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On May 3-4, 2010, the International Peace Institute (IPI) and the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation of Montreal co-hosted an event entitled “Refugees and the Regional Dynamics of Peacebuilding.”\* This event brought together approximately forty policy experts and practitioners from the humanitarian and peacebuilding communities for a focused discussion on the regional dynamics of refugee situations and conflict, and the need for integrated peacebuilding strategies to improve these dynamics.

This meeting note was drafted by *rapporteur* Paul Romita, IPI Policy Analyst. It reflects the *rapporteur’s* interpretation of the discussions and does not necessarily represent the views of all other participants.

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# Refugees and the Regional Dynamics of Peacebuilding

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## Introduction

By their very nature, refugee movements regionalize the effects of conflict as they spill over into neighboring territories. This is particularly true in the world’s poorest and most unstable regions, where countries like Guinea, Tanzania, and Pakistan have opened their borders to hundreds of thousands of refugees. Host countries may in some instances already be involved—either directly or indirectly—in the conflict, but refugee flows can also generate instability in neighboring countries and trigger cross-border interventions.<sup>1</sup>

The mass arrival and prolonged presence of refugees in neighboring countries can have a negative impact on peace: armed elements within the refugee population can act as spoilers to a peace process; host countries can push for early and unsustainable repatriation; refugees can be politicized either before or during exile; and refugees can put a major strain on host-country capacity. But the reverse is also true, in that there are cases where host countries have been inspired to play a positive role in finding solutions to a crisis in order to resolve the refugee situation. Likewise, refugees may contribute to peacebuilding in their country of origin, especially when they benefit from training while in exile.

Yet the issue of refugees has entered very little into contemporary discussions of peacebuilding. Most policy and research on peacebuilding focuses on efforts to consolidate peace and prevent a return to conflict. Refugees are only addressed as a secondary concern.<sup>2</sup> It can be challenging enough to ensure that security and development actors are on the same page when it comes to devising peacebuilding responses; humanitarian actors are often left out of policy discussions at the strategic level, and refugee issues tend to be treated as programmatic or operational concerns.

A separate, but related, problem is the tendency for peacebuilding discussions to focus almost exclusively on the country in question; for example, external partners tend to engage with the government and people of a postconflict country to facilitate peacebuilding, and neglect the needs of refugee-hosting countries and communities in the region. More attention needs to be paid to the regional effects of conflict, including political interference from neighboring states, the movements of armed groups, the spread of small arms,

\* The title of this event comes from an article written by 2003 Trudeau Scholar, Dr. James Milner, whose research on peacebuilding and refugee situations inspired the substance of the meeting. See James Milner, “Refugees and the Regional Dynamics of Peacebuilding,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, no. 1, UNHCR, 2009.

1 This introduction draws heavily from Gil Loescher, James Milner, Edward Newman, and Gary Troeller, “Protracted Refugees and the Regional Dynamics of Peacebuilding,” *Conflict Security and Development* 7, no. 3 (2007): 491-501.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 495.

and the resource burdens created by large-scale displacement of civilian populations. In this context, one frequently overlooked challenge is that of finding a regional approach in managing the often lengthy and complicated task of supporting refugees in their host countries, not to mention finding a solution to the plight of refugees. Failure to effectively deal with these issues can have long-term implications for security and development in both home and host countries.

International assistance to refugee management can be seen in three dimensions. The refugees themselves and their needs while in exile are the first dimension. Finding solutions for refugees, including facilitating their return to and reintegration into their own communities in an appropriate way is the second dimension. The third dimension is the fact that for host countries, there is no security, development, or humanitarian instrument to assist communities that are often devastated socially, economically, and environmentally by the sudden influx of massive numbers of noncitizens. Likewise, little is understood about how the presence of refugees can drive host-country involvement, whether positive or negative, in neighboring conflict situations. This has been a major gap in the international toolkit.

This report explores these issues and summarizes the major themes that emerged from the seminar entitled “Refugees and the Regional Dynamics of Peacebuilding,” organized by the International Peace Institute and the Pierre Elliot Trudeau Foundation of Montreal. After this introduction, it is divided into the following sections: (1) refugees as peacebuilders; (2) the potential benefits that countries can accrue from hosting refugees and the strategies they can pursue to support peacebuilding in countries of origin; (3) case studies of host-country experiences and return and reintegration processes; (4) the challenges of linking peacebuilding strategies to refugee situations and potential solutions to these challenges; and (5) a brief conclusion. The meeting was conducted under the Chatham House Rule.

## Refugees as Peacebuilders

Traditionally the level of refugee repatriation has been perceived as the measuring stick for

peacebuilding success in the country of origin: if the situation at home has stabilized, then more refugees will return. While this perception has its merits, it does not provide a framework for conceptualizing peacebuilding processes in countries of origin. First, it does not recognize the fact that effective reintegration should follow repatriation to enable refugees to maximize their potential upon return and to contribute to rebuilding their countries of origin. Second, it fails to take into account that refugees in exile can develop the skills needed to be effective peacebuilders upon repatriation. These two themes were major topics of discussion at the meeting.

