



Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

ANNUAL REPORT 2001



MISSION STATEMENT

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children seeks to improve the lives of refugee women, children and adolescents through a vigorous program of advocacy and by acting as a technical resource. Founded in 1989 under the auspices of the International Rescue Committee, the Women's Commission is the only organization in the United States dedicated solely to speaking out on behalf of women and children uprooted by armed conflict or persecution.

The Women's Commission brings the needs and rights of refugee women and children to the attention of the international community through fact-finding missions and through its roles as expert resource, advocate and technical advisor. Through monitoring, fact finding and partnerships with local women's and youth groups, the Women's Commission has had a significant impact on policies and programs affecting women, children and adolescents affected by armed conflict.

Although 80 percent of the world's 40 million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are women, children and adolescents, their rights are often ignored. The Women's Commission's strategy is to highlight issues of protection and care, advocate for positive change and show how sustainable improvements can be achieved. The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children enables refugee women, children and adolescents themselves to play critical roles in representing the refugee condition before varied audiences and promoting policy and programming changes.

WOMEN'S
COMMISSION
for refugee women & children





DEAR FRIENDS:

For the Women's Commission, as for so many other organizations working on refugee and humanitarian issues, 2001 brought renewed attention to the plight of Afghan refugees (including those displaced within the country), particularly the women and children.

The devastating attacks on the World Trade Center and the ensuing response of the United States government, which ousted the ruling Taliban, brought Afghanistan an opportunity for rebirth and renewal — and hope for an end to the suffering and displacement caused by decades of war.

While Afghanistan was a key area of focus for the Women's Commission in 2001, our work continued in Africa, the Middle East and other parts of the world. Our representative in Sierra Leone began documenting protection problems facing women, children and adolescents in her country. She noted that women and girls were being left out of some programming, and called for greater attention to their needs and a more vigorous response to the years of abuse and violence they faced at the hands of rebel forces. The Women's Commission conducted a global assessment of UNHCR's work with refugee women and girls and found similar problems in many refugee settings.

Our adolescent project worked with hundreds of young people from Kosovo and northern Uganda, documenting the conditions they face in the midst of war. They helped conduct research and shared the results with their governments, the United Nations and many others. Through their research work the adolescents have become advocates. They are committed to peace and are calling for specific programs and actions that can lead to peace, including education and job opportunities.

The Women's Commission continues to convene the Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium, a group of seven organizations dedicated to improving the scope and quality of reproductive health services around the globe. Our expert team provides technical advice and conducts assessments, from the Thai-Burma border to Colombia to Zambia, in an effort to address critical issues like maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence.

We also continue to monitor conditions facing refugee women, children and youth in the United States, particularly those who are being detained by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. While reforms are being considered, there remains a great deal to do if the United States is to uphold international standards and provide real protection to those escaping persecution.

We could not do our work without many partners — from our parent organization, the International Rescue Committee, to our sister agencies, donors and friends. The most important partners of all of these are the refugee women, children and adolescents who work with us in research, monitoring and advocacy. They ask us to help them change the world, and we take our lead from them.

Mary Diaz
Executive Director

Kathleen Newland
Chair, Board of Directors

participation and protection

partnering with local actors

The Women's Commission works with local refugee women's groups to help build their capacity and enable them to play a greater role in program planning and implementation. To this end:

PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN

The Women's Commission's technical advisor on gender, based in Peshawar, Pakistan, worked closely with refugee women's organizations, providing technical assistance, monitoring conditions and advocating for improvements in women's rights. (See page 6 for more on the Women's Commission's work in Afghanistan.)

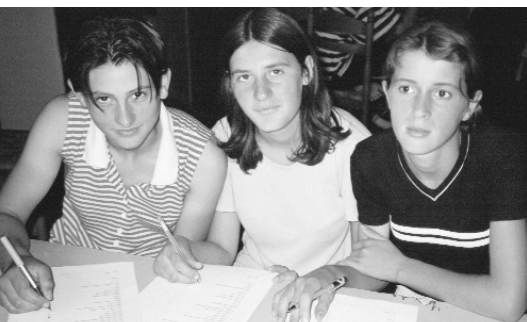
SIERRA LEONE

The Commission's newly appointed protection partner for West Africa, based in Freetown, Sierra Leone, began assessing conditions for displaced women and girls in Sierra Leone and in refugee camps in Guinea. In collaboration with local women's groups and the international humanitarian community, she conducted local and international advocacy to address the sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination that she uncovered.

KOSOVO

In March, the Women's Commission reported on the response of Kosovar women's groups to the Macedonia crisis, and helped organize a briefing by Kosovar women's organizations with UN Security Council members who were on a mission in Kosovo.

The Women's Commission hosted the month-long stay of the advocacy/information coordinator for Motrat Qiriaz, a Kosovar women's NGO. She developed her advocacy skills through participation in the Women's Commission's Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C., and at the Commission on the Status of Women meetings at the United Nations.



Dear Sir:

I am writing to refer a case of physical assault against M.S., a single mother of two teenage daughters at the Grafton Displaced camp.

As part of my mandate, I am monitoring sexual and gender-based violence at internally displaced camps. On September 9 during a field visit to Grafton Displaced camp, M.S. reported that she was mercilessly beaten and wounded by the husband of her neighbor when she intervened to find out why the man was quarrelling with her daughters.

