

Killing in the Name of the Lord



These children had been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army. Here they reenact their abduction.

Allison A. Pillsbury

Angelina Atyam last saw her daughter Charlotte four years ago. Charlotte, then 14 years old, was abducted from her school in the middle of the night by the Lord's Resistance Army, a Ugandan rebel group that is supported by Sudan. Along with 138 of her classmates, Charlotte was kidnapped from Saint Mary's College, a Catholic girls' school in northern Uganda, and forced to march at gunpoint to nearby Sudan. They joined thousands of other children, aged between eight and 18, who have been taken by the rebels and forced to become soldiers, slaves and "wives."

"The last information I have received about my daughter came over a year ago," says Angelina Atyam. "She was last seen in Sudan in January 1999 with a baby. Both of them are in a poor state of health. I have learned from others that my daughter was given to a very cruel commander and she is often beaten for no apparent reason. I have waited for four years in vain to be reunited with my daughter."

According to UNICEF, at least 12,000 Ugandan children have been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in the past 14 years. Many children are forced to witness the killing of family members and friends and the destruction of their homes. More than 4,000 have escaped to tell tales of brutality at the hands of the LRA, but most of the children are either dead or still captive.

Parents conduct international campaign

Following the abduction of her daughter, Angelina Atyam founded the Concerned Parents Association, an organization that has conducted an international campaign to pressure the rebel army and the government of Sudan to free the abducted children. But despite meeting *(continued on page 6)*

Behind Locked Doors: Abuse of Refugee Women at the Krome Detention Center

"The INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) has rules and policies, but they don't follow them," Bernadette* told the Women's Commission. "They treat us like animals. ... They degraded me so badly. ... We knew there were only two ways out of Krome, deportation or suicide. When you want freedom so badly, you'll do desperate things."

Twenty-five miles from downtown Miami, hundreds of men and women are languishing at the infamous Krome detention center, awaiting deportation or a determination of their asylum claims. Some have been there for months, even years.

Ever since it was opened in 1980, human rights groups have been issuing reports of chronically poor conditions and misconduct at Krome, one of the largest "service processing centers" run by the INS. Located at the edge of the Everglades in a former missile base next to an active firing range, Krome is a desolate place.

In March 2000, as part of its ongoing investigation of detention of women and children seeking asylum, the Women's Commission sponsored a delegation to assess conditions at Krome. While the Commission identified some problems, it also determined that the INS had made some progress in improving the facility.

Following that delegation, however, several events were reported that deepened our concern about INS detention practices in Florida. As a result, we returned to Miami in September to reevaluate the situation.

Sexual abuse and harassment widespread

In summer 2000, numerous reports of sexual misconduct and other abuses surfaced at Krome. Allegations ranged from rape by an INS officer of an asylum seeker, forcing women to strip and perform sexual acts for officers, *(continued on page 2)*

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Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

An independent organization formed with the assistance of the International Rescue Committee to advocate for the solution of problems affecting refugee women and children.

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Krome

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officers trading sex with detainees for favors, and officers establishing relationships with detainees after their release. Women who refused to participate or dared to complain reported that INS officers would threaten them with deportation or transfer to a county jail. Those who cooperated were told they would be released from detention.

More than twenty women are involved, several of whom have lodged complaints. At least 15 guards and one Public Health Service officer have been implicated. At least one of these guards was the subject of similar allegations in the early 1990s, but no disciplinary actions or criminal charges were brought against him.

Verbal and physical harassment of asylum seekers at the facility is also reported to be widespread. Guards scream at the Chinese detainees and collectively refer to them as "China." When asylum seekers filed a complaint against one guard, they were told not to pursue it or they would not be released after their credible fear interviews. A Somali asylum seeker was reportedly denied meals for several days because she would not remove her veil before eating.

Department of Justice orders investigation

The Justice Department has assigned the Office of the Inspector General, the FBI, the U.S. Attorneys Office, and the Office of Public Integrity to investigate the charges. One guard has been arrested for rape and another arrested for accepting bribes. More arrests may be imminent. A grand jury has been convened twice and more may be scheduled.

