

**61st Annual UN DPI/NGO Conference
REAFFIRMING HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL
The Universal Declaration at 60**

Midday workshop
**'Protecting the human rights of migrants and their families to
promote development: challenges and strategies'**

UNESCO Headquarters, Paris
5th September 2008

Introduction

Mothers' Union is a Christian mission organisation with 3.6 million members across 78+ countries.

We are a **network of grassroots members** who are committed to supporting family life and marriage through Christian fellowship, voluntary projects and programmes, and through lobbying, advocacy and campaigning.

We are not a development agency, although some members carry out development activities – our members support families within their own local communities through a mixture of structured activities and informal support.

Mothers' Union is particularly committed to supporting human rights relating to family life, such as Articles 16 (rights to marriage and family) and 25 (protection of motherhood and childhood) of the Universal Declaration

I'm going to tell you about how Mothers' Union works to protect and support the human rights of migrants and their families in 4 countries: Sudan, Australia, Zimbabwe and the UK.

SUDAN – Internally Displaced People (IDPs)

Issues and Challenges:

- Civil war + seasonal migration + Food and water scarcity lead to:
 - internal displacement including MU members;
 - fragmentation of families – some family members remaining in Khartoum whilst others head South
 - disruption to education – children in particular are not learning to read or write their mother tongue, only Arabic and English.
- Presence of NGOs (esp. in Juba) leads to unintended consequences:
 - Pushing up living costs – money to spend.
 - Exacerbating poor health and sanitation - use of resources.
 - Affecting community cohesion – inter-tribe hostility where some groups appear to receive more support than others.

Mothers' Union strategies:

- Across Sudan (inc. Renk and Juba), members run literacy circles – participatory learning groups, teaching literacy and numeracy, facilitated by MU member trainers.
- Learners - internally displaced people, repatriated or returnee refugees. May also be MU members.
- As well as numeracy and literacy, literacy circles also focus on other development issues.

Empowerment / development:

- Literate learners mobilise community members into development groups to address specific local issues - HIV/AIDS, elder care, construction of schools and clinics; and more general issues e.g. gender and human rights.
- IDPs and their families benefiting from:
 - Improved family/ household relationships – communication has improved between men and women, men are more involved in caring responsibilities and women more involved in decision making.
 - Higher levels of health and hygiene including pre and post natal care.
 - Women learning of the importance of visiting healthcare centres / professionals.
 - Men reducing the number of sexual partners.
 - Greater acceptance of family planning methods.
 - Learning about business and income generation – parents can then support their families.

Following internal displacement, Mothers' Union members are supporting each other and members of their communities to gain

practical skills and strengthen family relationships.

Rights to family life and to education are protected.

MDGs re education, gender equality, maternal health and HIV/AIDS are supported.

AUSTRALIA – Sudanese refugees

Issues and challenges:

- Sudanese MU member refugees have migrated to Australia – Sydney, Victoria, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth.
- Migrants and families experience difficulties settling into a new culture.
- Some husbands have returned to Sudan, leaving mothers with children.
- Migrants have come from different tribes – still have a lack of trust between each other and tensions still exist.

Mothers' Union strategies:

- Sudanese members have started MU groups in Australia and linked up with existing Australian MU groups leading to a familiar structure, fellowship and support from local community.

Empowerment / development:

- South Australia - 30 Sudanese MU members from Bendigo visited Australian MU members for a weekend – learnt about each other's lives, cooked traditional foods etc.
- Sydney – Sudanese MU social/ welfare worker, Monica, working with Sudanese migrants, in particular wives, supporting them with:
 - housing
 - money management
 - debt prevention
 - learning to listen to their children
- Worker is supported by Australian member, Beverly who talks with her twice a week to support and encourage her. Beverly also speaks to the Sudanese groups with Monica translating.
- Sudanese members keep updated with situation and human rights issues in Sudan and raise money to send back home.

Network of self-support amongst migrants and their families in country of destination, plus support from members in the destination country.

Rights to family life and special care for motherhood and childhood protected.

ZIMBABWE AND THE UK – Zimbabwean migrants in the UK

Issues and challenges:

- Tensions have been especially high in Zimbabwe since 1999 – member told me that it's difficult to know who 'friends' and 'enemies' are.
- Young people are being drawn into the militia.
- Lost generation – 18-42 year olds - either sick or killed.

Mothers' Union strategies:

- 1000 MU members from Zimbabwe in UK, some drawn to the UK for employment opportunities have set up Churches and branches across the country.
- Provide practical and pastoral support to each other.

Empowerment/ development:

- A member told me: "Other people's families become your own" – members join together to support weddings and marriages of children of each other.
- Members provide particular support to husbands, who seem to find it more difficult to adapt to UK.
- Zimbabwean migrants are also agents for change - challenging human rights abuses, supporting communities back in Zimbabwe by sending containers of supplies including medicines, children's toys and bicycles, and donations from MU members in London. Passage and movement of MU in Zimbabwe is made easier - people know MU is not political, and young in militia have often had mothers who have been MU members.

Network of self-support amongst migrants and their families in country of destination, plus ongoing support being sent to families and communities in country of origin.

Duties to the community mentioned in the Declaration are honoured.

THE UK – migrants from across the world

Issues and challenges

- UNHCR estimated 299,700 refugees in UK – less than 2% of world's refugee population.
- Getting through asylum process is lengthy and difficult.
- Mixture of acceptance, integration, ghetto-isation, ignorance,

hostility towards and overestimation of refugee population within UK.

- Most migrants from India, Pakistan, Ireland, Poland and Germany.

Mothers' Union strategies

- Members run their own projects and work with other NGOs and Churches to support migrants and refugees and their families from mainly minority groups. Provide mixture of structured and informal support.
- Birmingham:
 - 'Restore' project for asylum seekers – MU members volunteer – awareness raising, responding to needs, advocacy, campaigning
 - Methodist Church – MU members volunteer to support refugees and their families – activities, crèche, English classes, befriending, collecting and donating clothes, household items etc
 - Drop-in at enforcement centre for refugees – MU members on rota to chat to visitors, run kitchen/ serve refreshments, accompanying refugees to centre
- Bradford:
 - Drop in for refugees and their families at local health centre – MU members asked by local health authority to run drop in. Members look after the children, chat to refugees, offer informal support, provide friendship
 - reduce isolation and marginalisation
- Halifax:
 - St Augustine's House – provides help for asylum seekers. Leader is MU member and members run toddler and parenting groups.

Mothers' Union serving refugees and migrants in their communities and working in partnership with other NGOs, government and civil society.

Rights to family life and participation in life of the community protected; the right to adequate standard of living is supported; duties to the community are honoured.

Working to fight poverty experienced by refugees

Conclusion

The values and structure of Mothers' Union empowers members to work across the world to support migrants / refugees / IDPs and their families – whether they themselves are migrants supporting one another; or whether supporting migrants new to their communities. Mothers' Union works with people of all faiths and none.

The informal care, friendship and fellowship that Mothers' Union offers is just as important as the structured, practical support members carry out - it supports the innate dignity and worth of people, and promotes spirit of brotherhood/sisterhood.

Although political actions are necessary to protect human rights, NGOs and civil society must also work together to protect and promote them by acting in the spirit of the declaration and taking seriously the duties towards community that we all have.