

IN FOCUS

## Help for Disabled Refugees

In the Ban Mai Nai refugee camp in Thailand, an IRC rehabilitation center and prosthetics workshop serves disabled refugees from Myanmar. Here a refugee is fitted for a prosthetic arm.

PHOTO BY PETER BIRO

An ongoing crisis  
requires a sustained commitment

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**IRC Rescue  
Partner**

The single best hope of the world's refugees and displaced people is the sustained commitment of people who recognize their plight and care about their future.

By making a monthly pledge of \$10 or more, you will help the IRC rescue lives during emergencies while supporting our long-term efforts to rebuild war and disaster zones all over the world.

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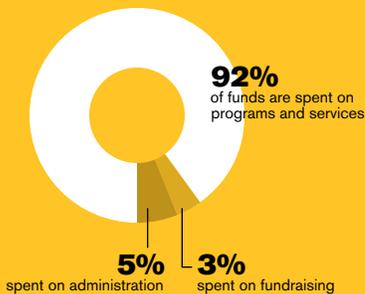
## Refuge on the Border

Hundreds of thousands of refugees fled to Liberia after political unrest and violence broke out in Ivory Coast earlier this year. Most of them are still there. The IRC is assisting uprooted people on both sides of the border. [SEE PAGE 4 >](#)

## In 2010 the IRC:

- › provided over **4.4** million people with access to clean drinking water and sanitation
- › served nearly **14.5** million people with primary and reproductive health care and vaccinated **210,000** children for measles and other childhood diseases
- › trained over **6,000** educators and supported schools attended by **373,000** children, **over half** of them girls

## IRC efficiency



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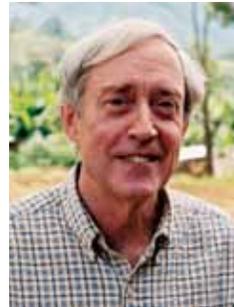
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**From Harm to Home | Rescue.org**

## A mission rooted in history

While you know the International Rescue Committee as a global humanitarian aid organization, you may not be aware of the details of who we are or what led to our creation. For that reason, I thought it might be helpful to readers of *The IRC at Work* if I offer a brief overview of our history and identity. This column will do that.

The IRC traces its origins to New York in 1933, when Albert Einstein urged that a committee of leading American citizens be formed to work with like-minded Europeans to liberate people being persecuted by the Nazis. Today, the IRC continues to pursue this mission by aiding people uprooted by persecution, war and conflict, or by natural disaster when there is large-scale population displacement.



Our work currently takes us to over 40 countries worldwide. We typically arrive to deliver lifesaving aid in crisis situations. That is how we initially became involved in Afghanistan, Congo, and South Sudan, for example. Once the emergency phase passes, we continue to help people rebuild their lives in their host countries or return to their original homes. We also assist refugees who are given sanctuary in the United States. Their numbers are relatively small. Indeed, the United States annually admits under 80,000 refugees. That equates to fewer than two in 1,000 of the world's 43 million uprooted people.

Of those refugees who are admitted to the United States, IRC staff and volunteers in 22 cities nationwide annually help as many as 10,000 begin new lives. Many of our staff members in this country are themselves former refugees who can show the newcomers how to rebuild their lives and livelihood in a matter of months. The vast majority of these refugees go on to lead productive, independent lives, and the success that they and their children achieve is both remarkable and inspiring. The opportunity to meet many of them is among the most rewarding dimensions of my job.

Over the years, the IRC has earned a reputation for being among the world's leading humanitarian relief and development agencies. Several factors contribute to this reputation:

- › To guide our global efforts, we have succeeded in attracting and retaining an excellent staff of outstanding professionals who are leaders in their disciplines, including emergency response, health care, children's programs, the protection and empowerment of women, and program measurement and evaluation.

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- › We involve those we serve in planning and carrying out our programs, giving them a hand, not a handout.
- › In the countries where we work, virtually all of our staff members are local citizens or are members of the group we are serving.
- › We have formed strong partnerships with leading universities, including Columbia, Harvard, Stanford, the London School of Economics, and MIT, to help us evaluate our work in the field and augment our in-house monitoring and evaluation.
- › We also are extremely fortunate to have loyal donors whose support is the rudder on our ship. Their private contributions give us the capability of attracting funding from the United States and other countries, the United Nations, and the European Union. More than 90 cents of every dollar we spend goes directly to our programs.

