

# San Diego Refugee Forum

## Minutes

Tuesday, March 15, 2011, 10:30a.m.-12:15p.m.

Springfield College, 5348 University Ave. Suite 100, San Diego, CA 92105

### I. Call to order at 10:37

([Click here](#) to listen to the audiorecording of the proceedings)

### Introductions & Announcement

- Attendees included: Ralph Achenbach, Abdulahi Aidid, Awichu Akwanya, Nawal Alkatib, Julie Armsay, Pat Bennett, Jibriel Blejani, Paulin Bwinika, Carmen Chavez, Kristine Chong, Kiera Clarke, Patti Clayton, Bonnie Copland, Melissa Dennison, Anthony Devine, Adrienne Dickson, Melissa DuBois, Juan Estrada, Kristi Evans, Connie Flores, Gauri Gadgil, Ashley Girodo, Dave Hall, Holly Hough, Nao Kabashima, Simin Khadiri, Ali Khalaf, Ayaan Khalif, Anne Kirwan, Elizabeth Lou, John Lynch, Jason Martinez, Elaine McLevie, Henri Migala, Ayan Mohamed, Abdi Mohamoud, Hector Morales, Rachel Mosakowski, Patrick Namwembe, Bryan Nazareth, Godelièvre Ndunduyenge, Becky Odyek, Paulino Paida, Paulina Plascencia, John Ramirez, Mary Rutland, Alex Sandoval, Ahmed Shal, Lina Shalabi, Tim Slade, James Sly, Carolyn Smyth, Fardowsa Suleiman, Dawn-Marie Tol, Sawda Ugas, Sara Vaz

Total Attendance: At least 56, of which at least 24 guests or first-time attendees

- Attendees registered for the first time include: Hector Morales and Dave Hall of [Emmanuel Faith Community Church](#); Julie Armsay; Paulin Bwinika and Patrick Namwembe of TACRA; Kristine Chong of the [California Immigrant Policy Center](#); Sgt. Patty Clayton of the [SD Police Department](#); Adrienne Dickson; Connie Flores of the [USCIS](#) Orphan Unit; Gladys Martinez of ICE; Gauri Gadgil of the IRC; Ashley Girodo and Ali Khalaf of JFS; Simin Khadiri of the [Alliance Health Clinic](#); Ayaan Khalif of Step Forward; Anne Kirwan of [Upwardly Global](#); John Lynch of [USCIS](#); Henri Migala of Cuyamaca College; James Sly and Rachel Mosakowski of [PCG](#); Ahmed Shal and Fardowsa Suleiman of SSF; and Thuan Nguyen, the CA State Refugee Coordinator; Kiera Clarke of PRM.
- Carmen Chavez announced that Project Refuge will be holding a fundraiser on April 2, 2011 from 11:30-2:30 p.m. For more information, contact Somali Family Service at (619) 265-5821.
- Gail Patterson of the Welcome Back Center noted that there is an upcoming NCLEX Review Course beginning on March 26 for which the WBC will be waiving the fee (normally \$500) for participants.
- Kristine Chong of the California Immigrant Policy Center noted that May 24th is Immigrant Day so there will be some advocacy in Sacramento on that day. The registration deadline is today, and the website is [www.caimmigrant.org](http://www.caimmigrant.org)
- John Ramirez announced that USCIS has an Open House coming up on Wednesday, March 16th from 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. at the Edward J. Schwartz Federal Building at 880 Front Street, Ste. 1209 San Diego 92101. USCIS recommends parking at Horton Plaza and then walking across to the Federal Building.
- Melissa Denison announced that the JFS Fix-It grant has just been renewed, so anyone who has senior clients who need home modifications for safety reasons should reach out to her.

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- Julie Armsay and Adrienne Dickson, with SDSU's Immigration & Justice Project, announced that the IJP is working to help pro-bono lawyers better understand the mental health needs of recent immigrants in San Diego.
- Kristi Evans with the Legal Aid Society noted that the Mid-City CAN Senior Momentum Team is sponsoring a focus group to gauge interest in a proposed Senior Center in the Mid-City area.
- Ralph reminded participants that the [listserv](#) can be a valuable resource, and encouraged everyone to sign up for it. He also noted that the process of redistricting will be taking place soon, and expressed an interest in having the refugee community organize itself to speak with a unified voice at the hearings.
- Nile Sisters is hosting an event at Hoover High School from 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. on March 26th, with the goal of bringing the youth of City Heights together and engage them in productive activities and help them get to know one another.

