



## Beyond Firewood: Fuel Alternatives and Protection Strategies for Displaced Women and Girls

Every day, millions of women and girls venture out of refugee and internally displaced persons camps, risking rape, assault, abduction, theft, exploitation or even murder. Why? To collect enough firewood to cook for their families or to sell to meet their basic needs.

"They have no choice—it's a matter of survival," Carolyn Makinson, executive director of the Women's Commission, told guests at the launch of the Commission's new report, *Beyond Firewood: Fuel Alternatives and Protection Strategies for Displaced Women and Girls*. "The risks associated with firewood collection have been well known for years, yet few effective fuel-related protection strategies are in place to combat the problem. It's time for the international community to take coordinated action to address this problem."

The launch, held at the German Mission to the United Nations in New York, was attended by dignitaries from the United Nations, including Secretary General Kofi Annan and his wife, Nane Annan, the Ambassadors of Germany and the United Republic of Tanzania, and Ruth Messinger, executive director of American Jewish World Service, which funded the project.

The Women's Commission undertook a project to investigate ways to reduce displaced women and girls' *(continued on page 4)*



© Faye Richardson

Students in Liberia are happy to be in school, some of them for the first time. Many children missed out on education during the 14-year civil war.

## Help Us Help Ourselves: Education in Liberia

After 14 years of a brutal civil war, Liberia is finally looking forward to a brighter future. The new president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, faces a huge challenge of rebuilding the country, as the infrastructure was largely destroyed during the fighting, and rampant corruption at all levels of the government has had a disastrous effect.

One of the biggest challenges will be to get the education system up and running.

"Education in Liberia needs to be developed from square one," says Lori Heninger, director of the Women's Commission's Education in Emergencies Initiative. Heninger led a Women's Commission delegation to Liberia in December 2005 to look at the situation of *(continued on page 3)*



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Some Bhutanese refugees in Nepal use parabolic solar stoves, and as a result have less need to collect firewood.

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## Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

An unincorporated affiliate of the International Rescue Committee formed to advocate for the solution of problems affecting refugee women and children.

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**D**ear Friends of the Women's Commission,

From the Women's Commission's earliest days, board delegations have played an important role in the way the Women's Commission accomplishes its work. Indeed, at its inception, the board *was* the organization, and board delegations were the organization's primary activity. Nearly 20 years ago, the founding board members were influential women who visited refugee settings and concluded that the special needs of refugee women and children were often ignored, despite the fact that women and children generally constituted 80 percent of refugee populations. These women determined to create an organization that would send delegations to meet with refugee women and children, ask them about their needs and priorities, and return to the United States to advocate on their behalf. One of the Women's Commission's first delegations was to Pakistan in 1989, and resulted in the establishment of the Afghan Women's Social Service Center, which offered training and literacy programs for Afghan women in Pakistan.

Since 1989, much has been accomplished. Our board delegations have been the driving force behind many of the Women's Commission's most important accomplishments. Refugee women told us of their need for family planning and reproductive health care. Subsequently, we helped to establish the Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium (now the Reproductive Health Response in Conflict Consortium). Refugee women told us that their highest priority was education for their children, and we published the *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*, the first comprehensive study demonstrating that millions of refugee children receive no formal education and demanding that the need be addressed. Our delegations spoke with young adult refugees, heard their frustration at the lack of educational and livelihood opportunities for young people, and we published *Untapped Potential: Adolescents affected by armed conflict*, the first review of programs and policies that addressed the needs of this age group.

Our recent delegation to Liberia continued this tradition. Lori Heninger, our director for Education in Emergencies, and I were joined on the delegation by three of our board members: Julia Aker Duany, herself a Sudanese refugee and a research associate at Indiana University; Miranda Kaiser, a lawyer who was recently a special investigator with Paul Volker's Independent Enquiry into the UN's Oil for Food Program; and Faye Richardson, formerly overseas director of the International Rescue Committee. One of the highlights of our trip was a meeting with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, recently inaugurated as President of Liberia. We were impressed by President Johnson Sirleaf's determination to deal with governmental corruption, and by her commitment to making education for all Liberians one of the top priorities of her new government. We report on the findings of our mission in an article in this newsletter (see page 1).

