



ORR Director Eskinder Negash

ECDC Conference Examines Challenges, Honors Champions of Refugee Services

Applauding the contributions that refugees and immigrants make to America’s economic, social and cultural development, ORR Director Eskinder Negash joined key members of his agency’s staff in observing the 30th anniversary year of the Refugee Resettlement Act of 1980 during a plenary session of ECDC’s 16th national conference in Arlington, Virginia May 3-5, describing new initiatives to strengthen programs and services amid current economic hardships.

As part of a thorough review of the agency’s case management system, Negash said that ORR’s national consultation event June 7-8 in Washington, D.C., would feature a “reverse-

orientation” component in which recently resettled refugees would brief case managers about their experiences accessing the effectiveness of existing services, and sharing recommendations for improvements.

Strengthening pre-arrival counseling for refugee newcomers is a major goal, Negash said, needed to overcome unrealistic expectations that many bring to the resettlement experience.

Also participating in the ORR review session—moderated by Dan Kosten, director of refugee and immigrant programs for World Relief—were Kenneth Tota, Deputy Director; Pamela Green-Smith, director, of the division of refugee assistance; and Ron Munia, director, division of community resettlement.

Keynote speaker Ahmed Samatar, dean of the Institute for Global Citizenship at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, recounted the history of African refugee and immigrant acculturation in American life, noting that the election of Barack Obama as the nation’s first African American president “exemplifies American opportunities and ambition.”

A key element in successful critical adaptation in America, he said, is becoming

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Human Rights First Applauds Senate Committee’s Examination of Refugee Protection Act of 2010

Commending the Senate Judiciary Committee’s May 19 hearing on the Refugee Protection Act of 2010, Eleanor Acer of Human Rights First said the legislation would repair many of the most severe problems in the U.S. asylum and refugee systems and strengthen the U.S. commitment to providing refuge to victims of religious, political, ethnic and other forms of persecution.

“Despite this country’s strong tradition of protecting refugees from persecution, a barrage of laws, policies and practices have badly damaged our asylum system over the years,” Acer said. “These flaws have led the United States to deny its protection to refugees who have fled from serious political, religious and other forms of persecution. Today’s hearing is a step in the right direction toward addressing these concerns and restoring our nation’s commitment to protecting vulnerable refugees.”

Human Rights First notes that asylum seekers are detained in the United States without basic due process safeguards, and their access to asylum has been limited

because of technical filing deadlines, expedited screening procedures, overly-broad exclusion provisions and maritime interdiction policies. Even refugees with well-founded fears of persecution are denied asylum due to these flawed laws and policies. The Refugee Protection Act of 2010, championed by Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and co-sponsored by Senators Carl Levin (D-MI), Richard Durbin (D-IL), Daniel Akaka (D-HI), and Roland Burris (D-IL), addresses these concerns and includes provisions that would:

- Eliminate the one year asylum filing deadline that bars applicants with well-founded fears of persecution from asylum;
- Remove barriers that prevent some asylum seekers from receiving prompt review by the immigration courts of detention decisions, so that these asylum seekers are not subject to prolonged and unnecessary detention;
- Ensure refugees are not deported back to persecution while they prepare their

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WORLD REFUGEE DAY 2010

Home is the theme for World Refugee Day 2010, observed annually on June 20 to draw public attention and support for the millions of refugees worldwide who are forced to flee their homes. The observance was launched internationally by a United Nations General Assembly resolution on December 4, 2000, marking the 50th anniversary of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

USA for UNHCR will conduct a special event in Washington, D.C. on Friday, June 18. For more information, email: events@usaforunhcr.org.

In My Opinion...

When You Can't Go Home Again?

Upon learning recently that the theme for this year's observance of World Refugee Day on June 20 would be the simple word *Home*, I was reminded anew of the challenges confronting refugees and immigrants as they seek to adapt to a new homeland while preserving valued cultural and social traditions of their countries of origin. Discussing such issues in his keynote address at our recent annual conference, Dr. Ahmed Samatar cautioned against what he described as two potential extremes of that pursuit. Seeking total assimilation is essentially a surrender of one's identity, he said, "an uncritical embrace of conformity." Refusing to adapt critically to a new culture is a form of rebellion that leads to exclusion and heightened vulnerabilities. As he counseled and as so many of us have learned, a middle path is more to be desired, a constant search for a cultural synthesis that preserves what is best in the old and embraces what is best in the new.



Tsehaye Teferra, Ph.D.

He had a receptive audience for his address on "Critical Adaption in America." Most attendees were former refugees and immigrants who have followed that middle path and have established community-based ethnic organizations to help their fellow countrymen experience a smoother journey of transition.

