

Birthday Celebrations Welcome New Naturalized Citizens

As part of the commemoration of America's 236th birthday, President Obama joined with USCIS in conducting naturalization ceremonies for more than 4,000 new citizens from June 28 through July 10. Describing the event which he

hosted at the White House on July 4 for 25 armed services members from 17 different countries as one of his favorite things to do, the President said it was a high honor to serve as their Commander in Chief and to be the first to greet them

as "my fellow Americans."

"It brings me great joy and inspiration because it reminds us that we are a country that is bound together not simply by ethnicity or bloodlines, but by fidelity to a set of ideas," he said. "With this ceremony today—and ceremonies like it across our country—we affirm another truth," Obama told the new citizens and their families and guests. "Our American journey, our success, would simply not be possible without the generations of immigrants who have come to our shores from every corner of the globe. We say it so often, we sometimes forget what it means—we are a nation of immigrants. Unless you are one of the first Americans, a Native American, we are all descended from folks who came from someplace else—whether they arrived on the Mayflower or on a slave ship, whether they came through Ellis Island or crossed the Rio Grande."

Before the President gave his remarks, USCIS Director Alejandro Mayorkas presented the countries of the candidates for naturalization and Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano delivered the oath of allegiance.



President Barack Obama listens as DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano administers the oath of allegiance during a military naturalization ceremony for active duty service members in the White House, July 4, 2012. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

States Granted Greater Flexibility in Administering TANF Programs

Responding to state officials seeking more flexibility in managing the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, the Obama administration announced in early July that HHS would consider waiving some provisions of the 1996 federal welfare reform law regarding work requirements.

The policy change resulted from an initiative President Obama launched in 2011 in a Presidential Memorandum directing federal agencies to work closely with state, local and tribal governments to identify administrative, regulatory and legislative barriers in federally-funded program that currently impede achievement of best results, according to a letter sent to state human service officials by George Sheldon of the Administration for

Children and Families.

During a series of consultations, Sheldon wrote, many jurisdictions said some TANF rules "stifle innovation and focus attention on paperwork rather than helping parents find jobs."

States seeking waivers to test alternative strategies, policies and procedures will be required to submit evaluation plans ensuring that the pilot efforts result in rigorous evidence about "what works and what doesn't in order to inform future policy decisions," Sheldon said.

With TANF emergency funds offered through the Recovery and Reinvestment act, 42 states created 260,000 subsidized jobs for jobless parents and disadvantaged youth in 2009 and 2010, illustrating the benefits provided by

greater flexibility.

Responding to complaints from Senator Orrin Hatch and Representative Dave Camp and other Republican leaders that the waivers would weaken welfare work requirements, HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius wrote:

"Our goal is to accelerate job placement by moving more Americans from welfare to work and no policy which undercuts that goal or waters down work requirements will be considered or approved by the Department."



Kathleen Sebelius
Photo by Chris Smith

In My Opinion...

About Newcomers: “Another Truth”

In this space last month I applauded President Obama’s decision to forego arbitrary deportation of young people who were brought to America by their parents when they were young children. He described it as an effort to make the nation’s immigration policy “more fair, more efficient and more just.” He said it was “the right thing to do.” And I agreed, identifying the decision as being consistent with the moral principles that undergird the nation’s refugee resettlement program.

As I observed the naturalization ceremonies conducted as part of this year’s annual observance of World Refugee Day and received reports of other events here and abroad, I was reminded anew of how much some nations gain through such enlightened policies and how much other nations lose from forced displacement of those representing enormous potential to their homelands.



Tsehaye Teferra, Ph.D.
President, ECDC

In his remarks to members of the military service at the White House naturalization event, the President reaffirmed his belief that welcoming newcomers is both the moral and right thing to do. Another truth, he affirmed, is that it is the smart thing to do because of the contributions they make to the nation. That truth was evident in the honor given to our associate Yani Rose Keo through the chamber opera premiered in Houston. (See page 4.) It is acknowledged on the UNHCR website feature titled “Refugees Who Have Made a Difference.” It profiles some 200 refugees or former refugees who have achieved special status within a community due to their achievements. Yani is included in the list, along with Walter Lam, president of our resettlement affiliate in San Diego. (So is Madeleine Albright, Albert Schweitzer, Miriam Makeba and Maria von Trapp and others—living and dead—who have “left a mark on the world.”)

As I was reflecting on these matters, there appeared in the Washington Post in early July an obituary of a former Cuban refugee whose achievements and contributions to his adopted homeland would surely qualify him for inclusion in some future list of difference-makers. But the nature of his highly-classified work will likely preclude such inclusion, leaving him, still, as a stellar example of countless refugees and immigrants who achieve mightily while quietly giving their time and talents in service to others.

