

# Annual Report 2003



**Refugee Consortium of Kenya**

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## Chairman's Statement

**A**t the end of 2002, Kenya witnessed historic elections and a change of regime that would set the pace for civil society's interaction with the Government in the following year. In 2003, much of the Refugee Consortium of Kenya's attention was directed toward pushing for the long overdue reforms in refugee management and for refugee issues to be taken on board the National Agenda. In particular, the organisation focused on advocating for the creation of a legal framework within which refugee rights, protection and management should be effected.



Despite the spirited advocacy efforts of previous years, there was a persistent lack of goodwill that frustrated the enactment of the Refugee Bill. However, 2003 opened opportunities to engage the Government meaningfully on the pending refugee legislation and on refugee management issues. RCK led civil society organisations and Government officials in reviews of the existing draft of the Refugee Bill to ensure it not only uphold international law provisions, but also that it is responsive to the needs of the refugee population in Kenya. In this spirit, RCK facilitated a forum with civil society organisations to audit the quality of protection that the Bill affords to women and children.

The advocacy efforts eventually yielded fruit when in September the Bill was formally published as a government document, prior to its presentation to Parliament for debate. By the close of the year, the Bill had gone through the first and second stages of legislation, after which the enactment of the legislation would be a near certainty. It is now anticipated that the legislation will be in place by mid 2004.

The year also witnessed RCK's first-ever fundraising golf tournament held in February. The tournament was a success both in engaging the corporate sector and in raising funds for various refugee assistance activities. The event also provided an enjoyable day of golf at the Muthaiga Golf Club. In addition, RCK held its annual World Refugee Day celebrations as part of its outreach to the refugee communities. The event saw the attendance of an overwhelming 450-plus refugees in a colourful and enjoyable celebration. The refugees were treated to a sample of delicious traditional cuisine from Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia.



On the legal assistance front, RCK attended to well over 3,000 individual refugees, 20 percent of whom were female, through its Legal Clinic programme. As part of its referral services, the organisation established key partnerships with other organisations and institutions, including hospitals, shelters for abused women and organisations offering education assistance. The referral services helped to increase the refugees' access to welfare services. The organisation also held a one-day free medical camp through which refugees received free medical consultation and medicine. This was made possible through the volunteer services of medical personnel and drug donations from pharmaceutical enterprises.

RCK also witnessed several changes during the year, perhaps the most significant being the relocation of RCK's long-time Executive Director, Abi Gitari, to Nigeria at the end of the year. Ms Gitari is a founder member of RCK and has served as the Executive Director since its inception. She left behind a glowing legacy and milestones that are set to launch RCK to even greater heights.

The year ended with an organisational strategic review and planning process to map out RCK's key priorities for the next three years.

Undoubtedly, 2003 was a very eventful and fast-paced year for RCK, but it was also a great success for both RCK and its constituencies. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all our partners and well-wishers who worked with RCK in various capacities in 2003, and we look forward to an equally fruitful year in 2004.

**Justice Msagha Mbogholi,  
CHAIR-RCK BOARD**

**Acting Executive Director, Judy Wakahiu (left)  
outgoing Executive Director, Abi Gitari**

## Background

There are approximately 280,000 refugees in Kenya fleeing from 11 different conflict-ridden countries. Most of the refugees in Kenya are from Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia and the Great Lakes region. There are two refugee camps in the country, namely Dadaab which is close to the Somali border, and hosting about 150,000 refugees, and Kakuma in northern Kenya near the Sudanese border hosting about 83,000 refugees. There are also between 50-60,000 refugees living in urban areas. The number of urban refugees cannot be determined exactly due to the fact that most do not have a mandate to be in urban areas, or are awaiting status determination, or else have been rejected by UNHCR.

The Narc Government, after taking power in January 2003, made positive pronouncements regarding proposals to relocate the refugees' camps to more habitable areas, to consider giving work permits to refugees and to take over from UNHCR the issuing of identification documents to refugees. This gave rise to the encouraging prospect that the welfare of all refugees would be improved. By the end of 2003, however, no action had been taken.

The government policy on refugees still remains encampment. This continues to have many ramifications for urban refugees including: lack of assistance, police harassment and hostility on the part of civil society. While there were signs of improvement in refugee management earlier in the year, for example with Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) giving attendance to urban refugees, as the year progressed, many of the positive Government pronouncements remained un-implemented. UNHCR still operates as a *de facto* Government ministry as we await the enactment of the Refugee Bill. This situation is worrying as there is a danger of current practices being prolonged indefinitely during which time, refugees continue to suffer from neglect, abject poverty, inadequate medical care, starvation and insecurity.

