

SOARING

LUTHERAN SERVICES FLORIDA

WINTER 2002

LSF Refugee Resettlement Program in Crisis Following September 11th

"For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me . . . when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters . . . you were doing it to me!" (Matthew 35-40, NLT)



The Biblical quotation cited above vividly describes what the LSF Refugee Resettlement Program has been doing so well for more than 20 years—helping people in desperate need who fled persecution in their homeland build new lives in freedom in America. Over the years, more than 21,000 refugees from all parts of the globe have turned to the LSF Refugee Program for help. Last year alone, the Program provided assistance to more than 3,200 people. However, since the tragic events of September 11th, the Program has resettled only 40 people. This is a decline of nearly 70% compared to the number of refugees resettled during the same time period last year.

The Refugee Resettlement program has a long history. Although it formally began in 1982 when the Agency was established, the roots of the Program date back to 1973 when the Florida Lutheran Council began resettling refugees fleeing the horror of Idi Amin, the cruel dictator of Uganda. The Council continued its vital work following the fall of Saigon in 1975 when thousands of Vietnamese refugees fled to the United States to escape political persecution from the North Vietnamese communist government. At that time, nearly every Lutheran church in the Tampa Bay and Miami areas, as well as other parts of Florida, was involved in sponsoring Vietnamese refugees. The congregations took in the refugees and their families, found them homes, fed them, clothed them, helped them learn English, taught them the ways of their new country, and helped them find jobs. In most cases, within just a few short months the refugees were self-sufficient and eventually became productive members of their communities.

"The need to help refugees fleeing political and religious persecution start over here in the United States is as great today as it was when the Program began more than 20 years ago,"



Vietnamese refugees arrive in Tampa.

said Danielle Kearney, the Director of the LSF Refugee and Immigration Program for the past 20 years. "Many of us can trace our roots back to ancestors who escaped persecution in their homelands and came to this country as refugees or immigrants with the dream of living in freedom and building a better life for their children. Today, there are thousands of people just like our ancestors who have been waiting to realize that very same dream and we can't just abandon them," she added. However, following the tragic events of September 11th, a moratorium on refugee admissions to the United States was imposed preventing more than 22,000 refugees who already had been approved by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) from entering the country. New security screening

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Clarence Caldwell
Vice-Chairperson, LSF Board of Directors

Dear Friends,

As an LSF Board member and a long time supporter of Lutheran Services Florida, I have watched this Agency grow into one of the premier social services organizations in the

Southeast.

During the past 20 years, the Refugee Resettlement Program—the genesis of the Agency, has helped tens of thousands of people who fled persecution build new lives. I have served in two congregations that sponsored refugee families and the experiences I gained were invaluable. As you will learn in this issue of *Soaring*, this important program has been seriously affected by the tragic events of September 11th.

Currently, due to new requirements imposed by the government after September 11th, the Program has resettled 70% fewer refugees this year than were resettled last year during this same time. As a result, there are many thousands of children, elderly, and families still suffering.

Because our Lutheran heritage inspires us to reach out to minister to those suffering from political and religious persecution, I urge you to read the articles in this issue carefully and to voice your opinion by writing to President Bush.

Thank you and God Bless,

The Rev. Clarence V. Caldwell

LSF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM IN CRISIS (CONTINUED)

procedures also were imposed requiring the case files of all 22,000 refugees to be reviewed again in Washington. Although President Bush signed the "Annual Presidential Determination" on November 21st pledging to allow 70,000 refugees to come to the United States this year—thereby officially lifting the moratorium, in reality the new governmental restrictions now may make carrying through on that pledge a virtual impossibility. Prior to September 11th, the normal procedure required refugees to have in-person interviews with an INS officer to determine their eligibility to enter the United States. This is still the case. However, whereas previously INS officers traveled to foreign countries to meet with refugees living in the camps—a practice known as "circuit rides," this practice was stopped after September 11th. Because of the new restrictions requiring that all refugee interviews be conducted only in U.S. diplomatic facilities, presently the interview process is limited to only three cities worldwide—Havana, Cuba, New Delhi, India, and Vienna, Austria. At this time, it is uncertain when the INS will fully resume interviewing refugees in other places. In addition, the INS also said that it plans to interview fewer new refugee cases.