The IRC sums up our mission of assisting uprooted people in four words: *from harm to home*. That is the journey that all uprooted people long to complete. With the support of our donors, the IRC does all in our power to help them toward their goal.

# Kiss a Llama for the IRC



RIVERTON HIGH SCHOOL

Selling kisses with a llama was just one innovative way students at Riverton High School raised \$81,000 for the IRC.

Nearly 2,000 students took action last winter and raised a staggering \$81,087 for the IRC in just three weeks, an amount that would be the envy of professional fundraisers.

The sophomores, juniors and seniors at Riverton High School, outside Salt Lake City, Utah, took a variety of innovative approaches to generate donations during their record-breaking charity drive.

As money trickled in a dollar at a time, every student found a way to participate: Some threw a benefit concert, sold candy or wrapped Christmas presents; others performed odd jobs for neighbors, shoveling snow, cleaning out barns, moving furniture and washing windows.

"It has become Riverton's tradition to not only choose an organization worthy of fundraising, but one that provides a learning experience," said Brad Sorenson, the school's principal.

Every year, Riverton students research charitable organizations to find worthy causes, focusing in past years on domestic violence, child abuse and drug addiction. The idea to work with the IRC came from senior Elyse Yerman, who had previous experience volunteering with a refugee Somali family. Yerman's classmates were initially hesitant because of misconceptions about refugees and immigrants. But as they worked through the confusion and confronted common stereotypes, the students transformed their

apprehension into passion.

"Each student changed a little by making a personal decision to support the IRC," said Yerman. "I believe this was the key to our success, that people are more inclined to help when they understand who they are helping and why it is important."

To create an even better understanding of the refugee experience, the faculty organized a role-playing simulation, taking a group of unsuspecting students to a local military base and processing them as though they were newly arrived refugees.

The students had to leave behind all their belongings. Volunteers recruited to direct the simulation spoke only in Farsi, creating a sense of disorientation and helplessness among the students.

"You think about all these people who have five minutes to pack and leave their homes," said Austin Emch, president of the Riverton student body. "Every student there came away with a new appreciation and gratitude for what we have . . . and for what the International Rescue Committee does."

In February, the students presented a check to Patrick Poulin, executive director of the IRC Salt Lake City office. "What you have done has literally saved lives over the next several months," Poulin told the students. "You inspire us."

—Martha Dodge

## Japan Tsunami Relief

The IRC is supporting three Japanese aid groups assisting survivors of the **earthquake and tsunami** that devastated northeastern **Japan** in March. "Our strategy is to give direct support to Japanese organizations that have access to the affected areas and that have the appropriate capacity and experience," says Michael Kocher, IRC vice president, international programs. **The Association for Aid and Relief Japan (AAR), JEN Japan and Peace Winds Japan** are distributing food and emergency items and are providing services to help survivors through the emotional and physical recovery process.

## Raising Voices for the IRC

The IRC recently launched an exciting new program, **IRC Voices**, established in cooperation with a group of prominent young artists devoted to raising awareness about the needs of refugees and others uprooted by global crises. Newly announced IRC Voices include **John Legend**, nine-time Grammy winner; **Rashida Jones**, actress currently appearing in the NBC television series "Parks and Recreation," **Sarah Wayne Callies**, star of the blockbuster AMC television series "The Walking Dead"; and **Jencarlos Canela**, award-winning musician and star of Telemundo's "Mi Corazón Insiste."

Two of the IRC Voices already have strong IRC connections. Callies is a long-time supporter and donor to the IRC and Canela has volunteered with the IRC in Miami for several years. "I can't think of a more rewarding use of my time than to raise my voice in support the IRC," Canela says.

