Across and Between Borders
The Refugee Experience and the Middle East

About half of the world’s refugees are generated by and/or hosted by the greater Middle East region. The status of Palestinian refugees worldwide continues to be at the heart of peace negotiations among Israel, Palestine, and their neighbors. Iraqi and Afghan refugees from the U.S. led wars in their home countries have sought refuge throughout the region and in the West. The Sudan not only generates significant numbers of international refugees, but it also hosts the world’s largest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Refugee issues in the Middle East are intertwined with the region’s most significant conflicts, yet remain on the fringes of most government policies.

Who is a refugee? While the simplest understanding of the term refugee might indicate a person seeking refuge (or safety), today’s official understanding of refugee status relies on guidelines set forth in the 1951 Geneva convention on the status of refugees (based on WWII displaced persons) and the 1967 protocol that followed, broadening the terminology to apply anywhere in the world. The UN asserts that a refugee is “a person who owing to a 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 avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

This definition has become a guideline around which individual governments have developed policies to grant or deny asylum and citizenship to refugees. It is crucial to note that while we might casually refer to a person who has fled their country out of fear for their safety as a refugee, one must literally apply (with all the paperwork and waiting it entails) to be officially considered a refugee. Indeed, the plight of a refugee anywhere in the world is plagued with matters related to official status and citizenship, threats of deportation, access to public services like education and healthcare, and legal employment.

The articles that follow aim to illuminate some of these daily struggles faced by refugees in the region, providing context and tools for navigating the complex world of international human rights law and its application in the Middle East and beyond.

Displaced in Amman
Seeking Refuge in Jordan,
Then and Now
By Greta Scharnweber
New York University

If you visit Jordan today, roughly half of the people you will meet are refugees. Jordan is home to nearly as many resettled Palestinian refugees as Jordanians. Indeed, the number of Palestinians in Jordan is equal to the population of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Recent wars involving Iraq and Gaza have created new waves of refugees to Jordan, particularly from Iraq.

Like most migrants, refugees that have come to Jordan mainly have settled in and near Amman, Jordan’s capital. About 2 million people currently live in the city, the vast majority of
Greetings from the fickle Northwest where spring days move with little forewarning from warm sunshine and celebration of flowers to heavy rain downpours and blustery wind. Facing the eternal promise of Spring can bring joy and surprise with each new day where I live.

In stark contrast, is the agonizing unpredictability that is the daily reality for refugees in and from the Middle East region. Countless people referred to as refugees may remain in this “status,” with little control over their own destiny, for years. In this issue, Perspectives editor Greta Scharnweber and other contributors have brought the plight of Middle Eastern refugees into focus through provocative background articles, specific examples of how this issue plays out and affects not only the refugees but various host countries in the region, and a comprehensive list of resources for teachers and students.

The role-play lesson plan should help students to see the range of refugee experiences as well as help to increase understanding of this complex issue on a human level. A resource I would add is the MEOC Award-winning book, A Little Piece of Ground by Elizabeth Laird, which shed light on relationships among Palestinian young people, some of whom were in refugee camps. We thank those who worked on this newsletter issue for assisting MEOC members in educating learners at all levels on this complex topic.

An exciting development for MEOC is a major revision of its website, with the new site to be unveiled within months. Those reviewing the new site have noted its attractive and easy-to-navigate design, relevance and timeliness of resources for teaching about the Middle East, links to websites of MEOC’s institutional members with event announcements and more resources, and a wide range of options for communication among those of us in the national MEOC network. Watch for an announcement on the MEOC listserv of the launching of the new website — coming soon!

Finally, start planning now to attend the Middle East Studies Association conference to be held in San Diego in November. The annual MEOC Teacher Workshop, on the theme of Iran and Iranian-Americans, will be held on Saturday, November 20. Details on our annual business meeting and Outreach Coordinators workshop will be sent through the MEOC listserv. Please join us at the time when MEOC members can connect and share resources and teaching strategies in person!

Best wishes to all in your endeavors to educate about and enhance understanding of the Middle East region.

Jean Campbell, MEOC President
WHERE ARE REFUGEES FROM?

• 8 million total, 4.7 million registered, Palestinians from Israel/OTs, 29% live in 58 camps
• 4.8 million from Iraq
• 3.6 million from Afghanistan
• 1.7 million from Sudan
• 1 million from Somalia

WHO CARES FOR REFUGEES?

• Palestinians (covered mostly by UNRWA)¹
• all others (Iraqis, Sudanese, Somali etc., mostly covered by UNHCR)²
• internally displaced persons – idps – displaced but in the same country (covered mostly by OCHA)³

CONSIDER THAT

• Jordan and Syria host over 2 million refugees from Iraq⁴
• 25% of all the refugees that the UNHCR oversees are from the Middle East North Africa region⁴
• 1/3 of all UNHCR refugees are in the Asia/Pacific region, 80% of these are Afghani
• Palestinian refugee communities in the Middle East region are over 60 years old⁵

U.N. REFUGEE AGENCIES

• Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - www.unhcr.org
  - international action for refugee protection and resolution
• UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) – www.un.org/unrwa
  - provides material assistance to Palestinian refugees (OTs, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria)
• Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) – www.ochaonline.un.org
  - provides relief for some idps/victims of conflict

which are refugees themselves or the children of refugees. Amman
was deemed one of the world’s cities most affected by refugee
influx in a 2010 study done on the state of the world’s cities by
UN/Habitat. From a rather small base, the modern city of Amman
swelled due to Palestinian resettlement in 1948 and 1967, further
growing over the past 20 years with refugees from the Iraq wars
and Israeli invasions of Lebanon and Gaza. Since 2003, at least
half a million new Iraqi refugees have flocked to Amman. This
fact of life in Amman places an enormous strain on the economic,
social, and physical infrastructure of the city.