Written by the Post’s Matt Schudel, the obituary describes how Pedro L. “Pete” Rustan escaped from Castro’s Cuba with his father when he was only 20 years old; gained political asylum; earned a Ph.D.; and became an innovator in aerospace and surveillance technology. He developed a spacecraft that was sent to the moon and sent back 1.8 million images of the lunar service. He developed an effective process to deflect lightning strikes from airplanes. He designed secret spacecraft to improve intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. When Pete retired last August, the Navy SEAL unit responsible for killing Osama bin Laden presented him with an American flag that flew at its forward operating base in Afghanistan.

“Any single element of Col. Rustan’s life—political escapee, scientist, military officer, satellite designer—sounds like the stuff of fiction,” Schudel wrote, “but he embodied them all.”

Upon his retirement from the Air Force, his humanitarian impulses led him and his wife, Alexandra, to “practically adopt” a Honduran village. He was 65 when he died on June 28 from prostate cancer.

With condolences to Alexandra and her family over their loss and profound admiration for the difference he made in so many lives, I express deep appreciation to the Post and Matt Schudel for sharing the story of Pete Rustan

Resettlement Affiliates Gain Attention Through Refugee Day Events

As ECDC branch offices and other refugee resettlement affiliates conducted special World Refugee Day events in late June to promote greater awareness of the needs and contributions of refugees, they enhanced awareness about their own programs and services through coverage by local media outlets.

Under the headline *The Ethiopian Community Development Council African Community Center Offers Services to Refugees*, an article in the July 3 issue of the Las Vegas Review Journal by Michael Lyle included an extensive interview with Berihun Teferra, managing director of the branch office.

“The organization provides resources such as classes that prepare people for jobs, English as a second language services, housing services and economic development such as down payment assistance,” Lyle wrote, noting that the office assists about 400 refugees annually. He quoted Teferra’s assertion that: “We are with them until they are no longer getting assistance from the government.”

The *Nashville Tennessean* reported on events conducted by the Nashville International Center for Empowerment (NICE), including a graduation ceremony for English language students in the organization’s adult education program and a World Refugee Day Block Party featuring ethnic music, dancing and food donated by local restaurants and cooked by refugees. NICE is a resettlement affiliate of ECDC.

In San Diego, social media outlets provided information and support for a Groupon campaign by the Alliance for African Assistance to raise funds for one-month bus passes for newly-arriving refugees. Combined with additional support from Woodstock, the campaign had raised sufficient funds by July 11 to purchase 100 passes. A contribution of \$72 will fund a month-long pass.

The informational materials noted that since Walter Lam founded the resettlement affiliate in 1989, it has resettled more than 1,350 refugees. Lam is a former refugee from Uganda.

In Arizona Lawsuit...

Civil Rights Groups Seek Revocation of Immigration Provision

A coalition of civil rights organizations filed a lawsuit in a federal district court in Phoenix in mid-July to block implementation of the so-called “show me your papers” provision of Arizona’s controversial immigration law. That provision—Section 2(B)—was left in place when the Supreme Court struck down three other provisions last month.

The groups claim that evidence of racial profiling not presented in the government’s initial case regarding state usurpation of federal immigration laws

would lead to a decision that the law is unconstitutional. In apparent anticipation of such action, the Court noted in its majority opinion “that other challenges could be brought against the section.”

In the new action, the civil rights groups argue that legislators who supported the law routinely used false “facts” and discriminatory language, intending the section to impose statewide the racial profiling tactics used by Sheriff Joe Arpaio of Maricopa County, according to a statement by the National Immigration

Law Center. The groups also introduced new evidence demonstrating that, if it is allowed to go into effect, section 2(B) will violate the Fourth Amendment and the well-established principle that federal immigration law preempts state immigration enforcement laws.

“Our Constitution protects us from state laws that intend to discriminate based on the color of a person’s skin or her or his nationality,” said NILC Managing Attorney Karen Tumlin. “The district court should block this hateful provision that threatens countless Arizonans’ basic right to live free from fear of harassment or prolonged detention.”

Police chiefs across the country have long concluded that section 2B could not be implemented in a race-neutral manner, the suit charges, adding that immigration experts agree that there is no way to determine immigration status based on external or physical characteristics.

Responding to the Court’s decision last month, President Obama, expressed concerns similar to those raised in the suit. While applauding the action invalidating the three stricken provision, he said: “I remain concerned about the practical impact of the remaining provision of the Arizona law that requires local law enforcement officials to check the immigration status of anyone they even suspect to be here illegally.”

“What this decision makes unmistakably clear is that Congress must act on comprehensive immigration reform. No American should ever live under a cloud of suspicion just because of what they look like. I will work with anyone in Congress who’s willing to make progress on comprehensive immigration reform that addresses our economic needs and security needs, and upholds our tradition as a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants.”

