

## Former Ethiopian Refugee Receives USCIS ‘Choice’ Award

Aster Zeleke, a former refugee from Ethiopia who currently serves as deputy director of USCIS’s Newark Asylum Office, was named in mid-September as one of nine recipients of the 2011 Outstanding Americans by Choice awards. The initia-

tive recognizes the achievements of naturalized U.S. citizens through civic participation, professional achievement and responsible citizenship.

“We have a strong tradition as a welcoming nation, and our efforts ensure

that the United States continues to draw people from across the world who contribute in important and innovative ways,” said Secretary Napolitano.

Fearing arrest and persecution by the brutal Mengistu regime in Ethiopia in the late 1970s because of her work as a politically-active bank clerk, she obtained a scholarship to further her education in Romania. Later she and her husband found refuge in Greece and finally in the U.S., where she sought work

to help other refugees.

She worked as a Resettlement Counselor with the Presbyterian Refugee and Immigrant Ministry Efforts in Philadelphia for eight years before joining the former Immigration and Naturalization Service, beginning her government career as a public servant. She became a naturalized citizen on September 13, 1989.

Among other recipients of this year’s Americans by Choice awards was former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright.

“I am honored to participate in this celebration of citizenship and the constitution because, from our nation’s earliest days, the United States has been enriched by the steady flow of immigrants to our shores,” said Secretary Albright.

“Attracted by America’s promise, they have contributed immensely to the vitality of our neighborhoods, the health of our economy, the depth of our democracy, and the ongoing example of our unity.”

In 1997, Albright was appointed the first female Secretary of State and became, at that time, the highest ranking

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**Aster Zeleke, center, receives “Outstanding American by Choice” award from USCIS Director Alejandro Mayorkas and Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano.**

## Departing Secretary Schwartz Describes Future Challenges in Refugee Affairs

Describing the refugee and IDP tragedy unfolding in Somalia and the Horn of Africa as indicators of future challenges that will likely confront the international community at times of scarce resources, Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration Eric Schwartz said in late September that continued generous U.S. financial support for humanitarian response is critical as an expression of America’s values and essential in overcoming the despair and desperation that threaten stability and the nation’s security interests.

Speaking at an event and webcast sponsored by the U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C., Schwartz said that future crises will test the capacities of humanitarians who are committed to alleviating suffering and promoting the conditions for peace and security.

“Within our own government and in our engagement with governments hosting populations at risk, we must be relentless, formidable, and highly effective advocates for victims of persecution, violence and human rights abuses,” Schwartz said. “We must be emboldened by a very broad conception of our humanitarian and protection mandate; in short, we must be skillful and aggressive humanitarian diplomats, both at home and abroad.”

In what could be considered his farewell address from the senior refugee post, Schwartz, who had earlier told colleagues at the Department of State that he was leaving in October to become dean of the Hubert Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, outlined some of the steps required to deal with what he called a

“dizzying array of dilemmas.”

Beyond the moral imperative to save lives, the United States has a key interest in maintaining a leadership role in the development of international humanitarian and refugee law, programs and policies and in leveraging critical support from others, he said.

Schwartz also urged continued improvement of intergovernmental coordination toward conflict prevention and response, acknowledging the work of a new Humanitarian Policy Working Group that brings together all of the civilian agencies and offices engaged in humanitarian policy work.

“Strengthened coordination will also enhance our ability to anticipate and respond to a changing humanitarian landscape that demands new approaches

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*In My Opinion...***Reexamining Values and Goals**

Often in the life of a nation, public discourse is swayed by social, political and economic developments that provoke a reexamination of long-established principles and practices. Sometimes the cause is cyclical and easily understood, as with America's quadrennial presidential elections when issues of little or fleeting import can dominate debates. At other times, the cause is more complex, the impact more widespread and the outcome more profound, as with the current global economic crisis that threatens severe funding shortfalls for humanitarian programs and services. Sometimes the fleeting, politically-spawned developments can erode support for the formerly revered and widely-accepted principles.

These thoughts emerged from the recent announcement of the latest group of honorees in the "Outstanding American of Choice" initiative, chosen by USCIS because of their "demonstrated commitment to this country and to the common civic values



**Tsehaye Teferra, Ph.D.**  
President, ECDC

that unite us all as Americans." Even for those who have come here as refugees or immigrants seeking safety, freedom and opportunity but have not become citizens, the lure of America's values and opportunities—and its historic welcome for "huddled masses yearning to breathe free"—remains an inspiration and motivation for contribution and achievement.

Until 1956, the Latin phrase *E Pluribus Unum* ("Out of Many, One") had been widely accepted as the nation's motto, appearing on the Great Seal of the United States in 1782 and used on coins and paper money since 1795. In what was widely considered a politically motivated gesture to faith communities, the motto was changed in 1956 by an act of Congress to "In God We Trust." (It has since been "reaffirmed" twice by both

the House and Senate.)