Our next delegation will launch a new project on livelihoods. We intend to conduct an assessment (across a variety of refugee and internal displacement settings) of current approaches to livelihood and income generation opportunities, to identify promising practices and to advocate that all displaced populations be provided with the means and opportunity to earn their own living and support themselves.



Carolyn Makinson

## Education in Liberia

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education in a country making the transition from conflict to post-conflict.

“Infrastructure, including school buildings, teacher training institutions, latrines and roads have all been decimated,” Heninger says. “There is a dearth of trained teachers, especially female teachers, the curriculum is outdated and there are not enough textbooks or school supplies. Plus, children and youth have missed out on years of schooling.”

Nearly all Liberians were displaced during the war, and 80 percent of the nation’s schools were damaged or destroyed. The adult literacy rate—a shockingly low 38 percent—is higher than the literacy rate of children, for the first time in the country’s history.

“Education was the number one priority of nearly every Liberian we met,” says Heninger. “A whole generation of young people has missed out on even the most basic education; they know how important it is to catch up and learn so they can be active members of Liberia’s rebuilding and its future. But at this point, adequate education is simply not available to them.”

The delegation met with President-elect Sirleaf shortly before she was inaugurated. She told the delegation that she is very committed to education. Parents and students consistently said that education is one of their top priorities, and internally displaced persons specified that they did not want to return home until schooling was available for their children. Parents make huge sacrifices to pay school fees for their children and organize to provide incentives to help unpaid teachers stay in their posts.

The Women’s Commission’s report *Help Us Help Ourselves: Education in the Conflict to Post-conflict Transition in Liberia* contains a series of recommendations, including:

- Accelerated learning programs for youth, many of them ex-combatants, who want to study but are too old to be in primary grades with young children, should be expanded and adequately funded.
- Basic reading and math skills should be provided to more young adults to complement job training programs; funding for the programs must also be sufficient.
- Flexible and student-centered adult literacy programs should be

designed to meet the needs of women who are responsible for household chores and childcare.

- Life skills—HIV/AIDS prevention, conflict resolution, human rights training, particularly on the rights of women and children—should be taught in all learning programs so adults and children have the tools they need to prevent future conflict.
- Teacher training should be implemented and salaries increased—and paid regularly—to encourage more teachers to return to their jobs.

“The peace, stability and economic development of the country depends on an educated workforce with access to jobs that pay a living wage,” says Heninger. “The new government is taking the right steps in working to eliminate corruption and to involve the people of Liberia in the development of the education system. The international donor community must contribute its share to make education for all a reality in Liberia.”

*Help Us Help Ourselves: Education in the Conflict to Post-conflict Transition in Liberia* is available at [http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/lr\\_ed.pdf](http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/lr_ed.pdf). ❖

## Staff Updates

The Women’s Commission bids farewell to **Joanne Kelsey**, director, Detention and Asylum Program; **Diane Goodman**, Geneva liaison; and **Clelia Peters**, program manager, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict. We welcome **Jessica Hansen**, program specialist, communications and development; **Michael Sidman**, administrative specialist; and **Joan Timoney**, director of advocacy and external relations. **Lori Heninger** is promoted to director, Education in Emergencies Initiative, and **Jenny Perlman Robinson** is promoted to senior coordinator, Education in Emergencies.

## You Can Help!

There are many ways you can support the Women’s Commission and demonstrate your commitment to women and children affected by conflict across the globe.

You can make an individual, tax-deductible contribution via our secure website [www.womenscommission.org](http://www.womenscommission.org), or you can send your gift directly to the Women’s Commission, attention Development Department, 122 E. 42nd Street, New York, NY 10168. You can remember the Women’s Commission in your will, or you can make a stock gift or a donation of goods. Donations to the Women’s Commission also make wonderful gifts in honor of friends and family. If you have any questions about how you can contribute to the Women’s Commission, please contact Susan Vignola, Development Officer, [susanv@womenscommission.org](mailto:susanv@womenscommission.org) or 212.551.3113.

