

## **WORLD REFUGEE DAY – LGBTI VERSION**

Each year in [June 20<sup>th</sup>](#), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and countries civic groups in the U.S and around the world celebrate the “[World Refugee Day](#)” in order to draw the public’s attention of refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide who have been forced to flee their homes due to war, conflict and persecution. World Refugee Day promotes public awareness about who refugees are, why they are here and what they contribute and to build welcoming communities. This year, the LGBTI Caucus of the Refugee Congress will gather ahead of this worldwide celebration, on Thursday, June 18th, 2015 at Human Rights Campaign - Equity Center in Washington, D.C, refugees, asylees, asylum seekers, NGO’s, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and government agencies to network and encourage dialogue to find solutions to many challenges that the LGBTI refugees face in term of medical, educational, housing and employment issues.

### **Theme: “LGBTI Refugees and Asylum Seekers Struggle for Integration”**

Good efforts were made by the US government through the “Heartland Alliance Welcome Project” to better sensitize and educate refugee resettlement agencies on how to work with LGBTI clients. There has been broad consensus that was a successful endeavor. However, unlike other forced migrant populations, LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers in the U.S do not usually have the natural support of their ethnic community. Their compatriots may in fact remind them of the very people that they have fled from and fearful of. In their contacts with the members of their own ethnic community, LGBTI refugees may continue to feel compelled not to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity for fear of discrimination and persecution so as a mean to prevent the LGBTI refugees from isolation and helping them to receive appropriate assistance and guidance that will make their transition to life in the U.S more successful, the U.S government and American civil society should provide them with resources to create “DIALOGUE” with various local LGBTQ communities and American Human Organizations with an LGBTQ focus that have been actively speaking out against

the persecution of LGBTI people at the international level. Unfortunately, those organizations are at the same time “DISCONNECTED” or “UNAWARE” of some of those LGBTI people adversely affected abroad who are now in the U.S as refugees or asylum seekers.

### World Refugee Day – LGBTI Version

Venue: Human Rights Campaign – Equity Center

1640 Rhode Island, NW, Washington, D.C 20036

Time: 9:50 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

**Moderator:** Beni DeDieu Luzau, Refugee Congress Delegate for Maryland and Coordinator LGBTI Caucus of the Refugee Congress

### Agenda

9:30 a.m. – 9:50 a.m. Registration and breakfast

9:55 – 10:00 a.m. Welcoming remarks from Larry Yungk, Senior Resettlement Officer, UNHCR – Washington Office.

10:00 – 10:05 a.m. Message of hope from Omar Bah, Refugee Congress Delegate for Rhode Island.

10:05 – 10:15 a.m. Remarks from the Keynote Speaker, U.S Congressman Alan Lowenthal of California 47<sup>th</sup> district and Vice-Chair, Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus.

10:15-11:00 a.m. Session 1 “LGBTI Refugees and Asylum Seekers Struggle for Integration”

**Facilitator:** Lara Finkbeiner, Deputy Legal Director, Equal Justice Works Fellow, Iraqi Refugee Assistant Project.

### Panelists:

- Ali B, an LGBTI asylee from Sudan

- David Masengesho, an LGBTI asylum seeker from Rwanda
- Pati Hernandez, a transgender asylee from San Salvador
- O. Tomilin, an LGBTI asylum seeker from Russia

This session will give the opportunity to LGBTI refugees, asylees and asylum seekers to address challenges experienced during migration since restarting their lives in the U.S. They will share the type of programs and services that have best served their needs and will highlight recommendations for funding, government agencies and NGO's to elevate LGBTI protection in the forced migration context.

**11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Session 2: Understanding the federal government's role and responsibility in assisting LGBTI refugees and asylees in building a new life in the U.S. This includes:**

- Learning about federal integration on LGBTI issues and populations into mainstream programs and initiatives, such as the US Department of Health and Human Services' LGBTI Coordinating Committee, and opportunities to partner and better consider foreign-born, newly arriving LGBTI populations within these efforts.
- Considering the rights of the LGBTI persons in deciding where they may be resettled (this means that those government and NGO entities who do make such decisions bear a responsibility to ensure LGBTI refugees are located in areas appropriate to needs of LGBTI refugees.)
- Learning about the measures the federal government is taking for the protection of the asylum seekers in detention and ensures their access to appropriate medical care (the Department of Homeland Security is planning on introducing new policies for LGBTI people in detention).

**Facilitator:** Mark Bromley from the Council for Global Equality.

**Panelists:**

- Andrea S. McIntosh, the Acting Quality Assurance Branch Chief, Asylum Division, Department of Homeland Security.

- Nick Martin, Office of Intergovernmental and External Affairs, Department of Health and Human Services.
- Regina Waugh, Director for Human Rights and Gender/National Security Council Staff, the White House.
- Holly Herrera, Resettlement and Placement Program Officer with the Office of Admissions at the State Department, Bureau of Population, Refugee and Migration.

**12:00 – 1:00 p.m.** working lunch – Session 3: Eradicating indifference or ignorance about the particular need of LGBTI refugees, asylees and asylum seekers from resettlement agency staff or others who work with refugees on a regular basis. This session will focus on explaining how the available resources for the rights of LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers provided by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) through its technical support “Rainbow Heartland Alliance Project” were constantly used by the resettlement agencies in different locations. What kind of efforts have been put into place in permanently refreshing those training and rising awareness when dealing with sexual minorities refugees.

**Facilitator:** Essey Workie – Regional Administrator, Administration of Children and Families, Region III, U.S Department of Health and Human Services.

**Panelists:**

- Ann Flagg, Maryland State Refugee Coordinator and Director, Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees.
- Ken Tota, Deputy Director, Office of Refugee Resettlement, Administration of Children and Families, U.S Department of Health and Human Services.
- Rachel Levitan, HIAS Vice President for Global Programs, Strategy and Planning.
- Scott Rhodes, Resettlement Advisor, Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

**1:00 – 1:55 p.m.** Session 4: If better bridges between refugee resettlement agencies and local LGBTQ organizations are built, LGBTI refugees and asylum

seekers will be more likely to receive the appropriate assistance and guidance, and that they will be more successful in their transition to life in the U.S. This panel will focus on the responsibility of the refugee resettlement agencies to collaborate with the American LGBTQ Organizations that dispose of the expertise and many resources for the LGBTQ work at the local and international level and remind them (LGBTQ Organizations in the U.S, including LGBT community centers, LGBT friendly health clinics, and statewide advocacy group) of being sought out and leveraged to provide the kind of on-the-ground support that national political organizations cannot.

**Facilitator:** Annie Sovcik, Director, Center for Victims of Torture, Washington Office.

**Panelists:**

- Andrew Fuys, Associate Director for International Programs, Immigration and Refugee Program, Church World Service
- Jessica Lilley, Program Officer, Reception and Placement, US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
- Kylar Broadus, Senior Policy Counsel and Director of Transgender Civil Rights, National LGBTQ Task Force.
- Terry Abeles, Director of Refugee Resettlement, Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Service

**1:55 – 2:00 p.m.** Closing Remarks: Bob Carey, Director, Office of Refugee Resettlement, Administration of Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services.

RSVP before June 17 to: [rclgbticaucus@gmail.com](mailto:rclgbticaucus@gmail.com)

