

“No Time for Gender” in Afghanistan

“Miss Sippi, this is an emergency! There is no time for gender! We’ll do that when we have time!” During my first and subsequent meetings with NGO members of the international consortium running Sakhi camp in northern Afghanistan I was greeted with this depressing mantra time and time again. The camp, set up in the early 1990s to house Tajik refugees fleeing civil war in their country, has now become home to 2,500 internally displaced families.

Sippi Azerbaijani-Moghadam has represented the Women’s Commission in Pakistan for over a year. In her frequent visits to Afghanistan she meets with Afghan women, international agencies and others to ensure that humanitarian assistance — the right kind of assistance — is getting to displaced women. In Pakistan, she also works with local women’s organizations, UN agencies and representatives of international nongovernmental organizations to strengthen their programs in reaching the needs of Afghan women — internally displaced within Afghanistan and refugees in Pakistan. There are many challenges to her work, as she describes below:

Women and Children Flee to Camps, Seeking Assistance

In spontaneous camps full of small tents made of cloth, plastic and old battered rugs, mushrooming around Mazar City, women were beginning their morning rituals of fetching water, boiling water for tea and wondering what the day ahead would bring. Entering one walled area I moved around the tents talking to women. Some have come from frontline areas, pushed out by fighting between the forces of the ruling Taliban and the opposition Northern Alliance troops. The Taliban are, it seems, also quietly encouraging families to leave their homes and villages to suffer more hardships in makeshift shelters. Others have left their villages because of the severe three-year drought ravaging Afghanistan. There are families who were displaced years ago by fighting in other parts of Afghanistan and are trying to eke out a living in Mazar. There are also poor and not so poor families from Mazar. None of these women look good. Their children look worse.

When I ask why they have moved, the answers are always the same: “We were told that if we moved here we would receive assistance!” or “We heard that the



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Conditions are very poor in camps for refugees and displaced persons fleeing their homes in Afghanistan.

United Nations was giving assistance!”

Women and children willingly move around, risking health and at times security in order to get a ration. In the camps they may be exposed to extortion, which may include receiving rations in return for sexual favors. In a particularly remote and dusty camp, one woman says: “If one expatriate came and told me that there would be no assistance coming to this camp, I could go home relieved and certain that I’m not going to miss out on anything. Instead I come and sit in this dust every day, just in case.”

In Sakhi camp I almost fell down a twenty-foot well hole because there was a dust storm and I could not see where I was going. The entire camp was full of holes — half dug latrine pits, shallow wells and holes from the camp’s previous incarnation — no warning signs or covers of any sort. I told the camp management that this was dangerous, especially for children. They said, “In

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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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The foundation of the international system for protecting refugees from persecution is the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. It is not a perfect document. In the first place, it is 50 years old, formulated at a time when diplomats were preoccupied with the ghastly lessons of Nazi persecution and the spread of repressive governments in Eastern Europe. Many of the issues that preoccupy refugee advocates today, such as persecution based on gender, are not specifically addressed in the Convention.

But the 1951 Convention is what we've got. It is one of the most universally accepted of all international treaties, with 140 states having formally accepted its obligations. New accessions continue to accumulate (for example, Mexico ratified the Convention only last year). At the same time, however, the Treaty is under pressure, if not outright assault, by politicians who claim that is outdated and increasingly irrelevant to the problems of refugee protection today.

In the face of these mounting pressures, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees initiated in 2000 "Global Consultations," designed to reinforce the principles laid out in the Convention, while addressing problems of interpretation and gaps in the coverage of existing refugee law. Among the gaps are clear guidelines on critical issues affecting refugee women and children, such as the terms for reunification of separated families, access to asylum for people whose experience of persecution is gender-specific, and the ability of children to pursue asylum claims independently. Nongovernmental organizations, including the Women's Commission, have insisted on being part of the Global Consultations, and are playing major roles in developing the framework for stronger and more comprehensive refugee protection.

Beyond these contributions of substance, NGO advocacy is critical to the success of the Consultations. The centerpiece of the process is a December 2001 meeting of all the governments that have adopted the Convention. They could use the occasion to reinforce their commitment, or they could back away. The Women's Commission has been and will continue to be a powerful voice among NGOs in letting the US government know that we support forceful US leadership to keep the Refugee Convention at the center of the fragile international consensus that shelters the displaced. Millions of refugees in danger around the world cannot afford to wait while governments reinvent the wheel.

Kathleen Newland, Chair of the Board

REFUGEE WOMEN'S VOICES HEARD IN GENEVA

by Mary Diaz, Executive Director

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children joined forces with the UNHCR Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women to co-sponsor an historic meeting of refugee women from around the world in June. The event, *Respect Our Rights: Partnership for Equality*, was a three-day dialogue between refugee women and UNHCR senior managers and government officials. Forty-seven women from refugee sites around the world gathered at UNHCR headquarters to discuss critical issues, including security in the camps, legal status and the quality of asylum, sexual and gender-based violence and equal access to shelter, water and health care. In a lunchtime session with the new UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Ruud Lubbers, the women requested closer partnerships with UNHCR in the field, and for the agency to recognize the important work they are doing to sustain their communities. This dialogue was the culmination of regional and country consultations held with refugee women throughout the spring.

