



# FY 2019

## ANNUAL REPORT

October 2018 – September 2019

 **WOMEN'S  
REFUGEE  
COMMISSION**  
RESEARCH. RETHINK. RESOLVE.

## Vision

Our vision is a world in which refugee and internally displaced women, children, and youth are safe, healthy, and self-reliant; have their human rights respected and protected; and inform and drive their own solutions and development.

## Mission

Our mission is to improve the lives and protect the rights of women, children, and youth displaced by conflict and crisis. We research their needs, identify solutions, and advocate for programs and policies to strengthen their resilience and drive change in humanitarian practice.

## How We Achieve Change: Research. Rethink. Resolve.

Our work begins in the community. We listen to displaced people and learn about their strengths and their unmet needs. Together with them and local partners we identify potential solutions to the challenges they face. We develop tools and provide technical assistance to practitioners to improve humanitarian response. We work with donors, policymakers, and practitioners to ensure that our recommendations are institutionalized and implemented across the globe.



This year, the Women's Refugee Commission reached a milestone as the organization turned 30. Reflecting on our impact over the past three decades, I feel tremendously proud of our achievements. But also humbled by the challenges that lie ahead.

With unprecedented levels of displacement and an increasing need for assistance, we feel a sense of urgency to advance our mission with ever greater determination and focus. We strive to embody within humanitarian response a commitment to strategies that can create lasting, transformative change. We are focusing on the strengths of women and girls—their skills, capacities, and potential—expanding the traditional needs-based model in new and exciting ways. Focusing on strengths is empowering. Focusing on strengths more effectively advances gender equality, resilience, and inclusion.

It begins with accountability to migrant and refugee women and girls. At WRC, we are committed to promoting the full participation, decision-making, and leadership of women and girls. We shed light on their challenges and create meaningful opportunities for them to forge their own paths to self-reliance with dignity and hope.

We believe that when women have the resources they need, they can change the circumstances of their displacement. With the right support, refugee women and girls can do more than survive; they can be agents of change within their communities.

We are more motivated than ever to protect the rights of migrant and refugee women and children and to make sure they receive the protection and support they need. We do this because we believe that if you get humanitarian action right for girls and women, you get it right for everyone.

This report highlights some of our work at the global, national, and community levels to advance gender equality and bolster individual and community-level resilience. We will continue to do whatever it takes to ensure that refugees are safe, healthy, and self-reliant. Thank you for standing with us.

Sarah Costa  
Executive Director

## DEFENDING THE RIGHTS OF MIGRANT, STATELESS, AND REFUGEE WOMEN

Around the world, migrant, stateless, and refugee women and children are disproportionately subject to exploitation, including legal and human rights violations. WRC works to hold governments accountable for upholding the rights of women and children, so they can find safety, access justice, and rebuild their lives successfully.

