





**Women's Commission for Refugee Women & Children**  
122 East 42nd Street  
New York, NY 10168-1289  
tel: 212.551.3088 or 3111  
fax: 212.551.3180  
info@womenscommission.org  
[www.womenscommission.org](http://www.womenscommission.org)

# Mission statement

*The **Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children** works to improve the lives and defend the rights of refugee and internally displaced women, children and adolescents.*

*We advocate for their inclusion and participation in programs of humanitarian assistance and protection.*

*We provide technical expertise and policy advice to donors and organizations that work with refugees and the displaced.*

*We make recommendations to policy makers based on rigorous research and information gathered on fact-finding missions.*

*We join with refugee women, children and adolescents to ensure that their voices are heard from the community level to the highest councils of governments and international organizations.*

*We do this in the conviction that their empowerment is the surest route to the greater well-being of all forcibly displaced people.*

*The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children is an independent affiliate of the International Rescue Committee. The Commission was founded in 1989.*

# Letter from Liv

I am more than 25 years into my journey to the less privileged countries and people. It continues to change my life. My mind is full of images that were never before part of my world. I have seen children near death from malnutrition and disease and lack of assistance. I have seen people too weak to walk the last hundred yards to food distribution places, sick people lying on the ground in silence – because the saddest cry has no sound. I have seen what reality is like when you do your living as a stranger in the world: living on soil in which you can put down no roots. Living with a loss that will never be replaced.



Fifteen years ago I was one of the women who founded the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. Why? Because after the years I'd spent on humanitarian missions – with the International Rescue Committee and with UNICEF – it became clear to me that women need other women's voices and understanding. And 15 years ago, the international community was largely ignoring refugee women and children.

Uprooted women and children were described as refugees only – although they made up 80 percent of those affected by war. In the media they were described as sad throngs of running people, masses of scared people crossing a border. Too often they forgot to make it clear that they are us. That I am you.

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children has accomplished so much more than we ever dreamed was possible. We have spoken out on behalf of the millions of women, children and adolescents around the world who have been uprooted by civil strife, war and persecution. We have visited refugees and internally displaced women, children and adolescents in 50 countries. We have met with representatives of governments, the United Nations, nongovernmental organizations, persuading them to take notice of the special rights and needs of women and children and to DO something. And we have given women and children the chance to speak on their own behalf, to government ministers, to presidents, to the UN Security Council. And when they talk, people listen.

This year we have lost one of the most powerful voices speaking on behalf of refugee women and children. Mary Diaz, who for ten years was the executive director of the Women's Commission, died in February after a valiant battle against pancreatic cancer. Mary was a true inspiration – to me, her staff and board, and everyone who was fortunate enough to meet her. Every day she fought to make the world better. We would not have been where we are today without her.

And things have changed in the last 15 years. But there is still much to do, and I invite you, our friends, to join us as we continue our life's work to improve the world for uprooted women and children, in honor of Mary Diaz.

**Liv Ullmann**, Honorary Chair

# 15 years of

Before the existence of the Women's Commission, the distinct needs of refugee women and children were not adequately recognized or addressed. Over the years, the Women's Commission has provided a forum for countless refugee women and children, whose voices would otherwise not have been heard. The Women's Commission works hard to ensure refugee women and children receive the care and attention that they deserve.

Lang Ngan, former Vietnamese refugee



When the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children was founded in 1989, there was little awareness of the special needs and rights of refugee women, children and adolescents. Although women and children generally make up some 80 percent of uprooted populations, they had been largely overlooked in humanitarian programs and policies. Over the past 15 years, the Women's Commission has been a consistent voice calling on the international community – the United Nations, national governments, international nongovernmental organizations – to develop and implement policies and programs to improve the lives of refugee women and children, and, importantly, to include refugee women in this process. The Women's Commission has also provided opportunities for refugee women and children to speak on their own behalf in international forums and with policy makers. Since 1989 we have made great strides and, in some cases, smaller steps, in reproductive health, participation and protection, children and adolescents, and asylum/detention. But much remains to be done. As we celebrate our 15th anniversary, we recommit ourselves to improving the lives of displaced women, children and adolescents around the world.

# accomplishments

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children is **founded by** Liv Ullmann, Catherine O'Neill, Mary Anne Schwalbe and Susan Stark Alberti, with Susan Forbes Martin, Vera Blinken and others, under the auspices of the International Rescue Committee.

## 1989

The Commission's first delegation mission, to Pakistan, results in **establishment** of the Afghan Women's Social Service Center, which offers training and literacy programs for refugees in Pakistan.



## 1990

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) publishes "Policy on the Protection of Refugee Women." The Women's Commission helped craft the policy.

