



Youth in Northern Uganda are the Hope for a Better Future

As the conflict in northern Uganda rages on for the 19th year, it may seem that there is little hope for the future of the devastated region. The statistics are bleak—the rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has abducted 28,000 children, forcing them to join their ranks as soldiers, sex slaves, cooks and porters. Today 80 percent of the LRA comprises children. Since 2002, the Ugandan government has launched a military campaign against the LRA dubbed Operation Iron Fist; this initiative has been funded by the U.S. government. Civilians are left with a troubling choice—while they want peace in the region, they do not want the government to kill their children who have been forced to join the LRA.

Despite these dire circumstances, young people the Women's Commission has worked with in northern Uganda remain hopeful for a better future.

The Women's Commission has worked with young people in northern Uganda since 2001, when it launched a project to survey the needs and wants of youth in the region. Through this project young people surveyed thousands of their peers, who named insecurity, abductions and murder, displacement, lack of education and being orphaned as their top concerns.

Following that study the Women's Commission, in partnership with American Jewish World Service (AJWS), began working intensively with youth groups in the
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New Video Helps Unaccompanied Children Navigate Immigration Court

When unaccompanied refugee or immigrant children arrive in the United States, they enter a confusing bureaucratic system of detention centers and legal proceedings. Often with no lawyer or designated caregiver and little knowledge of English, children as young as 18 months are forced to navigate court proceedings on their own.

In the past four years, the number of unaccompanied children taken into custody in the United States has increased by almost 30 percent. In August 2005, more than 1,000 unaccompanied alien children were in government custody each day and according to estimates, more than 7,000 were detained over the past year.

In order to prepare these children for their immigration proceedings, the Women's Commission worked with Kim Berner of Friday Night Films, who donated her services to produce a short educational video called "What Happens When I Go to Immigration Court?"

This orientation video uses child and adult actors, a real courtroom and child-friendly language to help children begin to understand the legal process that will determine their future. If children are better prepared for their hearings, they will experience less trauma and be better able to relate their stories.

The video will help children understand the purpose of immigration court; underscore that they are not considered criminals; explain the roles of all parties involved, including the lawyers, the judge and the witnesses; detail the rights and responsibilities of the child and lawyer, such as confidentiality and the need to be truthful; clarify court procedures, such as courtroom setup and the number and purpose of hearings; and explain possible forms
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Youth from the Concerned Children Youth Association in northern Uganda strategize during a workshop with the Women's Commission.

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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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Dear Friends of the Women's Commission,
Hurricane Katrina brought home to all Americans the tremendous suffering that innocent people experience when disaster strikes. Suddenly millions of people found themselves homeless, without the most basic necessities of life, often separated from their loved ones and sometimes at risk of violence. Had we not seen it with our own eyes on our television screens, we would not have believed that such chaos, despair and loss of life could continue here in the United States over the course of several days, given the enormous logistical, human and financial resources that the United States can bring to bear. We have also seen that women and children are often vulnerable in such crises and need distinct approaches to ensure their safety and meet their needs.

We at the Women's Commission are familiar with such scenes in countries around the world where displacement is often caused by violent conflict as well as natural disasters. And we are accustomed to seeing those affected struggle to survive and rebuild their lives with inadequate support—support that often dwindles once the initial crisis has passed and is no longer discussed in the media.

Nonetheless, amid the disaster, there are messages of hope. First, implementing the right programs and policies can really make a difference in helping people rebuild their lives, as we shall see over the weeks and months ahead in the United States. The same is true for refugee and displaced populations elsewhere, even if the results are not visible on our television screens. With well-founded policies and programs, and well-directed resources, refugees and displaced people are able to make new lives for themselves and their families. Second, there is a great deal of wisdom—some of it developed or disseminated by the Women's Commission—regarding the policies and programs that effectively protect those affected by disaster and help them rebuild their lives. A vital element of emergency response worldwide is to ensure that reproductive health care is available at the very beginning of an emergency to prevent and respond to rape, to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS and to meet the needs of pregnant women and newborns. We also know that getting children back into school, especially during the emergency phase, is vital to their physical and mental well-being. Standards have been developed for use in traditional refugee settings (the Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies) that should be applied in the current crisis.

