

SAHRiNGON Mounts a Multimedia Campaign for Refugees in Tanzania

Tanzania is host to one of the largest refugee populations in Africa, but many of its residents are not familiar with the challenges that refugees face or the conflicts that forced them to flee their homelands. Tanzania confines most of the Burundian and Congolese refugees it hosts to camps along its western border. To improve Tanzanians' understanding of and sympathy for these refugees, in 2006 the Tanzania chapter of the Southern African Human Rights NGO Network (SAHRiNGON) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) launched a public education campaign.

To improve coverage of refugees in the Tanzanian media, SAHRiNGON held a workshop for journalists, briefed them on refugees, and explored ways to collaborate to achieve positive coverage of refugees and combat prejudice against them. Five major newspapers and four major television networks participated. SAHRiNGON followed that workshop up with one for government officials, which the Tanzanian media also covered. SAHRiNGON also distributed a copy of its report on the economic impact of refugees in Kasulu district, which showed some of the benefits refugees have brought to that area.

SAHRiNGON further organized six television programs featuring experts on refugees from the Government, UNHCR, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the University of Dar es Salaam. These reached a national audience. SAHRiNGON also broadcast six live radio shows about refugees on the University of Dar es Salaam's Radio Mlimani, which illustrated how refugees were different from other migrants and highlighted some of the positive impacts they have had on Tanzania, including on the economy and education.

To reach young people, SAHRiNGON went to 10 schools and held debates on the topic "Presence of Refugees in Tanzania: Benefits or Demerits." Students arguing the pro-refugee stance pointed out that schools, hospitals, roads, and the airport at Kigoma had all improved because of the refugee presence, benefiting Tanzanians as well. They also argued that refugees' knowledge and skills could benefit the country and furthermore that there was a moral duty to help people fleeing persecution. In the wake of the debates, students from one of the schools visited SAHRiNGON to learn more about refugees. All together, 1,000 students saw or participated in the debates. SAHRiNGON also sponsored a student essay contest in November 2007 and gave the winner, Euphemia Tairo of Loyola High School, a 120,000 shilling prize for her essay "The Impacts of Hosting Refugees in Tanzania."

SAHRiNGON celebrated World Refugee Day on June 20, 2007 in Dar es Salaam with a parade and a band marching through the city. Later, NGO representatives, UN agencies, government officials, and the public gathered to honor refugees in Tanzania and beyond.

Changing public opinion is long and difficult, but SAHRiNGON's work in Tanzania has already begun to show progress. More people in Tanzania have begun to show an interest in refugees. Students are enthusiastic about treating refugees with dignity and respect like other human beings. Teachers approach SAHRiNGON for more information about the positive impact that refugees have made. Government officials also express a more positive attitude toward refugees. The Home Affairs Minister Joseph Mungai agreed that there are refugees who are good farmers and who contribute to the economy. "Our security apparatus shouldn't disturb such people," he said.



*SAHRiNGON organized a parade through Dar es Salaam to celebrate World Refugee Day 2007.
Credit: SAHRiNGON*