



Dr. Esther Brimmer
Addressing the Human Rights Council

Brimmer Represents U.S. Before Rights Council

As the United States recently began participation for the first time as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Assistant Secretary of State Esther Brimmer said the decision to seek election to a seat on the 47-member body is in keeping with the Obama administration's goal for a "new era of engagement" with other nations.

Noting that the Council has a troubled history, with some of its current and past members having weak records for protecting human rights, she said that four key principles—universality, dialogue, princi-

African Union Adopts Convention Pledging Unified Efforts to End Forced Displacement

African leaders meeting in Kampala, Uganda adopted a seminal convention in late October that promises legal protection and assistance to millions of people displaced within their own countries by conflicts and natural calamities on the continent.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, chairing a two-day special African Union (AU) summit on forcibly displaced people, praised the pact as an "historic agreement aimed at protecting and assisting our brothers and sisters, the internally displaced."

ple and truth—will guide the nation's participation, with a special emphasis on freedom of expression.

"Make no mistake," she said in her maiden address to the Council in Geneva, "the United States will not look the other way in the face of serious human rights abuses. The truth must be told, the facts brought to light and the consequences faced. While we will aim for common ground, we will call things as we see them and we will stand our ground when the truth is at stake."

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The new African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa is the first legal instrument of its kind in the world. It defines the obligations that states, and even armed groups, have to protect and assist their own uprooted citizens.

Forty-six African nations unanimously adopted the landmark convention while 17 heads of state and government, and foreign ministers signed it, including the presidents of Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Somalia, and the prime ministers and vice presidents of Burundi, the Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea and Rwanda. The convention still requires ratification by a minimum of 15 countries.

In the official summit declaration, the AU heads of state and government vowed to take measures to "prevent and finally eliminate from our continent the occurrence of forced displacement of people arising from conflict and natural disasters."

Participants hailed the outcome of the summit as a great achievement for a continent that has the world's largest popula-

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Refugee Protection in Americas Requires Cooperative Efforts, Conferees Agree

By Marie-Helene Verney

Cooperation between states is essential to address the joint challenge of refugee protection and migration in the Americas, UNHCR's top protection official told delegates at the opening of a regional conference on the issue in Costa Rica in late November.

Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Erika Feller, addressing representatives of 20 countries in North and South America, stressed that migrants and refugees were not the responsibility of just one organization, one country or one region, but the shared concern of all those seeking to protect the human rights

of people on the move.

The two-day conference, which follows regional meetings in Yemen and Senegal over the past 18 months, was convened to address the issue of mixed migration flows in the Americas, principally from south to north.

Delegates also looked at ways to implement UNHCR's 10-Point Plan of Action, which was developed to help governments protect refugees within increasingly complex population flows.

Millions of people are on the move around the world. Some seek better economic opportunities or to be reunited with family. Refugees have no choice,

they flee their homelands to escape violence or persecution. But, increasingly, migrants and refugees travel together, sometimes resorting to the services of traffickers and smugglers.

The issue is of special relevance in the Americas, where there is a long tradition of migration and asylum. The American continent is home to some 800,000 refugees, or about one in 12 of the world's total refugee population.

Most migration in the region is intra-continental—from South America to the United States and Canada—although there has also been an increase in the

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*In My Opinion...****IDP Convention: A Significant Achievement***

Through two pages of “rememberings” “recallings” and “reaffirmations,” the preamble of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa documents a 60-year accumulation of regional and international initiatives to addresses issues of forced displacement on the continent. It is an impressive and comprehensive statement of noble intentions and humanitarian commitments. Among them is a reaffirmation of a decision made at an AU Executive Council meeting in Addis Ababa in 2004 that said “the specific needs of IDPs such as protection and assistance should be addressed through a separate legal instrument.”

The Kampala Convention adopted in October fulfills that pledge. It is being hailed as a major accomplishment, filling a void in international humanitarian law—the first instrument to legally bind an entire region on matters of internal displacement.

Following the preamble are 14 pages of objectives and obligations describing how African states, international organizations, humanitarian agencies—even armed groups—must act in conformance to the Conventions mandates. “Members of Armed groups shall be held criminally responsible for their acts which violate the rights of internally displaced persons under international law and national law,” the document states, leaving undefined how such a provision can be enforced.