* * *

Important changes are taking place at the Women's Commission. With a mixture of sadness that we are losing them and joy at the exciting new opportunities they are embracing, we say goodbye to deputy executive director Ellen Jorgensen and director of external relations Wendy Young. Wendy has taken a job as coordinator, external and U.S. government relations with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Washington, D.C. Ellen is taking a leading role in Save the Children's response to Hurricane Katrina. We know that they will make an enormous difference to the lives of refugees and displaced populations in these new positions and thank them for the tremendous contributions they have made to the Women's Commission over the past several years.

Glenda Burkhart and Regina Peruggi, Board Co-Chairs

New Nepali Network Will Document and Respond To Violations of Children's Right to Education

On February 25, 2004, 65 students of Birendra Secondary High School, Bafikot, Rukum district, were abducted in the midst of the exams, as Maoists took over the school grounds for parades, drills and political indoctrination, Kathmandu Post, "Children in Maoist Ranks," June 17, 2004.

In April 2004, in a widely covered incident, six people were killed and others seriously injured in a helicopter raid on the premises of Bidhya Mandir Higher Secondary School in Binayak village, Achham district. The government opened fire from pod-mounted guns on a Maoist meeting on the school grounds, killing and injuring several children, and forcing other students to witness horrific violence and killing, according to the Himalayan News Service, "Schools Closed After Clashes." Following the incident, various area schools reportedly remained shut for several days, including Bidhya Mandir Higher Secondary School (Binayak), Annapurna Higher Secondary School (Kalagaon), Pashupati Secondary School (Chalsa) and Nana Secondary School (Barala).

These are just two of the many incidents documented in the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict's January 2005 report *Caught in the Middle: Mounting Violations Against Children in*

Nepal's Armed Conflict, which found that, among other grave violations to children's rights resulting from the ongoing conflict in Nepal, violations of the right to education are an ongoing and serious problem for Nepal's young people and their communities.

The decade-long "People's War" between Maoist and Nepali government forces has damaged children

from their communities, girls are forced into child marriages and children stop attending school for fear of violence. Many schools in district headquarters are overcrowded with students displaced from rural areas, while schools in rural areas may be under-attended by students and teachers due to fear, insecurity and displacement.

Facts on Education in Nepal

- 62.7% adult literacy, male
 - 34.9% adult literacy, female
- Literacy varies widely by ethnicity and location (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2003)
- 79% primary school attendance, male
 - 66% primary school attendance, female (UNICEF, 2002)
- 25%-35% average pass rate over the past decade for School Leaving Certificate at grade 10 (World Bank, 2001)
- Hundreds of schools are destroyed or not functioning. Maoists and government forces have attacked schools. Government forces use primary schools as garrisons. The Maoists use schools for recruitment. Teachers are also intimidated, harassed and targeted for violence. (Various sources, 2004)

and adolescents' access to education, with schools targeted for attacks and used as grounds for child recruitment and abduction, and with teachers targeted for intimidation, taxation and violence. Attendance rates are dropping as children are displaced

In the context of these escalating abuses, the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict has launched an innovative project to document and quickly respond to violations of Nepali children's right to education *(continued on page 8)*

Staff Updates

The Women's Commission bids farewell to deputy executive director **Ellen Jorgensen**, director of external relations **Wendy Young** and board liaison and planning officer **Deidre Siddalls**. We welcome **Sarah Chynoweth** as program manager for the Reproductive Health Program, and new interns **Kara Brothers**, **Maryam Ishani**, **Madhuri Kumar**, **Gabrielle Oestreicher** and **Tijana Ristic**. **Joanne Kelsey** is promoted to director, Detention and Asylum Program; **Mary Jane Escobar-Collins** is promoted to officer of board relations and operations.

Save the Date!

