

**STATEMENT OF DARYL GRISGRABER
FOR THE REFUGEE COUNCIL USA, MEMBERS OF THE
JOINT REGIONAL WORKING GROUP FOR AFRICA**

**AT THE PUBLIC HEARING OF THE BUREAU OF POPULATION, REFUGEES,
AND MIGRATION, DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

REGARDING THE U.S. REFUGEE PROGRAM FOR FISCAL YEAR 2008

June 11, 2008

Thank you for the opportunity to offer information relating to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program for fiscal year 2009. We appreciate PRM's ongoing partnership with RCUSA and its willingness to work together for the best possible protection for refugees worldwide. RCUSA is dedicated to ensuring that vulnerable refugees in different regions around the world have continued access to resettlement. We share with you today the Refugee Council's main concerns with regard to refugees from Africa.

In Africa, the resettlement numbers have declined while resettlement needs increase. We urge the U.S. government to increase attention to protracted refugee situations, such as those of Somalis, and of populations from eastern Democratic Republic of Congo now spread across the continent. There must also be increased efforts to address the needs of other vulnerable refugee populations, such as Eritreans in various countries and Darfuri refugees in Chad. We see a disturbing trend in South Africa and Burundi of refugee rights violations in countries of refuge. These factors are having an impact on the most fundamental rights of the displaced in various locations across the continent. The general situation in Africa merits a renewed emphasis on resettlement from the region and an increase in the admissions ceiling for African refugees that was set at 16,000 in fiscal year 2008.

In **Sudan**, we are particularly concerned about the tens of thousands of Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees who have been warehoused in the refugee camps of the east. There must be greater international attention focused on resolving this situation. These camps are some of the worst in Africa: largely neglected, overcrowded and located dangerously close to the borders of the countries from which the refugees fled. We are additionally concerned about the several thousand Ethiopians and Eritreans who remain on the former sites of recently closed camps, also in eastern Sudan, and those refugees in urban settings who do not benefit from UNHCR assistance. Assistance programs must make full use of NGOs' expertise and resources to move ahead in this complex situation.

In the absence of peacekeeping forces in Darfur, RCUSA members continue to be concerned about the protection of Sudanese refugees and the internally displaced in both Darfur and eastern Chad. Several attempts have been made to begin an evaluation and resettlement process from Chad, but have been stalled due to ongoing insecurity and administrative obstacles. As the rainy season approaches and access to the displaced becomes more difficult, protection of the displaced will become increasingly difficult as well. The transfer of refugees away from perilous areas on the Chad-Sudan border needs to be backed up by a resettlement program for those who remain in danger and for whom resettlement is an appropriate solution.

Few facilities exist in **Chad** to address the immediate physical protection and medical needs of refugees present in that country. Mentally and physically handicapped refugees, unaccompanied

minors, and others present in the refugee camps of Chad remain at significant and constant risk. In some of the twelve camps in Chad, implementing partners have identified particularly vulnerable individuals. This group includes those with medical needs, unaccompanied minors, and women at risk. In Gaga camp alone, roughly 1,000 such people have been identified. The existing lists should be cross-referenced with UNHCR registration data and resettlement processing should begin immediately for the identified individuals and groups.

In **Kenya**, we applaud UNHCR's Kenya branch office for its diligent work to increase resettlement identification and processing for a large number of vulnerable refugees in the camps in Kenya. UNHCR continues to address the needs of the large number of Somali refugees who have been present in the refugee camps of Kenya for over a dozen years. In pursuing and expanding its resettlement goals, UNHCR Kenya has made substantive efforts to build partnerships with NGOs capable of bolstering resettlement processing. These efforts should be strongly supported by the U.S. and replicated throughout the region and the continent.

NGOs operating in **Rwanda's** refugee camps have identified approximately 250 particularly vulnerable cases likely to be eligible for and in need of resettlement as the only viable durable solution. These cases include the elderly, physically handicapped individuals, unaccompanied children, child-headed households, women at risk, female-headed households, and cases with urgent medical and mental health needs. We urge immediate attention to these cases for possible legal and physical protection needs and resettlement eligibility.

In **Somalia**, ongoing conflict in and around Mogadishu, as well as in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, continues to displace Somalis who have few options for relocation. Communities of Somali refugees in the immediate region—including in Kenya, Djibouti and Yemen—remain in precarious situations. In addition to supporting humanitarian operations in the region, we urge a proactive response to the Ethiopian government in order to halt displacement and provide assistance to those currently unable to return to their homes.

