charles is still in Harmondsworth. They may be out of sight but they are not out of mind. Their stories live on.