



**NETWORK**   
**Connection**

PEOPLE LOBBYING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE • MARCH/APRIL 2008

**Iraqi Refugees:  
An Unfolding Crisis**

## dear members

We at NETWORK are convinced that this election year is about waking up the U.S. electorate. We know that we can no longer afford the luxury of treating elections like sporting events where we have winners, losers and cheering on both sides. We cannot afford to go back to sleep after the election until the next election cycle. The needs of our country and our world demand that we wake up and STAY awake after the election.

To this end, we are in the midst of preparing for the Convention for the Common Good, July 11–13, 2008, in Philadelphia. But almost more important is the preparation before the Convention, where we are urging all of our members around the country to have small conversations in order to create a Platform for the Common Good. Please go to our Web site to learn about the process and how to submit proposals for the Platform for the Common Good.

At the Convention, we will adopt the Platform, renew our spirits, and leave ready for the months and years ahead. We will be ready to do voter registration, education and turnout strategy. We will also prepare to get candidates at all levels to sign on to our Platform. Finally, we will begin the four-year process of holding our elected officials responsible for government for the common good.

I look forward to working with all of you in the months and years ahead. I hope to see a lot of you in Philadelphia. We can and will make a difference. The time is NOW!

*Simone Campbell, SSS*

## Convention for the Common Good

July 11–13, 2008  
Philadelphia, PA

Sheraton Philadelphia City Center Hotel



Join us in envisioning good government and building a Platform for the Common Good, as we reclaim government “of the people, by the people, for the people”...with liberty and justice for all.

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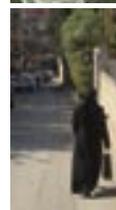
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# NETWORK

A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

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WEB SITE: [www.networklobby.org](http://www.networklobby.org)

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Cover artwork by Amir Ali Saadon of Baghdad. A member of the Iraqi Artists Assoc., he has exhibited his work in the Ukraine, Damascus and elsewhere.

NETWORK appreciates the generosity of the Iraqi artists whose work appears in this issue. We also thank UNHCR's Hussam Mukhtar, who contacted the artists and arranged for us to include their work.

Comments on this issue? Ideas for future issues of Connection? Let us hear from you!  
[connection@networklobby.org](mailto:connection@networklobby.org)



L–R: Iraqi youth choir in Damascus, Syria. Beirut and the Mediterranean Sea, Lebanon. Sign at the Lebanon–Syria border.

# Iraqi Refugees: An Unfolding Crisis

By SIMONE CAMPBELL, SSS

*EDITOR'S NOTE: On January 11, NETWORK Executive Director Simone Campbell, SSS, and Board Member Marie Lucey, OSF, traveled to Lebanon and Syria as part of a delegation sponsored by Catholic Relief Services (CRS). The purpose of their trip was to assess the situation of Iraqi refugees in the Middle East. They met with Iraqi refugees, Christian and Islamic leaders, representatives of religious and civil NGOs, U.S. diplomatic personnel, a Syrian Parliament Member, and UNHCR regional representatives. This issue of Connection provides information about their findings.*

I am haunted by the sound of the Iraqi youth choir in Damascus as I write. I hear the lovely (but mournful) song to Mary that they sang for our Catholic Relief Services (CRS) delegation of seven women religious, one laywoman and three CRS staff. It is this sound of youthful energy infused with hope that lifts my spirits. But it is also this sound that weighs me down, for it is the sound, too, of suffering and fear.

Join me in this account of our delegation's nine-day visit to Lebanon and Syria—a visit of heartbreak and healing, fear and fortitude.

## Background

The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there are between 2 and 2.5 million Iraqi refugees and an additional 2.2 million Iraqis internally displaced. This means that approximately one-fifth of the population of Iraq have been forced from their homes since 2002. It is like having 20% of the population of California displaced.

Where have they gone? Most of the refugees are found in the following countries: 1.5 million in Syria, 700,000 in Jordan, 50,000 in Lebanon and 150,000 in Egypt. In each country, this huge influx of frightened, traumatized people adds to significant domestic pressures in frag-



Painting by Fadia M. Yass of Baghdad, a member of the Iraqi Union for Artists and the Human Rights Society.

ile economies. Additionally, this Iraqi crisis has compounded the already grave problem of Palestinian refugees.

For more than 60 years, Arab countries have been host to Palestinian refugees who fled or were forced from the land that became Israel 60 years ago, or land taken by Israel in 1967. These long-term refugees live in camps in the neighboring host countries. Families have lived all of their lives in these camps, and many still have no national identity. It is estimated that direct descendants of the original

711,000 refugees now number 4.25 million people. You can imagine that this large displaced population stretches the resources of the host countries and the United Nations—along with the patience of the local populations.

More than two million Iraqi refugees fled terror and violence in their own country to enter this already difficult reality, underscoring the importance of settling the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, which further complicates the issue of peace in Iraq.

Another complication is that none of Iraq's neighbors has signed the 1951 International Convention on the Status of Refugees that set up UNHCR and established criteria for the treatment of refugees. This was because the large refugee population already present in these countries made them fearful

that they would be unable to measure up to expectations set out in the document. As a result, Iraq's neighbors have no legal obligation to recognize Iraqi refugees as a group for special consideration. It also means that the governments are not used to working with UNHCR.

With this scene set, let's go to Lebanon.

## Lebanon

The country known as Lebanon was established after World War I. In just 50 miles, its landscape changes from

COURTESY UNHCR



Delegation and local humanitarian workers with Bishop Abzy in Syria. Author is third from left.

Mediterranean beaches to snow-capped mountains topping more than 9,000 feet and back down to the Syrian border. We were told that it is twice the size of Delaware but has four times the population. Lebanon does not have oil, but it does have water. It observes Sunday rather than Friday as the weekly holiday.

Into this beautiful, bustling, and delicately-balanced nation, 50,000 Iraqis have fled. Lebanon is teetering on the brink of chaos yet again. A disastrous civil war (1975–1990), Syria's prior occupation of the Bekaa valley, Israel's prior occupation of southern Lebanon, and Hezbollah's current rise to power in the Palestinian refugee camps have all created a very precarious situation.