### RETURN AND REINTEGRATION PROCESSES

During the Cold War, the standard solution to the plight of refugees was return *without* reintegration. In the 1990s, however, it became clear that such an approach was not feasible. Like today, most refugees in this period had fled violent conflict. Peace processes in a number of places—Angola, the Balkans, Burundi, Cambodia, Mozambique, Rwanda, and elsewhere—meant that millions of refugees were returning home to countries that had been devastated by civil war. Not only were their humanitarian needs substantial, but they also required more sustained support than had previously been necessary to enable them to get on with their lives and contribute to building peace in countries traumatized by war. The large-scale return of so many refugees could potentially undermine the stability of countries of origin, so it was critical that substantive reintegration strategies be adopted.

Hence, in recent years, there has been a significant focus on *both* return and reintegration. Cash payments to returning refugees have provided them with greater flexibility in terms of opportunities they can pursue, as the experiences of Afghanistan, Cambodia, Burundi, and Sri Lanka have demonstrated. Beginning in exile and continuing upon return, efforts have sometimes been made to promote reconciliation and co-existence processes, notably in Rwanda and the Balkans in the 1990s. It was also noted during the discussion that effective return and reintegration programs may have to anticipate the flow of repatriating refugees into

urban areas, an occurrence<sup>3</sup> that requires creative approaches by the aid community. In general, as might be expected, reintegration strategies that are holistic, focusing on a broad array of critical issues such as land, human rights, education, livelihoods, and gender concerns, generally have a better chance of succeeding than reintegration strategies that are less comprehensive.

In keeping with the goal of effective reintegration, there has been considerable discussion over the past decade of the need to link humanitarian assistance to longer-term development. This has been called “minding the gap” in the humanitarian community.<sup>4</sup> Minding the gap is an important aspect of peacebuilding processes. When refugees repatriate, they are returning to communities that may have been devastated by violent conflict. Often, in such situations, governing structures are weak, infrastructure has been destroyed, basic services are lacking, and economic opportunities are limited. It is thus important that longer-term development efforts be undertaken to follow up on humanitarian assistance, not only for the sake of the refugees but also to sustain and rebuild the communities to which they are returning. A development approach, which prioritizes and sequences activities in accordance with the political, economic, and cultural exigencies of each unique context, can increase the chances that peace will hold.

Unfortunately, minding the gap has posed significant obstacles to the donor community. Many of these are bureaucratic in nature, centering on tensions existing between humanitarian and development entities. Such tensions are based on differing organizational cultures, worldviews, methodologies, training, and experiences. Since humanitarian and development actors generally do not plan together, there are often significant disconnects in the transition from humanitarian work to development activities. Humanitarian organizations like United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) tend to emphasize speed in their efforts to address crises, while development agencies largely focus on more sustainable projects,

which take long periods of time to implement. UNHCR is known for focusing on the needs of individuals, while development programs usually concentrate their efforts on particular under-resourced and underdeveloped geographic areas. Finally, there is the challenge of obtaining transitional funding from donors to strengthen the links between humanitarian assistance and development; this is frequently difficult because it entails sustaining donor interest and support when the perceived urgency of a refugee situation has diminished,<sup>5</sup> or when, in the words of one participant, a “stable instability” has set in.

Imaginative and pragmatic solutions need to be developed to overcome all of these challenges. Some of these are suggested below in the section on “Refugees and Peacebuilding: Strengthening the Linkages.” However, what is clear is that “minding the gap” remains a recurring issue that needs to be addressed to increase the likelihood that peacebuilding processes will be effective.

## REFUGEES IN EXILE

Meeting the humanitarian needs of refugees, while essential, tends to overshadow longer-term objectives centered on preparing refugees to be effective peacebuilders upon repatriation. It is challenging as well for policymakers and practitioners—who are often forced by the pace of events to make reactive decisions—to demonstrate the foresight and strategic vision needed to consider the peacebuilding potential of refugees in cases where countries of origin are still mired in violent conflict. As many of the seminar participants noted, a more proactive approach is required from the aid community and key political actors both to help build sustainable peace in conflict-affected regions and to limit the instability that can spark recurrent refugee situations.

The importance of developing refugee educational and livelihood skills while in exile is especially crucial given our knowledge of refugee situations and conflict. Most refugee situations are protracted: the average duration is seventeen years.<sup>6</sup>

3 According to one speaker, this has been particularly prevalent in South Sudan, where many of the Sudanese refugees who are returning home from Kenya and Uganda are relocating to Juba rather than returning to rural areas.

4 Jeff Crisp, “Mind the Gap! UNHCR, Humanitarian Assistance, and the Development Process,” PDES Working Paper No. 43, May 15, 2001, available at [www.unhcr.org/3b309dd07.html](http://www.unhcr.org/3b309dd07.html).

5 Ibid.

6 Gil Loescher, Alexander Betts, and James Milner, *The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): The Politics and Practice of Refugee Protection into the Twenty-First Century* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2008), p. 71.