## Beyond Firewood

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vulnerability to violence during firewood collection. The project assessed alternative fuel options, firewood collection techniques and other protection strategies, appropriate to the local context and in all phases of an emergency. The Commission undertook desk reviews of fuel provision, collection and physical protection strategies in various internally displaced persons (IDP) and refugee situations worldwide and conducted site visits in Darfur, Sudan and in the Bhutanese refugee camps in eastern Nepal.

The report finds that the humanitarian community has generally responded to the problem with one or more of four strategies: providing fuel directly to refugees; providing physical protection during fuel collection, for example driving women to collection points or forming patrols to protect the routes to the firewood source; promoting fuel-efficient technologies, such as solar cookers and mud brick stoves, which can reduce fuel use by as much as 80 percent; and developing alternative fuel sources, for example from forest waste products.

The Women's Commission is recommending that one agency, possibly the UN High Commissioner for Refugees or the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, identify an agency to coordi-

nate all fuel-related activities during an emergency. These activities must be developed in consultation with displaced women, and must be accompanied by the development of alternative income generation activities to be effective. Income generation activities with the most chance of success must be as practical as possible, use locally available materials and have an

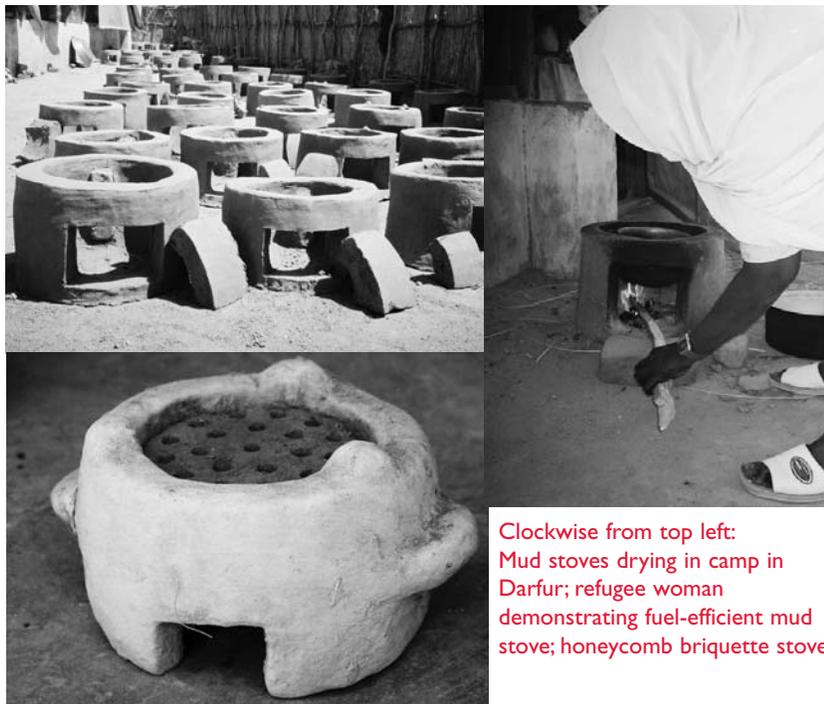
refugees have received kerosene since 1992 and where they also use alternative fuel options, found that sexual attacks outside the refugee camps are relatively rare.

“Although preventing gender-based violence must be addressed through a comprehensive approach that also strives to change the attitudes and behavior of the perpetrators and holds them

accountable for their crimes,” says Sandra Krause, director of the Women's Commission's reproductive health program, “there are concrete steps to prevent sexual violence associated with firewood collection that the international community can and must take now.”

The Women's Commission will be working with UN agencies, U.S. government agencies and our nongovernmental partners to advance the report's recommendations.

