

ABOUT REFUGEES

GET INVOLVED

ABOUT USCRI

TAKE ACTION

GET EMAIL UPDATES

SIGN UP



**Donate
now** ▶

About Refugees

End Warehousing

Resettlement

World Refugee Survey

USCRI Network

Immigration

Newsroom

USCRI Headlines

Local Stories

TV and Radio Coverage

Press Releases

Publications & Archives

GET EMAIL UPDATES

SEARCH:

GO

About Refugees > Newsroom > Press Releases

RELEASE OF WORLD REFUGEE SURVEY 2004 - *WAREHOUSING ISSUE*
7 MILLION ARE DENIED THEIR RIGHTS
USCR LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN

Monday, May 24 Press Conferences:

National Press Club Newsmaker Event, 3:00 p.m., Zenger Room
Nationwide Conference Call at 1 p.m., toll dial-in # (801) 983-4013

Embargoed to May 24, 2004 at 1 p.m.

Washington, D.C., May 24 - More than seven million refugees have been confined to refugee camps, segregated settlements or otherwise deprived of their rights for ten years or more, according to *World Refugee Survey 2004 - Warehousing Issue*, which the U.S. Committee for Refugees releases on May 24. USCR's 43rd annual survey of refugee conditions and statistics reports on the 11.9 million refugees worldwide and condemns the practice of refugee warehousing as legally indefensible and morally unacceptable.

"Warehousing is the practice of keeping refugees in protracted situations of restricted mobility, enforced idleness, and dependency - their lives on indefinite hold - in violation of their basic rights under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Encamped or not, refugees are warehoused when they are deprived of the freedom necessary to pursue normal lives," writes Survey Editor Merrill Smith in the major article, "Warehousing Refugees: A Denial of Rights, a Waste of Humanity."

"Briefly put, condemning people who fled persecution to stagnate in confinement for much of the remainder of their lives is unnecessary, wasteful, hypocritical, counterproductive, unlawful, and morally unacceptable," writes Smith.

The 1951 Refugee Convention recognizes the fundamental rights of refugees while in exile including those to work, freedom of movement and residence, own property, and receive an education. The Survey reviews these rights and the international community's failure to implement them. *World Refugee Survey 2004* is about freedom. It is about calling upon ourselves and the international community to treat refugees as equals and give them their human rights, while they are refugees, to support themselves and live normal lives in dignity.

Instead, refugees are frequently warehoused in remote, desolate, and dangerous border areas in conditions of hopelessness and despair, subject to aggression, sexual exploitation, and risk of attack and murder by militias and armies.

In her *Survey* article, "Lives Unlived," USCR Executive Director Lavinia Limón writes, "Consigning men, women, and children to lives unlived is beneath international standards and must end. We can no longer defend the status quo. It is time for the world to honor its commitments under international law: to allow refugees to exercise their rights consistent with the law and with the rights inherent to all human beings. It is simply the right thing to do. We can expect no more and aspire to no less."

World Refugee Survey 2004 includes a major article on urban refugees by Karen Jacobsen; detailed articles by USCR's policy analysts on warehousing in specific countries; and heartrending stories and photographs of warehoused refugee children and families at pages 84, 87, 88, 101, and 109. It is chock full of magnificent, gorgeous color photographs which are a feast for heart and mind.

"Presently, more than half a million refugees from Myanmar have lived without the right to work or travel for up to 20 years in Thailand, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and India. More than half a million Sudanese are stuck in camps or segregated settlements that have been operating for two decades. Over the course of twenty-five years, more than two million Afghan refugees have been in exile in Pakistan and Iran. Finally, the case of warehoused Palestinian refugees throughout the Middle East pre-dates the Convention itself, with

Past Press Releases

- 2005
- 2004
- 2003
- 2002

Refugee Conditions
by Country

-- Choose One --



Search the Map



more than two million living in camps and urban slums deprived of their Convention rights,” writes USCR Director of Policy Analysis and Research Gregory Chen in the article, “A Global Campaign to End Refugee Warehousing.”

“More than two-thirds of the planet’s 12 million refugees are denied the right to earn a livelihood, access to education, the freedom to move about, or the right to step into a courtroom and seek justice when they are wronged - all of which are guaranteed under the Convention,” writes Chen.

Presenting at the National Press Club will be USCR’s Limón, Smith, and Chen. USCR’s regional policy analysts will be available to answer questions. Their summaries of warehousing in the various regions of the world are appended below.