Women's Commission representatives **testify** on refugee issues and the needs of women and children at hearings of the U.S. Congress and the United Nations.

The Women's Commission testifies at a Congressional hearing and becomes the **first** U.S. organization to call for an international ban on the use of anti-personnel landmines.

## 1991



## 1992

Following a mission to Bosnia and Croatia, the Women's Commission is the **first** organization to report that rape has become a weapon in this war.

# 15<sup>years</sup> of accomplishments

Senators Olympia Snowe and Nancy Kassebaum introduce the Refugee Women and Children Protection Act which establishes the UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women as U.S. government policy. The bill is passed by Congress in 1994.

## 1993



## 1994

Following publication of the Women's Commission's **groundbreaking** survey "Refugee Women and Reproductive Health Care: Reassessing Priorities," the number of sexual violence, family planning and HIV/AIDS programs for refugees grows dramatically.

The Women's Commission co-sponsors with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and Save the Children the **first** international conference to consider the special needs of unaccompanied refugee and internally displaced children.

The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service releases guidelines that formally recognize rape, domestic abuse and sexual violence against women as potential grounds for asylum. The Women's Commission was **instrumental** in developing these guidelines.

## 1995



The Refugee Women's Network is established with support from the Women's Commission; its key leaders are Women's Commission board members. The RWN is an independent organization that provides leadership training for refugee women across the United States.

The Women's Commission helps **launch** and coordinates the Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium to improve provision of reproductive health services in refugee settings.



## 1996

President Clinton authorizes a \$5 million grant for a Bosnian Women's Initiative to be administered by the UNHCR, following **advocacy** by the Women's Commission.

The Women's Commission is the **first** organization to draw attention to the special concerns of refugee women being held in detention centers and prisons around the United States and pushes for reform.

# 1997



# 1998

The INS issues new guidelines on children seeking asylum in the United States in **response to** Women's Commission advocacy.

UNICEF, in collaboration with the Women's Commission, publishes "The Gender Dimensions of Internal Displacement: Issues and Actions."



The Women's Commission is **instrumental** in coordinating a coalition effort to ensure adequate U.S. protection of women asylum seekers who have fled gender persecution.

# 1999



# 2000

The Women's Commission publishes "Untapped Potential: Adolescents Affected By Armed Conflict. A Review of Policies and Programs," the **first** in-depth worldwide study on adolescents affected by armed conflict.

Research Conference 2000: Findings on Reproductive Health of Refugees and Displaced Persons, organized by the Women's Commission and Columbia University, is the **first** large-scale international conference on this subject.

# 15<sup>years</sup> of accomplishments

The Women's Commission **creates** the Afghan Women's Fund which gives grants to local Afghan women's groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

## 2001



Following the international Refugee Women's Consultation in June, co-sponsored by the Women's Commission and UNHCR, the High Commissioner for Refugees releases the "Five Commitments to Refugee Women" in December. The Consultation marks the **first** time that refugee women themselves are invited to UNHCR.



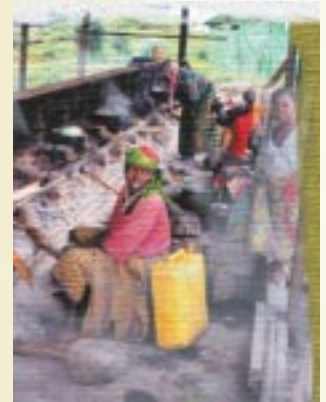
## 2002

As the **result of** Women's Commission advocacy, the U.S. Congress transfers custody of unaccompanied refugee children from the INS to the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

The Women's Commission releases its in-depth assessment of ten years of implementation of the UNHCR's policy and guidelines on the protection of refugee women.

As a **result of** strong advocacy from the Women's Commission and others, Congress introduces the Women and Children in Armed Conflict Protection Act, the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act and the Widows and Orphans Act, all of which would support new initiatives to improve the lives of refugee women and children.

## 2003



## 2004

The Women's Commission releases "Global Survey on Education in Emergencies," a **groundbreaking** study that examines the massive gaps in education for refugee and displaced children around the world.





