

**Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc.**  
901 S. Highland Street • Arlington, Virginia 22204

Written Testimony for June 6, 2007, Public Hearing on the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program

As a member of the Refugee Council USA, ECDC supports the Council's recommendations. We provide this testimony on Urban Refugees in Africa and outside African refugees as additional information to their testimony.

The continent of Africa continues to present a picture of successes, challenges and concerns. We rejoice for the successful repatriation of thousands of African refugees back to their homelands in Angola, Southern Sudan, Burundi, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has helped in reducing the number of refugees on the continent by the following numbers: 530,000 Sudanese refugees, 375,000 Burundian refugees, 335,000 Congolese refugees, 300,000 Somali refugees, 125,000 Eritrean refugees and 700,000 other African refugees. These successful repatriations coupled with multilateral peace building and development support for the continent are reasons for hope in Africa.

However, civil conflicts in Darfur, Chad, the Central African Republic, Somalia, Guinea and Zimbabwe continue to destabilize communities, displace people and create more refugees in addition to the 2.5 million already living on the continent. Among them are many who have languished for ten years or more in refugee camps. Many are also living in urban settings without any prospects of integration or repatriation, and many destined to be inadmissible to the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program if far reaching measures are not adopted to right the unintended consequences of the Material Support legislation on refugees.

While some long-stayer refugees like the Eritrean Kunamas in Ethiopia, Mauritanian refugees in Senegal, Burundians in Tanzania, and the Banyamulenge are being processed for resettlement in the U.S., there are still African urban refugees who need attention and resettlement in a third country.

## **URBAN REFUGEES IN AFRICA**

### **Urban Refugees in South Africa**

In February 2006, UNHCR estimated that South Africa hosts approximately 29,000 recognized refugees and 110,000 asylum seekers whose asylum applications are not finalized. They come from all over Africa, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Congo Brazzaville, and Zimbabwe. The current mass influx of refugees from Zimbabwe in particular has continued to swell the number of asylum applicants in the country, while service delivery to both refugees and asylum seekers is complicated by systemic delays caused by mixed populations of illegal immigrants, economic migrants and victims of human trafficking, all of them competing for the same resources. Some of the refugees in South Africa and their stories confirm that they live in deplorable situations, are harassed by the police and continue to be victims of xenophobic attacks and hate crimes. As recently as April 11, UNHCR reported that Johannesburg's inner city regeneration program has led to the eviction of more than 100 refugees and asylum seekers, their belongings were piled on the pavement surrounding the Coronia Gardens apartment block that had been home to many of them for years. Given the plight of the refugees in South Africa, we recommend that UNHCR continue to work with the South African government and expedite the process for NGO referrals to provide those refugees with compelling cases access to the U.S. resettlement program as P-1 referrals.

### **Urban Refugees in Kenya**

According to Refugees International, Kenya hosts approximately 220,000 refugees from neighboring countries, mostly Somalis, Ethiopians and Eritreans. Approximately 4,000-5,000 registered African

refugees in Kenya live in urban settings, mainly in Nairobi. It is also estimated that over 15,000 are without authorization. Unregistered refugees are subjected to arrest and threats of deportation by Kenyan authorities. They face serious challenges to their survival and are at great risk due to a lack of protection. Their physical security is endangered by various abuses, to name a few: extortion, harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, and sexual abuse. By law, Kenya requires refugees to live in camps and thus does not provide for any assistance to urban refugees living outside of designated areas. The Kenyan government has also begun preventing Somalis fleeing civil conflict in their country from entering Kenya. ECDC urges UNHCR and PRM to provide those urban refugees in Kenya with compelling cases access to the U.S. resettlement program as P1 referrals.

### **Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya**

The Kakuma refugee camp is home to over 90,000 refugees of many nationalities due to political instability in their countries. While Sudanese represent the majority, there are sizeable numbers of Eritreans and Ethiopians. Over 40% of the total population of these are women. The camp is located in a non-agricultural part of the Kenya, northwest of Nairobi, which is over 1,600 away. There are many refugees in this camp who have been there for 10 years or more, especially Sudanese refugees. ECDC urges PRM to refer these long-stayer refugees for resettlement in the U.S. as P1 cases.

### **Urban Refugees in Egypt**

Many of the urban refugees in Egypt have been provided access to resettlement as P-1. However, a sizeable number of the refugees with compelling cases continue to live in deplorable conditions with or without UNHCR support/protection. Though Egypt had agreed to grant local resettlement to these refugees, the decision is still viewed with skepticism by refugees and many institutions. Many of these refugees have lived in Egypt for more than 10 years, and for various reasons they cannot integrate into the host community. With the current situation in Darfur and Chad, the number of refugees in Egypt is likely to increase without any improvement in their living conditions. ECDC recommends that the United States take a vigorous move for family reunification for African refugees in Egypt by referring those who qualify to the U.S. resettlement program as P-3 status.