The Women's Commission organized and sponsored one regional and one local consultation in May. The North America consultation took place in Montreal, Canada. More than 20 women, refugees and asylees met and discussed a wide range of issues from detention of asylum seekers to the difficulties they face in gaining access to health, education and employment services. In Pakistan, Afghan refugee women met for a two-day consultation at the Women's Commission office in Peshawar to discuss the issues affecting Afghan refugee women in Pakistan. The Women's Commission sponsored six women from these consultations to participate in the global consultation in Geneva.

During the three-day meeting in Geneva, the refugee women identified four specific areas where UNHCR needs to partner with refugee women: a) promotion of refugee women's participation and decision-making, b) building women's resources, c) initiating long-term and integrated approaches and d) promoting men's participation.

The report of the Geneva proceedings is available at www.unhcr.ch.

Refugee Women Talk, by Beth Ferris, Program Executive, World Council of Churches

Mary is a widow with seven children ... a refugee from Sierra Leone ... "In 1998, we ran away from our town in Bo," Mary recalls. "A group of rebels caught us and murdered my husband. ... I was sure they were going to kill me. ... We made it to Guinea, where we lived in a refugee camp."

The refugee women [at the conference] are strong and passionate. They seize the opportunity to tell others what is really happening in refugee camps around the world. ... It is an intense and powerful meeting. ...

"I lost everything, everything ... — my husband, our business, our home, everything," Mary laments. " ... A few months ago, UNHCR moved us all to another, new, camp further from the border. ... Usually it's the man who builds the hut, but my children and I worked very hard to make bricks and build our tiny hut. ... We only have one blanket, so my children use one of my dresses for cover at night. I don't know where two of my children are: a 21-year-old boy and a 16-year-old girl. ... I can't sleep at night worrying about them. ... Our biggest problem right now is food. ... Everyone is so hungry. ... If you're not strong, the men and boys will take [your food] from you. ... The women turn to prostitution when they can't feed their children.... It would work much better if the women had the ration cards. Usually they give them to the men as head of the family. But sometimes the men trade the food for cigarettes or alcohol. Then it's really bad for the family."

... [T]here are also stories of hope. "In Afghanistan," a refugee woman explains, "there are no institutions which train women teachers, doctors or nurses. ... [In] a few years, women and girls will have no access to health care or education. But in the refugee camps, we're training Afghan refugee women. These women are the hope of Afghanistan. We are the future of our country."

Pioneer work

... In 1988, together with ... other NGOs, the World Council of Churches organized a first consultation on refugee women. ... Many of the recommendations from that conference have been implemented. Policies and guidelines have been developed by UNHCR, training materials developed and staff hired to focus on gender questions.

... [F]ifteen years ago no one wanted to hear about refugee women. UNHCR officials and governments looked at us as if we were crazy for suggesting that refugee women had particular needs and resources which must be recognized.

So much has happened since then ... For example, many governments recognize that women asylum-seekers need to talk to women officials about experiences of sexual assault. Programs are targeting women for income-generating projects, and gender concerns have become mainstream in many organizations. But as long as women are still

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our culture, women look after children and tell them where there is danger, so there's no problem." Talking to some women the next day I found that a toddler had fallen down a narrow hole for a tube well and died two days before. The body had not been recovered. I returned to the camp management who told me, "It will cost 50,000 rupees to cover the holes and we don't have a budget line for it." Following a heated discussion on priorities, various people were mobilized to find covers for the numerous holes in the camp.

Women are Not Seen as an Emergency Concern

At the time of my visit to Sakhi camp in early August families had received tents, one round of food assistance and access to one tube well with an electric pump and water bladder. They were able to use a clinic run by Médecins Sans Frontières.

The men disappear to Mazar in search of work every morning, leaving the women and children to deal with fuel and water collection and ensuring that they are there in case any type of registration takes place. Even though it is obvious that the women could participate in all sorts of meetings and processes, there is no interest in or commitment to this idea from the men running the camp.

Houses, wash rooms, latrines and wells are being built on a grid pattern planned by a former city planner who now works for an Afghan NGO. I ask him if he has consulted with the displaced families, especially women who would use the facilities the most. "This is an emergency. Everyone will get the same and later if they like they can build their own latrines and washrooms, where they want them." Later when I talk with women about the position of the various bits of infrastructure, they say: "Will educated engineers listen to us? We are nothing, nobody."

