The Rights of Refugees in a Globalizing World

David Hollenbach

Follow this and additional works at: http://ecommons.udayton.edu/uscc_marianist_award

Recommended Citation
http://ecommons.udayton.edu/uscc_marianist_award/1
The Rights of Refugees in a Globalizing World
THE RIGHTS OF REFUGEES IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

by David Hollenbach, S.J.

Marianist Award Lecture
2008
David Hollenbach, S.J. holds the University Chair in Human Rights and International Justice and is Director of the Center for Human Rights and International Justice at Boston College, where he teaches Christian social ethics. His research interests are in the foundations of Christian social ethics, especially human rights, the common good, and religion in political life.

He received a B.S. from St. Joseph's University, an M.A. in Philosophy from St. Louis University, and a Ph.D. in Religious Ethics from Yale University in 1975.


In 1990, he conducted the Winter School of Theology in six cities in Southern Africa. In 1996 he received a Fulbright Fellowship and was Visiting Professor of Social Ethics at Hekima College of The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya. He taught at Hekima College again in 2000, 2003 and 2006. He has also taught at the Jesuit Philosophy Institute in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and the East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila, Philippines.

In June, 1998, Hollenbach received the John Courtney Murray Award for outstanding contributions to theology from the Catholic Theological Society of America.
The following lecture was given at the University of Dayton on the occasion of the presentation of the 2008 Marianist Award to David Hollenbach, S.J., January 29, 2009.
I am deeply grateful to receive the Marianist Award from the University of Dayton. My great regard both for the ministries of the Marianist community and for the former recipients of this award make me truly proud and truly humbled to receive this honor. I am profoundly grateful to the Marianist community, to the award committee, and to your president Daniel Curran for selecting me to stand here this afternoon.

I would like to speak about the challenges raised in our globalizing world today by the plight of refugees and other people who have been forced from their homes. Globalization is a complex reality with a number of dimensions—economic, political, technological, cultural, and religious. One of the most dramatic manifestations of these global interconnections is the extraordinary movement of people across borders. Today there are about 200 million people living in countries where they are not citizens, many of whom have migrated in search of work that will provide a better life for themselves and their children.¹

1. The Situation of the Displaced

My concern today is with the people known as forced migrants, those who have been driven from their homes involuntarily. These include refugees, who are officially defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention as people who have had

Definition of a Refugee

1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

Article 1 Definition of the term “refugee”

For the purposes of the present Convention, the term “refugee” shall apply to any person who: . . . owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling . . . to return to it.
to flee their homes because of "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion"\textsuperscript{2} and who have crossed an international border. In many cases the source of this persecution is the government of their own country. Forced migrants also include people internally displaced within their own countries by war and conflict, human rights violations, natural and human-made disasters.

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Category of Forced Displacement} & \textbf{Total (in mil)} \\
\hline
Refugees under UNHCR mandate & 11.4 \\
Refugees under UNRWA mandate & 4.6 \\
\textbf{Total number of refugees} & \textbf{16.0} \\
Conflict-generated IDPs & 26.0 \\
Natural disaster IDPs & 25.0 \\
\textbf{Total number of IDPs} & \textbf{51.0} \\
Total refugees and IDPs & 67.0 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that at the end of 2007 there were a total of 67 million persons in the world who had been forcibly displaced from their homes. These include more than 16 million people...
who are refugees as officially defined by the *Convention*. It also includes 26 million people internally displaced within their own countries by war, and another 25 million displaced by natural disasters. In fact the estimate of 67 million is minimal, for it does not include people displaced by the effects of climate change or development projects, who number in the many millions.

Let me begin my reflections by telling you about several experiences I have had while teaching at Hekima College, the Jesuit School of Theology that is part of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Nairobi, Kenya. At Hekima I have seen the reality of forced migration in a number of places in Africa first hand.