As with most places in the world, the way that these different
groups of refugees are “handled” and categorized by the Jordanian
regime has varied due to a variety of social, political, and historical
factors. In short, not all refugees are created (or treated) equally.

Palestinians: From Citizens to Pawns
The vast majority of Jordan’s refugees are of Palestinian origin.
All but a small percentage (8%) of these refugees and their families
were granted Jordanian citizenship first with the annexation of
the West Bank in 1950, again following the six-day war in 1967,
and even extending to later waves of refugees. Refugees from
the Gaza Strip have not been granted this privilege. Regardless,
most Palestinians in Jordan have access to social services such as
education and healthcare. About 20% of Palestinians in Jordan live
in official refugee camps, and the rest live integrated with the other
residents of the city and the country. The word refugee camp is
misleading of course, as these “camps” are in some cases 60 years
old and the early tents were long ago replaced with permanent
dwellings. Today, life in a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan (or
in Lebanon or Syria) resembles that of a poverty-afflicted urban
neighborhood.

Services and support to Palestinian refugees and the administra-
tion of Palestinian refugee camps throughout the Middle East is
generally provided by UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works
Agency). UNRWA schools, healthcare organizations, and other
aid serves have supported Palestinian refugee families for 60
years. Even those Palestinians in Jordan that do not live in the
camps tend to be involved with or have come through the camps
at one time or another. Despite the wide acceptance of Palestin-
ians into the fabric of Jordanian society, these shared experiences
have created a strong sense of Palestinian solidarity. Advocacy
for the right of return remains a priority for even the children of
Palestinian refugees.
As citizens, Palestinians are allowed to work legally in Jordan. However, discrimination seems to be rampant, particularly in the government sector where Jordanians of Palestinian origin are significantly underrepresented. The regime is fearful of Palestinians becoming a clear majority in the country, which is, in their view, a threat to political stability.

As a result of this fear, the government has revoked or made temporary the citizenship of thousands of Palestinians granted citizenship in earlier years. The official goal of these actions is to thwart Israeli efforts to permanently resettle Palestinians in “the East Bank.” However, the individuals whose citizenship has been stripped tend to be politically active, and common understanding of the government’s actions is that these Palestinians are being punished for their political activism and perceived anti-Jordanian positioning. The affected Palestinians are effectively trapped inside Jordan, stateless individuals with no ability to migrate anywhere. In a sense, these Palestinians have become pawns in Jordan’s posturing with Israel and with its own population, at a high cost in human suffering.

Iraqis: The Silent Treatment

Since 2003, the new face of Jordan’s refugee crisis is Iraqi. 500,000-750,000 Iraqis have flocked to Amman, making one in four residents of Amman today an Iraqi refugee. This radical shift in the demographics of the city of Amman is undeniable. Yet the Jordanian regime has generally been turning a blind eye to the crisis. Human Rights Watch describes Jordanian policy towards Iraqi refugees as “The Silent Treatment.” To date, the existence of Iraqi refugees has hardly been acknowledged by the Jordanian government, referring to them as “visitors” or “immigrants.” Iraqis are more or less left to fend for themselves. The well-established presence of UNRWA in Jordan is not accessible to Iraqis, as their mandate covers only Palestinian refugees. The UN High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) has only granted a very tiny percentage of Iraqis in Jordan official refugee status. Meanwhile, human rights researchers consider most Iraqis in Jordan today to be “de facto” refugees.

Iraqis in Jordan are from Sunni, Shia, and other religious backgrounds, and are of widely varied economic classes. Refugees who arrived in 2003 tended to be affluent, and were welcomed as assets to the Jordanian economy. More recent groups have included lower and middle class families, and these groups have had a much harder time making ends meet. With no legal right to work, even the most educated must rely on informal sector labor to squeeze out a living that rarely meets the cost of living in the flooded and subsequently inflated Amman housing market. Healthcare is virtually inaccessible, and enrolling children in Jordanian schools (only allowed in 2007), comes with serious financial obstacles. Many children have lost years of education in their exile from Iraq, the effects of which will be long term. The standard of living overall tends to be extremely low, and many families share crowded living quarters.

The influx of Iraqi refugees to Jordan has slowed over the past year or so, and some families have moved on to Syria for lower cost of living or are beginning to return to a still unstable Iraq. Others are being resettled in Europe, Australia, and North America, including the United States. Many of the refugees are Iraqis who worked with the U.S. military as translators or other professionals who have been branded as traitors by other Iraqis. While those who are resettled permanently might be considered the “luckiest” of refugees, they still meet a whole host of challenges in the resettlement process. Learning a new language, usually starting over in lines of work that do not acknowledge any professional skills gained in Iraq, and adjusting to a whole new culture are just a few of the significant challenges that they will face as a resettled refugee.

While globally Jordan’s treatment of refugees is not particularly exemplary, it boasts the Middle East’s best track record given its accommodation of Palestinians and Iraqis who have found themselves settling in Amman for a variety of reasons. As we have seen, Jordan has, at the very least, exercised a non-policy of ignoring the large numbers of displaced persons living within its borders. This may not seem particularly welcoming, but if you are a refugee whose life is in danger, living “off the grid” may be the only choice.
Refugees in Cairo
By Paul Beran
Harvard University

Cairo is a hub of the Arab world. Its 20 million inhabitants are part of a vibrant political, social and economic capital for the region and the wider African and Asian worlds. From its strategic place in North–East Africa, Cairo serves as a connector of Africa and Asia to the Middle East and Europe. It is also a destination point for refugees that come from both areas.

A guide for learning about the situation of refugees in Cairo is the St. Andrew’s Refugee Services (www.standrewsrefugeeservices.org), with whom I was fortunate to spend time in April on our Egypt Forum program for teachers. Refugees are estimated to make up today between 100,000 to 250,000 people in Cairo. Most of these communities come from current conflicts in Iraq, Sudan and Somalia. Others, Palestinians from the 1948 and 1967 wars and before that Armenians from the 1915 genocide, are part of historic refugee communities that still reside in Cairo today.