Women's Leadership Resources are Unused

Sakhi camp is separated into blocks and each block has a designated leader who is supposed to act as a functional link between the people and those running the camp. I have been impressed by a number of the women I have met in the camps, so I ask in meetings whether female block leaders have also been elected. I am rewarded by the usual mantra which generally includes the words: "women...our culture...Taliban....uneducated women ...not possible....emergency..." Back in Sakhi camp, I am

horrified to find that they are planning to just go out and choose some female block leaders in one afternoon. This is not real empowering participation; it is a hollow gesture where the camp management will pick some women for some unclear purpose.

I meet some of the female health educators who have regularly been referred to by some members of the consortium as the answer to all gender ills. They have been employed along with *mahrms* (close male relatives who must accompany women when they are mobile or working, as decreed by the Taliban). The *mahrms* get paid and hang around in the immediate vicinity of the tents or areas where women are working. I meet the women in their tent in Sakhi camp. They are well dressed, educated, urban women with very shiny new *burqas* (the all-enveloping garment that women are required to wear). I am alarmed to hear that they have had no real health education training. They are being used to re-screen the internally displaced persons (IDPs) using rudimentary questionnaires. They tell me that if the women ask questions they cannot answer or problems they cannot deal with, they write them down for the *mahrms*. However, they have received no answers.

It is with sadness that I realize that this valuable opportunity to employ women and to collect valuable information about the female displaced is being neglected and that employing these women is primarily lip service to the gender cause pushed by donors. I take the issue up with the camp manager who says he has no time to talk to the women and says: "women...our culture...Talibannot possible....emergency..." After much discussion he concedes that he can spare some time during the day to see if the women have uncovered anything of interest or whether they have questions. There is no interest in or commitment to seeing the world through the eyes of women and children, especially those who are uneducated. The planners see, plan and act. Employing women in such situations fills a gender quota and is a palliative for those who would criticize, but the women have no power to do anything within the organization or the project.

The problem here, or part of it anyway, is simple: we are constantly faced with the same group of English-speaking, university-educated urban men of the 30-50 age group who know "what is best" for everyone in Afghanistan and are not willing to listen to rural men, rural women or urban women. Afghan women rarely get a look in.

In the rush to "do something" and to "do the right thing," we often forget that the reason why these women are suffering hardship is because of a war fought by men and a failed peace process which includes no women.

RESPONSES TO THE TRAGIC EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER 11 FROM AROUND THE WORLD

The Women's Commission issued a statement following the horrifying attack on September 11.

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children shares the profound sorrow of the world community in the face of last week's ruthless attack on innocent civilians and members of the armed services in New York City and Washington, D.C. We wish to express our condolences to the victims of the attacks and their families.

These actions must be understood as not only an attack on the United States, but an assault on the principles of respect for human life and democracy shared by all freedom-loving peoples around the world. We have found solace in the outpouring of support and empathy that has come to our offices from refugees and asylum seekers with whose communities we have worked over the years. (See "Refugees Respond," below.)

...

As we further define our national response to this tragedy, we call upon our leaders to respect the lives of civilians who may be trapped in countries the leadership of which has cooperated in terrorism. Repeatedly, we have seen that the vast majority of refugees uprooted by armed conflict have been women and children, many of whom have also been the victims of renegade governments which care little about their citizens.

Equally, we urge that individual citizens not act on their anger by lashing out at their Arab neighbors or others who appear "foreign." ... While prejudice and hostility against immigrants and refugees is not new to our society, now is a time to resist such base instincts and stand together as a community. ...

If these principles guide our actions in the days to come, we will be strengthened by our respect for humanity. We will win against the terrorists. Their corrosive acts will stand in isolation, condemned by the world community. (The statement is available on the Women's Commission website: www.womenscommission.org.)

Refugees Around the World Respond to Attack on World Trade Center

The Women's Commission received messages from refugees and colleagues around the world. The sampling below reflects the deep concern expressed by those whom we are more accustomed to bring solace to.

Greetings and I hope that you and your colleagues and

families are doing fine, I am sorry for the incident in New York and Washington, it is shocking. ... [A]s you know our people have been hostage of these people for years. ... It will be another disaster if [the] US attacks Afghanistan. ... [T]he people are in very bad economic condition, and specially the women and children [have] been victims all the time. We now [need] more humanitarian help then ever to survive. My best regards to all over there.

Afghan refugee woman, Pakistan

I ... send a message of condolences to you sisters [at] the Women's Commission. What a blow when we heard about the USA incidents. I hope it did not reach anywhere near your offices. We think of you all and we pray for Peace. I hope your organization is doing something in terms of future decisions to be taken by your government. ... [I]nnocents are innocents. I hope your government remember[s] about innocent people and [is] not just taking a final decision of attacking Afghanistan. It is terrible. I hope god guides your president.

Mary, Rwanda

I want to express my regret about the tragedy and make sure that you are all right. I hope none of your relatives or friends have suffered from this disaster. I love your city and its citizens as if it was my homeland.

Irakli (16), Republic of Georgia

We are all in shock to hear what has happened to your country. We sympathize with you and pray for all who have been affected by the tragedy. I hope you are OK. God bless you and keep you.