The longer refugees remain in exile, the longer their potential is wasted if they do not develop skills that they can use to lead productive lives both in asylum and when they return home. However, one speaker cautioned that careful analysis and planning focusing on local market conditions should accompany the development of livelihood programs; otherwise, refugees might develop skills that are not useful in the local context, thus making it hard for them to find work and stalling local development processes.<sup>7</sup> This speaker recalled a conversation she had with a tailor in Liberia, who stated that “It’s great that the NGOs are paying me to train tailors because I couldn’t make a living as a tailor,” a poignant illustration of her point.

Developing appropriate livelihood and educational skills is particularly critical among young refugees, as unemployed and unskilled youth are often a key factor in the (re)lapse into conflict, an especially important point when one considers that 8 million of the more than 40 million refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide are 15 to 24 years of age.<sup>8</sup> It is, for example, no coincidence that in 2010 the Working Group on Lessons Learned of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) took up youth employment as a topic of discussion, and that a major element of the integrated strategic framework for peacebuilding in Sierra Leone, one of six countries on the PBC agenda, is youth education and employment. It is therefore imperative that young refugees be equipped to play a constructive role in their communities upon repatriation, lest they undermine rather than contribute to peacebuilding processes.

Several participants highlighted the importance of addressing certification issues while refugees are in exile. The reintegration process would be much less disjointed and problematic if documents such as birth certificates, citizenship papers, and academic transcripts that establish the identity and credentials of refugees were in order before they returned home. For example, the children of refugees born in exile may find themselves stateless if they do not attain citizenship papers. Also, refugees who receive their educational training

while in exile may find that when they return home, they cannot find work commensurate with their skills because their credentials are not recognized in their countries of origin.

Other economic and political rights can be addressed while refugees are in asylum. The provision of free legal services can help refugees to obtain restitution for rights that have been violated in their countries of origin, including the restoration of pensions and property rights. Refugees can also participate in elections in their country of origin, helping them to maintain a connection to their homeland and a stake in its political processes. In recent years, for example, UNHCR has facilitated the efforts of the Iraqi Election Commission by providing it with demographic information and transporting Iraqi refugees to centralized locations where they can vote.

Finally, since refugees have constructive ideas about how to ensure that their return and reintegration goes smoothly, greater consideration should be given to their strategies for these processes. In recent years, host states and UNHCR have at times favored repatriation, even when refugees may be reluctant to return.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the considerable ethical implications involved, this can harm the prospects that refugees will be active peacebuilding agents after returning to their countries of origin.

## Host Countries: Crafting “Win-Win” Strategies and Contributing to Peace in Neighboring Countries

While host countries can play a crucial role in supporting the basic needs of refugees and in developing their skills, they are often not incentivized to do so. As one speaker noted, many host countries are struggling with considerable political, economic, and social challenges that compound the demands of hosting refugees. The picture, however, need not be as negative as it is frequently portrayed for host countries. They can

7 See Women’s Refugee Commission, “Building Livelihoods: A Field Manual for Practitioners in Humanitarian Settings,” May 2009, available at [www.womensrefugeecommission.org/programs/livelihoods](http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/programs/livelihoods).

8 Women’s Refugee Commission, Displaced Youth Program Fact Sheet, “Tapping the Potential of Displaced Youth,” 2010, available at [http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/reports/cat\\_view/68-reports/70-youth](http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/reports/cat_view/68-reports/70-youth).

9 Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 73–120.



derive benefits from refugee situations, while laying the foundation for sustainable peace in neighboring conflict-affected countries.

Recognition of the potential benefits of hosting refugees is the first step in developing strategies that create “win-win” situations for refugees, host countries, and countries of origin. While earning income, refugees can boost local economies. They can provide an inexpensive source of labor to local businesses and industries. Working as farmers, for example, they may help to develop the local agricultural sector. Where there is a large concentration of refugees and representatives from aid organization assisting them, there also may be opportunities for businesses and entrepreneurs to provide them with goods and services. Along these lines, the infrastructure development needed to attend to the needs of large influxes of refugees and aid workers can stimulate the construction sector and create long-term benefits to the host country that extend beyond the lifespan of a refugee situation.<sup>10</sup> One participant noted, for example, that Guinea established a parallel education system for Liberian refugees, in the process building schools it later used to educate its own population.

Host countries have a large stake in helping to develop the livelihood and educational skills of refugees in exile. When refugees repatriate, they return to fragile environments that are often at high risk of relapsing into conflict, with one-quarter to one-third of peace agreements collapsing within five years.<sup>11</sup> If they are skilled and can find meaningful work, there is a greater likelihood that they will rebuild their country of origin rather than contribute to its relapse into war. Relapse into war often means the perpetuation of yet another refugee situation, with countries that hosted refugees in the past forced to do so again.

Such situations are not hypothetical. Host countries like Tanzania and Uganda have had to manage repeated inflows of refugees over the past several decades from neighboring countries, which have had difficulty consolidating peace. Perhaps realizing that refugees are an important piece of the

peacebuilding puzzle, Tanzania and Uganda have in recent years pursued comparatively favorable policies toward refugees, as discussed in the following section.