Other provisions properly address critical issues, but also provoke questions about implementation and effectiveness. How will states that are notoriously



Tsehaye Teferra, Ph.D.

jealous about sovereignty respond to the provision that would allow the AU “to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in accordance with Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity? How will any state be able to prevent such acts as “sexual and gender based violence in all its forms, notably rape, enforced prostitution, sexual exploitation and harmful practices, slavery, recruitment of children and their use in hostilities, forced labor and human trafficking and smuggling?”

Reviewing the document, I was reminded of UNHCR Antonio Guterres’s dismay as he assumed his post in 2005 about the restrictions his agency had in serving IDPs. Facing essentially the same fate as refugees who have fled across international borders, IDPs were then beyond his mandate. Nowhere was that situation more evident than when a Security Council mission visited the Darfur region of Sudan in 2006. Along the border between Sudan and Chad were camped thousands of Darfurians, remaining in their homeland as IDPs. Thousands more were encamped as refugees in Chad. Meanwhile, living in Chad as IDPs were an estimated 50,000 people who had fled their villages to escape bloody armed attacks by militia units based in Sudan.

Similar situations still exist on the continent, where the IDP population is estimated at 11.6 million, far more than the refugee total and the highest concentration of any other region in the world, according to Andrew Soloman, deputy director of the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement.

To become a binding document, the Convention must be ratified by 15 AU member states. Despite concerns about effective enforcement mechanisms and adequate resource commitments, it is another noble and visionary document developed by Africans to address issues of particular concern to Africans. It is a significant achievement, worthy of prompt approval and implementation.

African Union Adopts Pact to Protect IDPs, Curb Displacements

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tion of internally displaced people (IDPs).

“Africa has been a pioneer in the fight for human rights,” Zambian President Rupiah Banda said following the adoption of the convention. “Today we have taken this fight a step further by giving legal force to the protection of human rights of internally displaced persons. The task ahead is to ensure that internally displaced persons enjoy these rights by implementing the provisions of the convention with urgency. Our people cannot afford to wait.”

The convention, in its preamble, underscores the need to “promote and strengthen regional and national measures to prevent or mitigate, prohibit and eliminate root causes of internal displacement as well as provide for durable solutions.” It notes the specific protection expertise of UNHCR and asks the organization to continue and reinforce its role in the protection of and assistance to IDPs.

A.U. Political Commissioner Julia Dolly Joiner said “the convention that has been adopted is a unique, comprehensive and unequivocal response to the challenges of forced displacement. This instrument clearly demonstrates that African leaders are conscious of the difficulties that displaced persons experience and are poised to, as much as possible, put and end to their suffering.”

U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres told a closing press conference that “this represents the concept of ‘responsibility to protect’ in action. It demonstrates that national sovereignty is fully compatible with the responsibility to protect.”

He added that the convention serves as a reminder that the responsibility to protect its own citizens is first and foremost an individual state responsibility and that where the state fails to do so, there is a collective African responsibility to act.

(By Melissa Fleming and Yusuf Hassan, in Kampala, Uganda.)

Annual Report on Religious Freedom Cites African Nations

Two African nations—Eritrea and Sudan are among eight countries identified as being of “particular concern” in the 2009 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom released by the Department of State in late October.

Other countries charged with serious violations of religious freedom were Burma, China, Iran, North Korea, and Uzbekistan. Twenty-nine countries had violations “of substantial interest.”

Twenty-one countries—some of which are also on the list “of particular concern” or “of substantial interest”—were found to have made specific improvements in religious freedom conditions.

The report contains assessments of 198 countries and territories, making it one of the most comprehensive reports available.

Responding to recent initiatives by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to advance within the United Nations the concept of “defamation of religions,” Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said there must be a sensible balance between freedom of religion and freedom of speech, according to a report by Jane Morse of America.gov.

“An individual’s ability to practice his or her religion has no bearing on others’ freedom of speech,” Clinton said at a special briefing marking the release of the report. “The protection of speech about religion is particularly important since persons of different faiths will inevitably hold divergent views on reli-

gious questions,” she said. “These differences should be met with tolerance, not with the suppression of discourse.”

The best antidote to intolerance, Clinton said, is a combination of robust legal protections against discrimination and hate crimes, government outreach to minority religious groups, and the vigorous defense of both freedom of religion and freedom of expression.

