

Tears of Joy as Abducted Girl is Reunited with Her Mother

Eight years after she was abducted by the rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda, Charlotte Awino made a daring escape in July with her young son, and was reunited with her mother.

During her captivity, Charlotte, who was 14 when she was abducted from her Catholic boarding school, was forced to "marry" an LRA commander with whom she had two children. Charlotte escaped with her younger son; her older son had been separated and lost in June during a government army attack. In a stroke of good fortune, he was found on the same day Charlotte escaped.

For the last 18 years, the LRA has been responsible for countless atrocities against the people of northern Uganda, including rape, murder and the abduction of an estimated 30,000 children. The fighting between the LRA and the Ugandan government forces has displaced some 1.6 million people in northern Uganda.

After her daughter was abducted, Angelina Atyam spearheaded a crusade to free children abducted by the LRA. Ms Atyam, a nurse-midwife, is the co-founder and chairwoman of the Concerned Parents Association, and has become one of Uganda's leading peace advocates. Rebel leaders offered to release Charlotte if Ms Atyam promised to end her crusade. Unable to let go of her convictions, she made the difficult choice to demand that the rebels release all of the schoolgirls they continued to hold.

But on July 21, Angelina Atyam was reunited with Charlotte and for the first time embraced her two grandchildren.

While celebrating Charlotte's escape, the Women's Commission called on the international community and the government of Uganda to do more to ensure the protection of civilians in northern Uganda to prevent their further abduction and abuse. It called on the LRA to end all attacks on civilians, end abductions and release children they still hold captive.

In a March 2004 statement regarding the abduction of children in northern Uganda, Angelina Atyam asked: "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? What crimes are the innocent children being abducted paying for? The One Big Question is: 'Who will wipe out our tears?'" In July, Angelina and Charlotte's tears were tears of joy. ❖

Women's Commission Welcomes Carolyn Makinson as New Director

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children welcomed Carolyn Makinson, its new executive director, in August. Ms Makinson, a demographer by training, was formerly executive director of MIT's Center for International Studies.



Before joining MIT, Ms Makinson was a program officer for Population and Forced Migration at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, where she is now a senior adviser. In that role, she was instrumental in supporting early research on education in emergencies, in bringing reproductive health services to refugees and in generating a stronger focus on the needs of refugee and displaced adolescents—efforts in which the Women's Commission has been an important participant. With Ms Makinson's support, the Mellon Foundation funded the Women's Commission's 1994 groundbreaking survey of reproductive health services for refugees, *Refugee Women and Reproductive Health Care: Reassessing Priorities*. She has also worked with the Demographic and Health Surveys as a country monitor for Burundi and Kenya, and as a research affiliate with the American University in Cairo. She studied refugee programs in Rwanda, Guinea and Mozambique as an affiliate of the International Rescue Committee and Save the Children in 1995/96.

Ms Makinson has won numerous academic fellowships and prizes and has published widely. In May she was honored with the Women's Commission's Voices of Courage award. She has a Ph.D. in Sociology from Princeton University. ❖

in this issue

A Message From the Chair of the Board	2
Urban Refugees Languish in Cairo	3
A Message from the Executive Director	3
Program Updates	4
Asylee Reunited With Children After 10 Years	8

Outgoing Chair of the Board Looks Back...and Forward

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.

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Dear Friends of the Women's Commission,

As I come to the end, this December, of five years as Chair of the Women's Commission Board of Directors, I am profoundly grateful for the privilege of being so closely associated with the work of this organization. It has truly changed the landscape for refugee women and children. They still face enormous obstacles to a safe and secure existence, but their needs and views are today much less likely to be ignored—in considerable part because of the Women's Commission's advocacy.

In eight years on the Board, I have come to know an extraordinary group of women, among our founders, board, staff, partners and supporters—especially the refugee women and children whose courage and dignity and unfailing determination are an inspiration to all who contribute their time, knowledge and resources to this organization.