According to M., her daughters had notified the Grafton police about the threat of violence weeks before it finally erupted but the police refused to investigate the matter... When the police intervened after M. was beaten, they did so in favor of the perpetrator. Even though she ran to the police with blood running down her face they refused to listen to

her and reluctantly gave her a medical referral for the injuries she sustained. The police... then ordered M.'s arrest. When the female police officer, one of those ordered to arrest her, saw her she told her colleagues that M. should not be arrested. The police officer then ordered her to go immediately to the hospital for treatment.

Kissy police station at Kissy Mess Mess is now handling the case. M. and her daughters have been summoned for further questioning tomorrow. I would appreciate it if your organization can intervene to ensure that they get the full protection of the law and their rights not be compromised in any way.

Letter to the director of the National Forum for Human Rights in Sierra Leone from Women's Commission's Protection Partner Binta Mansaray.

ASSESSING THE UN GUIDELINES

working at the united nations

In January 2001, the Women's Commission launched an assessment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) 1990 *Policy on Refugee Women* and 1991 *Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women*. With support from the governments of the United States and Canada, and in partnership with UNHCR, the Women's Commission tracked the implementation of these instruments over the past decade to see how useful they have been in improving protection for refugee women. The assessment team visited Eritrea, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Turkey and Zambia to conduct field research. The final report and recommendations to strengthen gender policy and programming will be presented to UNHCR and will feed into planned revisions of the *Guidelines*.

REFUGEE WOMEN'S CONSULTATION



BRINGING REFUGEE WOMEN TO THE UN

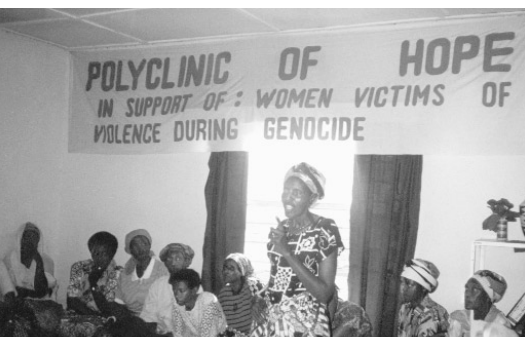
Joining forces with the UNHCR Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women and Gender Equality, the Women's Commission co-sponsored refugee women's dialogues in Pakistan and Canada, which were among a series of dialogues held worldwide in preparation for the Refugee Women's Consultation in Geneva in June 2001. The consultation, which was also co-sponsored by the Women's Commission, brought together 47 refugee women from around the world, UNHCR senior managers and government officials to discuss critical issues, offer remedies to protection concerns and request closer partnerships with UNHCR in the field. The conference report is a benchmark for UNHCR.

The Women's Commission also supported the participation of refugee women and youth at the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the UN Conference on Racism, the UN Consolidated Interagency Appeal Launch and other meetings and conferences to advocate for improved protection for refugee women and children.

YOU CANNOT DANCE IF YOU CANNOT STAND

The Women's Commission released an assessment of the UNHCR's Rwanda Women's Initiative in April. The report, *You Cannot Dance if You Cannot Stand*, offered lessons on the effectiveness of the initiative in promoting gender equality in humanitarian settings.

The assessment, reports and selected speeches can be found on the Women's Commission website at www.womenscommission.org.

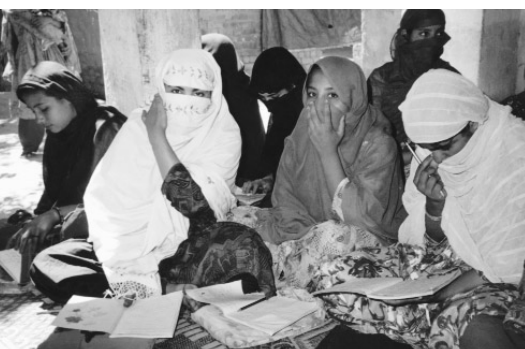




ASSESSING CONDITIONS IN THE CAMPS



CAMPAIGNING ON BEHALF OF AFGHAN WOMEN



afghanistan — responding to crisis: continuing 12 years of commitment

Shortly after it was founded in 1989 the Women's Commission sent its very first fact-finding delegation to Pakistan to look at the situation of Afghan women and children refugees. At that time, there were 3.5 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Delegation members testified before Congress about the inequality of funding in humanitarian programs and cited ways in which Afghan women refugees were not getting a fair share of U.S. humanitarian funds. Following a second delegation that year, the Women's Commission persuaded the National Endowment for Democracy, and later the U.S. Agency for International Development, to fund the Afghan Women's Social Service Center, which provided training and literacy programs.

Since 1989, the Women's Commission has sent many delegations to the region and in February 2000 hired a technical advisor on gender to work with Afghan women's groups in Pakistan and to assess conditions inside Afghanistan.

advocating for afghan refugees in pakistan

The Women's Commission's technical advisor undertook an assessment in June 2001 of the problems facing newly arrived Afghan women and girls living in the New Shamshatoo refugee camp near Peshawar, Pakistan. They were among thousands who fled the three-year drought and ongoing war between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance. Although the assessment was undertaken before September 11, most of the issues identified by the Women's Commission are still relevant — many, in fact, have become more urgent since then, particularly regarding women's health care and security. The report, *"We Simply Do Not Want to Die": Assessment of Protection Concerns and Case Studies of Afghan Women in New Shamshatoo Refugee Camp, Pakistan*, highlights the humanitarian situation of refugees and the problems that must be considered in planning and designing programs for repatriation.