Mark your calendars now for the Women's Commission's 2006 *Voices of Courage* Awards luncheon, which will take place on May 11 at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in New York City. This year we will honor refugees and others who have worked to ensure that children and adolescents in conflict areas receive quality, uninterrupted education. Check www.womenscommission.org for updates on honorees and ticket sales.

Youth in Northern Uganda *(continued from page 1)*

region. Through an innovative partnership, AJWS funded the Women's Commission to engage in a dialogue

Participation in the dialogue has given me an opportunity to develop skills in project proposal development and financial record keeping and budgeting.... This will help both the wider community and myself. ...[T]here will be effective transfer of [skills], resulting from a kind of "multiplier effect." One teaching another, then the one to others. A chain then forms and skills are transferred. This will ensure sustainability.

-- Acuch Peter, member of the Concerned Children Youth Association and participant in workshops with the Women's Commission

with four youth groups, to determine their top concerns and build their capacity to address them. Through visits to the region, Women's Commission staff worked with the youth groups on proposal writing, budgeting and record-keeping, management and other technical areas.

The four youth groups have decided to focus their efforts on educating their communities about human rights, HIV/AIDS and gender awareness. As people directly affected by the conflict (many of the youth have been displaced or abducted themselves), they are the best placed to understand the needs of their communities, and to educate and empower them. "In the midst of regular killings—five Ugandans were killed in the three days we were in Pader—these committed young people have come together to sensitize their communities..." says Lori Heninger, senior coordinator of the Women's Commission's Children and Adolescents Program. "They are incredible—resilient and committed to undertaking work, often without funding, offices or supplies."

As the Women's Commission worked with these four youth groups, other groups of young people expressed interest in such capacity building. The Women's Commission hopes that the four initial groups will

go on to act as mentors for other groups, which will then continue to pass on information and expertise. While the Women's Commission is ending its formal partnership with these groups, AJWS has agreed to continue funding and working with them on the projects they have begun. ❖

Take Action! Encourage Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to focus attention on the situation of youth in northern Uganda. Visit http://www.womenscommission.org/take_action/index.shtml to send an advocacy letter today.



©Lori Heninger

The Women's Commission worked with Pader Concerned Youth Association (above), the Concerned Children Youth Association (Lira), Gulu Youth for Action and WATWERO Rights Focus Initiative (Kitgum).

Legislative Update

The Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act of 2005 (S.119), also

known as the "Children's Bill," would ensure that refugee children who enter the United States alone would be provided a guardian *ad litem* to look out for their interests, and legal counsel to represent them in court proceedings. The Women's Commission worked this summer to garner support for the bill among new Senators. The bill, which was introduced by Senator Feinstein (D-CA), has received bipartisan support and, at press time, is scheduled for an up or down vote by the Senate without debate. When voted on in this manner, the bill must pass by unanimous consent. A companion bill, H.R.1172, has been introduced in the House of Representatives by Zoe Lofgren (D-CA).



The Widows and Orphans Act of 2005 (S.644) was attached earlier this year to the Kennedy-McCain Secure America and Orderly

Immigration Act and will have a good chance of passing if the Kennedy-McCain legislation passes the Senate. Introduced by Senator Brownback (R-KS), the bill would introduce a new immigration category to facilitate more timely entry into the United States of women and children at particular risk of harm. The Women's Commission continues to work to promote its passage in the Senate.

Learn More

To keep track of the status of these bills, please visit <http://thomas.loc.gov>. ❖

Seeking Fair Treatment for Haitians

The political violence and oppression that began in earnest with former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's departure from Haiti in February 2004 has continued to increase, with lawlessness, extreme violence and human rights abuses the daily norm. The U.S. State Department has declared that "there are no safe areas in Haiti," and the head of UN peace-keeping operations said in June that conditions in parts of Haiti are worse than in Darfur. Beyond the political instability on the tiny island, Haiti has not yet recovered from the damage caused by two major storms in 2004. Despite these circumstances, the United States continues to deport Haitians living here back to Haiti.