## UNIFYING SEPARATED FAMILIES

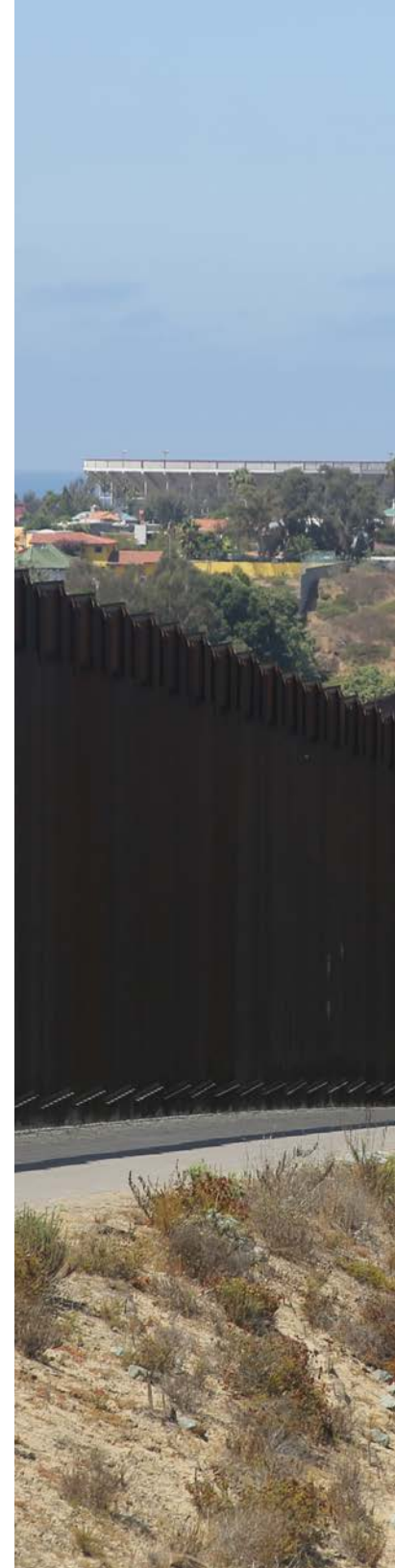
In April 2018, the Trump administration announced its “zero-tolerance” policy toward anyone trying to come to the United States without authorization. As a result, thousands of children were forcibly separated from their parents and families. WRC and partners successfully advocated for the end of zero tolerance and brought a class action lawsuit that resulted in court orders to reunify families separated at the US/Mexico border. In 2019, we continued to provide technical assistance in the Ms. L family separation lawsuit, where we questioned the whereabouts of additional children who had been separated by the government and had not been identified in the original class action. We provided critical information to the American Civil Liberties Union, submitted declarations to the court, and participated in a court-ordered convening with the government. As a result of our work, the government identified more than 1,500 additional children who had been separated from their parents. We continue to work with partners to contact every last one of these children to ensure that they are safe and are reunited with their families.



© WRC/Michelle Brané

## ALTERNATIVES TO IMMIGRATION DETENTION

After interviewing Selene Saavedra Roman, a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient (pictured at left) who had been detained in extremely disturbing conditions, WRC helped organize a hearing before Congress, and brought Ms. Saavedra Roman to Capitol Hill to testify about her experience. Our advocacy and communications efforts help get effective alternatives to detention programs on the national agenda.





## CAMPAIGNING FOR EQUAL NATIONALITY RIGHTS

In approximately one quarter of countries around the world, women continue to face legal discrimination in nationality rights, unable to pass their nationality to their children or spouse on an equal basis with men. This discrimination results in wide-ranging human rights violations and contributes to exploitation and abuse, including gender-based violence.

Since 2018, the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights—housed within the Women’s Refugee Commission—has supported Malaysian activists to advance nationality law reforms. This effort led to the Malaysian Campaign for Equal Citizenship. In 2019, the Global Campaign included Malaysian activists in a capacity-building workshop with coalition members from across the globe. With the Global Campaign’s technical and funding support, the Malaysian Campaign worked with affected mothers to enhance their capacity to advocate for reform, and produced a [compelling video of the mothers’ testimonies](#). A national forum held by the Malaysian Campaign in September garnered significant [media attention](#) and endorsements for reform by the Democratic Action Party and the Deputy Minister of Women, Family, and Community Development.



**Watch** “Its Time for Equal Nationality Laws - Ending Gender Discrimination in Nationality Laws”

<https://youtu.be/XDvKChMvfUuM>

## WORKING TO MITIGATE THE EFFECTS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the greatest threats to women and girls in emergency contexts. Men and boys also experience sexual violence. WRC is working to fundamentally transform the way GBV is addressed in humanitarian settings.

### THE LINKS BETWEEN ENERGY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Energy—for cooking, lighting, and powering appliances such as phones and radios—is essential to survival, including in humanitarian settings. Refugee women and girls are often responsible for gathering firewood and other sources of energy, which can put them at heightened risk of rape and sexual exploitation and abuse. It can also exacerbate tensions between refugees and host communities over natural resource management. Conflicts over energy use within the home can lead to intimate partner violence. A lack of lighting in public spaces puts women and girls at risk of danger when, for example, they go to the latrines at night, or when girls travel to school before dawn. Despite these risks, inclusive energy access, and its link to GBV, is routinely neglected in humanitarian response.

