

The refugee crisis in Africa: The churches' call to care

Africa has been plagued with refugee-producing crises for dozens of years. Who are these refugees? Why have they fled? What can congregations do to assist them in their search for safety and peace?

According to the United Nations, a refugee is a person outside his or her country because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group, and who cannot return home. Those persons who flee for similar reasons but do not cross into another country are considered internally displaced.

In its *World Refugee Survey 2007*, the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (www.refugees.org) estimated that there were 2,932,000 refugees and asylum seekers in sub-Saharan Africa at the end of 2006. In its *Internal Displacement: A Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2006*, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (www.internal-displacement.org) puts the number of internally displaced people in Africa at 11.8 million in 21 countries.

As one of 10 state and private voluntary agencies resettling refugees through the U.S. Refugee



Refugees from Togo, who have just crossed the border into Benin. Photo ©UNHCR/J.Björqvinnson.

Program, Church World Service has welcomed roughly 23,000 refugees from Africa since 1980. CWS, seven participating denominations, 35 local resettlement affiliates, and a host of congregational cosponsors and volunteers collaborate to meet initial material needs and to serve as guides as resettling refugees move toward self-sufficiency.

CWS also helps meet the needs of Africans in protracted refugee situations through its Durable Solutions for Displaced Persons program. In Tanzania, CWS supports high school and vocational training for refugee youth from Burundi. In Tanzania and Kenya, CWS is helping meet refugees' need for information and self-expression in a collaboration with FilmAid International.



Rwandan refugees Victoria Umulisa and her family were cosponsored by Wesley United Methodist Church in Lexington, Kentucky. Here, she socializes with congregants Viola Clements and Rev. Cynthia Talley. Photo by Doris Berry.



Top: In Tanzania, refugee youth from Burundi are receiving a high school education with support from the CWS Durable Solutions for Displaced People program. **Photo by Erol Kekic/CWS.**

Bottom: Under an agreement with the U.S. State Department, CWS processes the cases of all refugees in sub-Saharan Africa accepted for resettlement in the United States - more than 130,000 since 1990. Here, staff at the CWS Joint Voluntary Agency in Kenya interview a refugee family. **Photo by Craig Murphy/CWS.**

AN AFRICAN PRAYER

Let there be peace in Africa.
Peace is based on justice.
Peace depends on the establishment of justice and the respect for the rights of all men and women.
Peace is not simply the absence of war, but is the fruit of justice and love.

Let there be peace in Africa.
We have to transform the mentality and dismantle the structures that generate oppression of people.

Let there be peace in Africa.
Our beloved continent.
Our ancestors' land.

By Samuel Manguale Apach, a Sudanese refugee in a camp in Kenya. Excerpted and reprinted from *Tilting Cages: An Anthology of Refugee Writings*.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Welcome refugees resettling in your community. Enlist your congregation to cosponsor a refugee family, or volunteer with your nearest CWS refugee resettlement affiliate to help with resettlement tasks.

Support Durable Solutions for Displaced Persons. Congregations and communities can support DSDP with funds and by "partnering" with specific programs. For example, youth groups or classes can "partner" with refugee high school classes.

Speak Out! Advocate for public policies that extend help and hope to refugees.

To learn more, visit www.churchworldservice.org -- click "Refugees" -- or phone 212-870-3300, or write the CWS Immigration and Refugee Program, Suite 700, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115 USA.

CWS/IRP Participating Denominations: American Baptist Churches USA, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Reformed Church, Reformed Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church.

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROGRAM



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE