

THE STATUS AND RIGHTS OF REFUGEES

“We walked for days, for months, thousands of miles. We slept on the ground and often had to eat leaves to survive. People shot at us. Many boys were killed. What happened to my parents? I don’t know. But now we are here, to a new life. And I have seen snow for the first time.”- Quoted from one of the “Lost Boys of Sudan”, who resettled in the United States.

Source: www.unhcr.org

ACTIVITY: “Pack your bags”

Although it is impossible for those who have not been a refugee to fully comprehend what it is like, in this exercise students will attempt to put themselves, at least imaginatively, in their shoes. From this activity, students should understand that refugees are generally not able to plan their migration in advance; consequently they end up ill-prepared to face the incredibly difficult situations ahead of them.

Process

Facilitator tells students that they will be given two minutes to gather their belongings, whatever they choose, since they are being forced from their house and community, and will most likely not return. Students should be given those two minutes to brainstorm and write down what they should take. If possible or appropriate, in order to make the situation more realistic, distractions, such as making noise or turning off the lights can be applied. These distractions can either be addressed now or in the question period. Following, a discussion regarding the lists that have been created, and their content

Questions:

What did you take with you? Why?
Why did you think you would need these things?
Why were the lights turned off? And the noise?
Did you take identification/documentation with you? Why would you need this? If you did not bring this, how can you prove who you are?

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/south_asia/newsid_1832000/1832457.stm

<http://www.oneworld.org/guides/refugees/index.html>

Discussion questions:

- Who are the refugees in this case?
- Do the refugees have rights?
- Are other countries responsible for taking in refugees?
- Why would a host country *not* want to accept refugees? What would be the problem if the refugees were to be forced back to the country of origin? What human rights are at hand here?
- Why does the concept of refugees exist?
- How else are people classified when removed from their homes and community?
- If you were to generalize based upon the information in this article, how would you define the term “refugee”?

INFORMATION SHEETS:

A. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees

The process of developing a body of international law and conventions concerning refugees began in the early part of the 20th Century under the League of Nations (the predecessor of the United Nations). The process was completed in 1951 when a special U.N conference approved the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. As of 1952, when Denmark became the first state to ratify the Convention, 140 states have acceded to the Convention.

The 1951 Convention (with its subsequent 1967 Protocol, which removed geographical and temporal restrictions from the Convention) is the key legal document in setting the standards for the treatment of refugees. Influenced by the 1933 Refugee Convention and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1951 Convention provides a broad definition of refugees, allows refugees the freedom to practice religion and provide religious education to their children, access to courts, elementary education and public assistance. In the field of housing and jobs, the Convention states that a refugee should be treated at least as favorably as other nationals of a foreign country.

The Convention constitutes one of the most remarkable achievements in the long battle for realization of the ideal of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction, and has been recognized as a principle of international customary.

Source: United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees. For more information, you can access the UNHCR website at www.unhcr.org

B. Refugees are:

- People who have suffered human rights abuses and been forced to flee their homes.
- People who have crossed into another country to seek safety from persecution.
- People who if they return home would face possible death, torture or violence.
- People who would return home as soon as they could, but cannot because they fear for their lives.
- Normal people - men, women and children forced to take desperate measures to save their lives

Source: Amnesty International (Australia) Available URL: www.amnesty.org.au

LINKS:

Universal Declaration of Human Rights:	http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html
Project on internally displaced:	http://www.brookings.edu/fp/projects/idp/idp.htm
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees:	http://www.unhcr.org/
International Rescue Committee	http://www.intrescom.org/
US Committee for Refugees	http://www.refugees.org/
Refugees International	http://www.refintl.org/cgi-bin/ri/index
The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)	http://www.un.org/unrwa/
International Organization for Migration	http://www.iom.int/