Following the events of September 11 and the beginning of the war in Afghanistan, the Women's Commission developed a comprehensive advocacy and action campaign to address the crisis facing Afghan women and children, serving as an expert resource to the media, universities and NGOs; participating in meetings, briefings, panels and interviews held in Washington, D.C. and New York; and convening a working group of NGOs to share strategies and program initiatives in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Commission sponsored the participation of Afghan women at these events. A Women's Commission report, *Rights, Reconstruction and Enduring Peace: Afghan Women and Children after the Taliban*, presented a blueprint for action for the international community.

The reports can be found on www.womenscommission.org.

PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR LOCAL GROUPS



The Women's Commission's technical advisor on gender worked with Afghan refugee women's organizations and provided technical assistance. She helped refugee women conduct assessments and press for their inclusion in planning meetings held by the United Nations and international organizations to ensure that their concerns were not overlooked. The technical advisor traveled to camps and remote villages inside Afghanistan to evaluate conditions facing women and girls, and made recommendations to the international community regarding ways to improve protection and assistance.

afghan women's fund

Building on its work over the past decade with local groups monitoring the situation for Afghan refugee and internally displaced women and girls, the Women's Commission created a fund to support Afghan women's groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan responding to the critical humanitarian needs of Afghan women and girls following September 11. The Women's Commission disbursed small grants and provided technical assistance to help several local Afghan women's organizations continue programs for refugees and returnees so they might strengthen their role in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Afghanistan.



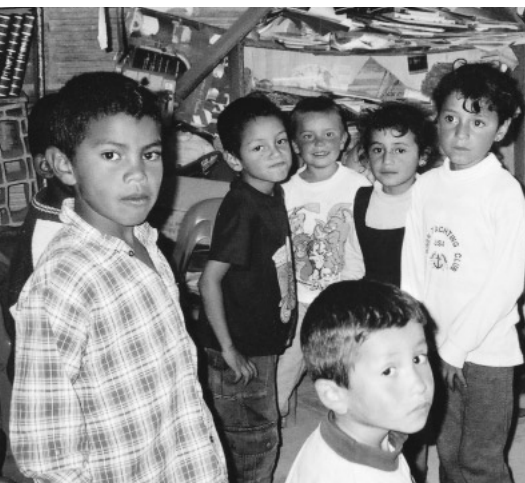
Despite an often hostile environment, a growing network of Afghan women's organizations is providing crucial humanitarian assistance. Their projects focus on health, education, income generation and, more recently, trauma and rights awareness. They are active mostly in refugee camps and refugee communities in urban areas of Peshawar, Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Quetta, Pakistan, as well as in Iran. Some have also been able to work in Afghanistan.

The Women's Commission will continue to build the capacity of these local women's groups and to emphasize their important role. They are in the best position to identify the needs of Afghan women and to design programs that are culturally appropriate.

WOMEN'S COMMISSION GRANT TEACHES 80 WOMEN AND GIRLS TO READ

In Pakistan, Afghan refugee women are desperate for training in basic literacy. Many living in urban areas like Peshawar are illiterate because they did not receive education in Afghanistan, and fall outside the humanitarian assistance programs which are only focused on camp-based refugees. These women cannot afford, or are denied access to, the Pakistani schools. The Afghan Women Welfare Department (AWWD) used a Women's Commission grant for a basic literacy course to train 80 women in Nasir Bagh, an urban refugee settlement. The literacy classes run for six months and are accompanied by child care services so that students can focus on the instruction. Through commitment from the community, AWWD encourages the students (ranging in age from 13 to 40) to share lessons with other family members and explore establishing informal home

schools to further the knowledge. Four months after the program began, the Pakistan government closed down Nasir Bagh in an effort to pressure the refugees to leave the country. While students and their families scattered, female teachers being paid by the grant were afraid of losing the income, which for many was the family's only source of income. The AWWD acted quickly, keeping the teachers on the payroll and transferring the program to Zenday village. The same work is now being done with the Zenday community, including encouraging men to support their wives and daughters to attend classes. While the closure of Nasir Bagh was a setback and raises serious issues on the safety of refugees in Pakistan, the grant continues to be applied in raising literacy standards among women and educating communities on the value of female education.



colombia delegation

More than two million Colombians (of a total population of 40 million) have been forcibly displaced from rural communities as the Colombian armed forces wage war against large paramilitary forces financed by the narcotics trade. Little has been done for the victims of war and terrorism either within Colombia or by the international community. Girls and women, who are routinely abducted and exploited, must fend for themselves.

Sexual violence against girls and women is a tactic of war. Domestic violence rates are also high among the displaced. Work is almost impossible to find and children are often denied primary education and must rely on "community" schools or receive no schooling at all. Without options, girls turn to prostitution to help their families. Adolescent pregnancy is skyrocketing. Chronic malnutrition is also widespread and severe malnutrition has been reported. Decent healthcare is impossible to access and reproductive health care is often unavailable.



