

Sudanese Refugees in U.S. Joyfully Vote in Referendum

With jubilation tempered by sad memories of lost lives and wasted years, more than 8,000 Sudanese refugees living in the United States voted overwhelmingly in favor of establishing a new country of South Sudan in the mid-January referendum established as part of a peace deal that ended the 1983-2005 civil war in their homeland.

Added to the 3.6 million pro-separation votes cast in Sudan and seven other out-of-country voting locations, their participation helped produce a 98.83 percent affirmation for separation, according to preliminary results released by the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission (SSRC).

Many of those voting in the United States traveled great distances by car and bus to polling sites in Washington, D.C.,



Basketball star Luol Deng holds a Sudanese flag as he waits to cast his vote in Chicago. AP Photo by Nam Y. Huh

Boston, Chicago, Nashville, Omaha, Dallas, Phoenix and Seattle, according to ECDC Resettlement Program Specialist Benaiah Duku, a U.S. representa-

tive of SSRC. Duku, who came to America as a refugee in 2002, helped plan and develop civic education and mobilization strategies with community leaders to encourage participation in the referendum. Training for poll workers was provided by the International Organization for Migration.

Among the poll workers were many of the Lost Boys of Sudan, some of whom were resettled by ECDC and its affiliates, Duku said. Other voting sites established to accommodate the Sudanese diaspora were in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Egypt, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

“A lot of people have fought for this day, a lot of lives have been lost over this, and now we have a say,” said Luol Deng, the Chicago Bulls basketball star as he arrived at the polling site in Chicago. “All we could do in the past is run. Now we’re here today to show we’re not running, we’re here to make a difference,” he said, capturing the sense of duty and opportunity shared by his fellow countrymen.

Deng, who escaped the conflict in Sudan as a child by moving to London, had used his stature and status to pro-

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Foster Children Gain Access to Nutrition Programs

Children placed into the foster care system by a state or court are now categorically eligible to receive free meals in all USDA child nutrition programs under provisions of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 which President Obama signed into law on December 13.

“Ensuring all children receive nutritious meals at school and through other child nutrition programs is a top priority for the Obama administration and a key step toward winning a healthy future for

the next generation of Americans,” said Department of Agriculture Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services Kevin Concannon. “Categorical eligibility is a vital tool to simplify and expedite enrolling eligible children in school meal programs.”

An estimated 423,773 children in the U. S. were in foster care on September 30, 2009, according to the Administration for Children and Families. ACF administers grants for foster care, runs the federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and oversees state child welfare agencies.

This new provision will help reduce administrative burdens on states, schools and foster care families by certifying eligible foster children for free meals in the National School Lunch and other Child Nutrition Programs without the need for an application. The National School Lunch Program serves nearly 32 million children nutritious meals each school day and is a critical component of the national nutrition safety net that safeguards children against hunger.

SAVE THE DATES

May 2-4, 2011

The State of African Refugees and Immigrants 60 years after the Refugee Convention: Challenges and Opportunities

ECDC’s 17th

**National Conference on Refugees & Immigrants
Holiday Inn Arlington, VA**

Census Data Distribution

Beginning in February and continuing through March, the Census Bureau will be distributing to states the local-level 2010 data that will reveal an updated portrait of America and launch what has often been a politically-charged debate on voting districts. Under Public Law 94-171, enacted in 1975, the Bureau must send to the governor and legislative leadership in each state data needed to redraw districts for the U.S. Congress and state legislature. Included are numbers on race, Hispanic origin, the voting age population and housing units, plus data on geographic areas such as counties, cities, and census tracts.

In My Opinion...

Sudan's Referendum & Diaspora Advocacy

With a prescience that has often marked her work in refugee affairs and migration, Kathleen Newland, co-founder of the Migration Policy Institute, published in November an illuminating study titled *After Exit, Diaspora Advocacy*, examining how various groups seek to influence policies and practices in their homelands and evaluating the resources and tactics employed in that pursuit. Acknowledging the enormous diversity of various diaspora groups and organizations and the issues that command their participation, Newland says that those with a strong sense of injustice or existential threat are generally the most highly motivated.

