

Celebrating Advances in Reproductive Health

At its May 12 Voices of Courage Awards luncheon the Women's Commission celebrated 10 years of advances in reproductive health for refugees. CBS News correspondent Lesley Stahl hosted the event and Canada's Ambassador to the UN, Allan Rock, gave the keynote speech.

Gertrude Garway received the award for her gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response work in Liberia. Gertrude worked to advance the reproductive health of other refugee and internally displaced women in Guinea in the 1990s. Today she works as a program manager for the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Liberia. She leads a team of more than 30 staff and has expanded the GBV program to cover 11 internally displaced persons camps and many communities, providing services to around 8,000 women.

Sophia, a refugee from Burma, received the Voices of Courage Award for her work as the program manager of the reproductive health inpatient department at the Mae Tao Clinic in Mae Sot, Thailand. Sophia supervises a staff of 25 junior and senior health workers and trains traditional birth attendants, maternal child health trainees and other reproductive health staff. Dr. Win Myint Than accepted the award on Sophia's behalf, as she was unable to attend the luncheon due to the heavy demands of the clinic.

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Gertrude Garway of Liberia, Dr Katherine D. LaGuardia of Ortho Women's Health, Carolyn Makinson, Women's Commission executive director, and Dr Win Myint Than at the Voices of Courage Awards luncheon.

Human Trafficking: A Growing Problem in the United Kingdom

Three years ago British police fished from the River Thames the torso of a boy who they believed to be somewhere between the ages of four and six and of West African origin. His exact identity unknown, he was dubbed "Adam." His arms, legs and head had been chopped off. Authorities suspected that he had been trafficked to the UK to be used in a fetish ritual, his blood drained, his body parts kept as trophies and the rest of his body later disposed of by his murderers. Twenty-one people who were suspected of having trafficked "Adam" were arrested on immigration charges. This and other incidents have served as a wake-up call to authorities in the UK that human trafficking, the illegal trade in human beings through force, fraud, coercion or violence for purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labor and other slavery-like practices, is a growing problem, both worldwide and on their own shores.

A report released by the Women's Commission this month, *The Struggle Between Migration Control and Victim Protection: The UK Approach to Human Trafficking*, estimates that hundreds, if not thousands of people are trafficked to the UK each year. Many of these are women and children from countries in Asia, West Africa and eastern Europe.

The report notes that, while poverty is frequently cited as the primary root cause of trafficking, and is clearly a significant factor, it is striking that many of the countries from which trafficked women and children originate are either experiencing conflict, are recovering from conflict or are known to have dubious human rights records. Many are characterized by inadequate recognition of the rights of women and children, and some are known for *(continued on page 3)*

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A Greeting from the Executive Director

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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Dear Friends of the Women's Commission,

On May 12, the Women's Commission held its annual luncheon. It was my first luncheon as executive director, and it was an inspiring and moving experience. As usual, our refugee honorees were the stars of the show. Listening to Gertrude and Sophia's stories, it was hard to imagine how they had accomplished so much for so many people, given the traumatic events they had lived through themselves.

For me, it was especially fortunate that the Women's Commission had decided to focus this year's luncheon on reproductive health for refugees and displaced populations. For each of us, there is a signal moment when the plight and aspirations of displaced populations hits home for the first time. For me, this first time was in 1993 when the Women's Commission's founding staff director, Mary Anne Schwalbe, drew my attention to the world's utter neglect of the reproductive health needs of refugee women. Since that time, I have followed the work of the Women's Commission and of the many organizations with which they have collaborated, and have been amazed by the magnitude of the changes they have brought about.

Ten years ago, when the Women's Commission conducted its first reproductive health field assessment, refugee women had no access to family planning or to programs to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS, nor were there programs to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. Now, a decade later, a major worldwide evaluation has shown that these services are routinely provided in stable refugee settings. Changes of this magnitude take time, persistence and the support and collaboration of the Women's Commission's many friends and colleague organizations. But change is possible. And when change takes place at this level—in the policies, programs and budgetary allocations of donor governments, UN agencies and international humanitarian organizations—it improves the lives of hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced populations around the world.

