REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL

2015 ANNUAL REPORT

A powerful voice for lifesaving action
Our Mission

Refugees International (RI) advocates for lifesaving protection and assistance for displaced people and promotes solutions to displacement crises.

“THE SCOPE AND THE CARE OF YOUR ADVOCACY IS TRULY REMARKABLE. YOUR FIELDWORK ENSURES THAT WHEN YOU CALL FOR CHANGE, IT’S BECAUSE YOU’VE SEEN THE NEED FIRST-HAND. WHEN REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL PROPOSES NEW POLICY, IT’S SERIOUS, WELL-INFORMED, AND SPEAKS WITH URGENCY.”

– SENATOR CHRIS COONS OF DELAWARE, 2015 CONGRESSIONAL HONOREE, RI’S 36TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER

A woman awaits repair materials for her house in Trokhizbenka in eastern Ukraine.

Photo courtesy of Patrick Breslin for Refugees International.

Front cover: A displaced child at a camp in Baghdad province, Iraq.
Letter from the President and Board Chair

Dear Friends and Partners,

2015 was truly a year unlike any other. As the numbers of those displaced by conflict globally became impossible to ignore, the world was forced to pay attention. From across the Middle East, to the shores of Europe, unprecedented numbers of people fled their homes. In many of these cases, refugees were met with staunch stonewalling by governments. Walls were built, borders were closed, refugees were defamed. Dangerous and harmful rhetoric conflating refugees with terrorists became all too common. The need to speak out in defense of the displaced and find solutions to their plight became more important than ever. At Refugees International, the very core of our mission was tested. However, our message remained loud and clear: **THE RIGHTS OF DISPLACED PEOPLE MUST BE RECOGNIZED AND RESPECTED.**

We continued to shine a spotlight on long-running displacement crises: Syrian refugees, the long-persecuted Rohingya, and those affected by ongoing conflicts in South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Somalia. And as these crises continue, 2015 also saw the emergence of new displacement hotspots. Refugees International was the first organization to report on Burundi’s displacement crisis—both internal and external—and exposed the military recruitment of Burundian refugees from camps in Rwanda. We also traveled to El Salvador where RI’s reporting brought much-needed attention to the thousands internally displaced by the country’s deadly gang violence. We traveled to Ukraine, an invisible displacement crisis, where more than 1 million people have fled their homes due to the conflict in the east. And we were on the ground in Greece, as thousands of Syrian refugees arrived seeking what they hoped would be a better future.

Throughout 2015, Refugees International was there to raise the voices of the people at the center of these crises: the refugees and displaced people themselves. In this report, you’ll learn about the tremendous impact we made in their lives. We are so grateful to those who have continued to support us in these challenging times. But there is still much to be done. We are truly grateful for those who continue to believe in our mission and our work.

Sincerely,

Michel Gabaudan, President

Eileen Shields-West, Board Chair
What is advocacy and why is it important?

Organizations that provide assistance to refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) view Refugees International (RI) as an ally to make recommendations which they themselves are often not in a position to advance. This alliance ultimately strengthens humanitarian efforts. RI staff do not reside in the regions where we work so our recommendations, which may shed unfavorable light on local or national governments, are not tempered by concerns about the safety and security of our staff. We are an independent organization which does not accept any government or UN funding. This enables us to speak forcefully and candidly on behalf of the world’s millions of refugees and IDPs.

Our strategic advantage lies in a combination of our independence, as well as our small and nimble structure which provides the flexibility required to respond rapidly to displacement crises worldwide.

How Refugees International Works

 Refugees International (RI) travels to the affected area and meets with displaced people, aid workers, local officials and donor governments.

 RI travels back to headquarters and begins drafting a report that includes its findings on mission.

 RI presents its report with specific recommendations for policymakers at the UN and governments around the world.