# 15 years of delegations

**1989**

Pakistan  
Thailand  
Malawi

**1990**

Hong Kong  
Mozambique  
Pakistan

**1991**

Cambodia  
Laos and Thailand  
Côte d'Ivoire  
Guinea and Liberia  
Pakistan  
Hong Kong

**1992**

El Salvador,  
Guatemala,  
Nicaragua, Mexico  
Horn of Africa  
Côte d'Ivoire,  
Liberia  
Malawi  
Former Yugoslavia

**1993**

Cambodia  
Former Yugoslavia  
Thai/Burma border  
Côte d'Ivoire  
Somalia,  
Southern Sudan  
and Kenya  
Côte d'Ivoire,  
Kenya, Pakistan,  
Rwanda  
(reproductive health study visits)

**1994**

Azerbaijan  
Rwanda  
Belize, Cambodia,  
Hong Kong,  
Thailand  
(reproductive health study visits)

**1995**

Rwanda  
Louisiana,  
Mississippi,  
Pennsylvania  
(detention center visits)  
Tanzania  
Mozambique  
Bosnia and Serbia

**1996**

Bosnia and Croatia  
Turkey  
California,  
Maryland  
Puerto Rico  
(detention center visits)  
Angola

**1997**

Sierra Leone  
Rwanda  
Illinois and  
New York (detention center visits)  
Thailand

**1998**

Guatemala and Mexico  
Tanzania  
Azerbaijan,  
Armenia and Georgia  
Kosovo  
Pennsylvania and Texas (detention center visits)  
India  
Lebanon  
Colombia

**1999**

Sudan  
Arizona (detention center visits)  
Albania  
Colombia  
Macedonia and Albania

**2000**

Rwanda  
Thailand and Burma  
Serbia and Montenegro  
Burundi  
Kosovo

**2001**

Pakistan  
Colombia  
Uganda  
Zambia  
Angola  
Turkey  
Eritrea  
Ethiopia

**2002**

Jordan and the West Bank  
Pakistan and Afghanistan  
Dominican Republic and Miami  
Syria and Jordan  
Sierra Leone

**2003**

Pakistan and Afghanistan  
Colombia  
Thai/Burma border  
Sierra Leone  
Uganda  
California (detention center visits)

**2004**

Chad  
Liberia  
Thailand (planned)  
Uganda (planned)  
Egypt (planned)  
Sudan (planned)  
Afghanistan and Pakistan (planned)  
Colombia (planned)  
US detention center (planned)

# 15 refugees who a

## Partawmina Hashemee, Afghanistan

**Partawmina Hashemee** of Afghanistan is the director of the Afghan Women's Resource Center (AWRC), one of the first Afghan women-led NGOs in the region. A refugee herself since 1983, Partawmina has been advocating on behalf of Afghan refugees in Pakistan for more than a decade. AWRC provides resources, including education, healthcare training, employment opportunities and skills-training projects for Afghan refugee women residing in and around Peshawar, Pakistan, both in camps and in urban settings. AWRC has now opened an office to help returning refugees in Kabul, and is expanding to other areas of Afghanistan.

## Angelina Atyam, Uganda

**Angelina Atyam**, a nurse-midwife and mother of six, is co-founder and chair of the Concerned Parents Association, a local nongovernmental organization in northern Uganda struggling to end child rights abuses and the abduction of children by the rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army.

In October 1996, Angelina's daughter, Charlotte, then 14 years old, was abducted by the rebels from her boarding school and taken into captivity. She has been held hostage ever since. Some 20,000 children have been abducted during the 18-year conflict. Abducted children are forced to fight, cook, act as porters and sex slaves. Angelina's own daughter has borne a child to a rebel.

The Concerned Parents Association's objectives include the unconditional release of all the children and an end to the abductions. The organization works to ensure that children who are released or escape from captivity are rehabilitated and eventually reintegrated into their communities. Angelina has addressed the UN Security Council and met with President and Mrs Clinton, as well as with the president of Uganda, advocating on behalf of the women and children of Uganda.

## Dr Cynthia Maung, Burma

**Dr Cynthia Maung**, known universally as Dr Cynthia, was working as a doctor in a tiny rural clinic in Burma in 1989 when a government crackdown forced her to flee to neighboring Thailand. In the border town of Mae Sot she established the Mae Tao Clinic, which now treats more than 150 patients a day, delivers 10 to 20 babies a month, trains 30 medics a year and provides prenatal checkups, childhood immunizations and education about nutrition, sanitation and family planning. The clinic has a 49-bed inpatient ward, as well as a trauma department, blood and eye labs, and a prosthetics department for landmine victims. Most of the patients are refugees and migrant workers from Burma. Dr. Cynthia's "backpack medics" also cross the border back into the Burmese jungle, where they teach traditional midwives sterile-birthing techniques and provide other medical care.

Although she has lived in exile in Thailand for 15 years, Dr Cynthia has no official papers and is effectively stateless, at constant risk of being deported. She lives in a house at the clinic's gates, along with her husband and three children, the last a baby girl adopted after being abandoned by her mother at the clinic.

# make the world better place

## Shqipe Malushi, Kosovo

**Shqipe Malushi** first came to the United States from Kosovo in 1980 on a student visa. But a Kosovar rebellion against Serb-dominated Yugoslavia flared, and she was granted political asylum.

