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## **Speaker Bios**

### **Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith**

The eighth child and youngest daughter of Rose and Joseph Kennedy, Jean Kennedy Smith's first experience in national politics came in 1960, as she traveled around the country for her brother, Sen. John F. Kennedy, in his campaign for the presidency. She became a political figure in her own right three decades later, when President Clinton nominated her to be U.S. Ambassador to Ireland in 1993, serving until 1998. She had accompanied President Kennedy on his famous visit to Ireland in 1963, and the Irish Government and the Irish people enthusiastically welcomed her return as America's Ambassador. Since 1964, Ambassador Smith has been a member of the Board of Trustees of the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation, which provides grants to promote awareness and advocacy in the field of mental retardation. She has also served on the boards of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

In 1974, Ambassador Smith founded *VSA arts*, an international nonprofit that uses the arts to include people with disabilities in all aspects of society. Her book, *Chronicles of Courage: Very Special Artists*, written with George Plimpton, was published by Random House in April 1993. In addition to a number of honorary degrees, she has received various awards, including the Jefferson Award for Outstanding Public Service from the American Institutes for Public Service and the Margaret Mead Humanitarian Award from the Council of Cerebral Palsy Auxiliaries.

### **Abdi Salah**

A native Somalian who was disabled by polio at the age of one and displaced by civil war at the age of eleven, **Abdi Salah** has spent much of his young life living in refugee camps throughout Kenya. Now 28 years old and resettled in the United States, he is working towards rebuilding a life that has seen much conflict. When civil war broke out in Somalia in 1990, Abdi and his family fled their home to escape the violence, but he would not see his parents again—they were separated during the exodus to Kenya. He spent the next fourteen years in two different camps, Liboi and Dadaab. Receiving medical care as a child in Somalia was difficult, but at Dadaab, it was nearly impossible. The polio Abdi contracted as an infant partially paralyzed his right leg. When he entered the camp, he was not questioned, examined or treated by doctors or specialists. He walked on makeshift wooden crutches which he made himself and managed the two-mile walk to and from primary school, focusing on his education and trying to overcome the frustration of not being able to work or perform chores due to his disability. In 2005, Abdi was resettled in the U.S. by UNHCR Nairobi. As a result of his English-speaking and computer skills, he qualified for an employment program with the International Rescue Committee's resettlement office in Atlanta, Georgia, where he now resides.

### **Dale Buscher, Director of Protection, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children**

**Dale Buscher** leads the Women's Commission's work on refugee livelihoods, displaced youth, gender and disabilities in New York. Since 1988, he has been working in the refugee assistance field in a variety of capacities. He has worked with Vietnamese boat people in the Philippines and later with Haitian refugees interned at Guantanamo Bay. He has worked with displaced Kurds in Northern Iraq, with Bosnian refugees in Croatia and with Kosovars in Albania and in Kosovo. While serving as Director of Operations for the International Catholic Migration Commission, Dale oversaw the organization's \$25 million international programs—covering 20 countries and 800 staff. In Geneva, and during extended field postings in Pakistan and Afghanistan, he started numerous new programs for the organization. Additionally, he has worked as a consultant and writer for United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), publishing a field handbook entitled "Operational Protection in Camps and Settlements." He is the author of numerous publications and a frequent speaker on humanitarian issues.

*For more information, go to:* [womenscommission.org/disabilities](http://womenscommission.org/disabilities)