 RI compels policymakers to help displaced people by: increasing financial assistance, enhancing operations and resources on the ground and influencing legislation.
“SOUTH SUDAN HAS BECOME A CONSTRAINTS-BASED RESPONSE, NOT A NEEDS-BASED RESPONSE.” – AID WORKER, JUBA, SOUTH SUDAN

Since 2013, South Sudan has been devastated by conflict as the government and opposition fight for territory and political control, often targeting civilians. When RI traveled to South Sudan in January 2015, around 2 million people had been forced from their homes including about 1.5 million internally displaced people (IDPs). The United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) was housing roughly 110,000 IDPs in temporary shelter on its six bases. Donors and aid organizations had mobilized to deliver significant amounts of aid but logistical and security challenges hampered the effectiveness of the response. UNMISS was also falling short of its mandate due to the presence of so many IDPs on its bases and its lack of resources. Upon return, RI met with donor government representatives and UN officials to push for improved coordination of the humanitarian response to refugees and IDPs and to urge UNMISS to prioritize the protection of civilians, including expanding its protection activities beyond its bases.

**IMPACT:** In March, RI was invited to present recommendations on how UN peacekeepers can protect civilians to a high-level independent panel of experts appointed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. The panel’s final report echoed RI’s input for accountability for peacekeepers who fail to protect despite the means and information to do so.

RI’s work on protection issues in countries where there are active peacekeeping missions directly feeds into the Partnership for Effective Peacekeeping (PEP). The PEP is a non-partisan coalition, co-chaired by RI, the Better World Campaign, and GlobalSolutions.org, and hosts regular events on strengthening UN peacekeeping. In July 2015, the PEP held a special briefing with Ms. Ameerah Haq, former UN Under-Secretary General for Field Support and former Vice Chair of the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations.
Syria Crisis:

In 2015, the Syrian civil war continued to devastate the country and displace millions of people in the region, with many continuing on to Europe. The conflict in Syria now accounts for roughly 20% of the record-high 60 million displaced worldwide by conflict or persecution. Since the start of the conflict in spring 2011, RI has conducted a dozen missions to the Middle East, witnessing the evolution of the situation of Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt, and northern Iraq. To build upon our work, in 2015 RI returned to the region to look at the needs of displaced Syrians in Turkey, Greece, and Jordan.

Turkey

In March, RI sent a team to Turkey to assess two separate issues. The first was the birth registration process for Syrian babies born in Turkey to refugee parents. RI found that the majority of Syrian newborns are at a heightened risk of statelessness. At the time, about 50,000 babies had been born to refugee parents and the huge majority of them were not being registered with either the Syrian or the Turkish government. This was creating a situation in which the unregistered children would potentially be stateless and, thus, barred from entering Syria when they return home.

The second focus in Turkey was the support international donors and the UN were providing for local Syrian humanitarian organizations working from neighboring countries to supply most of the aid in Syria. There has long been acknowledgement that these groups are essential to the humanitarian response. However, it has been difficult to secure funding for them because most were newly established, and it has been unclear whether the international groups that supported them at the start were preparing them to work independently. RI continued to examine the growth and capacity of these groups and supported their inclusion in international humanitarian initiatives to help them operate independently.

**IMPACT:** RI’s recommendations on addressing the issue were welcomed by the Turkish government and have been incorporated into services provided to Syrian refugees in the country. Furthermore, there was a substantial increase in worldwide attention on birth registration issues for Syrian refugees.

**IMPACT:** Since RI’s mission in Turkey in 2013, RI had been pressing the U.S. government to fund a significant capacity-building initiative specifically for expanding the capacity of local Syrian aid groups. In late 2015, the U.S. allocated $10 million to this initiative. This entirely new fund was established in response to RI’s consistent advocacy to empower local Syrian groups.

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Senior Advocate Daryl Grisgraber appeared on PBS NewsHour in January and April to discuss refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean.

Above: Two sisters and one of their sons who arrived from Syria recently before RI’s mission. Despite their temporary protected status, they still could not access services.
“WE WALKED A WEEK TO ARRIVE TO TURKEY. WE TRIED 4 OR 5 TIMES TO CROSS THE SEA BY BOAT AND THEY WERE TURNING THE BOATS AROUND BECAUSE OF THE WEATHER. THE TURKISH COAST GUARDS WERE TURNING THE BOATS AROUND WITHOUT ASKING THEM ANYTHING.” –SYRIAN REFUGEE, GREECE