What makes the timing of the report's publication seem prescient to those of us who have followed closely the unfolding drama of the apparent birth of the new nation



Tsehaye Teferra, Ph.D.

of South Sudan is the role being played by the Sudanese diaspora in the United States and the other countries where voting sites were established. Few groups have experienced greater injustice or escaped greater threats than those who affirmed Newland's premise by their enthusiastic participation in the January referendum. What role the Sudanese diaspora will play in the future remains to be seen, of course, but wise will be the leaders of the new nation who recognize the potential contributions they can make and enlist their support in nation building.

Many of those who voted in this country said they planned to return to their homeland, hoping to play an active role in its political, social and economic development.

That was an ambition frequently expressed by the Lost Boys of Sudan who participated in the reunion gatherings we sponsored with ORR in 2002 and 2003. It was echoed by one of the voters who drove from Minneapolis to Omaha, telling a reporter that nothing could have kept him away. "We have been suffering for almost 55 years, just fighting," he said. "If we get our own country, the majority of us are going back."

Hopefully those who do return will be welcomed and spared the resentment and mistrust that Newland says often greets returning diaspora members who may be viewed as agents of a foreign power or lacking legitimacy in the affairs of their country of origin. Allowed to participate fully, she says they can help in many ways, citing Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's election as president of Liberia—after living and working in America for many years—as an example of how domestic politics can be made transnational by diaspora involvement.

Newland's description of how modern advances in electronic communications have made diaspora advocacy efforts more immediate and abundant added another element to the perceived timeliness of her report as the democratic referendum in Sudan coincided with media-fueled demonstrations for freedom and change in Tunisia and Egypt. The web sites, discussion groups, and social networks that Newland identifies as having eradicated former constraints of distance and national boundaries were used by the demonstrators in Tunis and Cairo to launch and sustain their spirited advocacy for change. Emerging from the televised scenes of the demonstrations was also evidence of how ideas and attitudes gleaned from democratic societies can penetrate barriers designed to isolate and "protect" despotic regimes. President Obama's widely-viewed June 4, 2009 speech to the Muslim world from Cairo University was credited by some analysts as helping to ignite the calls for change and freedom. One of the banners unfurled in Tahrir Square echoed his campaign theme and captured the hopes and dreams of the Sudanese diaspora.

The banner read: "Yes We Can, Too!"

(For a free PDF download of the Newland study, visit: www.migrationpolicy.org)

USCIS Announces Cut-Off Of 2011 Visa Petitions

USCIS announced in late-January that it had received a sufficient number of H-1B petitions to reach the statutory cap of 65,000 for fiscal year 2011, applying a cut-off date of January 26 for application processing

The agency will use a computer-generated random selection process to select petitions needed to meet the cap, rejecting all remaining cap-subject petitions not randomly selected and returning the accompanying fee.

By Dec. 22, 2010, USCIS had also received more than 20,000 H-1B petitions filed on behalf of persons exempt from the cap under the 'advanced degree' exemption. USCIS will continue to accept and process petitions that are otherwise exempt from the cap. Petitions filed on behalf of current H-1B workers who have been counted previously against the cap will not be counted towards the congressionally-mandated cap, the agency said. For more information on the visa program and other USCIS services, visit: www.uscis.gov.

Sudanese Referendum...

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mote participation in the referendum.

Of the 8,791 refugees who registered to vote, 8,521 showed up, Duku reported. Only 75 voted to keep the country united, 8,412 voting in favor of secession, and 17 ballots were incomplete.

Describing the referendum as "a historic milestone," Ambassador Princeton Lyman, head of the State Department's Sudan Negotiation Support Unit, said that much work remains to be done to ensure that the promise of the referendum leads to lasting peace and stability for all of Sudan. Both sides will need to reach agreement on how to handle such future issues as "citizenship, security, debt, oil, currency and more."

