

REFUGEE EDUCATION TRUST

The mission of the Refugee Education Trust (RET) is to provide quality post-primary education to the largest possible number of refugee children, pursuing regional peace and development, countering child soldier enrolment and child prostitution.

Today, developing countries host some 1.5 million teenage refugees. In 2000, only 50,000 of these—a mere 3%—attended school beyond primary school. As a first step, RET aims to double this figure before 2006.

RET collects project proposals from operational partners in the field, selects and links the best ones up into RET country programmes, submits those to public and private donors for funding and co-ordinates them in the field, monitors, evaluates, audits and reports.

The initial goal is to double refugee school attendance in less than five years. The implementing capacity exists worldwide and can be mobilized. Financial resources are the limiting constraint.



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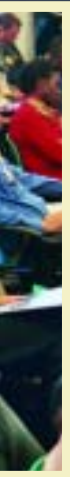


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refugee education



Keynote speeches

**First International Symposium
on Post-Primary Education for
Refugees and Internally
Displaced Persons (IDPs)**

18–19 September 2002, Geneva
Refugee Education Trust



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INTRODUCTION



Post-primary education for refugees gets far too little attention. While several large and influential organizations, as well as some small ones, work for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), most of them devote a small percentage of their efforts to education and to post-primary education.

This was emphasized at the “First international symposium on post-primary education for refugees and IDPs”, organised by the Refugee Education Trust. 135 individuals representing 67 organizations, assembled in Geneva, reaffirmed the urgent need for more and better post-primary education for refugees. The large number of participants indicates the urgency and the importance of the problem. The presence of HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand and Assistant High Commissioner Mary-Ann Wyrsh demonstrates the goodwill and international solidarity behind us. Ms. Helay Zadran and Mr. Jaafar K. Kuma, coming directly from the refugee camps and schools, connected us to the realities.

Our special thanks go to Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand and the High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers for their sustained support to refugee education and RET.

We gratefully acknowledge the presence of all participants and are happy to hereby present you the keynote speeches. ■

KEYNOTE SPEECHES

SPECIAL GUEST

Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand was a distinguished guest of the First International Symposium on Post-Primary Education for Refugees and IDPs.

HRH PRINCESS MAHA CHAKRI SIRINDHORN OF THAILAND

Formal Post-Primary Education and Vocational Training

Education provides the opportunity to choose, the opportunity to choose peace."

This motto of the Refugee Education Trust explains very well why we are here to discuss refugee education. Refugees have endured the violence of war and have been traumatised by conflict that most other people have never felt nor experienced. To educate refugees sufficiently, therefore, means to provide them with the opportunity to choose peace in the future.

In many host countries, oftentimes countries that are still developing themselves, primary education is currently insufficient. It is therefore a very big challenge when we consider ensuring that refugees in those countries receive post-primary education. Nevertheless, if the problem is neglected, it is going to be very costly over the span of one or two generations, because the long-term negative effects of depriving refugees of the benefits of education at this level would be felt by the host countries both socially and economically.

Socially, the danger lies in the alienation of an entire class of people, albeit a minority, within our society. Without the job skills necessary to secure a reasonable quality of life for them and their dependents, refugees face hard times and are forced into circumstances that might cause trouble for others. We have learned a lesson from developed countries where the first generation of children born to immigrants spends its formative years with two cultures and two sets of values. In a supportive situation, these children may prosper from such diversity so early in life. However, in an alienating environment, children become confused and disenchanted with the whole concept of society. In the latter case, the bonds of society are usually severed along with the sense of community spirit, personal responsibility and respect for others.



Economically, the question of post-primary education is not a question of "Can we afford to do it?" but rather a question of "Can we afford not to do it?" When refugees remain in their host country, their self-worth increases in proportion to their acquisition of new job skills and societal acceptance. Thus, the host country benefits by adding value to its own labour pool.