## Case Studies of Refugee Situations

The seminar featured five case studies of refugee situations representing a wide range of geographic regions (Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa) and time periods (from the 1970s to the present). The cases demonstrate the spectrum of approaches taken by states, from neglectful to benign; in some instances, a state’s treatment of refugees fluctuated, depending on political, economic, and social pressures. These cases underscore the fact that refugee situations often unfold in highly politicized contexts that are affected by the interactions between host countries, countries of origin, international aid organizations, and/or influential states. The following information comes directly from the case studies as presented at the seminar.

### CASES OF REFUGEE-HOSTING COUNTRIES

There are many challenges to hosting refugees. Host countries may not have the resources, the infrastructure, the expertise, or even the political will to manage refugee situations effectively. Sometimes they are disappointed with the perceived (and often actual) lack of interest and assistance from external actors, whose support is frequently motivated by political interests. They may close their borders, push for early and unsustainable repatriation, and/or neglect the living conditions in camps.

On the other hand, several factors may induce host countries to pursue favorable, or at least less restrictive, refugee policies. Rationales can be based on historical, cultural, or religious ties to the refugee population. Or they may have to do with the enlightened perspectives of leaders, who may have been refugees themselves at one time and are

10 James Milner, “Refugees and the Regional Dynamics of Peacebuilding,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, no. 1, UNHCR, 2009

11 Paul Collier et al, *The Conflict Trap* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Mans Söderbom, “Postconflict Societies,” Working Paper, CSAE WPS 2006-12, Oxford Centre for the Study of African Economies, Oxford University, August 2006; Roy Licklider, “The Consequences of Negotiated Settlements in Civil Wars 1945-93,” *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 3 (1995): 681-690; and Astri Suhrke and Ingrid Samset, “What’s in a Figure: Estimating Recurrence of Civil War,” *International Peacekeeping* 14, no. 2 (April 2007): 198.

influenced by moral as well as pragmatic considerations. During the workshop, host-country case studies in which many of these themes played out focused on Thailand, Iran, and Uganda.

### Thailand

In early 1979, Vietnam ousted the genocidal Khmer Rouge from power, after a war sparked by a number of border skirmishes between Vietnam and Cambodia (then known as Kampuchea). During the ensuing months, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians fleeing the conflict rushed across the Thai border, where they were kept in limbo, neither forced to return home nor welcomed into Thailand. Many different countries accepted some of the refugees, but most remained trapped for years in refugee camps along the Thai border, isolated from the outside world.

In context of the Cold War, the Thai government appeared less concerned about the plight of the refugees than how Vietnam had altered regional political dynamics by overthrowing the Khmer Rouge. By and large, according to the presenter, Thailand viewed the refugees as a nuisance rather than a humanitarian challenge. With the support of the United States, Thailand militarized the refugee camps, organizing armed resistance among the refugees, including many who had served the Khmer Rouge.

The Thai government skillfully managed the situation to its economic benefit. The international aid community poured money into border areas. The influx of foreign aid workers stimulated the local economy, as Thais found jobs supporting them. Ironically, the refugees themselves by and large made out poorly. Some received training and education in the camps, but employment opportunities were extremely limited, sometimes only available through international aid agencies. While the refugees languished at the border for years without anywhere to go, international aid agencies generally failed to ask questions about their role in perpetuating this situation.

The presenter suggested that several lessons can be distilled from the Cambodia/Thailand case. First, the security interests of hosting countries are paramount. The Thai government was focused

primarily on anti-Vietnamese resistance, not serving the needs of the Cambodian refugees. It benefited in this approach from the political support of the United States, whose superpower status protected Thailand from international censure for its policies. Second, for all the good they do, aid agencies will at times chase funds to perpetuate their work, even if, as this case demonstrates, it means not serving the long-term interests of the refugees.<sup>12</sup> At times, it appeared that humanitarian agencies were more apt to support the Thai economy, rather than the long-term needs of the refugees themselves. Third, effective communications technology builds bridges between communities, which this case illustrates precisely because of the absence of such technology. The Cambodian refugees had no effective way of communicating with people inside Cambodia or with the outside world. Their modern-day counterparts—Iraqi refugees in Syria or Somali refugees in Kenya, for example—can at least call back home with cell phones to talk to friends and family and keep abreast of affairs in their countries of origin.

One speaker at the meeting suggested that the inability of Cambodian refugees to communicate with Cambodian nationals inside the country contributed to the creation and perpetuation of two countervailing, divisive, and largely inaccurate discourses: on the one hand, many Cambodians who did not leave their country believed that the refugees received free assistance from the international community while attacking their homeland; on the other hand, many of the refugees believed that those Cambodians who stayed at home were supporters of the Khmer Rouge. It was suggested that the tensions created by the collision of these two narratives helped lead to the social and political upheaval in Cambodia in the 1990s.