The Women's Commission sent a delegation to Colombia in November 2001. The Commission issued a report, calling on the Colombian government to protect the rights of the displaced, especially women and children, and urged the U.S. government to provide substantially increased funding for humanitarian assistance for the internally displaced. The Women's Commission also recommended that the United Nations develop strategies for the participation of nongovernmental organizations and civil society, particularly women's and youth groups, in all humanitarian, human rights, peace building and development work.

The report, [Unseen Millions: The Catastrophe of Displacement in Colombia. Children and Adolescents at Risk](http://www.womenscommission.org), can be found at www.womenscommission.org.





women, peace and security

For true peace to be achieved in any conflict situation, women must be part of the peace process and their perspectives must be considered. In 2000, the United Nations Security Council took an important step in this direction when it unanimously passed Security Council Resolution 1325 (SC 1325) on Women, Peace and Security, calling for women's participation in humanitarian assistance and peace building. As with any resolution, the vital next step is action through implementation. In 2001 the Women's Commission monitored and encouraged implementation of the resolution. In collaboration with the Working Group for Women, International Peace and Security, the Commission released a report on activities and publications in response to SC 1325, brought refugee women and youth to brief Security Council ambassadors, delivered the NGO statement at a Security Council meeting on the implementation of the resolution and participated in a press conference.

Jamila, the Director of the Afghan Women's Welfare Department and a founding member of the Afghan Women's Network, which is supported by the Women's Commission, spoke at a United Nations Security Council meeting on the implementation of Resolution 1325 in October 2001. This is an excerpt of her remarks:

I have often heard that Afghan women are not political. That peace and security is men's work. I am here to challenge that illusion. For the last 20 years of my life, the leadership of men has only brought war and suffering.

I am a woman fighting for education. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, that is politics. I run a humanitarian NGO. In Afghanistan and Pakistan that is politics. My organization provides relief in the form of emergency supplies and health care, literacy and classes in English. We teach computer skills and give vocational training that helps women earn money for their families.

I began 13 years ago, when few women were able to study and we were largely restricted to our homes. I saw role models in my community who were able to make a difference in our life. Today we are many. We still face challenges within our families, particularly when men are unemployed, and from some in our community who oppose an active public role for women. We see larger grants funneled through Afghan men's organizations and wonder why. Women's organizations work in the refugee camps and reach out to the refugee communities in Peshawar, Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Quetta, where Afghan refugees do not receive any UN assistance. We are the role models for our youth; we are working for security and peace.

Do not think that because Afghan women wear a veil we do not have a voice. When the UN is looking for leaders, look to us. We want an Afghanistan free of extremism, in all its forms. We remember a time when women were doctors, lawyers and judges. Tap our networks that reach and assist women and their families. Women must be included in any peacebuilding efforts to ensure peace and lasting security.

reproductive health for refugees

Comprehensive reproductive health services designed to meet the needs of women, men and adolescents — not only pregnant women — are inadequate or nonexistent in most refugee and displaced settings. Long-term solutions to refugee situations may take years to achieve. The Women's Commission has been at the forefront of the movement to encourage agencies to ensure reproductive health services are available in the emergency phase of a crisis and to plan long-term health programs aimed at reducing illness and saving lives.

KEEPING REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ON THE INTERNATIONAL AGENDA

As the coordinating agency of the seven-member Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium (RHRC), the Women's Commission plays a key role in keeping the reproductive health needs of refugee populations on the international agenda and in increasing service provision in refugee and internally displaced settings. The Commission provides technical assistance and other support for local agencies which do vital work in this area.

FIGHTING HIV/AIDS

The Women's Commission's reproductive health project works with and parallel to the Consortium to address four areas of reproductive health: family planning, HIV/AIDS/sexually transmitted infections, gender-based violence (GBV) and maternal care, including life-saving emergency obstetric care.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic remains a tremendous threat to millions around the world; refugees and internally displaced persons are particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS because of their poverty, powerlessness and lack of social stability. The Women's Commission created a field tool to provide guidance and mobilize humanitarian agencies to address HIV/AIDS and in collaboration with RHRC partners began to develop a series of GBV field tools to help assess and monitor GBV prevalence. An annotated web-based sexual and gender-based violence bibliography was created to support improved international and local capacity to address GBV among refugee and internally displaced populations.

The Women's Commission also administered subgrants to strengthen local organizations' capacity to implement, monitor and evaluate improvements in the quality of reproductive health services at the Mae Tao Clinic in Thailand and a domestic violence project for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.



EBP FUND HELPS SAVE LIVES

Yatta is a 17-year-old refugee living in Liberia. Due to inaccurate information she received from friends in her community, she had many misconceptions about family planning methods. She was told that the prolonged use of any family planning method could lead to barrenness, painful side effects and eventually death. As a result, she became pregnant, and then a victim of an unreported criminal abortion from which she nearly lost her life.