Other problems surface at Krome

In March, INS told the Women's Commission it was regularly releasing asylum seekers who had been found to have a credible fear of persecution in their homelands. While this was a distinct improvement over the prolonged detention experienced by asylum seekers held in Florida detention centers in past years, it was also clear that these releases were the result of bed space concerns in the Krome facility rather than determinations based on the merits of each individual's case.

Since March, however, the release of asylum seekers has become more inconsistent. Some asylum seekers are now being transferred to county prisons outside of Florida. Attorneys reported that their clients are being transferred to the New Orleans Parish Prison and the York County Prison, both facilities about which the Women's Commission has voiced grave concerns regarding conditions. Other women have been moved to jails in Minnesota. Such transfers mean that women are being held for much longer periods of time and have been cut off from their legal representatives. The Commission was told that some Somali women who were moved to New Orleans were knocked to the ground by prison guards because they refused to remove their veils.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: At the time of publication, the women at Krome had been moved to the Turner Guilford Knight county jail in Miami. The Women's Commission has raised concerns that this transfer is unnecessarily punitive and further isolates the women from legal assistance. The Women's Commission continues to advocate for the women's release.

In recent months, the Women's Commission has undertaken delegations to Burma/Thailand, Serbia/Montenegro and Burundi. Full reports will be available on our website at www.womenscommission.org.

Burma/Thailand

The impact of decades of military repression on the population of Burma has been devastating. Hundreds of thousands of Burmese have been displaced by the government's suppression of ethnic insurgencies and of the pro-democracy movement. Women and girls flee or are trafficked into Thailand to work in the sex industry, in factories or as domestic workers. HIV/AIDS has reached epidemic proportions inside Burma and Burmese living in Thailand are being infected at an alarming rate.

The delegation met with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, General Secretary of the National League for Democracy, and discussed with her the provision of humanitarian assistance within Burma. She told the delegation that only political change can finally help the homeless and exploited displaced peoples of Burma. Aung San Suu Kyi agreed that the extreme severity of the AIDS crisis in Burma requires an urgent public education effort, for which international assistance will be needed.

Serbia/Montenegro

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is in transition: a new government is in place and is moving from dictatorship to democracy. A new attitude prevails, one of optimism and energy for building a new future for a country that was an international pariah for much of the last ten years. This should be an opportunity for more than 700,000 refugees and internally displaced people to decide their own futures. It is imperative that refugee and internally displaced women and youth have some say in making decisions about long-term solutions for themselves and their families.

The major challenge for FRY and the international community is to find durable solutions for the families and individuals who left their homes, neighborhoods and countries. In considering long-term solutions for individuals and families, the FRY will need to come to terms with its role in the wars in the Balkans, and incorporate democratic institutions which respect the rights of minorities, women and all people.

Burundi

The conflict in Burundi has lasted for over 30 years, with the most recent crisis developing in 1993. Negotiations for a lasting peace are now underway, with a peace agreement signed by most, but significantly not all, parties to the conflict in August 2000. This agreement remains fragile and could collapse at any time.

Women play an important role in Burundi's fledgling peace process, but feel insufficiently represented at the negotiating table, despite women's involvement in a multitude of projects promoting peace and reconciliation at the grassroots level. The Women's Commission delegation recommended greater participation for women in the negotiations, along with recognition of their contributions to peace. There is a critical need to support local Burundian NGOs providing much-needed peace and reconciliation programs, including multi-ethnic income generation projects.

Carmen Valenzuela

Carmen Valenzuela calls herself one of Guatemala's "real elite," but only because she was one of just a few women of her generation to have a university education. In all other ways she had to struggle—whether it was against discrimination as she pursued her medical studies or against the limitations of a poorly funded health service when she qualified as a pediatrician. Her daily contact with poverty and pain pushed her into political activism and in 1990 she was kidnapped and tortured by secret intelligence officers seeking information about her "illegal" activities. She was held for eight days in a government prison until an international campaign secured her release and she fled to the US.