If Sudan continues to meet obligations critical to both a successful North-South relationship and long-term stability in the region, Lyman said the United States is ready to move toward improved bilateral relations, including renewed dialogue and an exchange of ambassadors, and to commit to an enhanced economic relationship with Sudan.

Redda Mehari Assumes New Leadership Role At ACC Arlington

Redda G. Mehari, formerly with the African Community Center in Las Vegas, has been named program manager for ECDC's African Community Center in Arlington.

With more than 25 years of experience in refugee affairs, Mehari began his service with the International Catholic Migration Commission in Sudan as an instructor of English and cultural orientation and as a refugee camp manager for U.S. bound Ethiopian refugees. Coming to America in the



Redda G. Mehari

early 1980s, he began a 19-year career in increasingly responsible positions with the Migration and Refugee Services program of Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada.

Starting as a case manager helping newly-arriving refugees obtain basic necessities and adjust to a new culture, he ultimately became director of resettlement for the agency and administered the state-wide Wilson/Fish program of financial and medical assistance. After helping to establish and manage ECDC's branch office in Las Vegas, Mehari moved to Columbus, Ohio, in 2006 where he has most recently managed Warka Market, LLC, a family-owned small business.

Majoring in history at Haile Selassie I University in Addis Ababa, Mehari also studied at the District of Columbia Teachers' College in Washington, D.C., and received additional training as a medical interpreter by Bridging the Gap in Las Vegas and Access 2 Interpreters in Columbus. He received certification by Pacific Interpreters last year.

"By professional training and experience and through his personal commitment to public service, Redda is uniquely qualified to sustain and strengthen the programs and services of the ACC Arlington," said ECDC President Tsehaye Teferra. "We are delighted to welcome him back to our staff."

Houston ECDC Affiliate Receives LISC Grant to Expand Services

The Alliance for Multicultural Community Services in Houston, a refugee resettlement affiliate of ECDC, is one of 47 community organizations awarded grants totaling \$4.2 million in mid-December to establish and expand Financial Opportunity Centers in ten metropolitan areas.

Provided through the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), the Alliance grant of \$150,000 will be used to establish a center in the Gulfton neighborhood of Southwest Houston.

Gulfton is one of the most diverse, densely-populated areas of the city with a rich tapestry of ethnic, cultural and linguistic traditions. Most residents are new immigrants and refugees from Mexico, Central America, Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, according to an announcement issued by LISC.

The Centers are designed to help low-income residents transform their distressed neighborhoods into places of choice and opportunity by bundling such services as employment training and placement, financial literacy and public

benefits, including matched savings accounts and Small Business Administration loans. The Alliance was recently approved as an SBA intermediate lender and is helping to meet the needs of Houston's entrepreneurs.

The LISC grants are funded through the Corporation for National and Community Services' Social Innovation Fund, authorized under the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, a new federal program that addresses major challenges confronting communities by growing high-impact non-profit organizations delivering proven solutions.

Established in 1985 as a mutual assistance organization for Vietnamese, Cambodian, Ethiopian, and Laotian refugees, the Alliance is the largest refugee service provider in TX in terms of range of services offered and clients served. Last year, the organization helped 685 new arrivals establish new lives and served thousands more through its wide range of socio-economic, cultural and educational programs.

First Family Observes King Birthday With Service

After urging Americans to celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday with acts of service to others, President Obama and the First Family joined other volunteers at the Stuart Hobson Middle School in the District of Columbia to assist in a painting project. The President and First Lady painted images of bright red apple characters on pillars in the schools lunchroom to encourage healthier eating. Daughters Malia and Sasha painted college logos to promote higher education. "

"By dedicating this day to service, we move our nation closer to Dr. King's vision of

all Americans living and working together as one beloved community" Obama said in his proclamation on the 25th anniversary of the holiday in King's honor. With First Lady Michelle Obama's 47th birthday falling on the same day as the observance on February 17, the volunteer workers joined the President and daughters in singing the Stevie Wonder version of "Happy Birthday."