You will not find Kakuma on most world maps. It is a small town in northwestern Kenya, in the desert where anthropologists hypothesize the human race began. About twenty years ago, the Kenyan government specified the Kakuma area as the place people fleeing the Sudan civil war should reside. Today it is one of Kenya’s designated refugee camps and the number of people living there has fluctuated around 100,000, depending on the rise and fall of armed strife in Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Burundi, countries the refugees have come from.

One of those living at Kakuma is Abebe Feyissa, who has contributed to the book *Refugee Rights*, which resulted from a conference sponsored in Nairobi by the BC Center for Human Rights and International Justice. Abebe is an Ethiopian refugee who has been living at Kakuma for over fifteen years. A camp is supposed to be a temporary refuge. It is not a humane place to live long-term. Drinkable water is scarce and tightly rationed. Disease can be rampant and health care often nonexistent. Children, including those born in a camp, receive little
or no education. The work that refugees create for themselves provides only the barest of livelihoods.

But Abebe Feyissa cannot go home, because his life would be in danger in Ethiopia. Nor can he move to a Kenyan city in pursuit of work, despite the Convention's declaration that refugees have the right to move freely in the country of asylum (art. 26). This is because UN refugee authorities see camps as necessary to providing care efficiently for large numbers of displaced people. It also stems from the Kenyan government's fear that if people like Abebe come to the city they will take jobs from indigenous citizens and add to the costs that weigh heavily on their very poor country. Long term displacement like Abebe's is increasingly the
norm. The average length of displacement for the world’s refugees is over 17 years. According to the latest statistics, some 5.2 million of the world’s refugees have been living in exile for more than five years.5
Those who are not confined to camps often end up as urban refugees in places like Kibera, which is located a very short walk from where I teach in Nairobi. Kibera is estimated to be the largest slum in Africa. It is believed that over one million people live there, within an area about 1.5 square miles, though it is impossible to get an accurate census. They have little or no access to basic necessities, such as clean water, sewage disposal, or electricity. The refugees in Kibera have a bit more freedom of mobility than those in Kakuma. But they are often poorer. Since they do not fall under the mandate of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees they rarely receive international support. This year, for the first time, the majority of the world’s refugees live in urban areas. This is due in part to the displacement of millions of Iraqis from their country to cities like Damascus and Amman. Many of these urban refugees are among the poorest of the poor.

Globalization takes on a distinctive appearance when viewed from the vantage point of a refugee camp like Kakuma or an urban refugee destination like Kibera. The involuntary movement of people across borders threatens the most basic requirements of human dignity, such as having a home, sustaining one’s family, moving freely, having some say in the political life that shapes one’s fate, and even surviving. In describing the conditions of his life for over a decade in Kakuma camp, Abebe Feyissa observed: “There is more than one way of dying.”

All this displacement raises both political and ethical challenges in our globalizing world. The human rights of millions of people displaced from and within countries like Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burma, and Colombia are clearly not being protected by their home countries: Securing their rights, therefore, calls us to regard them not as simply citizens of their home countries but as human beings who are members of the global human family. Forced migration thus raises what we could call the challenge of ethical globalization. It compels us
to look at the new ways our ethical responsibilities reach across borders, calling us to receive those who seek asylum among us or to take action to alleviate the causes that have driven so many people from their homes.

2. Normative Considerations Relevant to the Displaced

How, then, can we respond more effectively to the ethical challenges raised by forced migration? In seeking to answer this question, I will highlight a few key principles drawn from both Catholic social thought and on contemporary secular reflection as well.

The dignity of the person is the basis of the Catholic Church's assessment of the ways all institutions and policies, including those of nation states, affect and respond to displaced people. Catholic thought also affirms that human beings are fundamentally social, so the realization of their dignity as persons can occur only in society. People who are driven from their home societies as exiles, therefore, are harmed by that very fact.

US Catholic Bishops on Justice

- "Basic justice demands the establishment of minimum levels of participation in the life of the human community for all persons."

- "The ultimate injustice is for a person or group to be treated actively or abandoned passively as if they were nonmembers of the human race."