This newsletter describes other Women's Commission programs that are bringing about similar changes. We aim to improve the treatment of women and children asylum seekers in the United States and of victims of trafficking around the world, to ensure that displaced children can go to school throughout their childhood, and to enable refugee women to play a leadership role in camps and other settings where the displaced live. We look forward to reporting on similar success stories in these and other programs in the months and years ahead.



Carolyn Makinson

Staff Updates

The Women's Commission welcomes **Violeta Sylva**, temporary part-time administrative aide, **Jessica Beaton**, reproductive health intern, **Anita Gooding**, Trinity fellow, **Simar Singh**, Watchlist intern, **Joanna Tice**, media and communications intern, **Sierra Weaver**, children and adolescents intern. **Clelia Peters** is promoted to program manager, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict. We say goodbye to **Julia Matthews**, senior coordinator, reproductive health program.



Trafficking in the UK

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violations of such rights in a manner that rises to the level of persecution.

The UK is working to combat trafficking in three ways: the criminalization of trafficking and the prosecution of traffickers; the protection of victims; and raising public awareness both domestically and abroad to prevent trafficking from happening in the first place.

The report acknowledges that the government has, since 2002, enacted laws that explicitly forbid trafficking and has been proactive in recognizing trafficking as a serious crime and prosecuting offenders. However, the UK has been less forthcoming with regard to the protection of trafficked persons. While countries such as the United States, the Netherlands and Italy have adopted laws to ensure the protection of trafficking victims, the UK has not yet done so. The UK does not allow a reflection period, during which the victim can recover from her trafficking experience and make decisions about the future. It does not provide any specific relief from deportation tailored to trafficking victims that would allow them to remain temporarily or permanently in the UK if return to their country

of origin is not viable.

Instead, a trafficked person must apply for asylum. This process is difficult, given that the UK has embraced increasingly restrictive asylum laws that dramatically affect the ability of individuals seeking refuge from persecution or other harm to access the protection they need.

The report does credit the UK with making attempts to offer physical protection to trafficked persons. Safe houses for trafficking victims have been tested; however, these initiatives have received inconsistent support and are designed to serve only certain categories of trafficked persons, such as children under age 18 or women trafficked for prostitution. The London Metropolitan Police also launched an innovative pilot project, known as Operation Paladin Child, in which law enforcement officials were posted at Heathrow Airport to collect information about children arriving unaccompanied in the UK. The effort did not attempt to identify adult trafficking victims, including women, and did not focus exclusively on trafficked children, but rather sought to identify unaccompanied children at risk more broadly. The program only lasted for a three-month period, but a summary of the

operation concluded that the study raised a significant enough concern about the number of unaccompanied children coming through Heathrow Airport to justify the creation of a multi-agency response to child migration.

Fundamentally, the report points out, trafficking will not end, and likely will continue to increase, unless effective strategies are developed that prevent communities at risk from becoming vulnerable, that protect and assist trafficking victims so that they are safe from retaliation by their traffickers and are not at risk of re-trafficking or other abuses, and that bring the full force of the law against traffickers to send a strong message that those who engage in this crime will be fully prosecuted.

Trafficking cannot be addressed through the lens of migration control. Interception efforts will only drive traffickers elsewhere and will do little to protect their victims. It is a human rights problem that deserves the full condemnation of and concerted and integrated response from the international community.

Read the full report at www.womenscommission.org/pdf/UK_Trafficking.pdf. ❖

Reproductive Health

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Ortho Women's Health, a unit of Ortho McNeil Pharmaceutical, Inc., received the corporate Voices of Courage award for its groundbreaking work in developing contraceptives. The Compton Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation were recognized for their long-term and ongoing support of reproductive health efforts for refugee and displaced populations.

And so, let us ensure that the Voices of Courage are heard. The voices of Sophia, and of Gertrude, the voices of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. We must not only hear those voices—we must listen to them, and then act. So much depends on our response. So many rely on our commitment. So let's get on with the job.

