

Remembering Mary Diaz

On February 12, 2004, the world lost one of its most dedicated and effective advocates for refugee women and children.

Mary Diaz was an eloquent, devoted and tireless advocate for the protection and empowerment of women, adolescents and children affected by war and persecution. As executive director of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children since 1994, she touched the lives of tens of thousands of vulnerable refugee women and children, as well as those who worked with her at the United Nations, government offices and international and local nongovernmental organizations.

"Her death will be a great loss to those who work for the cause of refugees," said Ruud Lubbers, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. "Under her leadership, the Women's Commission made a considerable contribution to UNHCR's policies on refugee women and children, most recently in our efforts to address sexual and gender-based violence. She will be greatly missed."

Mary had visited refugees and displaced women, children and adolescents in refugee settings around the globe, including in Angola, Tanzania, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Haiti and the Balkans. Under her leadership, the Women's Commission grew from an organization with four staff and a budget of \$450,000 to an organization with more than 20 staff and a budget of over \$4 million. Mary, who was 43 years old, enjoyed the respect, admiration and affection of everyone who had the fortune to work closely with her.

"She was such a wonderful, compassionate person who has touched many lives, especially us refugee women

and our children," said Julie Nsanzurwimo, former refugee from Burundi. "She will be missed very much."

Prior to working at the Women's Commission, Mary was director of refugee and immigration services at Catholic Charities in Boston, and had previously worked in the production department at a TV news station in Philadelphia. She held a BA in International Relations from Brown University and an MA in International Education from Harvard.

"Mary's dedication, commitment, passion and leadership had a tangible impact on the lives of millions of refugee women and children around the world," said Arthur E. Dewey, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. "She was a shining example of what it means to be a true humanitarian. [She] has left behind a legacy that will continue to bear fruit for many, many years. We will miss her tireless spirit and everlasting smile."

Following Mary's death, hundreds of tributes poured into the Women's Commission, and obituaries appeared in major newspapers around the country. They are available on our website at www.womenscommission.org. ❖



Campaign for Refugee Girls

From Afghanistan to Colombia to Sierra Leone, refugee girls are among the most at risk. They face abduction and rape, forced marriage and slavery, life-threatening pregnancies and HIV/AIDS. Because they are female, they are less likely to learn to read and write or have opportunities for formal education. They are often considered the property of their families, with little or no say in decisions regarding marriage and employment. In refugee camps, desperate families sell girls as young as eight as second or third wives to men in their 40s or 50s. Some girls become soldiers because they believe it is their only protection from violence and abuse.

While refugee girls face some of the most serious human rights abuses, they are less likely to find help or assistance, sometimes because of cultural and societal barriers, other times due to extreme poverty and neglect. Girls who want to stay in school, learn a trade or gain new skills have few opportunities; they are rarely consulted or encouraged to participate in camp programs or management.

The Women's Commission has launched the "Campaign for Refugee Girls" in order to document rights abuses, propose policy and program changes and work for reform. The advocacy campaign will focus on the challenges facing refugee girls and propose solutions. Partnering with other NGOs and UN and local groups and experts, it will build a network that will multiply opportunities for refugee girls. The campaign will stress the importance of educating refugee communities, particularly boys and men, regarding equal rights for girls and women. To contribute to the Campaign for Refugee Girls (The Mary Diaz Fund for Refugee Girls), please send a check made out to the Women's Commission to Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 122 East 42nd Street, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10168-1289.

Displaced Women in Colombia Risk Lives to Speak Out

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

An independent organization formed with the assistance of the International Rescue Committee to advocate for the solution of problems affecting refugee women and children.

122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168-1289

tel. 212. 551. 3111 or 3088
fax. 212. 551. 3180

wcrwc@womenscommission.org
www.womenscommission.org

Ellen Jorgensen
Acting Executive Director

Ramina Johal
*Senior Coordinator,
Participation and Protection Project*

Lori Heninger
*Senior Coordinator
Children and Adolescents Project*

Sandra Krause
Director, Reproductive Health Project

Diana Quick
Director of Communications

Wendy Young
Director of External Relations

Kathleen Newland
Chair of the Board of Directors

Women working for human rights groups in Colombia find themselves in an increasingly dangerous situation. The 38-year-long internal conflict, which has resulted in 3 million displaced people, continues to have a disproportionate effect on women. Armed forces, including the paramilitary and guerrillas, use sexual violence to control women and to punish them for taking leadership roles. In 2000, the UN Special Rapporteur for Women's Rights reported that women in Colombia were used as sex slaves, sexually mutilated and subjected to forced nudity, forced abortion and forced anti-contraception measures.

Additionally, in a recent speech, President Alvaro Uribe said that he regards all NGOs in Colombia as terrorist organizations, providing a veritable invitation for the paramilitary to attack them. The head of the paramilitary group has applauded this declaration, and encouraged his forces to attack human rights defenders.