The report, *Beyond Firewood: Fuel Alternatives and Protection Strategies for Displaced Women and Girls*, is available at <http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/fuel.pdf>. *Finding Trees in the Desert: Firewood Collection and Alternatives in Darfur* is at [http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/df\\_fuel.pdf](http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/df_fuel.pdf) and *The Perils of Direct Provision: UNHCR's Response to the Fuel Needs of Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal* is at [http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/np\\_fuel.pdf](http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/np_fuel.pdf). A four-page synopsis of the report can be found at [http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/Fuel\\_synopsis.pdf](http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/Fuel_synopsis.pdf). ❖



Clockwise from top left: Mud stoves drying in camp in Darfur; refugee woman demonstrating fuel-efficient mud stove; honeycomb briquette stove.

identified market. They must offer financial returns equal to or greater than those accrued from the sale of firewood. Otherwise, women and girls will still venture out of camps to find firewood to sell to provide income for basic needs other than cooking.

The two case studies highlight the situation in Darfur and Nepal. Sexual assaults on women and girls outside displaced persons camps in Darfur occur with alarming frequency; it is perhaps the most dangerous place in the world for women to collect firewood. The research in Nepal, where Bhutanese

## Caught in the Crossfire: Displaced Colombians at Risk of Trafficking

**M**ore than 40 years of internal armed conflict have ravaged Colombia, leaving hundreds of thousands dead, millions displaced and countless others who have suffered violations of their human rights, including human trafficking. An estimated 45,000 to 50,000 Colombians are trafficked each year, the majority of them women and children.

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children conducted a fact-finding mission to Ecuador and Colombia to assess the protection and assistance challenges faced by Colombian refugees who have fled into neighboring Ecuador and internally displaced Colombians who have sought refuge inside Colombia. It found that a lack of adequate protection and assistance puts displaced Colombian women and children at grave risk of human rights abuses, including trafficking. War and persecution create a lawless environment that provides fertile ground for criminal elements to exploit civilians caught in the crossfire.

Experts believe that at least 15 percent of trafficked Colombians were first internally displaced within Colombia. Seeking an escape from problems such as sexual violence, poverty and drug trafficking, displaced women and children become easy prey for traffickers who lure them with false promises of a new life in a foreign country.

The Colombian government has been criticized for its failure to adequately protect citizens who are affected by the armed conflict and forcibly displaced from their homes and communities. At the same time, it has been recognized for its aggressive anti-trafficking efforts, including comprehensive anti-trafficking laws

that address prevention, prosecution and protection of victims, and innovative strategies to raise public awareness about trafficking. The government has offered repatriation and reintegration assistance to trafficked persons identified abroad and has sought to bring traffickers to justice.

Concern remains, however, that these efforts inadequately consider the factors that put people at risk of trafficking. Trafficked persons cannot be automatically returned to their places of origin if conditions there remain dangerous and unsustainable.

Colombians who cross international borders are also at risk of trafficking. Ecuador historically has been relatively welcoming to Colombian refugees. However, a growing intolerance of migration by the Ecuadorian government has resulted in the border between Ecuador and Colombia becoming increasingly difficult for refugees to cross. They are increasingly resorting to the assistance of third parties, such as smugglers, to make it across the border. Such assistance can easily become abusive and lead to trafficking.

As a result of discrimination and employment barriers in Ecuador, Colombians are at grave risk of work site abuses. Significant numbers of refugee women end up in commercial sex work. Others take jobs in private homes as maids, nannies and laundresses, jobs that easily become exploitative, and may lead to trafficking.

Ecuador has no comprehensive anti-trafficking laws. It has not supported assistance programs for trafficking victims and no traffickers have been prosecuted.

This assessment is part of a global study by the Women's Commission to explore the nexus between refugee protection and trafficking. A copy of the report, *Caught in the Crossfire: Displaced Colombians at Risk of Trafficking*, can be found at

[http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/co\\_traff1.pdf](http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/co_traff1.pdf).

## Displaced Women and Girls at Risk

**I**n September 2003, Fatima, with her 9-month-old baby on her back, left her village in Darfur, Sudan with her neighbor in search of firewood in the bush. Later that day, the janjaweed militia invaded their village and the two women were taken by force from the bush to a village farther east. After walking for five days, they arrived in the village and Fatima was separated from her neighbor. She was compelled to work as a shepherdess, always closely watched by her captors.