## Introducing GenR

Anyone who thinks young people are apathetic or indifferent to humanitarian issues should consider **Generation Rescue**—or **GenR**—a group of young professionals who have organized to support the IRC and its work. GenR will use its creativity and leadership to give a voice to the people IRC serves and to young people who support the IRC. For information: [Events@Rescue.org](mailto:Events@Rescue.org)



# Helping hands across th

By Rebecca Balis

Ivory Coast was once a beacon of prosperity for West Africa, but a 2002 civil war divided the country and ushered in a decade of strife. In November 2010, incumbent president Laurent Gbagbo refused to accept defeat in an election he had postponed for years, triggering a crisis that displaced a million people. Some 190,000 fled to safety in neighboring Liberia. Gbagbo was forced from power in April, replaced by his duly elected opponent, Alassane Ouattara, but Ivorians fear that the violence will continue.

Recently I visited the Liberian border where the IRC is aiding Ivorian refugees by distributing emergency supplies, providing health care and assisting survivors of sexual violence.

In the town of Zorgowee, I met Kou Wonbah, a Liberian mother of three who, like many of her neighbors, told me she felt connected to the uprooted Ivorians who have landed in her country.

Kou was once a refugee herself. For six years, she lived with an Ivorian family when Liberia suffered through a protracted civil war. Now she shares her own crowded house and sparse food supplies with four Ivorian refugees.

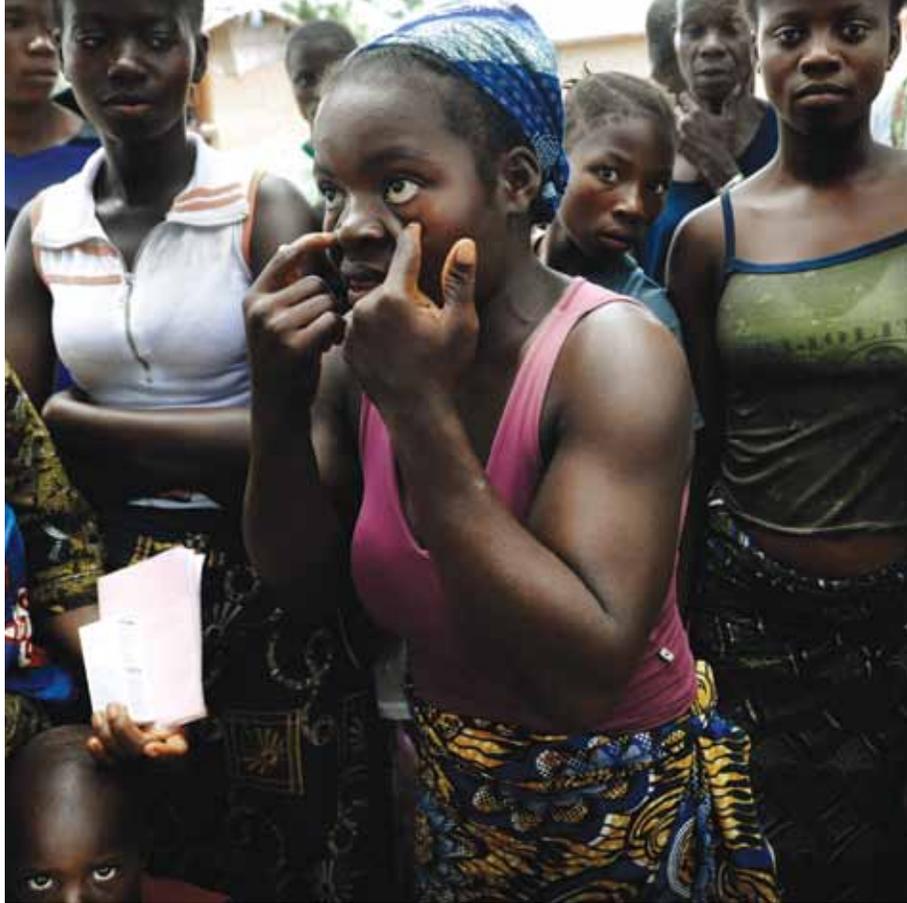
"The same thing that has happened to these people happened to us," Kou explained. "They welcomed us, so we must welcome them, too."