The result has been a major slowdown in refugee arrivals and today tens of thousands of children and families remain waiting in camps in countries around the world. "After their desperate attempts to escape persecution and tyranny, these people have been living in deplorable conditions for many months, even years, and now it appears there is no relief in sight," according to Ms. Kearney.

Recently, the State Department told Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS) and other national resettlement agencies to expect no more than 45,000 – 50,000 refugees to arrive this year. This is well below President Bush's pledge of 70,000. The new security measures present a challenge; however, it is the State Department's own restrictions—recalling INS field officers—that are largely responsible for the decline in refugee arrivals. LIRS President, Ralston Deffenbaugh, said "Refugees are not terrorists! We cannot allow this great rescue program, U.S. refugee resettlement, to wither away. It would be unconscionable to literally leave stranded tens of thousands of desperate refugees for whom our country can provide new hope and new life."

In mid-December some refugees (part of the group of 22,000 previously approved, but held back after September 11th) finally were admitted to the United States, but the number was infinitesimally small compared to the previous year. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS) reported that only 94 refugees were resettled by the entire LIRS network of affiliated agencies (including LSF) in December; whereas approximately 1,000 refugees were resettled during the comparable time

period last year. Unfortunately, the terrible plight of refugees continues worldwide and the need for resettlement is great.

Although the President of the U.S. signs the "Annual Presidential Determination" document every year stating the number of refugees approved to enter the country during that specific year, that does not guarantee that they actually will be admitted. In fact, statistics compiled by the U.S. Committee for Refugees and the U.S. Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration from 1992 through 2001 clearly show a chronic shortfall in refugee admissions. When comparing the number of refugees approved to enter the United States in every year during the past decade



Refugees from Kosovo look forward to living in freedom safely in America.

to the number of refugees actually admitted during that same year, statistics indicate a ten-year cumulative shortfall of 106,894 admissions—an average of 10.9% per year. The Bureau's estimated projection for 2002 shows a shortfall of 20,000 refugees who will not be admitted to the U.S. even though they have been approved. If this projection becomes a reality, it will represent a 28.6% difference between the number of refugees who were approved to enter the country in 2002 and the number who actually were admitted. This difference would be nearly three times the cumulative yearly average percentage shortfall during the past decade.

The slowdown in refugee arrivals has had a major impact on the LSF Refugee Resettlement Program, as well as on all of the other non-profit agencies in the resettlement network. Because the funding for non-profit refugee resettlement programs is directly based upon the number of refugees assisted, if that number decreases, the funding to the programs also decreases. As a result, Refugee Resettlement Program staff members—many of

LSF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM IN CRISIS (CONTINUED)



Refugees from Sudan dream of building a new life in the U.S.

whom were refugees themselves—now are facing layoffs. As a result, when the flow of refugees entering the country resumes and the accompanying demand for resettlement services increases, these same programs will not be prepared.

On February 12, the Senate Immigration Subcommittee held a hearing to examine problems with the U.S. refugee admissions program following the events of September 11th. In the hearing Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., Chair of the Immigration Subcommittee, said that he believes that, with screening procedures in place, the U.S. should keep the commitment of resettling 70,000 refugees this year. Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan., agreed with Sen. Kennedy and said that refugee admissions ceilings are not about numbers, but about people and that we must do what is just and right for people who deserve our country's protection. Ralston Deffenbaugh, LIRS President, said "We in the refugee resettlement community are heartened by the commitment of both Sen. Kennedy and Sen. Brownback not only to getting our current resettlement program back on track, but also to building it back to the levels of the past." Arthur "Gene" Dewey, the Assistant Secretary of State for the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, also spoke at the hearing and expressed guarded optimism that the U.S. would meet its goal of resettling 70,000 refugees this year. He indicated that a firm commitment of resources would be necessary to even come close to resettling 70,000 refugees and he did not present a plan to reach the goal. "I am concerned that Mr. Dewey's cautious comments did not include a plan of action on how to reach the 70,000 goal," stated Mr. Deffenbaugh. He added, "The chronic shortfall in admissions must end."