This suggests why the situation faced by displaced people is such a serious injustice. The US Catholic Bishops have affirmed that "Basic justice demands the establishment of minimum levels of participation in the life of the human community for all persons." Put negatively, "The ultimate injustice is for a person or group to be treated actively or abandoned passively as if they were nonmembers of the human race." Precisely because they have no community to call home, displaced people lack the community support needed to attain the minimal requirements of human dignity. In effect, they are being told that they simply do not count as human beings. Their exclusion has serious material and economic consequences
and it inflicts profound psychological and spiritual harms as well. Forced migra-
tion, by its very nature, is a denial of human rights.\textsuperscript{11} Displaced people are denied both the right to a homeland and the right to basic conditions of personal secu-
ritv. The marginalization refugees experience also undermines the common good. When millions of people are forced to live under plastic sheeting and to face the
dangers of cholera and other serious diseases, oftentimes for years on end, indi-
vidual countries and the global human community itself are gravely wounded.

3. Structural Challenges

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Pope John XXIII on Global Common Good}

\textit{Pacem in Terris} (1963), no. 135

"the shape and structure of political life in the
modern world, and the influence exercised by
public authority in all the nations of the world
are unequal to the task of promoting the
common good of all peoples."
\end{quote}

The injustices suffered by displaced people, therefore, imply that there is some-
thing seriously wrong with a system of global politics that fails to protect many
millions of people in the world today. In his 1963 letter \textit{Peace on Earth}, Pope
John XXIII argued that realities such as the acute suffering of refugees\textsuperscript{12} implies
that "the shape and structure of political life in the modern world . . . are unequal
to the task of promoting the common good of all peoples."\textsuperscript{13} The plight of the
displaced implies that we need to reexamine the presuppositions of our global
system.

In the first instance, states themselves are failing forcibly displaced people. Many
would never have become migrants were it not for the violent or threatening ac-
tions of their own government. In virtually all cases, the home states of refugees
and IDPs are failing to provide a minimum level of protection. And increasingly
today, other states that are in a position to assist refugees by providing asylum or
resettlement seek to avoid the responsibility to do so. In the face of these fail-
ures by states, interstate agencies like the UNHCR and various nongovernmental
organizations play increasingly important roles in coming to the assistance of
the displaced. But since these agencies are not in a position to prevent forced
migration, their indispensable response is often a reactive palliative for harms that
should not be inflicted on people in the first place. And sadly, these agencies have neither the political nor financial resources to respond to many of the basic needs of the displaced.

Responsibility to Protect

International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty

- State sovereignty implies responsibility, and the primary responsibility for the protection of its people lies with the state itself.
- Where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect.

The plight of forced migrants is one of the main reasons for the recent development of an approach to ethical and legal responsibilities across national borders known as the "responsibility to protect." The phrase "responsibility to protect" was the title of a 2001 report by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty established in the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda and the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia in the mid 1990s. The commission argued that a state has the primary responsibility to protect its own citizens and, if a state is unable or unwilling to do so, this responsibility moves to the international community. This stance was endorsed by the heads of state of most of the nations of the world at the 2005 World Summit Session of the UN General Assembly. Pope Benedict XVI also strongly affirmed it in his address to the United Nations in April, 2008.

The "responsibility to protect" is a form of ethical globalization—the recognition that our ethical duties reach across national borders when other people are in extreme need or when their fundamental human rights are being violated. This is in deep continuity with the idea that human rights set limits to national sovereignty.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, has recently argued that the responsibility to protect is relevant to the issue of forced migration. Guterres has called for a "new humanitarian-protection compact" that goes beyond protecting people from utterly disastrous abuses like genocide to protecting them from being forced from home for protracted periods. Pope Benedict’s intervention at the UN points in this direction as well.
Such a humanitarian protection compact will require rethinking global politics and law from the standpoint of human dignity and human rights. I want to suggest several directions such rethinking should take in light of the grave struggles faced by displaced people today. These proposals are drawn from the research conducted by our Center at Boston College.