Today’s refugees in Cairo are bound by a series of laws and procedures that afford them at best the right to not be returned to their country of origin and at worst leave them without rights and protection, including deportation. Refugees in the wider Middle East, including Cairo, are cared for and/or administered by three organizations and treaties and by the member states in which they land. The 1951 Convention on Refugees was signed by Egypt. This means that in theory Egypt is bound by a series of laws that enable refugees to seek safety and shelter from substantial fear of persecution related to race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion.

Two United Nations bodies care for the majority of refugees in the Middle East region and in Cairo. For Palestinians, a group of nearly 5 million registered refugees who live both in and outside of 58 official camps in the region, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA http://www.unrwa.org/) provides basic shelter and education support. For all other refugees, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR Middle East and North Africa section -- http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a02db416.html) is in charge.

Refugees fleeing persecution seek out Cairo for a number of reasons. Cairo is a large city that provides a greater chance for refugees to connect with fellow compatriots. Cairo hosts the UNHCR office in the region that can grant Yellow Cards (official refugee status) that protect the holder from non-voluntary return to their country of origin. Finally, Cairo is a central hub in the region and provides access and transit to other locations.

Upon arrival in Cairo, the routine for a fleeing refugee usually develops along a circuitous three-step route. 1. Arrival in Cairo by some means (walking across borders, airport, smuggled, perhaps trafficked). 2. Registering with the UNHCR to obtain a Yellow Card. 3. Seeking resettlement through the International Organization of Migration (http://www.iom.int/jahia/jsp/index.jsp) in potential hosting countries. This three step process may sound clear, but in reality it is rarely so. The majority of refugees in Cairo are not resettled. Instead they wait in a type of legal purgatory, in which they are unable to work legally or reside permanently. This limbo leaves refugee communities open to abuse and neglect.

Refugees in Cairo are re-settled if at all at the whim of the receiving country. In many cases this country is the US. Operative reasons for resettlement can be:

- The plight of refugee communities in the Middle East continues to be one of the region’s most crucial topics. Conveying the human story behind the staggering numbers can be a struggle for educators. Films and narrative memoirs can be particularly useful, and there are many interna-

- Women at risk
- Medical need
- Protection and security
- Family and Reunification
- Survivor of violence
- Elderly
- Minors
- No international prospects

...tional organizations working on behalf of refugees whose websites include a plethora of resources for teachers. The list that follows is a sample of recommended resources for background information and for the classroom.

- Family and Reunification
- Protection and security
- Medical need
- Women at risk
- Elderly
- Minors
- No international prospects

- FI LM RESO URC ES

There are several narrative works that speak to refugee communities from the Middle East region. One of the best is Man in the White Sharkskin Suit (2008) by Lucente Lagnado, which follows a Syrian (Aleppo)-Cairene Jewish family and particularly its patriarch as they are made refugee and flee to the US from Egypt in the early 1960s. Another is Edward Said’s memoir, Out of Place (2000), in which he talks about growing up in Cairo after his family was made refugee by the 1948 War in Israel-Palestine. What is the What by Dave Eggers (2007) tells the story of Valentino Achak Deng, a refugee from the Sudan who resettles in the United States and faces a myriad of adjustment challenges. Palestine(2001) by Joe Sacco is a journalistic comic book that paints in vivid detail the daily obstacles of ordinary life in the West Bank.

- RESOURCES ON REFUGEES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND BEYOND

M E M O I R S / NARRATIVES

There are several narrative works that speak to refugee communities from the Middle East region. One of the best is Man in the White Sharkskin Suit (2008) by Lucente Lagnado, which follows a Syrian (Aleppo)-Cairene Jewish family and particularly its patriarch as they are made refugee and flee to the US from Egypt in the early 1960s. Another is Edward Said’s memoir, Out of Place (2000), in which he talks about growing up in Cairo after his family was made refugee by the 1948 War in Israel-Palestine. What is the What by Dave Eggers (2007) tells the story of Valentino Achak Deng, a refugee from the Sudan who resettles in the United States and faces a myriad of adjustment challenges. Palestine(2001) by Joe Sacco is a journalistic comic book that paints in vivid detail the daily obstacles of ordinary life in the West Bank.

FILM RESOURCES

In this World, 2004. (part of the Sundance Series).

In This World is about the Silk Road in contemporary times. Instead of silk as a commodity of exchange and trade, human beings are the cargo of choice. Seeking a better life than in the refugee camps of northern Pakistan, two Afghan refugee boys (Enayat and Jamal) are offered the opportunity to be smuggled into the UK in the hope of securing a better life. The film follows the two boys through Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Italy, France and the UK. In This World is a full feature length production designed to resemble documentary footage. Some scenes to consider: Scene 1: Context and reason for being smuggled – until 5:00; Scene 3: Leaving family, possibly forever -- love, affection and a better life; Scene 7: Foreigners in Iran -- changes in landscapes; Scene 12: Being children in the mountains of Turkey; Scene 15: Near “success” working in Italy. (Available at the Harvard Outreach Library)
Iraq-The Lost Generation, 2008, Channel 4, a Hardcash Film Production

This documentary produced for Channel 4 television in the UK, is a series of vignettes into a variety of Iraqi refugee communities in Syria and Jordan. It focuses attention on telling the story of this massive amount of people, who due either to the political insecurity of where they lived in Iraq or because of the politicization of their identity meant it was no longer safe to remain in Iraq. Some scenes to consider: Scene 1:00 – 1:52 Iraqi refugees in Syria, overview; Scene 1:52– 6:01 Iraqi refugee seeking medical treatment from UNHCR in the West; Scene 6:01 – 12:06 Iraqi Christians in Syria; 16:10 – 20:58 Prostitution to survive; Scene 20:58 – 23:10 Syria as strained due to refugee community; Scene 25:28 – 31:02 Iraqi refugee children in Jordan at a special health clinic; Scene 31:18 – 34:30 a generation of traumatized children; Scene 42:54 – 48:56 loss of professional class.