Afterwards, Yatta was invited to a reproductive health program held for youth on Saturday evenings, sponsored by an EBP Fund-supported Liberian NGO that works with refugees. The reproductive health talks and discussions helped Yatta understand that family planning was aimed at preventing unwanted pregnancies, contrary to what her friends had told her. Yatta was referred for family planning counseling on the following Monday. She is now using contraceptive pills and has joined the NGO's team of peer counselors.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH
ADVOCACY DAY

eleanor bellows pillsbury fund

Through the Eleanor Bellows Pillsbury (EBP) Fund, the Women's Commission began funding new initiatives that address the critical reproductive health needs of war-affected adolescents by strengthening local capacity. Adolescent girls in refugee situations are the least likely to be offered education and reproductive health care because of their age and social status, putting them at greater risk for HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortions. The EBP Fund helps bridge this gap in protection for these young women. EBP Fund grants have been awarded to local organizations in Angola, Eritrea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Thailand, Uganda and Zambia.

Founded in 2000 by Barbara and Henry Pillsbury and Philip Pillsbury at the Women's Commission to address the many reproductive health needs of refugee adolescents, the Fund honors Eleanor Bellows Pillsbury, a former president of the Planned Parenthood Foundation of America and vice president of the International Planned Parenthood Federation. Ms. Pillsbury played a pivotal role in the fight for technical advancement and funding for reproductive health services in the United States and around the world.

reproductive health assessments

The Women's Commission conducted an assessment in Angola, where civil war has raged since the country became independent in 1975. The Commission found that severe deficiencies in reproductive health services are contributing to a soaring maternal mortality rate and that HIV/AIDS is a major factor in the high death toll. Recommendations included the reconstruction and supply of health facilities destroyed in the conflict, a focus on life-saving emergency obstetric services and a safe blood transfusion supply, as well as a concerted effort to reach the internally displaced from very rural areas with reproductive health services and information.

A delegation to Zambia, which hosts some 260,000 refugees from neighboring countries, found that adolescent refugees are at high risk of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS due to gender-based violence, the lack of condoms and the use of sex for survival. The team recommended a community-based distribution program for condoms and other contraceptives, and provided follow-up technical assistance to support organizations implementing GBV programs.

In response to interest expressed by NGOs and schools of public health in learning more about refugee reproductive health, the Women's Commission organized Refugee Reproductive Health Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C. More than 40 people participated.

children and adolescents

Refugee children and adolescents comprise 50 percent of refugees and displaced persons worldwide. The Women's Commission continues to bring refugee children's and adolescents' issues and concerns, along with recommended solutions, to the attention of governments, UN agencies, NGOs and others. In 2001, the Women's Commission campaigned for policy changes and more effective programs that will better protect children affected by armed conflict and give them the assistance and protection they need, including appropriate medical care and access to educational, recreational and income-generating activities.

MOBILIZING ADOLESCENTS



war-affected youth: working to improve their own lives

In a unique effort to bring young people's experiences and ideas to the forefront of decision-making, the Women's Commission mobilized hundreds of refugee, returnee and internally displaced adolescents in Kosovo and Uganda to conduct field research on the situation of war-affected youth. Following a three-day training, these young people carried out research in small groups, talking to adults and their peers, and released reports that reveal ongoing rights abuses and problems war-affected youth in these regions face on a daily basis. They advocated for policies and programs to address the critical needs of these young people for security, education and protection. The experiences have given these adolescents an opportunity to address their circumstances and gain leadership experience.

BUILDING CAPACITY



The research studies helped develop the capacity of youth groups involved in the field research through follow-up advocacy activities, including helping the Kosovar Youth Council win funds for and carry out a multi-ethnic project with adolescents in Kosovo. Several adolescents who participated in the study in northern Uganda founded their own group, Gulu Youth for Action, to follow up on the issues addressed in the study. One of the female adolescent researchers who came to advocate in the United States with the Women's Commission in September 2001 has been named to the Youth Advisory Council of the United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, and will continue this advocacy at the highest levels. The Women's Commission also enabled other war-affected youth to highlight their concerns to policy makers and donors in meetings and presentations at, among others, the World Bank, U.S. Congress and State Department and the United Nations.





young researcher turned activist: akello betty openy

Akello Betty Openy, 17, lives in the Gulu District of northern Uganda and has known nothing but war. For nearly her entire life, the Ugandan government has been fighting a rebel group in her area, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The LRA has kidnapped more than 12,000 children and teenagers over the past 16 years, forcing them to become child soldiers, sexual slaves, porters and cooks. Because of the war, the government moved people in northern Uganda to internally displaced camps, called "protected camps," where more than half of the population of the region now lives. "In reality, we receive little protection," says Betty, who lives in one of the camps. "The camps that we are forced to live in are wastelands of poverty, disease and human rights violations."

Betty was a member of an adolescent research team trained by the Women's Commission to study the effects of war on youth in northern Uganda. Betty and the team interviewed more than 2,000 young people and adults. "The youth we interviewed told us that the key to rebuilding our lives and restoring our communities is education, especially for girls, who have suffered disproportionately," Betty says. Inspired to continue advocacy work for young people after the study was completed, Betty co-founded Gulu Youth for Action to gain support for education for young people in northern Uganda. Betty herself has been unable to go to school for the last two years because her parents cannot afford the school fees. She is determined, however, to make education more accessible for herself and her peers. "We need to be heard and to participate, we need a future," she says. "We have a right to education and we want to go to school."



women's commission provides leadership on children

As the chair of the UNICEF-NGO Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict, the Women's Commission convened regular meetings, sharing information and facilitating collaboration between dozens of advocacy and service delivery organizations. The Women's Commission also coordinated strategy sessions and activities for the Leadership Council for Children in Armed Conflict and reached out to middle and high school students in New York City to raise awareness about the situation of refugee and displaced Afghan children.