Recommendations

1. Protecting the rights of refugees calls for sustained efforts to build peace where conflict has driven many millions from their homes.

2. Countries of the developed world have a moral responsibility to share the burdens of aiding the displaced.

First, the responsibility to protect calls for sustained efforts to build peace where conflict has killed many people and driven even more from their homes. This will require regional action by states neighboring those experiencing conflict, as well as support from more powerful countries of the developed world. Extremely poor Chad, for example, cannot carry the burden of absorbing all the refugees coming across its border from the Darfur region of neighboring Sudan. Nor is Chad capable of taking the political initiatives needed to stop the conflict causing the Darfur tragedy. Thus the responsibility to protect the refugees and to undertake serious peacemaking initiatives moves to the countries in the eastern Africa region and to us in the developed world as well. A peacemaking initiative of this sort produced real results in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Sudan in the north and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement in the south, which was facilitated by countries of eastern Africa, with strong assistance from the United States and some European countries. This agreement, like many in Africa, is fragile. But the shooting has mostly stopped and refugees have begun to return home. The agreement shows that powerful nations can make a significant difference when they address the causes of conflict and refugee displacement.

Second, rich countries of the developed world have a responsibility to share the burdens of aiding the displaced. The responsibility to help people in seri-
ous need is proportional to one's capability to help. For example, someone who cannot swim is not expected to come to the aid of a drowning child, while a good swimmer has a duty to help if this can be done without undue risk. In Africa, many countries near those producing large numbers of refugees lack the capability of protecting the displaced. So those with greater capacity have a greater responsibility. The duty to help Abebe Feyissa does not fall only on Kenyans though he is living in Kenya. Citizens of developed countries share this duty.

Such 'burden sharing' can call on the rich countries of the West to resettle some of the displaced by granting them asylum and eventually citizenship. For example, the United States has recently opened its doors to some Burundian refugees who have been in Tanzanian camps since way back in 1972 because they have little chance of returning home since their land has been occupied by others. This is a valuable initiative. But developed countries should also share the burden of preventing displacement through contributions to peacemaking and to lifting the economic burdens that are often deeper causes of displacement.

Recommendations (contd.)

3. Protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs) calls for an organized response by neighboring countries, regional organizations, and the United Nations.

4. The right to freedom of movement must be respected.

Third, protection of the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs) calls for an organized response by neighboring countries, regional organizations, and the United Nations. The plight of IDPs is a major challenge in Africa today, where nearly half the world's IDPs reside. In theory, the protection of the rights of these people is the responsibility of the government of their own country. In cases like that occurring in Darfur, however, it is the Sudanese government that has forced them to flee. In such cases, the international community has a duty to take action.

Such international action on behalf of IDPs should be preventative and not wait until conflict and grave human rights violations have begun. Nor should it
end when peace agreements have been signed. Despite the signing of the 2005 peace agreement regarding southern Sudan, for example, the needs of the millions seeking to return home will only be addressed by efforts to heal the wounds and bring reconciliation to that divided society. Neighboring states, regional organizations, and particularly church agencies can play crucial roles in making such reconciliation a reality.

In extreme cases where prevention fails, bodies like the African Union or the UN may have the duty to intervene to stop the gravest rights abuses, such as crimes against humanity or genocide. As a last resort, military force may be required. Moral responsibility can reach across borders in ways that override the sovereignty of a state even by force. In Kofi Annan's words, state sovereignty is "to protect individual human beings, not to protect those who abuse them."

**Fourth, respect for the right to freedom of movement by refugees is key to alleviating the dehumanizing experience of confinement to camps.** To be sure, camps can be necessary in responding to the needs of the displaced in the face of emergencies. But the extended restriction to camps known as "warehousing" undermines human dignity. Freedom of movement is not a "contingent right" that can be indefinitely abrogated. People should be confined to camps only when this is a necessary prerequisite for their protection, and confinement should be temporary and last only as long as is required to ensure protection.