The year 2003 saw the continuation of global "terrophobia". The Suppression of Terrorism Bill 2003 is Kenya's response to the fight against terrorism by legislating anti-terrorist measures, as other countries have done. From the point of view of refugees and asylum seekers, the proposed Bill violates the provisions of various international conventions, including the 1951 UN Convention on refugees, that were set up to protect their welfare in host countries. The Kenya Government is a signatory of the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees. Under the Bill, refugees are likely to be easier targets for unlawful prosecution and harassment.

The year also saw the tabling of the long-standing Refugee Bill in Kenya to which RCK made several recommendations. The Bill is set to be enacted before the end of 2004.

It is against this background that RCK operated in the past year. RCK hopes that much of the positive change which began in 2003 will have a stronger impact in 2004 and that once the Refugee Bill is enacted and a refugee department established, we can continue in our advocacy towards better welfare for refugees.



## Management / Trustee Board

Mbogholi Msagha	-	Patron
Anthony Njui	-	Chairman
Abi Gitari	-	Executive Director
Wambui Kimathi	-	Member
Jane Kiragu	-	Member
Marguerite Garling	-	Member
Mary Anne Fitzgerald	-	Member
Enid Burke	-	Member
Sam Kabue	-	Member
Virginia Staussi	-	Member

We welcome **Mr. Njui, Mr. Kabue, Ms. Staussi** and **Ms. Burke** as the newest members of the RCK Board.

## Advisory Board

Ambassador Behuel Kiplagat-**Chair**

Dr. Barbara Harrell Bond

Dr. Bonaventure Rutinawa

Ms. Helena Kithinji

Dr. Joe Oloka Onyango

Dr. Monica Kathina-Juma

## Foreword

As the Refugee Consortium of Kenya enters its fifth year of existence, we are encouraged that it has successfully grown through the initial challenges that face any new initiative and has firmly and undoubtedly established itself as a reliable centre for refugees in Kenya.

As the RCK Board, we single out the outstanding contribution of the outgoing Executive Director, Ms Abi Gitari and her staff over that period for successfully *'Keeping Hope Alive'* for the otherwise neglected community of refugees.

As the organization therefore goes through an internal transition, within the larger environment of a political transition, the Board will inevitably have to be more keenly involved in turning this good organization into a great one. The Board is aware that transitions do have hiccups that demand close navigation to be successfully completed.

As part of re-defining its role during this transition and in order to sustain the strong foundation that the organization has set for itself, the Board is bracing itself to assume a role that will enable it to make more substantive input in the management of the upstream – the strategic direction of the RCK and also the strengthening of the organizational capacity to achieve results. There is a renewed realization that good management practices are essential for the achievement of the organization's mission whose delivery the Board must take responsibility for. The Board does, however, know that this is a demanding agenda, especially for a volunteer Board whose members work on a full-time basis elsewhere and have sometimes barely made it to the scheduled Board meetings.

A new Board culture has therefore got to be recognized and the responsibility to be borne by the Board so that it will depart from the 'usual' approach that characterizes most NGO Boards which operate in an environment where the pressures of performance are less stringent than that of their counterparts in the profit-making sector who have to constantly show results. It is encouraging that in various Board meetings, discussions on improving the organization's performance have come up every so often. In trying to develop this role though, the Board is alive to the fact that issues of performance have the potential to generate tension between itself and the operating management and will have to steer this agenda carefully without meddling into operational matters.

To do this, the Board is determined to strengthen its competence in this area of steering a board-led performance agenda. As such, the Board is satisfied that its collective experience has invaluablely benefited from the entry of new members who include Anthony Njui, Sam Kabue, Enid Burke and Virginia Staussi whose experience in management, refugee issues, policy advocacy, among others things, both at local and international levels is truly refreshing.

Finally, I take this opportunity to thank our partners and clients who have continued working with us and our donors for supporting various RCK initiatives. As we embark on our new strategic plan (2004-2006) we hope we can continue counting on you as we work towards fulfilling our mandate.

We also wish our outgoing Executive Director the very best and wish to assure her that we will continue *'Keeping Hope Alive'*.

**Wambui Kimathi,**  
RCK BOARD MEMBER



## RCK Mission Statement

The Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK) is an Advocacy and Policy Development Centre. Its core values encompass the belief in the centrality of a common humanity for all peoples, and the need to ensure that the equality, inclusiveness, human dignity and rights are guarantees to all, especially refugee populations.

The mission of RCK is the promotion of refugee welfare, rights and protection at national and international levels. RCK carries out its mission through collaboration with the Government of Kenya, other NGOs and international bodies. It achieves this through legal reform, policy development, media advocacy, civic education and research.

