



# Women's Refugee Commission

## A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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November 2009

Name Address Label

Organization

Address 1

Address 2

City, state zip

Country

Dear Salutation,

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

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

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

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

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



Nick Obot speaking to farmers in northern Uganda.

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

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



Liv Ullmann with Voices of Courage honoree Mariatu Kamara.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The enclosed leaflet outlines our work around livelihoods, reproductive health, disabilities, youth and, in the U.S., detention and asylum. If you've been inspired by our work and the people we help, please send your tax-deductible donation to the Women's Refugee Commission today.

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

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carolyn Makinson".

Carolyn Makinson  
Executive Director

P.S. Please go to [womensrefugeecommission.org](http://womensrefugeecommission.org) to learn more about these issues and to donate. Your generous year-end gift will enable us to continue bringing about lasting, measurable change for those who need it most!