During 2015, over one million refugees and asylum seekers, primarily fleeing conflict in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, crossed the Mediterranean Sea from Turkey and arrived on Europe’s shores. Towards the end of 2015, RI visited Greece to meet first-hand with those arriving by boat onto the island of Lesvos. Immediately after disembarking, most refugees were overjoyed and relieved to have arrived in Europe, but they also encountered a chaotic and confusing scene as volunteers and aid workers scrambled to provide people with warm meals, dry clothes, and information about how to register with Greek authorities and continue their journey into Europe. During our mission in November, Macedonia partially closed its border and thousands of refugees had amassed on Greece’s northern border, unable to cross. RI has begun our advocacy for a coordinated European response that is rooted in protecting refugees and providing safe and legal pathways for movement, rather than one that emphasizes restrictions and border fences. In 2016, we will continue our advocacy in the region—amplifying the voices of the displaced.

Women line up to register with a local NGO for assistance in Sanliurfa, Turkey. Before they can take this step, they must first register with the Turkish government.

In October, RI President Michel Gabaudan spoke on a panel at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies on the refugee crisis in Europe.

Refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Lesvos, Greece in November 2015.
Jordan

“THE CHALLENGE IS NOT KEEPING PEOPLE ALIVE; IT’S GIVING THEM A FUTURE.”
—UN STAFF MEMBER, JORDAN

More than 85% of the Syrian refugees in Jordan live among the local population and receive far less attention than those living in camps. In August, an RI team visited Jordan to focus on these refugees and found that they were living in difficult conditions despite an improvement and expansion of the humanitarian response. At the time of the mission, the World Food Program cut its provisions to refugees worldwide, including the Syrians in Jordan. In addition, a significant exodus of Syrians across the Mediterranean and into Europe was confronting the region. Many Syrians in Jordan spoke of leaving because living conditions were still deteriorating and they no longer saw a future for themselves there.

**IMPACT:** RI pushed for assistance beyond immediate, urgent needs, given that many refugees have been in Jordan for almost half a decade. Food assistance has been significantly restored for Syrian refugees in Jordan, including those living outside of camps, and discussions about livelihoods are underway. RI continues to push for substantive assistance from the international community as the civil war in Syria continues with no end in sight.

12 million
The number of Syrians who were forcibly displaced in 2015.

In March, RI President Michel Gabaudan wrote an article for *The Huffington Post* on the fourth anniversary of the Syria crisis.

In September, Mr. Gabaudan testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee alongside the presidents of the U.S. Institute of Peace and International Rescue Committee at a hearing on the U.S. Role and Strategy in the Middle East.

In January, Senior Advocate Daryl Grisgraber was quoted by *ABC News* in a story about the need for more US aid for Syrian refugees in winter.

That same month, Ms. Grisgraber was quoted in a *US News & World Report* story on the Syrian refugee response.
When RI returned to the Central African Republic (CAR) in May 2015, civil conflict had displaced nearly a quarter of the country’s 4.6 million people. Compared to RI’s mission to CAR in 2014, certain parts of the country had stabilized, and donors were turning their attention toward early recovery programs, as well as planning for national elections. However, several locations that were calm at the beginning of the crisis became engulfed in conflict as rebel groups and militias relocated throughout the country through late 2014 and early 2015. RI visited IDP camps, including those in which international humanitarian actors were operating, and found that, overall, camp conditions were dismal. RI directed a spotlight toward the acute needs of the newly-affected areas and successfully pressed the UN and U.S. government to continue providing essential humanitarian assistance.

1.15 million

The number of people civil conflict has displaced from a population of 4.6 million people in 2015.
In July, Senior Advocate Ann Hollingsworth testified before the U.S. House of Representatives’ Foreign Affairs Subcommittee for Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations on displacement in Africa and RI’s recent mission to Chad.

“MY CHILDREN DON’T UNDERSTAND WHAT IS HAPPENING. THEY CRY AND CRY AND ASK WHY CAN’T YOU FEED ME?”
–SUDANESE REFUGEE, WADIFIRA, CHAD

More than ten years after first fleeing war in Darfur, more than 360,000 Sudanese refugees remain stuck in eastern Chad—an isolated and underdeveloped region in a country with an abysmally low ranking of 185 on the UN Development Programme’s Human Development Index. When RI visited Chad in 2015, these refugees were facing dramatic cuts to food rations and other services, and they had few opportunities to support themselves through agriculture or employment.