## RCK Objectives

To achieve its mission, RCK has developed strategic objectives. These include:

1. Advocating for the development of effective policies that encourage the promotion of humane management and improvement of the status of refugees.
2. Promoting public understanding and support of refugee issues.
3. Using advocacy tools for lobbying and policy recommendations.
4. Providing legal services to refugees and refer them to our collaborators for assistance when needed.
5. Working towards reducing violations and abuse of refugee rights.
6. Encouraging a consultative forum for refugee agencies, to share information and raise issues of concern.
7. Developing an effective network of NGOs and other key partners locally, regionally and internationally, for collaboration in responding to the plight of refugees.

## Unique Role of RCK

RCK is distinct in the role that it plays in refugee welfare and protection of their rights. It is the only Kenyan organisation that focuses on refugee issues using a human rights approach that is independent of the Government and key players in refugee welfare. This gives RCK the freedom to advocate for refugee rights with an unbiased and impartial voice. Since its inception, the organisation has delivered its mission with measurable success. Through the Consortium's emphasis on networking with other local, regional and international organisations dealing with refugees, it has been able to cover a plethora of issues. These include legal reform, policy development, civic education, research and information dissemination, refugee empowerment and capacity building to promote the welfare of refugees. RCK focuses on advocacy regarding refugee issues and collaboration within and outside the sector while still realising the importance of the services delivered by others to alleviate the plight that refugees encounter. RCK is and will remain a learning organisation concerning trends and emerging issues affecting the refugee situation.

## Executive Director's Statement



At the close of the previous year, Kenyans went to the polls and ushered in a new Government composed of a coalition of 14 political parties. In 2003, the country was caught up in a state of expectation that the new Government would follow through on their election promises.

Civil society organizations had their own expectations of what the new Government ought to do, to make up for the failures of the past regime. RCK, as a member of civil society in Kenya, also had its own expectations on what the Government ought to address regarding the plight of refugees. At the start of the year we recognized that we would have to revise our strategy to work with a Government that had committed itself in its election pledges to uphold and respect human rights in Kenya. A civil society forum was held in February 2003, which brought together various humanitarian and refugee assistance organizations. At this forum, we mapped out strategies for encouraging dialogue with the Government on refugee issues, while at the same time ensuring that our advocacy on behalf of refugees remained strong.

Our interaction with the Government began with a meeting with the Hon. Moody Awori, Vice President and Minister for Home Affairs, whose docket includes refugee affairs. In discussions with the Hon. Awori, he shared with us the view that the Government recognized the need to take over management of refugees and that it had also identified other gaps that it hoped to address in the coming years.

Throughout the year RCK continued to make use of our newsletter, *Refugee Insights* and other publications to highlight the plight of refugees in urban and camp areas as well as the effects of recent global events on their lives. In one newsletter we examined the adverse effects of the global fight against terrorism on refugee rights here in Kenya.

In addition to providing legal advice and representation to refugees through our Legal Clinic we also took our activities to various urban refugee communities. We embarked on a series of human rights and gender training workshops for refugees living in Eastleigh and Riruta Satellite areas of the city. Over 100 refugee men and women were trained in the basic understanding of human rights and gender. The training sessions provided an ideal opportunity for RCK to further interact with refugees and empower them through relevant information.

RCK's work on the draft Refugee Bill continued in earnest this year, taking advantage of the more receptive Government policy toward overall human rights. A gender and child protection audit was carried out on the Bill in November 2003 and recommendations drafted. The recommendations were presented to the parliamentary committee on Administration of Justice and Legal Affairs on November 17<sup>th</sup> 2003 by a joint panel representing civil society organizations. The good news is that following this, and the first



and second readings of the Bill in parliament, the Government has agreed to the setting up of a domestic law on refugees. We look forward to seeing its enactment in 2004.

In a strategic planning exercise held at the end of the year RCK staff, Board members and partners developed a three-year plan for 2004-2006. The plan is both bold and ambitious, but one that I believe this organization is in a position to undertake, given our experience in this field and RCK's committed staff.

On the personal front, the end of 2003 marked a milestone in my career and my time in Kenya, when I took the decision to relocate to Nigeria to be with my family. My years at RCK have enabled me to contribute to improving the welfare of refugees at national, regional and international levels. They have been exciting and challenging years, made all the more remarkable by the support I have received from RCK staff, Board members, friends of the organization and the refugees themselves. As I head to West Africa, I look forward to embarking on new ventures with the confidence that the work of RCK will continue to have a positive impact on the lives of thousands of refugees who desperately need our assistance.