-Ambassador Rock, keynote speaker

The 2005 luncheon raised \$440,000 for the work of the Women's Commission. Top donors included Ortho Women's Health, Orrick, Herrington and Sutcliffe, LLP, and Sue Simon. ❖

W Program Updates: Reproductive Health

Promoting HIV Prevention in Pakistan

Reproductive Health Program senior coordinator Julia Matthews visited Peshawar, Pakistan, in April to support the HIV/AIDS training of two local organizations working with Afghan refugees in Pakistan: Frontier Primary Health Care (FPHC) and Afghan Women's Network (AWN). The curriculum used in the training, *HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control: A Short Course for Humanitarian Workers*, was developed by the Women's Commission on behalf of the Reproductive Health Response in Conflict Consortium, and pilot-tested in Islamabad in June 2004. The visit represented another step toward global dissemination of the publication and was a good opportunity to support the local groups' efforts and see how the curriculum is adapted in these settings.

The FPHC group included 15 women and eight men from numerous local organizations that work with the surrounding population, including Afghan refugees who have integrated into the community. The training was conducted in Pashto. The day began with an FPHC staff member singing a poem about HIV that was quite open in talking about sex. The first activity, "Why don't people talk about sex?" was moved to later in the day to introduce the topic, "Why do people get HIV?" which the facilitators decided would give participants time to get comfortable with one another before talking about this sensitive topic. This alteration demonstrates how the local groups have taken ownership of the curriculum and adapted it to fit their local context.

Women and men participated equally, with male participants sitting on one side of the room and the women on the other. Certain activities were

conducted in separate gender groups.

AWN conducted their training in collaboration with the International Rescue Committee. The training was in Dari and all materials and posters were translated into Dari. There were 22 female participants; AWN will have a separate training for men later in the year. Participants were very confident and comfortable in present-



© Julia Matthews

Participants in the HIV/AIDS short course for humanitarian workers in Pakistan.

ing information and sharing points of view. They did animated role plays showing how people living with HIV are affected by the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, how young women are sexually exploited by older men and the importance of using condoms to prevent HIV transmission. Participants were creative in their dialogue and dress, turning their chadors (head scarves) into turbans to show they were men. Course participants recommended conducting the training in Afghanistan.

AWN arranged for media coverage and did interviews with the BBC, Voice of America, Radio Azadee (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty) and Sahar newspaper, which is published in Pashto and Dari.

HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control: A Short Course for Humanitarian Workers is available at <http://www.rhrc.org/resources/sti/hivaidsmanual/>.

Global Health Council Conference 2005

The Women's Commission had an active presence at this year's Global Health Council Conference, the theme of which was Health Systems: Putting Pieces Together. The June conference in Washington, D.C. included more than 2,000 participants from 85 countries. Sandra Krause, Reproductive Health (RH) program director, gave a presentation on the assessment of the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) of reproductive health that the Women's Commission conducted in Chad in April 2004 in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Findings showed that much greater attention is needed to ensure that priority RH activities are implemented in the earliest days of emergencies to save lives.

The RH program senior coordinator, Julia Matthews, presented on the Adolescent Reproductive Health Network, a coalition of eight local organizations that promote reproductive health education and services for Burmese refugees living on the Thai border. Julia emphasized the positive impact of supporting local organizations in their activities, allowing them to share lessons learned, develop educational materials collaboratively and conduct joint trainings.

In addition, the Women's Commission co-hosted an event with UNFPA to share findings from the report, *An Inter-agency Global Evaluation of Reproductive Health for Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons*. The Commission also organized a public information booth, providing an opportunity to raise awareness of reproductive health needs among refugee and IDP women and children, and to disseminate publications, as well as male and female condoms, which were a hit with many conference participants. ❖

Protection and Participation

Beijing Plus 10: Highlighting Concerns and Contributions of Refugee Women

Partawmina Hashemee, the Women's Commission's protection partner in Pakistan, was one of eight activists from around the world to receive United Nations funding to participate in a conference to review progress in the decade since the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing.