Shqipe is now executive director of the Albanian American Women's Organization "Motrat Qiriazhi," a nongovernmental organization based in New York City. The organization serves the Albanian American community, with particular attention paid to the needs of women and children. Through its various projects, AAWO contributes to strengthening the ties among Albanian Americans, and assists their effective integration into U.S. society.

During the war in Kosovo in 1999, Shqipe undertook an assessment mission to the region for the Women's Commission and was active in organizing assistance for refugees arriving in the United States.



## Amir Haxhikadrija, Kosovo

Leading by example, **Amir Haxhikadrija** has worked with countless children, adolescents and youth to create opportunities for thousands of young people affected by war in Kosovo to ensure their rights to assistance and protection as refugees and as returnees to their homeland. He has also worked consistently – before, during and after the war – across ethnic lines and often under very dangerous circumstances to promote equal rights, non-discrimination, non-violence and tolerance in Kosovo. He has been a staunch promoter of young people's critical role in implementing and benefiting from humanitarian, reconstruction, democratization and peace-building efforts.

During the refugee crisis in 1999, Amir and other young people organized themselves to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees, and as an "out-of-school-due-to-the-war medical student" he also worked with international NGOs to provide medical care to refugees. As an outgrowth of these community-based activities, Amir co-founded and is currently president of the Kosovar Youth Council (KYC), a nongovernmental organization. The KYC was founded in Albania, reconstituted itself in Kosovo and provides a superb example of how adolescent and youth activism can be supported to promote the recovery of communities in crisis and how their skills and enthusiasm can be transferred back to their country of origin after the emergency.

# 15<sup>refugees</sup> who make the world a better place

## Ochora Emmanuel and Akello Betty Openy, Uganda

**Akello Betty Openy and Ochora Emmanuel**, adolescents displaced by the civil war in northern Uganda, served as researchers for the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children's participatory study on displaced adolescents. The adolescent researchers interviewed more than 2,000 teens and adults to identify their needs and concerns. Subsequently, Betty and Emmanuel co-founded Gulu Youth for Action, a group that works to involve young people, especially girls, in issues of concern to them, such as adolescent health and education advocacy. GYFA hopes that through its work, adolescents will learn how to prevent STIs, including HIV/AIDS, and know where to go for prevention information, condoms, counseling and treatment. The group also mobilizes youth to work on peace and conflict resolution.

Betty is one of eight youths chosen by Olara Otunnu, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Children in Armed Conflict, to work with him to develop a youth advisory council with representatives from both war-ravaged and peaceful countries. The group will advise and help shape the policies of his office.



## Bushra Jawabri and Julia Resnitsky, Israel

At age 13, **Bushra Jawabri** began representing schools in Arroub refugee camp where she grew up in meetings with Israelis, presenting the Palestinian perspective on various issues of the conflict. **Julia Resnitsky** left Russia at age seven when her family moved as refugees to Jerusalem. In high school, she organized nonviolent conflict resolution workshops for junior high students.

Bushra and Julia have been involved in Seeds of Peace, an international organization that helps teenagers from conflict regions learn peace-making skills. In November 2001 Bushra was part of the official Palestinian delegation at the New York City International Youth Conference on uprooting the causes of hatred and terror, that was organized in response to the attacks of September 11. Julia's leadership in peace issues is challenged by her community, friends and family, who do not support her beliefs, yet she continues to volunteer with disadvantaged Palestinian and Israeli youth and mentor friends to work towards peaceful co-existence regardless of the obstacles they face.

## Xuan Nguyen-Sutter, Vietnam

**Xuan Nguyen-Sutter** was born and raised in Vietnam. She received a BA in economics from the University of Lausanne in Switzerland and an MBA from New York University. Against the advice of friends she returned to her homeland, only to become a refugee in 1975. She fled to Canada and later moved to the United States. For the last 25 years, she has worked in refugee camps in South East Asia and with refugee communities in the United States and Canada. In 1996, Xuan co-founded and became executive director of the Refugee Women's Network, a national organization that brings together women representing 32 countries and provides leadership and advocacy training to refugee and immigrant women.

## Leonora Castaño Cano, Colombia

**Leonora Castaño Cano** of Colombia was the president of the National Association of Rural, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Women (ANMUCIC), an organization with more than 90,000 members, most of whom are internally displaced by the ongoing civil war. Thirty-five of ANMUCIC's active members have been killed. As a displaced woman herself, and a leader with expertise in legislation and social policy, Leonora has achieved changes in policies and laws that benefit the often-marginalized rural people of Colombia. Because of her work, Leonora and her family received threats that compelled them to move to Spain.