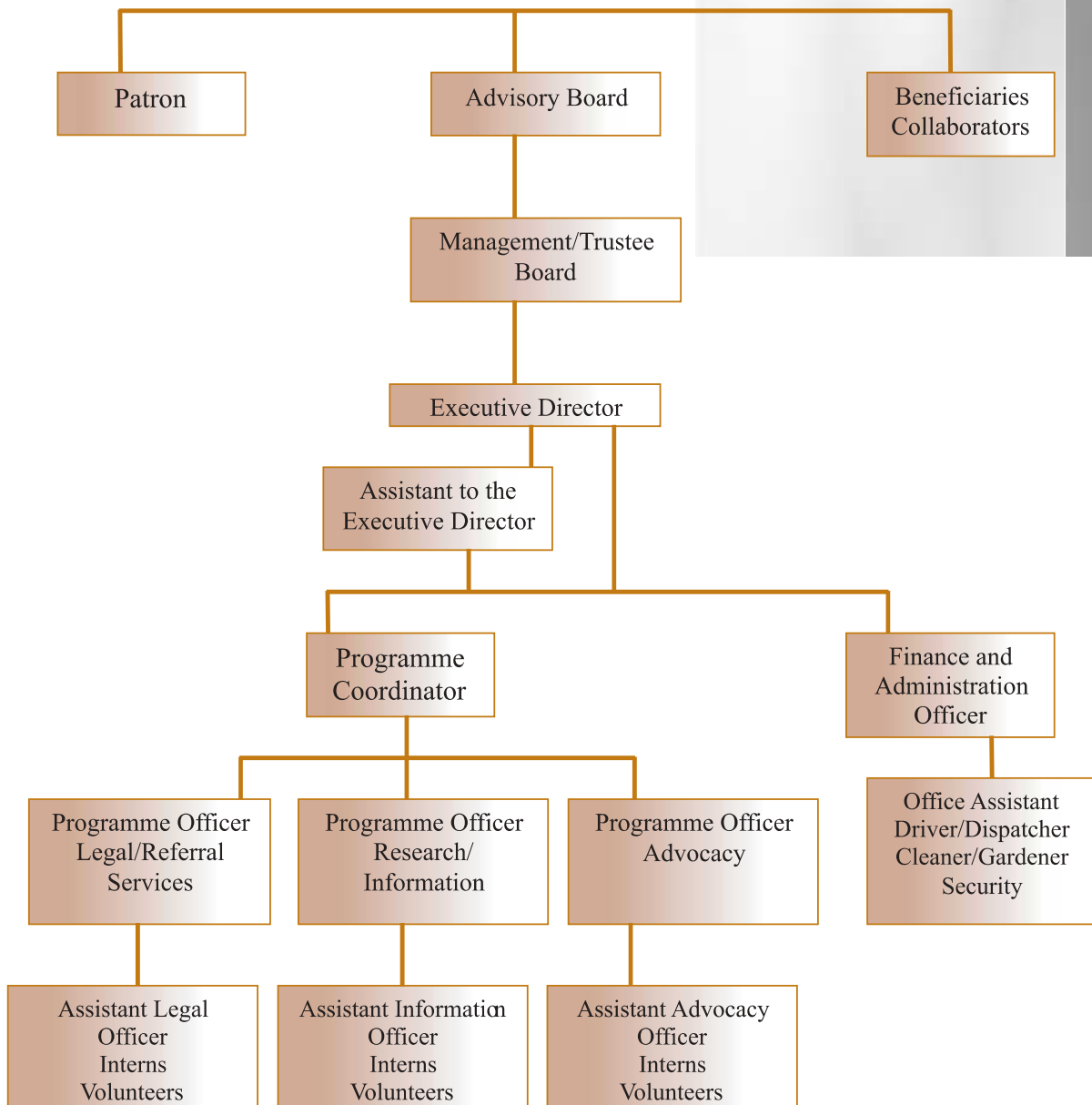
God Bless

# Administrative Structure

The Management Trustee Board assists in the policy decision making. The Board consists of nine members from diverse backgrounds.

The Executive Director has the overall management of the organisation and ensures the implementation of RCK objectives and policies, and is assisted by the programme and finance officers.

## ORGANOGRAM



## Highlights of RCK's Activities for 2003

The year 2003 was a challenging year for RCK. Externally, RCK took advantage of the fresh opportunities presented by the new Government administration to ensure refugee concerns were comprehensively addressed and by the Government's promise to resume its responsibility for refugees. Internally, RCK embarked on a transition period that would lead to a change in leadership by the end of the year. Refugee concerns did not change much during the year, although there was a significant shift in the approach to the issues. With the new political dispensation, the Government began to take responsibility over the refugee situation, with the Ministry of Home Affairs attending to individual refugee concerns; under the previous regime the Government had abdicated all its responsibilities to the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR).

RCK continued to advocate for the enactment of a legal framework to effectively address refugee issues, and also for the humane management of the refugee situation by the Government. RCK further advocated for the State to grant refugees the status provided by established conventions, and by doing so, fulfil its international obligations. Towards this end, RCK consulted with top government officials including the Vice-President and Minister of Home Affairs and the Deputy Secretary in charge of Refugee Matters in the Ministry of Home Affairs. As a result of these consultative meetings, RCK was requested to present a working document on the modalities of establishing a refugee secretariat in Kenya.

