

MEDIA RELEASE
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WORLD REFUGEE DAY June 20 – 2009

The global theme for this year's World Refugee Day (June 20) is "Real People, Real Needs" as set by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Despite the efforts of many, the needs of refugees worldwide are far from being met. Behind these unmet needs are not just numbers but real people with real stories.

On Friday 19 June, ninety former refugees who have been on a six week orientation programme at the Mangere Refugee Reception Centre, will leave to resettle in various regions throughout New Zealand. Some will be reunited with family members they haven't seen for a number of years. The group mainly consists of Bhutanese and Burmese (various ethnicities) as well as some Colombian.

Refugee Services (formerly RMS Refugee Resettlement) is a non-profit organization and New Zealand's national refugee resettlement agency assisting the 750 quota refugees who are accepted into the country each year. There are six intakes during the year.

Less than 1% of the over 11 million refugees worldwide are resettled in another country. New Zealand is one of the top ten governments who currently host the bulk of the refugees who are annually resettled in new countries offering resettlement as a durable solution.

Refugees are the innocent victims of war, persecution, discrimination, racism and oppression, forced to flee their homeland for nothing more than their ethnicity, religion or beliefs.

Lal man Rai is a former refugee originally from Bhutan who was in a refugee camp in Nepal for 17 years before being resettled in New Zealand in 2008.

"I was just a 17 year old boy and completely blind about politics but the Bhutanese army arrested me and my brother. Many people died in the jail – even my brother was killed in the prison through torture. Things were always tough and we were scared full time in our daily life.

"We are very thankful to the New Zealand Government for giving us shelter, accommodation and other facilities too. We were like strangers but New Zealand considered us its citizens. We are so grateful to be here in such a peaceful country. We had dreams and now these are fulfilled" said Lal man Rai

The average stay in a refugee camp has risen to 17 years, where there are real challenges to meet the every day needs of safety, housing, education, water, food, and medical care.

Resettlement is used only when refugees are unable to return to their own country and face such difficult or dangerous circumstances that they cannot safely remain in the country to which they have fled.

Because of our response to the refugee crisis in the world, we can offer protection and a safe haven where refugees can recover and rebuild their hopes for a better future. These are real needs for real people...just like you and I.

On World Refugee Day, let's not forget that some day in the future any one of us could be knocking at a stranger's door hoping to find a safe and friendly shelter. We should extend refugees the same kind of welcome we would like to receive if we

were in their position. Let us honour refugees for the courage and determination it takes to survive and rebuild their lives.

Coincidentally Volunteer Awareness Week, is also held during World Refugee Week from 14 to 21 June and we would like to acknowledge and thank all our valued volunteers who have an essential role in assisting former refugees integrate into their local community providing practical support and establishing community linkages. If you are keen to find out more about volunteering, please contact Refugee Services www.refugeeservices.org.nz

For further information or interviews please contact

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