Formal Post-Primary Education

Roughly defined, post-primary education extends beyond the foundation level of education. At the secondary education level, children grow into teenagers. At the post-secondary education level, young adults are offered a variety of job skills. The emphasis of post-primary education focuses on helping students acquire those specific skills needed in their future career or profession.

Herein lies a major obstacle to the development of formal, post-primary education. The high degree of specialisation required at this level means that recruiting and retaining qualified teachers in specialised fields such as computers, mathematics, science, technology and languages is very difficult.

Another problem is proper administrative support. Curricula, laboratories, appropriate facilities and up-to-date teaching materials are both rare and expensive. In addition, ongoing teacher training is necessary if teachers are to keep pace with advances in knowledge and technology. The last problem is a lack of individualised learning due to high student-teacher ratios, especially in remote areas. As a result, students tend to be less motivated and underachieving.

While these problems exist in regular schools, they are substantially more serious among refugees seeking to receive high quality post-primary education.

Vocational Training

What seems to be a successful model in deprived areas is the delivery of post-primary education together with vocational training. This can be achieved to a considerable degree despite all the obstacles. The concept is to manage a dual system that enables students to acquire both general knowledge and necessary occupational skills. Those who cannot continue their studies still have a means to earn their livings.

Vocational training at the secondary school level can effectively emphasise such disciplines as computers, agriculture, electronics, mechanics, art and business, etc. Vocational training can also be further emphasised by incorporating it into knowledge-based study; for example, plant tissue culture and plant breeding in botany, design and packaging in art class, electronics and mechanics in physics, etc.

The shortage of specialised teachers can be alleviated through distance education schemes. Despite limited budgets and resources, schools can still develop relatively good programs by seeking assistance, networking and partnerships from universities, colleges or other organisations.

A Case Study: Education of Refugees and under privileged groups in Thailand

My experience in educational development and administration has never been really for the refugees. It is rare that refugee status is granted.

However, in my capacity of the Vice President of the Thai Red Cross, I have in 1978, encountered people who had fled their countries to keep away from fighting. They were called illegal immigrants. These people were put in camps waiting to be repatriated. Some of them were assigned to a third country.

While they were in Thailand, it was vital that they should get some useful knowledge and skill for their future role in society. We organised vocational training, such as agriculture, home industry: weaving or basketry. For young people and interested adults we designed courses in their own language, in Thai and in English which, we thought, would be useful for them. If we were sure about the third country to which they would be sent, the language of that country would also be taught. Some illegal

immigrants were not put in camps but they were allowed to move only in certain areas.

In addition to the group of people that I have already talked about there are people whose names are not in the civil registration—non-nationality persons, i.e. people without Thai citizenship, or any citizenship at all, and people from the other side of the borders. The children in this category cannot be enrolled in any schools. If they get into schools they do not get school-leaving certificates in any level. This makes it difficult for them to get into a post primary educational institution and get decent jobs when they grow up.

About a decade ago, there was an announcement ensuring that everybody in this kingdom including immigrants, orphans, street children, had the right to pursue their education up to the tertiary level, both in formal and non-formal education, in government or private schools, colleges or universities. This is to uphold the ideal of education for all. In practice, up to now, in many cases children without proper birth certificate, cannot get into schools because of the red tapes in the process: lots of official papers are needed and the process is a long one.

Not only non-nationality persons, but also Thai people in the remote areas, or border areas are faced with multifaceted problems.

I had the opportunity to follow my parents to the rural areas to work in development projects since I was in my teens. There I saw that it was hard for kids to have a chance of getting post primary education. Many of them were malnourished which affected their physical and intellectual capabilities.

What we have done so far is to promote agriculture: growing vegetables, fruit trees, raising animals and fish. We try to make sure that the children have correct food intake, sometimes fortification and supplementation are needed. Later I have been advised that it is not enough to start monitoring children health in primary schools. One should start from kindergarten or daycare center and also one should look after pregnant women, nursing mothers and newborn babies. We should also pay attention to contagious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis as well as drug problems.