The OIC is an intergovernmental organization comprising 57 states with significant Muslim populations, Morse reported.

“The United States,” the secretary said, “will always seek to counter negative stereotypes of individuals based on their religion and will stand against discrimination and persecution.”

Freedom of religion is a founding principle of the United States—but it is a universal value, not just an American value, Clinton said. “It is a freedom guaranteed to all people in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,” she said.

According to Clinton, freedom of religion “allows nations that uphold it to become more stable, secure and prosperous.” It was a message echoed by Michael Posner, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.

In his introduction to the report, he writes: “Authoritarian regimes that repress religious groups and ideas in the

name of stability create the very conditions that subvert their stated goals. Repression radicalizes. Coercive and arbitrary interference in peaceful religious practice can harden resentment against the state and lead some to separatism or insurgency.”

Linking extremism and terrorism, Posner cautioned that “governments must ensure that their policies on religion do not have negative international consequences.”

The United States, Clinton said, is expanding programs that work to bridge the divide between religious groups. “These important efforts build on the shared values and common concerns of faith communities to sow the seeds of lasting peace,” she said.

Although the report shines a spotlight on abuses by states and societies, it also seeks to draw attention to positive steps many countries and organizations are taking to promote freedom and interreligious harmony, Clinton said.

She commended the leadership of the Philippines in the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace at the United Nations, as well as Jordan’s role in initiating the “A Common Word” dialogue and many other international and domestic initiatives.

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 designates the promotion of religious freedom for all persons as a core objective of U.S. foreign policy.

Brimmer Represents U.S. Before U.N. Council

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Brimmer is assistant secretary for the Bureau of International Organizations.

Acknowledging that the United States’ record on human rights is imperfect, Brimmer said the nation’s history is a story of progress.

“My presence here today is a testament to that progress,” she said in Geneva, “as is the Administration I serve. It is the President’s hope and my own that we can continue that momentum at home and around the world.”

She also called for a more balanced approach by the Council, urging tolerance and respect worldwide instead of

focusing too much on Middle Eastern issues. Between 2006 and 2008, she noted, the Council issued resolutions condemning Israel 15 times.

“As the United States seeks to advance human rights and fundamental freedoms across the globe, we embrace a commitment to live up to these ideals at home and to meet our international human rights obligations,” Brimmer said. “We will join with you to reinforce the importance of accountability and good governance within the Council, ensuring that our own operations and deliberations reflect the values we are entrusted to uphold.”

SAVE THE DATES

MAY 3-5, 2010

ECDC’S

**16TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON AFRICAN REFUGEES
AND IMMIGRANTS**

Arlington Holiday Inn at Ballston
Arlington, Virginia

[Watch for further details
in upcoming editions.]

MPI Report Documents Recession's Impact on Foreign-Born Workers

While immigrants surpassed native-born workers in several key labor market outcomes from the mid-1990s through 2007, recording higher employment and lower jobless rates, the trend was reversed with the onset of the current recession, according to a report released in mid-November by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI).

The report, *Tied to the Business Cycle: How Immigrants Fare in Good and Bad Economic Times*, analyzes employment and unemployment patterns over the past 15 years and two recessions, showing that immigrant economic outcomes began deteriorating before the current recession officially began in December 2007.

The authors, Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas Senior Economist Pia Orrenius and Agnes Scott College Economics Professor Madeline Zavodny, trace immigrants' declining fortunes largely to the housing bust which began in spring 2006. As residential construction employment slumped, the immigrant unemployment rate began rising toward the end of 2006, and immigrants since have recorded higher unemployment rates and bigger

declines in employment than native-born workers. The analysis tracks MPI's own research, dating back to January, into how the recession has affected immigrants here and around the globe.

"Despite the longer-term trend of rising employment and falling unemployment rates for foreign-born workers, the current recession offers new evidence that economic outcomes for immigrants in the short run are more strongly tied to the business cycle than for natives," Ms. Orrenius said.

The report offers a number of possible explanations for why labor market outcomes for immigrants, who represent more than 15 percent of the workforce, are more cyclical. Among them: Immigrants are overrepresented in less-educated groups that have experienced the greatest job losses; and are more likely to work in cyclical occupations and sectors that suffer the largest job losses during downturns, such as construction and manufacturing.

To review the full report, visit: www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/orrenius-Nov09.pdf.