The Women's Commission is working with a coalition of religious,

human rights and refugee groups to temporarily halt deportations. Recently, the coalition met with representatives from the State Department, the National Security Council and the White House to explore options for protecting Haitians. In addition, the Women's Commission co-sponsored a conference to explore the deepening crisis for Haitians and discuss U.S. policy toward Haitians in the United States and the Caribbean. Staff also testified before the Congressional Black Caucus about solutions to the current crisis. Among the alternatives proposed are granting Temporary Protective Status (TPS) to Haitians, which would allow Haitians to stay in the United States until conditions in Haiti improve.

While TPS is typically a decision made by the Administration, a bill

that has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives called the "Haiti Compassion Act" (H.R. 2592) would have the same effect. This bill would allow Haitians in the United States who have not been found by the government to be refugees, but are "nonetheless fleeing or reluctant to return to politically dangerous situations" to be granted Temporary Protected Status and remain in the United States for 18 months. The bill, which was introduced by Alcee Hastings (D-FL) in May 2005, had 22 sponsors at press time. ❖

Take Action! To support The Haiti Compassion Act, please go to http://www.womenscommission.org/take_action/index.shtml and urge your Congressperson to support the bill.

Children's Video

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of immigration relief for children.

"This innovative educational video will orient and empower thousands of vulnerable unaccompanied children by enabling them to understand their rights regarding relief from deportation, including asylum," says Christopher Nugent, an attorney who coordinates *pro bono* efforts for the law firm Holland and Knight, LLP. "After viewing the video upon arrival in office of refugee resettlement facilities, child clients will be better prepared to assert their rights and interests both with *pro bono* attorneys and immigration judges. The video therefore complements and furthers our efforts to provide legal services to unaccompanied children and represents a milestone in the years of the Women's Commission's advocacy for these children."

"What Happens When I Go to Immigration Court?" was filmed in

English and will be translated into Arabic, Creole, French, Fujianese and Spanish. The video, which is approximately 15 minutes long, contains music and other devices to hold a child's attention. It is expected to be completed in November.

The Women's Commission was fortunate to have the support of several key government officials for this project, including the Chief Judge of the Immigration Courts at the Executive Office for Immigration Review in the Department of Justice and the Director of the Division of Unaccompanied Children's Services in the Office of Refugee Resettlement within the Department of Health and Human Services. The Women's Commission will ensure that the video is widely used by advocates and officials working with unaccompanied alien children.

The Women's Commission thanks Kim Berner for donating her time and talent to produce this much-needed video. ❖

Planned Giving

Providing for the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children in your estate will enhance our ability to provide a voice for refugee women and children for years to come.

You can remember the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children in your will, or you can name the Women's Commission as a beneficiary of your life insurance, living trust or qualified retirement plan.

Please call Roxanne Saucier at (212) 551-3088 for more information.



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Abuse Without End: New Report Explores Burmese Women and Children’s Risk of Trafficking in Thailand

Kaung (name changed), who was born in Thailand of Burmese parents, was ten years old when a trafficker paid his estranged father 1,000 baht (US\$25) for him while his mother was away from home. The trafficker then resold him to a gang that operated begging rings in Bangkok.

Kaung lived with two other boys and one girl while working in a begging gang. They were locked in the home of the traffickers, where they slept on the floor with no blankets or mosquito netting.

According to Kaung, the traffickers beat him with a metal rod, stuck him with needles and burnt him with cigarettes. He also witnessed severe abuses against the other children.

This anecdote, from the new Women’s Commission report, *Abuse Without End: Burmese Refugee Women and Children at Risk of Trafficking*, puts a human face on a growing problem in Thailand—the countless number of Burmese women and children who become victims of human trafficking. Defined in the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion...for the purposes of exploitation,” people may be trafficked for sexual or physical exploitation or forced labor.

According to Women’s Commission field assessments, women and children fleeing conflict and persecution may be at increased risk of trafficking due to their vulnerable situation. In the case of the hundreds of thousands of Burmese refugees living in Thailand, this vulnerability is increased due to their lack of legal

status in Thailand.