Anne, Rwanda

I send my sincere regrets for what has happened. Once again, great sorry. I hope you are alright. With best wishes,

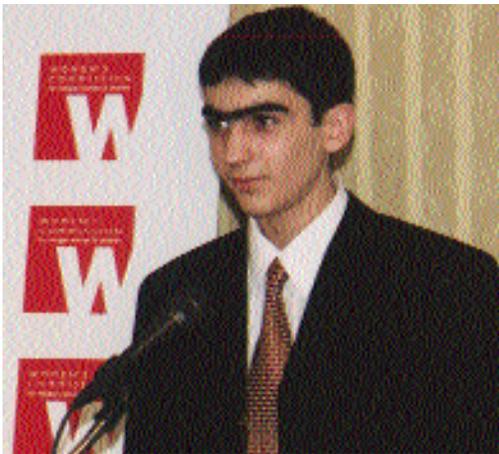
Liliane, Burundi

I've been thinking of you and the Women's Commission staff in light of all this tragedy. I hope you all and your families are safe. Please let me know how you and your family are doing. Take care.

Kao, Laotian refugee, resettled in St. Paul, Minnesota

Honoring refugees from Afghanistan, Georgia and Somalia for their contributions in the field of education in emergencies, the Women’s Commission held its annual Voices of Courage awards luncheon in June. The Norwegian Refugee Council was honored for its exemplary work. Congresswoman Nita Lowey gave the keynote address. Liv Ullmann hosted the event, and she and fellow actress Julia Ormond presented the awards.

Making a Difference at Age 16



Irakli Sabekia was only eight when he and his family became refugees. He grew up in Georgia, a small state straddling the Caucasian mountains in central Asia, whose recent history has

been plagued by violent internal conflicts. Irakli lived in the western province of Abkhazia, and when Georgia proclaimed independence from the dying Soviet empire in 1991, Abkhazia was quick to follow in its claim to secession. A war for independence broke out in 1992 and Irakli and his family were forced to leave their home and flee.

Irakli has become something of a young hero to the estimated 200,000 who fled the war in Abkhazia. He runs a youth group with some 100 members and is known as one of the brightest and most active youth leaders in Georgia. He coordinated a clothes drive and set up a small library for a kindergarten for refugee children. He organized an exhibition of artwork by children affected by the conflict and set up a debate club on the theme of “Settlement of the Conflict in Abkhazia.” In the summer of 2000 he was chosen to attend a Youth Development summer camp in the USA and put together a film for Tbilisi state television about his visit to the United States. He is currently involved in establishing weekend schools for internally displaced children.

All this, while living with his family in difficult conditions in a collection center for displaced people in the capital Tbilisi.

Refugee Gives Up Life in Canada, Returns to Somalia to Train Women

On a cold January day in 1996, **Hawa Aden Mohamed** told her friends in Toronto she was going back to Somalia. Everyone was shocked. Hawa had fled Somalia three years earlier as a refugee and had built a new life for herself in Canada.

But Hawa wasn’t able to forget her homeland. She was still painfully aware of the millions of Somali women who, unlike her, had not been able to escape. So she resigned from her post at a women’s health organization in Toronto, packed her bags and took a plane to Somalia.

Within a year she had set up the Juba Women’s Development Center in Kismayo, a town destroyed by war and home to thousands of displaced women and children. In the midst of devastation, Hawa created a training center for more than 500 women and girls, which included a library of over four thousand books and a health unit. The center coordinated literacy, numeracy and skills training courses, as well as workshops on healthcare and violence against women.

In 1999, warlords invaded Kismayo and looted the center. Many of the women were killed or forced to flee again. Hawa herself fled to north-eastern Somalia where she began to turn a destroyed public school into a training center for women, despite opposition from local religious leaders. Today the Galkayo Education Center for Peace and Development has ten trained teachers and 450 students. And in Kismayo, the warlords have moved on and the teachers whom Hawa trained herself have set up classrooms again.



Photo credits: © Mary Bloom

Afghan Woman Risks Life to Educate Women and Girls **Leading the Fight for Education for All**



“I have three strikes against me: I am a woman, I speak out for women and I’m a Hazara, a minority group,” says **Dr Sima Samar** of her dangerous work to bring education and skills training to women and girls in Afghanistan.

The ruling Taliban forbids women and girls to attend school or to travel alone and any woman who flouts these laws can be punished by flogging. Dr Samar knows the risks, but she continues to run almost 50 schools for 19,000 students in rural Afghanistan and northern Pakistan, under the auspices of “Shuhada,” an organization she founded in 1989. Several schools teach up to 12th grade and 39 percent of the students are girls.

Dr Samar was always aware of the importance of girls’ education. “I started thinking in grade six, why are my brothers so different? I tried to be good in school,” she recalls of her own schooldays. Her persistence paid off and she eventually received a degree in medicine from Kabul University. She was forced to flee Afghanistan following the Soviet invasion.