The Women's Commission nominated Partawmina, director of the Afghan Women's Resource Center (AWRC). Partawmina's selection was based on her work with internally displaced persons and returning refugees, as well as AWRC and the Women's Commission's innovative work using the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a tool for advocacy in refugee, returnee and displaced settings.

Commonly referred to as "Beijing Plus 10," the UN session was also tied to advancement of the MDGs. The eight Millennium Development Goals, adopted in September 2000, set targets for reducing poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. For more, see www.un.org/millenniumgoals.

In a roundtable co-sponsored by the Women's Commission and the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights and hosted at the UK Mission to the United Nations, Partawmina joined women's rights leaders from Afghanistan, Kosovo, Sri Lanka and India to share strategies on strengthening international support to women activists. Partawmina emphasized the need for long-term funding and technical support for local women's groups. She called for the international community to pay increased attention to the role of women's groups in advancing civic education and pointed out that AWRC's registration of 6,000

women to vote in the Afghan presidential election did not receive any public recognition despite the hard work of her agency. Citing how the Women's Commission's Protection Partners Project supported her development as an activist over the years, Partawmina recommended that local women's groups be given similar opportunities to learn advocacy skills to influence international policy.

At an event hosted by the Women's Commission, "Refugees and the UN Millennium Development Goals: Strategies for Inclusion," Partawmina drew from workshops AWRC organized in Pakistan and Afghanistan to better ensure that the MDGs address the particular needs of refugee, returnee and internally displaced women as well as local women's groups—a major gap for the MDGs where AWRC operates. She also described outcomes from the workshops, including a commitment by a UN agency in Kabul to include a civil society representative on Afghanistan's MDG Task Force.

Other speakers reinforced the importance of the MDGs for returnees and displaced women. Sadiqa Basiri, co-founder of the Omid Learning Center, described the challenges in Afghan girls' education;

Bushra Halepota, senior policy advisor at the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, highlighted challenges and opportunities for UNHCR to advance the MDGs globally; and Ramina Johal, senior coordinator of the Women's Commission's Protection and Participation Program, described Women's Commission efforts to leverage the workshops beyond Afghanistan so that UN agencies and governments acknowledge the millions of displaced women and children in national MDG policies and programs worldwide.

Based on her experience at Beijing +10, Partawmina said, "[S]uch conferences are great opportunities for activists, especially for those who are coming from countries like Afghanistan to upgrade their knowledge and strengthen their capacity. I will incorporate my learning in all AWRC's future programs and projects in order to extend, expand and accelerate AWRC's contribution towards women's empowerment and gender equity, and to enhance the protection of displaced/returnee and refugee women and children."

Reports of the MDG workshops in Pakistan and Afghanistan are available on the Women's Commission's website at www.womenscommission.org/projects/P&P/MDG.shtml. ❖

To raise issues of concern to refugee, returnee and internally displaced women at Beijing Plus 10, the Women's Commission also:

- o sponsored the participation of refugee women: Sadiqa Basiri from Pakistan/Afghanistan and Kalpana Rizal from Bhutan/Nepal, as well as eight women resettled in the United States through the Refugee Women's Network;
- o co-sponsored, with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), a panel presentation on the findings of the Inter-Agency Global Evaluation of Reproductive Health for Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons;
- o co-sponsored a presentation, along with UNICEF and the International Rescue Committee, on education as an essential tool of protection for women and girls in emergency settings.

W Children and Adolescents



Education: A Basic Right for Displaced Children and Youth

Education plays a vital role in the lives of children and youth affected by emergencies; however, in the 10 situations that have produced the greatest number of uprooted persons, 27 million children and youth do not have access to school. More than most, these young people can benefit from the structure, stimulation and safety a stable learning environment provides.

A 2004 landmark report by the Women's Commission, the *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*, found that in emergencies, educational programs very often lack the support and leadership they need to be effective.