Briefly describing his own pilgrimage since arriving in America in 1974 as a undergraduate college student, Dr. Samatar mentioned the important role passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 played in nurturing the increasingly diverse character of the American nation. It abolished the National

Origins Formula that had been in place since the Immigration Act of 1924. Signifying his perception of the bill's historic impact, President Lyndon Johnson arranged a signing ceremony on October 3, 1965 on Liberty Island in New York, where members of Congress, governors, mayors and others gathered below the Statue of Liberty to hear him declare the end of the "harsh injustice of the national origins quota system" that admitted newcomers solely on the on the bases of where they came from.

"Today, with my signature, this system is abolished," President Johnson said. "We can now believe that it will never again shadow the gate to the American nation with the twin barriers of prejudice and privilege." He went on to laud the nation's history in ways that seem particularly relevant today as immigration policies are again high on the policy agenda of what appear to be increasingly polarized population segments.

"Our beautiful America was built by a nation of strangers. From a hundred different places or more they have poured forth into an empty land, joining and blending in one mighty and irresistible tide," he said. "The land flourished because it was fed from so many sources—because it was nourished by so many cultures and traditions and peoples. And from this experience, almost unique in the history of nations, has come America's attitude toward the rest of the world. We, because of what we are, feel safer and stronger in a world as varied as the people who make it up—a world where no country rules another and all countries can deal with the basic problems of human dignity and deal with those problems in their own way."

As Dr. Samatar implied—and as some recent "tea party" demonstrators have confirmed—not all Americans today share President Johnson's esteem for multiculturalism, some finding it quite "threatening." Yet there remains "a great reservoir of decency here," he said, describing President Obama's election as proof that "American exceptionalism is real."

For African refugees and immigrants who can't go home again, this year's World Refugee Day theme suggests that we join those who preceded us here by embracing a much larger, more encompassing concept of "home."

Human Rights First Urges Approval of Refugee Act

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petitions for federal court review;

- Clarify the "particular social group" basis and "nexus" requirements for asylum so that the asylum requests of vulnerable individuals, including women fleeing gender-based persecution, are adjudicated fairly and consistently; and
- Protect refugees from inappropriate exclusion by refining the definitions of "terrorist activity" and "terrorist organization" so that our immigration laws target actual terrorists, as opposed to hurting thousands of legitimate refugees who are not guilty of any wrongdoing and pose no threat to American security.

"Today's hearing will shine a light on these serious problems and spark discussion that should lead the Senate to act on this important legislation," said Acer. "Failure to act will only prolong and perpetuate the failed policies that currently plague our asylum and refugee systems."

MPI's *E Pluribus Unum* Awards Honor Programs

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) announced in mid-May the four winners of its second annual *E Pluribus Unum Prizes* for exceptional immigrant integration initiatives.

Each given a \$50,000 award, the winners are the Chicago-based Illinois Department of Human Services and the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights; the Latino Community Credit Union, Durham, N.C.; the Tacoma Community House, Tacoma, Washington; and Upwardly Global, San Francisco, California.

The McDonald's Corporation's "English Under the Arches" was also recognized with an honorable mention for its contribution to immigrant integration in the United States.

Established with support from the J.M. Kaplan Fund, the program encourages the adoption of effective integration practices and seeks to inspire others to support the integration of newcomers as full participants in U.S. society.

For more information about the winners and MPI's programs, visit: www.migrationpolicy.org.

Annual Refugee Conference Honors Service ‘Champions’

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Keynote Speaker Ahmed Samatar

ing a stakeholder in its political and social life. “America is a place of enormous diversity, always struggling for equality,” he said. “The making of American solidarity is always in motion.”

Plenary and workshop sessions addressed such issues as health and well-being in the African newcomer community; improving prospects for African refugee youth; challenges facing refugee women; and adapting cultural traditions as a means to community empowerment.

Following traditional visits with congressional leaders on Capitol Hill, the annual awards banquet honored four leaders for their contributions to improving the lives of refugees and immigrants.

Maureen Bunyan, lead co-anchor for WJLA-TV and mistress of ceremonies for the event, was honored for her leadership in expanding opportunities for women and immigrants in journalism and broadcasting.

Christopher Zimmerman, vice-chairman of the Arlington County Board, was recognized for his role in “creating a welcoming and supportive environment for refugee and immigrant newcomers to Northern Virginia.”

Alie Kabba, executive director of Chicago’s United Africa Organization, was honored for his role in “creating a vibrant coalition of organizations serving African refugees and immigrants in the Chicago area.”

Asfaha Hadera, founder and co-executive director of the African Services Committee in New York, was honored for his work in “improving health and self-sufficiency for the African community in New York.”

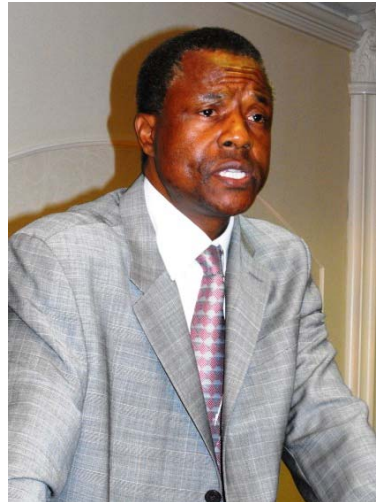
Virginia Congressman Jim Moran attended the dinner, commending ECDC for its leadership in addressing the needs of refugees and immigrants. Buti Kale, UNHCR’s Deputy Regional Representative, participated in a plenary session examining program and policy changes and future prospects for refugee resettlement flows to the United States.