During our visit, Lebanon's presidential election was delayed for the fifth time. The Lebanese Parliament knows whom they want for president, but they cannot work out the other power-sharing arrangements. Their constitution says that the president must be Christian, the prime minister must be Sunni, and the parliament speaker must be Shia. This was a power-sharing distribution based on an earlier census, when the population was fairly equally divided into three parts. Since that time, the Christian population has decreased and the Shia population has dramatically increased.

Fifty thousand Iraqi refugees fled through Syria to Lebanon, often because they had family members already in Lebanon, some familiarity with Lebanon, or a desire to run as far away from Iraq as possible. What they encountered was a country that closed its borders to refugees. Just as with people coming to the U.S., some refugees paid smugglers to get them into Lebanon. Others got visitor visas and just stayed, or they slipped through the borders on their own. All of these refugees have no status in Lebanon and, unlike in the U.S., it is crime to be

### Small Change

Dropped from the counter of globalization in the midst of economic transactions, these human coins, illegal tender get swept up into the dust pan of national identity and border security.

These small coins of labor fall through the cracks of caring, ending up in dank dark pens—smaller than pennies in the global wealth, taken as too small to matter, mere annoyances or possible threat to a sovereign nation.

These small coins are tossed into cages of fifty, sixty jumbled together on the floor, in corners, along barred walls. They do not fit into ATMs. They will not be received for deposit in the world economy. They are spare change tossed on the counter of globalization—and forgotten.

—Simone Campbell, SSS



Peace dove features prominently in Iraqi child's drawing.

without status. So the refugees are terrified of being picked up by the police and sent to jail for the crime. We were told that their sentences can vary from one to 18 months and that most Iraqis receive the minimum sentence.

Once they finish their time in jail, these refugees are transferred to a facility for immigration processing. Let me tell you about the facility. First, let me say that General Harraki, who is in charge, told us right away that she and her whole staff want a different facility. They deplore the conditions and are trying to get a new place, but they have not been able to do so. In the meantime, they work with a non-governmental organization to improve conditions for the detainees and staff.

The facility was constructed under a freeway in downtown Beirut. It is completely without windows and built in a long narrow design to mirror the roadway above. Air-intake vents bring in polluted air from the freeway. There are 13 cages that hold the detainees. The cages contain no furniture, so people sit and sleep on mats on the floor. We were told that each cage was meant for 40 people, but there are currently 50 to 60 in a cage.

The women are grouped together by nationality and the men are organized alphabetically. We saw people from Sri Lanka, Pakistan,





L-R: Straight Street in Damascus (see Acts 9). Refugee couple. Damascus in the morning. Beirut street.

Somalia, the Philippines, Iraq and many more countries.

We were told that most people stay in this facility for two to three months while their deportation or voluntary departure is arranged. Iraqis have been refusing to return to their country, and instead have been choosing to stay in this underground facility. One Iraqi man has been there for more than a year.

Into this setting came the Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center—heroes to our whole delegation. Beginning in 2000, the Migrant Center began to work with the detention facility, the only NGO to do so. They improved conditions by bringing in a washer and dryer that allows the detainees to wash their clothes. They also provide round-the-clock access to social workers, health screenings, three hot meals a week, a library, etc. After we returned to the U.S., we received word that this marvelous organization has joined with UNHCR to negotiate with Lebanese security for the parole of Iraqi refugees and their families. After payment of a \$630 fine, they would be paroled into Lebanon in the custody of UNHCR for a period of six months.

They are still working out the details of this agreement, but hope to begin implementing it by March of this year. Catholic Relief Services is partnering with the Migrant Center to pay a portion of these fines in order to get as many people out as quickly as possible.

Leaving this heartbreak of a place, I realized that I came because of the Iraqi refugee crisis, but I met the reality of globalization. I have often argued that

immigration is not a domestic issue, but this brought me face to face with the stark reality of a world's population on the move. Not only must the Iraqi refugee crisis be considered in the context of the Palestinian issue, it also has the backdrop of global migration. Fortunately, it is set also in a context where people of good will work for the common good.

Najla Chahda and her staff of social

The first family we met included a mom and dad and their 10 children. In Kirkuk, they had run a liquor store, as many Christian families do in Iraq. They fled after their store was burned, the father was tortured by militia, and their lives were threatened by fundamentalist Muslims who said that alcohol was evil. They wonder if the real issue was that Christians were making a good middle-class living and others were jealous. When they fled, they took their life savings of about \$10,000 with them. They spent \$2000 to get to Syria and then \$4800 (\$400 each) to get smuggled into Lebanon to join the wife's sister and her family. They all live in a room of about 15 square feet with an alcove kitchen and bathroom, and they have spent their entire savings. Their older children work under the table and bring home a combined total of about \$800 a month for their family. They must pay \$270 per month for rent and utilities and \$10 per day just for bread for their family. Because of damage to his hands, the father trembles constantly and is unable to work. These Iraqis fear for their survival each day and dream of being relocated



Painting by Wadhah Mahdi of Baghdad, member of the Contemporary Visual Arts Association and Fine Art Association.

COURTESY UNHCR

workers and outreach workers at the Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center are such people of good will. They have developed a multi-service center that serves 1400 Iraqi refugee families by providing food, medical care, mental health services and much more. The seven social workers strive to respond to the variety of needs of the families.

We were privileged to meet several of these families.

to someplace safe.

Another Iraqi who haunts my memories is a 30-year-old new mother who has her masters in nuclear physics. She and her father were working in a small Iraqi company that helped rebuild a hospital in Iraq when they were threatened for working with a U.S. company. Her father was killed, and she fled to Lebanon where she joined her husband who had fled earlier. She clings now to



L-R: View from Dominican Convent in northern Lebanon. An Iraqi refugee mother and child in their temporary apartment. Street mural.

her new baby, whose name means flower. When she spoke of her ordeal, she closed all the doors and windows that were letting in the warming sunshine, sat in the middle of the bare room on the floor with us, and whispered of her terror. She and her husband live in fear of the Lebanese police, but also in fear of other Iraqis whom she believes might be following them. We did not know if this was a realistic fear or the residual effect of the trauma that she faced.

