

**ABOUT THE CONFERENCE****ECDC's 16th National Conference*****African Refugees and Immigrants:  
Challenges, Changes, Champions***

**May 3-5, 2010  
Holiday Inn Arlington  
Arlington, Virginia**

When ECDC conducted its first national conference in 1993, African refugees had been eligible to participate in the United States refugee resettlement program for only 13 years. Even with the admissions ceilings for the region kept at relatively low levels, many of those early arrivals had already established local service organizations to help their newly-arriving countrymen, following a path pioneered by ECDC from its inception in 1983. Originally established to serve the growing Ethiopian community in the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area, ECDC had by then broadened its vision and outreach, having become a multi-service agency serving a growing and diverse multicultural community.

By sharing freely its experiences in program development and service delivery, ECDC had provided valued support to the emerging community-based mutual assistance associations, establishing the African Resource Network in 1991 as a vehicle to nurture their growth and enhance public awareness about African refugee issues.

The national conferences were launched to further those goals, providing opportunities for leaders of the local community organizations to associate with national leaders in refugee and humanitarian affairs; receive updates on policy and program issues; gather ideas from best-practice experiences; and gain inspiration and the sense of renewal that accompanies the fellowship and networking experiences provided by such national gatherings.

When ECDC's 6th national conference in 2000 observed the first two decades of African refugee participation in the nation's resettlement program, more than 93,000 had been admitted. By last year's conference, arrivals from Africa had grown to more than 233,000.

To review past conference themes is to comprehend the continuing tragedy of conflict-induced flows of refugees and internally displaced people on the continent. But such a review also reveals the growing importance of addressing the needs and aspirations of refugee newcomers—and the attitudes and responses of receiving communities. That concept was embraced at our 11th conference in 2005 under the theme *E Pluribus Unum? Africans in America*. Placing the question mark after the nation's widely-admired motto conveyed our plan to examine how well the goal of "oneness" was being achieved.

"Challenge" is a word frequently used in previous conference themes, addressing most often the issues of protection and assistance for those fleeing war, torture and abuse on the continent. And "changes" in policies and practices have spawned many concurrent workshops, generally dealing with resettlement issues. "Champions" became part of this year's theme as the conference planning committee sought to honor both the dedicated workers who champion the cause of refugees and immigrants, and those who have become champions of survival and achievement.

**CHALLENGES, CHANGES, CHAMPIONS**

We invite you to join us for a rewarding experience of fellowship and renewal!