



Cayman Islands Human Rights Commission

promoting, protecting and preserving human rights

Human Rights Commission's Statement on World Refugee Day 2016

Today, 20 June 2016 is World Refugee Day. First observed in 2001 on the 50th anniversary of the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the day seeks to recognise and raise awareness of the millions of refugees and displaced persons globally.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ("UNHCR") defines a refugee as: "someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries."

According to the UNHCR:

- some 59.5 million people across the world have been forced out of their home countries;
- of that 59.5 million, approximately 20 million are refugees;
- more than half of that 20 million are under the age of 18;
- there are about 10 million stateless persons globally;
- every day on average some 42,500 people are forced to leave their countries against their will.

In many cases such persons are denied a nationality in another country, resulting in violations of their basic human rights such as access to healthcare, education and freedom of movement. Locally, these rights are protected by the Cayman Islands Constitution, including s.16 (non-discrimination), which reads: "government shall not treat any person in a discriminatory manner...on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, age, mental or physical disability, property, birth or other status".

This year's UNHCR theme is #WithRefugees. It seeks to create a unified force of support for refugees across the globe. A petition will be delivered to the UN headquarters in New York today asking governments to ensure that every refugee child gets an education, every refugee family has somewhere safe to live and every refugee can work or learn new skills to make a positive contribution to their community.

The strength, courage and resilience of refugees is also being recognised in other areas. The 2016 Rio Olympics will, for the first time, debut an all refugee Olympic team made up of 10 athletes. Serving as a "symbol of hope for refugees worldwide" the six men and four women selected are originally from

South Sudan, Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia. Members of the all refugee team will compete in swimming, track and field, and judo.

"These refugees have no home, no team, no flag, no national anthem," International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said in a press release. The formation of the team is "a signal to the international community that refugees are our fellow human beings and are an enrichment to society".

Ends.