In preparation for the UN General Assembly's Special Session on Children, the Women's Commission participated in preparatory meetings. The Commission organized events, including a daily caucus and several panels, to influence the attending governments to address the needs of children in armed conflict. The Special Session, originally scheduled for September 2001, was postponed until May 2002 due to the September 11 terrorist attacks.



asylum and detention

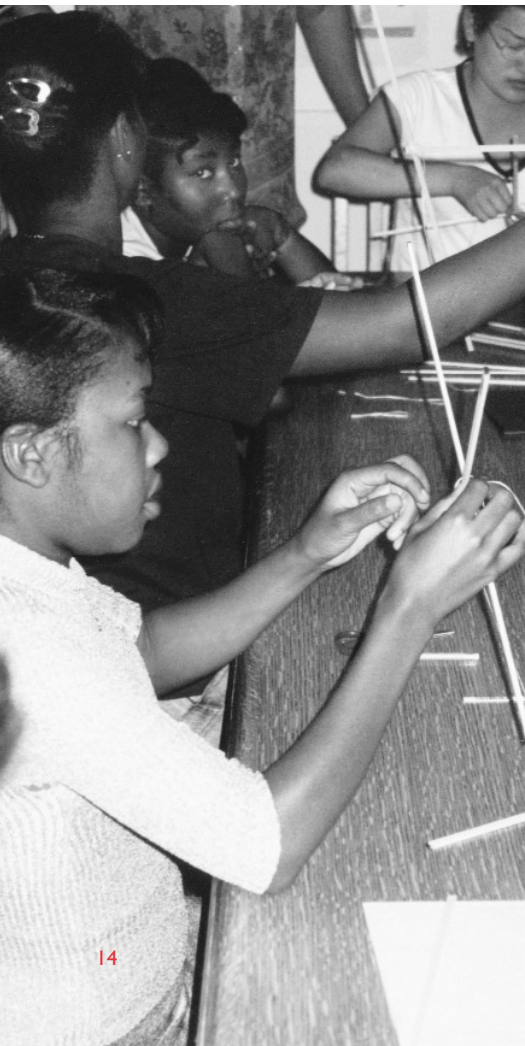


In 1997, the Women's Commission became the first organization to draw attention to the harsh and degrading treatment of women asylum seekers held in local and country prisons and in U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) detention centers. Subsequent research by the Women's Commission has revealed that children seeking asylum are also frequently subject to poor treatment and denied meaningful access to the asylum system. The Commission is a prime advocate for changes in U.S. immigration and asylum policy, working with the INS, the Department of Justice, the U.S. Congress and partner NGOs.

detention of refugee women and children asylum seekers

Some 5,000 children and 2,000 women who arrive in the United States every year seeking asylum are detained by the INS. Many of these women and children are fleeing persecution because of their religion or political beliefs; others are fleeing armed conflict and human rights abuses. However, they are often treated as criminals and locked up in isolated prisons, with no access to lawyers, translators, friends or family.

The Women's Commission, by documenting and raising awareness of the poor treatment of refugee women and children asylum seekers, acts as a catalyst for changes in U.S. detention policy that will prevent unnecessary detention and ensure adequate access to asylum procedures grounded in principles of due process.



As follow-up to a 2000 report on the Krome Detention Center in Miami, the Women's Commission monitored the conditions of detention for refugee women and children asylum seekers in facilities across the United States, including INS detention centers; county prisons, juvenile jails and other criminal facilities; and shelters for unaccompanied minors. The delegations documented rights abuses against women detainees in a Florida prison and released a report on their plight, *Innocents in Jail: INS Moves Refugee Women from Krome to Turner Guilford Knight Correctional Center, Miami*. A delegation also evaluated conditions for children in the custody of the INS in eight juvenile jails in Texas, California, Washington and Oregon.

Women's Commission staff also acted as a technical resource to attorneys representing women and children asylum seekers. This included the provision of technical advice to lawyers representing individual asylum seekers on how best to present their clients' asylum cases.

Fega, an eight-year-old girl from Nigeria, was abused and abandoned by her father and then put alone on a plane headed to the United States. She was held in an INS shelter care institution for 15 months before being released to an aunt. The INS refused to allow Fega access to a juvenile court for a determination as to whether she might be eligible for long-term foster care and a Special Immigrant Juvenile visa despite clear evidence of abuse and abandonment. Her attorney then filed for asylum. A social worker documented that Fega's development and mental well-being had deteriorated as a result of her prolonged detention. Fega eventually lost her ability to speak her native language, relying instead on the two dominant languages in the facility — Spanish and English. Fega was only released after her case appeared in a New York Times article.

From "Prison Guard or Parent?: INS Treatment of Unaccompanied Refugee Children" (published May 2002).

playing a leading role in law reform

As part of attempts to reform the current system of asylum and detention, the Women's Commission played a leading role in drafting and building support for legislative initiatives to ensure the protection of refugees in the United States. The Refugee Protection Act mandates the parole of asylum seekers whenever possible and the use of alternatives to detention in other cases. The Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act contains provisions to improve shelter and foster care, family reunification procedures and appointment of counsel and guardians to unaccompanied refugee children asylum seekers.