Shuhada now runs four hospitals and three clinics inside Afghanistan and provides medical training. “I was worried where the next generation of female doctors would come from,” Dr Samar says. Literacy programs include information on hygiene and family planning, and often food is distributed at the classes.

Dr Samar has received numerous death threats for her work with women and girls, but she remains convinced that the Taliban will be forced to rethink their education policy.

For more than 50 years, the **Norwegian Refugee Council** has provided humanitarian assistance to people fleeing from their homes and has defended their fundamental human rights. NRC has developed targeted education programs serving internally displaced and refugees in some of the world’s worst war zones, including Angola, Sierra Leone and Burundi.

The NRC has inspired the Norwegian Government to respond rapidly to the challenge of providing education in refugee and crisis situations. The NRC helped create the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies, which includes UNICEF, UNHCR, UNESCO and many NGOs. When emergencies erupt in different countries, the NRC provides education officers to UN agencies, free of charge.

The NRC has been leading a campaign to have education recognized as the “fourth pillar of humanitarian assistance,” making it as important a component in emergencies as food, shelter and health.



Liv Ullmann and Eldrid Middtun

Eldrid Middtun, education advisor, accepted the award on behalf of NRC.

Special thanks to the following, without whom the luncheon would not have been such a great success: Anderson Productions Ltd., United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Winifred Barbu, Mary Bloom, Daniel and Micky Boulud, Najia Dalil, Elaine Danzig, Patricia Evert, Ayoub Foday, Shlomo Gronich and the Sheba Choir, Hi Neighbor, Touré Kunda, Bangalee Keita, Mama Keita, Paul Leone, Emil Ljesnjanin, Barbara Neves, Priscilla Shanks, Fazal Sheikh, Annie Smith, Wendy Smith, Haxere Veseli.

And particular thanks to our luncheon sponsors and supporters, who helped us reach our goal of \$240,000.

A Child’s Right: Education in Emergencies, the video made for this year’s luncheon, featuring refugee youth, refugee experts and the UN Secretary-General, is now available. The 8-minute video, made by Anderson Productions Ltd., is \$20 - contact Rachel Beatty at 212.551.3088 or rachelb@womenscommission.org.



IF NOT NOW, WHEN?: SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN BOSNIA

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is an umbrella term for any harm that is perpetrated on a person against that person's will, and that has a negative impact on the physical and/or psychological health, development and identity of the person. Violence may be physical, sexual, psychological, economic or socio-cultural. The violence is the result of gendered power relationships, determined by the social roles ascribed to males and females, almost always and across all cultures disparately impacting women and children.

In conflict situations, rape, torture and other violent forms of sexual assault are commonly used as weapons of war. SGBV also occurs in refugee and internally displaced settings, where the breakdown in family and social structures heightens the risk of violence. Such violence is an affront to public health, to universally accepted human rights guarantees and to the restoration of refugee and internally displaced families and communities.

In spite of increased awareness among humanitarian actors about the importance of SGBV programming during and following complex emergencies, field-level resources to assess, prevent and respond to SGBV are at best scarce, often non-existent. Recognizing this lack, the US Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM), is supporting the Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium (RHRC) in a two-year Sexual and Gender-based Violence Initiative to improve international and local capacities to address SGBV in refugee, IDP and post-conflict environments around the world. Outcomes of the project include a web-based bibliography of SGBV resources, a global report on existing programming and an assessment, monitoring and evaluation manual for SGBV program managers and field staff.

In order to gather data for the global report, project coordinator Jeanne Ward, Women's Commission board member Betsy Kovacs and doctoral student Cari Clark visited Bosnia and Herzegovina in June.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Brief Review of Findings

On the face of it, the Bosnian government has recognized the importance of women's equity and equality. The constitutions of both the Republic of Srpska and the Federation accord equal rights and opportunities to men and women under the law (UNDP, 2000).

However, Bosnia is a patriarchal society, in which issues of violence against women — in both the community and the family — have traditionally been relegated to the private sphere. Neither entity possesses the infrastructure — from sensitized police to trained judiciaries

and lawyers to coordinated social services — that would support women seeking protection from or prosecution of their abusers. As such, few survivors seek assistance from the police or legal systems.

In the absence of government programming, international and local organizations have taken the lead in identifying and responding to issues of violence against women. SGBV projects were initiated in Bosnia during and following the conflict as a result of a confluence of factors, including the influx of international aid, the worldwide recognition of women as targets of sexual violence during the Bosnian conflict and the burgeoning Bosnian women's movement.

However, programming is variable and inconsistent — in Sarejevo and Zenica, for example, there are safe houses, hotlines and coordination among service providers; in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are no programs and no coordination. Exacerbating the discrepancy in programming is the disparity in sensitivity and awareness regarding SGBV at the highest levels of international aid and government organizations. In a telling anecdote, an employee of UNHCR allowed that the organization does not see SGBV programming as an aspect of its mandate to protect women and children.