Through these families and others we met both in their homes and at the Migrant Center shelter, we learned of the terrible effects of violence. We learned that many people suffer with post-traumatic stress disorder and that we must learn quickly how to respond effectively. We learned of their precarious lives below the radar in Lebanon, and we heard families say they did not want to return to Iraq. We understood a small portion of their terror and trauma. Our hearts were broken in the four short days we spent with them—but we needed to move on.

## Syria

Halfway through our trip, we drove the 70 miles from Beirut to Damascus. We spoke of Paul's experience on the road to Damascus when he was blinded. I thought about how blind I am at times to the life of Christ around me. It also seems that our nation is blind to this crisis.

I realized quickly that I had been blinded by U.S. rhetoric to the more complex reality of Syria. It is a modern, secular country that fears religious extremism and dominance by western culture. Many women on the streets of Damascus wear the hijab and the modern Islamic covering for women. And yet the city has lingerie shops with display

windows showing the most revealing mannequins that I have ever seen.

We are told by our government that Syria sponsors terrorism. I don't know if that is true, but I do know that they have welcomed 1.5 million Iraqi refugees.

For four and a half years, the Syrians told Iraqi refugees that they did not have permission to accept salaried employment but that they could invest in business. So Iraqis lived on savings, money sent to them, or through black market jobs. This means that the majority of Iraqis are living on the edge of hunger and need every day.

when they had the resources to do so.

The government has said that children can attend the free public schools, but this has once again necessitated having double shifts in Syrian schools. The Syrians are working to find ways to accredit Iraqi teachers and physicians to help serve their population.

All of this is evidence of an open-hearted response by Syrians to their Iraqi brothers and sisters. But this generosity has come at a price. Syria's population has risen by eight percent in four years, while Damascus has grown from four million to more than five million people.

This caused rents to skyrocket and the cost of ordinary services to increase dramatically. In 2007, the government realized that this was not just the short-term problem that they had expected. In October, they began requiring visas to enter Syria from Iraq. Refugees can obtain these visas either in Baghdad or at the border. This policy has greatly slowed their entrance into Syria. It has also reduced the flow of traffic back and forth between the two countries, a phenomenon called "circular migration."

This reduction in circular migration causes hardships for families. I met several young people whose parents had sent them to Damascus to be safe while one or both parents

stayed in Iraq to earn money to support their children. One 18-year-old told me that she and her younger brother had been living with an uncle, but the uncle turned abusive when money became too tight to feed everyone. They moved out and are on their own, and they are unable to have visits with their parents. It is getting more difficult to get money from Baghdad to Damascus. She worries constantly about the safety of her family.

Another teen told us that she had



Painting by Amir Ali Saadon.

COURTESY UNHCR

In response to the need, ordinary Syrians took Iraqi families into their homes. They gave them small summer cottages in the hills outside of Damascus to live in. Taxi drivers often do not charge passengers who speak Arabic with an Iraqi accent. When I rode with three Iraqis to meet a refugee family, the driver did not want to take their money. They had to convince him that this time they had money provided by others and that, in justice, they wanted to pay for their trip

come with her father and disabled brother in order to provide care for him. Her mother and siblings are still in Iraq. They worry constantly about each other.

Yet another teen told us that her mother and siblings came to Damascus while their father worked in Iraq to earn enough money to support them. He finally sold everything and planned to join them just before Christmas. The day before he was to leave, he was killed. Now the mother is a widow and has no one to support her and the family. The 18-year-old son, who had wanted to stay with his dad, blames himself for not being there to protect his father.

There are 1.5 million stories, and Catholic organizations are working across faith lines to serve all they can.

The Good Shepherd Sisters are a wonderful example of the work being done. They have organized more than 70 Syrians of all faith to respond to the needs of the Iraqis. Working with UNHCR and other organizations, they have provided a neighborhood center where we heard the youth choir that haunts me to this moment, a shelter for women and children, a hotline for abused women, and emergency shelter, food and clothing for those who fled. These four marvelous Sisters (two Syrian and two Lebanese) are working with the other religious and laypeople to respond to what one man described as a “tsunami” of people. They are serving the most vulnerable and organizing the Iraqis to serve each other.

Iraqis have less fear in Syria because they do not worry about being picked up by the police, but the process of resettlement in a third country is difficult. UNHCR and the head of the U.S. Embassy told us that resettlement in the U.S. has been extremely slow. As of the end of January, the U.S. had only admitted 1,376 Iraqi refugees toward a promise of 12,000 admissions between October 1, 2007, and September 30, 2008. Delays are caused by a convoluted process and

## A Good Shepherd

Listen up my country—all you people puzzled or paralyzed. It is time to heed the cry, the call, the urgently stated desire of this Syrian Sister, this good shepherd to her people.

Listen up oh members of my government to the anguish of the people fleeing homes for their very lives. Listen up to this clear vision of my Syrian Sister, this good shepherd to Iraqis

Listen up all people in the United States. Listen up policy makers and generals, ordinary people and tycoons of economic dominance. Listen up to this good shepherd's searing call:

“We don't need any money.  
We don't need anything but peace!  
This war is a crime against humanity.”

—Simone Campbell, SSS

the incredibly slow pace of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) screenings. UNHCR let us know that they have referred more than enough refugees to the United States for resettlement. The head of our embassy said that the State Department had referred more than enough to DHS. But we met people interviewed by DHS months ago who have yet to hear about admission to the U.S.