### Iran

For some twenty years, Iran and Pakistan hosted 5 to 6 million Afghan refugees, the largest refugee community in the world. Afghan refugees flooded into Iran and Pakistan in the wake of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 to prop up a pro-Soviet regime. Basking in the euphoria of the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian government welcomed the Afghan refugees based on the notion

<sup>12</sup> This theme, albeit in a different context (with case studies focusing on Kyrgyzstan, Goma, DRC, and Bosnia) is explored in Alexander Cooley and James Ron, "The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action," *International Security* 27, no. 1 (Summer 2002): 5–39.

of a borderless Islam. In spite of the many hardships suffered during its 1980-1988 war with Iraq, Iran expended considerable resources to support its Afghan refugees, instituting favorable policies toward them that included access to ration cards, jobs, small loans, and free education. Rather than living in refugee camps, most Afghan refugees in Iran were integrated into the wider population. Iran was able to achieve this in spite of the fact that it did not receive much help from abroad because of its status as an international pariah state.

However, while Afghan refugees in Iran were treated quite well for a number of years, Iran's policies toward them began to shift in the mid-1990s as strains were placed on the country's capacity to provide social services. In the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War, many war veterans who had returned home needed jobs and many of the wounded needed health care. Meanwhile, a bulging Iranian youth population required educational, health, and other services. As a result, given the limited resources of the Iranian government, the needs of the refugees were marginalized.

Worse yet, Afghan refugees became a convenient scapegoat for the problems facing Iran. They were subjected to official and social discrimination. Their access to the labor market and education was restricted. In the Iranian press, they were increasingly stereotyped as a backward people, who were involved in the drug trade and took jobs from Iranians, even though many of them performed menial labor that was not desirable to most. The change in policy came as a major blow to the Afghan refugees who thought they had been accepted in Iranian society. Conditions were tough enough for Afghan men working in Iran, living a relatively transient existence, and sending remittances home to their families in Afghanistan. But they were even more difficult for Afghan families in Iran whose legal rights were undermined, who had to pay increasingly high rents, and whose children no longer could attend school.

Afghan refugees found deprivation of education particularly unfair and unjust. Compulsory schooling had been a significant benefit accorded to them, and was to a degree emblematic of their acceptance in Iranian society, as the Iranian government often underscored the importance of education to the "good Muslim." When the Iranian

government rescinded this right, it was essentially undermining the educational values that it had been instilling in the refugees it had been hosting for years.

In response, Afghan women began to organize small informal classes in their homes, so that their children could attend school. These classes became important social and educational venues that helped create a stronger sense of Afghan identity than had previously existed in Iran. No longer studying in Iranian schools with Iranian curricula, Afghan refugee children began to develop a greater understanding of Afghan culture and learned to be proud of that culture, thus countering the corrosive narrative of "Afghan backwardness" that pervaded Iranian society.

Unfortunately, when Hamed Karzai's government came to power in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban, the Iranian government stepped up its efforts to compel the Afghan refugees to repatriate. It signed a tripartite agreement with UNHCR and Afghanistan, calling for Afghans' "voluntary" repatriation while its policies toward its Afghan refugees became more restrictive. Access to jobs and banking services was eliminated, and informal schools, which had done much to form a collective Afghan identity, were shut down.

There are a couple of key lessons to be drawn from the case of Afghan refugees in Iran. First, politics play a major role in the development of international aid policies. Iran managed this refugee situation largely on its own, without assistance from the international donor community, which by and large held the regime in low regard. To its credit, Iran initially pursued relatively benign policies toward the 2 million or so Afghan refugees that it hosted, although it subsequently cast a shadow on its efforts by reversing these policies.

Second, education policies developed by host countries for refugees should take a long-term perspective. While Afghan refugees attending Iranian schools may have gained an appreciation for the value of education, they were not being appropriately equipped to return to their country of origin, as they were not being taught Pashtun and Dari, Afghanistan's official languages. In contrast, while Pakistan did little to support its Afghan refugees during the same period, keeping them largely confined to camps along the Pakistan-

Afghanistan border, it allowed international aid organizations to form educational structures that taught the refugees Pashtun, Dari, and English and provided them with computer training. Such training helped these refugees to develop the skills they would need to succeed and play a constructive role in rebuilding their communities when they returned home.

## Uganda

Uganda is located in one of the world's most war-prone regions. In addition to its own recent history of civil war, it shares a border with countries that have experienced or are still experiencing a high level of deadly conflict, including Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Sudan. Moreover, conflict-affected countries such as Burundi, which is struggling to consolidate peace, and Somalia, which has been marred by perpetual civil war for nearly two decades, are nearby. Thus, it is no surprise that Uganda is host to one of the world's most diverse refugee populations, with refugees from all of the above-mentioned countries residing within its borders.

The government of Yoweri Museveni, himself a former refugee, has developed policies highly favorable to refugees. In many respects, these policies are a model for other hosting countries. In 2006, Uganda promulgated legislation that offered refugees the right to work and freedom of movement. The government has, furthermore, established a development assistance program for refugees, which gives them access to health care and education.