Lutheran Services Florida (LSF) joins Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS) in advocacy on behalf of the tens of thousands of refugee children and families still waiting in camps worldwide. We ask all those who are sympathetic with the plight of these desperate people to write a letter to President Bush asking him to save the U.S. refugee resettlement program by keeping his pledge to allow 70,000 refugees to come to the United States this year. If you have had personal experiences with refugees in your church or in your community, include these in your letter to the President and tell him why this issue matters to you. Because the White House is not receiving postal mail, it will be necessary to fax your letter to be certain that your important message is received and heard. The White House fax number is (202) 456-2461. To ensure that your message will have the greatest impact, copies of your letter also should be faxed to the attention of the following White House policy staffers who deal with this issue:

- Elliot Abrams, Senior Director for Democracy, Human Rights and International Operations, National Security Council (202) 456-9140
- Diana Schacht, Special Assistant to the President, Office of Policy Development (202) 456-0382

Other ways to take action and express your views on this issue include:

- Contacting Florida's U.S. senators:
The Honorable Bill Nelson and The Honorable Bob Graham
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
- Sending your original letters to:
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS)
122 C Street NW, Suite 125
Washington, D.C. 20001

LIRS representatives will hand deliver the original letters to administration officials when they meet to discuss the refugee issue.

- Speaking to your pastor and asking for assistance in making your fellow parishioners aware of this dire situation
- Telling your family, friends, and neighbors about this issue and urging them to take action as well.

If you believe in the importance of refugee resettlement, now is the time to voice your opinion by taking action. There is strength in numbers and we believe that caring people working together to help others in need **can** make a real difference.

(NOTE: This article is based in part upon information provided by Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services.)

LSF WELCOMES REFUGEES

AFGHANISTAN FAMILY BEGINS A NEW LIFE IN AMERICA

Although they were weary from traveling all day, the family was joyful when their plane landed in Tampa because they knew that finally they were safe. Their long, difficult journey had come to an end and they were about to begin building a new life living in freedom in America.

They spoke no English when they stepped off the plane in July of 2001, but Torialay Razaqyar, his wife, Gulpekai, and their six children were welcomed warmly by the LSF Case Managers and the Afghan interpreter they had brought along to speak to the family in their native language. In anticipation of their arrival, an apartment – stocked with groceries and furnished with everything the family would need to start their new life – had been prepared for the family. When the Case Managers took them to their new home, Torialay said "Arriving in the United States is the end of a tragedy for me and my family."

Before the Taliban took over his country, Torialay had worked as a journalist and had served as the Director of Culture and Information for the North Zone of Afghanistan. As a member of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, he made documentary films against the on-going war in Afghanistan and he also reported on human rights violations. Then the Taliban came to power, and in 1998 Torialay fled for his life. He walked more than 500 kilometers through mountainous terrain in severe weather wearing only light clothing and searching the countryside for what little food he could find. The journey was dangerous, and often he had to hide during the day, but he continued walking for more than one month until he reached the border and was able to escape to Pakistan where he found shelter with relatives.