These target groups live sparsely in places of difficult access so it is not easy to provide them with enough qualified teachers. It is important to provide teacher-training courses and teaching media. In some places it is possible to provide computers for networking as I mentioned earlier but it is not always the case. In many primary schools the children's mother tongues are not Thai and the school children come from different tribes. Their cultural background is varied and their command of the Thai language—the media of teaching—is inadequate. As a result, their academic performance in other core subjects—math and science—becomes poor and does not lead to success in the secondary level.



RURAL POOR

Many refugees live in rural border areas where even finding a common language for education can be a challenge.

This problem of different languages and dialects exists also in organizing education for refugees.

We have therefore provided vocational training with various aims: training of the fine motor skills for young kids, for self-sufficiency of the household and community, and as a source of income.

In relation to this, I would like to mention two other programs, which might be effective for refugee education: first, setting up cooperative shops in schools. The kids learn the social principle of working together, discussing, voting, and being responsible for their own lives. They will get academic skills in writing reports. They learn also mathematics, accounting and marketing.

Secondly, we have to make them aware of the importance of environmental protection and sustainable development. I gather that there is no need for me to clarify this point.

Conclusion

Education is a long-term project, but yet urgent. We do not have time to wait and look for evidence to prove whether the kids are legal or illegal, for they grow up every day! It is not an easy task to organize refugee education, since the situation in each location is not the same; it has to be "tailor made" for each group, if not individually.

The task is immense, no one can act alone, and it demands absolute concerted efforts and sincere commitments of all parties. It can be possible only through compassion and loving-kindness. I hear my parents say, "to give without discrimination", to choose the best things or best services to give to all, regardless of their race, religious inclination, and socio-economic status. Thus, let us join hands to create a better world. ■

RUUD LUBBERS, UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Opening Address as delivered by Ms. Mary Ann Wyrsh

I would like to warmly welcome all of you. Your expertise, experience and motivation are an invaluable resource. Thank you for demonstrating your support in such a concrete way by being present here today.

All societies attach the highest importance to education. In the developed world, we take education for granted. In the developing world, there is also a great thrust towards "Education For All".

Refugees as a group face many obstacles to benefiting from educational opportunities, prior to and during their displacement. Often, on their return to their homes, they face new challenges to continuing their education.

UNHCR's first tasks are to ensure the protection of refugees and the provision of their basic life sustaining needs. UNHCR considers basic education to be both a right of all refugees as well as an essential tool for their protection. This year, 2002, we have budgeted over \$38 million for education. Despite this, because of limited funding and competing needs, UNHCR offices often find themselves unable to dedicate adequate funds to education.

Education is a priority of the refugees themselves. Already during the emergency phase of refugee operations, while refugees are seeking their shelter and enough food and water to survive, their minds turn to the future, with hope for a better life. We know that education gives refugees self esteem and dignity, and the chance to solve their own problems, defend their rights and become self reliant.

Most of UNHCR's efforts and resources go to primary education. We know that very few refugee children in developing countries go on to secondary school. The figures are significantly lower than those collected by UNESCO which give an overall figure of 18% for non refugee children in the least developed countries. In terms of education, for a range of reasons, refugee adolescents in developing countries have many fewer opportunities than local children.

Youths possess enormous energy and potential. If they are not usefully occupied, this potential can be diverted from positive to negative activities. Refugee youths can easily become prey to substance abuse, delinquency or, even worse, to exploitation such as sexual abuse and forced military recruitment.

With this in mind, in December of 2000 (on UNHCR's 50th anniversary) UNHCR helped to create the Refugee Education Trust. RET became operational in May 2001. Its aim is to provide post-primary education for refugees.

UNHCR has supported the creation of this independent humanitarian organization in recognition of the importance of its goals. The organization has made important progress since its inception, and UNHCR looks forward to the next stage of our relationship with RET, as partners in promoting post-primary education in countries around the world.

Although fully operational for little more than one year, RET has already achieved much success, with five ongoing projects in Pakistan, Tanzania, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Uganda—with over 22,000 students sponsored. This is more than double the initial target of 10,000 students in the first year of operation.