I have seen the Women's Commission grow in expertise and influence around the world, not least in the corridors of power in Washington, Geneva and New York.

I have mourned with all of you the loss of a great leader in Mary Diaz, and I have admired and tried to help an extraordinary staff, led through a difficult and painful transition by Ellen Jorgensen, who kept the programs on course and growing stronger, even while coping with their own grief.

I have participated in the selection of a new Executive Director, Carolyn Makinson, who, I know, will take the Women's Commission to new heights. And I have seen the Board go from strength to strength with new infusions of powerful, talented and committed women who are eager to take the organization forward. Regina Peruggi and Glenda Burkhardt take over as co-Chairs of the Board in January. From having worked with them, especially over the past year, and with Carolyn in the last few months, I can foresee a period of tremendous dynamism in our work.

So while I am sad to be rotating off the Board, I am happy and gratified to be leaving the organization in such capable hands, and able to count on so many dedicated supporters. I thank all of you for your confidence and your friendship. For as long as I live, I will count myself a staunch friend of the Women's Commission.



Staff Updates

Carolyn Makinson is hired as executive director. Ellen Jorgensen steps down as acting executive director and becomes deputy executive director. Lori Heninger is hired as senior coordinator, Children and Adolescents Project. Roxanne Saucier is promoted to program manager, communications and development. Megan McKenna is promoted to senior coordinator, media and communications.

A Women's Commission delegation traveled to Cairo, Egypt, in September, to assess the situation of urban refugee women and girls, paying particular attention to concerns of adolescent girls. Among the issues the delegation examined were: the impact of UNHCR policies, guidelines and processes on the protection of urban refugee women and girls; the participation of refugee women and youth in addressing protection needs; the prevalence of gender-based violence and related prevention and response efforts; access to education; access to health care; and the progress of UNHCR's gender and age mainstreaming pilot project.

"Urban refugees are an often-overlooked and neglected population and very little is known about the specific concerns of women and children refugees in urban areas," says Carolyn Makinson, executive director of the Women's Commission, who participated in the delegation. The delegation met with representatives of UN agencies, local nongovernmental agencies and with refugees themselves. Despite policies that appeared to provide access for refugees to education and health care, it was clear that large numbers of refugee and displaced children did not attend school and had minimal access to health services. It was also clear that thousands of women and children from Sudan and Somalia—countries that are subject to continuing widespread conflict—are living in Cairo without adequate protection.

The Women's Commission will publish a report and undertake advocacy based on its findings. ❖



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Delegation members meet with Somali refugees.



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Sudanese refugee children participate in a summer school.

It was with great pleasure that I joined the Women's Commission at the end of August. In fact, I felt that I was simply "coming home" after an absence of a couple of years. During my time at the Mellon Foundation, I had worked closely with both Mary Anne Schwalbe and Mary Diaz and shared their excitement at the growth and success of the Women's Commission. Of the many organizations with which I worked, it always had a special place in my heart and in my esteem.

Barely had I unpacked my bags in New York before I was swept off on a board delegation to Cairo with Ellen Jorgensen and three Women's Commission board members, Susan Alberti, Jacqueline de Chollet and Faye Richardson. I had lived in Cairo during the mid 1980s—a period during which the issue of refugees was not much discussed among the public in Egypt. Between then and now, much has changed. Many Egyptians are frustrated by the lack of progress in resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the misery in which Palestinians continue to live, both in the diaspora and in the West Bank and Gaza. There has also been a large increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers from other countries—most notably Sudan and Somalia. Egypt's urban population is growing rapidly and many of its own citizens live in urban slums with inadequate access to health care and education. These circumstances, we found, have increased tensions between the native urban poor and those who seek shelter in Cairo from conflicts in their own countries.