WRC partnered with Mercy Corps to conduct a global review and case studies in Uganda and Jordan on the link between energy access, GBV, and gender equality. Based on our findings, we are producing training materials and programming tools for humanitarian practitioners that will improve the safety of and opportunities for refugee women and girls through inclusive access to energy.

“Scarcity of energy resources... forces households into awful decision-making scenarios affecting women and girls — risk assault or rape or go without water or cooked food.”  
-Uganda case study

### MEN AND BOYS ALSO AT RISK OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The prevalence of violence against women and girls in war and conflict is quite widely known. Less well known is the extent to which men and boys are also targeted. Unaccompanied boys, boys and men with disabilities, adolescent boys, and people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, among others, are particularly at risk of sexual violence, abuse, and exploitation. Female family and community members are also impacted by male sexual victimization.

In FY 2019, WRC released a series of reports detailing horrifying sexual violence against men and boys in two humanitarian crises: the Cox’s Bazar refugee camps in Bangladesh and in Libya as men and boys attempted to reach the Mediterranean to cross to safety in Europe. Following publication of our report on the situation in Libya, the International Criminal Court prosecutor made a statement to the United Nations Security Council in which she stated that “[m]y Office has provided key evidence and information to national authorities, which has facilitated progress in a number of investigations and prosecutions relating to crimes against migrants in Libya.”

## THE CALL TO ACTION ON PROTECTION FROM GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN EMERGENCIES

The Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies is a groundbreaking initiative involving states and donors, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations. The goal of the Call to Action is to fundamentally transform the way GBV is addressed in crises so that every humanitarian response—from the onset—mitigates the risks of GBV, especially violence against women and girls, and provides safe and comprehensive services for survivors. In 2019, WRC produced a guide to help field-based donors and organizations develop a local “road map” to implement the Call to Action in their particular humanitarian setting. The guide is based on lessons from innovative Call to Action pilot projects supported by WRC and our partners in northeast Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2017-2019.

*Call to Action Road Map mid-year review meeting, Maiduguri, Nigeria, July 2018 © UNFPA*



## ADVOCATING FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH FOR ALL REFUGEES

Lack of sexual and reproductive health care is a leading cause of death, disease, and disability among refugee women and girls of reproductive age. WRC is committed to protecting refugees' reproductive rights and ensuring lifesaving health services are available from the onset of an emergency.

## INVOLVING COMMUNITIES IN SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

In November 2017, WRC embarked on an innovative health initiative in Borno State in northeast Nigeria, designed to strengthen capacity and resilience at the community and local government levels. After 10 years of conflict, more than 1.7 million people are displaced, and 64% of health facilities in Borno State have been destroyed or damaged. The project takes a unique approach to humanitarian action by prioritizing local leadership in every aspect of implementation. Working with five local partners, WRC provides technical and capacity-building support to the state government and other partners to implement a community health program and facilitate improved access to quality primary health care. In September 2019, using training materials we developed with them, our community-based partners conducted the first training in the program, preparing facilitators to train community health workers. The health workers provide their communities with basic health information and encourage the use of local health services. By increasing the availability of information and access to services, this initiative aims to improve community members' reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health and nutrition immediately and for the long term.

## STATE OF THE FIELD: ACCESS TO CONTRACEPTION FOR CRISIS-AFFECTED POPULATIONS

People affected by crises consistently report a desire to delay or avoid pregnancy. Yet access to contraception remains a gap in many crisis-affected settings. WRC is conducting a global assessment to map contraceptive provision across diverse settings. The dual goals of this assessment are to understand the barriers to accessing contraception and to identify solutions that will improve access for women, girls, and couples. We also conducted three case studies documenting contraceptive service provision in humanitarian responses in Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Mozambique. The [Bangladesh case study](#) was published in June 2019. Additional findings from the global assessment will be released and shared in 2020. They will provide a strong foundation for the humanitarian community to develop strategies and recommendations to expand the availability of contraceptive services across humanitarian settings.