While the change may have had no significant impact on what we have perceived as increasingly frequent cycles of xenophobia, recent actions by several state legislatures indicate continued erosion of the nation's commitment to "oneness." It was that perception that prompted us in 2005 to use the unity motto as the theme of our annual conference on African refugees. It was styled *E Pluribus Unum? Africans in America*, with the question mark, indicating concerns about some of the barriers African refugee newcomers were facing in achieving full acceptance and participation in their new homeland. We welcomed the action by USCIS the following year to establish the Outstanding American by Choice initiative, believing that it would help overcome negative, stereotypical attitudes toward refugees and immigrants. Since that action, the program has recognized more than 80 men and women from 35 countries and from a variety of backgrounds and nearly all sectors of society.

With the global economic recession focusing public discourse on spending priorities, it is our hope that the program is serving as a reminder of the contributions refugees and immigrants can make to host nations and prompt a reaffirmation to serve vulnerable populations.

Providing an opportunity for such a reaffirmation will be the December 7-8 ministerial-level meeting of all member states of the United Nations in Geneva, culminating a year-long observance of the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 50th anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. It will enable states, and possibly other actors, to make concrete pledges to address specific forced displacement and/or statelessness issues. It will also be a treaty event, giving states the opportunity to formalize their accession to the refugee and statelessness conventions and/or remove any reservations to these instruments. Maybe it will help refocus public debate from what can be cut from national budgets to what values and goals must be preserved.

**ECDC Restructures Key Management Roles At National Headquarters**

Announcing a restructuring of ECDC's headquarters operations recently, President Tsehaye Teferra said that Allene Wright was assuming the position of Senior Vice President for Administration and Management and Sara Tompkins was rejoining the organization's senior staff as Vice President for Refugee Resettlement.

To her longtime responsibilities as ECDC Vice President and Secretary/Treasurer of the Board of Directors, Wright assumed directorship of the resettlement program eight years ago.

"During her tenure as director of the program," Teferra said in an email to staff and affiliates, "Allene has brought stability to the management of the program, delivered new systems, including an online database for headquarters and affiliate staff, and improved our staff training at the headquarters and affiliate levels. Under her watch, the number of refugees resettled increased from 816 in 2003 to 3,547, in 2010. The ECDC Refugee Resettlement Network also increased from 11 in 2003 agencies to 18 in 2012.

Noting that Sara Tompkins formerly served as program manager for the ECDC African Community Center in Arlington between 2005 and 2006, Teferra wrote that she has most recently served as a program officer for the Department of State's Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration.

A graduate of the University of Houston Law Center, where she was a Dean's Scholar and received the Dean's Award for Public Interest, she was a staff attorney at the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty in Houston, overseeing a program designed to improve access to federal nutrition programs for homeless persons.

During her time in Houston, she also served as immigration manager and program coordinator for the Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston, coordinating medical and health services, assisting in refugee resettlement and representing clients in such immigration cases as applications for asylum, adjustment of status and citizenship.

## 'Choice' Honorees Fulfill Promise Inscribed on Nation's Great Seal

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Arturo E. Howard



Nawar Shora



Joseph Banco, Jr.



Omar Cruz



Betty Nguyen Phillips



Alma Plancich



Gerda W. Klein



Madeleine Albright

woman in the history of the U.S. government. She reinforced American alliances, advocated for democracy and human rights across the globe, and promoted U.S. trade, business, labor and environmental standards abroad, according to her award citation.

Other honorees this year (with their country of origin) were: Alma Plancich, Executive Director, Ethnic Heritage Council, Seattle, originally from Croatia; Nawar Shora, Senior Policy Advisor, Transportation Security Administration, Washington, D.C., Syria; Betty Nguyen Phillips, Information System Security Officer, U.S. Secret Service, Washington, D.C., Vietnam; Omar Cruz, Lead Cyber Threat Analyst, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Washington, D.C., Dominican Republic; Joseph A. Banco, Jr., Associate Chief, U.S. Border Patrol, Washington, D.C., Yugoslavia; Arturo E. Howard, Chief Warrant Officer, U.S. Coast Guard, Washington, D.C., Columbia; and Gerda Weissmann Klein, Founder, Citizenship Counts, Holocaust survivor, author, and human rights activist, Phoenix, Arizona, Poland.

Conducted as part of an annual recognition of Constitution Day and Citizenship Day, the event was among 285 ceremonies held around the world that welcomed more than 27,000 new American citizens. In partnership with the National Park Service, 14 of the ceremonies were at park sites.