The Women's Commission will soon publish a report on our findings from Cairo, and will advocate for changes that may assist not only refugees in Cairo but refugees and asylum seekers in other urban settings. ❖

Save the Date - Luncheon 2005

The Women's Commission's 2005 Voices of Courage luncheon will take place on Thursday, May 12, 2005, at the Mandarin Oriental in New York City. The theme of the luncheon is celebrating the advances in reproductive health for refugees. For more information, contact Patricia Evert Productions at 212.219.2953 or PEvertProd@aol.com.



Using the UN's Millennium Development Goals to Advocate for Refugees

The United Nations has embarked on an initiative to reduce worldwide poverty by 2015. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as the initiative is known, set clear targets for reducing poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. The MDGs were adopted in September 2001 by 191 countries at the United Nations Millennium Summit. Since displaced populations are disproportionately affected by poverty, the Women's Commission is advocating that strategies, policies and programs enacted to achieve the goals include refugee, returnee and internally displaced women and children.

In June 2004, the Women's Commission, in collaboration with the Afghan Women's Network and the Afghan Women's Resource Center (AWRC), co-sponsored a half-day workshop in Pakistan called Advancing UNHCR's Five Commitments to Refugee Women and the UN MDGs. Representatives from women's civil society, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Government of Pakistan came together to understand these instruments and to suggest concrete actions to take collectively, as well as individually.

Following the workshop, the Women's Commission informally shared select recommendations with the UN Development Program, the lead UN agency responsible for the MDGs, and with UNHCR's offices in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Women's Commission has also broadly disseminated a workshop summary report with findings and recommendations among UN agencies, the Government of Pakistan, NGOs and donors to support ongoing activities

to advance these instruments.

Reaction to the workshop has been extremely positive and AWRC, with support from the Women's Commission, has planned similar workshops in Afghanistan (Kabul, Jalalabad and Herat) to bring together various stakeholders, to encourage more strategic collaboration between Afghan returnee and displaced women and the international community, and to focus on the MDG process as a vehicle to improve the situation of Afghan women, particularly returnees and IDPs.

More information is available at <http://www.womenscommission.org/projects/participation/index.html>.

Security Council Discusses "Three Ps": Prevention, Participation and Protection

We cannot lose sight of women's concerns in the reconstruction processes. Sustainable and durable peace can only be achieved when women's concerns and contributions are incorporated in every aspect of rebuilding the peace, including social and economic reconstruction." So said H.E. Ambassador Lauro L. Baja, Jr., of the Permanent Mission of the Philippines to the UN, as he opened a roundtable on women, peace and security co-sponsored by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

The Women's Commission, as acting coordinator of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, co-sponsored two UN Security Council Roundtables with the Permanent Missions to the United Nations of Canada, Chile and the United Kingdom in January and July 2004. The roundtables, held at the Rockefeller Foundation, generated ideas on ways to strengthen conflict prevention, the participation of women and the protection of civilians

in all of the Security Council's work.

In an unprecedented format, Council members from senior posts, including ambassadors, select UN officials and NGOs, sat "elbow-to-elbow" as equal participants to examine a new conceptual framework known as the "three Ps"—prevention, participation and protection. Five UN resolutions formed a basis for discussion, as all are groundbreaking initiatives that call on the Council to integrate the "three Ps" into all its work:

- Resolutions 1265 and 1296 on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict;
- Resolution 1366 on the Role of the Security Council in the Prevention of Armed Conflict;
- Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security; and
- Resolution 1460 on Children in Armed Conflict.

The second roundtable focused on developing a concrete tool to improve the incorporation of a gender perspective in the work of the Security Council. It also offered an opportunity to discuss the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of UN Security Council 1325 on women, peace and security, published in October 2004.

The roundtables sparked reflection on the Council's work on these urgent issues and renewed commitment to partnership as key to advancing international peace and human security. Participants tackled the question of how to move beyond ad hoc implementation of thematic resolutions towards measures that strengthen, systematize and institutionalize their full implementation.