Representatives of local women's groups with whom the delegation spoke expressed strong concerns about decreasing levels of funding from international donors and consequent expectations that local NGOs achieve self-sufficiency. The downsizing of funding to NGOs serving survivors is a particularly volatile issue given that the current rise in public awareness campaigns about *(continued on page 10)*

Medica Zenica: Providing Services for the Women of Bosnia

Medica Zenica, a model local NGO, provides an array of coordinated services for women, including a hotline, two safe houses, job training, and coordination with social services, local police and legal aid. Medica Zenica also has an information and advocacy program unique in Bosnia for its success in raising awareness regarding the issue of SGBV at both the local and national levels. The advocacy program has successfully pressured the government regarding legislation, and has also promoted Medica's services through posters, media relations, and unique campaigns such as children's food packages labeled with announcements of the SOS hotline. The organization was started by a group of women in Zenica who, with the support of a gynecologist from Cologne, Germany, started the center in order to serve women's psychosocial needs during the war.

Against All Odds: Surviving the War on Adolescents in Uganda

I've joined this research team so that youth can better understand their rights and needs, for better protection for youth and to sensitize the community about youth problems," says Richard, 17, an adolescent researcher with the Women's Commission research study in Gulu, Uganda. "Understanding youth problems can bring more understanding and cooperation within the community and create peace in the community."

Few young people in northern Uganda have had the opportunity to voice their concerns to decision-makers and to be actively involved in creating and implementing projects to improve their lives. Few have organized effectively as advocates to address their circumstances and gain leadership experience.

Women's Commission researchers Jane Lowicki and Allison A. Pillsbury involved adolescents in leading and conducting a research study that will bring young people's experiences and ideas to the forefront of decision-making. Research teams of 26 adolescents were formed in Gulu and Kitgum/Pader Districts. This work was conducted in collaboration with international and local organizations in northern Uganda.

Following a three-day training, the adolescent researchers carried out research in small groups, speaking with their peers and adults, individually and in group settings. The teams investigated the areas of: education; health, including HIV/AIDS and reproductive health; security; gender issues, particularly the situation of girls; generating a livelihood; and the role of youth as leaders in improving their lives and their communities. They identified recommendations for solutions to these problems, especially constructive roles for young people in improving their society.

The teams produced reports on their findings, and the Women's Commission produced a report based on these findings and staff research, *Against All Odds: Surviving the War on Adolescents. Promoting the Protection and Capacity of Ugandan and Sudanese Adolescents in Northern Uganda*. Young people and adults involved in the project presented their findings to decision-makers in New York, including at the report launch at the Lillian Vernon Center for International Affairs, at New York University. The September 11 tragedy prevented the youth from meeting with policy makers in Washington, and caused the postponement of the UN Special Session on Children, in which they were to participate. The Women's Commission and other organizations will carry their messages to decision-makers internationally.

Special Session on Children Postponed

The UN Special Session on Children that was to take place from 19-21 September at the United Nations in New York City was postponed following the attacks of September 11. The summit was to have reviewed global progress for children since 1990 and set new goals for the decade ahead. The Women's Commission had been an active participant in planning for the session and had many activities planned. We will continue our advocacy on behalf of the world's refugee children and adolescents.

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Afghanistan

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Women's Commission Advocacy is Effective

Working in Afghanistan and Pakistan is a huge challenge. However, the Women's Commission's technical advisor has had a positive impact on the lives of Afghan women by influencing the work of international agencies in the field:

- She has changed attitudes of care providers through dialogue, as illustrated in this article.
- She has documented protection concerns and suggested way to overcome them. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, other UN agencies and NGOs have received and used her report on refugees who were forced to return to Afghanistan from Iran, her report on Taliban edicts (laws) and her report on the New Shamshatoo camp in Pakistan. A report on conditions in Mazar is forthcoming.
- She has organized meetings for local women's groups, building capacities in, among others, the areas of skills training and media relations.
- Worked with Women's Commission staff to develop advocacy messages to take to Capitol Hill. Her messages have been successful in guaranteeing additional assistance to Afghan refugee women and children.

Editor's note: this article was written before the events of September 11. Following the attacks in the United States, the Women's Commission temporarily closed its office in Pakistan. Sippi Azerbaijani-Moghadam has been doing advocacy and outreach from the United Kingdom. She remains in touch with local women's groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan. A copy of the Women's Commission's advocacy statement and action proposal for Afghanistan is enclosed with this newsletter.



The Eleanor Bellows Pillsbury (EBP) Fund

The Eleanor Bellows Pillsbury Fund, a fund dedicated to the critical needs of war-affected adolescents for reproductive health information and services, was established at the Women's Commission through the generosity of the Pillsbury family, their friends and colleagues. With additional support from Women's Commission donors, the Fund is approaching its initial goal of raising \$100,000 by June 2002.