RET has constructed and furnished school buildings, provided educational materials, trained and paid teachers, promoted health education, encouraged girls' participation and provided vocational skills training.



The Opening Address was delivered by Ms. Mary Ann Wyrsh on behalf of Ruud Lubbers, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

A fundamental principle is to be more accountable to the refugees by ensuring their full and active participation in education projects. UNHCR hopes that in the years ahead, RET's capacity to broaden the range of its activities will grow.

A major challenge for us all is to create greater awareness of the importance of post-primary education. At present, UNHCR seeks to ensure access to primary and lower secondary education for all refugees, but we are aware that in many cases opportunities are limited to primary education.

Secondary education motivates children to finish primary school and provides girls with the necessary education to become teachers and leaders, thus becoming important role models. This is essential for getting more girls into primary school and achieving a gender balanced and equitable society.

We must also overcome the gap between emergency and development aid. At present post-primary education for refugees is a casualty of this gap. We must find a solution for this. RET is well placed to contribute to efforts in this direction.

Education is one of the biggest gifts that we can give our children. For refugees who have lost everything, this is certainly the case. It is impossible to calculate the immense costs that are incurred by depriving refugees of education. If all that some children know is violence, deprivation and exploitation, they will lack the resources to contribute to the development of stable, just and productive societies in the future.

If, on the other hand, we are able to provide them with secure environments, where they have access to education including post-primary education how much more likely they are to become productive citizens of the countries they live in.

I hope that, with the help of all of you here today, we will be able to go forward together with strengthened cooperation, to find practical solutions to this challenging but vitally important problem. I hope that as a result of this Symposium you will regard RET not just as a funding organization, but as a collaborating platform for the future provision of post-primary education for refugees. ■

Ms Helay ZADRAN, AFGHAN REFUGEE IN PAKISTAN

Thank you for the opportunity to share a few words on behalf of the Afghan refugees striving in neighboring countries for their basic rights.

In 1988 when we left Afghanistan in search of peace and security, my parents were never sure that their children would be able to continue education in a refugee status. In fact, it would have been the reality if schools had not been established

for refugees in Pakistan. Hence a couple of days after our arrival we were enrolled in a refugee school in Islamabad. We enjoyed going to that school, as I would be with children having the same background and experience and hence understanding each other's fears and feelings. I had just finished grade four when all refugee schools shifted to Afghanistan as the Mujahideen returned. For almost four years, we had no schools to go to for we could not afford the high charges of Pakistani private schools and the governmental ones did not accept us. I remember when I would wake up early in the mornings to watch the Pakistani children in our street hurry to their schools. It reminded me of my own school but at the same time left me with great pains of disappointment and hopelessness. I felt all my dreams and hopes washed away. Suddenly everything changed when a new school with affordable charges supported by some external sources was established for refugees in the town. My two sisters and I were among the first to enroll. Only then did I feel happiness in my life. And, today working in education sector as result of continuous years of my strive and struggle, I feel a strong sense of victory and achievement.

Education is recognized as an absolute right for all children including those seeking asylum in other countries by the Convention for the Rights of Children. Further emphasis has been made that the international community should support the education of refugees in those countries where the host governments are unable to do so.

The fact that education is vital to life is well known to everyone. But this need becomes even more crucial in situations of change, flux and instability. By educating refugee children, we are actually widening their chances of being able to have a say in their country's future decisions.

Education for refugees should not be limited to elementary schooling. In fact if sustainability and empowerment is to be brought to the lives of the affected children, their primary education should be followed by quality post-primary and higher education. It is the students completing their higher education whom ultimately contribute to addressing the lack of teachers, doctors, engineers, scientists and politicians in their countries.

Realizing the essence of education in the lives of refugees, the International Rescue Committee's Female Education Program (IRC/FEP) for the past several years has been constantly striving to provide quality primary as well as post-primary education to Afghan children in Pakistan. Activities of the organization range from supporting schools to courses for women in the fields of pre-school education, public health and administration and English-language development. FEP is currently extending educational materials as well as financial and technical support to a total of 38 schools and 55 community-based classes in Pakistan.