The Women's Commission's protection partner in Colombia, Claudia Mejía Duque, director of Colectivo María María, spoke at the Women's Commission offices during a visit to New York. With her was Leonora Castaño Cano, president of ANMUCIC (the National Association of Rural, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian Women). María María is a network of professional women, including lawyers, journalists and anthropologists, who research the effects of violence on women's participation in Colombia, and advise and train grassroots women's groups. María María supports ANMUCIC, which undertakes human rights, health and education programs across Colombia.

ANMUCIC's has 90,000 women members, the majority of whom are internally displaced. Thirty-five of its active members have been killed in the conflict. Over the last five years, the work of ANMUCIC has been seriously disrupted, with a marked increase in the last year. Four members were raped and two "disappeared," although the organization was able to negotiate the release of one of these women. When she came back, it was with a message from the paramilitary, warning ANMUCIC to stop organizing. More than half of the leaders of the organization have been forced into exile to save their own lives. Ms Castaño Cano herself was forced to move to Spain following threats on her family's lives.

On behalf of all women in Colombia, Ms Mejía Duque called on the Colombian government to fulfill its commitment to all UN resolutions and to stop the collaboration between the paramilitary and the military. She said the Colombian government should strictly fulfill the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of women and should recognize the disproportionate impact of the conflict on women, particularly in regards to sexual violence and reproductive health. She called for a specific public policy to deal with displaced women, within the framework of a policy to deal with IDPs in general, and pointed out that women should be participants in such a policy's formation. She also called on the Colombian government to remove the restriction against the International Criminal Court and to ratify the declaration on the rights of women.

Finally, Ms Mejía Duque advocated for the level of humanitarian assistance to Colombia from the United States to be increased and that it not to be connected to military and drugs.

The Women's Commission will continue to work with Colectivo María María to advocate for reforms on the national and international level that address the escalating violence toward women's groups. ❖

War Ends in Liberia, but Violence against Women and Girls Continues

After 14 years of devastating civil conflict, Liberia now seems to have turned the corner. But as the population struggles to rebuild, a shattered society offers little protection for women and children. A six-member delegation, consisting of Women's Commission board members, staff and other professionals, spent 10 days investigating the situation of internally displaced and returnee women, adolescents and children in post-conflict Liberia. In particular, the team focused on prevention and response to the high level of gender-based violence, access to education and the inclusion of girls and women in the Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Rehabilitation (DDRR) process.

"I tired of fighting. I give up my gun." The young boy, one of the first disarmed child soldiers to reach the cantonment (temporary camp for ex-combatants) in Tubmanburg, offered this comment to a member of the Women's Commission delegation. He, along with most of the estimated 15,000 young former fighters, wants nothing so much as to go to school. Many, if not most of the 1.6 million children in Liberia have missed out on years of education, and for the first time in Liberia's history, the younger generation is far less educated than their parents. However, schools have been looted and destroyed, and internally displaced children in particular cannot access education. As part of its post-delegation advocacy, the Women's Commission will press the international community to fund education and skills training, especially for girls.

Thousands of women and girls were abducted by fighting forces to serve as sex slaves, porters and cooks. In an important precedent, these women and girls "associated with the fighting forces" are eligible for the DDRR process, without having to

Women's Commission Gift Helps Women's Group

Lyn Gray, program consultant, YMCA/Liberia helped coordinate the Women's Commission's delegation to Liberia. She writes:

Estella Nelson, national coordinator of the Liberia Women's Media Action Committee, was very excited to receive a gift of one digital camera, one 35 mm camera and one microcassette tape recorder sent by some of the members of the Women's Commission delegation who had visited Liberia. It was not hard to see how the work Nelson and the other women of the Committee are undertaking had made such a positive impression on the delegation members. The Committee works to sensitize the Liberian public and educate Liberian women on women's rights issues. Their strategies include a free newsletter, a monthly forum for students at which a film is shown and discussed, and development of a radio program called "Gender Forum." The Committee members, mostly female journalists, all donate their time, but the needs are so great that Nelson has taken a three-month leave from her job with a newspaper to focus on the Committee's goals. Her dream for the not-too-distant future is to expand their activities to include awareness of children's rights. ❖

produce a weapon. This enables them to receive the same benefits as combatants. In practice, however, the policy is not clearly understood, and there are serious concerns that the message is not reaching women and girls. This is one area among many (others include land inheritance and voting rights) where special efforts must be made to ensure that women and girls, especially in rural areas, are aware of their rights. Liberian women's and youth groups are eager to undertake the challenge of communicating this critical information to the population, but need support to travel to remote rural areas and to produce radio programs.

The end of war has not ended violence against women and girls. Rape is prevalent throughout the country, and especially in the internally displaced camps where protection is minimal. Survivors of violence have difficulty accessing medical care, counseling, HIV/AIDS testing and treatment. Even when a victim chooses to report a rape, there is no effective system of redress. The Women's Commission will push for support of

local efforts to reform the judiciary system, beginning with an amendment of the narrow rape law, which allows many perpetrators to go free.

"Thank you for coming, especially at this time. Not that many people are interested in these issues," said the Senior Protection Officer at UNHCR. "It is great to have so many women in the office!" exclaimed the UNICEF Country Director, the only female head of a UN agency in Liberia.