Responding to the needs of young people in conflict zones for protection from sexual violence, prevention and care of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS and complications arising from unsafe abortions, local groups in Africa and Asia are utilizing grants from the EBP Fund in creative ways. All grantees are providing adolescents with the information required to protect themselves and their health.

In **Sierra Leone**, where adolescent girls have suffered disproportionately from decades of conflict, FAWE (Forum for African Women Educationalists) will extend reproductive health services, psychosocial assistance and educational support to help sexually abused and displaced girls reintegrate in their communities and become self sufficient.

In **Thailand**, grants are helping two Burmese refugee women's groups raise awareness of adolescent reproductive health needs and to train a core group of Burmese teenagers living in refugee camps. Those trained will encourage other refugee girls to take charge of their own reproductive health and will form support groups to discuss experiences with rape, sexual violence and HIV/AIDS.

In **Tanzania and Angola**, grantees are promoting greater understanding among adolescents on reproductive health options and safety through production and dissemination of brochures and other informational materials in local languages.

In **Liberia**, a group run by former refugees is training 65 youth peer counselors plus 10 clinical staff to provide youth-friendly services and to organize adolescent activities including drama and cultural performances on reproductive health issues.

For an adolescent in a war zone, the obstacles to a safe, productive and meaningful life are often overwhelming. With the resources of the EBP Fund, the Women's Commission helps local groups respond to their reproductive health needs.

The EBP Fund honors the memory of Eleanor Bellows Pillsbury, a pioneer in ensuring the reproductive health rights of women in the US and abroad. Please help us build our ability to address the reproductive health needs of adolescent refugees. If you would like to contribute, contact Ellen Jorgensen at 212-551-3115 or ellen@womenscommission.org.

Children Seeking Asylum Held in Detention

The Women's Commission continues its work to protect children in the custody of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). It is working in partnership with the international law firm of Latham and Watkins to reform the system and ensure children, many of whom are refugees, receive protection and essential services, including legal representation.

In August the Women's Commission visited nine juvenile detention facilities used by INS to house children asylum seekers and other children in proceedings. It found that children are frequently commingled with youth offenders. This is in violation of a 1997 class action settlement agreement which lays out standards for confinement of children in INS custody. The delegation also found that children may languish in these facilities for months with little access to legal or social services. One Honduran street child told the delegation, "I stare at these four walls all day and I go crazy."

Wendy Young, who directs the Women's Commission detention and asylum work, testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee in September as the Committee considered, S.121, the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act. This bipartisan legislation severely limits the use of detention for unaccompanied children and requires the appointment of a guardian ad litem to ensure that the best interests of the child are considered in immigration proceedings.

Bosnia

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violence against women will likely increase the number of survivors seeking assistance.

A lack of official statistics on SGBV makes it difficult for the Bosnian government to fully articulate the scope of the problem and institute appropriate solutions. However, in communities where local research initiatives have been undertaken, the data, along with social marketing programs, have been successfully used as a tool to stimulate awareness among local providers, and have reportedly enhanced sensitivity to the issue of SGBV, as well as improved response mechanisms.

If we are to ensure peace and the health and human rights for women, we must place SGBV high on the agenda of all organizations and governments serving refugee women and children around the world. Funding specific to SGBV must be maintained. We cannot wait until the perfect program designs are in place before tackling this sensitive issue. As the president of a model SGBV organization in Bosnia said, "If not now, when?"

More information about the RHRC's SGBV project is available at www.rhrc.org/tech/index.html.

Women and Peace

When the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed resolution 1325 on women, peace and security in October 2000, it committed itself to ensuring that “Security Council missions take into account gender considerations and the rights of women, including through consultation with local and international women’s groups.” This is a key strategy underpinning the resolution to ensure that women in conflict areas receive improved protection, inform and have access to peace negotiations, and that the UN reform its services, including peacekeeping, to ensure greater gender mainstreaming.

In June the Women’s Commission joined forces with the United Nations assistant secretary-general and special advisor on gender issues and advancement of women and the executive director of UNIFEM to arrange a groundbreaking meeting in Kosovo between UN Security Council ambassadors and a group of Kosovo’s activist women. At the end of the one-and-a-half-hour meeting, Igballe Rogova, coordinator of the Kosova Women’s Network, presented the head of the mission with a letter outlining concrete recommendations by women’s organizations for improved relations with UNMIK, a larger role for women in rebuilding Kosovo and a role for women in inter-ethnic reconciliation.

This meeting was important in that it raised the visibility of local organizations in Kosovo that are working on behalf of Kosovars and Macedonian refugees. Following the meeting, staff from the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations got in touch with the Women’s Commission, soliciting advice on the upcoming Security Council delegation planned for Sierra Leone.

Wall Street Leader Honored For Work With Refugees

Dina Dublon, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer at JPMorgan Chase, is using her contacts in the financial world to reach new heights, while pursuing uncommon goals. Recently selected by the Pacem In Terris Institute to receive the esteemed Service to Peace Award, Dina joins the ranks of other notables who have contributed great personal efforts to promote the welfare of children throughout the world.

