

Preliminary Post-ICRIRR Note for the File¹

International Conference on the Reception and Integration of Resettled Refugees

Vildmarkshotellet, Norrköping, Sweden – 25-27 April 2001

1. Two hundred and sixty-five (265) participants from the eighteen (18) resettlement countries as well as two *ad hoc* resettlement countries (Great Britain and Germany) attended ICRIRR, which was hosted by the Swedish National Integration Office. These included the major donor countries and major supporters of refugee protection. Among the participants were representatives of the Governments, non-governmental organisations, UNHCR field, regional and headquarters staff, as well as former refugees. All eight (8) of the emerging resettlement countries were also represented at ICRIRR. This was the first time that both the traditional and emerging resettlement countries were able to meet in an international forum to exchange best practices in the reception and integration of resettled refugees.

2. ICRIRR was a key component of a larger integration initiative primarily funded by the Nordic Countries, with assistance also provided by the United States of America, the German Marshall Fund USA and Canada (Department of Citizenship and Immigration). The mission statement guiding the design and implementation of the conference noted that ICRIRR “...is designed to provide an international forum for the exchange of ideas and means of supporting refugee resettlement among the traditional and emerging resettlement countries...planned as the mid-point catalyst in an on-going process of exchanging best practices in the integration of resettled refugees among the resettlement countries.” Goals for the conference included:

- Drafting commonly endorsed principles for the “successful” reception and integration of resettled refugees that are applicable regardless of the level of funding available to resource resettlement programmes, (*refer to resulting Principles, attached*);
- Facilitating both formal and informal links and exchanges between the various resettlement countries;
- Gathering resources for the development of a reception and integration handbook; and
- Strengthening the reception and integration programmes of traditional and emerging resettlement countries, (*refer to “Next Steps” resulting from ICRIRR, attached*).

3. Part of the strategy in the design of the conference planning process was to identify and recruit specialists in the resettlement countries from the State and local Governments, NGOs and grassroots refugee and community-based organisations engaged in the reception and integration of resettled refugees. A Steering Group,

¹ Please note that the Official Proceedings Report for ICRIRR will be completed prior to the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (20-21 June 2001). This document is designed as a preliminary briefing note for immediate reference, together with the document entitled: "ICRIRR: Principles," and Erik Stenstrom's "Next Steps" memo.

guided by an Executive Committee comprised of representatives of the Governments, NGOs, UNHCR field and Headquarters staff and former refugees with the daily responsibilities of policy-making and programmatic operations in the reception and integration of resettled refugees, engaged in a process of working collaboratively with their counterparts around the world in planning the conference.

4. This creative planning process engaged local resettlement constituencies in an analysis of their respective “best practices” as well as building bridges for the development of new partnerships among the resettlement constituencies of the eighteen (18) resettlement countries for the sharing of “best practices” on an international level. Through a series of three major Steering Group meetings (4 May 2000; 2 July 2000; 17 November 2000) and five Executive Committee Meetings (2 July 2000, 16 & 18 November 2000, 14 January 2001, 23 February 2001 and 23 & 28 April 2001), over the course of the past 12 months, an agenda was crafted taking into consideration the three major themes identified by the Steering Group in the design of successful resettlement programmes:

- Preparing Refugees and the Receiving Communities
- Common Needs of Resettled Refugees
- Special Needs of Resettled Refugees

A total of twenty (20) individual topical sessions framed by keynote addresses and plenary sessions were conceived, planned and implemented by members of the Steering Group and locally identified experts. Emerging countries were paired with traditional resettlement countries as co-chairs of the individual conference tracks in an effort to further strengthen partnerships around the world and the exchange of resources.

5. The strategy behind the Steering Group process was to establish a comfortable working rapport between representatives of the eighteen (18) resettlement countries; immediately initiate an exchange of information, country to country, constituency to constituency; and to break down the myriad tasks in the planning of the conference so that each of the countries involved would share equitably in the work; and to foster the “ownership” of the final product – including, ultimately, a set of commonly endorsed principles.

6. Accomplishments achieved through the lead-up planning process have included the following:

- Strong bonds have been established between the policy makers and reception and integration practitioners of the eighteen (18) resettlement countries; individuals involved in the implementation now know each other and each other’s programmes, policies and respective strengths and challenges.
- Resources have been shared, and views and philosophies exchanged. It is now known where questions can be answered or needs for expertise met.
- An impressive set of documents that didn’t exist before – resources that put the challenges inherent in the reception and integration process in clear focus and have pointed to some models and methods that have worked for colleagues around the world – have been produced. These include:

- a) An annotated bibliography on integration issues for resettled refugees;
- b) Eighteen (18) Resettlement Country Programme Descriptions;
- c) A fifty-page “Brief History of Resettlement” comparative grid of the programmes of the eighteen (18) current resettlement countries;
- d) A “Global Overview” paper that provides a comprehensive and informative perspective on the resettlement models in operation, worldwide;
- e) Twenty-five (25) framework papers on specific topics identified through the Steering Group discussions as representing key issues challenging the countries of resettlement – papers that will serve as the backbone of the integration addendum to the Resettlement Handbook;
- f) A set of twenty-five (25) executive summaries listing every “best practice” mentioned in each of the individual sessions represented on the ICRIRR agenda for the mutual strengthening of reception and integration programmes;
- g) A collection of over one hundred (100) definitions by refugees on what integration has meant to them, (courtesy of Canada).

7. As part of the planning process, an analysis was made of the current status and future needs of the resettlement programmes of the emerging resettlement countries. Subsequent requests by the Governments and implementing partners of the emerging resettlement countries to identify and send suitable experts in reception and integration were met and deployees subsequently dispatched to Benin, Burkina Faso, Argentina, Brazil and Chile. In the course of this process, special links were forged, for example, between the Southern South American resettlement countries and Spain, and between Canada and Benin and Burkina Faso so that resources and experience gained might be shared between countries with similar language backgrounds. In addition, special care was taken to plan a pre-ICRIRR meeting for emerging resettlement countries to provide an overview of the conference agenda and link then with their counterparts among the traditional resettlement countries.

8. Over fifty (50) former refugee participants resettled in the eighteen (18) countries of resettlement served as panellists, presenters, speakers, session leaders, facilitators and rapporteurs during ICRIRR. Their voices provided other partners with a “reality check” on “best practices” shared and principles drafted, and their leadership infused the planning process with greater integrity.

9. Through a strategically designed and sequential summary process culminating in the final Conclusions and Recommendations plenary of the conference, a set of commonly endorsed Principles were endorsed by all eighteen (18) resettlement countries, which are attached to this document for further reference.

10. The Director General of the Swedish National Integration Office, Mr. Andreas Carlgren, pledged to set aside resources for the purpose of “...passing on and making known the results of our work at the conference.....and also [as] a way of enabling the UNHCR to continue its important work in this field....” [I.e., the exchange of best practices in the reception and integration of resettled refugees and forging formal and informal links between the countries of resettlement]. He challenged other countries to do the same.

11. Mr. Erik Stenstrom, the Working Chair of ICRIRR, outlined the proposed “next steps” in the integration initiative, which are also attached for further reference.

(2/05/01)