**IMPACT:** RI advocates pushed the United Nations to reverse some of the most harmful reductions in aid, and the UN responded by releasing $6 million in new support for Sudanese refugees.

A mother, daughter, and her children in Farchana refugee camp, Chad. They have been there for 10 years. The family is often forced to skip meals due to a lack of food.

**RI: Out Front**

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800 calories

The amount of calories in food rations per day for some Sudanese refugees—woefully inadequate for proper nutrition and health.
El Salvador

“THE END GOAL IS NOT THE UNITED STATES—IT’S GETTING OUT OF EL SALVADOR.” –INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSON, EL SALVADOR

In June 2015, RI traveled to El Salvador, a country with one of the highest murder rates in the world, to shine a spotlight on forced displacement due to gang violence. Only six months into the year, thousands of Salvadorans had been murdered, and hundreds of thousands more were subject to extortion, death threats, forced recruitment, and rape by the country’s two major gangs. Although the El Salvadoran government has made efforts to combat the extraordinary level of violence, it has paid no attention to the tens of thousands of Salvadorans forcibly displaced from their homes. Our advocates met with families living in constant fear on the run or in hiding, as well as the few local actors who were assisting them. In addition to calling on the El Salvadoran government to establish a coordinated response for the forcibly displaced, RI pressed the international community, including the U.S., to provide humanitarian assistance to families in desperate need of protection.

RI’s report was widely covered in U.S. media and Latin America media, such as Reuters and Fox News Latino.

NPR’s Latino USA program investigated Mexico’s internally displaced population, with an interview with Sarnata Reynolds, Senior Advisor on Human Rights. The reporter accompanied RI on our brief follow-up mission to Mexico during the summer of 2015.

Ms. Reynolds moderated a briefing at the U.S. House of Representatives on the underlying reasons for the movement of Central Americans coming to the U.S. seeking protection.

In October, RI hosted Cristosal—an independent El Salvadoran non-profit and partner on the El Salvador mission—and assisted Cristosal with its outreach strategy to the U.S. government.

IMPACT: Following the mission, civil society organizations have received international funding in support of their work on IDPs. Additionally, the U.S. announced that it would be working closely with the UN Refugee Agency to admit a greater number of refugees from Central America.

Many Salvadorans declined being photographed for fear of retaliation.

Below: A drawing by a 7-year-old girl in El Salvador. Due to threats from gang members, her family was forced to flee their home. She lost her father to gang violence three years before. When RI met with her in June 2015, she and her family had been hiding in a safe house for a month, and she had not even been able to go outside.
“UKRAINE IS IN THE MIDST OF EUROPE’S LARGEST INTERNAL MIGRATION CRISIS SINCE WORLD WAR II.” –RI, UKRAINE: AN INVISIBLE EMERGENCY

In 2015, a separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine had displaced over 1.7 million Ukrainians, killed 10,000 and injured thousands more from indiscriminate shelling, land mines, and explosive remnants of war. In July, RI’s mission to Ukraine helped focus greater international attention on the unmet humanitarian needs of the displaced, particularly civilians living near the line separating the opposing forces. Residents of this “grey zone” were at risk due to cutoffs of water, gas, and electricity, and reduced services. Restrictions on movement limited the residents’, the UN’s, and international groups’ ability to meet basic needs. RI highlighted the effective humanitarian work undertaken by Ukrainian civil society organizations in partnership with local government and urged increased international collaboration and funding for these cost-effective local actors.

IMPACT: Following RI’s mission, the UN increased support to local NGOs and committed in 2016 to work with over 100 local organizations, concentrating aid on the 1.2 million living in the conflict area and pressing for unimpeded access particularly to separatist-controlled areas.

RI Honorary Advisor Dawn Calabia alongside Ambassador Paula J. Dobriansky spoke at the Women’s Foreign Policy Group on the crisis in Ukraine in October.