These comments reminded us how the needs of displaced women and children continue to be regularly sidelined, and how important it is for the Women's Commission to bring attention to them and to apply concerted pressure for change.

Members of the delegation held a press briefing in Monrovia, reported their findings to U.N. officials, held meetings on Capitol Hill upon their return, and are planning a variety of advocacy actions in the coming months.

A report will be available in July. ❖

W Trafficking: A Scourge Affecting Refugee Women and Children

Hundreds of thousands of refugees from Burma have fled into neighboring Thailand in the past two decades. Escaping armed conflict and rampant human rights violations, the refugees often find that safety remains elusive even after they cross the Thai border. The failure of Thailand to offer them meaningful protection puts them at risk of continued human rights abuses, including trafficking. Women and children are particularly at risk of trafficking, and the sexual and physical exploitation and forced labor associated with it, as they desperately seek a way to support themselves and their families.

The international community has paid tremendous attention to trafficking in recent years. In 2000, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children to the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime was issued. The purpose of the protocol is to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, with special attention to women and children; to protect and assist victims of trafficking, with respect for their human rights; and to promote cooperation among countries that have ratified the protocol in order to achieve those objectives. The agreement does not supersede the obligations of par-

ties to the protocol under international humanitarian, human rights, and refugee law, including the principle of non-return that is the core of the international refugee protection framework laid out in the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.

The nexus between refugee protection and trafficking is poorly understood and little acknowledged in Thailand. Thailand has not ratified the 1951 Convention. Instead it has adopted a narrow definition of refugees as “those who have fled fighting,” which does not comply with international law and excludes large numbers of Burmese refugees.

Burmese in Thailand are at strong risk of being trafficked, whether before crossing the border, during the border crossing or in Thailand itself. Trafficked women and children may end up in a range of abusive situations, including children forced to beg on the streets in urban areas, women and girls working in the sex industry or in substandard and dangerous labor conditions in textile factories or other industrial settings. Sometimes, the trafficked person is not paid at all or is paid a wage far below that promised or allowed under Thai law. Labor conditions are appalling, characterized by long hours and physical

and sexual abuse.

Trafficked persons apprehended in Thailand are typically deported. Some are deported with prior notification to the Burmese government. Others who have been designated as refugees or persons of concern by UNHCR are rounded up, detained and informally deported to border areas without prior notification to the Burmese government.

Clearly missing in the dialogue on trafficking in Thailand is a holistic, rights-based approach that addresses the root causes of migration from Burma to Thailand. New solutions must be sought that take into consideration the reality that repatriation is neither a safe nor viable option for many. Trafficking of persons in refugee-like circumstances must be considered within the international refugee framework, which traditionally has promoted the durable solutions of local integration, third country resettlement or safe and voluntary return. Even in the absence of ratification of the Refugee Convention, Thailand—with the support of the international community—must abide by these principles.

The delegation to Thailand was the first in a project to examine the links between refugee protection and trafficking. ❖

CREATIVE DONORS

Action for Justice

The Women’s Commission thanks the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary (RSHM) for their generous contribution of \$10,000 in 2003. RSHM is a diverse group of more than 1,000 women who engage in educational, pastoral and social services. Women and children, as those most affected by the negative aspects of globalization, are the focus of many of the group’s “action for justice” programs.

These programs include shelters for the homeless in New York City, refugee services in Rome, Italy, a center for victims of domestic violence in California, environmental ministries and justice and peace initiatives. The Women’s Commission is very grateful to have been chosen as a recipient of RSHM’s generosity.

Musicians for Peace

In October, the Women’s Commission

was the beneficiary of a “Musicians for Peace” concert. The organization brings together a host, musicians and a nonprofit organization for a collaborative fundraising event.

Hosts Allison Whiting and Fred Schroeder welcomed 50 friends into their home for a buffet dinner, which they provided, and the Colorado String Quartet, who volunteered their time and talent to support the Women’s *(continued on page 5)*

Millions Missing Out on Education

More than 27 million children and youth affected by armed conflict are not in school, according to a recent report by the Women's Commission. Of those, over 90 percent are living in their own country.

Communities and international and local organizations are making great efforts to offer education to war-affected children and youth. "Yet, education in emergencies is critically underfunded, particularly for those who are displaced within their own countries," says Lynne Bethke, author of the report, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*.

Most children and youth who are in school are in the early primary grades. The enrollment of all children, but especially girls, decreases steadily after grade one. Very few refugee and internally displaced children have access to secondary education; only 6 percent of all refugee students are enrolled at the secondary level. For internally displaced youth, even fewer opportunities exist. Youth who have not completed primary education require a range of formal and non-formal education options, to provide them with a bridge back to the formal system or with the basic skills needed to be healthy and productive members of society.

Teachers in emergencies also face difficulties: overcrowded classrooms - often with 50 or more students; multi-grade, multi-age classrooms; and threats to their own safety, as teachers are often targeted during conflict.

Many teachers have little training or education themselves. All of these factors can dramatically affect the quality of education provided.

In most emergency situations, the majority of teachers are men, which can lead to lower enrollment of girls.