## Maggy Barankitse, Burundi

**Maggy Barankitse** is from an elite Tutsi family in Burundi, but this did not stop her from organizing shelter for Hutu families during the country's civil war. Seeing the number of unaccompanied children, she built five villages where Hutu and Tutsi children can grow up, go to school, manage a household and tend to livestock, while feeling a sense of home and belonging. Each village has a couple of "village mothers." Maggy has set up a bakery, a dressmakers' workshop, a small boardinghouse and a farm where the children who have completed school can work and support themselves and their "families."

Maggy's struggle for the children in Burundi is often dangerous. She searches for abandoned and wounded children in war areas. She has been brought to trial several times, and her life has been threatened because she speaks out about the way politicians, the army and the rebels violate children's rights.

In the decade since she began this project, Maggy has helped over 10,000 children. She also helps poor children in neighboring villages, and shows that people in Burundi can help one another.

# 15<sup>refugees</sup> who make the world a better place

## Mangala Sharma, Bhutan

**Mangala Sharma**, a member of the ethnic Nepalese minority from southern Bhutan, fled persecution in her homeland in the early 1990s and spent almost 10 years living in a refugee camp in Nepal. There she founded an organization called Bhutanese Refugees Aiding Victims of Violence (BRAVVE) in response to rape and other gender violence she witnessed. Run entirely by refugees, the organization provides skills training to refugee women and adolescents in tailoring, weaving and typing, among other activities. The money they earn is used to buy food to supplement the limited provisions they receive.

In 2001 Mangala was able to gain asylum in the United States. Her husband and two daughters, however, were forced to remain behind in Nepal for more than two years before they were able to join her. Mangala now works at the Refugee Women's Network in Decatur, Georgia, where she helps refugee women integrate into the United States and become leaders in their communities.

## Aster Kidane, Ethiopia

**Aster Kidane** has dedicated the past ten years to working on behalf of refugees in Ethiopia and the United States. As an Eritrean, she had to flee Ethiopia in 1998, at the start of the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and

made her way to the United States, where she received asylum later that year. Before the war, Aster had worked for the Jesuit Refugee Service and provided direct social services to more than 100 refugees from Africa. As a program officer and then project director, she developed a number of successful programs that increased assistance to refugees and the internally displaced.

Aster now works as the coordinator of the Riverside Church Sojourners Ministry and has recruited more than 100 volunteers to visit asylum seekers held in the Elizabeth, N.J., and Wackenhut, N.Y., detention centers. Aster works tirelessly negotiating with detention officials to gain regular access to the detainees and is a forceful voice in educating the public about refugee and asylum issues. Aster has also established a small support group of women newcomers to the United States.

## Binta Mansaray, Sierra Leone

**Binta Mansaray**, an expert on gender-based violence, was the Women's Commission's country representative and protection partner in Sierra Leone from 2001 to 2003. Binta helped to galvanize local humanitarian and rights groups to form a coalition that monitors and advocates for the needs of Liberian refugees and internally displaced Sierra Leoneans. She addressed the United Nations as it examined the passing of Security Council resolution 1460 on the protection of children affected by armed conflict. She produced reports on the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in Sierra Leone, particularly as it affects girls, and on the involvement of internally displaced women in the first national elections held after 10 years of civil war. Binta also worked with the organization WITNESS to produce the film *Operation Fine Girl: Rape Used as a Weapon of War in Sierra Leone*, the first and only documentary about the pervasive reality of sexual violence during war. Binta is now the outreach coordinator for the special court addressing war crimes in Sierra Leone.

# Looking Ahead...

Dear Friends,

Since its inception, the Women's Commission has refused to accept excuses. We will not listen to "that's the way it has always been" or "that would be too difficult to change." Our independence – which flows from the generous support and encouragement of a very wide range of donors – enables us to speak out on controversial issues and to pursue solutions with tenacity.

The Women's Commission has become known for its ability to identify emerging issues, to conduct research and provide crucial data, and to advocate effectively. We have learned how to make the voices of refugee women and youth heard, and how to change laws, practices and attitudes.

We have been gratified by successes, but persistent challenges galvanize us. In remote desert camps or "hidden in plain view" in urban areas, refugee and internally displaced women and children continue to face persecution and violence. Fleeing rights abuses and seeking safe haven, women and children are detained by immigration authorities or fall victim to traffickers. In new crises and in situations of protracted displacement, uprooted children do not receive an education. In ALL of these settings, women and girls suffer rape and exposure to HIV/AIDS.