## We Must Respond

There is so much more to say, but no space. I come back with a heart broken by what I saw. I come back with a spirit renewed through the witness of the Lebanese, Syrians and international teams working in myriad ways to meet the needs of people caught up in this



Iraqi refugee child's drawing. It reads, “Please Jesus, get my father and brother out of prison. Thanks for keeping them safe and sound for me. Amen.”

huge crisis. I come back weeping at what our country has done and all of the ways that we duck our responsibility to welcome the victims of this war. We must take action now. We cannot allow our comfort and complacency to keep us from living the Gospel. Let the scales fall from our eyes so we might see the suffering Christ in all of our brothers and sisters.

It is time that we heed the call of Sister Marie-Claude, who heads up the work of the Good Shepherd Sisters in Damascus. She pleaded with us to understand that the greatest need is for peace.

Simone Campbell, SSS, is NETWORK's Executive Director. She wrote the poems in this article while in Lebanon and Syria. Photos by Simone Campbell, SSS, Arlene Flaherty, OP, Laura Sheahen, and Sr. Clare Nolan.

L-R: Refugee housing in Beirut. Iraqi refugee children. Umayya Mosque in Damascus.



# Congress Acts On Economic Stimulus As Other Issues Also Demand Attention

By MARGE CLARK, BVM, CATHERINE PINKERTON, CSJ, JEAN SAMMON AND SIMONE CAMPBELL, SSS

This second session of the 110th Congress is particularly critical, as it leads into an election that will have consequences not just for our own nation, but for the world. We must pay special attention to both the presidential candidates and Members of Congress up for reelection in order to make educated decisions as we vote.

This year started off on a hopeful note as Congress and the administration came together to work on a bipartisan stimulus package, a refreshing change from the frustration and stalemate that characterized so many issues from the farm bill to the budget in 2007. This note has soured, however, since the release of the president's budget proposal. NETWORK hopes that our government will put partisan politics aside to work to address the needs of our most vulnerable in a turbulent economic time. With your help, we will continue our advocacy on these issues.

## Economic Stimulus

The president finally acknowledged an economic downturn and negotiated with House leadership to craft an economic stimulus package. The package takes small steps toward alleviating escalating economic pressures. It provides checks worth \$300 to \$600 for individuals (double for couples) in households earning more than \$3,000 per year, plus an additional \$300 for each dependent child. Rebates phase out for individuals earning \$75,000 or couples earning \$150,000 annually. Assistance is also provided to businesses, and the Senate included provisions to extend rebates to seniors and disabled veterans.



The stimulus package did not include some options that would have assisted the low-income people most vulnerable in a recession, including more funds for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), increased food stamps benefits, and increased unemployment insurance. It also omitted crucial aid to states, which are constitutionally required to balance their budgets. As tax revenues drop, states may be forced to cut Medicaid and Medicare to offset lost revenues. These stimuli may be included in a second economic stimulus package if the economy does not improve.

NETWORK will continue advocating for economic stimulus that assists those most vulnerable in a recession.

## Budget

The FY 2009 budget season began on February 4 when President Bush revealed his proposal. House and Senate budget committees now struggle to build a federal budget that will meet the varied needs of the nation. A bicameral resolution is expected by March 15.

NETWORK encourages Congress to create a budget built on justice, economic equity and compassion for those who struggle for economic survival. We also recognize the difficulty of achieving this in a year when the economy heads toward recession and the



housing market falters. Meanwhile, the president calls for even greater gifting of the wealthiest households and corporations through tax breaks, along with an increase in security spending by 8.2%. And he also proposes increasing domestic and other spending by only 0.3%, well below the rate of inflation.



## Housing

The National Affordable Housing Trust Fund (S. 2325) is gaining co-sponsors. If enacted, it will begin to meet the high demand for housing for people with the greatest economic need. NETWORK will continue to support this important legislation

## Child Support

In the last session, Congress was unsuccessful in restoring cuts made to Child Support Enforcement (CSE), which took effect in October. Many states provided stop-gap funding for the program, but will be unable to continue filling the federal funding gap in FY 2009. As a result, millions in private child support dollars will go uncollected, forcing single-parent families onto federal assistance programs.



The House Ways and Means committee has included restoration of CSE funding in their recommendations for the budget resolution. While the budget

Need up-to-date information about legislation in Congress? Check out NETWORK's Legislative Action Center at <http://capwiz.com/networklobby/issues/bills/>. ★ To learn what happened to legislation you followed in the past, go to <http://capwiz.com/networklobby/issues/votes/> and enter your zip code in the "Key Votes" field.

resolution is non-binding, this would draw attention to the crisis many states face and that many single-parents families will face if funding is not restored. NETWORK will continue to advocate for a full restoration of funding both in the budget resolution and in the appropriations process.

### Farm Bill

As of mid-February, committee chairmen in the House and Senate were still negotiating with each other and the Bush Administration to develop a compromise farm bill acceptable to all. A bill must be passed by a conference committee, then the full House and Senate, by March 15. NETWORK will have updated information about this and other issues on our Web site.

### Iraq

There are two opportunities for positive advocacy on Iraq. The first is through the budget. The president proposed a \$250-million dollar cut to the Migration and Refugee Assistance Account, principally in overseas services, with no real increase in the funding for resettlement of refugees in the United States. This is the exact opposite of what is needed. We need to increase our assistance to refugees, especially Iraqi refugees, and dramatically increase our resettlement of Iraqis in the U.S. Instead of funding cuts, these vital programs need more money. Over the coming months, we will have many opportunities to engage this issue.

On a policy level, the Friends Committee on National Legislation is promoting legislation that mandates an internal as well as regional international

peace conference in order to move toward stability in Iraq. We are looking for an opportunity to submit this legislation and help shape the administration's policy. In a "signing statement" with the 2008 Defense Authorization, the President stated that he did not think he was bound by the "no permanent bases" provision of the Act. This indicates that he is not likely to follow a directed peace effort. However, we believe that this is an important movement to begin in order to set a direction for the new administration.

### The Trade Agenda

Several trade agreements are awaiting congressional approval, including agreements with Panama, South Korea and Colombia. Each was negotiated by the administration through now-defunct fast-track authority and is therefore protected from any amendments or deletions of agreed-upon provisions. They await a simple up-or-down vote.

