

San Diego Refugee Forum

General Meeting Minutes – March 17, 2009

I. Call to order at 10:40 am

Diana Ross

Present: Ralph Achenbach, Janet Wolf, Nimo Gure, Ahmed Sahid, Bob Montgomery, Sheryl Eaves, Bryan Nazareth, Dung Le, Lisa Swid, Mikaela Wallinder, Maacah Morah, Stuart Dotson, Barbara Tucker, Ayaan Khalif, Dilkhwaz Ahmed, Dan Breuninger, Sean Riordian, Paige Newman, Hassan Abdisahman, Deqa Sayid, Lucy Larom, Alessandra Facca, Justine Hollowell, Samantha Hua, Nimo Hassan, Samantha Hurst, Donna Peterson, Melissa Dennison, Brent Freeman, Juan Estrada, Sara Vaz, Kathi Anderson, Julie Mitchell, Abdi Mohammoud, Diana Ross

II. Introductions

III. Minutes and Announcements

- Samantha Hurst moved to approve the minutes from the February meeting. Motion was seconded by Barbara Tucker. All present approved, no nays, no abstentions.
- Janet Wolf announced that the health sciences department at San Diego State University requires of its undergraduate seniors to complete an internship in public health. Organizations interested in hosting an intern can contact her.
- Deqa Sayid of the IRC invited all present to a fundraiser for the City Heights community farm held at Searocket Restaurant in North Park on Thursday, March 19.
- Melissa Dennison announced that the Fix-it service for home improvements promoting safety is open to all individuals who entered the US as refugees and are currently 60 years or older. The service is free of charge, and all grant moneys need to be allocated by September. She is currently accepting referrals.
- Maacah Morah shared that the Graduate School of Public Health at San Diego State University is planning on developing a health research project in the refugee communities of San Diego.
- Sheryl Eaves shared that Cuyamaca College has seen an increase of 30% in ESL students over the last year, mostly on account of newly arrived Iraqis in East County.
- Samantha Hua announced that the upcoming CARI meeting on April 9th will feature information on the Iraqi community in East County.
- Newly attending participants included representatives from Activist San Diego (Alessandra Facca and Stuart Dotson), from the Coalition to End Genocide in Uganda Now (Lucy Larom) and from Foothills Christian Community (Julie Mitchell). We welcome all new participants.

IV. Focus: Health Assessment of Elder Somali Refugees

- Janet Wolf of the health sciences department at San Diego State University presented on the findings of the health assessment study of elder Somali refugees in San Diego.

V. Financial Report

- Ralph Achenbach reported the new account balance as \$1,741.96.
- All members and participants were reminded to renew their membership fees before the end of March. Non-paying participants will not be able to participate in this year's elections

VI. Committee Updates

- Diana Ross reported that the event committee has been merged with the advocacy committee.
- Kathi Anderson reported that the membership and outreach committee has not met since the last general meeting.

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VII. County Reports

- Bryan Nazareth shared that ORR has expressed an interest in funding a study on the impact of new arrivals in six US locations, and that he will make more information available to the Refugee Forum as soon as it becomes available.

VIII. Provider and State Advisory Reports

- Bob Montgomery reported that numbers for arrivals remain strong, primarily on account of Iraqis. In addition, Burmese refugees account for large numbers, and San Diego is beginning to see arrivals from Butan. He anticipates that the total projection of 4,800 arrivals for FY09 will easily be met.
- Barbara Tucker reported that the case load in the East County welfare-to-work program has doubled and is likely to double again in the next few months on account of the large numbers of newly arriving Iraqis.
- Bob Montgomery also reported that new regulations for the East African family reunion program, currently still on hiatus, will be announced some time between April and June. The new program will be DNA-based, with all costs of DNA-testing borne by the US-based family members, which is likely to create a significant burden.
- Bob Montgomery also reported that there will be no State Refugee Summit in 2009, but that one may take place in spring of 2010.
- Kathi Anderson reported that due to the continuing hiatus of the East African family reunion program, numbers of asylum seekers are overwhelming and that periods of detention are increasing in length. Sean Riordian added that the system is burdened at the front-end, with insufficient capacities to conduct credible-fear interviews, leading to the increased length of detentions. A lively discussion ensued. Several participants expressed an interest in inviting a representative from the CCA facility in Otay Mesa to a future Refugee Forum meeting and/or in conducting a visit of the facility.

VII. Adjournment at 11:50 am

IX. Next Meeting: April 20th, 10:30 am