**In the year ahead, the Women's Commission will:**

- promote education in emergencies as critical to the safety and development of displaced children and adolescents;
- intensify advocacy for essential reproductive health services for communities in crisis – including family planning, prevention and management of HIV/AIDS/STIs and gender-based violence, and maternal care, including emergency obstetric services;
- research the vulnerability of displaced girls and women to trafficking, and stimulate policy reforms to prevent trafficking and promote appropriate responses for victims;
- help craft and press for passage of legislation that will protect refugee women and children both at home and abroad.

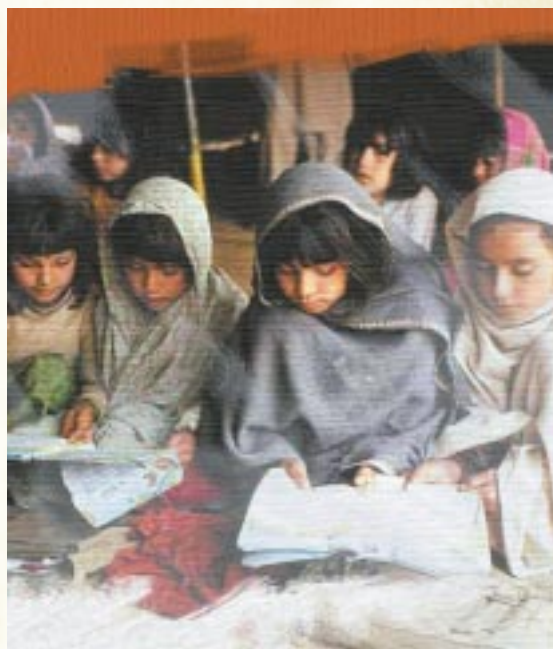
The needs of displaced women, adolescents and children will lead us, and Mary Diaz's spirit will guide us as we continue to challenge the "way things have always been done" and use our strengths and experience to make a difference.

**Ellen Jorgensen**  
Acting Executive Director

**Kathleen Newland**  
Chair of the Board

# Campaign for Refugee Girls

From Afghanistan to Colombia to Sierra Leone, refugee girls are among the most at risk. They face abduction and rape, forced marriage and slavery, life-threatening pregnancies and HIV/AIDS. Because they are female, they are less likely to learn to read and write or have opportunities for formal education. They are often considered the property of their families, with little or no say in decisions regarding marriage and employment. In refugee camps, many families sell girls as young as eight as second or third wives to men in their 40s or 50s. Some girls become soldiers because they believe it is their only protection from violence and abuse.



While refugee girls face some of the most serious human rights abuses, they are often less likely to find help or assistance, sometimes because of cultural and societal barriers, other times due to extreme poverty and neglect. Girls who want to stay in school, learn a trade or gain new skills have few opportunities; they are rarely consulted or encouraged to participate in camp programs or management.

The Women's Commission has launched the "Campaign for Refugee Girls" in order to document rights abuses, propose policy and program changes and work for reform. The advocacy campaign will focus on the challenges facing refugee girls and propose solutions. Partnering with other NGOs and UN and local groups and experts, it will build a network that will multiply opportunities for refugee girls. The campaign will stress the importance of educating refugee communities, particularly boys and men, regarding equal rights for girls and women.

To contribute to the Campaign for Refugee Girls (The Mary Diaz Fund for Refugee Girls), please send a check made out to the Women's Commission to **Women's Commission for Refugee Women & Children**, 122 East 42nd Street, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10168-1289.



# 15 friends speak out

## Senator Edward M. Kennedy

I commend the Women's Commission for its impressive record that is both inspiring and moving. For fifteen years, you've been a leading voice in the ongoing struggle to improve the lives and defend the rights of women and children uprooted by war or fleeing persecution.

You're on the front lines – giving much-needed assistance to the survivors of war and the victims of violence and disease. You're also on the front lines in the battles in Congress – providing sound technical expertise, wise policy advice, and vivid testimony on issues that range from asylum and detention to desperately-needed health care. You're speaking out against the constant injustices that plague refugees, asylum seekers and the internally displaced.

Today, more than ever, you're making a very real difference for women and children who need our help the most, and our nation and the entire world community owes you an enormous debt of gratitude.

## Senator Sam Brownback

To the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children and all of its supporters:

Congratulations on fifteen years of protecting displaced women, children and adolescents. Your organization has an important mission to care for some of the world's most vulnerable people, and your tireless efforts ultimately save lives.

I am particularly grateful to the Women's Commission for its assistance on the Widows and Orphans Act. The Women's Commission has been instrumental in developing this legislation and building bipartisan support for it on Capitol Hill. Closing this gap in refugee protection is an important task, and I am proud to work with the staff of the Women's Commission to provide relief to women and children at risk of harm.