In addition to NILC, the coalition engaged in the new suit includes ACLU; MALDEF; the National Day Laborer Organizing Network; the ACLU of Arizona; the Asian Pacific American Legal Center and the Asian American Justice Center, both members of the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice; and the NAACP.

UNHCR Launches Sports Program for Refugee Youth



Youngsters in the Kurisanani Youth Project in South Africa display sports kit items.

Just a few weeks ahead of the 2012 Olympic Games in London, UNHCR announced a new program that will help distribute sport kits in 20 countries over the next two years aimed at bringing sports to more than 150,000 youngsters living in camps for the forcibly displaced.

Teaming with the International Olympic Committee and the South Korea-based Samsung Group, the initiative began in South Africa and India and will be expanded to sites chosen by UNHCR in Africa, Asia and South America.

Each IOC sports kit contains basic equipment and material for about 300 players, including balls, bibs, caps, shirts and chalk to mark out a field. The kits will enable young people in refugee or IDP camps or sites to organize games that will help provide fun and a semblance of normality in their lives.

IOC President Jacques Rogge said that distribution of the sports kits would mean that “many young people living in camps and settlements for refugees will be able to experience the joy of sport. They deserve to live like other young people in the world: learning and playing.” UNHCR has long promoted sport and education for all refugee children, believing that sport can play an important role in relieving tension and fear among people having to live together in camps and settlements.

Yani Rose Keo's Life Inspires Chamber Opera on 'New Arrivals'

If you wanted to produce a dramatic chamber opera illuminating the tragedies and triumphs confronted by most refugees who are forced to flee their homelands to escape war, terror or persecution, you'd likely seek someone who had lived through such experiences, right?



Yani Rose Keo poses with Cambodian *smot* singer Phoeun Srey Peou who performed in the premier of Houston's *New Arrivals* opera.

Photo courtesy Houston Grand Opera

That's what the Houston Grand Opera did, premiering *New Arrivals* as part of World Refugee Day observances in late June at the Baker Ripley Neighborhood Center and the Asia Society Texas Center. It tells the story of Yani Rose Keo, acting director of the Alliance for Multicultural Community Services, an ECDC affiliate.

Actually her story prompted the concept, according to an engaging report and review by David Clarke of Broadway World.com.

"Upon hearing about Yani Rose Keo, the administration at HGO felt compelled to explore the story of her journey from Cambodia to Houston, which led to the commissioning of *New Arrivals*," Clarke wrote, noting that the opera company encourages and supports contemporary artists by commissioning on average one new premier each year.

Before she became a refugee herself, Yani Rose Keo had begun serving refugees fleeing the civil war raging in her Cambodian homeland, working as a volunteer with International

Aid and Assistance for Refugees in the early 1970s.

After Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge seized the country in ways that resulted in more than two million people losing their lives through brutal executions or starvation, she and her four children were forced to flee, first to Thailand and then to France, where she worked for seven months as a pediatric nurse. (Her husband, a former high-ranking official had fled to Houston.)

"Before the war, I had never worked for anyone and when I went to France, I had to take care of my four children alone. This was a scary experience, but it made me a stronger person and pushed me to help others in need," she is quoted in a UNHCR profile about "Refugees Who Have Made a Difference."

Joining her husband in Houston, in the mid-1970s, she resumed her work with refugees, soon joining Ethiopia refugee Kassahoun Bisrat in founding the Alliance.

With a libretto by Catherine Filloux and music by John Glover, the work "effortlessly relates Yani Rose Keo's story to the audience," Clarke writes, exploring the emotional and psychological torment of adversity upon the soul as exemplified by her experiences and those of the three refugees she helps during the opera.

"As a whole, *New Arrivals* is a sensational new opera that will hopefully be performed many more times around the world, presenting a story that deserves to be told, received, and appreciated," Clarke wrote.

FY 2011 African Refugee Admissions

As of June 31, 2012 • Ceiling for FY 2012 is 12,000

Country of Origin	Refugees	Country of Origin	Refugees
Burundi	138	Niger	4
Cameroon	1	Nigeria	2
Central African Republic	135	Rwanda	144
Chad	12	Senegal	5
Congo	98	Sierra Leone	1
Dem. Rep. Congo	1,443	Somalia	3,521
Eritrea	869	South Africa	1
Ethiopia	459	Sudan	676
Gabon	1	Tanzania	2
Gambia	2	Togo	26
Ivory Coast	28	Uganda	18
Kenya	13	Zimbabwe	1
Liberia	56	TOTAL	7,656

Source: U.S. Department of State, PRM

African Refugee NETWORK

Vol. 20, No. 4

July 2012

The African Refugee NETWORK is produced bimonthly by the ECDC Center for African Refugees and Immigrants (ECDC-CARI). Opinions presented do not necessarily reflect official viewpoints and you should not assume endorsement by ECDC. Material appearing in the newsletter may be reproduced with credit. For additional information, contact:

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