Demonstrating a generosity that challenges the images of war and trauma often associated with West Africa, Kou and her neighbors are happy to offer the refugees one thing they have in unlimited supply—their friendship.

"We need to help them forget the war they saw and violence they faced," Kou said. "We must provide them with a safe place to live."

Karwee and 13 members of her family, including her five children, have been living with another Zorgowean family since they arrived from Ivory Coast. Speaking with a serenity that belied her traumatic experiences, Karwee told me about the violence and harassment she had faced in Ivory Coast. She recalled how she and her relatives hid in their homes as chaos raged in the streets. Finally they fled into the forest and made their way across the border.

"There are many of us—children are everywhere—but it works. There is no *palava*," Karwee said, using the local term for conflict. "The Liberians have given us food and, little by little, we are working together and are able to give them something too."



# e border

The IRC has helped Zorghoewee and other towns near the border set up classrooms and communal spaces where refugee children can continue their education. While the children are in school, some of the adults join their Liberian hosts at work on their farms and in their rice fields. Others earn money by braiding hair or selling “geebee,” a local specialty made from pounded cassava, in the market. The IRC has also organized soccer matches and other activities so neighbors and newcomers can get to know each other better.

“We want the refugees to be able to stay with us—we want to work together, play together, get water together from the same pump,” said Caroline Sewah, one of the Liberian teachers at Zorghoewee School.

As Ivory Coast lurches toward some resolution of its long conflict, and as Liberia continues to recover from years of war and poverty, the IRC has committed to continuing its work supporting local communities while providing emergency services for the refugees.

— **Rebecca Balis is a Princeton-in-Africa Fellow working with the IRC in Liberia.**



OPPOSITE PAGE: Refugee children receive vaccinations from the IRC mobile health team in the Liberian border town of Bangaplay. PHOTO: CHRIS DE BODE /SV

THIS PAGE TOP LEFT: An Ivorian refugee express gratitude that villagers in the border town of Bangaplay have opened their doors to them but says the refugees need additional aid and help. PHOTO: CHRIS DE BODE /SV

THIS PAGE TOP RIGHT: An IRC mobile health team carries vaccines and drugs to the Liberian border town of Blemieplay where hundreds of Ivorians fleeing violence have taken refuge. PHOTO: PETER BIRO

THIS PAGE BOTTOM: An IRC mobile health team at work in the Zorghoewee transit camp for Ivorian refugees. PHOTO: CHRIS DE BODE /SV

ON THE COVER: Ivorian refugee children attend a performance at a school in Zorghoewee. Many of the children attending the school are from the Zorghoewee transit camp. PHOTO: CHRIS DE BODE /SV

# After the Flood

The IRC is helping hard-hit communities recover from the worst flooding in Pakistan's history.



Local IRC workers installing a new water system to replace one destroyed by flooding in the Upper Swat Valley.

One year ago, Pakistan was inundated by the worst floods in living memory. A raging torrent tore through the north of the country with terrifying speed, pulverizing everything in its path before flowing south into Punjab and Sindh provinces.

Over 20 million people were affected by the floods, half of them made homeless. Nearly 5.5 million acres were laid to waste. The economic damage to Pakistan's crops, livestock and infrastructure has yet to be fully calculated. And the humanitarian crisis brought about by the flooding is far from over.

When the residents of Shah Wasaye, a village in Sindh Province, returned home this spring after spending months in a government-run camp, they found only debris. Their once fertile fields were covered by a thin crust of salt left by the receding water. Not one building remained standing. The villagers were forced to erect makeshift tents as temporary shelters.

"We are happy to be home, on our land," says Mohammed Omar, one of 400 returning villagers. "But it is hard. We lost everything: our homes, donkeys, cows and crops."

To help the people in Shah Wasaye and elsewhere in the flood zone, the IRC has launched a community rehabilitation project, one the largest it has ever undertaken. The project will rebuild infrastructure in Sindh Province and will help more than 150,000 people return to farming and other economic activities.

"Sindh is the breadbasket of Pakistan," says Mirela Kuljanin, the IRC's livelihoods coordinator in the province. "So naturally we will focus on rehabilitating and irrigating flood-devastated agricultural land."