This illegal status stems from the fact that Thailand has not signed the international refugee convention. Instead, the Thai government characterizes refugees as “displaced people fleeing fighting,” a definition that does not comply with international law and excludes large numbers of refugees from Burma, such as those fleeing the political repression, armed conflict and economic devastation resulting directly from years of despotic rule.

Because of their illegal status, Burmese refugees in Thailand have extremely limited means to support themselves and their families. They eke out a subsistence living, are marginalized in the Thai economy and exploited as a cheap source of labor. They live in fear of detection by Thai authorities, who may deport them or extort bribes from them.

Forced into an underground existence by their lack of status...Burmese in Thailand are at high risk of being trafficked, both during migration and once in Thailand itself.

Because the Thai government requires refugees living in camps along the Thai/Burma border to have written approval before leaving those camps, people leave surreptitiously to work on nearby farms for meager wages; many simply abandon the camps permanently to seek relatively better wage labor in urban or semi-urban areas. Refugees who leave the camps are vulnerable to arrest, harassment, extortion and trafficking.

Forced into an underground existence by their lack of status and precarious living conditions, Burmese nationals in Thailand are at high risk of being trafficked, both during

migration and once in Thailand itself. After being trafficked, women and children may end up in a range of abusive situations, including forced prostitution, begging, domestic work or work in substandard and dangerous conditions in textile factories, fishing or other industrial settings. Consistently, labor conditions for trafficked persons are characterized by long hours and physical and sexual abuse. Fear of deportation haunts those living without legal status, making them reluctant to report abuse.

Despite the fact that the majority of Burmese people living in Thailand cannot safely return home, Thailand typically deports trafficking victims back to Burma, putting them at risk of being identified and targeted by the Burmese military. Refugees typically return to Thailand, at risk of being swept up in the same cycle of violence and exploitation. Often people return to Thailand with greater debt, either from having to bribe officials en route or from the costs of resettling in Thailand. The cycle of repatriation and return leaves people more vulnerable to traffickers, and bolsters corrupt practices at the local level.

Missing in the dialogue on trafficking in Thailand is a holistic, rights-based approach that addresses the root causes of migration from Burma to Thailand. New solutions must acknowledge the reality that for many Burmese nationals repatriation is neither a safe nor viable option. Trafficking of persons in refugee-like circumstances must be considered within the international refugee framework. Even in the absence of ratifying the Refugee Convention, Thailand—with the support of the international community—must abide by its principles and the rights enshrined therein. ❖



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Addressing Reproductive Health Needs in Darfur, Sudan

As the conflict continues in Darfur, Sudan, women and girls continue to be raped. The Women's Commission's Reproductive Health Program director traveled to Darfur in August to monitor grants the Women's Commission had given to address basic reproductive health care in the ongoing crisis there.

Although this was not a comprehensive assessment trip, general findings, more than 18 months into the crisis, were mixed. One highlight is that progress has finally been achieved, through training and the release of some political constraints, in humanitarian workers' capacity to ensure clinical care for survivors of rape. However, in South Darfur, findings showed that women and girls are suffering from complications of pregnancy and delivery as well as unwanted pregnancy due to rape and unsafe abortions. They are often not receiving basic emergency obstetric care in a timely or effective manner, resulting in reports of approximately two to three deaths per week at the local hospital. In addition, no condoms were visible and there have been problems maintaining stocks of reproductive health supplies. While the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has clearly had logistical problems resulting in two- to four-month delays in receiving supplies, many agencies also appear to be overly dependent on UNFPA for all reproductive health materials and supplies, rather than procuring supplies locally and from their usual medical supply sources. Also of concern, it appeared that several humanitarian workers were not following current guidelines on the use of emergency contraception.