We Loved Each Other So Much, 2004

This film portrays the relationship of diverse Beirut inhabitants for the singing diva Fairuz. Through the music, and the myths around Fairuz, they tell their life stories, and narrate the tragic, stirring history of their city. Some of the most telling are the interviews with Palestinian refugees in Beirut’s southern camps and also new economic refugees from Lebanon leaving Beirut for Canada.

Kandahar, 2001

In Persian and English, this film is set in Afghanistan. Kandahar’s main character is Nafas an Afghani - Canadian who is returning to Kandahar during the Taliban period of the late ’90’s to see her sister who has threatened to kill herself. The film is about her journey into Afghanistan and the refugee and Internally Displaced Communities she moves within to do so. Throughout, the movie uses the burka, a covering for women that reveals no physical appearance, as a continuing thread to discuss issues of religion, gender, sexuality, power and love. Some scenes to consider: Scene 2: Preparing to enter Afghanistan -- twin themes of burka and war; Scene 4: Religious text memorization -- religion as dogma; Scene 6: Visit to the doctor -- covering and uncovering; Scene 9: Real and imagined legs -- the impact of war.

God Grew Tired of Us, 2006 (www.godgrewtiredofus.com)

Winner of both the Grand Jury Prize and the Audience Award at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival. GOD GREW TIRED OF US explores the indomitable spirit of three “Lost Boys” from the Sudan who leave their homeland, triumph over seemingly insurmountable adversities and move to America, where they build active and fulfilling new lives but remain deeply committed to helping the friends and family they have left behind.

The Lost Boys of Sudan, 2003 (www.lostboysfilm.com)

Lost Boys of Sudan is a feature-length documentary that follows two Sudanesan refugees on an extraordinary journey from Africa to America. Orphaned as young boys in one of Africa’s cruellest civil wars, Peter Dut and Santino Chuor survived lion attacks and militia gunfire to reach a refugee camp in Kenya along with thousands of other children. From there, remarkably, they were chosen to come to America. Safe at last from physical danger and hunger, a world away from home, they find themselves confronted with the abundance and alienation of contemporary American suburbia.


A forthcoming documentary on the challenging lives of Iraqi Refugees living in Syria and Jordan. A useful trailer is found on the website.

PHOTOGRAPHIC RESOURCES

Lahtza (Glimpse): Zakira, (http://www.zakira.org/)

Zakira (memory in Arabic) is the brainchild of photojournalist Ramzi Haidar who developed the idea of teaching Palestinian refugee children in Lebanon photography skills in order to gain a glimpse of their daily realities in and outside of the camps. The results are published online and in a book as well as several traveling exhibitions.

Nothing Like My Home: The Iraqi Refugee Crisis (www.teachablemoment.org)

Nothing Like My Home, a collaborative project of Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility and photographer Lori Grinker, uses the arts and interactive classroom activities to engage young people and their communities in a vital issue: the plight of the 4.7 million Iraqis who have been forced to flee their homes because of war and violence.

UNRWA, (www.unrwa.org/)

UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) provides assistance, protection and advocacy for some 4.7 million registered Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the occupied Palestinian territory, pending a solution to their plight. Their website includes a photo archive and other fascinating insights into life as a Palestinian Refugee in the larger Middle East.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Learning to Give (learningtogive.org/lessons/unit189/lesson4.html)

Provides lessons on refugees in general, useful in providing an introduction to thinking about refugees, other kinds of migrants, and human rights.

Human Rights Watch, (www.hrw.org)

HRW is one of the world’s leading independent organizations dedicated to defending and protecting human rights. Their website includes numerous case studies and up-to-date information on various refugee crises worldwide.

UNHCR, (www.unhcr.org)

UNHCR, the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has country specific annual reports (use map on the right to navigate to specific countries) as well as a massive statistical archive.

USA for UNHCR also has some good lesson plans on Refugees, immigration and UNHCR, found at their teachers’ corner — there are great printable lego posters too (http://www.unrefugees.org/site/IIIQKS0wFqG/b.4803793/k.89B4/lesson_Plans.htm!)

Doctors Without Borders, (http://doctorswithoutborders.org/events/refugeecamp/resources/)

Provides some general refugee plans as well as online tours of refugee camps.

US Department of State, (www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrprt/2009/index.htm)

The US State Department publishes an annual report on human rights issues by country, which includes a section on the treatment of refugees.


Provides people in need with critical resources to assist them in becoming integrated members of American society.

Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, (www.state.gov/g/prm/index.htm)

This bureau provides aid and sustainable solutions for refugees, victims of conflict and stateless people around the world, through repatriation, local integration, and resettlement in the United States.

US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) (www.refugees.org/)

USCRI publishes an annual report called the World Refugee Survey, which can be viewed by country.

Forced Migration Online, (http://www.forcedmigration.org/)

Provides instant access to a wide variety of online resources dealing with the situation of forced migrants worldwide.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

If you look, you will find refugee resettlement assistance, whether government supported or volunteer, in your area. Such organizations are often open to service learning programs, helping teachers and students to learn about refugee resettlement, and of course, recruiting new volunteers! In NYC, for example, school-aged children could benefit from a visit to the following organizations: the NYU/Bellevue Hospital Program for Survivors of Torture, the NYU Center for Immigrant Health, and the Resettlement Office of the International Rescue Committee (IRC).
U.S. Refugee Policy and the Middle East
A Simulation Activity
By Joan Brodsky Schur

In this teaching activity students apply what they have learned about refugees in the Middle East to current U.S. policy about refugees from the region. Which refugee applicants from the Middle East deserve to win the right to enter the United States as refugees? Suggestions for how to set up the role-play appear at the end of the article.

