

20 Years of Making Refugee Women, Children

A Short History of the Women's Refugee Commission



Top: Founding Director Mary Anne Schwalbe in Sudan.

Above: Co-Founder Liv Ullmann with Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong.

1989

Under the auspices of the International Rescue Committee, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children is founded by Liv Ullmann, Catherine O'Neill, Susan Stark Alberti and Susan Forbes Martin, with Mary Anne Schwalbe as the founding director.

The Afghan Women's Social Service Center, offering training and literacy programs to refugees in Pakistan, is founded following the first delegation to Pakistan.

1990

Helps craft the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) policy on the protection of refugee women.

1991

First U.S. organization to call for an international ban on the use of anti-personnel landmines.

1992

Reports that rape has become a weapon of war following a mission to Bosnia and Croatia. Rape is later recognized as a crime of genocide under international law.

1993

Participates in the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna.

1994

UNHCR policy on the protection of refugee women becomes official U.S. government policy, thanks to our successful advocacy campaign.

Mary Diaz becomes executive director of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

The landmark report *Refugee Women and Reproductive Health Care: Reassessing Priorities* results in the dramatic growth of the number of programs for refugees that address sexual violence, family planning and HIV/AIDS.

Participates in the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development.

Co-sponsors the first international conference to consider the special needs of unaccompanied refugee and internally displaced children.

Undertakes domestic delegations to jails in New Orleans, Mississippi and Virginia, where women from the *Golden Venture* are detained. The ship, smuggling 286 Chinese into the U.S., ran aground in Far Rockaway, New York City.

1995

Plays a critical role in developing guidelines released by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service to recognize rape, domestic abuse and sexual violence against women as potential grounds for asylum.

and Young People Safe, Healthy and Self-Reliant



Top: The Women's Refugee Commission sent a delegation to the 1995 fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Center: Mary Diaz served as executive director from 1994 to 2004.

Above: Vanessa Redgrave participated in a delegation to a women's detention center in Pennsylvania.

In conjunction with refugee women on our board, we help found the Refugee Women's Network, which provides leadership training for refugee women across the U.S.

Helps launch and coordinates the Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium (now the Reproductive Health Response in Conflict Consortium) to improve provision of reproductive health services in refugee settings.

Participates in the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women.

1996

Successfully advocates for President Clinton to authorize a \$5 million grant for a Bosnian Women's Initiative administered by UNHCR. The grant provided loans for Bosnian women to establish small businesses and receive skills training.

Holds a sold-out benefit reading on Broadway of Eve Ensler's *Necessary Targets*, with Meryl Streep, Anjelica Huston, Cherry Jones and Calista Flockhart.

1997

The report *Liberty Denied* draws attention to the special concerns of asylum-seeking women who are being held in U.S. detention centers and is the first to push for reforms.

1998

In response to our advocacy, the Immigration and Naturalization Service issues new guidelines for children seeking asylum in the U.S.

1999

Plays a critical role in a coalition effort to ensure adequate protection in the U.S. for women asylum seekers who have fled gender persecution.

2000

Publishes *Untapped Potential: Adolescents Affected by Armed Conflict, A Review of Policy and Programs*, the first worldwide study on this issue.

With Columbia University, organizes "Findings on the Reproductive Health of Refugees and Displaced Persons," the first large-scale international conference on this issue.

With other nongovernmental organizations, initiates UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security to address the devastating impact of war on women.

2001

Creates the Afghan Women's Fund to make grants to local Afghan women's groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Co-sponsors, with UNHCR, the international Refugee Women's Consultation, which marked the first time refugee women were invited to attend a UNHCR meeting. Subsequently, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees releases the "Five Commitments to Refugee Women."

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of Family Detention Center That Critics Liken t

There is only one other family detention center in the country, the 60 Family Shelter Care Facility near Ft....



Gary Mead, an Immigration and Customs official, left, speaking yesterday at the Detention Center for illegal immigrants. Detainees, right, wear uniforms that officials c...

Friday that "I don't think this should be incarcerated at all." "If they can put an ankle bracelet on Martha Stewart to the show's run off to Jamaica," said a protester. Jane Orin, a computer technician, "they can find ways to do it for immigrant families."

Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials who traveled from Washington to lead the tour with company staff members showed off one of the 11 dormitory areas, or pods, lined by bare paneled detainee rooms, each with a metal bunk bed, a sink and a toilet. The rooms are not locked at night, but a laser beam alerts guards if anyone leaves a room after bedtime -- 9 p.m. for children and 10 for adults. The detainees wear outfits of green and blue, which Duany Corrado, a spokesman for the corrections company, blamed to scrub out critics described as prison garb. Officials say steps at the center

2002

Successfully advocates for Congress to transfer custody of unaccompanied refugee children in the U.S. from the Immigration and Naturalization Service to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, a social services agency.

2003

As a result of our advocacy, in partnership with others, Congress introduces the Women and Children in Armed Conflict Protection Act, the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act and the Widows and Orphans Act to support new initiatives to improve the lives of refugee women and children.

2004

The groundbreaking *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies* examines the massive gaps in education for refugee and displaced children around the world.

Carolyn Makinson becomes executive director of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

2005

Youth Speak Out: New Voices on the Protection and Participation of Young People Affected by Armed Conflict provides a unique overview of the problems and challenges young people face during and after armed conflict and offers youth-driven solutions for addressing these problems.

Publishes *Masculinities: Male Roles and Male Involvement in the Promotion of Gender Equality* as part of our project to "mainstream" age, gender and diversity into the work of UNHCR to promote equal access and opportunities for refugee women, men, girls and boys.

2006

Beyond Firewood: Fuel Alternatives and Protection Strategies for Displaced Women and Girls is the first in-depth report on the sexual violence that women and girls face when they leave refugee camps to collect firewood, and also explores the alternatives to firewood.

Produces and distributes "What Happens When I Go to Immigration Court?," a first-of-a-kind educational video with an accompanying manual to orient immigrant children to U.S. immigration court.

Plays a leading role in founding the Reproductive Health Access, Information and Services in Emergencies (RAISE) Initiative, which is catalyzing change in how reproductive health is addressed in emergency response.

2007

Your Right to Education: A Handbook for Refugees and Displaced Communities, along with the innovative human rights booklet *The Right to Education during Displacement*, raises awareness of everyone's right to education through drawings that readers at all levels can understand.

Ensures the voices of young people are included in the Graça Machel 10-year follow-up report to the UN on children in armed conflict by submitting information from youth in northern Uganda.



Top: The Women's Refugee Commission gets media attention on critical issues.

Above: Carolyn Makinson has led the Women's Refugee Commission since 2004.



Top: Women's Refugee Commission and UNICEF staff in Uganda.



Above: Parabolic solar cookers in Nepal. Solar cookers are just one alternative to firewood in refugee camps.

Below: The Women's Refugee Commission turns 20 and gets a new name.



2008

Locking Up Family Values: The Detention of Immigrant Families results in significant improvements in 2008 at the largest U.S. family detention center.

Disabilities among Refugees and Conflict-affected Populations is the first global study on problems faced by refugees with disabilities. A companion resource kit guides on-the-ground workers to ensure that refugees with disabilities can access the services they need.

Guidance produced by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Safe Access to Firewood and alternative Energy in Humanitarian Settings is endorsed by IASC, putting in place the foundation of a coordinated global strategy for addressing fuel needs at the start of all new emergencies.

As part of the Beyond Firewood Program, hosts the first-ever international conference to bring together the developers, users and funders of alternative cooking technologies.

Co-leads the development of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Teacher Compensation Guidance Notes, which will help ensure teachers affected by crises are paid a regular, fair wage.

In partnership with Columbia University, publishes a report and market assessment toolkit linking vocational training programs to market opportunities for young people in northern Uganda.

2009

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children officially changes its name to the Women's Refugee Commission.

Publishes *Halfway Home: Unaccompanied Children in Immigration Custody*, a landmark study of the conditions of care and confinement for children in immigration proceedings without a parent or guardian.

Brings our 15 refugee youth advisors from around the world to meet for the first time in Istanbul, Turkey, for strategic planning and to participate in the INEE Global Consultation.

Building Livelihoods: A Field Manual for Practitioners in Humanitarian Settings is a first-of-its-kind manual to guide humanitarian agencies in providing economic opportunities for refugees. The manual will be published in May 2009.

Releases *Top Ten Critical Needs Facing Refugees and Those Displaced in Emergencies*.