In December, Ms. Calabia also presented on a panel at the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation on humanitarian, development, and peacekeeping assistance in Ukraine.
Iraq

“PEOPLE CAME HERE EVEN THOUGH THERE ARE SHORTAGES. SAFETY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HUNGER.” – INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSON, IRAQ

The displacement crisis in Iraq continued to grow as the fighting between ISIS and the Iraqi government and its militias persisted. In August 2015, an RI team traveled to Iraq to assess the humanitarian situation for IDPs who had relocated to areas of the country other than Kurdistan (which was well-covered by humanitarian actors). Practically no information was forthcoming on the rest of the country given the precarious security situation. Just five miles away from territory controlled by ISIS, RI staff met IDPs living in desperate conditions. Humanitarian aid actors were few and far between. Upon return, RI briefed U.S. policymakers on the needs of the displaced and how the Iraqi government could best be supported to take charge of assisting its displaced people. RI pushed key stakeholders to strengthen their presence and build on existing programs in order to reach the most vulnerable people.

In May, Senior Advocate Daryl Grisgraber spoke with WBUR/National Public Radio about the surge of refugees in Iraq.

In February, RI President Michel Gabaudan was on a panel at the Iraqi Cultural Center organized by Education for Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC) on The Deepening Humanitarian and Human Rights Crisis in Iraq.

IMPACT: Following the release of RI’s report, the international staff presence in Baghdad increased and the USAID-Iraq mission remains open until the foreseeable future.

1.2 million out of 3.1 million

The number of Iraqi IDPs countrywide who were in areas where RI conducted its mission.

Far right: Ms. Grisgraber meeting with a displaced mother and her son at an IDP camp in Baghdad province. Top right and bottom right: Displaced Iraqis living in a camp in Baghdad province.
Malaysia & Myanmar

"WE HAD GOALS AS UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, BUT IN 2012 THEY CHANGED FROM FINISHING OUR STUDIES TO STAYING ALIVE."

—YOUNG ROHINGYA REFUGEE IN PENANG, MALAYSIA

Since 2012, more than 100,000 Rohingya fled Rakhine State in Myanmar by boat and more than 1,000 died during the journey. Currently, as many as 150,000 Rohingya live in Malaysia, where they are considered “illegal” migrants, regardless of whether they are registered with the UN Refugee Agency—and most are not. In 2015, RI looked at the regional response on Rohingya refugees and the specific context for the Rohingya now in Malaysia, both new refugee arrivals and second or third generations. The conditions for the Rohingya in Malaysia are dire and families struggle to ensure their children are educated and that they can secure work without constant harassment and danger.

**IMPACT:** RI’s recommendations directly informed planning for the November 2015 ASEAN Summit. In March 2016, it was announced that Malaysia will begin working with countries of origin to offer limited visas for workers although with restrictions.

RI Board Member Matt Dillon visited Myanmar to raise awareness about the situation of the Rohingya. His trip was covered by local and international media. Upon return to the U.S., he continued to advocate for the rights and protection of the Rohingya. This included a press conference at the National Press Club and an interview with Charlie Rose, both with RI President Michel Gabaudan.

RI President Michel Gabaudan spoke on a panel at the Center for Strategic and International Studies on Southeast Asia’s refugee crisis.

In May, Sarnata Reynolds, Senior Advisor on Human Rights, spoke with PBS NewsHour about why thousands of Rohingya refugees have fled Myanmar, only to be stranded at sea.
Burundi

“I RECEIVED A TEXT SAYING I WOULD BE ‘ELIMINATED’ TODAY, SO I’M TRYING TO LEAVE. BUT I CAN’T CROSS TO TANZANIA BECAUSE THE BORDER IS PATROLLED EVERYWHERE. I DON’T KNOW WHERE TO GO.” –INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSON, BURUNDI

The small African nation of Burundi took a turn toward chaos in 2015 when President Pierre Nkurunziza sought a controversial third term in office. In the violent months that followed, internally displaced Burundians remained hidden and unaided by the international community. Some Burundians who tried to flee the country were also blocked by security forces and youth militias. In September 2015, RI advocates traveled to the country to meet with IDPs, record their stories of persecution, and push for their protection. RI’s subsequent report called on humanitarians to start helping IDPs, and urged the United Nations and African Union (AU) to patrol Burundi’s borders so would-be refugees could cross in safety.