## PRM's Schwartz Addresses Future Challenges...

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on issues like urban refugees; protracted refugee situations; and the protection of particularly vulnerable populations, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons. It will also better enable us to implement ambitious objectives of President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and USAID Administrator Shah to promote the empowerment of women through a National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security; through support of UNFPA and its efforts to provide reproductive health services in conflict settings; and through efforts to combat discrimination against women in nationality laws."

"As I prepare to move on, Schwartz

concluded, "I leave with a deep conviction that U.S. support for international humanitarian assistance is money well spent: It saves lives, it promotes our leadership, and it can create conditions for peace and reconciliation. And while the challenges that characterize this work are daunting, we must not underestimate our collective capacity to improve the human condition—to provide food, shelter, education, basic protection and real hope for a brighter future. In sustaining focused and skillful efforts to promote the principles of international humanitarianism, we demonstrate our commitment to these honorable objectives, and we keep faith with millions of vulnerable people around the world.

Meeting recently with 40 participants in the 2011 African Women's Entrepreneurship Program, at the Department of State, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton applauded their efforts to revolutionize what women are doing in Africa and around the world. Established in 2010 under the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' International Visitors Leadership Program, AWEPP honors accomplished entrepreneurs and leaders of small and medium-sized businesses in Africa.



NEWS BRIEFS

**UNHCR Opens New Camp In Ethiopia for Sudanese**

To accommodate some of the thousands of refugees who have been fleeing into Ethiopia to escape conflict in Sudan's Blue Nile state in recent weeks, UNHCR opened the Tongo Refugee Camp in the western Benishangul Gumuz state.

With a capacity for 3,000 people, the camp's first arrivals were among some 27,000 civilians who have fled the fighting between Sudan government forces and rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Army-North since early September.

The camp is part of an effort by UNHCR and Ethiopia's Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs to avoid the establishment of spontaneous settlement at the border locations.

**MPI Study Details Impacts On Immigration of 9/11**

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 prompted a profound realignment of the U.S. immigration system, with national security and enforcement becoming the dominant lens through which programs and budgets have been shaped over the past decade, according to a Fact Sheet released by the Migration Policy Institute in late August.

Titled "Through the Prism of National Security: Major Immigration Policy and

Program Changes in the Decade since 9/11," the report notes that the attacks prompted the largest government reorganization since World War II; increased information sharing and data collection across international, federal, state and local law enforcement and intelligence agencies; sparked broader use of nationality-based screening and enforcement initiatives; and the expansion of immigrant detention policies.

The heightened security focus also has provided the impetus for increased state and local involvement in immigration enforcement and policymaking, previously a realm almost exclusively the province of the federal government, the Fact Sheet says. It is available at: [www.migrationpolicy.org](http://www.migrationpolicy.org).

**Immigration Forum Head Decries Alabama Decision**

Describing the refusal by a federal judge in Alabama to block the toughest provisions of a new immigration law as "a sad day in our nation's history," Ali Noorani, Executive Director of the National Immigration Forum, said in late September that the decision will burden local police departments with responsibilities that belong to the federal government and be extremely costly to enforce.

The sections that the judge allowed to proceed include making it a state crime

for an undocumented immigrant not to carry documents required by federal law; making it a felony for an undocumented immigrant to do business with the state; and requiring public school officials to determine if enrolling children were born outside the United States or are children of undocumented immigrants.

Blaming the law on a deficit of leadership in the U.S. Congress on immigration reform, Noorani said the result is allowing states to "run amok with proposals that attack our American values of fairness and equal treatment."

**Somaliland Officials Plan Deportation of Immigrants**

Authorities in Somalia's self-declared independent Republic of Somaliland have given a month's notice to an estimated 80,000 illegal immigrants—mostly Ethiopian—to leave the region. Osman Garad Sofe, Somaliland's Deputy Interior Minister, told a news conference in Hargeisa that those targeted did not include registered refugees or Somalis displaced from the larger Somalia.

Many Ethiopians in the region were from Oromia, which is badly affected by an ongoing drought that has undermined livelihoods, according to a report from IRN.

"Now that the Somaliland government says it does not want us," said one of the targeted immigrants, "what can I do? I will simply obey and leave."

**FY 2011 African Refugee Admissions**

As of September 30, 2011 • Ceiling for FY 2011 is 15,000

Country of Origin	Refugees	Country of Origin	Refugees
Angola	2	Ivory Coast	7
Burundi	110	Kenya	1
Central African Republic	182	Liberia	121
Chad	25	Mauritania	3
Congo	27	Nigeria	1
Dem. Rep. Congo	977	Rwanda	74
Eritrea	2,032	Senegal	1
Ethiopia	560	Sierra Leone	28
Gabon	3	Somalia	3,161
Gambia	7	Sudan	334
Ghana	1	Togo	5
Guinea	1	Uganda	10
Guinea-Bissau	4	Zimbabwe	8
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7,685</b>

Source: U.S. Department of State, PRM

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