Carmen's life as a refugee in the US was not easy, although she threw herself into her studies and her work with homeless children. In 1994 she attained what she calls "one of my best achievements," the birth of her only son Diego, but as a single mother alone in a foreign country, she yearned for the love and support of her distant family and home.

"Being a refugee ... was not a pleasant experience. I always missed the social, personal and professional life that had taken me 35 years to build in my home country," she recalls.

Carmen became a consultant for the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and a board member of the Guatemala Human Rights Commission in Washington, D.C. Last year she joined the Women's Commission's Board of Directors.

"I have brought to the Women's Commission mostly my personal experience as a refugee, a torture survivor and activist on women's rights," she says of her work with the Commission.

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Beijing Plus Five: Women Gather to Assess Progress

For five days in June thousands of women (and men) gathered at United Nations headquarters in New York for a Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, *Women 2000: Gender, Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century*. Commonly referred to as *Beijing Plus 5*, the session assessed progress made in the five years since the *Fourth UN Conference on Women*.

Caucus on uprooted women

During the session, the Women's Commission, with support from several organizations, hosted a daily Caucus on Uprooted Women, where attendees—from more than 25 countries—produced a Caucus statement. Reflecting concerns of the group members, the statement emphasizes that states and other actors must address the needs of internally displaced women, the impact of long-term displacement, and sexual violence. Caritas Sebushahu, a Burundian refugee living in Tanzania, presented the statement to the UN session in the ad hoc plenary on the last day of the conference.

Women's Commission supports attendance of refugee women

Caritas Sebushahu of Burundi, Betty Ochana and Santa Oyet from Uganda, and Mangala Sharma, a refugee from Bhutan, attended the UN conference and NGO sessions with support from the Women's Commission. The sessions provided an opportunity for the women to advocate particular concerns: Caritas spoke informally with a documentary film crew on sexual violence in Burundi and in Tanzanian camps; Betty arranged a meeting with the UN Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict. They also got to network with other advocates. The Women's Commission also worked with the Refugee Women's Network and its delegation—including Commission Board Member Xuan Nguyen-Sutter.

Caritas Sebushahu writes:

It was a big honor of an unprecedented kind for me to have been selected and invited to attend such a prominent conference.

It gave me hope, as well as my compatriot refugees in general and refugee women in particular, that the world around us is out to share the plight of women.

Beijing + 5 unveiled the most important element in the human relationships today: powerful women committed to defending women's rights by promoting and advocat-

ing gender equality. "The voices of the voiceless!"

Taking part in some of the caucus sessions was an opportunity to realize that many participants were refugees, like me, and are determined to do their level best to abate violence directed to women and girls. I also discovered that there are similarities between trafficking in women and girls in some countries and forced marriages, early marriages that plague our refugee camps. My attending B+5 broadened my mind and I feel I am in a position to advocate strongly for women's and girls' rights and to promote gender equality. I was revitalized to have an opportunity to exchange news and views with my colleagues around the world dealing with prevention and stopping sexual and gender-based violence, as well as assistance to survivors of this kind of violence.

The idea of engendering the peace process in the case of Burundi is connected to the B+5 demand to politicians to include women (refugees and displaced) in peace negotiations as valuable partners in decision-making. When I briefed women refugees about B+5, they advised that I represent them in the Arusha Peace Talks (July and August, 2000) where I felt really comfortable sharing and discussing issues related to gender with Burundian women. B+5 gave me a lot of inspiration.

Mangala Sharma writes:

In many situations, refugee organizations like ours—Bhutanese Refugee Aiding the Victims of Violence (BRAVVE) and the Tibetan Women's Association—are not recognized by the UN. Both our organizations were rejected from being accredited [to the Beijing Plus Five conference]. The Women's Commission's role is vital in situations like this; they could be our eyes and ears. Having attended both the conferences (Beijing in 1995 and Beijing Plus 5), I felt the role of international NGOs like the Women's Commission could be expanded. Their expertise and resources could be utilized in organizing preparatory meetings at the field level, and may form a regional refugee women's forum where issues are discussed and finally brought to UN meetings. Many a time, people in the field are not aware of what is happening in the UN and how to find your way.