IMPACT: After RI returned from its mission, the European Union pledged €5 million in aid ($5.6 million) for the Burundi crisis—including, for the first time, “humanitarian protection activities inside Burundi.” The AU, as well as UN Security Council member states, also expressed support for the border monitoring force RI proposed.

Nearly all displaced individuals RI spoke with requested that their faces not be shown to protect their identities. The Burundian man pictured was in hiding and feared for his life after pro-government militias threatened him because of his political positions. He was forced to leave his family behind and was living in the forest, hoping to cross the border to safety in Tanzania.

RI was the first organization to report on Burundi’s internally displaced. RI’s report was covered by Reuters, the International Business Times, RFI, and widely circulated in local media in Burundi.

200,000 The number of Burundians who fled to neighboring countries between April and November 2015.
As violence and unrest hit Burundi in 2015, more than 70,000 Burundian refugees fled into neighboring Rwanda. Many of these refugees in Rwanda reported to RI that they were being recruited—often by force—into armed groups seeking to overthrow the Burundian government. RI’s groundbreaking report from Rwanda exposed a sophisticated, transnational recruitment network—one that even targeted refugee children as young as 16.

**IMPACT:** RI’s findings prompted strong statements of concern by the U.S. Department of State and the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Representative Ed Royce of California. Days after the report’s release, the United States froze the assets of a Burundian politician whose party was accused of recruiting refugees.
Firewood to be shared amongst Burundian refugees at Mahama camp, Rwanda.
In addition to the 60 million displaced worldwide, an average of 22.5 million people are newly displaced each year by climate or weather-related disasters. That is equivalent to 62,000 people every day. Although floods, droughts, and other climate-related disasters affect rich and poor countries alike, it is the poorest and most vulnerable communities that are hardest hit. RI’s Climate Displacement Program advocates for improved protection and assistance for those displaced by climate-related disasters in poor and fragile states. We work both on the ground in the wake of disasters to ensure that the needs of displaced populations are being met and at the global level to advocate for effective solutions for those uprooted by extreme weather and other climate change effects. These populations are not protected under the UN Refugee Convention. RI’s Climate Displacement Program has emerged as a leading voice on the urgent need for governments and humanitarian agencies to better prepare for climate-related impacts, prevent displacement where possible, and to build the resilience of the most vulnerable communities to withstand and recover when disasters strike.

As a result of sustained advocacy by RI and its partners, the new UN Paris Climate Change Agreement adopted in December 2015 and endorsed by over 193 governments sets up a “Climate Displacement Task Force” to identify solutions to climate displacement. RI and its partners have been invited to provide expert input to the Task Force established in 2016.

- RI was a key contributor to the development of a new set of guidelines for government-led, planned relocation in the context of disasters and climate change led by The Brookings Institution, Georgetown University, and UN Refugee Agency. RI also contributed a case study on post-disaster relocation based on RI’s extensive research and advocacy regarding shortcomings in the Philippine government’s plans to relocate one million displaced people in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan.

- As the co-chair of a working group on disaster risk reduction (DRR), RI spearheaded joint advocacy on behalf of U.S. NGOs and in coordination with European NGOs to ensure that the new Sendai Framework for DRR, adopted in March 2015 by 187 countries, included ambitious commitments to increase financing for reducing disaster risk and building resilience at the local level.

- RI’s submissions and proposed language on the threat that climate change presents to security and stability were included in the U.S. Department of State’s 2015 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) Report—a major blueprint that guides U.S. priorities abroad.

RI was instrumental in convincing the U.S. government to support the Nansen Initiative on Cross-Border Displacement in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change, a two-year initiative led by the Norwegian and Swiss governments to build international consensus on how to better assist and protect those forced from their homelands by disasters and climate change who are not protected under the 1951 Refugee Convention. RI is invited to provide expert input to support implementation of the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda in 2016.

In June, RI: Out Front Program Manager Alice Thomas presented at a Woodrow Wilson Center event on Global Trends and Implications for National Security and Diplomacy.
Climate Displacement Mission: Myanmar

“IF LEFT UNADDRESS, THE IMPACTS OF THE 2015 FLOODS DISASTER ON MYANMAR’S RURAL POOR ARE LIKELY TO CONTRIBUTE TO EXISTING PUSH FACTORS LIKE PERSECUTION, MARGINALIZATION, AND GRINDING POVERTY TO FURTHER DRIVE BOTH INTERNAL AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION.”