Participants in the first training of the Borno State health initiative in northeast Nigeria, which prepared facilitators to train community health workers. © Mohammed Bakar

## DEVELOPING TOOLS FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-RELIANCE

As the number of people displaced by conflicts and crises reaches record levels, and the length of displacement increases, it is critical that we develop sustainable solutions for refugees. Giving refugee women cash assistance and opportunities to safely earn a living increases their self-reliance and resilience, restores their dignity, and protects them from harm. WRC is a pioneer of work in this area.

## HOW CASH PROTECTS WOMEN FROM VIOLENCE

Traditionally, refugees have received aid in the form of in-kind assistance, such as food and blankets. Cash and voucher assistance is increasingly used in humanitarian settings to support local markets and broaden refugees' access to goods and services. There is evidence that cash can also play an important role in preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV). Financial resources can help women become financially independent, thereby reducing child marriage. Cash assistance can also facilitate access to medical or legal services, which are often vital to a woman's ability to protect herself in a crisis. Cash is not yet widely used for these purposes, though WRC is actively working with partners to expand the use of cash and voucher assistance to prevent and respond to GBV, which remains an enduring problem for displaced people.

WRC's recent work in Ecuador highlights the effectiveness of integrated cash and GBV response. Venezuelan migrant women and girls living in Ecuador face extremely high rates of sexual violence, exploitation, and abuse. WRC partnered with CARE and two local women's rights organizations to strengthen the capacity of service providers in Ecuador to use cash assistance in the prevention of and response to GBV. After the initial three-month pilot project, women reported that cash assistance allowed them to access key support services for themselves and their children. They further reported that the services protected them and their children and contributed to the prevention of further violence.

## AN INITIATIVE TO HELP REFUGEES ACHIEVE SELF-RELIANCE

The Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative, led by WRC and RefugePoint, seeks to promote opportunities for self-reliance as a way for refugees to regain agency over their finances and futures, while supporting the peace, stability, and prosperity of host communities. The goal of the Initiative is to measure the impact of livelihood programs over time and ensure that the programs are effectively helping refugee households become economically independent and transition away from reliance on unpredictable humanitarian assistance.

Our self-reliance measurement tool, which captures the most vital data indicative of a refugee household's well-being, was successfully pilot tested in Jordan, Kenya, and Mexico in 2019. The pilots provide valuable information about program impact and guidance on how WRC and RefugePoint can successfully achieve the goal of reaching 5 million refugees in five years with self-reliance programming.



Refugee women in Uganda participated in a focus group discussion on using cash assistance to mitigate the risk of gender-based violence. © WRC/Tenzin Manell

## GENDER AND SOCIAL INCLUSION: LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Within refugee populations, certain groups are particularly vulnerable or likely to be overlooked, including people with disabilities, adolescent girls, and LGBTQI individuals. WRC endeavors to ensure that all people, including those traditionally excluded, play an active role in identifying solutions and designing programs that impact their lives, meet their unique needs, and build on their capacities.

### A COMMITMENT TO REFUGEES WITH DISABILITIES

Women, children, and youth with disabilities are among the most socially excluded groups in any displaced community. Exclusion reduces their access to services and assistance, and increases their risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation. At an international conference on “Ending Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Humanitarian Crises” in Oslo in May 2019, WRC made a commitment to work in partnership with women-led organizations to strengthen the capacity of GBV service providers and decision makers to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls with disabilities in humanitarian settings. We will do this by supporting effective implementation of new international [disability guidelines](#). WRC helped develop and conduct projects in Jordan, Sri Lanka, and Uganda to pilot test the GBV section of the guidelines.



*WRC Executive Director Sarah Costa accepted InterAction's Disability Award in recognition of our groundbreaking work on people with disabilities in displacement settings. © Patricia Swahn McIlreavy*

### ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are central to an effective, inclusive, and rights-based response in crisis situations. In May 2019, WRC conducted a review of how gender has been integrated into the Rohingya humanitarian response in the Cox's Bazar refugee camps in Bangladesh. We documented positive practices, such as safe spaces where women and girls can access a range of services and activities, including sexual and reproductive health services. However, despite many examples of humanitarian response advancing gender equality in Cox's Bazar, WRC also noted areas of concern, including a lack of understanding about how the crisis is affecting more marginalized populations, such as women with disabilities, older women, and people of diverse sexual orientation. Our recommendations are informing humanitarian best practices in Cox's Bazar, where these practices are actively promoted.