**Best wishes on this special anniversary and continued success in the days ahead!**

## Charles MacCormack, President, Save the Children

Few issues are more tragic or less addressed than the treatment of women and children in armed conflict and displacement. In just one century, we have gone from conditions where 90 percent of the casualties were soldiers to conditions where nearly 90 percent of the victims are civilians, primary women and children. Save the Children has had no more dedicated and capable partner in addressing these issues than the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, and I know we will continue to work together on these issues until these intolerable conditions no longer blight the lives of millions.

**Carolyn Makinson,**  
Executive Director,  
Center for International Studies,  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

From the outset, the Women's Commission has had extraordinary leaders in Mary Anne Schwalbe and Mary Diaz as Executive Directors. And it shows in the results that it has achieved. Astonishing that one, relatively small organization could unfailingly pick the most important issues and have a major impact on all of them in terms of world-wide policies and programs – landmines and reproductive health for refugees in the early years and, more recently, adolescents and education for displaced populations.

Representative

**Carolyn B. Maloney**

I congratulate the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children on its fifteenth anniversary and commend its members for their invaluable work. With your strong commitment to promoting peace, improving global health and protecting refugees from violence, you truly are making a difference in the world. I look forward to working with you in the future to improve the lives of the world's women and children.

**Meryl Streep, Actor**

Congratulations to the Women's Commission on fifteen life-saving years. Organizations such as yours take the 21st Century challenge of refugee displacement and turn it around. The enfranchisement of women and support for their well-being and that of their children paves the way to a positive future for all of us.

**Eve Ensler,**  
Author of "The Vagina  
Monologues"

I applaud the brave work that the Women's Commission has spearheaded the past fifteen years in refugee camps throughout the world, addressing notoriously overlooked issues by the international community including the lack of sanitary napkins, inadequate nourishment and rape – a colossal problem in these camps. Thank you Women's Commission for giving these displaced women a voice.

**Julia Ormond, Actor**

Investing in the potential of refugee girls is to directly invest in the future peace and stability of a community. The work the Women's Commission is doing to ensure greater protection for refugee girls, who are often forced into marriages, abducted and sold into sexual slavery, and deprived of education, could not be more timely or vital.

**George Rupp, President,  
International Rescue Committee**

Since its founding, the Women's Commission has become an admired and effective advocate for some of the world's most vulnerable people. The determined efforts of its staff, board and volunteers have improved the lives of millions of uprooted women, children and adolescents worldwide. My colleagues and I are proud that the Women's Commission is part of the International Rescue Committee family. We look forward to continuing our close working relationship.

## Ruud Lubbers, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNHCR is honoured to join the friends of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children in commemorating its 15th anniversary. The Commission's work has set the stage to place cutting edge issues pertaining to refugee women and children on the public agenda and to influence policy decisions to provide better protection for them. UNHCR considers the Commission an exceptional partner in UNHCR's efforts to support the empowerment of refugee women and to bring their voices and experiences into our debates and practice. We have also worked closely with the Commission on issues affecting refugee children, and in recent years, the special needs of adolescents.

As we celebrate the achievements of the Commission, we also commemorate the invaluable contributions of the late Mary Diaz. For ten years Mary was an outstanding and tireless advocate on behalf of displaced and refugee women and children. Her efforts contributed significantly to policy developments in the area, including many of the current initiatives underway in UNHCR to address sexual and gender-based violence. Mary will be dearly missed by all of us at UNHCR, as well as by all the women and children in our populations of concern.

We will continue the fruitful collaboration with the Commission and commit to keeping Mary's important legacy alive.

## Indira Kajosevic, Executive Director, Reconciliation and Culture Cooperative Network (New York and Zagreb)

The staff of the Women's Commission are all caring professionals, dedicated to supporting a better future for refugee women and children. Their priorities were to protect lives, and give voice to over 7 million civilians that were forced to leave their homes in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo during the last decade. Its staff, consultants and board members paid numerous visits to refugee centers in the region to listen to women and children who had little opportunities to tell their stories; Women's Commission reports reached people in the decision making places urging them to support the work of refugee organizations, women and youth centers in the war-torn Balkans.

Heartfelt HAPPY 15<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY WOMEN'S COMMISSION.

## Joyce Mends-Cole, Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women/Gender Equality for UNHCR

I have been associated with the Commission in many ways – as a former board member, as a refugee, and as the Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women/Gender Equality for UNHCR.

The Commission is really the premiere organization for refugee women. As I mourn the death of Mary, I am comforted by her shining life and the stellar colleagues she has left behind. I feel that I am a part of the Commission family and I want to express my deepest appreciation for the extraordinary partnership my office has had with you which has provided needed support for my staff and myself as we struggled to bring refugee women's voices and experiences into UNHCR mainstream action. I salute your courage and wish you all the best for many years to come. Well done!