### **New Members Welcome**

- New Members include: Casa Cornelia Law Center; the Somali Bantu Community of San Diego; UCSD/SDSU Comprehensive Cancer Partnership; the California Endowment; Molina Health Care; Crittenton Services for Children; the Karen Foundation; Dr. Margaret Higgins; Tabernacle African Caribbean Refugee Association; Consumer Center for Health Education and Advocacy.

### **Task Force Updates**

#### *Event Planning Task Force*

- A JFS volunteer reported for Mikaela Wallinder and noted that the Task Force is looking for photographers; has partnered with some other organizations for food; and still trying to select a theme for World Refugee Day. Questions or comments should be directed to Mikaela. The next meeting is on Monday, March 28, 1 PM at the Museum of Photographic Arts.

#### *Health Task Force*

- Bonnie Copland of the County noted that the invitation-only Language Summit is taking place next week, on Wednesday 3/22/2011 from 9:00-11:00 a.m. and 1:00-3:00 p.m. If any attendees know of anyone at the Executive Management level in Healthcare, and think they should attend, please let Bonnie know so she may extend a formal invitation.

#### *Asylees/Asylum Seekers Task Force*

- Carmen Chavez of Casa Cornelia and Ayan Mohamed of Somali Family Service noted that the upcoming CCA Tour is tentatively scheduled for either May 28th or May 30th. They are currently planning on 3 different tours (perhaps 15-20 people at a time). Casa Cornelia is also discussing the possibility of hosting a pro-bono legal clinic in City Heights for asylum-seekers, and will be e-mailing the listserv to gauge interest. Ahmed Said of Somali Family Services noted that the Corrections Corporation of America is increasingly dropping off asylum seekers downtown in the middle of the night, with no money, rather than dropping them off during the day at some point. He asked Carmen to raise that issue with CCA.

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### *Refugee Employment Task Force*

- Bryan Nazareth of the County had no update to provide at this time.

### **Other Updates**

#### *Reception & Placement*

- IRC: Bob Montgomery noted that “arrivals fell off the table last month, and remain off the table because of security checks” and invited Kiera Clarke of PRM to comment.
  - Kiera noted that there is a new security clearance set in place by DHS; that it is not targeted to any one group in particular; they expect to normalize arrivals within the next 60 days or so; and they expect things to be “bumpy” in the meantime. Asks VOLAGs to remain in contact with their national affiliate networks
- Catholic Charities: There have been no arrivals for this month so far. Expected arrivals for the last couple weeks have been cancelled; the agency is nervous because it may lead to a “bulge” later in the year.
- JFS: Expected 29 people for this month so far, but have only 5.
- AAA: Has had only 20 arrivals (10 cases), mostly Burmese and Nepalese; most of the cancellations have been from the Iraqi context
- Ralph noted that the R&P allotment has begun to be counted either as income or an asset and is now disqualifying the client from receiving County-level welfare benefits, and invited the VOLAGs to comment prior to having the County elaborate on the issue.
  - Dr. McKay noted that a meeting was held between the VOLAGs and the managers of the Family Resource Centers (FRCs), as well as some other policy people. It was confirmed that if the R&P allotment money is distributed over multiple months, it changes the projection of future income, and thus affects their eligibility. If the money is received in one lump sum and spent down appropriately (to below \$2000), it appears to have less of an effect.
  - Alex Sandoval noted that a meeting took place on February 22 with the heads of various FRCs, JFS/IRC/Catholic Charities; he stated that the “rules have not changed” and the property limit remains at \$2,000, where it was before. If the money is received in multiple installments (2 or more) over several months, that is to be treated as *income* rather than as *property*.
    - Domenico Campusan (sp?), manager of the North Central FRC, is collecting the VOLAGs’ questions and scenarios and is passing them on to the CalWORKs program, which will then develop a policy inquiry.
    - Where clients are not eligible for CalWORKs, they should be referred to apply for RCA (Refugee Cash Assistance).
  - Thuan Nguyen noted that VOLAGs can issue vouchers directly to the landlords and utility companies in such a way that they are considered ‘vendor pay’ rather than income. Alex Sandoval confirmed this understanding.