Full reports of the roundtables are available at: <http://www.peacewomen.org/un/ngo/wg.html>. ❖

Northern Uganda: Children at Risk

In September, Women's Commission Children and Adolescents project staff returned to northern Uganda as part of the Commission's continuing advocacy support to young people. Through an American Jewish World Service grant, the Commission has been partnering with two youth groups to develop youth-led advocacy and networking strategies to ensure the security and well-being of internally displaced youth. One week was spent with each youth group, Watwero Rights Focus Initiative in Kitgum and Gulu Youth for Action in Gulu.



Night commuters carry their bedding into town.

The Women's Commission also did a follow-up investigation into the status of night commuters and displaced women and children in IDP camps near each town. (See *Women's Commission News* Number 22 (July 2004) for information on an earlier investigation—available at http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/nl_07.04.pdf.)

The delegation found that the situation in night commuter shelters continues to be bleak, especially in Kitgum, where young people and adults reported being regularly bullied or stoned by gangs of boys, girls are reportedly raped within the shelter grounds and girls and boys still do not have separate sleeping spaces. Lighting is inadequate, poor

sanitation contributes to the spread of disease, many children are still forced to sleep outside and children must pay to sleep in the designated spaces. There were no police visible within or around the sleeping spaces. Conditions in nearby IDP camps are also dire.



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The Women's Commission will refocus its advocacy strategy targeting key NGOs, donors and UN agencies working in northern Uganda to advocate for better incorporation of young people in the decision-making processes affecting the IDP community. The Women's Commission will also increase pressure on donor governments to encourage the government of Uganda to seek a peaceful settlement in the north and to provide for and protect all of its citizens. ❖

WATCHLIST

Nepal: Children Caught in the Crossfire

Children and adolescents in Nepal are facing grave violations of their security and rights in the context of armed conflict. Children have been killed and maimed and have been victims of a range of other egregious violations of their security and rights committed with impunity by both the Maoist rebel forces and government armed forces since the outset of the

“People's War” in 1996. Since the end of a ceasefire between the Maoists and the government in August 2003, violations against Nepali children have surged.

The armed conflict has contributed to further degeneration of the already low standard of living of many children and adolescents. It has hampered access to health care, food and social services for many families, particularly in rural communities. Schools are targets of attacks, used as grounds for child recruitment and abduction of teachers and students.

The situation of children and armed conflict in Nepal is a priority for the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, a network of NGOs housed at the Women's Commission. Watchlist will publish a country report documenting violations against children in Nepal amid the armed conflict in late 2004. This report is being produced through a consultative process with a wide range of NGOs operating in Nepal and other agencies and will include practical and targeted recommendations for action by the UN Security Council.

Watchlist is also carrying out two capacity building projects with local NGO partners in Nepal. Watchlist is working with the Community Study and Welfare Centre to collect information on specific cases of violations against children in the context of Nepal's armed conflict and will translate this information for use in the Watchlist report. The second project responds to the request of several local NGOs in the far-west region of Nepal for training in monitoring, documenting and safely advocating for the end of violations against children. Working with the Nepali human rights NGO Advocacy Forum, two trainings were held in September and October 2004. ❖

W Reproductive Health for Refugees

Addressing Domestic Violence in Lebanon

Domestic violence is widespread in conflict situations around the world. In Lebanon, where Palestinian refugees have been living in camps for decades, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children has supported the local organization Association Najdeh's efforts to provide reproductive health information and education for the past seven years.

Najdeh identified the need for and established a flagship domestic violence program, which includes



Young men attend an Association Najdeh participatory workshop on gender issues and rights.

counseling, legal aid and ongoing workshops that address gender, violence, discrimination and conflict resolution for refugee women, men and adolescents in the 10 refugee camps in Lebanon. The project data show increasing community participation in preventing gender-based violence (GBV) and use of counseling and legal aid services. Najdeh's domestic violence advocacy campaign resulted in the engagement of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and NGOs working in the camps to address domestic violence among Palestinian refugees, as well as

interest and commitment from international donors to support Najdeh's domestic violence program. In addition, Najdeh's domestic violence research has been presented at regional and international conferences, published and widely disseminated.