Raising the issues of refugee and IDP women

Maha Muna, Women's Commission deputy director, worked closely with the Rwandan delegation of government and NGO representatives to Beijing Plus 5, introducing members to policy makers and potential donors. The Women's Commission also hosted panels on internally displaced persons, and gender and reconstruction of Southeastern Europe. Both panels had presentations by

refugee women and adolescents, senior UN and government representatives, and NGOs. The Women's Commission collaborated with the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on a panel featuring three women from conflict areas, including Afghanistan and Colombia. Mary Diaz, director of the Women's Commission, chaired a UNHCR-sponsored panel featuring the new UNHCR Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women/Gender Equity, Joyce Mends Cole, a former Women's Commission board member.

In addition, the Women's Commission joined the Urgent Action Fund and Kvinna Til Kvinna (Women to Women, a Swedish foundation) in launching the *Gender Audit of South Eastern Europe*. The report makes the case that by omitting a gender perspective from the 1995 Dayton Agreement and the immediate follow-up, the international community greatly undermined its own effort to rebuild Bosnia. The report found that the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) had generally failed to "mainstream gender" into its own administration and the transitional government of Kosovo. This had undermined both the capacity of Kosovar women's groups and their willingness to work with UNMIK.

The report was released (in Albanian) a few weeks later in Pristina, Kosovo at a regional women's conference. (For the full text, visit the reports page of the Women's Commission website, www.womenscommission.org.)

United Nations Security Council Holds Historic Debate on Women, Peace and Security

At an unprecedented debate on the impact of war on women in October, the UN Security Council acknowledged women's vital role in ending conflict. On October 23, the Security Council heard testimonies from prominent women from war-torn countries, including Sierra Leone and Somalia, and put questions to experts from humanitarian and human rights organizations. An NGO Working Group on Women and International Peace and Security, comprised of Amnesty International, the Hague Appeal for Peace, International Alert, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, made recommendations to the Security Council, including:

- Consulting and including women's groups in peace negotiations
- Training peacekeepers to be aware of the special situation of women
- Promoting more women to senior UN positions in

conflict areas

The following day, Council members held an open session, at which government representatives and UN agency staff made statements about women in war. So many governments wanted to speak, the session was continued for a second day.

Security Council resolution 1325, adopted unanimously on October 31, 2000, calls upon all parties to armed conflict to fully respect international law applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls—especially civilians—and to take special measures to ensure their protection and particular needs. It recognizes the need to respect the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps and settlements, and the need to take into account gender considerations there, as well as in planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

The resolution calls for Security Council missions to take into account gender considerations and the rights of women, including through consultation with local and international women's groups.

The Council requested the Secretary-General to provide to Member States training guidelines and materials on the protection, rights and particular needs of women, as well as on the importance of involving women in all peacekeeping and peace-building measures.

For more details, and copies of statements, please see the advocacy page of our website, www.womenscommission.org.

High Commissioner Lauds Women's Commission Presentation at UN Meeting

The Women's Commission co-sponsored a presentation at the Executive Committee meeting of the UNHCR in Geneva in October. Five women—from Colombia, Burma, Sierra Leone, Burundi and Kosovo—shared their stories of forced exile, internal displacement and return. Binta Mansaray from Sierra Leone and Naung Htet Thu from Burma spoke about the need to reduce sexual and gender-based violence and improve women's access to health care in refugee-impacted areas.

In her closing remarks at the conference, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata recognized the event, saying, "The roundtable discussion was a welcome break from the formality of the proceedings in this room. By all accounts, the frank and refreshing exchange with refugee women was a highlight of this session, as the voices of refugees have been missing from our deliberations. I encourage you to retain and build upon these initiatives."



Uganda

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with President and Hillary Clinton, Vice President and Mrs. Gore, and high-level ministers, United Nations officials and activists, little progress has been made.

“Our objectives are the immediate and unconditional release of all the children and a halt to abductions,” says Ms. Atyam. “We want the rehabilitation and re-integration of former abductees, with an emphasis on education. We want peace for all of Uganda.”

