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NGOs to Collaborate on Refugee Rights

WASHINGTON, DC, June 27, 2005 The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) is pleased to announce the North-South Civil Society Conference on Refugee Warehousing to be held September 25 and 26 in Geneva, Switzerland. The Conference will serve as an opportunity for nongovernmental organizations from America and Europe to build networks with civil society from refugee hosting and donor countries to promote refugee rights. The Conference will focus particular attention on basic human rights to earn livelihoods-- such as the rights to work, practice professions, run businesses, and own property-and freedom of movement. Refugees, human rights advocates, business and labor leaders, representatives of faith communities, and other civil society actors are encouraged to attend.

Conference sponsors hope to draw the attention of world leaders to the problem of refugee "warehousing"-refugees in situations of restricted mobility, enforced idleness, and dependency, their lives on indefinite hold - in violation of their basic rights under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Of the world's 11.5 million refugees, nearly 8 million have effectively been warehoused for five years or more, most for decades. "The international community has a moral obligation to end this illegal and ineffective practice," said Lavinia Limón, President & CEO of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI).

In 1993, the average refugee situation lasted nine years. By 2003, the average duration increased to 17 years, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). An international sign-on Statement Calling for Solutions to End the Warehousing of Refugees has garnered the support of over 200 nongovernmental organizations from around the world and notable individuals such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu and His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Conference participants seek to build international and local constituencies for refugee rights and international responsibility sharing. "The participation of those living and working in countries that host refugees is vital," said Limón. "Their voices and experience will be crucial to developing solutions to this problem that will benefit both the refugees and the residents of their host countries." The conference will immediately precede UNHCR's Annual NGO Consultation and the meeting of its Executive Committee making it an excellent opportunity to bring participants' concerns before the international community. The deadline to submit a proposal is July 15.

For more information, or to register or submit a paper, go to www.refugees.org/warehousing. The Conference is sponsored by Dutch Council for Refugees, Frontiers (Lebanon), Refugee Consortium of Kenya, Refugee Council USA, Thai Catholic Commission on Migration, and World Council of Churches.

The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) is a non-profit, nongovernmental organization that has served refugees and immigrants and defended the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons worldwide since 1911. USCRI's resettlement program and network of community-based partner agencies help thousands of refugees build new lives in the United States each year. USCRI publishes the World Refugee Survey and Refugee Reports.

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