# Women's Refugee Commission
# A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

December 2009

For 20 years, the Women's Refugee Commission has worked tirelessly and advocated vigorously to make life better for millions of displaced women, children and young people—their courage and resilience inspire us every day. **Your steadfast support over the years has made it all possible.**

As I reflect on what we've accomplished in our 20th anniversary year, I would like to share with you the stories of **three exceptional individuals who inspired me in 2009.** *Each has touched my life and work in a special way.*

**Mariatu Kamara**—I first met Mariatu in May before she accepted our Voices of Courage Award, and I was immediately struck by the way she carried herself—with a determination and self-confidence that belied her years. Once you know her story, you'll see why both qualities were necessary ingredients for the challenging journey that led Mariatu from her home country to her current home in Toronto, Canada.

Mariatu's voice is truly one of courage. When she was 12, young rebels in Sierra Leone captured her and cut off both her hands. Today, at 22, Mariatu is a college student, studying to become a counselor for abused women and children.

In her memoir, *The Bite of the Mango,* she wrote: "I may not have hands but I have a voice….The heart of my country is the heart of the people who helped me see myself not as a victim but as someone who could still do great things in this world." ***I am awed by people like Mariatu, whose lives have been turned upside down through conflict and displacement—and who persevere with conviction and grace.***

Nick Obot speaking to farmers in northern Uganda.

**Nick Obot—**I met Nick in July at a livelihoods workshop we led in Nairobi, Kenya, where we provided humanitarian workers with hands-on training on new approaches for economic self-sufficiency. Nick, whose family had been displaced during decades of civil war in northern Uganda, did nothing less than help to rebuild agriculture in his home region. Working with his colleagues, he convinced farmers to return to their once-abandoned land and helped them realize that they could mill crops such as rice locally—saving huge road tolls, taxes and transportation costs.

More…

Now equipped with two diesel-powered rice mills bought with funding from the Women's Refugee Commission, formerly displaced farmers have been able to save money *and* increase their returns. ***Nick showed me that innovative thinking turned into action can literally change a village, and that our efforts can help bring stability to war-torn communities.***

Liv Ullmann with Voices of Courage honoree Mariatu Kamara.

**Liv Ullmann**—Twenty years ago, actress/director Liv Ullmann co-founded our organization; today, she continues to be our rock and inspiration. From early missions in which she met with women and girls in refugee camps in Hong Kong to her current passion for protecting the lives of women and girls who risk rape when they collect firewood, Liv has given us a beautifully caring window into the lives of refugees we serve but often do not see.

Whether it's the 12-year-old girl in Chad who risks attack when she fetches firewood to cook a meal for her family or the 30-year-old mother in Nepal learning to distill oils so she no longer has to travel three days to take plants to market, Liv intuitively *knows* the people whose lives we're working to improve. ***Liv's passion for this most vulnerable population informs the work we do every day.***

Although you may not know Mariatu, Nick or Liv personally, I hope they inspire you, too.

**We are most grateful for your past support. As we come to the end of 2009, we hope you will help us once again, because there is so much yet to do.**

With more than 40 million people displaced around the globe, the need for sound policies and effective programs to improve the lives of refugee and asylum-seeking women, children and young people is greater than ever before.

**Your gift today to the Women's Refugee Commission can transform lives.**

Please read the insert below for more information on our accomplishments in 2009 and our plans for 2010.

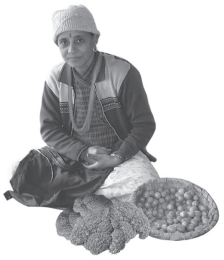
Wishing you and yours all the best in the new year,

Carolyn Makinson
Executive Director

Women's Refugee Commission
Research. Rethink. Resolve.

# Making an Impact in 2009

Our 20th anniversary year, 2009, has been a banner year. Since early January, when we launched our new name and logo, our programs have continued to gain traction and have a significant impact in the field. Some highlights are listed here. You can read much more at: womensrefugeecommission.org.



**Building livelihoods, creating economic opportunities**

- In May, we released *Building Livelihoods: A Field Manual for Practitioners in Humanitarian Settings.* This first-of-its-kind, comprehensive "how-to" manual, based on two years of field research, will help practitioners working in refugee settings to design and implement more effective economic interventions for displaced people. More than 1,500 copies of the manual have been distributed or downloaded, and so far, we have taught more than 150 humanitarian workers how to use the manual.

**Helping displaced youth become self-reliant**

- In partnership with Columbia University, we developed a "Market Assessment Toolkit," to assist vocational training providers and youth in gathering information on local market demand and translating it into improved programming. In March, the toolkit was field tested in northern Uganda, and it is now being requested and used by many operational agencies globally and referenced by donors, such as the World Bank, as good practice.

**Keeping women and girls safe when collecting firewood**

- In April we launched global guidance to ensure safe access to cooking fuel in humanitarian settings, specifying who needs to do what when to protect the safety and health of displaced women and children. So far, we have conducted workshops on these guidelines for hundreds of humanitarian workers around the world.
- The UN Secretary General included language on the links between fuel and firewood and sexual violence in his report on Security Council Resolution 1820 on women, peace and security.

**Providing reproductive health care at the start of an emergency**

- We worked to ensure that the Minimal Initial Service Package (MISP) and comprehensive reproductive health care were integrated into the Health Cluster guide for humanitarian health response, released in June, and the revised Inter-agency Standing Committee HIV/AIDS guidelines, released in October.
- Throughout the year we worked to improve reproductive health services by doing assessments in Jordan, northern Uganda, and Thailand, offering recommendations to practitioners and policy makers.

**Fighting for fair treatment of asylum-seekers**

- Our 2007 report and sustained follow-up advocacy played a significant role in the U.S. government's decision to stop holding immigrant families at the notorious T. Don Hutto detention center in Taylor, Texas.
- We provided crucial input to the Administration on immigration detention reform, including on alternatives to detention, implementation of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and issues involving family separation and termination of parental custody due to immigration detention and deportation.

WOMEN'S REFUGEE COMMISSION

# Our 2010 Action Plan

**In 2010 we will:**

### Promote economic opportunities

- Conduct a series of workshops for humanitarian workers in five countries to help humanitarian workers create effective market-based livelihood programs that reduce women's vulnerability to sexual violence—an all-too-common byproduct of women's involvement in the workforce. We will advocate with policy makers to adopt our recommendations and will urge donors to fund market-based livelihood programs that better protect displaced women and young people.

### Improve life for displaced people with disabilities

- Promote the development and adoption of a new policy on refugees with disabilities by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that will be a key mechanism for ensuring that refugees with disabilities are identified and have access to humanitarian assistance and services.

- Work with dozens of field-based agencies in three countries to implement our 2008 disabilities resource toolkit. Then we will advocate for global adoption of measures that will improve the lives of refugees with disabilities.

### Promote education and jobs for refugee youth

- Test promising practices in pilot projects to determine models for meeting the educational needs of young people, which can be replicated and taken to scale in displaced settings everywhere.
- Develop and promote a resource "toolbox" for humanitarian workers, policy makers and donors to address displaced young people's educational and job training needs.

### Ensure safe access to cooking fuel

- Conduct several workshops in refugee settings to provide training and technical assistance to humanitarian workers.
- Encourage field-testing of promising alternative fuels and energy technologies by practitioners in the field, UN agencies, humanitarian policymakers, major funders and developers of alternative fuels.

### Campaign to reduce maternal mortality

- Undertake a campaign to reduce maternal mortality among women and girls in conflict settings.
- Run a pilot project on community-based distribution of family planning services in southern Sudan and spearhead a pilot project on community-based care for survivors of sexual assault in Myanmar (Burma).

### Protect women and children in immigration detention

- Push for the development of alternatives to detention and due process rights for families and women seeking asylum in the U.S. by participating in advisory and working groups with the Department of Homeland Security as it reforms the immigration detention system.

- Seek to end the inhumane detention practices that result in the separation of families during immigration proceedings by working with the Administration and advocating for legislation that provides protection and due process rights of children and their parents.

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