The Concerned Parents Association has more than 500 parents and family members. Although many were afraid to speak out at first, they realized they could not keep quiet if they wanted their children back. The association works to restore children to their communities and, with the community, to accept the children, restore their physical and psychological health, and help them go to school.

They advocate forgiveness and reconciliation. “While we should be demanding justice we are calling for forgiveness,” says Ms. Atyam, “because we know that 85 percent of the rebel army is made up of our own abducted children.”

TAKE ACTION: Please write letters to your representatives to urge them to put pressure on Sudan to release the children abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army. This letter is available to copy and paste on the advocacy page of our website at www.womenscommission.org. Please send copies to: Ben Hoffman, Director Conflict Resolution Program, The Carter Center, One Copenhill, Atlanta, GA 30307. The Center is working to negotiate a peace agreement between Sudan and Uganda.

The Honorable _____
The United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Making a Commitment to Children

The Women’s Commission was an active participant at the first International Conference on War-Affected Children, hosted by the Canadian government in Winnipeg, Canada from September 11-17. During the first two days of the conference, youth from war zones around the world gathered; for the following three days experts, including nongovernmental organizations, UN and government representatives, met; and for two days government Ministers and representatives came together.

At a press conference during the experts meeting Jane Lowicki, senior coordinator of the Women’s Commission’s Children and Adolescents Project, presented preliminary findings from the Commission’s recent study conducted by and about youth in Kosovo. More than a year after the peace accord and NATO’s entry into Kosovo, reported Ms. Lowicki, young people of all ethnic backgrounds still rank security and psychosocial recovery from war as their top concerns. The study calls for the needs of youth—particularly “at-risk” youth who are not finding adequate support—to be addressed through programming initiatives and strong action to build ethnic tolerance and prevent increased acts of violence committed against, and by, youth. The study underlines the need to develop the constructive capacities of young people to become strong civil society actors and calls on international and local support for youth to be deepened and sustained. Kosovar youth Amir Haxhikadrija and Hekuran Soba, with whom Ms. Lowicki had worked on the project, and Jeta Dumnica also spoke at the conference.

During the experts meeting, Ms. Lowicki also gave a presentation on war-affected adolescents and Mary Diaz, executive director of the Women’s Commission, moderated a panel on gender and conflict. Allison A. Pillsbury, project manager, Children and Adolescents Project, participated in a meeting with government, UN and NGO officials to ensure the release of abducted children from northern Uganda and halt all abductions (see article, page 1). As a result of this meeting, the Women’s Commission has joined with other NGOs to form a coalition for the children affected by conflict in northern Uganda.

The Women’s Commission took a lead in organizing and running an NGO meeting the day before the experts meeting began. More than 75 NGO delegates from around the world worked together to identify priorities for and beyond the Winnipeg conference. One of the main outcomes of the NGO meetings was a commitment to continue working together through on-going international networking.

The NGOs produced an NGO Action Plan, *Peace is Every Child’s Right*, which was acknowledged as the strongest and most specific proposal for action that came out of the conference. It will be a working document for NGOs, leading into the September 2001 UN Special Session on Children.

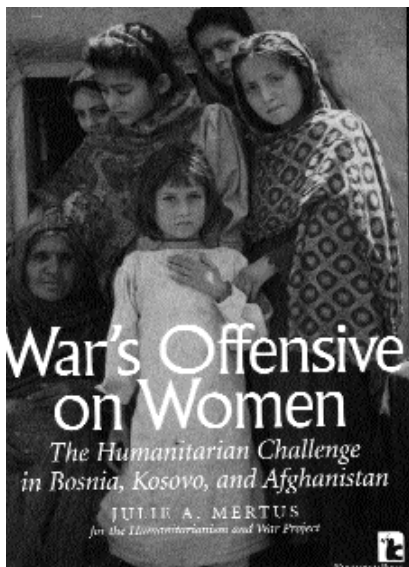
WOMEN'S COMMISSION ANNOUNCEMENTS

Carmen Valenzuela

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Carmen is now back in Guatemala working for PAHO and the Population Council, focusing on reproductive health issues among the Mayan people. She is happy to be home again and welcomes the political stability after the severe repression of the 1980s. But Carmen still sees the residue of forty years of war every day in her health work with women and children and worries for the future of her homeland.