The Women's Commission's director of government relations and U.S. programs testified twice before the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration on the arbitrary and prolonged detention of asylum seekers. She argued that prolonged detention erodes the physical, mental and emotional health of asylum seekers and wastes taxpayer dollars, and recommended a rational parole policy and alternatives to detention for asylum seekers. She urged the subcommittee to pass the Refugee Protection Act and the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act. Women's Commission staff also met regularly with INS detention officials to promote administrative reforms and participated in a two-day retreat with key INS officials, resulting in important administrative reforms under the Administration's INS reorganization plan. A meeting was also held with then-INS Commissioner Doris Meissner.

The Women's Commission participated in a successful coalition effort by refugee rights and domestic violence organizations to reverse a decision by the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) denying asylum to a victim of domestic violence. After pressure from the Women's Commission and colleague organizations, then-Attorney General Janet Reno referred the case back to the BIA on her last day in office.

More than 100 legal service providers from across the country attended a training co-sponsored by the Women's Commission, the American Bar Association and the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service on providing representation to children in INS custody.

The Women's Commission also attended the UNHCR's global consultations seeking to improve the international protection of refugees and the maintenance of fair individual asylum systems. This included participation in an invitation-only meeting of select international experts on detention and family unity issues to advise UNHCR on policies it should issue to its member states.

Critical to the Women's Commission's efforts was the unique partnership it formed in February 2001 with the law firm of Latham & Watkins, one of the world's largest law firms. The firm has offered more than \$1 million in pro bono services to the cause of children in immigration proceedings, including assisting the Women's Commission in its legislative efforts.

public education and outreach

advocacy

A key element in the Women's Commission's strategy to effect change is to raise public awareness and understanding of issues of concern to refugee women, adolescents and children. The Women's Commission created opportunities for board, staff and supporters to participate in advocacy which reached targets in the United Nations, State Department, Congress, White House and Department of Justice. Staff made presentations, placed articles in publications and attended conferences to share knowledge with varied audiences. Extensive outreach enhanced by the Women's Commission's reputation as an expert resource resulted in increased media coverage of rights abuses and protection needs of war-affected women and children.

The Women's Commission organized dozens of meetings with Congressional members and staff during the Women's Commission's annual Advocacy Day. Board members, staff and others advocated for assistance to internally displaced people within Afghanistan; the release of abducted Ugandan children; aid to Burundi; reproductive health for refugees; passage of the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act and the Refugee Protection Act; and for adequate appropriations to the Migration and Refugee Assistance account.



voices of courage

Refugee women and youth who are leaders in the field of education in emergencies were the focus of the Women's Commission's annual Voices of Courage luncheon. Hawa Aden Mohamed of Somalia, Sima Samar of Afghanistan (later appointed Minister of Women's Affairs by the post-Taliban interim government) and Irakli Sabekia of Georgia were honored for bringing education to refugee and displaced children and women in the midst of conflict. The Norwegian Refugee Council was honored for its exemplary work in education in emergencies. Congresswoman Nita Lowey gave the keynote address. Actresses Liv Ullmann and Julia Ormond presented the awards, and Ms. Ullmann hosted the event.

media coverage

Overall media coverage by major media outlets increased throughout the year. Highlights included articles and quotes in major newspapers, including the New York Times, Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor, Miami Herald, Baltimore Sun, Dallas Morning News, Chicago Tribune, Boston Globe, Philadelphia Daily News and New York Post; magazines such as the New York Times magazine, Jane, Newsweek International and the UN Observer; radio interviews on Voice of America, BBC, WNYC (National Public Radio affiliate) and Talk America Radio; television appearances on networks including BBC World News, Reuters TV, MSNBC, CNN and C-SPAN; and web quotes on Dateline NBC, MTV.com, Washington Post.com and the IRIN Network.

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Gina Clausi
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Henia Dakkak
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Mary Jane Escobar-Collins
Office Administrator

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We would like to thank the many
volunteers, interns and consultants
who worked with the Women's
Commission in 2001.

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ANNUAL REPORT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2001

The following is a summary of the financial operations of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children for fiscal year 2001 (October 1, 2000 – September 30, 2001). This summary is based upon figures from the accounts and records prepared by the International Rescue Committee, which is classified as a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and is thus qualified for charitable contribution deductions. An independent audit of IRC's accounts, including those of the Women's Commission, is available upon request.

REVENUE	Amount
Foundation	969,402
Individual Contributions	446,535
United Nations Grants	265,367
Government	310,338
Special Events	358,982
Total Revenue	2,350,624
 EXPENSES	
Asylum & Detention Project	144,184
Board of Directors Project	62,060
Children & Adolescents Project	210,965
Fundraising Project	290,130
General Advocacy Project	577,970
Participation & Protection Project	202,351
Public Education Project	213,025
Reproductive Health Project	641,334
Total Expenses	2,342,019
Surplus	8,605
Beginning Fund Balance	1,458,956
Ending Fund Balance	1,467,561

NOTE: The ending fund balance of fiscal year 2001 includes a total of \$65,307 from the Founders' (Endowment) Fund, \$561,400 from individual donations and \$840,854 from various foundations and private grants.