Rajiv Shah Nominated To Fill Top Leadership Position at USAID

President Barack Obama has nominated Rajiv Shah as Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Currently serving as Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics

and Chief Scientist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Shah, manages the Agricultural Research Service, the Economic Research Service, the National Agricultural Statistical Service and the National Institute of



Rajiv Shah

Food and Agriculture. If confirmed by Congress, Shah will become the highest ranking Indian American in any U.S. administration.

At USDA, Shah launched the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), a new scientific institute created to elevate and enhance the capacity of agricultural research to address sustainable food production, climate and nutrition.

Prior to joining the Obama Administration, Shah served as the Director for Agricultural Development at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Previously, he served as the foundation's first Director for Financial Services to the Poor, and led the Strategic Opportunities initiative through which he worked with foundation co-chairs to identify, assess and recommend new areas of giving.

Shah worked on health care policy for the Gore 2000 presidential campaign and served as a member of Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell's transition committee on health. He is a co-founder of Health Systems Analytics and Project IMPACT for South Asian Americans.

Shah has served as a policy aide in the British Parliament and worked at the World Health Organization. He earned his M.D. from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School and his Master of Science in health economics at the Wharton School of Business. He has attended the London School of Economics, and is a graduate of the University of Michigan.

Costa Rican Conference Address Refugee Issues

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number of people coming from other continents. Nations in the Caribbean and Central America, including Mexico, now face huge challenges as countries of transit. The numbers are difficult to ascertain: an estimated 500,000 people try to make their way every year to the United States via Mexico.

Not everybody on the move is vulnerable or in need of international protection, but all have fundamental human rights. Refugees have specific rights under international law and one of the biggest challenges for receiving countries is to be able to quickly identify refugees within mixed migration flows.

The conference also explored ways of identifying and providing appropriate support to the most vulnerable people caught in mixed migration flows, such as unaccompanied minors, victims of hu-

man trafficking and pregnant women. They also debated the establishment of reception facilities, including shelter and health

Feller said the main concerns for UNHCR were a lack of basic reception facilities, denial of entry to a country, and the automatic and sometimes prolonged detention of people in migration flows, including refugees. She encouraged countries in North and South America to build on their national laws and good practices and pledged UNHCR's continued support.

The two-day conference was jointly organized by UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration and the Organization for American States, with the support of several other international organizations, including the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights.

*Typifying Beneficiaries of U.S. Resettlement Program***Somali Teenager Relishes Rescue From Refugee Camp Life**

By Kisut Gebre Egziabher
in *Kebribeyah Refugee Camp, Ethiopia*

Hodan Mawlid has spent almost all of her life in a baking, dusty refugee camp in Ethiopia, yet the 18-year-old remains remarkably optimistic despite suffering the loss of her parents at an early age and the hardship that followed.

“I have led a very painful life,” she told a UNHCR visitor here recently. “But I always find solace in my belief that the best way to prevail over the cruelties and ills of the past is to forget them altogether and start all over again.”

Now, things are changing for Hodan: last month she flew to the United States after being accepted for resettlement and her positive attitude should help her face the challenges that will arise in an alien land and culture.

“Just how smooth the new beginning is depends so much on the individual and the situation,” said UNHCR Senior Resettlement Officer Larry Yungk. “I think there tend to be opportunities out there, but there is no guarantee of success,” he adds.

Hodan was among a group of 23 vulnerable Somali refugees, including her uncle and his family, who were accepted by the U.S. under a UNHCR-organized resettlement program and flown to Denver, Colorado. They cannot return home because they originate from volatile southern or central areas of Somalia, where people continue to flee their homes to escape conflict.

Before leaving Addis Ababa, she said she knew there were tough times ahead, especially to begin with as she struggles to learn English. But she’s had a lifetime of preparation. “I’ve known suffering all my life. Compared to what I’ve endured, language and cultural barriers will be nothing to worry about.”

Hodan was born and brought up in eastern Ethiopia’s Kebribeyah Refugee Camp after her parents crossed from neighboring Somalia in 1991, fleeing the chaos that followed the collapse of the Siad Barre regime. They were among more than 600,000 people who fled to Ethiopia and found safety in eight refugee camps.

“When I grew old enough to inquire about my parents, I learned from my uncle, who took care of me while in the camp, that my mother had died as a refugee when I was four years old and that my father returned to Somalia some months later,” she recalled.