Among the ongoing challenges for Najdeh's domestic violence project are the conservative culture, prevailing religious versus civil law to address personal issues such as birth, marriage and divorce, stigma associated with psychological counseling, the economic situation constraining women's choices and the complexity of the domestic violence cases taxing Najdeh's five counselors.

While the Women's Commission's involvement with the project is over, Najdeh will continue with this vital work.

Women's Commission Testifies at Congressional Briefing on Sudan

Sandra Krause, reproductive health project director, presented on gender-based violence (GBV) and Sudan at a Congressional briefing hosted by the American Refugee Committee, Senators Hillary Clinton and Olympia Snowe, and Representatives Betty McCollum and Judy Biggert. Her presentation focused on the overall lack of attention to preventing and responding to widespread rape, including gang rape, of women and girls in Darfur, Sudan, despite the existence of guidelines and standards of care for preventing sexual violence and providing clinical care for women and girls who survive rape.

Congressional representatives were asked to support these standards, which are addressed in The Women and Children in Armed Conflict Protection Act (HR 2536). This legislation mandates that the

U.S. government address the specific health needs of women affected by emergencies like the one in Chad and Darfur. To urge your Senator to support the Women and Children in Armed Conflict Protection Act, go to www.womenscommission.org.

Global Evaluation of Reproductive Health for Refugees Shows Progress: Gaps Remain

The Women's Commission produced a synopsis of the inter-agency global evaluation of reproductive health for refugees and internally displaced persons. The global evaluation shows that while significant progress has been made in raising awareness and advancing reproductive health for conflict-affected populations in all areas of reproductive health programming and technical support, the gains achieved are threatened by a particularly difficult political and economic climate. The summary was produced in collaboration with the Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Refugee Settings steering committee.

At the field level, findings show that reproductive health services in stable refugee settings have increased and are generally well established though some areas such as gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS services are weaker and critical gaps remain in safe motherhood, family planning and sexually transmitted infections. Furthermore, specific programming to ensure youth-friendly services and male involvement is needed. In contrast, reproductive health services for internally displaced persons are severely lacking and in need of urgent attention. ❖

New Act Harms Women and Children Seeking Asylum

On October 9, 2004, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 10, the “9/11 Recommendations Implementation Act,” which contained many immigration-related provisions. While the Women’s Commission supported passing legislation addressing the findings and recommendations of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States [the 9/11 Commission], we argued urgently that the House of Representatives follow the example in the Senate and pass a “clean” bill, i.e., that contained no extraneous provisions unrelated to the 9/11 Commission’s findings and recommendations. However, the Bill that passed the House contained provisions that extend far beyond the scope of the 9/11 Commission’s recommendations and unnecessarily harm women and children asylum seekers.

Specifically, the Women’s Commission is concerned with the provisions that expand the use of expedited removal, change the burdens of proof for asylum seekers, allow women and children to be removed to third countries and invigorate pre-inspection and document inspection at foreign airports. As this newsletter goes to print, it remains unclear whether these provisions will be negotiated out of the final bill during the conferencing process.

One example of the extreme nature of this bill is the expedited removal provision that will impact women and children escaping persecution in a particularly harmful manner. The provision extends expedited removal to all undocumented immigrants who have lived in the United States for more than five years; thus, frontline immigration border officials will have the responsibility to quickly determine

whether asylum seekers have access to the asylum system. Refugee women and children who are escaping rape, female genital mutilation, honor killings, forced marriages, sexual slavery, trafficking, recruitment as child soldiers and other forms of age- and gender-related persecution often face the most difficulty in presenting their cases. Due to the extremely sensitive and often painful nature of such claims and cultural barriers that inhibit women and children from expressing themselves and their needs, they often require significant time and counseling before they can articulate their claims, particularly in front of government officials.