Perhaps the biggest challenge to the human rights of displaced people is that the call to be "realistic" could cause us to give up on advocating change on behalf of refugees before we even start. Yet we should remember recent initiatives led by churches and other advocacy agencies that have successfully pressed for significant change in international politics: For example, The Jubilee 2000 Campaign called for reduction or cancellation of heavy debts owed by some of the world's poorest countries to international lending agencies. This campaign was energized by Pope John Paul II and the leaders of many other religious and secular communities. It had significant influence on the policies of the World Bank, the IMF, other international financial institutions, and the treasuries of the UK and the US. If advocacy on behalf of the displaced is well-organized, it can have real influence. We need both church-based and secular voices to be raised on behalf of refugees.

What will this look like? In the U.S, when we hear of the plight faced by refugees the response that most readily comes to mind is asylum. To be sure, we need a notably greater readiness to grant asylum than has been forthcoming in the U.S. in the post 9/11 era. For example, today there are over 2 million Iraqi refugees and 2.5 million internally displaced Iraqis, but only about 14 thousand of them have been resettled in the United States.18 But overall, when we consider
that there are nearly 70 million displaced people in the world today, asylum in the countries of the north is not a realistic solution to a problem of this magnitude. Rather, we need to address the problem through prevention of displacement and through systemic responses within the counties from which displacement is occurring. In other words, we need to address the deeper causes of all the displacement in our world today. We need also need to help create the political, economic, and cultural conditions that will enable these millions of people to return home or to find new homes. Keeping people in refugee-like situations for an average of 17 years will simply not do.

For example, another group of Burundians were driven to flee to Tanzania in 2006 because of famine in their home country. The continuing threat of hunger in Burundi, as well as the fragility of the peace agreement there, makes many of these Burundian refugees in Tanzania fear going home. Tanzania is a very poor country that can hardly be expected to bear the burden of protecting these people on its own. Thus the Burundians should be enabled to return home safely by alleviating the hunger in their home country. This calls on developed countries to provide development assistance within Burundi itself. It will also mean broadening the definition of who counts as a refugee to include not only those who flee persecution but also those forced from home by severe economic deprivation such as famine.

4. Sign of Hope: Public Opinion Can Make a Big Difference

Developing responses that deal with these deeper causes of displacement will only occur when global public opinion becomes much better informed about the suffering caused by the displacement crisis of today. Influencing global public opinion will be a long-term project, but it can be done. Consider, for example, how in just one generation public opinion has moved from near ignorance of the threats to the global environment to broad recognition that we face an ecological challenge requiring political, economic, and scientific responses. This change has occurred through the combined efforts of environmental advocacy groups, scientists, educators, churches, and political leaders. Similar changes are possible in the way we respond to the nearly 70 million displaced people on the globe today.

Engaged education and advocacy-oriented research will be key in the effort to shape public opinion on the displacement question. Here we can learn something important from the path followed by my Jesuit order in addressing the refugee question. The Jesuit Refugee Service was founded just over 25 years ago, and in this short time the refugee and migration issue has moved from a marginal Jesuit concern to one of the top five priorities for the ministries of the Jesuit order. How did this happen?
Well Informed Advocacy

- Build on Jesuit Refugee Service's three goals:
  - Accompaniment
  - Service
  - Advocacy
- Rooted in experience of *accompaniment* of the displaced
- Shaped by *rigorous intellectual investigation*
- Requires sustained dialogue between practitioners and scholars

The mission of JRS has three objectives: accompaniment, service, and advocacy. Accompaniment means being with the refugees on the ground, listening to their stories, showing them in action that they are not forgotten. Many refugees say this is the most important help they have received. It also has a deep impact on those who are listening, stimulating commitment to take action. So accompaniment leads to service, such as education for refugee children or providing safe havens for refugee women threatened with sexual violence, two of the services provided in JRS work. And such service in turn helps those doing the service see the need for well-informed advocacy to change the policies that cause displacement. Accompaniment, service and advocacy support each other and, in turn, lead to influence on public opinion.