—RI, MYANMAR FLOODS: MISSED OPPORTUNITIES BUT STILL TIME TO ACT

Persecution and ethnic and religious conflict are not the only cause of displacement in Myanmar. The country is also ranked the second most vulnerable in the world to disasters and climate change. In mid-2015, the worst flooding in decades—combined with a tropical cyclone—destroyed the homes and livelihoods of 9.5 million people, forcing the government to declare a state of emergency and request international humanitarian aid. In late-2015, RI traveled to the worst-affected areas of the country to assess the response by the international community and the ongoing protection and assistance needs of more than a million people displaced by the disaster. RI’s report revealed that despite the country’s high vulnerability to climate-related hazards, the floods/cyclone caught international agencies off guard, resulting in an underwhelming response and missed opportunities.

Left: Families who lost their homes in unprecedented floods in Rakhine State, Myanmar reside in makeshift shelters along the road. Right: A single mother and her daughter forced to flee reside in a makeshift shelter in Myanmar.

IMPACT: RI’s recommendations regarding the need to support the most vulnerable flood-affected communities to recover their homes and livelihoods, and to improve disaster preparedness and response operations, were adopted in the UN’s 2016 humanitarian response plan for Myanmar.

A family displaced by massive flooding and landslides in Sagaing, Myanmar.
In instances of armed conflict and displacement, women and girls face exceptional danger. They live under the constant threat of acts of gender-based violence (GBV), such as rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, and traditional harmful practices like female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage. In addition, women have a more difficult time obtaining access to official documents required to determine nationality, leaving them at risk of statelessness.

RI advocates for the respect of women’s rights and calls for the international community to prioritize the needs of women and girls who have been forced to flee their homes. RI holds the UN, U.S. government, humanitarian actors, donor nations, and host governments accountable to recognize GBV as life-threatening and to meet the specific needs of women and girls.

RI ensures that policymakers and humanitarian actors listen to and prioritize the needs of women and girls, starting with minimizing the risks of GBV as a necessary first step. RI works to ensure that women and girls benefit from GBV lifesaving programs, including access to medical, psychological, legal, and security assistance.

**RI has made it a priority to advocate for improved humanitarian responses that elevate the well-being and safety of women and girls.**

**RI: Out Front**

- **RI's report on Congolese women and violence is cited as a “Must Read” by Foreign Policy’s Democracy Lab.**

- In February, Marcy Hersh, Senior Advocate for Women and Girls, presented her in-depth field report on gender-based violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo to members of the Women’s Foreign Policy Group at events in both Washington, DC and New York City.

- In November, Francisca Vigaud-Walsh, Senior Advocate for Women and Girls, took part on a panel on sexual violence in conflict at the American Society for International Law (ASIL), where she spoke of the specific vulnerabilities and types of sexual violence experienced by women and girls fleeing from conflict.

- In December, Ms. Vigaud-Walsh appeared on Voice of America’s Washington Forum to talk about the conflicts and displacement in the Central African Republic and Burundi.

- Ms. Vigaud-Walsh discussed the allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers in the Central African Republic on France24 in August.
By October 2015, a violent political crisis in Burundi had forced more than 220,000 refugees to flee. Over half of them were female, many of whom experienced gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual violence, during their plight. Nearly 50% of Burundian women and girls who reported GBV upon arrival in Tanzania required post-rape care. RI traveled to Tanzania to assess whether international standards were being met to meet the needs and ensure the protection of women and girls. Many female refugees in Tanzania told RI that the threat of violence continued for them in the very camps where they should feel safe. RI found that humanitarian efforts in Tanzania fell unacceptably short of minimum standards, and failed to adhere to guidelines for GBV interventions in humanitarian settings, thereby increasing women and girls’ risks to GBV.

**IMPACT:** RI was the first organization to raise awareness of the conditions in the camp and its impact on Burundian refugee women and girls through its report, *Women and Girls Failed: The Burundian Refugee Response in Tanzania*. As a result, humanitarian actors in the country have committed to improve conditions and strengthen protective measures for women and girls. Further, international donors increased their financial contributions to the Burundian refugee response.