United States Refugee Policy
Up until the early 1950s the United States did not have federal laws that specifically addressed the status of refugees (as opposed to immigrants in general). That changed only in the aftermath of World War II, which set in motion massive dislocations throughout many parts of the world, and a new understanding of the dimensions of the Holocaust. During World War II the vast majority of Jews and other refugees from Nazi Germany were turned away from American shores. After the war the United States Congress passed a series of acts that granted certain privileges to refugees, especially to those escaping from Communist regimes. During the Cold War era most Americans equated the term “refugee” with someone fleeing Cuba, the Soviet Union, or the People’s Republic of China. As the Vietnam War drew to a close in the mid-1970s, Congress passed laws that aided in the evacuation of more than 200,000 Vietnamese refugees, primarily those whose lives were in danger because they had worked for the U.S. government.

Finally Congress passed the U.S. Refugee Act of 1980, the most comprehensive piece U.S. of legislation regarding refugees. While the act has been amended and re-interpreted over time, the essential policy set forth in this document has remained intact three decades later. The act adopted the definition of “refugee” contained in the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol as:

Any person who is outside any country of such person’s nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

Our government aims to grant consideration for refugee status to at least 50% of all refugees referred by the UNHCR (the U.N. refugee agency) worldwide. The Refugee Act of 1980 set up a quota system that divides the total number of refugees permitted to enter the U.S. annually among five geographic regions, with an unallocated number of open spaces. Changes over time include varying quotas for each of these five regions, and more recently terrorism-related inadmissibility provisions.

Like other countries, U.S. policy must balance the imperative to rescue refugees while guarding against those who apply for refugee status as a pretense to enter the country, or those who pose a security threat to America if admitted. For 2010 the U.S. Department of State has placed its annual ceiling on refugees in the Near East/South Asia category at 35,000 and from Africa at 15,500 (out of a total of 80,000 spaces). This reflects huge increases for spaces allocated for near East/South Asia which pre-9/11 (2000) was only 8,000 a year, and in the last year of the Bush Presidency (2007) 5,500. Below is a summary of relevant pieces of the Proposed Refugee Admission for 2010; for the complete document go to (http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/129393.pdf). Successful applicants must provide evidence that:

1. They were impelled to leave their homeland
2. That if they returned they would face persecution greater than that of the general population
3. That they are not permanently settled elsewhere.

Current law also sets forth a system of priorities that apply to those seeking refugee status in the United States. These can summarized as follows:

- Priority 1 – Individual cases referred to the U.S. program by the UNHCR or other agencies.
- Priority 2 – Groups of cases deemed at especially high risk for persecution in their home countries. This category may apply in some cases to those still residing in the home country.
- Priority 3 – Individual cases from eligible nationalities who are seeking reunification with family members already in the United States. Eligible nationalities include Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan. Included in Priority 3 are:
  - Iraqis associated with the United States. These include employees of the U.S. government, a USG-funded contractor or grantee, and U.S. media and NGOs working in Iraq.
  - Iranian members of certain religious minorities are eligible for processing and benefit from a reduced evidentiary standard. These include Bahais, Sufis, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Christians.

Refugee Applicants to America
Saughar is a teacher who still resides in Iran. Her father is a factory owner whose factory was set on fire two years ago. Although there was no proof, Saughar believes that the fire was a case of arson meant to intimidate the family because they are members of the Bahai faith. In 1983 the government of Iran banned the religious practice of Bahais and labeled them as heretics. Recently President Ahmadinejad has accused the Bahais of being American spies and secret Zionists. Since his re-election in 2009 Saughar fears being arrested, or worse.

Ahmed is an Iraqi who worked in the oil industry for the United States Army in 2003 and 2004. This work made him the target of other Iraqis, especially those Sunni insurgents who were members of the now-deposed Baathist Party. After living in hiding in Iraq and fearing for his life, he fled his home with his family in 2007 and moved to an Egyptian refugee camp. Although Egyptians view the educated Iraqi elite positively, they still deny them many rights. Iraqi’s cannot attend Egyptian schools, but many of them like Ahmed have the money to send their children to private schools.

Fatima is a doctor who grew up in Baghdad. Her husband was killed in the wake of the internecine violence that erupted in Iraq after the U.S. invasion. While she lived in an area of Baghdad once deemed “safe” by U.S. authorities, by 2006 the increasing violence led her to resettle with her children in Amman, Jordan. Although Fatima could still work as a doctor in Baghdad, she is afraid to do so. She believes that she is entitled to live in the United States because of the suffering she has endured since the U.S. invasion.

Hassan grew up in Southern Sudan and was a teenager when his family fled the violence in his homeland and settled as refugees in Egypt. There he is faced with racial prejudice because his skin is much darker than most Egyptians. While technically eligible to work in Egypt, Egyptian laws and bureaucracy have made it virtually impossible for him and other Sudanese to get a work permit.
Hassan refuses to return to his violent and unstable homeland, and his attempts at getting a work permit in Egypt have been rejected three times, mainly on minor technical grounds.

Yussef has been living in the al Wahdad Palestinian refugee Camp in Amman, Jordan since 1967 when to save his life he fled his homeland in Gaza during the Six Day War with Israel. He has never been granted a Jordanian passport, but only temporary and renewable ones because he has the “right of return” to Palestine, a right no one expects he will be able to exercise in his lifetime. In Jordan he has no right to vote, own property, send his children to public schools, or receive Jordanian medical assistance. Instead he has received these services through UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency). Willing to forego his “right of return” and tired of being a “stateless person” he is seeking refugee status in the United States.

Myriam was born in Iraq to a Palestinian family who fled to Iraq during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. She grew up under the helping hand of the Iraqi Baathist regime; her family was allowed to work and receive the benefits of government services, including schooling. They were not, however, granted citizenship or the right to property. Nonetheless, other Iraqis (especially those of the oppressed Shi’a majority) resented families like hers. When the United States invaded Iraq in 2003 many of these Palestinian families were forced from their homes and feared for their lives. They were easily scapegoated -- branded as agitators who were out to subvert Iraq’s new regime. Reports of arrests, kidnappings, torture and death followed. Myriam fled Iraq in 2006, but was rejected from refugee camps in Jordan. She lives now in a border camp run by the UNHCR, who has recommended her for resettlement in the United States.