The Women's Commission provided the following recommendations to UN officials in Sudan's capital, Khartoum:

New Project Aims to Reduce Incidence of Rape during Fuel Collection

"The danger is the same, near or far, but there's no wood nearby. When we are there getting the wood, local people sometimes take the girls' clothes off. And do bad things. The people wear green uniforms. Some have camels, some have horses. At the place where we get the firewood they tell us, 'Line up one by one.' They say, stand two by two and they take us off like that and then they rape us. Sometimes this happens until evenings. We have told the police, but the police say stay in your tent and nothing will happen."

-- Women's Commission interview with Darfurian refugee girls, Mille camp, Chad. January 16, 2005

Many agencies have documented cases of women and girls being raped by government-sponsored militias while traveling out of displaced persons camps to collect vital fuel-wood for cooking and other household needs. Often, families are forced to choose between sending men who are more likely to be killed, or sending women who are "only raped."

The Women's Commission, with the support of American Jewish World Service, is launching a project to document the lack of coordination and absence of best practices regarding the provision of fuel; identify attempted solutions already in use; make recommendations and identify options, advantages and disadvantages for fuel alternatives and firewood collection methods in all phases of conflict-affected situations; and promote fuel solutions that protect women and girls in all phases of an emergency.

- ♦ UNFPA should host a training on the clinical management of survivors of rape every three months to address high turnover of both national and international personnel in this setting.

- ♦ UNFPA should explore providing basic emergency obstetric care training including post-abortion care in South Darfur, while also addressing political sensitivities to this level of care.

- ♦ International NGOs should consult with their national staff about culturally sensitive ways to make condoms visible and available to the community and do so.

- ♦ UNFPA should source national and other suppliers for reproductive health supplies and encourage agencies to procure these essential

supplies while also encouraging agencies to use locally available materials and human resources to develop simple clean delivery kits.

- ♦ UNFPA and other humanitarian organizations should widely disseminate readily available field manuals on reproductive health in refugee settings, emergency contraception and emergency obstetric care. ❖

To learn more about the situation for people displaced by the violence in Darfur, read the Women's Commission's report, *"Don't Forget Us": The Education and Gender-based Violence Protection Needs of Adolescent Girls from Darfur in Chad*, available at http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/Td_ed.pdf.

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Nepali Network (continued from page 3)

due to armed conflict. This pilot project, the Partnerships for Protecting Children in Armed Conflict (PPCC), brings together a group of local, national and international NGOs working on child protection in Nepal to monitor, report and respond to violations to the right to education.

A Watchlist working group coordinator based in Kathmandu will liaise with the PPCC Working Group member organizations in order to directly link information gathering with advocacy or activities that will provide tangible remedies for children and their communities. Working Group members will devise response activities, which may include collaborative advocacy campaigns, trainings, direct assistance for victims and development of programming focused on needs the group identifies.

The project will focus on five specific violations of children's right to education: strikes, forced closure of private schools, attacks on schools, threats to teachers and abductions or arrests of children from school grounds. In its first year, activities will focus on four conflict-affected

districts in Nepal, with the potential to expand to other locations as the project grows.

In addition to halting violations of children's right to education, the project aims to build partnerships between diverse organizations and to strengthen the capacity of the NGO community in Nepal to monitor, report and respond to violations against children's rights during armed conflict. ❖

Some sections of this article excerpted from Caught in the Middle: Mounting Violations Against Children in Nepal's Armed Conflict. Read the full report at http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/np_wl.pdf.

After the news of crossfire spreads Chameli and Diley's parents are worried and rush to search for them. They're thrilled to see their children return home.



The school is shut down due to the fear of renewed clash.



The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict also worked with the Nepali human rights group Himalayan Human Rights Monitors (HimRights) to draft a "children's version" of the Watchlist report, in a comic book format.

Working with a diverse group of 57 children, HimRights developed the comic book, "Farewell to Firearms," based on the children's own experiences. "Farewell to Firearms" teaches girls and boys about violations to their rights during armed conflict, and empowers them to resist these violations. The comic book format makes the stories clear and direct, and is accessible to those who are less literate. The comic book is currently being translated from Nepali into three additional indigenous languages in Nepal.

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