For example, from accompanying refugees, JRS workers learned that many had been wounded by land mines. This led to JRS participation in the global campaign to abolish land mines. Through advocacy shaped by intellectually careful analysis, this campaign succeeded in having most of the countries of the world, sadly not including the U.S., ratify the global treaty abolishing land mines, a campaign that received the Nobel Peace Prize. The chances of advocacy being effective are thus increased when they emerge from the practical engagement called accompaniment. This has important implications for the kind of education and research that will help generate public response to displacement today.

Influence on public opinion calls for both educational initiatives and research projects that grow out of a blend of practice and intellectual analysis, in turn leading to advocacy that helps shape public opinion. We are seeking to take steps in this direction at my home institution of Boston College. The Jesuit social centers, universities, and pastoral activities around the world are in the very early stage of efforts to form a global network of cooperation that combines practice and analy-
sis to shape public opinion on refugee policy. This cooperation is itself a form of globalization in action.

These initiatives, of course, are but a small piece of the much larger effort that is needed to respond to the global crisis of forced migration. But I think such efforts to blend accompaniment, service, and advocacy point to the kinds of action that can have significant influence. They can help move us toward more effective response on many fronts—political, educational, economic, cultural, and church-based. I hope you agree they can contribute to alleviating the plight of forcibly displaced people in our globalizing world.
Endnotes


3 “Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,” Introduction, para. 1. This document was prepared by the Secretary-General’s Special Representative on IDPs for the United Nations and “taken note of” by the UN Human Rights Commission on 17 April, 1998. Available online at: http://www.reliefweb.int/ocha.ol/pub/idp_gp/idp.html (downloaded August 9, 2004).


9 Vatican Council II, Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), no. 25.


11 This is made explicit by the U.S. Bishops when they define human rights “the minimum conditions for life in community.” See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Economic Justice for All, at no. 79.

12 John XXIII, Pacem in Terris, no. 103.

13 John XXIII, Pacem in Terris, no. 135, in O'Brien and Shannon, eds., Catholic Social Thought.


THE MARIANIST AWARD

Each year the University of Dayton presents the Marianist Award to a Roman Catholic distinguished for achievement in scholarship and the intellectual life.

Established in 1950, the award was originally presented to individuals who made outstanding contributions to Mariology. In 1967, the concept for the award was broadened to honor those people who had made outstanding contributions to humanity. The award, as currently given, was reactivated in 1986.

The Marianist Award is named for the founding religious order of the University of Dayton, the Society of Mary (Marianists). The award carries with it a stipend of $5,000.
RECIPIENTS OF THE MARIANIST AWARD

1950 Juniper Carol, O.F.M.
1951 Daniel A. Lord, S.J.
1952 Patrick Peyton, C.S.C.
1953 Roger Brien
1954 Emil Neubert, S.M.
1955 Joseph A. Skelly
1956 Frank Duff
1957 John McShain
   Eugene F. Kennedy, Jr.
1958 Winifred A. Feely
1959 Bishop John F. Noll
1960 Eamon R. Carroll, O.Carm.
1961 Coley Taylor
1963 René Laurentin
1964 Philip C. Hoelle, S.M.
1965 Cyril O. Vollert, S.J.
1967 Eduardo Frei-Montalva
1986 John Tracy Ellis
1987 Rosemary Haughton
1988 Timothy O'Meara
1989 Walter J. Ong, S.J.
1990 Sidney Callahan
1992 Louis Dupré
1993 Monika Hellwig
1994 Philip Gleason
1995 J. Bryan Hehir
1996 Charles Taylor
1997 Gustavo Gutiérrez
1998 David W. Tracy
1999 Jill Ker Conway
2000 Marcia L. Colish
2001 Mary Ann Glendon
2002 Mary Douglas
2003 Margaret O’Brien Steinfels
   Peter Steinfels
2004 Cardinal Avery Dulles
2005 David J. O’Brien
2006 Cyprian Davis, O.S.B.