Hisham is an Iraqi who has an uncle residing in Detroit. Hisham owns a gas station outside of Baghdad and hoped to prosper after the 2003 U.S. invasion of his country. Instead he found that the supply of Iraqi gasoline was subverted by insurgents cutting gas pipelines. When his own gas station was bombed by the insurgency in 2007 he decided to leave Iraq and has since lived in a refugee camp in Amman, Jordan. His uncle has prospered in the American auto industry and would like Hisham to come join him.

Bakri grew up in a Sudanese family that was shattered when he was a young boy. His sister, like many young girls from the south, was raped and murdered in the conflict. His father disappeared but Bona and his mother escaped to Egypt as refugees. Grateful to be out of harm’s way, Bono discovered that refugees from the south of Sudan face daunting odds in Cairo. Although very bright and well-motivated, Bona is not allowed to attend Egyptian schools and his mother fears he will remain jobless. In 2009 Bona was informed that his father, with the help of the UNHCR, had resettled in America. He and his mother wish to join him there.

Amina fears for her life in Iraq because her husband was a well-known translator for American troops stationed in Iraq. In 2009 she was blown-up in a roadside bombing, and Amina believes this was no accident. Now her entire family feels under threat of reprisals against Sunni Muslims after the U.S. invasion. She is willing to work for the U.S government as a translator, but has received these services through UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency). Willing to forego her “right of return” and tired of being a “stateless person” she is seeking refugee status in the United States.

Khalid is a Sunni Iraqi who fled his homeland in 2006 in response to reprisals against Sunni Muslims after the U.S. invasion. He subsequently settled in Amman, Jordan, but his whereabouts much of the time has been undocumented. He has been reported to be in possession of large amounts of cash even though he has had no legal means of employment in Amman. There is reason to believe that he has associated with a variety of terrorist organizations under a variety of assumed names, but there is no incontrovertible evidence that this is in fact the case.

Role-Play

1. Assign one student to role-play each of the applicants described above. Assign two students to interview him or her, one role-playing an officer of the U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services, and the other an officer in the Department of Homeland Security.
2. After all applicants have been interviewed in front of the class tell students that only six of them may be admitted to the United States. On a worksheet ask students to explain their reasoning for their decision.
3. Finally hold a class discussion in which you ask students to reach a consensus on the fate of each applicant. How do they feel about the fate of each person?

Follow up

Using the resource list provided in Perspectives assign students to research the actual fate of similar refugees who have resettled in America. Where might they live? Work? What U.S. or non-governmental agencies might have helped them to relocate? Contact some of these agencies and invite refugees and/or the agencies who have helped them to speak to the class.
Council Member Updates: SPRING 2010

Alex Safos writes that Global Learning Across Borders (Global LAB) customizes 2-4 week cultural tours of Morocco for students or educators with a group minimum of 10 participants. Global LAB is also accepting applications for its fall 2010 Morocco semester program open to students aged 16-22—especially appealing to “gap/interim/bridge” year students taking time off between high school and college. This cultural immersion program will take place from mid-September to mid-December and include: Moroccan Arabic (“darja”) language instruction; home-stays; service-learning; cultural lectures and roundtables; trekking; and independent study projects. Fees, Marrakech, The High Atlas Mountains, The Tinerhir Oasis and Todra Gorge, The Sahara, Chefchaouen, Essaouira, Rabat, Asilah, Tangier, and Casablanca are among the diverse locales students will experience during this comprehensive Morocco survey before a week-long conclusion in Andalucia, Spain. For program details and an application, visit (www.global-lab.org). Candidates interested in Morocco semester leader positions should send a resume and cover letter to info@global-lab.org. Moroccan Arabic or French language proficiency, country knowledge, and prior experiential education with young adults are required.

Louisa Moffitt tells us that the Marist School in Atlanta, Georgia, hosted the 19th annual High School Model League of Arab States conference at the end of January. Over 260 students from the metro Atlanta area participated in the event. The keynote speaker was Dr. Michael Herb of the Georgia State University Middle East Outreach Program. The students were treated to a Middle Eastern luncheon on the second day of the conference, hosted by the Arab-American Women’s Society of Georgia, the Alif Institute, and the Marist Parents Club. Students chosen as Outstanding Delegates at this year’s conference were eligible to apply for a one-week summer internship at the National Council on US-Arab Relations in Washington, DC, during the summer of 2010. This internship is sponsored by the Alif Institute in Atlanta, Georgia.

Lisa Adeli writes that the University of Arizona Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES) will hold an intensive Middle Eastern Studies Summer Institute from July 9-16 with parallel programs for K-16 educators/pre-service teachers and for high school sophomores/juniors. Participants will have the opportunity to choose among a variety of sessions, both beginning and advanced, and will also have daily discussion sections about the pedagogical implications of the material. Since CMES received a grant from the Arizona Humanities Council, we will charge only a nominal fee: a $100 registration fee for teachers, $50 for students. That will include housing for out-of-town teachers and ALL students, some meals, and programs. Teachers may opt to receive 3 graduate credits IF they pay U of A tuition; students may similarly receive 3 undergraduate credits. Anyone paying tuition will be refunded their registration fee when they attend the institute. For more information/registration, see (http://cmes.arizona.edu/outreach/12.php) or email adeli@email.arizona.edu.