The news was a devastating blow, especially as Hodan had no siblings who could comfort her. Her uncle and aunt and their children became her surrogate parents and siblings, but she had to drop out of school after Grade Four to supplement the family’s monthly food ration by working as a housemaid in a nearby town.

Meanwhile, relative stability in Somaliland and northern Somalia’s Puntland led to the repatriation of well over half-a-million Somali refugees from Ethiopia between 1997 and 2005. But Hodan’s kin were from southern Somalia where continuing insecurity has prevented their return. Resettlement became an option. The Somalis still living in camps in eastern

Ethiopia, including Hodan and her relatives, were caught in a protracted refugee situation with no end in sight. As part of the efforts to resolve the problem, the U.S. government agreed in 2007 to accept thousands of these Somalis for resettlement. To date, UNHCR has referred the names of some 5,600 for possible resettlement.

“While UNHCR’s primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees, our ultimate goal is to help find durable solutions that will allow them to rebuild their lives in dignity and peace,” explained Moses Okello, UNHCR’s representative in Ethiopia.

The Somali community in the United States is closely-

knit, UNHCR’s Yungk noted, adding that this could help the young Hodan settle in well. Her biggest hurdle could be education.

“Unfortunately, if one is over 18 and arrives in the U.S., one is generally not eligible to finish public schooling,” Yungk said, adding that refugees like Hodan were usually steered towards General Equivalency Degree programs, English-language courses and vocational training.

Hodan welcomed the opportunity for a new life with plenty of opportunity. There is no looking back for her. “I do not think I have any incentive to go to Somalia any time in the future,” she concluded.

(With an approved ceiling of 12,000 African refugees in FY 2009, the U.S. resettlement program processed a total of 9,670. For FY 2010, the ceiling for the Africa region is set at 15,500, with a global ceiling of 80,000.)



Hodan gets ready to board a bus that will take her to Addis Ababa from Kebribeyah Refugee Camp.

NEWS BRIEFS

Senate Confirms Yohannes As New Leader of MCC

The United States Senate on November 20 unanimously confirmed President Obama's nomination of Daniel W. Yohannes as the new Chief Executive Officer of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC).

Created by Congress in 2004, MCC's mission is to help reduce global poverty through the promotion of sustainable economic growth. It provides large-scale grants to developing countries, complementing other U.S. development programs.

Arriving in the United States as a 17-year-old Ethiopian immigrant, Yohannes started at the bottom of the economic ladder, earning his way through college as a stock boy in a clothing store and later as a teller at a local bank in Los Angeles.

After a distinguished career in banking, including service as President and Chief Executive Officer of U.S. Bank in Colorado, he became a private investor specializing in real estate, financial institutions and the renewable energy sector.

Yohannes will become chairman of the MCC board of directors, which includes the Secretaries of State and Treasury, the USAID Administrator, the U.S. Trade Representative and four private sector representatives.

UNHCR Pledges Renewed Efforts on Gender Violence

Launching the annual *16 Days of Activism to Eliminate Violence Against Women* in late November in Geneva, UNHCR António Guterres pledged greater assistance to help states prevent sexual violence, protect individuals and provide remedy to victims.

"Gender-based violence is one of the most virulent, culturally endemic, and persistent trends in the world," Guterres said. "Sexual violence is a brutal form of physical and psychological warfare rooted in the gender inequality extant not only in zones of conflict, but in our everyday personal lives."

The issue is of global concern, undermining peace and security and shattering community and family ties, he said, not-

ing that UNHCR is integrating prevention and response measures in the agency's efforts on physical protection, health, community empowerment and durable solutions.

The international activism campaign originated from the first Women's Global Leadership Institute in 1991.

World Food Program Aids Refugees Fleeing DRC

The United Nations World Food Program said in late November that it is ramping up efforts to feed tens of thousand of Congolese who fled a recent outbreak of tribal violence in northwestern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

More than 38,000 people escaped into the neighboring Republic of Congo, crossing the river separating the two countries after deadly clashes erupted in late October between two tribes in DRC's Equateur province.

The fighting, thought to be over disputes on farming and fishing rights in the village of Dongo, left dozens dead and an estimated 14,000 internally displaced persons inside DRC who are too afraid to return to their villages.