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- Ralph noted that a gap would still remain while the County is formulating its policy response, and asked how families deemed ineligible for TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) funds could access the RCA money.
  - Bryan Nazareth confirmed that refugees should be able to receive RCA from the County, but that they aren't currently receiving any. He noted that this had formerly been issued through Wilson Fish.
  - Dr. Michael McKay and Thuan Nguyen responded that this was traditionally the case, but that families fitting the TANF-eligible profile are now supposed to access RCA through the County.
  - Thuan stated that should TANF-type families be turned away from CalWORKs benefits because of income levels, these families need to then be moved to RCA until such time that they become income-eligible for CalWORKs, when they could be moved back.
    - Ralph asked whether the County is prepared to do this, noting that the need is quite pressing for new arrivals. Bob Montgomery noted that other counties do the same thing, and simply bill the Federal government for the RCA money when families do not receive Welfare benefits. He expressed his concern that the County has not been tapping into the pool of RCA money that exists specifically to serve refugees who are not eligible for TANF.
      - Bryan's response was that this question would need to be taken back to the County as part of the policy review; Ralph noted that this would be problematic for the newly-arriving refugees who are experiencing such pressing need, and further that many refugee-serving areas of the country look to San Diego for leadership, and quick action would be best.
  - Kristi Evans (Legal Aid Society) noted that all notices of action from the County bear a phone number that can be called should the applicant wish to appeal a negative decision, and therefore that a general process already exists.
    - Ralph concurred, but noted that the responsibility for connecting refugees to RCA is actually the County's, and should not be passed off onto local nonprofit organizations.
    - Bob Montgomery agreed, pointing out that the County really should be in direct contact with ORR (the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement) or Thuan's office in order to sort this out.
    - Dr. McKay asked whether the County's line staff are aware that any time they encounter a refugee who is deemed ineligible for TANF, the refugee should then be referred to access RCA, for which they are automatically eligible.
      - Following an inconclusive response and a discussion of how the County would like to see the 'spending down' of property

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documented, Ralph pointed out that (a) Dr. McKay's question had not yet been answered, that (b) Thuan had confirmed that it was the County's responsibility to refer the clients directly to RCA, and (c) perhaps the 'quick fix' required in the short-term to prevent refugees' being harmed while the County processes paperwork and policy reviews might be for a memo to be circulated to the County's line staff detailing their responsibility for this referral process and providing instructions.

- Alex and Bryan stated that they would need to bring the question back to their management, and could not commit to a timeframe for any resolution of the issue. They would, however, impress upon their management the urgency of the situation.
- Thuan said that her office would take it upon themselves to issue an ACL to the County explaining the policy and directing the County to implement it.

■ Ralph pointedly asked Bryan and Alex how the County would get a refugee family onto RCA if they were denied TANF benefits, in light of the State having asserted that it is the County's responsibility.

- Alex stated that they would need to wait and find out how the FRCs are doing it currently. Ralph asked whether an injunction could take place to prevent the refugees' being denied CalWORKs benefits in the meantime, while they sort that out. Bryan replied that a blanket injunction would not be possible, because CalWORKs eligibility is based on income, but that the question would be brought to his superiors that day.
- Ultimately, Ralph asked whether an update from the County could be provided by the close of business that day detailing the measures that had been taken with respect to the RCA-referral issue. It was noted that the decision-makers in question were not present at the meeting, and therefore it was unlikely that there would be any news to report back, but Ralph was invited to send an e-mail directly to Kim Forrester (one of the decision-makers) to apprise her of the issue. Thuan noted that upon her return to her office, she and her staff would take a look at the State laws and Federal regulations, and e-mail those to Bryan to have him pass those on to Kim as well. Holly Hough (Rep. Hunter's office) noted that she would bring the matter to the attention of County Supervisor Diane Jacob as well, and press the issue from that end.

### **FOCUS: Refugee-Related Resources (CDSS-administered resources for refugee-related services)**

- Thuan Nguyen, Chief (Refugee Programs Bureau, CA Dept. of Social Services) [RPB@dss.ca.gov](mailto:RPB@dss.ca.gov) ([Click here](#) to view a .pdf of Thuan's presentation)
- Invited people to send messages to the above e-mail address if they encounter problems.
- Overview of where all the money goes: the state receives money, passes it on to the counties, which then actually provide the services; listed eligible participants in those services (refugees, asylees, Cuban/Haitian Entrants, Cuban Medical Professionals, Afghan & Iraqi nationals)

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receiving SIVs, certified Human Trafficking Victims and their family members, and certain Amerasians from Viet Nam).