Joe Stanik, MEOC secretary, is the 12th-grade social studies instructor at New Era Academy High School, a public school in Baltimore, where he teaches AP European History and an elective course on the history of the Middle East. Since 2001, his students have participated in the National High School Model Arab League program, where they simulate the deliberations and actions of diplomats in the Arab world. This school year, his students represented the Kingdom of Bahrain. He also leads a monthly seminar on Muslim civilization for two Annapolis-area churches and teaches the history of the Middle East at Anne Arundel Community College (Arnold, MD). He plans to travel to the Middle East this summer.

SAGE (Studies Abroad for Global Education) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to changing lives through educational travel. They work directly with teachers to design an experience abroad that matches their curriculum and interests. Ride camel-back with your students in the Sahara Desert to meet with nomadic Berber traders. Stay with a family in their traditional “riad” home. SAGE’s extensive network of contacts in each location allows us to design custom itineraries and cultural immersion experiences that meet the unique needs of each individual group. SAGE offers custom school trips to destinations such as Morocco, South Africa, Cambodia, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, Peru, Chile and Argentina. In the United States, we offer educational trips to the Lakota as well as Navajo Nations. Now is the time to start planning for 2011 Group Travel! Contact us today for a brochure and more details: info@sageprogram.org.

Paul Beran writes that CMESOC at Harvard University assists K-12 educators teaching on topics related to the Middle East region and Islam/Muslim communities, and develops region related content for use on and off-campus. This year they have focused on classroom appropriate technology, using art to teach about religion and Hip Hop. One of the highlights of the 2009-2010 year was the hosting of a jointly sponsored (NYU, OSU) MEOC workshop during MESA outreach on human rights. A new work has been partnering with other NRCs on campus in workshops that combine technology training on free web tools (wikis, Voice Thread, blogs) with content specific information on a global area. Upcoming is a workshop on Hip Hop in East and West Africa and the Middle East region in partnership with the Outreach programs at the University of Illinois, UCLA and the Committee on African Studies at Harvard. This complements a series of performances by the Palestinian-Israeli Hip Hop group DAM, in which they performed in area Arabic programs. All program information is available at (http://cmes.hmdc.harvard.edu/outreach/news/).

Zeina Seikalys tells us that The Center for Contemporary Arab Studies and the National Resource Center on the Middle East, Georgetown University, again are offering the annual, one-week workshop for secondary school teachers, “Approaches to Teaching the Middle East”. It will be held June 28-July 2, 2010 at Georgetown University. This program offers a multidisciplinary approach to teaching about the countries of southwestern Asia and northern Africa. Through their respective disciplines, scholars and experts will explore topics in the history, geography, politics, religions, economics, sociology, anthropology, literature, culture, and arts of the Middle East. There are no fees to attend this workshop, and each teacher participant will receive $100 worth of resources, background information, and teaching materials. First-time attendees will be eligible to apply for three graduate credits from Georgetown for completing this program. This program is intended for DC area educators, though teachers from other parts of the country are welcome to apply. Note that housing is not provided. To apply, please contact Zeina Azam Seikalys, Director of Educational Outreach at CCAS: seikalz@georgetown.edu, or 202-687-6176. Deadline for application: May 17, 2010.

Cristin Hodgens writes that she recently completed a project related to the five week Fulbright-Hays study tour she took to Turkey last summer under the sponsorship of the Center for Middle Eastern North African Studies at University of Michigan. Professor Gottfried Hagan led the tour and advised her curriculum unit, which is titled “Nostalgia Across Nations: Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye, Istanbul’s Huzun, and the Legacy of Ataturk.” The main goal of this twelve day unit is for American literature students to understand nostalgia as a powerful, universal phenomenon: it is in The Catcher in the Rye, it is in their personal experiences, and it is a cornerstone of national consciousness for our Turkish contemporaries. Day by day lesson plans, handouts, and multimedia resources are included as students are guided through the essential question of “What is nostalgia, and how is it powerful?” She would love to chat with teachers interested in incorporating it into their work.

Jonathan Friedlander informs Perspectives readers that a collaborative of scholars, educators, and multi media specialists contributed to the making of Middle Eastern American Resources Online (MEARO)—a web portal designed to provide access to a variety of materials about Americans who trace their ancestry to the Middle East. MEARO offers currently a teaching module integrating the Middle Eastern
American experience into the coverage of U.S History and Geography and English Language Arts at the junior high school level; several videoocs illustrating Middle Eastern Americans lives past and present, and information about recently published academic and literary books on Middle Eastern Americans. MEARO is expanding its resource base and in the near future will be presenting teaching modules for elementary and high school level instruction; census data on Middle Eastern American groups; a listing of major collections of documents and primary sources available in libraries, museums, and archives; a directory of community organizations and ethnic news channels and media outlets; and materials focusing on the representation of Middle Eastern Americans in popular culture. For more content and information go to www.MEARO.org.

Amber Bloomquist from the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies at the University of Michigan informs us that Teaching Globally is a professional development workshop over three days (June 29-July 1) for middle and high school world history/geography teachers presented by the World History Initiative of the University of Michigan International Institute and School of Education. Building on specific case studies from around the world, the workshop will use the themes of movement, power and organization in the ancient world. The workshop will engage teachers on ways to use these themes to both compare and connect the various global cases presented by university faculty, and to build connections between the Middle School curriculum and the High School Foundations Unit covering the same eras. The workshop will not offer teachers ready-made curricula, but rather will provide educators access to primary documents and approaches with which they can fashion units to fit their classes’ specific needs. During the 2010-2011 school year, faculty and graduate students of the program in History and Social Science Education, led by Prof. Bob Bain, will follow up with teachers about how they are using these in the classroom.