Unfortunately, from the perspective of the Ugandan government, there have been drawbacks to this benign approach. For one, many Ugandans believe that while their country has done its part in providing for refugees, international aid actors have not provided assistance commensurate with the level of the challenge. While recent international attention and resources are focused on multifaceted crises in Sudan, the DRC, and elsewhere, many Ugandans are resentful of what they perceive as a lack of international support for Uganda's efforts as a refugee-hosting country.

Second, on a related note, many Ugandans are concerned that mechanisms are not created by

international actors to engage effectively with the hosting communities other than to serve refugees. It is as though hosting communities are abandoned once the refugees leave. This breeds resentment in these communities and potentially could discourage host nations that pursue policies favorable to refugees from continuing to do so in the future. One speaker, for example, stated that Malawi had very favorable policies toward refugees in the 1980s, opening its borders to hundreds of thousands of Mozambicans, but that it has pursued much more restrictive refugee policies in recent years because of limited assistance from the donor community.

Lastly, there appears to be a fine line between developing constructive approaches to assisting refugee populations and catering to their needs in ways that discourage them from repatriating. There have been numerous instances of refugees in Uganda wanting to stay in exile because they believe they will continue to receive much more favorable treatment than if they were to repatriate. One solution to this impasse would be if host countries have the capacity and the desire to offer citizenship to refugees, but such instances are the exception rather than the rule.

## CASES OF RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

The workshop also featured two cases that analyzed return and reintegration processes for refugees returning from Zaire/DRC to Rwanda and from Tanzania to Burundi. These cases contrast sharply with one another. Whereas DRC and Rwanda spent many years at war with one another in a conflict that ultimately engulfed eight African countries in the region<sup>13</sup> and led to several million deaths, Tanzania and Burundi have collaborated in an effort to develop sustainable solutions to refugee challenges. The Tanzania/Burundi case is also of interest because return and reintegration was only one part of a solution that also included Tanzania offering citizenship to Burundian refugees.

### Rwanda and Zaire/Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

In the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, which claimed the lives of approximately 800,000 Tutsis and Hutu moderates, more than a million

<sup>13</sup> In addition to DRC and Rwanda, these include Chad, Libya, Namibia, Sudan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.



Hutu refugees fled across the Rwandan border into eastern Zaire (now DRC). As the presenter stated, while residing in the refugee camps, Hutu militants confiscated aid, bullied refugees, and launched attacks across the border on Rwanda. Meanwhile, international actors did little to curtail the activities of the Hutu militants.

In 1996, Rwanda invaded eastern DRC, in the process pushing large numbers of Hutu extremist refugees back into Rwanda, in what the workshop presenter called “militarized repatriation.” Once back in Rwanda, the Hutu extremists could not effectively challenge the Tutsi-led government of Paul Kagame, and Hutu uprisings in the late 1990s were brutally suppressed by the regime. The Kagame government instituted what many have characterized as an effective, albeit heavy-handed, socialization program to reintegrate refugees back into society. The mandatory program is designed to teach refugees about the social and political realities of the current Rwanda, with the most intensive training provided to ex-Hutu combatants. Funded in large part by the World Bank, the program claims to have demobilized and reintegrated some 54,000 ex-combatants in the last fifteen years, according to the presenter.

Government-controlled socialization is only one reason for the success of the program. As the presenter noted, the government also “controls land and assistance that promotes dependency and compliance from the ex-combatants.” It should also be noted that in a small, densely populated country like Rwanda, land is an especially valuable resource. While the program has had its benefits, it has nonetheless embittered many genocide survivors, who believe that they have received nothing for their trauma, and that the criminality of the *genocidaires* has in effect been rewarded.

### Tanzania and Burundi

In 2007-2008, after more than a decade of restrictive policies toward refugees, Tanzania offered citizenship to the roughly quarter of a million Burundian refugees (and their families), many of whom had resided in the country since 1972. This was part of a dual approach to the refugee situation that also consisted of collaborative efforts with the government of Burundi, UNHCR, and other external actors to facilitate the return of those refugees who declined the offer of naturalization. It

appears that the offer of naturalization was fueled by a genuine desire on the part of the Tanzanian government to contribute to peacebuilding in Burundi. By enabling more refugees to become Tanzanian citizens, there would be fewer returnees to Burundi; therefore, the social and economic stresses of reintegration in this fragile postconflict state would be diminished. In all, about 75 percent (or 162,000) of the refugees chose naturalization, while 25 percent (approximately 60,000) decided to return to Burundi.

These processes have been conducted in a systematic and organized fashion. In June 2007, Tanzania, Burundi, and UNHCR signed a tripartite agreement to manage the refugee situation. From July to October 2007, Tanzania undertook a census and registration process in preparation for naturalization and return and reintegration activities. The program consisting of these activities was launched by UNHCR in March 2008. Several donors have supported the program, which has been facilitated by the *Commission Intégrée pour le Rapatriement, la Réintégration et la Réinsertion* (through which Burundi, Tanzania, and UNHCR seek to develop integrated strategies to manage the technical and political challenges of return and reintegration) and the Burundian National Land Commission, which helps to mediate land claims sparked by the influx of returnees.