The Women's Commission has found that a major gap exists in understanding the most promising strategies for establishing quality, appropriate education systems for refugee and internally displaced children and youth during the transition from conflict to post-conflict reconstruction. This period of transition is a critical time for providing protection and continuity for children and youth, for peace-building and for economic, social and political reconstruction; education is an essential factor for each of these processes. Recognizing this gap, the Women's Commission is embarking on a project to gather case studies and lessons learned around this transition, as a foundation to advocate for improved educational policies and programming. The information gathered will inform not only post-conflict reconstruction needs, but will also contribute to the development of education programs during conflict that can provide displaced children and youth with the best possibility for a smooth transition upon return.

The Women's Commission will conduct a three-country case assessment that will provide information

and lessons learned regarding what has been done, what has worked and what gaps remain in the conflict to post-conflict transition. Probable locations for the case study are Afghanistan, Liberia and Sudan, as well as the surrounding countries affected by refugee flows. The assessment will consider the structure of ministries of education in host and home countries, donor financing policies in the conflict to post-conflict transition, access to education for all racial, ethnic and religious groups upon return or for local integration, numbers of female teachers, and other pertinent questions according to the specific context of each region.

The primary output will be a user-friendly, practitioner-oriented "Lessons Learned" tool, documenting findings from the case assessments and highlighting possible ways forward on providing education to displaced populations in emergencies

through post-conflict settings. This will be the first document of its kind to provide useful, practicable information for education providers and decision makers, and will be an invaluable tool for advocacy efforts to effect concrete change.

The Women's Commission will also develop a user-friendly advocacy tool placing education in emergencies in the context of international and regional human rights, humanitarian and refugee law. This rights-based tool will be developed for use by local communities in their advocacy for educational services both in situations of displacement and upon return or local integration.

The Women's Commission hopes that this initiative will fill a critical gap in information in the field so that organizations can better advocate for quality, appropriate education programming for displaced and returning children and youth. ❖

The Millennium Declaration, adopted by 189 governments in 2000, resolved: "To ensure that, by [2015], children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education." However, these goals, known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), will not be met without immediate action to ensure that all children and adolescents in emergency situations have access to quality and relevant education.

The MDGs related to education are the furthest from being met in areas affected by emergencies, both conflict and natural disasters. According to UNESCO, half of the estimated 104 million out-of-school children live in countries affected by or recovering from conflict. These children, whether refugees, internally displaced persons, or those who have not been forced to relocate but have had their social structure disrupted, are denied their right to education.

World leaders will review the progress toward achieving the MDGs at a conference in September; under current rules, however, NGOs will not be able to participate. Without civil society participation, there is no guarantee that the lack of progress on education for conflict-displaced populations will be addressed.

Take action now by sending a letter to Anne Patterson, Acting Permanent Representative of the United States to the UN, to tell her that spokespeople from a range of NGOs and civil society groups should be allowed to participate to provide a more comprehensive perspective to the meetings. Find a pre-written letter at www.womenscommission.org/take_action/index.shtml.

“Fifty and Fabulous” Party Raises Money for Refugees from Darfur

Jan Naegele and Pam Gervais celebrated their 50th birthdays and raised money for the Women’s Commission at a party they hosted in April at the Eli Whitney Museum in New Haven, CT. By asking friends to make a donation to the Women’s Commission in lieu of gifts, the pair raised more than \$2,000. Deputy executive director Ellen Jorgensen gave a brief talk on the Women’s Commission’s work with Darfurian refugees and showed a short film about a recent visit to refugee camps in Chad.

University of Arizona’s “Salsa Fiesta Fundraiser” Raises \$800

The Women’s Commission was the beneficiary of the second “Salsa Fiesta Fundraiser” of the University of Arizona’s Professional Women in Business Association. The women identified the Women’s Commission through our website, as they wanted to make a donation to help Darfurian refugees, particularly women. The Commission provided information and photos for the social event. The Salsa Fiesta raised \$800, as well as awareness on the situation in Darfur, increased the Women’s Commission’s visibility in Arizona and piqued the interest of some aspiring businesswomen.



Raising Money One Penny at a Time

As part of a social action project, fifth graders at the Brooklyn New School, a public elementary school in Brooklyn, NY, collected pennies from friends and family, and then discussed global issues to decide where to donate the money. They decided to put \$450 toward a new laptop for the Concerned Parents Association in northern Uganda, a longtime partner of the Women’s Commission. They also used \$500 to buy school supplies for displaced children in Chad and northern Uganda.