Jean Campbell writes that the Middle East Studies Center, Portland State University, with the World Affairs Council of Oregon held an all-day Middle East Youth Forum for 240 Oregon middle and high school students and teachers. Strengthening the educational impact of the day, Middle and high school world history/geography teachers presented by the World History Initiative of the University of Michigan International Institute and School of Education. Building on specific case studies from around the world, the workshop will use the themes of movement, power and organization in the ancient world. The workshop will engage teachers on ways to use these themes to both compare and connect the various global cases presented by university faculty, and to build connections between the Middle School curriculum and the High School Foundations Unit covering the same eras. The workshop will not offer teachers ready-made curricula, but rather will provide educators access to primary documents and approaches with which they can fashion units to fit their classes’ specific needs. During the 2010-2011 school year, faculty and graduate students of the program in History and Social Science Education, led by Prof. Bob Bain, will follow up with teachers about how they are using these in the classroom.

Joan Brodky Schur tells us that the Bank Street College of Education ran a course in Morocco for American educators this spring entitled Cultural Explorations in Morocco: Implications for Educators in Multicultural Settings. Under Joan’s leadership, teachers traveled to Rabat and Fes where they studied with a variety of Moroccan scholars, visited schools in both cities, and met with officials in the Ministry of Education in Fes. This fall Joan presented a day-long workshop with Susan Douglass to teachers in Rockford, Illinois. She also contributed two lesson plans to the Indian Ocean in World History Website (http://www.indianoceanhistory.org), the first on the history of tea as a global commodity and on the second on Indian Ocean travelers from the Medieval Era.

Joan Litman (Music faculty, United Nations International School, New York City) continues to present workshops on Middle Eastern Songs in cultural context to music teachers trained in Western Music. The most recent presentations were held in Princeton, Chicago and Philadelphia, where her women’s choirs presented folk and traditional songs of Turkey, Lebanon, Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan. The goal is to present and teach Middle Eastern repertoire to American music teachers so that the beauty of Middle Eastern music can be enjoyed by students and represented on school concerts!

James Ryan of the Middle East Center at Penn tells us that he has been busy organizing a number of events for the coming year. We are very excited to announce the inauguration of our Artist in Residence Program that will get under way in the upcoming Academic Year (application information is forthcoming, check our website). This program, which will pair accomplished artists with faculty members at Penn for three month residencies will result in brave new works of art and scholarship as well as a number of new outreach tools for the community. We are also planning to continue our two very successful Teacher’s Workshop series, one with Camden County College and another with Global Education Motivators. The MEC is also strengthening it’s ties with the Philadelphia School District by contributing to it’s newly funded STARTALK program as well as collaborating with the UN Assoc. of Greater Philadelphia on it’s GEAR UP program. Many more exciting things are in the works -- for more info visit (http://sas.upenn.edu/mec).

Audrey Shabbas is continuing to do Teacher Workshops and is the ingredient for adding an “Islamic Art” component (fashioned after her organization’s curriculum, Doorways to Islamic Art, www.awaironline.org) to any program covering Middle East or Islamic cultures. She’s also currently doing “Timbuktu: Legacy of the Written Word” as both a Teacher Workshop and a brand new curriculum. She feels if her past work on Al-Andalus (A Medieval Banquet in the Alhambra Palace) found a place both as workshop and curriculum within “Middle East” Studies, why not the same kind of link to the southern edge of the Sahara and the lively commerce and intellectual life of Timbuktu? The curriculum centers around the one million medieval Arabic manuscripts in Mali, and is particularly important for descendants of the regions peoples - all of whom were part of the scholarly world of universities and libraries of the region - at least in aspiration if not fact - and were soon to be sold into slavery in the Americas. For African-American students in particular the questions “How do you take a literate society and make it illiterate?” and “How do you take a people who were at the apex of international trade (including books!) and turn them into a product to be traded?” are crucial in their understanding of their legacy. Contact Audrey by email: awair@igc.org

Barbara Petzen writes that with the successful launch of the TeachMideast.org site last fall under our belt, the Middle East Policy Council (MEPC) is now focusing on increasing content in the site, with new background essays, images, multimedia content, and lesson plans coming on line all the time. They are also now able to begin making available the video and audio content, including lectures, film, etc., from the original NITLE Arab Culture and Civilization site. Beyond TeachMideast.org, MEPC continues to offer free professional development institutes around the country with Education Director Barbara Petzen. Recent venues have included Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC; New York, NY; Boston, MA; and Denver, CO. Some of the most popular content requested in our recent workshops includes food cultures, the Palestinian-Israeli relationship, youth culture in the Middle East, new media and media literacy, gender, Islam and the other religious traditions of the region, Ottoman history, music and artistic traditions of the region, Middle Eastern film and literature, and more. Anyone interested in hosting a workshop can contact Barbara at bpetzen@mepec.org.

Greta Scharnweber of the Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies at New York University informs us that this year’s outreach program has covered a number of topics in its professional development program, including seminars on modern art from the Middle East, Kurdish history and culture, Iranian political participation, Arab immigration to NYC, Food and politics, interfaith relations in the medieval Muslim world, and a comparative workshop on coffee in the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa. Summer programs at NYU will include a multi-day course on The Politics of Water (July 27-29, 2010) as well as a three-day seminar on The Multi-layered Lives of Muslim Women of the Middle East and North Africa (August 9-11, 2010). For more details, contact Greta Scharnweber at gs113@nyu.edu.
Join the Middle East Outreach Council!

MEOC Enrollment Form

Check your desired membership:
__Individual membership ($10.00)*
__Institutional membership ($25.00)
__Corporate membership ($150.00)
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Name:
Institution:
Address:

Phone number:
Fax number:
Email Address:
For teachers enrolling at the joint MEOC-MESA rate:

Grade levels taught:
Subject areas taught:

Return this form with your check made out to the Middle East Outreach Council to:
MEOC
c/o Melinda McClimans
Office of International Affairs
321a Oxley Hall, 1712 Neil Ave.
Columbus, Ohio 43210-1219

*Individual members must pay by personal check; institutional checks will not be accepted for individual memberships

**This joint MEOC-MESA membership is available to K-12 classroom and community college teachers only. If you are enrolling as a joint MEOC-MESA member, you must provide your institution name as well as information on the grade levels and subject areas you teach.