



advocacy

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## Q&A: Refugee Resettlement

### **Q: Who is a refugee and what is resettlement?**

A: A refugee is a person who has fled their home country and who has a "well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion." According to the World Refugee Survey in 2009, there are approximately 14 million refugees worldwide. There are three durable solutions available to refugees: repatriation (returning to their home country), local integration into the country to which they fled to, or resettlement in a third country. About one percent of all refugees are resettled to a third country each year when they are unable to pursue any other durable solution. Resettlement can be a vital and truly life-saving option for victims of conflict and persecution giving them a chance to begin a new life in a conflict-free country.

### **Q: Where are refugees resettled?**

A: Refugees are resettled in many different countries. The United States is one of the main resettlement countries receiving the largest number of refugees that the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) considers eligible for resettlement. In fact, each year the US consistently resettles more refugees than all other resettlement countries combined, fulfilling its long-standing tradition of being a safe haven for the persecuted and victimized people of the world. In 2008, the US welcomed about 48,000 individuals out of 65,000 refugees resettled around the world that year. Refugees that did not come to the US were resettled in one of nine other countries (Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom).

### **Q: Why does the US welcome refugees?**

A: Welcoming significant numbers of refugees each year is a powerful way that the US demonstrates global leadership on humanitarian issues, in addition to carrying out the fundamental American value of inclusiveness of all people. Although the US significantly leads other countries in refugee resettlement, it should be noted that since September 11, 2001, US refugee resettlement numbers have declined overall. Refugee admissions dramatically fell in 2002 to 27,000, compared with an admission number of 70,000 in 2001 and an average of 91,000 in the preceding decade. More recently, admissions have begun to increase (about 50,000 refugees have been resettled in the past few years) but are still below previous numbers. This trend is disturbing because while resettlement overall has decreased, the need for resettlement continues to grow as the global refugee population increases. Today, an estimated 500,000 are in immediate and urgent need of resettlement.

### **Q: Why do we resettle refugees?**

A: Resettlement is, of course, an act of rescue for some of the world's most vulnerable persons, releasing thousands each year from near death situations, protracted suffering in a refugee camp or the grinding poverty of an urban slum. Resettled refugees are often those who can arouse the conscience of an otherwise indifferent or unknowing society to this global humanitarian crisis. For Episcopalians and Christians generally, our theology informs our ministry to refugees and forcibly displaced persons. Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM) carries out, with other faith-based and secular agencies, a national program of refugee resettlement through a public-private partnership with the US government. EMM affiliate offices and parishes in one third of the dioceses of the Episcopal Church participate in resettlement work. Refugees are received from all parts of the world and sponsorship is offered to refugees without regard to national origin, race or religion. Local parishes play an important role in EMM resettlement.

### **Q: Where do resettled refugees come from?**

A: In Fiscal Year 2008, the three largest refugee groups who came to the US were from Burma, Iraq and Bhutan. In 2008, the US exerted a strong effort to bring Iraqi refugees who were victims of the ongoing instability in their country to the US. This population received special attention because prior to 2008, a total of only a few thousand Iraqis had been brought to the US. Even with this extended effort, many Iraqis remain in desperate situations in other countries and afraid to return.

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