Fatima was raped at night by different men. Approximately five months later, part of the flock under her care was stolen. As retribution, the owner of the flock grabbed her baby son and beat him to death on the ground in front of her. Three months later, Fatima escaped to Chad with the help of one of the wives of the janjaweed. She passed through her village during her journey, where it was confirmed that her husband had been killed during the raid. She traveled alone during the night, hiding herself and fearing for her life throughout the entire journey. Fatima finally arrived at a clinic in Chad, where it was established that she was seven months pregnant.

Displaced women and girls are often resilient survivors, courageous protectors and untiring caregivers. They hold their families together under the most difficult and inhumane of circumstances. In such circumstances, however, displaced women and girls also face incredible risks to their security and well-being, including rape, abuse, torture and *(continued on page 7)*

## Struggling to Survive: Children in Armed Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

**T**hree soldiers from the united Congolese forces...tied an 11-year-old girl with an electric cable and repeatedly raped her in a military camp, according to the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

A Mai-Mai officer arrested a 17-year-old boy...after [he] refused to draw water for the military stationed there.... The Mai-Mai fighters in the camp severely tortured the boy while holding him in detention. The boy was released only after a large fine was paid for his release.

Six fighters gang-raped a woman in front of her husband and children while another soldier raped her 3-year-old daughter, according to Human Rights Watch.

These cases are examples of the brutal violations against Congolese children documented by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict in the April 2006 report *Struggling to Survive: Children in Armed Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) continues to endure the world's deadliest humanitarian crisis; according to the International Rescue Committee, more than 38,000 people die every month as a direct and indirect consequence of the armed conflict. As

many as 45 percent of these deaths occur among children who fall victim to egregious human rights violations committed in an atmosphere of almost complete impunity.

*Struggling to Survive* details heinous violations against children's security and rights, including killing

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and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, denial of access to humanitarian assistance, attacks on schools and hospitals, abductions, and recruitment and use of children in armed forces and groups.

"Despite the presence of the United Nations' largest peacekeeping operation, the promise of upcoming elections and billions of dollars spent for post-conflict reconstruction in DRC, most Congolese children are not faring any better than they were three years ago—and for some children, health, safety and well-being have drastical-

ly deteriorated," says Julia Freedson, Director of Watchlist.

Violations against children are

committed against a backdrop of outward progress towards reconstruction, such as the demobilization of thousands of children from armed forces and groups, and the International Criminal Court's arrest of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo of the Union des Patriotes Congolais on charges of enlisting, conscripting and using children in hostilities in DRC.

Whereas some progress in improving the security and

rights of children in DRC has been achieved, rape and mutilation of girls, recruitment and use of children by armed groups and other despicable abuses against children continue. In addition, children are dying from preventable diseases every day and girls and boys are missing out on educational opportunities.

The children struggling to survive in DRC need immediate and sustained assistance from local, national and international policy makers who have the power to create tangible changes for children and their communities. Watchlist calls upon the governing authorities in DRC, all armed groups and forces operating in DRC, the UN Security Council, the humanitarian community in DRC and others to take immediate and sustained actions to halt all violations against children in DRC and to halt further violations against children's security and rights.

The Watchlist report, *Struggling to Survive: Children in Armed Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, is available at [www.watchlist.org](http://www.watchlist.org). ❖



Children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are vulnerable to egregious human rights violations. © OCHA

## Immigration Reform Jeopardizes Asylum Seekers

One of the hottest issues before the current Congress is immigration reform. The House of Representatives has already passed an immigration bill that is strongly opposed by the Women's Commission and many other organizations, including human rights and religious organizations.

As this newsletter goes to print, the action has moved to the Senate where the Women's Commission will continue to fight any provisions that could put asylum seekers and trafficking victims, many of whom are women and children, at further risk.

We will oppose efforts that would allow the government to detain

asylum seekers throughout their court proceedings because this hinders their access to lawyers and can have devastating consequences on their mental health.

The Commission will also fight to protect asylum seekers and trafficking victims from being prosecuted because they may have used false documents to enter the United States. These people have often fled terrible circumstances that left them with little choice but to use false papers. And we want to make sure that asylum seekers are protected from expedited removal or summary deportations without a hearing.