Photos (all Angola): clockwise from top left: Eldrid Midttun; Lynne Bethke; ADRA; Lynne Bethke

Information was collected on a broad range of over 500 education projects with a focus on formal education activities. Continuation of this effort through a centralized reporting system is essential to ensure that the educational needs of refugee and internally displaced youth are highlighted and receive full attention.

"The international community cannot continue to allow millions of children caught in conflict to miss years of education," says Ms Bethke. "Children and youth who miss out on schooling are less able to contribute to the rebuilding of their countries and more vulnerable to illegal and dangerous activities."

The report is available at <http://www.womenscommission.org/reports/index.html>. ❖

Female teachers can help alleviate the fear some parents have in sending their post-puberty girls to school because they are seen by some parents as an added protection for girls against sexual exploitation. Female teachers are also important role models.

Although much can be done to improve and increase the provision of education in emergencies, the money is sorely lacking. In 2002, of the \$46 million requested through the UN, only \$17 million was actually pledged and contributed. Funding for education for the internally displaced is particularly dire.

The *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies* gathered information on how many refugee, displaced and returnee children and youth have access to education and on the nature of the education they receive.

Musicians for Peace

(continued from page 4)

Commission. After the performance, acting director Ellen Jorgensen and reproductive health project director Sandra Krause spoke about the Women's

Commission's programs, particularly reproductive health for refugees.

"It was incredibly inspiring to many of our guests, some of who gave much more generously than we'd expected because they were so moved both by the donation of the musicians' time and their beautiful program but also because of the benefiting charity," commented Allison Whiting. The event raised over \$5,000 for the Women's Commission's general programs. ❖

W Women's Commission Celebrates 15th Anniversary

The Women's Commission marked its 15th anniversary on May 13, with its annual Voices of Courage awards luncheon. More than 500 people attended the sold-out event, which was held at the new Mandarin Oriental hotel in Manhattan. The luncheon raised over \$430,000.

The Commission honored 15 people—eight refugees and seven other individuals and institutions:



Marguerite (Maggy) Barankitse, a Tutsi from Burundi, organized shelter for Hutu families during the country's civil war. She has built five villages for unaccompanied children, where they go to school, manage a household and tend to livestock, while feeling a sense of home and belonging. Maggy has helped over 10,000 children.



Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) is the foremost pro-refugee voice in the Republican party. He has introduced several refugee bills in the Senate and has been a key proponent of rejuvenating the U.S. refugee resettlement system since its breakdown after Sept. 11.



Leonora Castaño Cano of Colombia was president of the National Association of Rural, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Women, an organization with over 90,000 members. Because of her work, Leonora and her family received threats that compelled them to move to Spain.



Partawmina Hashemee of Afghanistan is the director of the Afghan Women's Resource Center, which provides education, health-care training, employment opportunities and skills-training projects for Afghan refugee women in and around Peshawar, Pakistan, as well as in Kabul.



JPMorgan Chase is a leading global financial services firm with operations in more than 50 countries. It has shown its concern for refugees and the internally displaced through its longstanding and loyal support of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.



Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) has long been a leading voice on refugee issues in the Senate. He has written and sponsored refugee bills and has visited numerous refugee settings. Sen. Kennedy has worked directly with the Women's Commission on several pieces of key legislation relating to refugees and asylum seekers.



Julia Kharashvili fled Abkhazia for Tbilisi, Georgia in 1993, where she helped found the Internally Displaced Women's Association. She developed programs to increase participation of displaced women and to reduce effects of the trauma of war on communities, particularly on children.



The Kosovar Youth Council (KYC) is a local youth-led non-governmental organization that brings together youth from all sides of the conflict to promote peace and reconciliation. The KYC was an instrumental partner in the Women's Commission's adolescent-led research project in Kosovo.



Ochora Emmanuel Lagedo is a founding member of Gulu Youth for Action in northern Uganda, where he advocates for the needs of displaced and abducted children, particularly girls. He participated in the Women's Commission's adolescent

research project.



Carolyn Makinson is Executive Director of MIT's Center for International Studies. Previously she was responsible for the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's population and refugee programs, where she was instrumental in putting reproductive health for refugees on the international agenda.



Joyce Mends-Cole, UNHCR's Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women and Gender Equality, is a Liberian women's rights activist. She has partnered with the Women's Commission for many years on gender issues affecting refugees and internally displaced people.



The Nightingale-Bamford School is an independent K-12 girls' school in New York. In 1995, fifth grade girls published *Poems for Life*, a book of poems chosen by celebrities, to benefit the Women's Commission. The school hosted a summer program for refugee youth resettled by the International Rescue Committee.



Hazel Reitz has been the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration's voice at the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' Standing Committee meetings, where she consistently raises concerns about UNHCR's performance in the area of protection of refugee women and children.



Dr. Win Myint Than of Burma was integral to the development of health worker training program in the Karenni Refugee Camps on the border in Thailand. She was granted citizenship

in Canada, but returned to the Thai/Burma border and strengthened medic training there.



Stella Umutoni of Rwanda is active with the International Rescue Committee's Youth Leadership Program. She has spoken about refugee issues to other young people, and at the Ford Foundation's celebration of World Refugee Day.