- 12** In addition, RCK convened a workshop to review the Gender and Child protection provisions in the proposed Refugee Bill 2003. The objective of the workshop was to carry out an audit of the proposed Refugee Bill 2003 from a gender and child protection perspective and propose suitable amendments to address identified gaps. The workshop was officially opened by Hon. Mirugi Kariuki, a Member of Parliament and also a member of the Parliamentary Committee on Administration of Justice and Legal Affairs. Recommendations were submitted to this Parliamentary Committee with a view to amend the Refugee Bill.

RCK has also continued to create important links with like-minded organisations, the Government of Kenya, international organisations as well as research and academic institutions for purposes of networking and information sharing. In this regard, RCK began co-implementing a research project in 2003 with the Centre for Refugee Research in the University of New South Wales, Australia. During the year RCK also focused on increasing collaboration with local organisations in order to mainstream refugee rights in the broader human rights agenda in the country.

Also, during the year, RCK supported staff development through training to enable them to respond to the challenges and dynamism of the humanitarian field. To achieve these goals, one staff member attended a course at the International Summer School on Forced Migration in Oxford; two staff members attended the East African School of Refugees and Humanitarian Affairs (EASRHA) certificate course in Uganda. Another staff member attended a seminar on mainstreaming women's rights in media advocacy and reporting.



**Hon. MP Paul Muite and RCK Executive Director present the first prize to Philip Murgor during RCK Golf Tournament Fundraiser.**

## Overview of Programmes

RCK has continued to live up to its mission of promoting the humane management of refugees in the region through its three main programmes, namely: the Legal and Referral Programme which works towards providing a better environment for refugees to enjoy their basic rights and to reduce the incidence of refugee rights violations; the Advocacy Programme which keeps a pulse on refugee issues and helps to mobilize support for refugee protection; and the Information and Research Programme which acquires, produces and disseminates accurate, timely and effective information to relevant authorities, organisations and individuals to promote refugee welfare.

This year witnessed enhanced institutional performance while programme implementation was significantly up from last year. Programmes continued to develop more effective strategies in responding to the fluid refugee situation, with particular emphasis in two areas:

- I. Civic education aimed at empowering refugees with a good understanding of gender and human rights issues.
- II. Outreach initiatives aimed at assisting our constituents to access basic social services e.g. medical care

RCK's role in advocacy, education and information dissemination has been strengthened by extending inter-institutional links and collaborating with relevant stakeholders, such as humanitarian and human rights organisations, media outlets, UNHCR, religious bodies and law enforcement agents. These links encourage other organisations to respond to refugee concerns and enhances RCK's area of work



**Information/Research Officer, Cynthia Mugo (centre) at an RCK outreach at Kabiria**

# Advocacy Programme

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**Advocacy Officer, Eva Ayiera confers with participants at Human Rights Gender Training Workshop**



## Highlights of 2003

The Advocacy Programme adopts a two-tiered approach: upstream advocacy that focuses on legislators, policymakers and Government officials responsible for refugee management and administration, and downstream advocacy that focuses on refugees to educate and raise their awareness on rights issues.

The year 2003 proved to be a pivotal year in refugee advocacy. After the historic elections of 2002, the swearing in of the new Government presented a window of opportunity to effect positive changes in refugee management. The programme was consequently able to intensify its Government advocacy work to push for reform in the ailing refugee sector.

## Civil Society Consultative Forum

The Programme commenced the year with a consultative forum for civil society organisations aimed at building consensus on the key reform issues to be raised with government representatives and making recommendations for reform. The forum also affirmed the need to review the dormant Refugee Bill with civil society and the Government to ensure it responds to the actual needs of the refugee situation in Kenya. Following this forum, a memorandum was prepared and issued to the Ministry of Home Affairs to begin dialogue on refugee issues.

## Refugee Management Advocacy

Through communiqués, and meetings with government officials, including the Minister for Home Affairs and other officials in the Ministry, the Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs, as well as officials in the Attorney General's office and the Police Department, the Programme was instrumental in pushing the refugee agenda as a crosscutting issue to be taken into account in various ministerial policies.

The Programme plans to continue its advocacy with various government departments to take up refugee concerns in order to improve refugee protection. In addition, the Programme will focus on ensuring that the Government take up its responsibility for refugee management, in order to streamline the sector and to allow other stakeholders to provide their support and monitoring roles.

## Advocacy on the Refugee Bill

The Programme intensified its advocacy for the enactment of refugee legislation. Advocacy focusing on the Bill commenced early in the year with a meeting with the Ministry of Home Affairs officials to press for a government review of the long-neglected refugee bill, in collaboration with civil society. This was undertaken while recognising the need for the Bill to respond to the realities and needs of the refugee situation in Kenya. In addition, Programme staff carried out a review of the Bill in preparation for the external review organised by the Government.