- They receive several different kinds of funding from ORR:
  - Cash, Medical, Administration (CMA) funds, which include
    - Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)
    - Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) program
    - State and County Administration costs
  - Refugee Social Services (RSS)
  - Targeted Assistance Funding (TAF)
  - Discretionary Grant for Services to Older Refugees
  - Refugee School Impact Grant
  - Total arrivals to CA by year:
    - 2006 - 5200
    - 2007 - 6607
    - 2008 - 9478
    - 2009 - 11272
    - 2010 - 8563
  - Q: Why did the amount of \$ for School Impact Grant drop by 1 million dollars from 2006-2010?
  - A: The first 5 years, the maximum the State could apply for was \$2 million; in the last round, the maximum was \$1 million
  - San Diego County Refugee Arrivals by year:
    - 2006 - 796
    - 2007 - 1088
    - 2008 - 2595
    - 2009 - 4168
    - 2010 - 3663
- **Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)**
  - RCA is available in all 58 counties, and is offered for up to 8 months at the same level as the CalWORKs program; for FY 2010, the State had a monthly average of 2055 RCA clients
  - San Diego County does not have an RCA program right now because of the Wilson/Fish Alternative Project; if, however, a family is deemed ineligible for CalWORKs, the County needs to move them to RCA, so perhaps there will be some RCA clients in San Diego County soon.
- **Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM)**
  - Cares for unaccompanied minors who are refugees, asylees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, victims of human trafficking, or undocumented minors having received SIJS (Special Immigrant Juvenile Status)
    - Q: How does a child who is eligible access this program here in San Diego?

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- A: If the child is with ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement), they will place the child in the Division of Unaccompanied Alien Children (DUCS) program; if the child is an asylee or trafficking minor, they will be automatically moved into the URM program
  - It parallels the County's foster care program
- **Refugee Social Services (RSS)**
  - Primarily targeted for employment services, eligible for up to 5 years
  - For a county to be eligible for it, it must have received >400 arrivals each of the last 5 FYs (San Diego County is eligible)
- **Targeted Assistance (TA)**
  - Same services as RSS, but different target population; RSS is for the new arrivals (less than one year in-country), whereas the TA provides services for longer-term, harder-to-serve refugees
  - Current TA counties: Fresno, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego, and Santa Clara
  - ~33% of people who received RSS and TA services through CA received them in San Diego County
- **Older Refugee Discretionary Grant**
  - Often meant to provide refugees with citizenship-related services; also meant to link older refugees with mainstream providers
  - As of 2010, there were 2863 elderly refugees in San Diego County
- **Refugee School Impact Grant (RSIG)**
  - CA received \$950,000 in money under the RSIG (out of a max of \$1,000,000) -- kept \$60k for admin costs, put out \$890,000 for districts to apply for
  - This grant can provide for English language instruction, after-school tutorials, summer-school enhancement, counseling, parental school-involvement, and interpreter services for parent-teacher meetings and conferences
  - The current 2-year cycle will end August 14th, 2012
  - Max for each school district is \$200,000 per year; if a district receives the money the first year in each 2-year cycle, it will automatically receive it the second year
- **Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs)**
  - ORR reported 5105 SIVs entered the U.S. between Oct. 1, 2007 and Sept. 30, 2010; 776 resettled in CA
- For more info. on CA's Refugee Program, contact Lisa Vang (**Chong.Vang@dss.ca.gov**) at (916)654-2387 (the analyst for SD County)
- Thuan strongly encouraged attendees to consider attending the CA Refugee Summit in Sacramento on April 13th-14th; it will be less of a conference, more of a technical assistance session
  - Q: What is being done to track numbers about Secondary Migration? If a refugee is coming from elsewhere to be served by a local agency, it is *that agency's* responsibility to get that information to the State; however, it is not clear how many agencies were aware of that requirement.

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- A: The RSS money that ORR allocates to CA depends on the number of refugees, asylees, and secondary migrants the State serves. The State is working with counties to come up with a way to track all the secondary migrants, but refugee serving agencies need to keep track of full name, date of birth, alien number, date of arrival, and the like. The State's staff will clean up the data aggregated from the counties.
- The State is now asking for secondary migrant data, where it didn't before, because it used to be able to track who was from out of state by the first three digits of their SSN. However, the Social Security Administration is going to stop issuing numbers by area of birth/arrival (as of June) in order to make it more difficult for people to commit identity theft.

### **Adjournment**

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