Darius Mans Selected As New Head of Africare

Africare, an international development organization specializing in development assistance to Africa, has chosen Darius Mans, as its new President. Most recently serving as Acting Chief Executive Officer of the Millennium Chal-

lenge Corporation, Mans will officially start on January 4, 2010, when current president, Julius E. Coles, leaves after more than seven years of service. Mans will be the fourth president in Africare's 39-year history.

Before assuming the acting CEO post at MCC, Mans served as Vice President of Implementation, managing a \$6.3 billion portfolio in 18 countries.

U.S. Will Host 2012 AIDS Conference, Clinton Says

Describing HIV/AIDS as "the defining health challenge of our time" at a November 30 White House observance on the eve of World AIDS Day, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that Washington will host the 2012 International AIDS Conference since the ban on people with AIDS entering the country had been lifted by President Obama.

The day of observance was adopted by 140 countries in 1988. It is commemorated every December 1 to raise awareness about the pandemic that has killed more than 25 million people since it began in 1981.

Clinton described a new five-year global AIDS strategy, noting that President Obama is "dedicated to enhancing America's leadership in the fight against global AIDS, with serving PEPFAR serving as the cornerstone of our global health initiative to promote better and more sustainable health outcomes."

President Obama touched on the U.S. commitment to the battle against AIDS in a speech he gave in Ghana in July.

FY 2010 African Refugee Admissions

As of November 30, 2009		Ceiling for FY 2010 is 15,500	
Country of Origin	Refugees	Country of Origin	Refugees
Burundi	53	Mauritania	8
Central African Republic	9	Rwanda	10
Chad	8	Sierra Leone	15
Congo	74	Somalia	670
Dem. Rep. Congo	168	Sudan	78
Equatorial Guinea	9	Togo	1
Eritrea	332	Uganda	3
Ethiopia	35		
Gambia	1	TOTAL	1,549
Liberia	75		

Source: U.S. Department of State, PRM

At RCUSA-Sponsored Conference...

PRM's Schwartz Describes U.S. Initiatives on Statelessness

While the concept of statelessness may seem abstract and distant from America's key policy issues, it creates despair and misery of such magnitude that it can threaten stability and impact the nation's national security interests, according to Eric Schwartz, Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM).

Addressing a conference on statelessness hosted by Refugee Council USA and the Georgetown Law School's Human Rights Institute in late October, Schwartz described actions by the Obama administration to enhance awareness of the scope and breadth of the problem and to encourage more effective responses by public and pri-

vate agencies for reconciliation and protection.

The global number of stateless persons is estimated to be as high as 12 million, he said.

Commenting on his recent trip to Africa, Schwartz described an encounter with officials in the Democratic Republic of Congo who were reluctant to accept the return of their own nationals.

"To add this kind of uncertainty to the overwhelming suffering that refugees and displaced persons already endure is unacceptable, and underscores for me the critical importance of preventing statelessness as a priority for my Bureau and for the Administration," he said. "Without the 'right to have rights,' stateless people are among the most vulnerable in the world."

Noting that PRM is already using the nation's refugee resettlement program as a means of providing a durable solution to stateless individuals and groups in need of resettlement, Schwartz said efforts are underway to leverage more humane and responsible policies among hosting governments for the stateless refugees who will not be resettled in third countries.

A.U. Ambassador Battle Cites Continental Issues

By becoming the first major non-African country to appoint a full-time ambassador to the African Union (AU), the United States demonstrated its commitment to a strong partnership with the people of Africa, says the current incumbent in that office.

U.S. Ambassador to the African Union Michael Battle says the appointment affirms the views of President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that AU has "the capacity to function with a single voice on continent-wide issues, like the European Union acts as a single voice on issues



Amb. Battle

that affect Europe."

that affect Europe."

In a recent interview with American.gov staff writer Charles W. Corey, Battle said he was "looking forward to the day when the continent would not be catastrophe-and crisis-oriented but would be able to focus long-term on its development role and interaction with the world community.

The African Union is also important to the United States, Battle said, because the continent of Africa is confronting so many of the major issues that the world will be facing in the future. One such issue, he said, is food security. That issue is more important in Africa than any other place on the globe because there has been a record of food deprivation in Africa and also because there is an abundance of land that can and should be cultivated.