The Women's Commission presented posthumous awards to **Arthur Helton** and **Sergio Vieira de Mello**, two leading humanitarians who died in the bombing of UN headquarters in Baghdad in August 2003. As a leading expert on refugee policy and law, Arthur Helton influenced the work of everyone in the field as he fought for the rights of the dispossessed. In his various positions with the United Nations, which took him all over the world, Sergio Vieira de Mello served as an inspiration to all who work for the rights of refugees and the displaced.

Dina Dublon, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of JPMorgan Chase and a board member of the Women's

Commission, accepted the award on behalf of her company. She spoke of her experience on a Women's Commission board delegation to Rwanda and told the audience: "If we can couple personal accountability with organizational responsibility, we can create a powerful force for change. We must find ways to get involved in issues that go beyond ourselves, beyond our immediate communities."

Stella Umutoni called on the audience to pay attention to women and children in conflict zones: "Let us reach out to them, listen to them, encourage them; give them a sense of hope and future. Make them aware that they deserve a right to be listened to and their cries heard. It is through listening, touching one another that we can heal. Through this I have been able to reach out to others to testify. As women, let us stand out of the crowd, fight for our rights and the rights of those who are less privileged and who are victims of circumstance."

In her acceptance speech, Partawmina Hashemee spoke of the collaboration between the Women's Commission and the Afghan Women's Resource Center: "The Women's Commission has opened doors for us so that we could speak

for ourselves at key policy meetings and with high-level officials. The Women's Commission has helped us enter a new level of advocacy; there are not enough words to thank them for this."

Maggy Barankitse urged the audience to "forget your titles - think that you are children." "We are created to love, not to kill," she continued. "Yes, l'amour est inventif. The love, it makes inventors of us all."

Nicholas Kristof of the New York Times gave the keynote speech, and spoke of his recent experiences in eastern Chad and Cambodia. Lesley Stahl of CBS 60 Minutes was host. A short film tribute to Mary Diaz was shown, which also launched the Women's Commission's Mary Diaz Campaign for Refugee Girls.

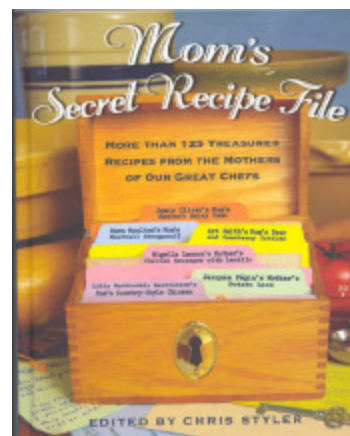
More details on the luncheon are available at www.womenscommission.org.

Among the major sponsors of the luncheon were: JP MorganChase, Gail Furman, Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP, Sue Simon, Roger Altman and Evercore Partners, Elizabeth J. Keefer, Clay and Garrett Kirk, Sheila C. Labrecque, Mary Moglia, Richard Spears Kibbe & Orbe LLP, and Douglas and Mary Anne Schwalbe. ❖

Mom's Secret Recipe File

Mom's Secret Recipe File features stories, recipes, family cooking lore, tips and advice from chefs and their mothers. The chef/mom duos are featured in "mini chapters" that begin with short introductions written by the chefs—a favorite memory about how their moms' cooking styles inspired their own—followed by four recipes from their moms' secret files. Chefs who share their mothers' recipes include Jamie Oliver, Nigella Lawson, Chris Styler, Jacques Pepin, Mollie Katzen, Anthony Bourdain and Rocco DiSpirito.

A portion of the proceeds of Mom's Secret Recipe File will go to the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. The book, published by Hyperion, can be ordered at Amazon.com or from your local bookstore.



W Sudanese Refugees in Chad Lack Essential Reproductive Health Care

Forty-five-year old Kadija sat on the dirt floor in the registration area of the Iridimi Transit Center in eastern Chad with her head bent to the ground and a despondent expression on her face, oblivious to the hot sandy wind that swirled around her. Three small children covered with flies were sitting close by and a fourth was in her lap. Kadija lost her husband and a 6-year-old child in Sudan. She appeared to be grieving

as she continued the long sad struggle with her remaining children to survive. Kadija arrived at the transit center in April after fleeing her home in Sudan. She first arrived at a Chadian border town, Tine, in January. She then began to walk to the Iridimi Transit Camp, 40 miles away; generous Chadian villagers helped her with the loan of the donkey. She now waits under a plastic sheet to register—the next day she hopes—for shelter, food and water for herself and her family.

More than 1 million people in the Darfur region of western Sudan have been forced to flee their villages following attacks by the Arab militia known as the Janjaweed. While most remain within Sudan, more than 200,000, mainly women and children, have crossed the border into Chad. A Women's Commission/UNFPA mission in April to Chad found

that many of the refugees were not receiving basic care or security. Reproductive health care was almost non-existent despite the widespread and systematic rape of women in Darfur by the government-backed Janjaweed.