Moreover, children have traditionally been exempt from expedited removal in recognition of the vulnerabilities that their age creates. H.R. 10, however, would apply expedited removal regardless of age, thus subjecting children to a process that they cannot reasonably be expected to understand or appreciate. Even if protections are put in place for children, they may be improperly classified, and treated as adults due to the lack of a scientifically sound method to determine age. The result could be returning at-risk women and children to life-threatening situations. ❖

Donors’ Corner

The September issue of *Glamour* magazine included a piece called “Be a Hero in Five Minutes” that encouraged readers to donate to the Women’s Commission to help provide treatment for rape victims fleeing Darfur, Sudan. More than 150 readers responded, donating \$6,500 to the Women’s Commission’s reproductive health programs for Darfurian refugees.

Women’s Commission Mourns Death of Denise Froelich

The Board of Directors and staff of the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children mourned the passing in September of board of directors member Denise Froelich, a true friend to refugees around the world. “We will miss her dedication, spirit, warmth and wisdom,” said Carolyn Makinson, executive director, and Kathleen Newland, board chair, in an obituary published in the *New York Times*.

Summer Interns Make a Difference

Over the summer the Women’s Commission benefited from the assistance of many students who dedicated their vacation to interning and volunteering. We would like to thank the following for their invaluable help: Sarah Chynoweth—Reproductive Health Intern; Mitushi Das—Participation and Protection and Communications/Media Intern (Everett Internship); Delia French—Development Volunteer; Lauren Herman—Reproductive Health and Children and Adolescents Intern (Everett Internship); Meredith Hubbell—Trafficking and Watchlist Intern (Trinity College Fellow); Rui Kotani—Watchlist Intern; Brooke Lauten—Watchlist Volunteer; Samir Singh—Watchlist Intern; Sarah Skeist—Volunteer (general)

An account by Meredith Hubbell of her experience can be found at <http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/humanrights/04-05/HubbellRpt.html>

Asylee Reunited With Children After 10 Years

When Immaculee Harushimana left Burundi in 1993 for the United States on a Fulbright scholarship, she thought she would return to her two young sons and her husband a short time later. But war broke out in Burundi soon after she left, and the separation lasted 10 years.

In July, the painful ordeal came to an end. Ms Harushimana's two sons, Jobert and Gildas, ages 14 and 12, arrived at JFK airport in New York City, having finally been allowed by the U.S. government to join their mother, who gained asylum in 1996.



Immaculee Harushimana, Gildas and Jobert, with International Rescue Committee director of immigration programs Abigail Price, who worked for years to reunite the boys with their mother in the United States.

Photograph © Megan McKenna.

"Words cannot describe how I feel," said a tearful Ms Harushimana upon the boys' arrival. "I am so thankful to have Jobert and Gildas here with me, where they can feel safe for the first time in their lives. I am also thankful to Mary Diaz [former executive director of the Women's Commission], who never forgot about me and continually advocated for my case."

The boys lived for a number of years in hiding with their father in Burundi. As Hutus, they were targets in the war. In 2001, Ms Harushimana's husband took the boys to Kenya, where they would be safer, and put them in foster care. The father was not allowed to stay in Kenya, so he returned to Burundi. He died in June this year after a long illness.

Although Ms Harushimana's story has a happy ending, she remains well aware of the suffering of others. "I'm only one of hundreds of thousands who have been separated from their children due to war," she says. "My children were only two of the millions who cry, 'Momma, where are you? Come save us.'" She dreams of "mothers, like me, reunited with their children, and of children, like my own, who get to taste their mother's love again." Only now, she will no longer have to dream.

In August Ms Harushimana held a mass in New York City to celebrate her sons' arrival and to remember her late husband and Mary Diaz. ❖