## REFUGEE YOUTH SPEAK OUT

Young refugees have talents, skills, and capacities that are often neither recognized nor utilized. WRC was instrumental in establishing and supporting the Global Youth Advisory Council (GYAC) in 2018, which advises the UN refugee agency on how humanitarian actors can work more effectively with and for refugee youth. A GYAC delegate addressed the UN Economic and Social Council Youth Forum in New York in April 2019. As a result of this advocacy, inclusion of refugees in national education systems will be part of the Forum's final report. GYAC members also brought youth voices and perspectives to the UN Climate Change Summit in New York in September 2019 and to several events in Geneva, including the UNHCR High Commissioner's Dialogue on Refugee Protection, the annual UNHCR consultations with NGOs, and planning meetings for the Global Refugee Forum.



*Members of the Global Youth Advisory Council met with Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, (back row, fourth from left) in Geneva. © Nathalie Bussien*

## RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS

When humanitarian crises strike, adolescent girls are especially disadvantaged. WRC directly engages with adolescent girls, their families, and communities to support, protect, and uphold girls' rights while advancing sustainable changes in humanitarian practice to promote girls' healthy development. WRC successfully worked with key partners, including UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration, to pilot and adopt our programming models, such as the I'm Here Approach\*. In 2019, we developed materials to monitor and evaluate adolescent sexual reproductive health programming in safe spaces.

*\* I'm Here is a humanitarian practitioner's guide on how to better understand adolescent girls' experiences and create girl-focused programming.*

## CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF FIGHTING FOR THE RIGHTS OF REFUGEE WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND YOUTH

In May 2019, the Women's Refugee Commission celebrated 30 years of accomplishments in improving the lives of refugee women, children, and youth.

[Watch The Women's Refugee Commission at 30](#)



Voices of Courage laureates participated in a panel moderated by Mallika Dutt (left), the founder of the global human rights organization Breakthrough. Panelists, left to right: Marguerite Barankitse, founder of Maison Shalom and Voices of Courage Award honoree in 2004; Sima Samar, Chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and honoree in 2001; Mina Jaf, founder and director of Women Refugee Route and honoree in 2016.



Liv Ullmann, co-founder of the Women's Refugee Commission, made opening remarks, recalling the early days of the organization.



WRC board chair emerita Dina Dublon (left) introduced Voices of Courage honoree Indra Nooyi, philanthropist and former CEO of PepsiCo.



Emi Mahmoud, slam poet, gave a rousing performance to close the event.

Luncheon Photos  
© Todd France

## WATCH VIDEO



(Left) WRC participated in Women Deliver's 2019 global conference on gender equality and the health, rights, and well-being of girls and women. Pictured here is Catherine Harrington, campaign manager of the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights, which is hosted by WRC.

(Right) Sarah Costa delivered the Kapuscinski Development Lecture in Brussels on gender equality and reproductive health in humanitarian contexts. The high-level lectures are organized jointly by the European Commission, the United Nations Development Programme, partner universities, and development think-tanks. Photo © UCOS



A group of renowned musicians participated in The Lantern Tour: Concerts for Migrant and Refugee Families. Concerts were held in five US cities, and raised money for the Women's Refugee Commission. Left to right: Lila Downs, Graham Nash, Jackson Browne, Emmylou Harris, Steve Earle, Shawn Colvin, and Jerry Douglas. Photo © Todd France