Later in the year the Programme collaborated with the two other Programmes in a gender and child protection audit of the Refugee Bill, along with members of civil society organisations. Arising from this meeting, a report containing recommendations for the Bill was presented to the Parliamentary Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs. By the end of the year the Bill was tabled in Parliament for the first time in over 20 years since the Bill was proposed. The Bill went through the first reading and the committee stages in parliament before Parliament was prorogued in December 2003. It is hoped that in 2004 the Bill will go through the second and third readings and the Presidential Assent before it becomes law.

## Civic Education

The Programme carried out a series of human rights and gender training workshops for refugee groups, in response to the changes taking place in the refugee sector. The workshops targeted refugee leaders in the various communities for a rigorous two-day training on gender construction, human rights, refugee rights and international and domestic protection of refugee rights. The workshop also raised the need for refugee communities to monitor and report rights violations and to seek redress. A total of 125 refugees from Kangemi, Eastleigh and Kabiria were trained.

As a way forward, the refugees resolved to form representative groups to facilitate dissemination of information to and from the refugee communities to enable rapid response.



## Outreach

Outreach forms a key part of the Programme's work among refugee communities. This year the major outreach events included a medical camp, World Refugee Day celebrations and visits to refugees' residences.

The medical camp was the first of its kind in RCK. The event was a success despite a modest turnout. The doctors dispensed free drugs to patients and undertook free medical checkups. About 50% of the turnout were men, 30% were women and 20% were children. The Programme plans to make the medical camp an annual event.

During the Christmas period, the Programme engaged in a clothes and food drive for a centre for orphaned refugee children in Kabiria in Riruta-Satellite region. The centre is run by volunteer Congolese refugees through an initiative known as *Groupe d'Etude et d'Action pour le Developpement Communautaire* or GEADECO. Donations of food, clothes, toiletries, books and Christmas snacks were presented to the centre before the Christmas break.

## International advocacy on regional issues

The Programme attended the annual Executive Committee meeting of the UNHCR held at the UN headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. The meeting, commonly known as ExCom, provides the opportunity to raise regional refugee concerns at an international forum. The Programme presented a report on the refugee situation in the country and the region. The report called for equity in resource distribution for humanitarian assistance.

## Challenges

- w Although the change in Government came with the expectation of greater civil society interaction with the Government, it proved difficult to schedule meetings with the relevant Government officials. This in turn slowed the process of instituting reforms in the refugee sector.
- w Reports of local police continuing to harass and wrongfully arrest refugees continued almost unabated. The situation was exacerbated by the absence of a refugee law to enforce refugee rights through the justice system.
- w Another major challenge was the continued marginalization of refugee issues from mainstream human rights advocacy. Many human rights organisations do not take up refugee concerns in the course of their advocacy.

# Legal/Referral Programme

## Highlights of 2003

The Programme continues to provide the direct link between RCK and its constituency which is the refugee community in Kenya. In 2003 the Programme underwent major changes and programme shifts aimed at improving its efficiency. The Programme maintained its relevance to RCK's beneficiaries by helping to meet their legal needs and making referrals to partner organizations for their social needs.

In 2003, the new Government quickly set out to establish that it would commit itself to uphold human rights and respect for the rule of law. Recognising this shift, RCK, at the start of 2003, took stock and looked at new ways to establish working linkages with the new Government through its Ministry of Home Affairs, and with the police in its handling of refugees. The results have been positive for refugee welfare and especially in resolving some of the legal issues they have faced in the past. For example, with the previous regime, arbitrary police arrests, detention and harassment of refugees were common however, the legal clinic has seen a marked improvement with fewer reported arrests.

The objectives of the Programme remain as always:

- i) to provide a better legal environment for the protection of refugee rights;
- ii) to work towards a decrease in the violation of refugee rights;
- iii) to empower refugees to articulate and demand their rights.

The provision of legal services through the weekly Legal Clinic continued to be the core activity of the Programme. In 2003 a total of 3,468 clients attended the clinic, of whom 672 were women.

## Trends Analysis

w As indicated above, there were more male than female clients visiting the Clinic in 2003, a trend similar to previous years. This can be attributed to the fact that most females are listed as dependents/spouses on their husband's mandates and usually defer to them in all official matters, including following up their asylum concerns. Any enquiries about the status of a case and other related



**Assistant Legal Officer,  
Anne Asugah (facing  
picture, left) chats with  
guests during International  
Women's Day 2003**

issues are therefore made by the male head of the household. Women clients who came to the Clinic were usually unmarried, widowed or separated.

w The steady decrease in clients from August to December can be attributed to the transfer of refugee status determination (RSD) to the camps. Fewer asylum seekers found themselves in Nairobi by September when UNHCR moved the RSD procedures to the camp level.