Congressman Jim Moran



ORR’s Pamela Green-Smith



UNHCR’s Buti Kale



Honorees included, from left, Christopher Zimmerman and Asfaha Hadera, receiving awards from ECDC President Tsehaye Teferra, and Maureen Bunyan, receiving plaque from ECDC Board Vice Chair Henning W. Leidecker, Jr.

NEWS BRIEFS

USCIS Is Now Issuing Redesigned ‘Green Cards’

USCIS began issuing a redesigned Permanent Resident Card (Green Card) in mid-May, which incorporates several major new security features to prevent counterfeiting, obstruct tampering, and facilitate quick and accurate authentication.

The enhanced features will better serve law enforcement, employers and immigrants, all of whom look to the Green Card as definitive proof of authorization to live and work in the United States, indicated USCIS.

In keeping with the Permanent Resident Card's nickname, it will now be colored green for easy recognition. USCIS will replace Green Cards already in circulation as individuals apply for renewal or replacement.

UNHCR Urges EU States To Resettle More Refugees

An effort by UNHCR to get European countries to adopt a common resettlement program for refugees gathered momentum in mid-May as the European Parliament marked an “Awareness Day on Refugees and Resettlement” by calling for a significant increase in the number of refugees resettled to the EU.

Vincent Cochetel, who heads UNHCR’s resettlement service, noted that files on 128,000 people were submit-

ted by UNHCR to resettlement countries last year, but only 6,800 were offered a new start in European countries, compared to 62,000 accepted by the United States. Of the total, Cochetel said, about 84,000 were accepted by 26 countries.

ECDC Expands Network of Resettlement Affiliates

The Pan African Association (PACA) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin., and the Coptic Orthodox Charities, Inc., (COC) in Clearwater, Florida joined ECDC’s network of affiliates, participating in administering resettlement and matching grant programs sponsored by the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

Established in 1999, PACA seeks to serve all people of African descent in the greater Milwaukee area, preserving and enriching African cultural values through education, empowerment and dialogue. Fessahaye Mebratu is executive director of PACA.

Headed by Amira Salama, COC is a faith-based organization established in 2001 to provide legal, social and cultural services to refugees and immigrants, with an emphasis on Middle Eastern cultural awareness.

Through branch offices in Denver, Las Vegas and its 9 affiliated agencies, ECDC resettled 3,880 refugees last year and served 874 clients though the matching grant program.

Heightened Somali Conflict Spawns New Flows of IDPs

Stepped-up fighting in the Somali capital of Mogadishu between government troops supported by African Union peacekeepers and armed opposition groups displaced more than 17,000 people in May, according to report from UNHCR.

Most remained in the capital where an estimated 360,000 IDPs exist, unable to afford transport to makeshift camps west of the city that are already filled to capacity.

Somalia is one of the countries generating the highest number of forcefully displaced people in the world. An estimated 1.4 million Somalis are displaced within the country, while more than 580,000 live as refugees in neighboring countries.

UNHCR’s partners in the Somali capital report that people are exhausted, tense and hungry, but they still constantly listen to the radio, hoping they will hear that the fighting has ended.

CALENDAR

June 25 — The 7th annual Immigration Law and Policy Conference will be held in Washington, D.C. It is sponsored by the Catholic Legal Immigration Network in partnership with the Georgetown University Law Center and the Migration Policy Institute. For information, visit: www.cliniclegal.org.

African Refugee NETWORK

Vol. 19, No. 5 April-May 2010

The African Refugee NETWORK is produced bimonthly by the ECDC Center for African Refugees and Immigrants (ECDC-CARI). Opinions presented do not necessarily reflect official viewpoints and you should not assume endorsement by ECDC. Material appearing in the newsletter may be reproduced with credit. For additional information, contact:

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FY 2010 African Refugee Admissions

As of May 31, 2010 • Ceiling for FY 2010 is 15,500

Country of Origin	Refugees	Country of Origin	Refugees
Burundi	260	Ivory Coast	1
Cameroon	6	Liberia	201
Central African Republic	18	Mauritania	32
Chad	20	Rwanda	116
Congo	154	Senegal	2
Dem. Rep. Congo	1,917	Sierra Leone	31
Equatorial Guinea	9	Somalia	2,657
Eritrea	1,166	Sudan	308
Ethiopia	242	Togo	2
Gabon	1	Uganda	20
Gambia	5	Zimbabwe	7
Guinea	3	TOTAL	7,178

Source: U.S. Department of State, PRM