The IRC is working alongside villagers to clean contaminated water canals and irrigation systems and rebuild dams and access roads, Kuljanin notes. Participating families receive fertilizer and enough rice seeds to cultivate at least five acres. To help kick start the local economy, the IRC is also distributing poultry and livestock to farmers.

Meanwhile, millions of people remain in dire straits. The need for clean water and health care is acute. Across Sindh Province, the IRC has installed water tanks, hand pumps and latrines. Outside of Shah



## Pakistan

**Location:**

› Southern Asia

**Neighbors:**

› India, Iran, Afghanistan, China

**Population:**

› 187,342,721

**Total Area Flooded in 2010:**

› One-fifth

**Homes Destroyed:**

› 1.7 million

**People Aided by IRC in Flood Zone:**

› 1 million

**People Who Received IRC Health Services:**

› 200,000

Wasaye, the IRC set up a mobile health clinic that is treating people for diseases brought on by contaminated water and the lack of hygiene. Two roving medical teams provide services that have reached some 50,000 people in the province.

And in the Upper Swat Valley in the remote far north, teams of IRC workers are helping devastated mountain villages return to normal and, in some cases, improve infrastructure.

"This is the first time we have running water," said Abdul Hakim, a resident of Zor Kaleh, a village that sits at an altitude of 7,500 feet. "Before, we had to go up into the mountains to collect water. It took four hours to bring down ten liters."

Still the crisis remains acute throughout Pakistan and humanitarian needs are overwhelming, says Tammy Hasselfeldt, director of IRC programs in Pakistan. "It will take a very long time and increased support from the outside world to help the people of Pakistan to recover." —Peter Biro

# Refugees plant new roots in community gardens

The IRC helps refugees get back to the land and healthy ways of growing and eating food.

Few places are more dissimilar than the remote mountain villages of Central Africa and the car-clogged suburbs of Salt Lake City. But Associate Uwineza, a refugee from Burundi, has recreated a little bit of Africa on a patch of land in Utah.

Several times a week, Uwineza travels by bus to a community garden where she carefully tends a small plot of vegetables.

"I have been farming since I was nine years old," she says as she waters a neat row of green amaranth, known in her native language as *lenga lenga*. "This was my life in Burundi and this is what I am good at"

As Uwineza waters her plants, she greets fellow gardeners working the 1.5-acre garden. They, too, are refugees from countries as diverse as Bhutan, Myanmar and Ethiopia. Like Uwineza, many of them miss working their own land and growing their own food.

In response, the IRC has launched New Roots, a nationwide program that helps refugees establish community gardens, farmers' markets, food pantries and farm-based businesses. "The IRC provides agricultural training, tools, seeds and vital connections to potential buyers," says Ellee Igoe, who supports the IRC's community food and farming programs in the United States. "We recently connected a group of refugees to Earnest Eats, a national granola bar company that has agreed to buy mint from our farmers."

In addition to Salt Lake City, the IRC has established New Roots programs in Boise, Idaho; Charlottesville, Virginia; New York City; Phoenix; San Diego; and Seattle. Last year, First Lady Michelle Obama visited the San Diego community garden, calling it "a model for the nation, for the world."

Encouraging refugees to become farmers may even give a boost to America's ailing agricultural economy. American farmers are aging and their children are not following in their footsteps. "We desperately need experienced farmers and refugees can help fill the void," Igoe says.

In addition to its economic goals, New Roots aims to provide greater access to healthy food in communities that often suffer from poor nutrition. Many refugees come



PETER BIRO

Associate Uwineza (right) planting seeds at the New Roots community garden in Salt Lake City. "When we harvest the food, we can eat it or sell it. This is our economy," Uwineza says.



PETER BIRO

The New Roots program provides access to healthy food in communities that often suffer from poor nutrition.

from countries where food is freshly grown or purchased at local markets. But in the U.S., struggling with limited budgets and lacking information about alternatives, many refugees turn to prepackaged or fast food. "I had

never seen spaghetti, cookies or pizza before I came here," says Uwineza with a laugh. "I am used to vegetables and that's what I want to eat. They are healthy and taste good."

—Peter Biro