This case is encouraging because it demonstrates the potential for countries of origin and host countries—as well as UNHCR and the international donor community—to collaborate to diffuse potentially volatile refugee situations. Nonetheless, ongoing substantive and skillful engagement in Burundi by the UN, donor countries, NGOs, and the Burundian government will be required to effectively manage the reintegration of the Burundian returnees. As the presenter noted, many of these returnees, approximately 34 percent (or 20,000), do not have land in Burundi or are returning to places where their land has been occupied. He also stated that this segment of the returnee population is a potential “time bomb,” as they lived for many years in politicized refugee camps in Tanzania, are returning to politically sensitive areas of Burundi, and are living in extreme poverty. Addressing this issue is therefore a crucial challenge.

## Refugees and Peacebuilding: Strengthening the Linkages

During the course of the meeting, it became clear that while some progress has been made, there is still much room for improvement in cultivating the peacebuilding potential of refugees and creating viable linkages between refugee situations and peacebuilding processes. The discussion highlighted some of the current political, bureaucratic, and conceptual obstacles that remain, and offered suggestions for developing strategies to address these challenges.

First, the subregional and regional dynamics of peacebuilding and refugee situations are not yet fully appreciated by policymakers and practitioners. Institutional responses to peacebuilding are generally confined to country-specific approaches, while there is rarely effective coordination between the country of origin and the host country in addressing refugee situations. The UN Peacebuilding Commission, for example, is focused on particular country cases, and its integrated strategic frameworks are designed to support nationally developed peacebuilding strategies. With respect to addressing refugee situations, former High Commissioner for Refugees Sadaka Ogata called for “situational approaches” that could include the collaboration of two to four countries and other international aid actors. But, while such arrangements can be effective, they are limited in number, and have not been institutionalized in a systematic fashion to adapt to and manage the vast array of refugee situations. The cooperation and coordination between Tanzania, Burundi, and the broader aid community—as well as the institutional structures that have collectively been developed in this case—are the exception rather than the rule. As this case continues to unfold, it may offer useful lessons and best practices to the humanitarian community and countries affected by refugee situations.

Thus, more systematic and comprehensive approaches could be devised at the subregional and regional levels both to manage refugee situations and to forge linkages between such situations and peacebuilding. Such approaches in turn would need to be backed up by sufficient resources and the

political will to act. As has been all too evident in international efforts to manage conflict, developing a normative and institutional framework is not enough; it must be supported by requisite resources and capable personnel and the political stars must be aligned. One participant also suggested that peacebuilding processes would benefit from a systematic international approach to engaging with and harnessing the talents of the vast diaspora communities from DRC, Iraq, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and elsewhere. Diaspora communities have the potential to contribute significantly to peacebuilding in postconflict environments by contributing financial resources and/or returning home and bringing their entrepreneurial and technical skills to bear.

Second, there is a need for enhanced sharing of best practices and lessons learned between different communities of practice. During the workshop, when the discussion turned to the return and reintegration of refugees, a participant asked if experts working on refugee reintegration had shared experiences and strategies with those who work on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs and vice versa. It would seem that these two communities could learn much from one another, as there are many overlapping challenges in reintegrating refugees and reintegrating ex-combatants (related, for example, to land, housing, education, vocational training, and health care, as well as the importance of addressing such needs in a comprehensive manner that also focuses on community development). Nonetheless, it was clear from the discussion that there is very little intellectual cross-fertilization occurring between these two communities. It also appears that more could be done to build bridges between the academic and policy communities to enhance our understanding of the connection between refugee situations and peacebuilding.

Third, it was suggested that more concerted efforts could be made to bridge the gap between humanitarian and development responses to the challenges discussed during the meeting. These two groups of actors still seem to struggle to find ways to operate cohesively. Strengthening joint-planning processes that are now being developed, especially in the UN context, offers one strategy for addressing this gap. It is also important that humanitarian and development actors share

knowledge more systematically with one another of their respective activities in what one scholar has called a “common tradespace” so that they can better appreciate the necessary linkages between these activities and work together more coherently and effectively.<sup>14</sup>

Fourth, additional research needs to be generated that provides analysis of refugees as peacebuilders, as well as the role that host countries can play in nurturing the skills of refugees and finding solutions to violent conflict in neighboring countries. The Protracted Refugee Situations (PRS) Project at University of Oxford—as well as the efforts of a handful of academics at other universities and practitioners in multilateral, bilateral, and nongovernment organizations—has produced very important work on these issues. In general, however, there is still ample room for enhanced analysis and learning.

Fifth, well-planned and well-conceived advocacy efforts focused on key member states (especially in the UN Security Council, the Peacebuilding Commission, and regional organizations), UN funds, programs, and agencies, and NGOs could help raise awareness of the linkages between refugee situations and peacebuilding. At present, these linkages are not entirely clear to many such actors. The dominant discourse views refugee situations as requiring short-term, humanitarian assistance, until the immediate crisis has stabilized. Afterward, even though refugees may remain in exile, other seemingly more pressing priorities monopolize the resources and attention of the

international aid community. Thus, although progress has been made, much work still needs to be done before the peacebuilding potential of refugees and the needs of refugee-hosting countries are well understood and can generate creative solutions backed by significant resources.