NEWS BRIEFS

USCIS Announces New List Of Visa-Eligible Countries

Ethiopia and South Africa are the only African countries among 53 nations whose nationals are eligible to participate in the H-2A and H-2B programs this year, according to a mid-January announcement by the Department of Homeland Security

The H-2A program allows U.S. employers to bring foreign nationals to the United States to fill temporary agricultural jobs; the H-2B embraces temporary non-agricultural jobs. Developed in consultation with the Department of State, the new list excludes Indonesia, “after considering a number of relevant factors under the governing regulations.”

The list is at: www.uscis.gov.

UNHCR Seeks Nominees For Annual Nansen Award

UNHCR is seeking nominations for its annual Nansen Refugee Award, with a submission deadline of February 28. Established in 1954, the award honors an individual or an organization in recognition of extraordinary and dedicated service and is the most prestigious honor conferred by UNHCR. The award consists of a commemorative medal and a \$100,000 monetary prize donated by the governments of Norway and Switzerland.

The monetary prize is intended to enable the recipient to pursue refugee assistance projects drawn up in consultation

with UNHCR. More than 60 individuals, groups or organizations have won the award since Eleanor Roosevelt became the first winner in 1954.

The nomination form is available at: www.unhcr.org.

U.S. Official Visits Africa To Strengthen Security

Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Andrew J. Shapiro met with senior civilian and military officials in Djibouti, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo during a mid-January trip designed to build on security cooperation initiatives aimed at meeting shared security challenges.

The Bureau of Political-Military Affairs is the Department of State’s primary link to the Department of Defense, and oversees more than \$5 billion in annual security assistance programs, offering 42 partner nations in sub-Saharan Africa training opportunities and, in some cases, equipment essential to building modern, professional armed forces across the continent.

New Liberian Camp Will Serve Ivorian Refugees

To accommodate continuing flows of refugees from Ivory Coast, UNHCR has started constructing a new camp in the eastern Liberian town of Bahn, which will initially be capable of housing some 18,000 refugees. UNHCR site planners

and the local community are working together to clear 200 acres of jungle for the camp, which lies on land provided by the Liberian authorities.

There are now an estimated 25,000 Ivorian refugees in Liberia, with around 600 people arriving daily because of the tension and uncertainty that has pervaded life in Ivory Coast since the presidential election in late November. Refugees continue to tell UNHCR staff that, in most cases, they are fleeing fear of violence rather than actual violence against them.

Gulf of Aden Claims More Migrants Seeking Refuge

At least 80 African migrants—mostly Ethiopians—have drowned in the Gulf of Aden trying to reach Yemen, according to an early January report by the country’s Interior Ministry. Two boats carrying about 40 persons each capsized near Bab al Mandaab Strait and Raas al-Arab, a ministry spokesman said.

“Boats are usually overloaded. Smugglers cram us aboard their boats like bricks. They don’t leave any space for us to move our legs or hands during the trip until we find ourselves forced to relieve ourselves on board,” said Omar Mohamed, a Somali refugee who arrived in Yemen last month, told IRIN.

An estimated 43,000 people made the dangerous trip in flimsy boats between January and October last year, UNHCR said.

FY 2011 African Refugee Admissions

As of January 31, 2011 • Ceiling for FY 2011 is 15,000

Country of Origin	Refugees	Country of Origin	Refugees
Angola	1	Liberia	22
Burundi	33	Nigeria	1
Central African Republic	50	Rwanda	32
Chad	23	Sierra Leone	15
Congo	5	Somalia	819
Dem. Rep. Congo	387	Sudan	107
Eritrea	705	Togo	2
Ethiopia	117	Uganda	2
Gambia	6	Zimbabwe	6
Guinea-Bissau	4	TOTAL	2,338
Ivory Coast	1		

Source: U.S. Department of State, PRM

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