UK Mini-Marathon

Annie Garthwaite, a friend of the Women’s Commission’s late executive director, Mary Diaz, raised more than \$3,500 for the Mary Diaz Fund for Refugee Girls by collecting sponsorships on the Ironbridge Half Marathon, which she ran in the UK in April. Sixty-nine friends and admirers of Mary contributed money to the Fund, which documents rights abuses refugee girls face, and proposes policy and program changes. Congratulations to Annie, for not only completing her first half-marathon, but also raising funds for displaced girls in the process.

Women’s Commission Staff Raises Funds for Afghan Girls’ School

On June 2, 2005, Afghans opposed to girls’ education burned down the Godah Primary Girls School, destroying not only the tents that housed the students, but also the blackboards, desks and supplies. The girls, however, remain determined to finish their education; they continue to meet outside under trees for their classes.

Women’s Commission staff organized a happy hour event that raised



\$2,000 to rebuild the school and purchase blackboards, desk, chairs and basic supplies.

Volunteer Bakes to Raise Funds for Refugees

High school senior Katie Palmer volunteered at the Women’s Commission for two weeks during the spring, as part of her senior class project. She returned to school in Missouri equipped with materials and videos. Katie held a bake sale at her school and at the same time educated her fellow students about issues of concern to refugee women and children. Through her culinary efforts, Katie raised \$650 for the work of the Women’s Commission.



If you have ideas of creative ways to raise money for the Women’s Commission, such as hosting an event or collecting sponsorships for a local walk/run, please contact Roxanne Saucier at roxannes@womenscommission.org or (212) 551-3088. We would be happy to provide you with informational materials, such as reports, a video/DVD or photos. ❖



Detention and Asylum

Legislation Would Help At-Risk Women and Children Find Safe Haven in U.S.

The Detention and Asylum program staff continue to work with Congress to pass the Widows and Orphans Act. This unique legislation would allow a woman at risk of harm because of her gender or a child at risk of harm due to her age or sex to come to the United States in a very expeditious manner. At the time this newsletter was published, the Widows and Orphans Act of 2005 had been introduced both as a “stand alone” bill and as part of the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act (S. 1033).

Throughout their travels, Women’s Commission staff have met many women and children who could benefit from this legislation. For example, in Pakistan, staff met “Bibi” (a pseudonym), a widow living in an urban refugee settlement. She knows that the community leaders are sexually abusing her children, and she is powerless to do anything about it. Because she has no income to pay rent, Bibi had arranged with the local Afghan community leader to live rent-free; it is this Afghan leader who is abusing her children. She suspects

that the Pakistani government representative in charge of law enforcement in the settlement, a close friend of the Afghan leader, is also abusing her children.

As a widow with no money, Bibi is powerless to protect her children. If she reports this crime, she fears that she will be deported back to Afghanistan where she has no means of survival. The Widows and Orphans Act of 2005 is designed to help at-risk women and children in such predicaments by identifying them and removing them in an expedited fashion to the United States.

In addition, this legislation proposes to:

- Ensure the rapid identification and processing of women and children at risk of harm as special immigrants by governmental, international and designated nongovernmental authorities by requiring adjudication of their special immigrant status within 45 days, upon which they would be paroled to the United States and allowed to apply for adjustment of status in the United States within one year.
- Protect the security of the United States by requiring a completed government database search prior to admission of these women and children.
- Facilitate the effective integration and self-sufficiency of these women and children at risk of harm once in the United States through the Office of Refugee Resettlement of the Department of Health and Human Services.
- Facilitate the family reunification of women and children at risk of harm by enabling their children or siblings to join them in the United States.
- Ensure governmental accountability and transparency in implementing the Act by requiring the Secretary of Homeland Security to report to Congress on the progress of the program.

To learn more about the current status of the Widows and Orphans Act or to send a letter to your Congressperson in support of the bill, please visit the Women’s Commission’s website, www.womenscommission.org.



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