“The critical reproductive health needs of refugees are not being met; as a result, they’re in constant jeopardy,” says Sandra Krause, director of the Women’s Commission reproductive health project, who visited eastern Chad as part of an evaluation conducted by the UN-led Inter-agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Refugee Settings. “Despite the pervasive rape of women by the Janjaweed,” says Ms Krause, “nothing is being done for the rape survivors to protect them from further trauma such as unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, or to address their psychosocial needs. In addition, there are no ways for survivors to report sexual abuse and exploitation.”

Three out of five women in Darfur are either pregnant or breastfeeding, but preventing maternal and neonatal mortality and ensuring adequate nutrition for those who fled to Chad was not a priority, the Women’s Commission found. Visibly pregnant women were not given clean delivery kits and transport for women suffering life-threatening complications from pregnancy and



Awaiting transport at Adre

delivery was not always available. Refugees reported fears about contracting HIV/AIDS, but condoms were not readily accessible, although the team found

there was a demand.

“Increased resources should be available to support international organizations on the ground to ensure that lifesaving reproductive health care is available to all Sudanese, particularly refugee women and girls in Chad,” Ms Krause says. “Only when these services are provided, will the lives of refugee women and children be protected.”

The Women’s Commission recommends that the standardized emergency response measures of the minimum initial services package (MISP) for reproductive health care, such as the prevention of HIV/AIDS and



Girl guarding firewood at Touloum

maternal illness and death, and care for women who have been raped must be available at the earliest stages of an emergency, along with food, shelter and water. It is calling for more donor support for these priority reproductive health activities. ❖

All photos © Julia Matthews



New arrivals at Bahai seek shade under a tree.



Woman at Kounoungo camp

Reproductive Health Resources

Promoting Emergency Contraception in Conflict-Affected Settings



For women forcibly displaced by conflict, access to emergency contraception (EC) is not only a right, but a critical need that can help to maintain and improve their reproductive health. While maternal mortality is a common cause of death among women living in resource-poor settings, the stressful living conditions of displaced women make complications of pregnancy and delivering a child even more difficult and life threatening. By offering a “second chance” to those whose regular contraceptive method has failed, EC enables a woman or adolescent girl to avoid an unplanned or forced pregnancy and can reduce her risk of death or illness due to complications from childbirth or unsafe abortion. In emergency situations, EC is a vital reproductive health service because women are often at risk from unprotected sex as a result of rape or coercive sex, lack of availability of contraception, or powerlessness to negotiate contraceptive use.

To address the reproductive health needs and rights of refugee women, health workers must make EC services available from the beginning of a response to a humanitarian crisis. To increase awareness and knowledge about EC among health service providers, the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, on behalf of the Reproductive Health Response in Conflict (RHRC) Consortium, has developed the *Emergency Contraception for Conflict Affected Settings: A Reproductive Health Response in Conflict Consortium Distance Learning Module*. A distance learn-

ing method increases access to information about EC, promotes flexibility, assures quality information, empowers learners and is cost effective. The EC module is available in brochure form, on the web at www.rhrc.org, and as a CD-ROM, and will be translated into different languages. The RHRC Consortium is working to mainstream EC by increasing awareness and knowledge of EC and improving access to and demand for EC in appropriate program locations. To order a copy of the module, contact info@rhrc.org.

Addressing Gender-based Violence in Conflict-Affected Settings



Gender-based violence (GBV) is an umbrella term for any harm that is perpetrated, against a person’s will, that is the result of power imbalances that

exploit distinctions between males and females, as well as among males and among females. Violence may be physical, sexual, psychological, economic or sociocultural. Perpetrators may include family members, community members or those acting on behalf of cultural, religious, state or intrastate institutions. Although not exclusive to women and girls, GBV principally affects them across all cultures.

Throughout history GBV has been an integral component of armed conflict. Sexual violence is often systematic, for the purposes of destabilizing populations and destroying bonds within communities and families, advancing ethnic cleansing, expressing hatred for the enemy or supplying combatants with sexual services.

Evidence suggests that the use of rape as a weapon of war has increased dramatically in recent years in conflict areas in Africa.

To address the critical need for data on the nature and scope of GBV in conflict-affected settings, the Women’s Commission, in collaboration with the International Rescue Committee, spearheaded the development of the RHRC Consortium’s *Gender-based Violence Tools Manual for Assessment and Program Design, Monitoring and Evaluation in Conflict-affected Settings*. Informed by a working group comprised of representatives from the RHRC Consortium, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Health Organization and others, the manual provides the first compendium of tools specifically designed and field-tested to facilitate gender-based violence data collection as well as programming.

The entire tools manual may also be downloaded as a PDF (as well as select tools in Microsoft Word format) at www.rhrc.org/resources/gbv. For further information please contact us at info@rhrc.org.

Conference 2003: Reproductive Health From Disaster to Development

The Women’s Commission co-hosted the Reproductive Health Response in Conflict (RHRC) Consortium’s second international research conference, Conference 2003: Reproductive Health From Disaster to Development, in October 2003 in Brussels, Belgium with co-sponsors UNFPA and UNHCR, and collaborating partner, International Centre for Reproductive Health at Ghent University.

The conference report is available at www.rhrc.org.