Her advice to young women—wherever they are in the world—is to get an education, “to first of all get out of ignorance, which is the quickest way to poverty and illness.”



War's Offensive on Women by Julie Mertus, who has worked as a consultant with the Women's Commission, is available from the Kumarian Press at 800.289.2664, kpbooks@aol.com or www.kpbooks.com

Giving Options

We can now accept credit card contributions on-line at www.womenscommission.org.

We also accept contributions of stock. Please contact Ellen Jorgensen at 212.551.3115 or ellen@theIRC.org

Planned gifts

Planned gifts lay the groundwork for the future financial stability of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. Your future gift—in the form of a bequest or other deferred gift—will help ensure that there will always be a voice speaking out on behalf of women, adolescents and children uprooted by persecution and conflict.

Please consider providing for the Women's Commission in your estate plans.

I would like to be a part of the Women's Commission's future work.

I have remembered the Women's Commission in my estate planning.

I/we wish to be acknowledged in any Women's Commission publication as:

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Address: _____

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Email: _____

For further information, please contact Ellen Jorgensen, Director of Development, at 212-551-3115 or ellen@theIRC.org

Gift Memberships

Introduce a friend, colleague or relative to the Women's Commission with a gift membership. For your \$35 contribution, we will send the new member a letter informing her/him of your gift, an information packet, and newsletters and periodic updates for one year. You will receive an acknowledgement for your tax records.

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Krome

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Report calls for reform

In October the Women's Commission released its report on the situation at Krome, "Behind Locked Doors: Abuse of Refugee Women at the Krome Detention Center." The report calls for the INS to regain control of the facility and to ensure that staff who have participated in illegal activity and unethical behavior be criminally prosecuted or subject to appropriate disciplinary actions. The Commission continues to advocate that the INS release from detention any asylum seeker who has established a credible fear of persecution, and that the agency develop alternative sites for detaining those women who cannot be paroled.

"The abuses at Krome are a direct result of the INS's total failure to implement a generous parole policy for asylum seekers and a detention system that respects the rights of detained individuals." commented Wendy Young, Director of Government Relations and U.S. Programs for the Women's Commission. "The agency must immediately regain control of Krome and holding abusive officers accountable for their actions."

The report is available at ww.womenscommission.org or by contacting us.

* The women's names have been changed to protect their safety.

TAKE ACTION: We encourage you to write to your congressional representatives urging them to enact legislation to overhaul the INS detention system.

Luncheon 2000

The Women's Commission honored the Colombia Children's Movement for Peace, Al Jana/Arab Resource Center for Popular Arts from Lebanon and the Kitgum District Concerned Women's Association from Uganda for their work with refugee and displaced children at its annual Voices of Courage awards luncheon in June. *Marie Claire* magazine received an award for its efforts to bring critical issues affecting refugees and asylum seekers to public attention. Awards were presented by supermodel Iman and singer Angelique Kidjo. The event was hosted by Cherry Jones.

Staff Updates

The Women's Commission welcomes **Rachel Watson** as its new media liaison, and welcomes back **Marta Bekele**, former administrative assistant, as program specialist. We are sorry to say goodbye to **Sam Mei**, our grants manager, who has taken a position as director of finance at the Parks Council in New York, and **Minh-Thu Pham**, our one-year Hart Fellow who worked on our asylum and detention project and US government relations.

Website

Our thanks go out to middle school student Gershon Dublon, who once again dedicated much of his summer vacation to helping us update our website. Thanks also to web designer Kirstin Chappell, who gave our site a new look, and to Adobe Gifts in Kind for its donation of software to build and maintain our site. Please visit our site to find reports, news and general information about the Women's Commission and refugee issues: www.womenscommission.org.



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Refugee Women and Children**

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