



# Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## New Americans Learn Jazz Traditions

On Friday, November 21, 92 students of all ages from around the world were treated to a personalized concert by the celebrated jazz conguero **Poncho Sanchez**. **Jazz St. Louis** provided the forum for Sanchez and his band to teach immigrants and refugees from places far away about jazz music and traditions. Smiling widely, refugee kids and adults, many who have overcome great trauma, tapped their toes and bobbed their heads to the lively tunes.

Jazz St. Louis generously arranged for the students of the International Institute St. Louis to attend the special presentation. Attendees came from around the world including Burma, Bhutan and the former Soviet Union, many of whom have survived war or suffered persecution and are starting a new life in St. Louis.

Sarah Barnard, Manager of Special Programs and Literacy, said “Our clients eagerly anticipated this event. For some of them, the familiar rhythms brought smiles to their faces, and for others this music was entirely new and delightful. The Institute was truly pleased to receive this offer from Jazz St. Louis, and we appreciate their planning efforts and funding, as well as the enthusiastic presentation by Mr. Sanchez and his musicians.”

### Background Information

#### **AHISKA TURKS**

The Ahiskas lived in the south of Georgia for centuries. In the 1940s, Stalin deported all of the Ahiskas to Central Asia. Stalin’s reasons for this deportation are unknown, although researchers speculate that he either wanted to clear the area in order to invade Turkey or was acting out of antagonism as a non-Muslim Georgian. About 50,000 Ahiskas were thought to have died due to repression, execution, starvation, cold, and thirst in their exile. They remained isolated outsiders in their new places of settlement: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Not only did the Ahiskas face repression, deportation, and violence in the mid-1900s, but they were also subject to new violence in 1999 in Uzbekistan as the USSR crumbled.

#### **BHUTANESE (IN NEPAL)**

The majority of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal are descendants of people who in the late 1800’s began immigrating to southern Bhutan. Upon the move, they became known as Lhotsampas, or “People of the South.” Ethnically, they are overwhelmingly Nepali-descended, with non-Nepali ethnic groups including the Sharchop, Drupka, Urow, and Khengpa. Most report living in Bhutan as farmers or students. They resided in southern Bhutan until 1990 when concerns over a shifting demographic and political tensions led the government to announce that all Lhotsampas who could not prove they had been residents of Bhutan in 1958 had to leave. This led to tens of thousands of southern Bhutanese fleeing to Nepal and the Indian state of West Bengal.

#### **BURMESE**

In Burma (Myanmar), many different ethnic groups have been forced to relocate due to the government. Estimates show that over half a million internally displaced persons have been required to move. Hundreds of thousands more have fled to surrounding countries. The International Institute serves mainly Karen refugees who have been living in Thai refugee camps. An ethnic minority numbering about 7 million in Burma and Thailand, they have suffered under the Burmese government and have been denied independence from Burma. They have often been targets of ethnic cleansing.

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b># of students</b>
Afghani	4
Ahiska Turk	8
Bhutanese	37
Burmese	13
Burundian	1
Chilean	1
Chinese	1
Congolese	3
Cuban	1
Eritrean	5
Honduran	1
Liberian	3
Mexican	6
Moldovan	2
Pakistani	1
Romanian	2
Spanish	1
Togolese	1
Ukrainian	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>92</b>

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**About the International Institute St. Louis:** Celebrating its 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2009, the International Institute has a long history of connecting immigrants with the wider St. Louis community through events like Festival of Nations. The agency is a catalyst for economic development in St. Louis, with a small business center for immigrant entrepreneurs and extensive language translation services. Top notch education and social services are also available. Learn more about the International Institute at [www.iistl.org](http://www.iistl.org). Proud member of the United Way of Greater St. Louis and the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants.

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