Congress indicates no movement toward consideration of any pending agreements but cannot avoid the intense administration focus on the Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Despite the president's call for its passage in the State of the Union Address, Congress is reluctant to consider it. Entering into an agreement calling for strict labor rights with a country where union organizers and workers are mutilated and murdered is difficult. The staunch opposition of the 10.5 million AFL-CIO members to any such agreement strengthens congressional resistance to action.

In May 2007, the House leadership reached an agreement with the administration intending to strengthen labor,



environmental and medicinal-access provisions in trade agreements. However, a number of Democratic freshmen, elected in districts negatively affected by current trade policies, were not satisfied with these minor changes to current U.S. trade policy, which was manifested when the House Democrats divided 109-116 over the Peru FTA in December.

The president is relentlessly pushing for a vote on the Colombia FTA, and may bypass congressional leadership to force a vote. In addition, the administration has been coordinating congressional delegations to pre-arranged sites in Colombia to influence their positions. But the Colombia FTA, like other agreement made under the current administration, is an offshoot of NAFTA. NAFTA is widely criticized by many legislators and U.S. workers. Since 1994, it has been responsible for the loss of highly-paid industrial jobs through outsourcing and has caused an influx of immigrants, particularly from Mexico.

NETWORK, in alliance with the Interfaith Working Group on International Trade and Investment, will continue our work for a new U.S. trade policy.

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*Marge Clark, BVM, and Catherine Pinkerton, CSJ, are NETWORK lobbyists. Simone Campbell, SSS, is NETWORK's Executive Director. Jean Sammon is NETWORK's Field Coordinator.*

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# Stranger in a New Land

BY VIVIAN MANNEH WITH LAURA SHEAHEN

**M**My family and I aren't refugees the way most Americans think of them; we never slept in tents or stood in line for soup. But like all refugees, we rarely felt secure about where we could call home. We're Palestinian, and because of that we understand what refugees confront every day as they try to build lives outside their home countries.

I'm now a program manager for Catholic Relief Services, which provides food, shelter, education and job opportunities to people uprooted by war and natural disasters. Over the years, I've seen a pattern in the realities that refugees across the world face.

## Lack of Legal Status

So often, refugees don't belong anywhere; no one will take them in as regular citizens. Even if they manage to start a life in a new country, they usually aren't allowed to have the permits or papers needed to be part of society. Imagine trying to register at a college without a driver's license, get a job without a birth certificate, or travel abroad to visit relatives without a passport. Refugees rarely have any ID that can help them accomplish simple human goals.

I'm relatively lucky in this regard. I'm a refugee myself; in 1948, when my dad was 13, he had to flee Haifa with his parents and siblings. They went to Jerusalem, and my dad starting working right away because his parents couldn't find jobs.

Growing up, my family and I had Jerusalem identity cards. If you didn't have a card, you couldn't enter Jerusalem without a permit. If you didn't pay taxes on the card, your identity might be taken from you.

After I finished high school, I was eventually able to get a regular Jordanian passport using my brother's address in Jordan. I'm more fortunate than most Palestinians.

In most of the world, even being born in a country doesn't guarantee that you're legally a citizen. Recently in Syria and Lebanon, I met Iraqi refugee

mothers who had just given birth. Their babies are just as homeless as they are when it comes to legal status.

Sometimes politics complicates the already complex world of immigrant status. I know some Palestinian refugees in Egypt; the parents fled in 1948 to Cairo. Their two sons, now grown, married Egyptian women, but their Egyptian wives cannot give their citizenship to their husbands or their children since their husbands are Palestinian. If their husbands had been any other nationality, they could have become Egyptian.

## Unemployment or Underemployment

Without ID cards or work permits, refugees usually have to take "shadow economy" work—bottom-of-the-barrel jobs with longer hours and lower pay than regular citizens. For example, Sudanese refugees in Egypt can often find work, but aren't paid at the same level as Egyptians. They also don't get health insurance and other benefits.



LAURA SHEAHEN



LAURA SHEAHEN

From top: Street in Beirut. Iraqi family in Damascus.

Right now, well-educated Iraqi refugees with skills and experience are sitting idle in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon because those countries won't allow them to work. There are people with master's degrees unable to pay rent or feed their families.

### Child Exploitation

In many refugee families, the parents can't find jobs, so they send their children out to work. In Syria, for example, refugee children sell gum on the streets or work as auto mechanics. Children don't know their rights and will work for less.

Refugee girls can be especially vulnerable to sex trafficking and prostitution. That's what's happening with many Iraqi teenagers in Syria right now; in some cases, the mother is desperate and encourages her daughter to "work" at a nightclub, for example.

### Lack of Healthcare

Many undocumented refugees either aren't allowed to use public health services that legal citizens can use, or will not to go to regular hospitals for fear of getting caught and deported. If they do use health services, they can end up spending huge amounts of the family's income, especially on chronic diseases like high blood pressure and diabetes.

### Lack of Education

Some host countries allow non-citizen children to attend public schools. But even when they do, other factors may keep refugee children from receiving an education. For example, Sudanese children from tribes like the Dinga know a dialect of Arabic, but not the dialect spoken in Egyptian schools. In Lebanon, Palestinian children aren't allowed in the public schools, which continues the cycle of poverty. Often, refugee children are a year or two behind. CRS provides what we call "informal," or catch-up, education tailored to refugee children.

### Prejudice

In Cairo, local Egyptian men make gorilla motions when they see Sudanese refugees on the street; they call them monkeys. Sometimes refugee children won't go to school because they're afraid of being teased about their ethnicity. And in certain Middle Eastern countries, refugees are more accepted if they're Sunni Muslim as opposed to Shia Muslim.



Laura Sheahen



Simone Campbell, SSS

From top: Iraqi refugee children in the Dominican Sisters Convent in Lebanon. Vivian Manneh (author).

### Broken Family Ties

People who flee their countries can be separated for years from their parents, siblings and even spouses. In many cases, one part of a family might be lucky enough to be accepted as immigrants in one country while other close family members are stuck in a transitional situation.