Information: Steven Forester (202) 347-3507

Africa Of Africa’s more than 3 million refugees, an estimated 2.3 million, or nearly 75 percent, have been warehoused for 5, 10, 20, or more years. These refugees include some 325,000 Burundians struggling to survive in western Tanzania, where government restrictions have reduced their ability to farm, supplement their diets, or earn income. Ethiopian authorities have long denied the majority of the estimated 95,000 Sudanese refugees living in western Ethiopia—many of who supported themselves as farmers in Sudan—access to even small parcels of land for agriculture purposes, rendering the population solely dependent on the international community for food and other basic needs for more than two decades. Conversely, several hundred thousand Angolan refugees living in settlements in western Zambia have benefited from generous land-distribution policies that enabled them to obtain a remarkable level of self-sufficiency.

East Asia and the Pacific In Southeast Asia, over 600,000 refugees live in warehoused conditions, of which 400,000 have been warehoused for over 10 years. Most are from Myanmar, whose abysmal human rights record and treatment of ethnic minorities continues to generate over 30,000 refugees a year. In Thailand, Bangladesh, and India more than 200,000 refugees live in camps substantially deprived of rights. Twice that number, including vulnerable women, children, the elderly, and the infirm live as illegal migrants and are not only deprived of rights but also subject to arrest and deportation. The Malaysian government granted 60,000 Filipinos who arrived some 30 years ago some of their basic rights but still denies them the freedom of movement. After 28 years in Thailand, 15,000 Laotian Hmong refugees, who lived in an informal settlement without Convention rights or international assistance, will resettle in the United States, ending one of Southeast Asia’s longest warehousing cases.

South and Central Asia In South Asia hundreds of thousand of refugees remain warehoused in varying conditions. Over 100,000 Sri Lankan refugees have remained in India without rights for up to 20 years. In Nepal, some 114,000 Bhutanese refugees have been encamped since 1992 without hope of a durable solution or a change in conditions. Although they have excellent high school education system in the camps, the Nepalese government does not allow them to access higher education to learn a profession or trade. Denied the right to work, to own property, to have a livelihood, the enforced idleness has taken a harsh toll on the refugees’ lives. Aid workers have noted increasing incidence of depression and anxiety amongst this population. One young adult described his life to USCR, “I am landless, and without citizenship; if I have nothing, then I hope for nothing.”

In Pakistan, however, conditions are somewhat better, and the Pakistani government is moving forward to improve protection. Although Afghan refugees, some of whom have been there a quarter century, do not have legal rights, the Pakistani government largely tolerates their employment and free movement, and allows them access to courts. In contrast Afghans in India, many of whom remain in urban settings, receive no Convention rights.

Middle East Refugees in the Middle East—some 4,353,000 in all—accounted for 37 percent of the world’s total in 2003. Nearly half of them have lived without the basic rights of employment, movement, and property ownership for 13 to 55 years. Of the two million Palestinian refugees included in this total, those in the Occupied Territories live in a constant state of military siege, while Lebanon expressly denies Convention rights to Palestinian refugees as it extends many to other refugees and foreign residents. Among other refugee populations in the Middle East, some 30,000 refugees from Iran and Turkey look forward to receiving Convention rights in a post-war Iraq.

Europe Although the nations of Europe generally afford full Convention rights to refugees they recognize, a small group of refugees and asylum seekers—around 100—remain trapped in legal limbo on the Sovereign Base Areas (SBA) on the island of Cyprus. Although by treaty the United Kingdom retains sovereignty over the SBAs and some of the refugees passed through Cyprus, neither power will grant them basic Convention rights. The European Union (EU) and other resettlement nations have ignored pleas to accept this small group. Meanwhile, their lives remain on hold. One woman described her life on the bases, “We are like animals, we drink, eat and sleep, and day and night become the same.” As parties to the UN Refugee Convention, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Cyprus have failed in their recognized obligations.

Americas Colombia's total number of refugees and displaced persons continued to soar reaching approximately 3 million, despite President Alvaro Uribe's claims of human rights improvements. Uribe's military offensive under his Democratic Security program and the resulting fighting among the government, leftist guerrillas, and right wing paramilitaries forced more than 250,000 people to flee their homes. Uribe's administration put civilians at greater risk of displacement and other human rights violations by enlisting civilians in military patrols and calling human rights activists and other government critics terrorist sympathizers.

The U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR) is a public information and advocacy program of Immigration and Refugee Services of America (IRSA), a nongovernmental, non-profit organization. Since 1958, USCR has defended the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons worldwide.

[Click here to view the World Refugee Survey 2004 online.](#)

© 2010 USCRI | [contact](#) | [support](#) | [privacy](#) | [feedback](#) | [jobs](#) | [store](#) | [login](#) | [network login](#)