

Scottish Refugee Council Press Release



26 January 2006

21 Years – Achievements and Challenges

**Scottish Refugee Council AGM, Glasgow City Chambers Banqueting Hall, 13:30-16:30
Friday 27 January 2006**

Scottish Refugee Council begins its 21st year, by challenging Scottish local authorities to help some of the world's most vulnerable people.

The Gateway Protection Programme is funded by the Home Office, in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). It aims to tackle the problem of resettling particularly vulnerable refugees; many of whom have spent years living in refugee camps in some of the world's poorest countries. The UK government has agreed to resettle up to 500 people a year under the scheme. Refugees get help in looking for work, housing and education; including English lessons, after an initial cultural induction course.

So far three English local authorities have welcomed refugees from Sudan, Myanmar (Burma), Liberia and Congo to a new life under the Gateway programme. No local authorities in Scotland have signed up to date.

Scottish Refugee Council Chief Executive, Sally Daghlian, said:

“The poorest countries in the world are caring for most of the world’s refugees, and they do not have the resources to cope. This simply isn’t fair. The UK, and other rich nations, must take a fair share of the responsibility for dealing with what is a global problem. The Gateway Protection Programme is a welcome step forward, but although the government has agreed to accept 500 people a year, barely half that number have been resettled so far. As Scotland’s leading refugee agency, with wide experience of assisting refugee integration, we are ready to work with any authority in Scotland which is prepared to take part in the programme.”

The newly appointed UNHCR representative in the UK, Bemma Donkoh, is giving the keynote address at the AGM.

She said:

“During this time when the worldwide number of refugees and asylum seekers appears to be declining, with the number of asylum seekers in the UK plummeting, we would like to see a greater focus on providing real solutions to refugees. Protracted refugee situations waste lives by perpetuating poverty and despair, which in turn often causes people to seek aid and protection further afield. Scots can play a key role in addressing this cycle by working with the government and UNHCR to welcome more exiles and helping them to integrate.”

**Bemma Donkoh and Sally Daghlian will be available for interview 0930-10.30 at Scottish Refugee Council Headquarters and 12.30-13.15 in the Satinwood Suite at Glasgow City Chambers*.*

For further information, please contact Andrew Dougal, Press & Communications Officer, Scottish Refugee Council on 1041-223-7927, mobile 07734-030763, or email andrew.dougal@scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk

ENDS

Notes

1. The Gateway Protection Programme

In February 2002, the Home Office declared the creation of a formal ‘500 Gateway Programme’. The Gateway Programme aims to resettle 500 refugees each year and will add to the existing Mandate and Ten or More resettlement schemes. The Gateway Programme became operational in April 2003. The UK has also received refugees through specific programmes in response to emergency situations, including 42,000 Ugandan Asians expelled from Uganda from 1972-74, 22,500 Vietnamese displaced persons from 1979-92, over 2,500 Bosnians in the early 1990s, and over 4,000 Kosovars in 1999.

2. Resettlement

Resettlement is one of three durable solutions advocated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and a way of addressing the special needs of refugees. It involves an assessment by the resettlement state against specific criteria, leading to permanent resettlement if accepted. It can be a long and difficult process for the refugees, ultimately leading to full integration into a new community. Some countries have long-established resettlement programmes. Those with the largest quotas in 2001 were the United States (80,000 refugees), Canada (11,000), and Australia (10,000). The other durable solutions advocated by UNHCR are voluntary repatriation and local integration.

3. Programme

1.30 – 1.55 Arrival, Registration & Coffee

1.55 – 2.00 Civic Welcome to Glasgow City Chambers

2.00 – 2.45 Formal Annual General Meeting (AGM)

2.45 – 2.55 Refugee Speaker:

Ms Twimukye Mushaka

Karibu, refugee community organisation

2.55 – 3.15 Keynote address:

Mrs Bemma Donkoh, newly appointed UK representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the UK

**3.15 – 3.35 Question and answer session – Chaired by Joyce
McMillan (Scottish Refugee Council Patron)**

3.35 -4.30 Reception in Mahogany Room, Glasgow City Chambers