I met a 19-year-old girl in Damascus. Her parents were accepted by a European country, but since she and her brother are both over 18, they're still in Syria.

Another young Iraqi man, around 18, was threatened with being kidnapped. He and his mother, who is sick, left Iraq for Damascus. But his father is in Baghdad, working to support them. Refugees are already incredibly vulnerable, and being cut off from loved ones makes their lives that much harder.

### Trauma, Fear and Insecurity

People don't pick up and flee their countries without a good reason. Some refugees have witnessed horrible things. I visited an Iraqi refugee in Syria who has five children—the youngest is three, the oldest around 13. In July 2007, she and her family were traveling from Baghdad to Mosul. Their car was stopped and her husband was shot and killed on the spot in front of their children.

Many charities are trying to meet refugees' physical needs, like shelter

and food. But it's so important to address their psychological needs as well. CRS ran a trauma counseling service for Palestinian children in Gaza who had seen atrocities, and we fund programs like peer counseling and group sessions in Syria and Lebanon.

### Uncertainty About the Future

Probably the worst part of being a refugee is never knowing what's going to happen to you. Millions of refugees around the globe are waiting for another country—usually a rich one like Canada—to take them in. But the "resettlement" process, as it's called, can take years. And sometimes countries reject applicants. Refugees can be stuck indefinitely in a place they hoped would be temporary.

### What Americans Can Do

The problem of refugees won't stop until there is peace, employment and food in troubled countries like Iraq and Sudan. Preventing war and quickly responding to famine or disasters are key. Americans who have political influence in these areas, or financial resources, could contribute what they can.

Americans can also lobby the U.S. government to accept more immigrants, especially from war-torn nations, and to contribute money to United Nations programs that feed and educate refugees in other countries.

And finally, Americans can treat newcomers in their midst with compassion. Ask yourself: What would I do if I could no longer live in my home country? If your child's school is crowded or your taxes are higher because of undocumented immigrants in the U.S., just keep in mind what some immigrants suffer before they leave their homes. No one deserves to be a second-class citizen.

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*Vivian Manneh is Catholic Relief Services' Regional Program Manager for the Middle East. She runs programs that provide shelter, health services, education and legal assistance to refugees and domestic migrant workers. A Palestinian by birth, she has a Jordanian passport and lives in Cairo. Laura Sheahen is Regional Information Officer for CRS in the Middle East and Eastern Europe.*

# The Compassion and Service of Sisters in the Middle East

BY MARIE LUCEY, OSF

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The author was a member of the CRS delegation that traveled to Lebanon and Syria in January (see page 3).*

During our Middle East visit, we were both humbled by and proud of the work of women religious with Iraqi refugees, whom the Sisters see as brothers and sisters. With limited resources, but great compassion, dedication and skill, they respond to overwhelming human needs in partnership with organizations such as Caritas/CRS and UNHCR.

In Beirut, we met Sr. Maria Hanna, Dominican Iraqi superior, who sadly described the December bombing of the Dominican convent in Mosul. When asked what strategy there is for the 104 Dominican sisters in Iraq, Maria Hanna answered simply, "They will stay."

Part of the convent is an orphanage for 20 young girls, including four small Iraqis. The older girls performed a play they had prepared for our visit, while the smaller ones danced to a popular song. One of our delegation members, Dusty Farnan, OP, led all of us in the Hokey Pokey, a moment of fun in the midst of sad stories.

In Beirut, we also met Sr. Souhaila Bou Samra, Good Shepherd superior of the region, and a group of Good Shepherd sisters who work in six areas of Lebanon with women and girls in prisons, with African and Asian migrants, and, more recently, with Iraqi refugees.

In Damascus, we were in awe of the ministries of the Good Shepherd Sisters. In a visit to their Abrahamic Center, the Iraqi youth choir sang for us and several shared their painful experiences of loss and anxiety due to the violence unleashed in Iraq. Sisters Marie-Claude and Marie Therese have created a network of 50 volunteers to assist about 400 families. Marie Therese told us that she "kneels in front of every Iraqi because



ALL PHOTOS: CRS STAFF



*L-R: The author (left) talks with Sister Marie-Claude Naddaf, a Sister of the Good Shepherd in Damascus. Iraqi orphan girls perform a play. The author (far right) and former NETWORK Education Program Board Member Arlene Flaherty, OP, (center back) meet an Iraqi refugee family in Lebanon.*

of their suffering." We witnessed this suffering in our visits to families served by the Center.

We were accompanied by some of the volunteers, who have their own stories of loss and pain.

The Good Shepherd Sisters also run a women's shelter open to all abused women, the only such shelter in Syria. Recently, they opened a Listening Center that provides a hotline for women and is staffed by young volunteers. Much of this amazing work is headed by Sr. Marie-Claude Naddaf, a dynamo of compassion and energy who is highly revered by all we met, including Dr. Muhammad Al-Habash, president of the Islamic Studies Center. In February, she will be in Brussels to speak to the EU Parliament about the Iraqi refugee crisis.

Our Damascus visit also included a meeting with Sr. Antoinette Azur, director of the Lazarus Congregation (a branch of the Daughters of Charity). A Lebanese herself, Sr. Antoinette told us that the sisters are opening a shelter on the border between Syria and Lebanon. With funding from UNHCR, they have renovated their convent, a former summer camp, to serve as a shelter for 130-140 women and children newly arrived

from Iraq. They will be sheltered for up to six months and will be assisted by a professional team in dealing with trauma and provided help in finding housing.

Sr. Antoinette was also politically aware, asking us how we view our government's policies toward the Middle East, and if we support Hillary Clinton for president since men have "done such a terrible job"—and maybe a woman would do better!

In a letter to members of the delegation after our return, Sr. Marie-Claude, on behalf of the Good Shepherd Sisters, thanked us for our visit, stating: "For us, you were angels of mercy representing the nobility of humanity... Your visit was like a balsam spreading in this suffering East—the beautiful east which is searching for peace and justice. Together we can build and contribute for a new world that enjoys much more justice and much more love."