## Conclusion

Given current trends in resource scarcity, population growth, and violent conflict, it is clear that refugee situations sparked by warfare will continue to be a major challenge to the international community in the coming years and decades. International actors have not fully grasped the linkages between peacebuilding and refugee situations and therefore have only scratched the surface in devising ways to strengthen these linkages. While this workshop contributed some valuable ideas to the discussion, imagination, foresight, political will, and resources will be needed in abundance in the coming years to truly make a difference in both policy and practice. As the above case studies demonstrate, each refugee situation is unique and therefore requires approaches that are tailored to specific circumstances. International actors—ranging from states and NGOs to international, regional and subregional organizations—must develop more nuanced and flexible strategies to refugee situations that develop and incorporate the peacebuilding agency of refugees and incentivize host countries to play a constructive role in preparing refugees for sustainable repatriation.

<sup>14</sup> See Sarah Jane Meharg, *Measuring What Matters in Peace Operations and Crisis Management* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009). While Meharg's study focuses on peace operations and crisis management, it is applicable here. She defines a “common tradespace” as “those spaces bounded by shared processes among agents within that space.” p. 43.

## Agenda

May 3, 2010

18:00 – 20:00 **Keynote Remarks and Reception**

H.E. Mr. Martin Palouš, *Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the United Nations; Vice Chair, Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)*  
Introduction by Dr. Edward C. Luck, *Senior Vice President for Research and Programs, International Peace Institute (IPI)*

May 4, 2010

08:00 – 08:30 Breakfast

08:30 – 09:00 **Welcome**

Dr. Edward C. Luck  
Dr. Pierre-Gerlier Forest, *President, The Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation*

09:00 - 10:30 **Panel I: Cases of Protracted Refugee Situations: Host-Country Experiences**

Chair

Ambassador Robert Fowler, *former Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations; 2008 Trudeau Mentor*

*The first session will take stock of what we know about how countries hosting refugees have managed these challenges. What are some of the political, economic, environmental, and social impacts that the absorption of refugees has had on host countries? What positive (and negative) strategies have been employed by these countries (at different levels of government, by communities and civil society) to cope with this influx of refugees? If relevant, were there ways that local, national, and regional actors operated that exacerbated the plight of the refugees? What lessons can be learned from each case?*

Panelists

Mr. Joel Charny, *Vice President, Policy, Refugees International*  
Ms. Sarah Kamal, *London School of Economics and Political Science; 2007 Trudeau Scholar*  
Mr. Stanlake J. T. M. Samkange, *Representative and Country Director, United Nations World Food Programme, Uganda Country Office*

10:30 - 11:00 Break

11:00 - 12:30 **Panel II: Regional Approaches to Managing Refugee Returns and Reintegration**

Chair

Mr. Alex Neve, *Secretary General of Amnesty International Canada; 2008 Trudeau Mentor*



*This session will take stock of lessons learned from refugee returns and reintegration strategies. How can host-country concerns be addressed while at the same time ensuring that communities and institutions in the country of origin are capable of reabsorbing refugee populations and providing for their needs? How can we ensure that attention does not rapidly shift to peacebuilding in the country of origin at the expense of refugee-assistance programs in neighboring countries? What regional mechanisms and approaches have been developed to address refugee crises and how can these be strengthened?*

Panelists

Dr. James Milner, *Carleton University; 2003 Trudeau Scholar*

Dr. Sarah Kenyon Lischer, *Associate Professor of Political Science, Wake Forest University*

Dr. Jeff Crisp, *Head of Policy Development and Evaluation, UNHCR (Geneva)*

12:30 - 14:00

Lunch

14:00 - 15:30

**Panel III: Peacebuilding Strategies for Refugee Situations**

Chair

Ms. Judy Cheng-Hopkins, *Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO)*

*This session will focus on strategies that international, regional, and national actors can develop to ensure closer consideration of the links between protracted refugee situations and peacebuilding. What are institutional and political barriers to ensuring more effective collaboration among security, development, and humanitarian actors, and how can these be addressed? What are possible entry points for the UN's peacebuilding architecture in informing an integrated response?*

Panelists

Mr. Udo Janz, *Director, UNHCR (New York)*

Dr. Carolyn Makinson, *Executive Director, Women's Refugee Commission*

Mr. Stan Nkwain, *Deputy Director of the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, UNDP*

15:30 - 16:30

**Panel IV: Closing Session**

Chairs

Ms. Carolyn McAskie, *Former Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support; 2009 Trudeau Mentor*

Dr. Edward C. Luck

*This session will focus on strategies for implementing policy prescriptions highlighted at the workshop.*

## Participants

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Permanent Mission of Bosnia and Herzegovina to  
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