Ms Helay ZADRAN, Afghan Refugee in Pakistan.

Representing Afghan refugees and describing their needs and constraints, I should add that secondary level education for Afghans has suffered tremendously due to neglect and lack of resources over several years. There are many Afghan students who were provided with only primary and sometimes post-primary education but no further measures were ever taken to complete their higher education. Their example is of some one's who is guided to some distance to the destination but is left in the middle of the road. Even if he struggles a lot, he cannot move ahead.

The establishment of the new government in Afghanistan gives the refugees hope. With the recent improvements in the region, the focus of aid and assistance has been shifted inside the country, which is a very positive and healthy sign. However, many refugees are still not prepared to repatriate. This category includes those who immigrated many years back and are now so well established in some old camps of Pakistan that they find it both difficult and costly to repatriate. Some others' houses in Afghanistan have been destroyed and they don't find any means to reconstruct them in the near future. At the same time, they find it hard to afford renting houses there. The third group includes those who are very cautious about their children's future.

The education infrastructure in Afghanistan has been destroyed and there are significant gaps in this sector to be filled. Very few teachers are trained, resources are rare and a limited number of schools are properly functional. Many Afghan parents who realize the importance of quality education prefer to repatriate when their children are finished with their schooling.

This leads us to the point that Afghan children who with their families stay back in Pakistan for some years should not be ignored. Sufficient resources and support should be available for them as long as their stay in Pakistan. Otherwise, I am afraid these children will also face a similar disappointment, which the children including myself had experienced several years back.

At the end, I would like to maintain: Open the windows of opportunities for refugee children and let the light of hope enter their dark lives. ■

JAAFAR K. JUMA, IDP, SUDAN

Allow me to present some basic facts of Sudan, but with special emphasis on IDPs.

People in Sudan (1999)

Total population	31.9 million
Urban	11.0 million
Rural	20.9 million

*United Nations Humanitarian Coordination Unit

IDP population (UNHCU) *

Total Sudan	2.5 million
Khartoum area	1.8 million

Educational attainment (IDP School Survey 2002)

Illiterate rate of the IDP population

Male	34%
Female	51%

IDPs who follow secondary education and beyond

Male	12%
Female	9%

IDPs who currently follow secondary class

Total	40%
Male	62%
Female	15%

IDP teaching staff

Professional teachers	20%
Male teachers	94%
Female teachers	6%

As a matter of fact, all the IDP schools, be they governmental, church or community schools, were established as a result of the consequences of war. As evidence, in the area of general education of 1,151 schools in the South, 977 schools were closed down and only 174 are operational. This because the schools were either physically destroyed or deserted by tens of thousands of students who fled to the northern region, to Khartoum (1989 statistics on schools).

Although we took the challenge and did our best in educating our young ones, yet every month in Khartoum about 50 displaced students leave school. Twenty-five of these students do not wish to leave school. Two thirds of these students are girls. Girls worldwide have less access to education than boys (ILO, 2000). The lower enrolment and graduation rates for girls are due to a number of factors, which I will not raise now.

The causes and consequences of school drop out in Sudan are closely related to some developmental issues such as poverty, malnutrition and gender, in education as well.

To date, IDPs in Sudan have not received any quality education. We are still fighting illiteracy. Imagine our students have heard of computers but have no access to them. Even the majority of our teaching staff has not touched a computer.

Educating IDPs and refugees has a multiple meaning. Education should go beyond mathematics, literacy and biology. Education must include the cultivation of responsible attitudes, a healthy life style and good social relationships. And giving support should be tied to the integration of these attitude-building programmes.

We are therefore very grateful to RET to be willing to provide support to IDP secondary schools in Sudan, since no such support has been seen in this country over the last 12 years. ■



WORKING WITH LITTLE

Sudan is categorized both as "Severely indebted" by the World Bank, and as a "Least Developed Country" by the United Nations.

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