The total revenue of \$2,350,624 for fiscal year 2001 includes \$487,622 multi-year grants restricted for project use.

DONORS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2001

October 1, 2000 to September 30, 2001 (\$500 and up)

American Cathedral in Paris	JP Morgan Chase & Co.
The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation	King's Fountain
The Ankeny Family Fund of the Minneapolis Foundation	Linden Productions
Anonymous	The Lizbeth & Frank Newman Charitable Trust
AXA Foundation	The McKnight Foundation
The Bank of New York	Milestone Capital Management
Black Rock, Inc.	The Moriah Fund
Bloomberg News	Open Society Institute
Blue Oak Foundation	Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP
BNP Paribas	Patricia Evert Productions
Callahan Co.	Prospect Creek Foundation
Canadian Peacebuilding	Quinn Fable Advertising
Cap Gemini/Ernst & Young	Reebok Foundation
Chase Manhattan Bank	Richards, Spears, Kibbe & Orbe
Chase Manhattan Foundation	Robert and Joyce Menschel Foundation
Columbia University	Roe Foundation
Deutsche Bank	Social Science Research Council
The Faye and Mike Richardson Charitable Trust	Step Up Women's Network
Ford Foundation	The Sunshine Group, Ltd.
Gifts in Kind	Three Guineas Fund
The Greenpoint Foundation	Thacher, Proffitt & Wood
The Henphil Pillsbury Fund of the Minneapolis Foundation	United Nations Population Fund
Hewlett Foundation	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
Hillsdale Fund	United States Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration
The Howard Bayne Fund	United Way of Tri-State
The Howe Family Fund	The Whitehead Foundation
Institute of International Education	The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
The J. M. Kaplan Fund, Inc.	The Women's Bond Club of NY
The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation	The Worth Collection, Ltd.
Jonathan Rose & Company	
The Joyce Mertz-Gilmore Foundation	

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Individual Contributions

For information on making individual donations, including stock gifts, please contact Ellen Jorgensen, director of administration and resource management, at 212.551.3115 or ellen@womenscommission.org. You can also donate online at our website: www.womenscommission.org

Send your tax-deductible contributions to:

**Women's Commission
for Refugee Women and Children**
122 East 42nd Street, 12th Floor
New York, NY 10168-1289

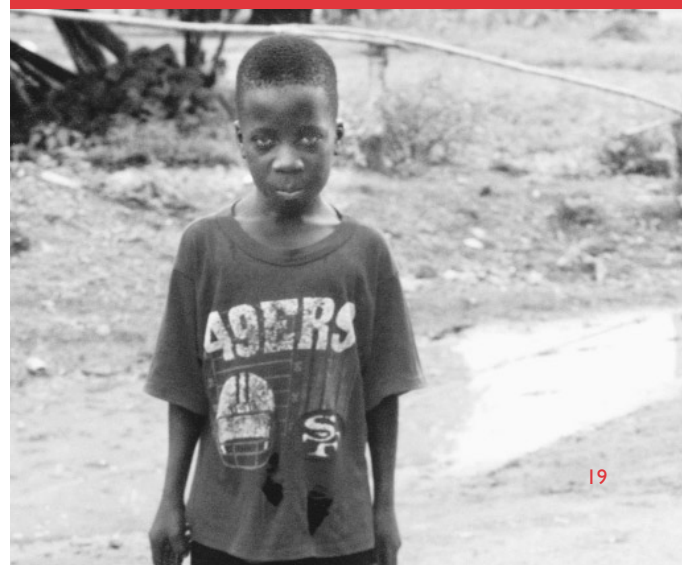
Planned Gifts

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 us as a beneficiary of your life insurance, living trust or qualified retirement plan. The legal designation is Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children/International Rescue Committee, Inc., a New York charitable corporation located at 122 East 42nd Street, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10168-1289.

Front cover: (top left, clockwise), UNAIDS, UNAIDS, Sandra Krause, Jane Lowicki; p. 2 Holly Myers; p. 3 Allison Anderson Pillsbury, Mary Bloom, Holly Myers, Allison Anderson Pillsbury, Allison Anderson Pillsbury; p. 4 Jane Lowicki; p. 5 Maha Muna, UNAIDS, IRC; p. 6 IRC, IRC, Ramina Johal; p. 7 Ramina Johal, Peter Bussian; p. 8 Holly Myers; p. 9 UNAIDS; p. 10 Allison Anderson Pillsbury, UNAIDS, UNAIDS; p. 12 Jane Lowicki, Jane Lowicki, Allison Anderson Pillsbury; p. 13 Judith Jay Ross, Allison Anderson Pillsbury, Womens Commission; p. 14 Jurate Kazickas; p. 16 Mary Bloom, p. 19 Allison Anderson Pillsbury; p. 20 IRC, Holly Myers, Julia Matthews, UNAIDS.





WOMEN'S
COMMISSION
for refugee women & children



**Women's Commission
for Refugee Women and Children**

122 East 42nd Street, 12th Floor
New York, NY 10168-1289

Tel. 212. 551. 3088/3111 Fax. 212. 551. 3180

wcrwc@womenscommission.org

www.womenscommission.org