While we treasure these words with gratitude and humility, we know who the real "angels of mercy" are. We met them in Beirut and in Damascus.

*Marie Lucey, OSF, is Associate Director for Social Mission of the Leadership Council of Women Religious and a NETWORK Board Member.*



## Iraqi Refugees Deserve Our Help

- **More than 4 million Iraqis have left their homes.**
- **Among them, 2.2 million have fled to neighboring states, with the largest numbers in Syria (1.5 million people), Jordan (700,000 people), and Lebanon (50,000 people).**

—United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, February 2008

“The Church hears the suffering cry of all who are uprooted from their own land, of families forcefully separated, of those who, in the rapid changes of our day, are unable to find a stable home anywhere. She senses the anguish of those without rights, without any security, at the mercy of every kind of exploitation, and she supports them in their unhappiness. We are called to work so that every person’s dignity is respected, the immigrant is welcomed as a brother or sister, and all humanity forms a united family which knows how to appreciate with discernment the different cultures which comprise it.”

—Pope John Paul II Message for World Migration Day 2000

All over the world, people flee their homes due to warfare, economic strife, and religious and ethnic persecution. The war in Iraq continues to rage on and thousands live with no security, rights or stability—a situation that destroys families and throws them into a permanent cycle of poverty.

We cannot simply hear the cry of the millions displaced because of devastating war, unspeakable acts of genocide, and dehumanizing poverty. We **must** respond with action.

The plight of refugees calls for action by individuals, faith-based groups, non-governmental organizations, and our government. As the process of forming next year’s federal budget begins, we need to include the plight of refugees among our nation’s moral and political priorities.

**Contact your senators and representative to ask them to support increased funding for refugees programs.**

**You can reach them through the Capitol switchboard (202-224-3121) or NETWORK Web site ([www.networklobby.org](http://www.networklobby.org)).**

We encourage the reproduction and distribution of this back-to-back fact sheet.

“ Millions of Iraqis have fled their homes and are now living precariously either as refugees in neighboring countries or as internally displaced people (IDPs) inside Iraq itself. Many more want to flee but are trapped within Iraq, often in considerable danger and without adequate access to clean water, food, healthcare or education. These people need help now. ”

—International Rescue Committee, December 2007

## Refugee Services and the U.S. Federal Budget

The federal budget process for FY 2009 is already well underway. Now is the time for constituents to call their legislators and let their priorities be heard. If the message is strong enough, politicians will listen. Below you will find some suggested “proposal requests” regarding refugee legislation:

- Part of the Foreign Operations appropriations bill each year, the **Migration and Refugee Assistance Account (MRA)** funds overseas refugee assistance. This involves the protection of refugees and the provision of food, shelter, health services, and other vital assistance. MRA also provides funding for the processing of refugees for admission to the United States and initial resettlement expenses.

The president’s current budget proposal includes a \$250 million cut to the Migration and Refugee Assistance Account. The United States promised to admit 12,000 refugees in this fiscal year. We are not only alarmingly behind at this point, but even the State Department has affirmed that achieving the goal is doubtful.

Tell your legislators to support full funding of the Migration and Refugee Assistance Account.

- Another area of budget concern is the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** appeal for \$261 million for operations relating to Iraqi refugees in the region. In Syria alone, UNHCR has registered over 149, 972 Iraqi refugees, provided food assistance to over 43,600, and rehabilitated 100 schools. The services that UNHCR provides refugees are crucial and the funding that UNHCR receives from the United States is critical. We have a responsibility to meet the request, if not increase it.

If we hope for peace, we must build the foundation of possibility. And if we believe in the possibility of peace, then we should provide the resources for reality. We must increase assistance to the Iraqi refugees.

For more information please visit... <http://crs.org/public-policy/migration.cfm>  
<http://www.unhcr.org>

Also, to see a list of House members on the Appropriations Committee, please visit...  
<http://appropriations.house.gov/members110th.shtml>

*Compiled by Kathleen Byrne and Jon Gromek.*

**We encourage the reproduction and distribution of this back-to-back fact sheet.**



**NETWORK**—a Catholic leader in the global movement for justice and peace  
25 E Street NW, Suite 200 • Washington DC 20001  
202-347-9797 • [www.networklobby.org](http://www.networklobby.org)

# “In the face of escalating violence, escalate love”

BY SARA DWYER, ASC

Perfect love casts out fear. Without fear, peace. With peace, justice. With justice, right relationships. We know this.

But our media overly portray violence, disrespect and fear. Our culture frequently overwhelms us with images that threaten our deeply held longing for peace.

We must tell our own stories of peace and justice efforts to provide images of hope.

Creating justice begins in hearts able to hear and see the crying needs of our world. Then, out of love, the people act.

Two couples whose hearts motivated them to act are Jim and Kathy McGinnis (Institute for Peace and Justice), and Ken and Cindy Preston-Pile, who are with the Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service.

## **Institute for Peace and Justice**

Kathy and Jim McGinnis have been tireless promoters of peace. Their Institute for Peace and Justice, based in St. Louis, works for peace and for an end to war, especially with Iraq. They have created educational resources for families and groups that look at national security from a biblical perspective, which they contrast with government policies that focus primarily on military power.

The Institute created a “Pledge of Nonviolence” as a way for each of us to live as peacemakers—confronting “boulders of violence” with “pebbles of love.”

Kathy and Jim participate in local and national peace actions and encourage members across the

country to join them. They have helped organize visits to congressional offices, and they conduct an annual silent presence for peace in front of the White House.

One of the messages they share is a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King that “war is an enemy of the poor.” To spread his message of non-violence, they are helping to create a multi-artistic presentation (in dance, song and spoken word), performed by young people primarily for youthful audiences. They also have an e-resource, “Peace Pieces,”

and offer readers concrete action possibilities.

For more information about their work, see their Web site ([www.ipj-ppj.org](http://www.ipj-ppj.org)) or call 314-918-2630.

## **Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service**

Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service is a nationally-based nonprofit whose mission is to foster a peaceful world through nonviolent education, community-building and action.