Battle, who was appointed by President Obama, said he is now the third U.S. ambassador to the African Union and heads a diverse mission concerned with a

broad array of issues, including development, conflict resolution, democracy and electoral assistance, the U.S. Africa Command (Africom) and the African Union Mission to Somalia (Amisom).

Before becoming ambassador, Battle was the president of a consortium of six theological seminaries in Atlanta and a former Vice Chairman of the American Committee on Africa, also known as African Action.

A longtime admirer of President Obama and Secretary Clinton, Battle said: "Being the U.S. ambassador to the African Union gives me an opportunity to work with and for persons who have demonstrated absolute excellence and an absolute commitment to the people of Africa."

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Zimbabwean Activist Receives R.F. Kennedy Human Rights Award

Zimbabwean activist Magodonga Mahlangu was honored at the White House on November 23 as President Obama presented the 2009 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award, established in 1984 to honor human rights defenders around the world.

It carries a cash prize of \$30,000, as well as ongoing legal advocacy and technical support from the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights.

After witnessing the massacre of thousands of her countrymen, including family members, Mahlanagu decided it was intolerable that the people of Zimbabwe were forbidden to know the truth about what was happening in their country. She embarked on a relentless advocacy effort that led to her current leadership position with an organization called Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA).

Co-founded by Jenni Williams in 2002, WOZA demonstrated to Zimbabwean women and men alike that the brutal rule by President Robert Mugabe's regime could be met with peaceful and heroic public defiance, according to a report from Stephen Kaufman, a staff writer at America.gov.

"By her example, Magodonga has shown the women of WOZA and the people of Zimbabwe that they can undermine their oppressors' power with their own power, that they can sap a dictator's strength with their own," Obama said at the award presentation. "Her courage has inspired others to summon theirs."

Obama noted that WOZA has grown from a handful of activists at its founding to a movement of 75,000 people, including a men's branch. "Over the past seven years, they have conducted more than a hundred protests—maids and hairdressers, vegetable sellers and seamstresses, taking to the streets, singing and dancing, banging on pots empty of food and brandishing brooms to express their wish to

sweep the government clean," he said.

But their protests are usually confronted with violence by Mugabe's riot police.

"They have been gassed, abducted, threatened with guns and badly beaten, forced to count out loud as each blow was administered," Obama said, adding that 3,000 of their members have been in prison or police custody, and both Mahlangu and Williams are facing a possible five-year prison sentence from a trial, where the two were charged with "conduct likely to cause a breach of peace."

In a recent interview with the Voice of America (VOA), Mahlangu welcomed the award as a means of increasing the visibility of Zimbabwe's human rights struggle.

She said many people have a mistaken impression that the Global Political Agreement signed between President Mugabe and his political rival Morgan Tsvangirai has brought change "because there is food in the market."

"People think that things are OK. But we are really setting the record straight, and also we are very grateful for this opportunity to be here, winning, receiv-



President Obama presents Kennedy Human Rights Award to Magodonga Mahlangu.

ing this award, because it is going to amplify the voices of ordinary persons in Zimbabwe," she told VOA.

The event marked the first presentation of the award since the death in August of Senator Ted Kennedy, who understood that his brother's legacy included a belief in the need to build laws and society with an eye to the difference between right and wrong, Obama said.

Robert Kennedy's legacy is "a sensitivity to injustice so acute that it can't be relieved by the rationalizations that make life comfortable for the rest of us — that others' suffering is not our problem, that the ills of the world are somehow not our concern," Obama said.

CALENDAR

May 3-5, 2010 — ECDC's annual national conference on African refugees will be held at the Arlington Holiday Inn at Ballston in Arlington, Virginia.

May 6, 2010 — The 2010 Voices of Courage award luncheon of the Women's Refugee Commission will be held from noon-2 p.m. at Gotham Hall in New York City, to be hosted by Lesley Stahl of *60 Minutes*.

For more information, visit: www.womensrefugeecommission.org.

RESOURCES

Closing the Distance: How Governments Strengthen Ties with Their Diasporas is a new book from the Migration Policy Institute analyzing the objectives and activities of 45 diaspora-engaging institutions in 30 developing countries. Such institutions are based in destination countries as well as countries of origin, the book says, with many encouraging participation in development activities in their homelands. For more information, visit: www.migrationpolicy.org.