The number of cases reported of gender-based violence among Burundian refugees from May to September.

651

Top: Shower facilities in camps fail to meet minimum standards to reduce the risk of GBV. Middle: A mapping exercise completed by Burundian refugees at Nyarugusu camp, the red Xs were labeled unsafe (including toilets and showers), while the green Xs were deemed to be safe areas. Bottom: Burundian refugee women in Nyarugusu.

In December, RI’s Tanzania report was featured in a *BuzzFeed* article, prompting an immediate public response from the UN Refugee Agency’s representative in Tanzania.

– TUN KHIN, HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST, RECIPIENT OF THE 2015 RICHARD C. HOLBROOKE LEADERSHIP AWARD
Public Education Events

In 2015, the increase in harmful rhetoric and myths surrounding refugees and displaced persons made it paramount for RI to intensify our engagement in public education. RI continues to counter and dispel pervasive myths when we speak publicly about our work. Donors, supporters, and policymakers receive the latest updates from our missions and raise critical funds for our programs.

The premier event is RI’s Anniversary Dinner held each spring in Washington, D.C. We inform the public about the plight of the world’s most vulnerable populations, as well as celebrate exceptional individuals who have demonstrated remarkable leadership and strong commitment to humanitarian action. Last year, RI presented our highest honor—the McCall-Pierpaoli Humanitarian award—to Maureen Orth, a nationally-recognized journalist and author. Past recipients include former Nobel Peace Prize Laureate José Ramos-Horta, culinary innovator José Andrés, actor Forest Whitaker, and former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Nane Annan.

Smaller public education events are held throughout the year in major cities including, but not limited to, Washington, D.C., New York, San Francisco, and Chicago. These events are an opportunity for our supporters to participate in RI’s lifesaving advocacy. For more information on our events, please contact events@refugeesinternational.org.

Ways to Give

President’s Advocacy Society
Donors of $1,000 or more receive exclusive opportunities to engage with RI President Michel Gabaudan as well as with advocates who have recently returned from field missions.

Online
Make a secure contribution on our website at: refugeesinternational.org/donate.

Mail
Make checks payable to: Refugees International
2001 S Street NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20009

Combined Federal Campaign
The Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) gives federal employees the opportunity to give to charitable organizations via a payroll deduction. Please consider giving to RI using CFC #10664.

Gifts of Stock and Planned Gifts
Please contact the Development Department at 202-828-0110, ext. 202 or development@refugeesinternational.org.

We would be so grateful if you would notify us that you have named Refugees International in your will. We would very much like the opportunity to thank you for your lifesaving gift to help the world’s most vulnerable people.

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Statement of Activities and Change in Net Assets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support and Revenue</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>1,917,454</td>
<td>2,238,424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation grants</td>
<td>1,497,173</td>
<td>1,446,480</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investment income</td>
<td>1,151</td>
<td>46,689</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-kind contributions</td>
<td>170,179</td>
<td>115,367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other loss</td>
<td>(1,020)</td>
<td>(1,864)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total support and revenue</strong></td>
<td><strong>$3,584,937</strong></td>
<td><strong>$3,845,096</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Expenses**

Program Services:
- Total program services: $2,623,914 (2015), $2,788,426 (2014)

Supporting Services:

**Total functional expenses**

Other Items: Pension

**Change in Net Assets**
- Net assets at beginning of year: $1,325,019 (2015), $725,673 (2014)
- **Net Assets at End of Year**
  - $1,786,667 (2015), $1,325,019 (2014)

Please see the 2015 annual audit report found on RI’s website for details.
Children in a flood-affected village in Mrauk U Township, Rakhine State, Myanmar, that was heavily damaged by the floods.

Be Informed. Stay Engaged.

RI was pleased to launch our new website in the fall of 2015: refugeesinternational.org. Access our latest blogs, photo reports, and video footage published from the field. A big thanks to Amanda and Espen Tuft for their generous support.

Follow us on Twitter @RefugeesIntl  Friend us on Facebook at Refugees International  Watch us on YouTube at Refugees International
Displaced children at an IDP camp in Bambari, Central African Republic.