Night Commuters in Uganda Seek Safety in Town Centers

"I live in Labuje IDP camp near Kitgum," says Lizzy, 15. "I am an orphan. I have come to St. Joseph's Hospital three to four times per week to sleep for the past three months. ...I see the same boys, a group of about five of them, bothering me and other girls at the same place every night. Girls need to leave earlier, in daylight, to increase our security. I also think police should patrol schools where abuses take place. ...

"Other girls and I often walk alone for several reasons. Many times our parents remain behind, and those who are orphans like me have no one to accompany us. I lost both parents, and earlier this year, I also lost my elder brother when he was killed by the LRA."

For 18 years, war has ravaged northern Uganda. Joseph Kony and his rebel force, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), profess to be fighting a spiritual war for the Acholi people against the government of Uganda and its military, the Ugandan People's Defense Forces. The LRA has been responsible for countless atrocities committed against its own community, including the abduction and abuse of tens of thousands of children and adolescents, who make up most of the rebel army.

At least 30,000 young people have been abducted to date, and the number is steadily increasing. Girls and boys are forced to commit atrocities against each other and against their communities. Of those young people not with the rebel forces, more than half live in displaced persons camps, where access to education, health care and other basic necessities is minimal and security is uncertain. Girls are particularly vulnerable to abuse, rape and sexual exploitation or enslavement. Today there are over

1.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs)—over 90 percent of the population in the affected region—and the war has spread to areas in the north and the east previously untouched by the conflict. Nearly 70 percent of the displaced population is under 25 years old.

Women's Commission Children and Adolescents Project staff traveled to the Gulu and Kitgum districts of northern Uganda in December 2003. They worked with Gulu Youth for Action and Watwero Rights Focus Initiative, two youth-led organizations, and other youth partners to investigate the current protection and assistance situation for adolescents and youth, including an investigation into the situation of "night commuters"—mostly girls, boys and women who walk each night to town centers from villages and IDP camps to seek safety from attack by the LRA.

As the estimated 50,000 "night commuters" flee the threat of LRA attacks, they encounter other dangers. Many adolescent girls and boys have reported cases of sexual violence against night commuters en route to and at sleeping centers, exposing them to the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. Survivors of rape also risk stigmatization and have little access to medical, legal or counseling assistance. They also suffer physical and psychological trauma from the abuse. Many night commuters report inadequate adult supervision of sleeping spaces or lack of humanitarian support and protection.

The United Nations, NGOs, donors and the Ugandan government have failed to adequately coordinate and implement measures to systematically monitor, advocate for and improve young people's protection, or support their capacity to better protect themselves. The protection of young people must be a participatory effort that occurs at local and inter-

national levels. Young people must be given a safe space not only to offer their opinion on what security and participation mean, but also to have the financial and logistical support of adults as they take steps to address insecurity.

"Young people are more than future leaders," says Matthew Emry, project manager of the children and adolescents project. "They are today's leaders, and the future of northern Uganda may very well reside in building their capacity and security today."

A Ugandan Mother's Courage and Hope: Angelina Atyam

A little over eight years after her 16-year-old daughter, Charlotte, was abducted from a Catholic boarding school in northern Uganda, Angelina Acheng Atyam received a photograph of a young woman and two children. Angelina's eyes were visibly tearing up as she showed the photos of her now-adult daughter and new grandchildren to Women's Commission staff during a January 2004 mission to the United States and Canada. These photos were Angelina's first visual acknowledgment that Charlotte had not been killed by her abductors, the Lord's Resistance Army.

Angelina has been spearheading a crusade to free any of the surviving 30,000 children who have been abducted by the LRA over the course of the 18-year war. Angelina, a 56-year-old nurse-midwife, is the co-founder and chairwoman of the Concerned Parents Association, and has become one of Uganda's leading peace advocates.

Not long after Charlotte's abduction, rebel leaders offered to release her if Angelina promised to end her crusade. Unable to let go of her con-
(continued on page 11)

Children and Adolescents (continued from page 10)

victions, Angelina made the difficult choice to demand that the rebels release all of the schoolgirls they continued to hold. Many abducted girls are forced to become the wives of rebel commanders, serving as sexual slaves. Other girls and boys are forced to commit unthinkable atrocities against each other and against their communities.

In early 2004, the Coalition for Peace and Justice in Northern Uganda, a six-person delegation of civil society members, including Angelina, traveled to New York, Washington, D.C., and Ottawa to convince international policy-makers to become more involved in the resolution of the Ugandan conflict.

Angelina met with key officials in UN offices and foreign ministries, and participated in roundtables, press conferences and interviews and meetings with civil society organizations supportive of a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Angelina and the Coalition debriefed civil society members in northern Uganda. They also met with government of Uganda officials to directly appeal for follow-up to their recommendations, and to promise to be open to peaceful resolution of the conflict.

On March 25, 2004 Angelina Atyam and the Concerned Parents Association issued a statement regarding the abduction of children in northern Uganda. At the end of Angelina's statement, she asks several questions: "For how long must the children of northern Uganda have their rights abused through abductions and captivity and how many should die before the world can act? ... The One Big Question is: 'WHO WILL WIPE OUT OUR TEARS?'"