The main issues that refugees presented related to insecurity from agents of their home countries; delays in UNHCR security decisions and eligibility processes; police harassment; lack of social assistance in terms of food, medical shelter and education; and an increasing number of gender violence incidents. Legal representation was provided to refugees who were either held unlawfully at police stations or charged in court in contravention of international laws governing refugees. Lack of awareness among the judiciary often resulted in refugees being detained indefinitely by police or facing lengthy court procedures.

The Programme also provided other services in collaboration with partner humanitarian and human rights organizations. These partnerships enabled the Programme to refer refugees' requests for medical assistance, housing, food and education to others when presented at the Clinic. New partnerships were established with Uzima dispensary in Kahawa and St. John the Worker clinic in Kangemi, which have provided free or subsidized medical treatment to urgent cases upon referral by the Programme.

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The Women's Rights Awareness Programme (WRAP) and the Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW) were both extremely supportive of the Programme in 2003. On several occasions, refugee women at risk received emergency shelter and legal counsel from them.

The Programme expanded its activities in order to meet the needs of refugees. For example, in keeping with the new Government's commitment to uphold human rights and the rule of law, the Programme strengthened established links with local police stations serving communities where refugees reside. The response from the station commanding officers was very encouraging. For example in Riruta, there was a significant decrease in the number of cases of unlawful arrests of refugees and asylum seekers in the area.

## Networking

In jointly organizing the International Peace Day on September 21<sup>st</sup>, the Programme and its partners, Africa Peace Point (APP), Independent Medico Legal Unit (IMLU) and Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA) were able to raise the profile of refugee issues in civil society and among Kenyans in general.

## Challenges

- w The Clinic continued to grapple with the issue of available space and clients experienced longer waiting periods before being attended.
- w There was an increase in the number of social assistance cases requiring immediate attention. RCK's current referral database consists of organizations that provide assistance mainly to newly arrived asylum seekers, so that those with pending security cases could not always gain assistance. The Clinic's emergency social assistance fund was therefore stretched beyond capacity.

# Information / Research Programme

## Highlights of 2003

The Programme advocates for refugee protection through the timely dissemination of information on refugees. Its objectives are achieved through the media, by research through the production of publications on relevant topics, and by participating in forums dealing with refugee concerns. The Programme ensures the visibility of the organisation and refugee issues. It is responsible for producing RCK information materials such as the quarterly newsletter, *Refugee Insights*, booklets, reports and brochures. It is through the Programme that those interested in refugee issues are kept abreast of progress made, of the challenges that refugees face in Kenya and the region. It also helps to raise public awareness on the refugee situation.

The year 2003 heralded both hope and anxiety for refugees. The refugee situation in Kenya is receiving attention like never before through the print and electronic media. Taking advantage of this new approach the Programme has continued, with a measure of success, to champion the rights and welfare of refugees.

### Research

The Programme conducts and commissions research into specific refugee issues. The findings form the basis for policy recommendations and engagement in effective dialogue with the Government, religious bodies, stakeholders and civil society. This year a handbook was produced on Human Rights Gender training, as well as reports on small arms infiltration and the Refugee Bill. In addition, a number of booklets were published namely:

- w The Significance of 'ExCom' for Refugees in Africa
- w The Draft Refugee Bill 2003 – A summary and critique of the draft Refugee Bill
- w Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons – The plight of women and children in Africa
- w Refugee Advocacy – A voice of the voiceless

RCK also developed posters to enhance refugee rights awareness among Kenyans.

## Media Outreach

RCK has continued to maintain and enhance its presence in the media through broadcast interviews, letters to the editor, and feature articles sent to Kenyan dailies, as well as the international and regional press, and to NGO publications such as Human Rights Watch. Approximately 20 articles were written and published in the daily press as clarification or to provide information on specific refugee issues. At least five RCK events were covered in the media during the year, two of them were televised interviews coordinated by RCK and KTN, focusing on refugee issues. RCK also has a significant electronic presence, regularly exchanging articles and reports with external partners and engaging in electronic dialogue. These activities have served to raise greater awareness on the plight of refugees in the region and also highlighted the role of RCK as a refugee advocacy body and educated the public on key refugee concerns such as the need for a legal framework.

## Commemoration of International Events

RCK continued to commemorate international days and events by mobilizing civil society, local communities and refugees to participate. This has been a key method of creating awareness and advocating for refugee rights and humane refugee management in Kenya. In 2003 RCK organised celebrations for World Refugee

Day, International Women's Day, International Day of Peace and International Human Rights Day among other special days. In particular, the World Refugee Day celebrations were a big success, bringing together over 450 refugees in a celebration of their cultures, their common humanity and in remembrance of their countries of origin. The event provided the opportunity for refugees from different communities to interact with representatives of concerned organisations.

