



**Hopes Fulfilled or Dreams Shattered?  
From resettlement to settlement Conference  
November 23<sup>rd</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup>, 2005**

**Background Paper**

**Refugee Resettlement Conference with a focus  
on Housing, Cultural Identity and Community  
Development in Resettlement of Refugees**

**Written By: J Gore**

**This background paper has been prepared to inform  
discussion at this conference and does not necessarily  
represent the views of the Centre for Refugee Research.**

**Hopes Fulfilled or Dreams Shattered: Refugee  
Resettlement Conference with a focus on Housing,  
Cultural Identity and Community Development in  
Resettlement of Refugees**

A paper by Jo Gore

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Africa, live in peace forever!

By Andrew Mayak  
The Sudan  
1995

Preamble

Resettlement of refugees is one of the three durable solutions the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) works for in partnership with governments, humanitarian organisations, the private sect

individual (UNHCR 2005d). According to UNHCR, before a decision is taken to pursue the resettlement of a refugee, every effort should be made to fully explore the possibility of local solutions such as local integration, and the possibility of voluntary repatriation in the foreseeable future should also be evaluated (UNHCR 2005d). Regarding legal and/or physical protection, resettlement is deemed appropriate when a refugee's situation meets one or more of the following conditions: "Immediate or long-term threat of *refoulement* to the country of origin or expulsion to another country from where the refugee may be *refouled*; Threat of arbitrary arrest, detention or imprisonment; Threat to physical safety or human rights in the country of refuge, rendering asylum untenable" (UNHCR 2005d).

Adding weight to the UNHCR resettlement guidelines is the Agenda for Protection. The Agenda came out of the Global Consultations on International Protection – a discussion between governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), refugee experts and UNHCR. It focuses on issues and activities that would benefit from multilateral commitment and cooperation (UNHCR 2003, p.9-10). The Agenda c

economic, social and cultural development" (OHCHR 2005a). Strengthening this is Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights affirming that "In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language" (OHCHR 2005b)

Culture and identity are interlinked. A sense of identity requires a group or community to support that identity (Little et al 2002, p.172). It is "culturally and structurally determined: ...tied to a grid of social roles, statuses, groups and networks" (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003, p.338). Characteristics of (psychological) sense of community include the "perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others... the feeling that one is part of a larger, dependable and stable structure" (Sarason, 1974, p.156 cited in Fisher and Sonn, 1999, p. 716) A sense of community does not appear to be a priority with government housing providers. Members of the same ethnic group are often dispersed across cities and countries creating cultural difficulties for refugees<sup>2</sup>. The Hmong have a soul-calling ceremony performed on the third morning after the birth of a child. However, the Hmong community in Australia are scattered and such rituals can be delayed for up to a month (Liamputtong 2002, p.830-831).

It has been suggested that one's home "represents a vital interface between society and the individual" (Mallett 2004, p.68). Home is a place where "socio-cultural and historical ideas about family, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and age are reinforced..." (Mallett 2004, p.78). Mallett (2004, p.62) suggests that "...the house itself, the interior design of the house and the decorations and use of space all reflect the occupant's sense of self". It has been observed that many refugees turn their transition housing into a culturally appropriate space with rugs and minimal furniture, making a more flexible space by using mattresses instead of beds (Interview notes, Service Provider 3, 21<sup>st</sup> October, 2005). In a New Zealand Housing paper it was recorded that Somali families struggled with having only one toilet that was accessed through the kitchen. Traditionally a female domain, it was difficult when men had to pass through that space. Somali traditionally do not mix the genders after the age of seven and separate living spaces were required (Lilley, S 2004, p.16).

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<sup>2</sup> Placing refugees of the same ethnic group together can also be problematic. In the Tamil community in northern Norway, families that belong to different castes were placed in the same community. This created tension as they endeavoured to keep separate from the other castes yet yielded to their need to be part of the Tamil com8 538.82237112.581e1 Tm(s)Tj98 0 0 h 12.5811 Tm( keep )Tj261

Home is al

- Residence in NSW
- Household income
- Asset ownership
- Ability to sustain a successful tenancy
- Repayment of former debts
- Generally, be at least 18 years of age" (Dept. of Housing 2002b).

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### Current Situation in Australia and Internationally

The path to accessing housing has many obstacles - language problems, financial struggles, difficulties finding appropriate and affordable housing, a lack of familiarity with Australian society rules and legal framework, and unhelpful real estate agents (Beer and Foley 2003, p.19). In terms of suitable housing the main concern for refugees lies in proximity to services such as transport, medical centres, schools and employment. Transport is particularly important for maintaining networks with family and friends (Interview43002 Tc02 u35 T

when they are vulnerable, or when there is social tension associated with displacement. Viewing housing in relation to other aspects of integration, such as health, employment and education is also regarded as good practice (ECRE 2002).

Despite the plethora of material on good practice, there are some clearly identifiable gaps in the policy an

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Framed in the context of refugee resettlement in San Diego County, California, the Roundtable brought together a panel of practitioners, policymakers, and academics currently engaged in work with this group. Complimenting the local participants were several practitioners that engage in similar work at the international level. The Roundtable specifically focused upon two major, inter-related areas in resettlement: micro-enterprise/job creation strategies and psycho-social programs.

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This is the web page of RMS (formerly known as refugee and Migrant Service), a non-profit, non-governmental, non-sectarian incorporated society in New Zealand. They provide public and community education programs and monitor and contribute to the development of national and international policies relating to refugee resettlement.

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A webpage setting out the questions and answers to resettlement procedure for refugees in the United States.