

Providing Help and Hope Around the World

Ellen R. Sauerbrey

Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration



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U.S. Department of State

As I write these words, it is estimated that more than 12 million people around the world are living as refugees: people who have left their country and cannot return because of a legitimate fear of persecution based on their political or religious beliefs, their race, nationality, or membership in a social

group. There are millions more living in similar straits, people who have not crossed an international border but have been driven from their homes by conflict or discrimination.

There are many reasons for the world to be concerned with the plight of refugees. Above all, their situation reminds us that the international community must continue to address the root causes of refugee flows—intolerance and discrimination, lack of freedom and of democratic rights and principles. But alleviating the suffering of refugees, and finding solutions for them, is a humanitarian imperative.

Imagine that you, yourself, lost your home, your possessions, your livelihood, simply because of who you are. Imagine living with the uncertainty of the refugee situation—will you ever be able to go home? Where, when, how can you start your life again and build a future for your family? It is a challenge to keep hope alive in such a situation. This is why refugees in many cases are also vulnerable to recruitment into armed conflict, thus feeding a cycle of violence.

I am particularly moved by the plight of refugee children, so many of whom grow up with no knowledge of

life beyond the confines of a refugee camp.

The United States is committed to upholding the human dignity of refugees and victims of conflict around the world. This work demonstrates the generosity and compassion of the American people.

By assisting people faced with persecution and violence, we help to transform societies and support goals that are important to the entire global community: championing human rights and defusing regional conflicts.

The United States is a global leader in protecting and assisting refugees and victims of conflict. The United States has historically been the largest single-country donor to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Committee of the Red Cross, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and the International Organization for Migration. The



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Two Karen boys stand inside their temporary home at Tham Hin Refugee Camp south of Bangkok, Thailand, in August 2006. Assistant Secretary Ellen R. Sauerbrey facilitated the recent resettlement to the United States of some 2,700 such refugees from Burma.



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Workers spread a flag of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on the jetty in front of a passenger vessel chartered by ICRC to rescue passengers stranded by fighting between government forces and the Tamil Tiger rebels in Jaffna, about 240 kilometers northeast of Colombo, Sri Lanka, in August 2006.

Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) manages more than \$800 million in annual appropriations for programs that range from meeting the basic needs of displaced individuals and communities to providing lasting solutions for millions of refugees. Since World War II, more refugees have found permanent homes in the United States than in any other country.

Protecting and Assisting Vulnerable People

The U.S. Department of State supports implementing partners to help ensure both the legal and physical protection of refugees and other extremely vulnerable people in the world. Programs have included national and community education initiatives to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, a microenterprise project for trafficking victims in India, and a youth education and athletic program for Sudanese refugees from Darfur to reduce recruitment of child soldiers.

Other programs support life-sustaining and capacity-building assistance efforts that address water and sanitation, food, health, shelter, education, social and economic empowerment, and other needs. This support ranges from keeping food aid flowing to refugee camps in Kenya, to providing kitchen kits for newly displaced Colombians, to sponsoring education and skills courses for Afghan women refugees and returnees.

These activities enable victims of persecution and conflict to reclaim their lives, whether by returning home once conditions are safe, building a new life in their country of asylum, or resettling permanently in another country.

A New Beginning

In some cases, resettlement is the best option. Resettlement provides refugees with the opportunity to rebuild their lives. The United States, the world's leading resettlement country, has offered this opportunity to more than 2.6 million refugees since 1975. The president consults with Congress to determine the number of refugees who can be admitted each year. We have expanded our refugee processing capacity around the world in recent years, and the United States welcomes an increasingly diverse group of refugees. More than 40,000 refugees from 68 countries started new lives in the United States in 2005 alone. Our program is successful because of the preparation and care we take to promote opportunity and self-sufficiency for refugees once they arrive in the United States.

We have a long track record of successfully integrating refugees from all backgrounds. It is important to note that we select applicants for our program on the basis of need—we do not make selections for our program based upon level of education, job-related skills, or other such criteria. However, once refugees are selected for U.S. resettlement, every effort is made to ensure their successful integration into American life. Before leaving for the United States, they participate in an orientation program to introduce them to American culture, values, and laws.

On arrival, refugees are helped with education, language training, and job skills to give them every chance for a successful new beginning. Most refugees who come to the United States are able to find jobs and support their families. After five years, resettled refugees become eligible to apply for American citizenship, and the vast majority take this opportunity.

The work of integrating refugees is carried out by a network of public and private agencies, depending on a great deal of voluntary support. This program is a wonderful public-private partnership, and I have been deeply impressed with the dedication of people working with refugees. I think the enthusiasm with which U.S. communities welcome these new arrivals truly reflects America's belief in freedom, human rights, and equality.



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Hollywood actor and United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) Goodwill Ambassador Angelina Jolie before a meeting with India's junior minister for external affairs in New Delhi, India, in November 2006. Jolie visited the Indian capital and spent some time with Sikh Afghan and Myanmar refugees.

This faith is rewarded by the many contributions of former refugees. I have been honored to meet with many former refugees who have gone on to success in all areas and who are moved themselves to give back to the society that gave them the opportunity.

Leadership in Population Diplomacy

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration not only leads U.S. efforts to protect and assist refugees and victims of conflict, but also coordinates U.S. foreign policy on population and international migration issues.

The goal of U.S. policy is to promote healthy and educated populations. The United States supports voluntary and informed decision making regarding family planning so that all couples can achieve healthy families of the size they desire. The U.S. government provides substantial foreign assistance to improve maternal health and to combat maternal, infant, and child mortality.

Promoting Orderly and Humane Migration

People migrate for many reasons: to escape conflict, to avoid environmental degradation or natural disasters, to seek economic opportunities, or to reunite with family. Effectively managed migration is a priority of the United States, as about 20 percent of the world's estimated 191 million migrants reside here.

Through PRM, the U.S. Department of State promotes safe, lawful, orderly, and humane international migration practices by working with governments to share best practices and cooperate on a range of region-specific issues, including border security, asylum procedures, and the protection of the human rights of migrants. Among migrants, women and children are especially vulnerable to extreme exploitation, such as trafficking for labor or sex. PRM is part of a comprehensive interagency effort that works with governments and international and nongovernmental organizations in the fight against trafficking in persons.

Universal Values

Our goal in our work on behalf of refugees, and in population and migration policy, is to provide help and to provide hope. Through the work of the U.S. State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, the United States is upholding values we believe are universal, and promoting human dignity and freedom. ■

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