We appreciate the success of the voluntary repatriation of thousands of Sudanese refugees from the refugee camps in **Ethiopia**, as well as from Kenya, Uganda and elsewhere. Over 15,000 Eritrean refugees in Kebrebegeh and Shimelba refugee camps have been recognized as in need of resettlement. These are relatively large caseloads that, with rapid processing, can result in positive durable solutions for a significant number of individuals who have been displaced for a protracted period and continue to be at risk in their country of origin. UNHCR has made significant efforts to pursue partnerships with NGOs to increase resettlement processing in the camp setting. The U.S. should make full efforts to ensure that these partnerships are solidified, implemented and replicated.

In addition, thousands of Eritreans continue to flee their country due to political and religious persecution, in particular. Many have made it to neighboring countries where their status affords them few rights and protections. In the absence of effective diplomatic relations with the government in Asmara, we encourage the U.S. to make vulnerable Eritrean refugees a protection priority. The Eritrean government's monitoring of those who leave due to persecution makes resettlement to a third country the only viable option for many Eritrean refugees in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere. Those who have fled since 2001 are especially hard-hit by the government's current policies and should be offered timely protection.

In light of the political violence in **Zimbabwe**, South Africa and Zimbabwe's other neighbors must prepare for and address the needs of refugees consistently flowing out of Zimbabwe, and they will also have to formulate contingency plans for a possible situation of mass flight. The

situation requires both domestic and international attention and action. Many are fleeing Zimbabwe to escape danger due to their political opinion, and significant numbers of those who arrive in South Africa are *bona fide* refugees in need of protection. As we have seen in South Africa of late, managing the legal and physical protection needs of refugees has acquired a new, multi-dimensional, complex character. We urge a strong stance, backed by resources, in support of the refugee population, many of whom have suffered repeated persecution, first in their country of origin and again in their country of first asylum. To that end, specific attention must be paid to those Zimbabwean refugees who are survivors of violence and torture perpetrated against them in their country of origin. The UNHCR's operations in South Africa need full support, along with encouraging the South African government to implement its asylum processes in a meaningful way. The camps that have been set up to assist and protect those fleeing xenophobic violence in South Africa must not become long-term settlements for the displaced.

While repatriations in several provinces of the **Democratic Republic of Congo** have been meeting with some success, new displacement—most notably in North Kivu—has increased the numbers of those needing humanitarian assistance. Women and children continue to account for large numbers of those displaced, and violence against women and girls remains high. RCUSA stresses meaningful protection for the displaced, with particular attention to those at risk of gender-based violence. We are also very concerned about the urgent legal and physical dangers Congolese refugees continue to face in the volatile political climate in **Burundi**, particularly those vulnerable Tutsi refugees present in the urban center of Bujumbura. Their protection needs should be immediately evaluated, addressed in terms of urgent protection needs, and subsequently assessed for resettlement processing.

A small number of 1972 Burundians remain in Nakivale refugee settlement in southern **Uganda**. These refugees are eligible for immediate resettlement processing based on prior group identification. Between two and four thousand Somali refugees are also present at Nakivale, along with up to 200 members of various minority populations who may or may not be eligible for resettlement but are nevertheless among those who have, in the past, been relevant resettlement populations and present legal and physical protection needs. We are also extremely concerned about the small number of Congolese refugee survivors of the Gatumba refugee camp massacre in Burundi who remain in Kampala without any option for local integration or repatriation. These refugees should be immediately identified and processed for resettlement.

The urban center of Lusaka in **Zambia** is home to some eight to twelve thousand refugees, many of whom are present because of immediate legal and physical protection needs they face in the camps. The majority are Congolese, and the remainder includes women at risk, unaccompanied minors, those with medical needs, and other vulnerable individuals. The resettlement of the majority of the Banyamulenge refugees in Zambia is positively noted as a success, and we additionally applaud UNHCR Zambia's interest in partnering with NGOs to increase identification, referrals and resettlement processing both in the urban setting and in the refugee camps in the West and North.

In light of the complexity and number of vulnerable refugee populations in Africa, we applaud PRM in its work and successes thus far. Areas in need of continued attention include:

- greater transparency from PRM, CIS and DHS with regard to reasons for resettlement denials;
- more comprehensive and efficient response to refugees with medical needs, including urgent processing for needy cases and increased transparency regarding acceptance and rejection reasoning; and,

- increased attention to unaccompanied minor refugees, particularly those who have not been integrated into the refugee community and those who are present in Africa's urban centers.

We further urge increased cooperation with organizations and agencies that work with relevant populations in the course of their day-to-day operations and are therefore competent to identify particularly vulnerable refugees, especially those who are eligible for resettlement processing.