They have seen increasing polarization between the left and right—in faith groups, political action, and even in movements for justice and peace. Political and religious leaders demonize others, and people working for justice demonize leaders. A key insight Pace e Bene explores in their training process is how nonviolent peacemaking works to transform “us vs. them” thinking and action.

Nonviolent peacemaking recognizes that everyone has a piece of the truth, and we each have some of the untruth. It also offers tools and strategies for peace, and it creates a dynamic to enhance what Mahatma Gandhi called the heart unit—the strengthening of relationships—or what Martin Luther King called the Beloved Community, especially between ourselves and our perceived enemies.

Ken Preston-Pile notes he had been searching for his passion and vocation for years. As he studied and practiced nonviolence, he became transformed. He says, “Nonviolent peacemaking has become the integrative force in my life, bringing together my personal and social life, my spirituality and politics.”

By promoting the truth that only when we focus on our inner spiritual journeys can we more effectively act for peace and justice, Pace e Bene helps explore the transformative power of nonviolent peacemaking. For more information about Pace e Bene nonviolence trainings and resources, contact Ken Preston-Pile, [kenpreston@paceebene.org](mailto:kenpreston@paceebene.org), or call 510-268-8765, or visit [www.paceebene.org](http://www.paceebene.org).

## **To Learn More**

These are just two examples of organizations that can help you make a difference. If you feel you need more information about Catholic Social Teaching as an underpinning of your justice work, the University of Notre Dame is offering an online course on CST starting March 24 for only \$99. If you would like to register and join a NETWORK study group, contact me at 202-347-9797, ext. 209 or [sdwyer@networklobby.org](mailto:sdwyer@networklobby.org).

You CAN make a difference!

Sara Dwyer, ASC, is NETWORK Education Program Coordinator.



Jim McGinnis witnessing in front of the White House

COURTESY JIM MCGINNIS

**March 9-10, Warren OH**

NETWORK's Executive Director, Simone Campbell, SSS will lead workshops on "Election and the Common Good" for parish members at Blessed Sacrament Parish.

**March 13-16, Detroit MI**

Simone Campbell, SSS, will give a presentation on civil law at Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) gathering of new leaders of religious congregations.

**March 29, Albany NY**

Simone Campbell, SSS, will facilitate workshop on "Immigration and Catholic Social Teaching," sponsored by the Sisters of Saint Joseph.

**April 1-2, Orange CA**

Simone Campbell, SSS, will facilitate a discussion on "Collaboration—Spirituality for the 21st Century," sponsored by LCWR at St. Joseph of Orange.

**April 4, Akron OH**

Simone Campbell, SSS, will present "The Budget as a Moral Document" to the First Friday Club of Greater Akron.

**April 8, Dubuque IA**

Simone Campbell, SSS, will present "Elections '08 and NETWORK's Issues," sponsored by LCWR from 7:00 to 9:00pm. This event is open to the public.

**April 9, Dubuque IA**

Simone Campbell, SSS, will facilitate a discussion on "Elections '08 and Our Values" for LCWR leadership.

**April 12, Minneapolis MN**

Simone Campbell, SSS, will present "Human Dignity at the Heart of Foreign Policy," sponsored by the Plymouth Center.

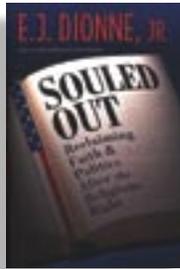
**April 22-23, Baltimore MD**

Simone Campbell, SSS, will facilitate a workshop on Election '08, the common good and globalization, sponsored by LCWR.

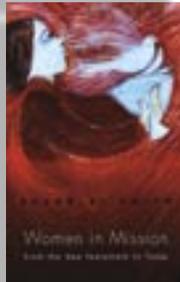
**April 26, Trenton NJ**

Simone Campbell, SSS, will be the keynote speaker and a workshop presenter at the Diocese of Trenton Charity and Justice Convocation entitled "Justice & Peace: Working the Vision" at Holy Innocents Parish. Her workshop is entitled "Economics and Social Justice 101."

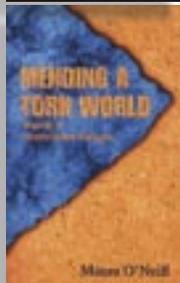
## NETWORK recommends



**Souled Out; Reclaiming Faith & Politics After the Religious Right** by E.J. Dionne, Jr., Princeton University Press. <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/8599.html>



**Women in Mission; From the New Testament to Today** by Susan E. Smith, Orbis Books. <http://www.maryknollmall.org/description.cfm?ISBN=978-1-57075-737-2>



**Mending a Torn World; Women in Interreligious Dialogue** by Maura O'Neill, Orbis Books. <http://www.maryknollmall.org/description.cfm?ISBN=978-1-57075-726-6>

## Making a Difference Throughout the Year

Supporting just policies is one of the good works we are called to do during this Easter season. Why not extend your generosity throughout the year by pledging a monthly donation to NETWORK? You can instruct NETWORK to make pre-authorized withdrawals from your bank account or pre-authorized charges to your credit card each month. It's easy to sign up—just fill out and return the envelope in the center of this magazine.

## Where There's a Will, There's a Way!



Making an enduring gift to a ministry you care about is a meaningful way to continue the generosity you have shown during your lifetime. "Planned gifts"—made through a will, trust, life insurance plan, retirement plan or by other means—help build the justice movement. To further NETWORK's mission, please consider making a lasting contribution that will support justice.

Without the support of people like you, NETWORK can't continue to be a leader in the movement for justice and peace.

For more information and a free booklet, *How to Make a Will That Works*, fill out the envelope in the center of this magazine, or email [hruz@networklobby.org](mailto:hruz@networklobby.org), or call Hanna Rutz at 202-347-9797 x217.

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A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

25 E Street NW, Suite 200  
Washington, DC, 20001  
PHONE 202-347-9797 FAX 202-347-9864  
[www.networklobby.org](http://www.networklobby.org)

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