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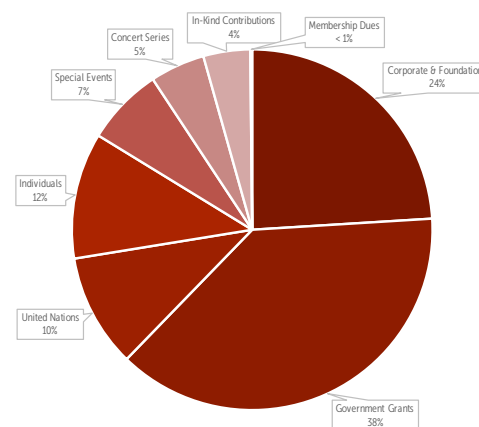
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 Carrie Simon  
 Henry Smith  
 Margaret Smith  
 Donald Stephens  
 Ben Stewart  
 Ian Stuart  
 Ben Sylvester  
 Martha Vail  
 Joel T. Walker  
 Carrie Welch  
 Jonathan Werner  
 Mary White  
 Katie Williams  
 Kenneth Wolf  
 Dominique Wolfe  
 Wurman Family Charitable Fund  
 Anonymous (2)

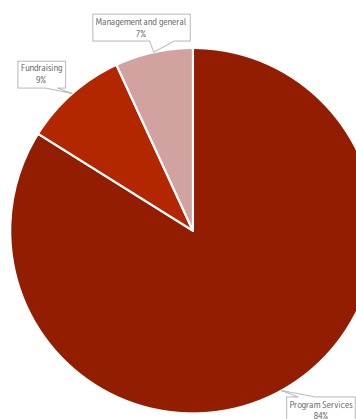
## FINANCIAL REPORT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2019

The Women's Refugee Commission is exempt from federal income taxes under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Copies of our audited financial statements for FY 2019 are available on our website.

### FY 2019 REVENUE TOTAL REVENUE: \$11,822,057



### FY 2019 EXPENSES TOTAL EXPENSES: \$9,816,647



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Madelyn Bucksbaum Adamson  
Analisa Allen  
Liz Appel  
Alexandra Arriaga  
Zrinka Bralo  
Joy Bunson  
Elizabeth Daniels  
Martha Gallo  
Barbara Hack  
Catherine LaCour  
Malini Saba  
Eileen Serra  
Ambassador Donald Steinberg  
Deborah Tolman  
Sandra Sennett Tully  
Carrie Welch  
Suhas Yerra  
(As of September 2019)

## THANK YOU

The board and staff of the Women's Refugee Commission thank Jocelyn Cunningham for her 15 years of dedication to the organization and her leadership as co-chair of the board of directors from 2010 to 2019. We salute her unwavering efforts to improve the lives of refugee women, children, and youth around the world.



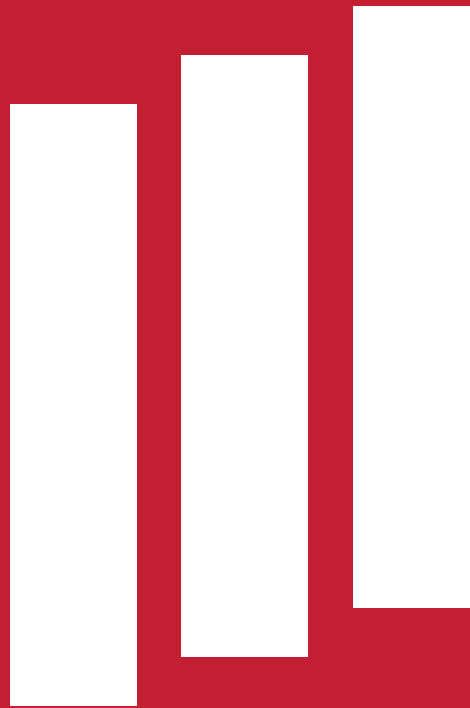


*WRC staff attended the Voices of Courage Awards luncheon in May 2019. Photo © Todd France*

## CREATE LASTING CHANGE TODAY

The Women's Refugee Commission is the only international organization dedicated solely to protecting refugee women's rights to sexual and reproductive health care, to freedom from gender-based violence, and to economic and social empowerment.

Change a life today at: [www.womensrefugeecommission.org/donate-now](http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/donate-now) or contact us at [info@wrcommission.org](mailto:info@wrcommission.org) to join our mailing list and stay up to date on ways you can be involved.



**WOMEN'S  
REFUGEE  
COMMISSION**

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**Research. Rethink. Resolve.**

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