A life change occurred for Dina when she decided to participate in the Women’s Commission delegation to Rwanda in 2000, taking a week from her busy Wall Street schedule to tour the war-torn country, assessing the needs of women and children struggling to rebuild their

lives in the wake of devastation and loss. Dina was moved particularly by the strength and resiliency of Rwandan women, as they provided support to their families and communities and reconstructed their societies. She was amazed at the hope that education provided to young girls, enabling them to face their futures with courage. Upon her return to the United States, Dina knew that her experience had profoundly affected her. Using many of her business skills, Dina became an advocate for the cause and rallied her associates to provide funding and support for the Rwandan communities.

The Pacem In Terris Institute is made up of educators, business leaders and government officials united for the advancement of peace in conflict, post-conflict and developing regions of the world. The Institute sponsors collegiate and graduate scholarships for young women and men from such areas. Upon completion of their studies, students return to work for the peace and prosperity of their nations and regions. The annual Service to Peace Award is significant in honoring those who make it possible for the principles of peace to flourish, through personal initiative and concrete actions.

The President of Rwanda, H.E. Paul Kagame, nominated Dina to receive this award based on her awareness- and fund-raising on behalf of women and children refugees. Her initiative led the Women’s Bond Club to grant \$10,000 to the Women’s Commission. Funds contributed by the JPMorgan Chase Foundation allowed the Women’s Commission to grant over \$25,000 to women’s organizations in Rwanda that are addressing specific needs identified by the delegation. They also contributed to the Women’s Commission’s publication of the Rwanda Women’s Initiative Assessment produced in April 2000. Additionally, through contacts at Chase, the Women’s Commission facilitated a sister school collaboration between Chapin Girls School, a private girls’ high school in New York, and the FAWE Girls School in Kigali, a school that is run by a local nongovernmental organization in Rwanda.

Dina became involved in the work of the Women’s Commission by following in the footsteps of her teen-aged children. Her daughter, Amale, volunteered in the office and her son, Gershon, designed the layout and constructed the Women’s Commission website. Eager to know the source of her children’s inspiration, Dina began her journey to Rwanda. She now sits on the Board and has raised the awareness of the work of the Women’s Commission of many colleagues and friends. Dina accepted the Service to Peace Award not as recognition for her work, but as a responsibility to ensure her future participation.



Staff Updates

The Women's Commission welcomes **Julia Matthews**, reproductive health project manager; **Rachel Beatty**, administrative assistant; **Mary Jane Escobar-Collins**, office administrator; **Julia Freedson**, watchlist consultant; **Binta Mansaray**, protection consultant, based in Sierra Leone; **Hind Osman**, grants assistant; and **Sarah Spencer**, program specialist. We bid farewell to **Rachel K. Jones**, reproductive health project manager and **Erin Hagopian** and **Meaghan Maher**, administrative assistants. We extend grateful thanks to all our summer interns and volunteers: **Emily Adler**, **Sarah Bermeo**, **Alexa Degioannini**, **Saba Gashugi**, **Mamie Gummer**, **Ilana Kellerman**, **Connie Lee**, **Noah Many** and **Nicole Sadler**.

E-mailing the Women's Commission

The Women's Commission's new email address is wcrwc@womenscommission.org. Please use the @womenscommission.org suffix when e-mailing staff.

Refugee Women Talk

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raped while searching for firewood and families go hungry because the man with the ration card needs cigarettes, there is much work to be done.

Budget cuts

But many UNHCR programs are threatened by a recent round of budget reductions. ... The impact of UNHCR's budget reductions is evident in the stories of refugee women from every corner of the globe.

... There are so many stories of need, of suffering, of pain. It seems incredible that UNHCR's budget is being cut because rich countries don't want to pay, because they're tired of paying for relief to victims of wars that drag on and on. But they couldn't be any more tired of

WE ARE ACCEPTING NOMINATIONS FOR HONOREES:

REFUGEE WOMEN AND YOUTH PEACE MAKERS

Each year the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children holds a luncheon to honor individual refugee women and young people who are working on behalf of other refugees. We are now seeking candidates for the Voices of Courage awards for our May 2002 luncheon. The theme of the 2002 luncheon is **WOMEN AND PEACE**.

Some of the criteria are:

- o Candidates should be women or youth who work or have worked to assist refugee or internally displaced communities.
- o Candidates should be passionate advocates for peace.
- o Candidates should support ethnic diversity, peace building and non-violent conflict resolution activities.

To nominate a candidate for a Voices of Courage award, please send a letter of nomination and the CV, résumé or biography of the nominee to:

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children
Attn: Luncheon nominees
122 East 42nd Street, 12th Floor
New York, NY 10168-1289

Or by email to: diana@womenscommission.org

war and suffering than the women at this meeting.

Elizabeth Ferris is a former Women's Commission board member. The entire text of her article is available at <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/press/01/17/feat-e.html>

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

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