



PROCLAMATION OF THE REFUGEE CONGRESS

WHEREAS, we are refugees who came to the United States of America from 1947 to 2011, and have gathered today in this Refugee Congress to be the voice of the more than three million refugees who have found protection in this country in the last 60 years;

WHEREAS, we and our fellow refugees are deeply grateful for having received refuge and sanctuary in the United States and for the spirit of generosity in which we were received by the American people;

WHEREAS, we recognize there are still more than 43 million people forcibly displaced worldwide, of whom 15 million are refugees in need of protection, assistance and a durable solution;

WHEREAS, we recognize that each year less than one percent of the world's refugees are resettled globally;

WHEREAS, we recognize that the majority of refugees are women, children and elderly, and they continue to need protection, assistance and hope for a life beyond a refugee camp;

WHEREAS, this year marks the 60th Anniversary of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 50th Anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has called on nations to renew their commitments to these historic documents;

WHEREAS, we support the pledges proposed by UNHCR to the government of the United States to use its moral authority to address issues of resettlement, protection, assistance and durable solutions for refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons;

WHEREAS, the voices of all refugees should be heard, and the real faces and stories behind every statistic about forcibly displaced people must not be forgotten;

NOW, THEREFORE, we, the Refugee Congress, call upon all nations, including the United States, and UNHCR, to make every effort to find solutions for these displaced communities, to promote conditions for safe voluntary return and reintegration, to encourage local integration where feasible and to support resettlement.

We recommend that each refugee receive relevant and comprehensive orientation, starting from selection for resettlement throughout the early stages of integration, in order to empower refugees and their families to achieve financial self-sufficiency and personal fulfillment.

We further recommend the promotion of refugees' increased awareness of, and access to, resources and opportunities through ongoing orientation and individualized guidance, strengthening collaboration among refugees to advocate for their communities, and greater community understanding of refugees and their potential, so that refugees achieve successful integration that enables them to be contributors to their new country.

We encourage UNHCR and governments to recognize that refugees and asylees represent an untapped resource when responding to refugee situations around the world, and we call upon them to incorporate refugees and asylees as actors and decision-makers in providing protection and delivering humanitarian support, such as:

- Encouraging the election of refugees by their peers to participate in the distribution of aid;
- Bringing refugee educators from the diasporas as volunteer teachers of other refugees;
- Including refugees in the evaluation of the effectiveness of all aspects of refugee protection through surveys and interviews, and as researchers and monitors;
- Educating and training refugees to be ambassadors who communicate about, and promote greater public awareness of, refugee situations.

We recommend that an independent domestic advisory and advocacy council be established to represent the unique refugee perspectives and experiences.

We request that UNHCR finalize the proceedings from this Refugee Congress, and share the findings and recommendations at the UNHCR Ministerial meeting, with the Administration and the Congress of the United States and other refugee program stakeholders.

We call upon UNHCR to include the refugee voice as an integral and essential element in all discussions affecting refugees, and in carrying out its mandate to protect and seek solutions for refugees.

We pledge that we shall continue to do our utmost to remember, to represent, and to help our fellow refugees, stateless persons and other forcibly displaced individuals around the world.

APPROVED by acclamation by the Refugee Congress Delegates
on this day, Wednesday, August 3, 2011, in Washington, D.C.