We will also urge the Senate to retain a provision offered by Senator Brownback (R-KS) and passed by the Judiciary Committee that would make it easier for women and children who have been identified as particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation to secure protection in the United States. This "widows and orphans" legislation is a Commission priority, and we have worked closely with Sen. Brownback's office on the issue.

As Congress addresses important immigration questions, it must also make certain that the United States continues to offer safe haven to those fleeing persecution and violence. ❖

## Advocacy

### High Stakes Budget Battles Affect Refugees

The usual spring budget battles in Washington seem even more high stakes this year as the Women's Commission and our partners in the humanitarian community push for critical funding for the many millions displaced by conflict.

When Congress completed work last year on the 2006 foreign assistance budget, there was a serious shortfall in funding for vital refugee assistance programs. As a 2006 supplemental funding bill makes its way through the Congress, the Women's Commission continues to strongly support funding for the ongoing refugee crisis in Sudan. And we are working to secure additional monies for food assistance in Africa and for the urgent needs of refugees and returnees in various countries, including Afghanistan, Burundi, the

Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda and Liberia.

In addition to working on 2006 funding questions, the Commission has also begun working with Congress on the President's proposed budget for 2007. We believe that at least \$366 million should be added to the President's 2007 request for migration and refugee assistance to address refugee needs, ensure the success of repatriation programs underway in several African countries, provide sufficient support to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other international aid agencies, and allow the United States to admit 90,000 refugees in 2007.

To support our advocacy efforts with the Congress, visit the Take Action section of our website: [http://www.womenscommission.org/take\\_action/index.shtml](http://www.womenscommission.org/take_action/index.shtml). ❖

### Women at Risk

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trafficking. Understanding these risks and the early identification of those most at-risk can assist with the development of preventative approaches and enhanced protection.

A new Women's Commission report, *Women and Girls At Risk: Risk Factors, Protection Solutions and Resource Tools*, identifies the risks leading to displacement, risk factors during displacement and risks that inhibit safe and sustainable return. Additionally, it proposes protection solutions in the context of displacement and in situations of return. Finally, the report presents tools for assessing risks and details criteria for good field practice that reduces the risks displaced and returnee women and girls face.

Read more at: <http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/WomRisk.pdf>. ❖

## New Challenge Grant Honors Mary Anne Schwalbe



Mary Anne Schwalbe with refugee children in Montenegro, 2000.

To pay tribute to Mary Anne Schwalbe, the Women's Commission's founding director emerita, two anonymous donors have offered to match up to \$50,000 in individual contributions. These gifts will go toward the Women's Commission's Founders Fund, which Mary Anne and her husband Douglas established at the Women's Commission's 10th anniversary. Support for this fund helps the Commission build long-term financial security in order to continue work that improves the lives and defends the rights of refugee and internally displaced women, children and adolescents worldwide.

Mary Anne was the first staff director of the Women's Commission, and continues to support the organization financially and with her time and expertise. She has been instrumental to the establishment, growth, sustainability and overall success of the Women's Commission.

We invite you to contribute to this fund, which honors Mary Anne's vision, commitment, generosity and 17 years of service to displaced women and children. To make a contribution, simply note "Challenge Grant" in the memo of your check; if you prefer to donate online, please visit <http://www.womenscommission.org/donate/index.shtml>, click on "Donate Now" and choose "Challenge Grant" under the Program drop-down menu. Thank you for your support.

## Wedding Couples Support Women's Commission

The Women's Commission would like to congratulate two couples who got married in March and extend warm thanks to them for their support. Newlywed couples David Halpert and Restu Kusumaningrum, and Steven Robinson and Jenny Perlman Robinson decided to give their guests an alternative to traditional gift registries by inviting them to make donations to the Women's Commission. These donations not only celebrate the couples, but they further the Women's Commission's efforts to voice the needs and uphold the rights of conflict-affected women and children all over the world.

If you're interested in soliciting gifts on behalf of the Women's Commission, whether it's for a wedding, a birthday or a special anniversary, please contact Susan Vignola, development officer, at [susanv@womenscommission.org](mailto:susanv@womenscommission.org) for more information. ❖

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