## Internal Computer Networking

The Programme is the organisation's Information Communication and Technology (ICT) focal point. In 2003, RCK improved internal communication by networking all the organisation's computers. This has allowed for more efficient sharing of information and has reduced costs by eliminating the need for printed correspondence within the programmes. An electronic diary was put in place to inform staff, quickly and efficiently, of office developments.

## Resource/Reference Library

RCK has a growing information centre that contains a broad collection of material on refugee issues. The library is open to refugees, researchers, working partners, policymakers and students. It has a large concentration of publications on refugee issues. The library was set up to provide information, research, periodicals, journals and educational materials pertaining to refugees that are easily accessible to all those interested in refugee issues. The centre is in the process of going digital, with all information being entered onto a computer database. The main aim of this exercise is to make the resource centre more efficient by allowing easier and faster access to information, as well as tracking and retrieving the various reports, newsletters and booklets available. The database will make it easier to identify gaps in the type and number of publications in RCK's possession.

## Challenges

- w There was a marked lack of concern for refugee issues and growing xenophobia around the country due to the alleged 'security threat' that refugees pose and which hindered objective coverage of refugee issues in the media.
- w Civil society also remained largely uninformed of the plight of refugees. This ignorance together with the currently depressed economy often resulted in intolerance and hostility toward refugees.
- w Although African cultures are renowned for their hospitality to visitors, this quality has worn thin with the growing influx of asylum seekers and is scarcely enjoyed by refugees.



## The Year Ahead

The year ahead will mark the genesis of RCK's implementation of the initial activities of its 2004-2006 Strategic Plan. The review process began at a workshop held in November 2003 to be finalised in the early part of 2004 when the strategic plan document is to be adopted as a blue print for RCK's activities for the next three years. During the workshop, RCK's vision and mission were reviewed, leading to a re-defining of RCK's vision, core values and strategy.

Among the many changes/improvements that the workshop identified were the streamlining of programmes, strengthening of the management, governance and administrative procedures.

In addition, RCK plans to

- w Focus on the legal and institutional reform to be undertaken by those government departments that interact with refugees, especially the police. Refugee rights training of the police force is key to a guarantee of refugee enjoyment of the basic human rights.
- w Carry out research on various issues that will inform advocacy work.
- w Build and enhance stronger links with other organisations and institutions for collaboration and referral purposes.
- w Increase awareness on upcoming policies and laws on refugees through civic education and outreach.
- w Develop capacity of staff to perform in a professional and empathetic manner to refugees through capacity building for staff, retreats, team building among others.

In addition, RCK hopes to strengthen its lobby and advocacy work in the near future.



## Conclusion

Overall, the year has been one of meaningful progress. RCK has continued to cultivate collaborative partnerships with a wide cross-section of organisations. This has led to a significant increase in joint initiatives undertaken with external stakeholders.

Through the Programme activities, the profile of refugees and the problems they face have been significantly raised at the local level during the year. For example, the participation of Members of Parliament in reviewing the Refugee Bill with RCK has led to a more informed parliamentary debate. In addition, the year saw refugee issues highlighted in both print and broadcast media.

Outreach missions carried out in the course of the year to examine and assess specific issues that refugees face have generated factual information that was used to produce publications and disseminated to create greater awareness of refugee issues. RCK continues to help sensitise law enforcement agents on the refugee's plight and to distinguish between asylum seekers, refugees and illegal immigrants. This has been achieved through regular visits to the police stations, as well as by holding meetings and discussions with these agents.

As indicated elsewhere in this report, RCK took advantage of the changing political climate with the new government and its more receptive approach to refugee issues. As a result, RCK was able to contribute significantly to the debate on the establishment of a legal framework to address refugee problems, making concrete recommendations to Parliament through the Parliamentary Committee on Administration of Justice and Legal Affairs. Also through a series of meetings, such as the meeting with the Vice-President, RCK was able to improve its relationship with the Ministry of Home Affairs, refugee section.

At the regional level, peace and reconciliation forums took a turn for the better and the peace process e.g. for Sudan and Somalia, hosted by the Kenya Government promised an end to the decade-long conflicts. This has rekindled the hopes of the Sudanese-Somali refugee communities living in Kenya that they could return to their homeland in the near future.

RCK's main agenda now is to ensure that refugee issues are included in Government planning as well as in civil society programmes; and to continue to advocate for the completion of the process of establishing a legal framework to improve the status of refugees, and for finalizing the process of creating a refugee department. In order to address the awareness gap among the local communities on the plight of refugees, RCK will focus on legal and human rights education for both refugees and local communities, on research initiatives for purposes of awareness raising and also to support advocacy work.

Financially, RCK will continue to strive to ensure a stable income base, as this still remains a major challenge.

# Financial





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