To see Angelina Atyam's full statement, visit the Women's Commission

website, ww.womenscommission.org.

Voices Out of Conflict: Young People Affected by Forced Migration and Political Crisis Conference

Displaced young people aged 10 to 25 face a host of protection concerns, including threats to their security from fighting forces and others, sexual abuse and labor exploitation, and lack of access to education, employment and healthcare. Research and experience suggest that these young people are not adequately listened to, even by the agencies and NGOs whose goals are to help them.

The Voices Out of Conflict: Young People Affected by Forced Migration and Political Crisis Conference held near London, UK, in March 2004, brought together young refugees to put their experiences and solutions directly to funders, agencies and academics.

Fifteen young people from Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Canada, the UK, Rwanda, Palestine and elsewhere participated at the conference as key speakers and presenters, through film and informal discussions, and by raising provocative questions and concerns that challenged organizers, adults, NGOs and youth themselves on issues around participation and protection. Women's Commission staff provided guidance to the youth participants and helped ensure maximum opportunities for their involvement throughout the proceedings.

Many attendees commented that this was their first opportunity to come together with people working on the same or similar issues in other parts of the world and said that they intend to keep in touch with each other in the future. Many stated that they would start taking youth partic-

ipation more seriously within their policies and practice.

The Voices out of Conflict conference was organized by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, International Rescue Committee UK, Refugees Studies Centre at Oxford University, Save the Children UK and Cumberland Lodge.

From Survivors to Health Promoters: Adolescents Counteract the Effects of War

World health leaders and nearly 2,000 participants from more than 85 nations gathered in Washington, D.C., for the Global Health Council's 2004 conference: Youth and Health: Generation on the Edge. Participants included healthcare providers, community organizers, program managers, policymakers, researchers, advocates and youth from around the world.

The Women's Commission organized a panel presentation—From Survivors to Health Promoters: Adolescents Counteract the Effects of War—a collaborative effort between the Commission's Children and Adolescents Project and the Reproductive Health Project, and three youth-led organizations, Kosovar Youth Council (KYC) in Kosovo, Center for Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA) in Sierra Leone and Watwero Rights Focus Initiative in northern Uganda. Following participation in the Women's Commission's adolescent-led research, each of these youth groups has initiated projects to address a wide range of youth concerns, including reproductive health (RH), HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence (GBV).

The panelists were Eldita Tarani (Kosovo); Josephine Akello (northern
(continued on page 12)



Children and Adolescents *(continued from page 11)*

Uganda); Ngolo Katta (Sierra Leone). Matthew Emry, Women’s Commission children and adolescents project manager, was the moderator.

Eldita Tarani described KYC activities, including an AIDS awareness campaign around World AIDS day. She also detailed the lack of reproductive health activities for young people and the importance of peer education: “Being trained by adults about HIV/AIDS was boring and young people felt insecure and shy and did not want to discuss these issues in front of older people....I think the peer approach is one of the most important approaches to use in HIV prevention. It felt very free and fun—while at the same time important information was exchanged. In the first training among our peers, young people felt shy to talk but by the third meeting together people felt closer, told jokes and had a lot of fun together—while learning important information.”

Josephine Akello told the audience: “I would like to take you to Uganda. Now, imagine you are a 15-

year-old boy or girl. You go to school, you get abducted. You go to fetch water, you get raped. You go to dig in the garden, you get killed.”

She described the situation of night commuters—predominately children and women—who are forced to flee their villages and camps every night to sleep in town centers with the hopes of escaping abduction by the Lord’s Resistance Army. She also listed several key solutions, including a call for support to an end to the war and a call to donors and NGOs to support youth organizations through capacity building.

Ngolo Katta described the partnership between the Women’s Commission and the CCYA, and the creation of “peace crusader” clubs, which provide peer education. In addition to broadening the base of health education campaigns, the CCYA also strives to teach peace in order to prevent the violence that is still prevalent in his community. Ngolo ended his presentation by challenging audience members to help them increase their access to authorities, policy makers and donor funds. He also challenged them to support capacity building for young

people, and for donor agencies to support and pay attention to the youth of Sierra Leone.

Youth Attend Meetings

The three youth also participated in GHC’s advocacy day workshops and events. They met with Congressman Barney Frank of Massachusetts and an aide to Senator Jim Bunning of Kentucky and with InterAction, USA for UNHCR, International Crisis Group, World Vision, Human Rights Watch and the Red Cross.

During a meeting at the U.S. Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration, all three youth gave clear pleas to increase U.S. government support to their regions, particularly to youth-led initiatives. BPRM staff asked questions on funding in all three regions, the level of political will for peace in Uganda, trafficking issues in Kosovo and transitional justice in Sierra Leone, particularly around the war crimes tribunal and youth protection. At all the meetings, the young people gained important and potentially useful contacts for future collaboration and support. ❖



**Women’s Commission
for Refugee Women and Children
INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE**
122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10168-1289

Permit No. 4814
Non-Profit Org
U.S. Postage Paid
New York, NY