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From Other Shores

10.12.2012 | Culture and Society, Hot Topics, Campus and Community A conference at the University of Dayton will explore ways to help a growing influx of refugees from widely divergent areas of the globe better integrate into the Dayton community.

Speakers will include the U.S. liaison officer for the International Catholic Migration Commission and the executive director of the Migration and Refugee Services for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"Engaging Refugees, Building Community, Becoming Citizens: Refugees in a New Community," will be held 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday, Nov. 16, at the 1700 South Patterson Building at the University of Dayton.

The conference is a project of the Ethnic and Cultural Diversity Caucus, a program initiative of the National Conference for Community and Justice of Greater Dayton, and is jointly sponsored by NCCJ, the University of Dayton's human rights studies program, Wright State University, Miami University and Premier Health Partners. It is the third Miami Valley Forum on Immigration.

"NCCJ is delighted to see this important conference, which has been in the planning stages for almost a year, drawing widespread community support," said Mary Tyler, executive director of NCCJ. "The conference is the result of a two-year study conducted by NCCJ's Ethnic and Cultural Diversity Caucus among the refugee population in the Miami Valley that looked at broad areas of refugee life and offered strategic recommendations that cut across categories including language, housing, law enforcement, banking, and employment. We are grateful to our partners in this effort and the opportunity to support the work of the city of Dayton's Welcome Dayton program."

Theo Majka, University of Dayton sociology professor and part of the team that conducted the study, said that since 2006, Catholic Social Services alone has resettled nearly 1,000 refugees in the Dayton area, not including those granted political asylum and other refugees who first lived elsewhere and then moved to Dayton.

"In many ways, refugees face greater challenges than those who have immigrated voluntarily," he said. "In one or two weeks, they may find themselves going from a place like a refugee camp to a Midwestern city like Dayton. The journey from a rural environment in a developing country to a post-modern urban world can produce a variety of stressful circumstances that are often added to previous traumas experienced in their country of origin."

Jane E. Bloom, the U.S. liaison officer for the International Catholic Migration Commission, will deliver the keynote speech. She oversees the committee's work in the United States and leads policy and advocacy work on issues ranging from protection, resettlement and migration.

Johnny Young, the executive director of the office of Migration and Refugee Services for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops also will participate. Young is a retired career diplomat who served as U.S. ambassador to Sierra Leone, Togo, Bahrain and Slovenia, in three presidential administrations. The Office of Migration and Refugee Services promotes awareness of and collective responses to the plight of immigrants, refugee, trafficking victims and migrants.

The conference will support existing Dayton-area programs to ease the transition for refugees and immigrants, such as the city of Dayton's Welcome Dayton plan, an initiative to help the city become more inviting to immigrants to help grow jobs, businesses and population.

In the past six years, Catholic Social Services has worked with Sudanese, Burundian, Rwandan, Congolese, Iraqi, and Meskhetian (or Ahiska) Turks, an ethnic Turkish population originally from the Meskheta region of Georgia in the former Soviet Union. During the past two years, the social service agency has increasingly resettled refugees from Bhutan, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Cost of conference registration is \$25 and includes a box lunch. University of Dayton faculty, staff and students may attend free

of charge, but must register in advance. The number of participants is limited to 140. Continuing education units are available in the areas of education and social work.

For information on registration, email dquillen1@udayton.edu. For more information on the conference, visit <http://bit.ly/RnpPH7>.

For interviews, contact conference organizers: Jeanette Taylor at jtaylor@nccjgreaterdayton.org (url: <mailto:jtaylor@nccjgreaterdayton.org>) ; Theo Majka at tmajka1@udayton.edu (url: <mailto:tmajka1@udayton.edu>) ; Tom Wahlrab at tom.wahlrab@cityofdayton.org; Jacqueline Housel at houselja@muohio.edu (url: <mailto:houselja@muohio.edu>) ; or Cristina Redko at cristin.redko@wright.edu (url: <mailto:cristin.redko@wright.edu>) .