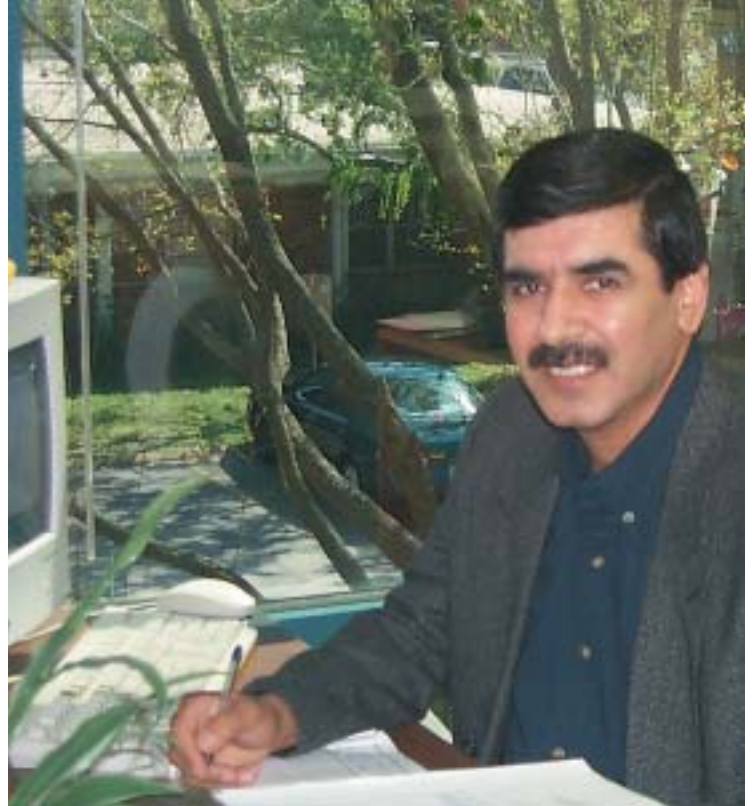
Three more months would pass before Torialay was able to get word to his family that he was alive. They were jubilant when they heard he had survived, but it would be still another year before they were able to escape undercover and join him in Pakistan. When the family finally was reunited, life was difficult. Uprooted from their home, they lived as refugees—moving from place to place, and depending upon others for their survival. They lived every day in hiding; the children couldn't go to school, and Torialay couldn't work.

After nearly one year, their prayers were answered when the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees granted refugee status to the family. Ultimately, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services and Lutheran Services Florida served as co-sponsors to resettle the family in the United States.

As a result, life has changed dramatically for Torialay and his

family during the past eighteen months. After they came to Tampa, the LSF Case Managers helped the family learn English and enrolled the children in school. Ms. Danielle Kearney, Director of the LSF Refugee and Immigration Program, hired Torialay and helped his wife find a job. Today, all of the children speak English and are doing well in school. "My children are on the honor roll every month," said Torialay proudly. After working hard and saving their money, they recently bought their own house.

Most important of all, they have a new addition to their family. Seven months ago, their daughter, Husnia, was born. "Husnia is an American citizen," said Torialay. "My children are our future and that is why we wanted to come to the United States because it is the land of freedom. There is education for my children. It is a country of laws and opportunities. When I was in Afghanistan, I read about Patrick Henry who said 'Give me liberty or give me death' and that is how I feel," Torialay added. He continued, "I think that the problems and hopes are the same for all of the refugees in the world, so I have deep concern for the crisis in the refugee program now because refugees are not terrorists, they too are the victims of terrorism."



As a former refugee, Torialay Razaqyat, LSF Refugee Specialist, understands what other refugees need to adapt to living in their new country.

LSF NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

LSF APPOINTS NEW BOARD MEMBER



Adrian Tocklin

Adrian M. Tocklin, Esq. recently was appointed to serve on the LSF Board of Directors. A retired attorney and executive in the insurance industry, Ms. Tocklin brings to the LSF Board more than 25 years of legal and business experience.

Previously, Ms. Tocklin was employed in executive positions, including President and Chief Operating Officer, with Continental Corporation, a \$4 billion insurer headquartered in New York, NY. She became

President and Chief Executive Officer–Diversified Operations after Continental merged with CNA Insurance in 1995.

The recipient of numerous honors and awards for outstanding achievements, Ms. Tocklin was named APIW Insurance Woman

of the Year in 1998. Currently, she also serves as a member of the Board of Directors of CNA Surety. She also is a member of Our Savior Lutheran Church in St. Petersburg where she is an active volunteer on the Finance and Outreach and Human Care Committees. Ms. Tocklin and her husband, Gary, reside in St. Petersburg.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE LSF-NORTHWEST REGION

The LSF-Northwest Region, located in Pensacola, received a Superior Performance rating resulting from a recent Program Monitoring Review conducted by The Community Trust Corporation, an agent of the Florida Network of Youth and Family Services. The Region also received a "Commendable Performance" rating in a Monitoring Review by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, as well as the exemplary "Deemed Status" rating from the Department of Juvenile Justice review. Included in the Northwest Region are Youth Shelters (Currie House, HOPE House, and Safe Haven) that provide safe refuge for troubled teens and young runaways, and Counseling Programs aimed at reuniting youths with their families.