### **Sierra Leonean and Liberian Refugees in West Africa**

Throughout West Africa, there are roughly 30,000 Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees who comprise a significant residual caseload following the largely successful repatriation efforts to these two countries between 2002 and 2005. It is widely believed that these people have very strong reasons for not availing themselves of repatriation opportunities to their motherlands. Most have no homes to go back to or are too traumatized to return, having experienced significant violence and trauma themselves and having lost family members. ECDC recommends that PRM and UNHCR on a case-by-case basis, and refer families with compelling claims for P1 resettlement.

## **AFRICAN REFUGEES OUTSIDE OF AFRICA**

### **African Refugees in Yemen**

Yemen still hosts a considerable number of refugees, primarily from the Horn of Africa. Estimates indicate that most of the refugees are from Somalia. The United Nation estimates there are nearly 100,000 Somalis in Yemen even though Yemeni officials put the number between 300,000 and 800,000. The civil conflict in Somalia is causing more Somalis to flee to Yemen and other states around the Horn of Africa. The condition of Somali and other African refugees is worsening according to the Yemen Times. They cannot assimilate in the Yemeni community, because the Yemenis think that many of them carry dangerous diseases. Since the beginning of 2007, the Yemeni government has begun taking action against new refugees and threatening them with deportation. Many are also subjected to racial discrimination and abuse despite their immigration status. In November 2005, there was an uprising by Somali refugees demanding better living conditions or assistance to be able to move to a third country. Given the plight of these refugees, we urge UNHCR and resettlement countries to assess the refugee situation in Yemen and

provide resettlement to those who are unable to return to their homeland and for whom resettlement is needed for their protection or is the appropriate durable solution.

### **African Refugees in Moscow**

The situation for many African refugees in Moscow has not seen any improvements. The UNHCR continues to give identification cards to refugees that carry no legal weight. The police and municipal authorities mostly refuse to accept these cards leaving refugees without access to registration or social services. Many of the African refugees do not have steady jobs and usually work washing dishes for next to no pay. Due to this situation, the UN gives single men \$70 per month, which is insufficient to meet their needs. By the time a refugee pays \$50 for rent they are left with \$20 (600 rubles). Racism and abuse are daily occurrences in the lives of these refugees. The racism is so bad that Russia has “refugee accommodation centers,” the only safe areas where refugees are not afraid to venture out on the streets because they do not have to worry about harassment by police or violent skinheads. This situation is supported by reports ECDC has received from the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy. We urge the UNHCR to expedite processing those African cases eligible for resettlement as P-1 cases.

### **Eritrean Refugees in Malta**

Malta continues to experience a continuous increase in the number of refugees from the Horn of Africa especially those from Eritrea. At present, around 700 immigrants live in detention centers, while a further 1,700 are open centre residents. The high incidence of African immigration has caused suspicion, detention and hardship for many African refugees in the country. According to the Malta Media News, around 200 refugees will be resettled in the United States and that there are also plans for the U.S. government to resettle 200 immigrants from Malta every year through an initiative steered by the UNHCR. If this is true, it would provide a durable solution for African refugees in Malta. ECDC urges PRM to follow through with this plan if it is true, or adopt a similar one to refer qualified refugees as P1 cases to the U.S. resettlement program.

## **OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Refugee Admissions.** Recognizing the desperate conditions confronting so many African refugees, with special note of those almost forgotten in African urban cities and through shortfalls in meeting approved ceilings because of material support legislation, we recommend that the FY 2008 allocations for Africa be set at 35,000, with the overall ceiling accommodating a minimum of 90,000 refugees.

**UNHCR/NGO Partnerships.** ECDC urges PRM to work with UNHCR to expedite and follow-through to allow qualified NGOs to refer the many, almost invisible urban refugees in Africa for resettlement in a third country.

**Assistance for UNHCR.** Every year, the UNHCR Global Resettlement Needs document identifies refugees in Africa who are in need of resettlement in a third country. However the agency has always indicated the need to increase its capacity in order to refer all those in need of resettlement. Considering the especially difficult circumstances these refugees endure on a daily basis and the fact that the longer people remain in camps and limbo in other locations around the world, the more difficult their resettlement and integration process are later, we recommend that PRM provide assistance to UNHCR to build its capacity, so that all refugees identified to be in need of resettlement in FY 2008 could be referred.