# Bob DeVecchi,

## President Emeritus International Rescue Committee

In 1989, when the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children came into being, I was President of the International Rescue Committee and it was through that organization that the impetus to form the Women's Commission came. The creators came from a small group of unique and altogether formidable members of the IRC family – from its Board, its staff and dedicated volunteers.

My admiration and respect for the Women's Commission knows no bounds. It is a source of inspiration, encouragement, and hope in a world too often lacking these values today.

I salute each and every person who has been and who is involved in the Women's Commission, including its Board, its staff, and the many volunteers who carry on its mission with such dedication, creativity and energy. Countless refugee and internally displaced women and children throughout the world, and indeed all of civilized humanity, owe debts of gratitude to the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. May it continue to prosper and to grow as long as the need is there. I've cheered you on from your inception, and will continue to cheer as long as I can.



# Carol Bellamy,

## Executive Director, UNICEF

UNICEF has been privileged to be a partner of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children for many years. Our closely aligned mandates have given us welcome opportunities to collaborate and build on each other's work in key areas such as internal displacement, children affected by armed conflict and adolescent participation in conflict and post-conflict situations.

The Women's Commission is one of the strongest advocates for children affected by armed conflict. Whether it is at international gatherings, in discussions with Security Council delegates in New York or in country-level dialogue, the Women's Commission has always been a credible and passionate voice defending the rights of children affected by armed conflict. They showed tremendous leadership in agreeing to "host" the new Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, and this initiative has now established itself as a key source of information and analysis on the situation of children in conflict-affected countries.

The innovative approach of the Women's Commission is one of its greatest strengths. It has pioneered work in the area of adolescent participation and influenced the work of many other organizations in this area, including UNICEF.

We at UNICEF would like to thank you for your important and original contributions to protecting and promoting the rights of children and women affected by armed conflict. We wish you many more years of success, and we count on our continued partnership.



May 13, 2004

Dear Friends:

I am delighted to have this opportunity to congratulate the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children on its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Since its inception in 1989, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children has worked to improve the quality of life and defend the rights of refugee and internally displaced women, children and adolescents. As a watchdog and advocacy organization, the Women's Commission works on behalf of refugee women and children around the world, meeting with them to learn first-hand of their needs and conditions. Your efforts ensure that their voices are heard among governments, international organizations and NGOs. The resources and technical assistance you provide have a ripple effect that can change the status and conditions of women and children around the world. Through the exchange of ideas and experiences, the Women's Commission works tirelessly to find the solutions to problems affecting refugee women and children and to work toward the goal of ensuring healthy and productive lives for them.

I send my congratulations to the Women's Commission for 15 remarkable years and my best wishes for a wonderful anniversary celebration.

Sincerely yours,

Hillary Rodham Clinton  
United States Senator

# Donors . . . Recognizing our Supporters

The Women's Commission thanks all the individuals, foundations and corporations that have supported our work over the past 15 years. The generous donors listed below have each given more than \$100,000. We would like especially to thank our anonymous donor, who showed great faith in the Women's Commission from the very beginning, and over the years has given more than any other individual, foundation or corporation.

Anonymous (1)	The David and Lucille Packard Foundation	Lilian Hertzberg	JP Morgan Chase	Oak Foundation
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We thank the Women's Commission Charter Founders, individuals and others who contributed \$5,000 or more by December 1999.

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# In Memoriam

*On February 12, 2004, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children lost its beloved director, Mary Diaz.*

*As executive director of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children since 1994, Mary was an eloquent, devoted, tireless and effective advocate for the protection and empowerment of women, adolescents and children affected by war and persecution.*

*She touched the lives of tens of thousands of vulnerable refugee women and children, as well as those who worked with her at the United Nations, government offices and international and local nongovernmental organizations. Mary had visited refugees and displaced women, children and adolescents in refugee settings around the globe, including in Angola, Tanzania, Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Dominican Republic and the Balkans. Under her leadership, the Women's Commission grew from an organization with four staff and a budget of \$450,000 to an organization with more than 20 staff and a budget of over \$4 million.*

*Mary, who was 43 years old, enjoyed the respect, admiration and deep affection of everyone who had the fortune to work closely with her.*

*Prior to working at the Women's Commission, Mary was director of refugee and immigration services at Catholic Charities in Boston, and had previously worked in the production department at a TV news station in Philadelphia. She held a BA in International Relations from Brown University and an MA in International Education from Harvard.*

*Her death is a loss to the international community. The Women's Commission is committed to carrying on her vision to improve the lives of refugee women, children and adolescents around the world.*

*Donations in Mary's memory may be made to the Mary Diaz Fund for Refugee Girls. Donations may be sent to the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 122 East 42nd Street, New York, NY 10168-1289.*