

Volunteer Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Assignment: \_\_\_\_\_

Department Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Ext. \_\_\_\_\_



**INTERNATIONAL  
INSTITUTE**  
SAINT LOUIS

Volunteer,  
Intern and Practicum Student  
Handbook



Revised January 2008



Dear Volunteer,

Congratulations! You are now officially a volunteer at the International Institute of St. Louis! We are excited to work with you and hope that your experience is a meaningful one.

Since 1919, the International Institute has been strengthening the St. Louis community by helping immigrants and their families become secure and successful Americans and by promoting the value of ethnic diversity in the social, cultural and economic life of the region.

We would like to congratulate you again on becoming part of our mission, as a volunteer with our agency. Your efforts offer a valuable service to our clients, and our staff will work with you to ensure that your experience is mutually beneficial.

We take great pride in our volunteers. Your commitment and support are critical to our success. Thank you, in advance, for your hard work and enthusiasm.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time. I am here to support you. I look forward to working with you!

Sincerely,

Sarah Bekemeyer  
Community Outreach Specialist

Kate Howell  
Volunteer & Communications Coordinator



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## Frequently Asked Questions

**What should I do if I am going to be absent during my assigned shift?** Notify your **Department Supervisor or Field Instructor** by leaving a message on his/her voicemail as far in advance of the absence as possible. Please include your name, the date and time of shift and absence, and the project or job you were scheduled to do. Also, tell your supervisor when you will return to work. If an emergency arises, please **try** to contact the Institute.

**What should I do if my work/family/personal situation changes and I need to change my volunteer schedule?** Talk with your Department Supervisor or Field Instructor. The Institute values your service and commitment and will do its best to accommodate your schedule changes. Please understand that your new schedule may not match the needs of your current volunteer job. If this is the case, your supervisor and the Volunteer Coordinator will work with you to find another position that meets your qualifications, availability, and interests.

**My volunteer assignment is not what I expected. Can I change my assignment? Who should I speak to?** We want all our volunteers to be happy in their positions at the Institute. If for some reason you are unhappy or think you may be better suited to a different volunteer job, please speak with your Department Supervisor, Field Instructor or the Volunteer Coordinator.

**I have a friend or relative who would like to volunteer. Who should I refer them to?** Please have them speak to the Volunteer Coordinator, at (314) 773-9090 extension 189.

**I need to present my school/employer/etc. with documentation of my volunteer service. How can I obtain this information?** Please contact the Volunteer Coordinator. The Institute can provide you or your affiliate organization with a list of your volunteer hours. Please give the Volunteer Coordinator **2 weeks** to process your request.

**With whom can I discuss situations related to my volunteer experience if I do not wish to speak with my Department Supervisor or Field Instructor?** Please contact the Volunteer Coordinator, at (314) 773-9090 extension 189.

**If a client I am working with discusses a complaint or a problem regarding their home life, family, job, etc., with whom should I discuss this?** You may develop relationships with clients so that the clients feel comfortable discussing personal matters with you. However, should a client come to you with problems other than those related to your volunteer duties, you must contact your Department Supervisor or the Volunteer Coordinator rather than attempting to solve this problem.

**If you have other questions not covered by this short list, please ask your Department Supervisor or the Community Outreach Specialist.**

## **Volunteer Management Program**

With the growth of volunteering worldwide, there is recognition that the time and contribution of volunteers must be respected, and that their work must benefit both volunteers and the organizations they serve.

Volunteers are an integral part of the International Institute's client services and community relations. In an effort to better coordinate the efforts of our volunteers, the International Institute of St. Louis has created a centralized Volunteer Management Program (Summer 2002). The Volunteer Coordinator is charged with mobilizing and supporting volunteers to engage in effective action that addresses the specified needs and mission of the International Institute.

To be effective, the Volunteer Program must have the commitment of management and staff who directly supervise or work with volunteers. The Volunteer Coordinator will act as liaison to volunteers and staff to facilitate successful working relationships and meaningful experiences for all parties.

### **Mission of the Volunteer Management Program**

The Volunteer Management Program at the International Institute will:

- be administered with high professional standards
- build commitment to a shared vision and mission
- develop and match volunteer qualifications, motivations, time availability and unique contributions with meaningful opportunities
- guide volunteers to success in ways that benefit the Institute, its clients and the volunteer
- develop and evaluate a framework of organization for volunteering at the Institute



## Staff Directory

Volunteer & Communications Coordinator

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Community Outreach Specialist

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## What is my role at the Institute?

### Who is a volunteer?

Volunteers can be professionals and nonprofessionals; board members, local residents, students and members of the larger community; those who give a few hours and those who volunteer every week; those who work in classrooms, offices, and homes; those who can provide much needed services in administration, education, employment, health and social services. Volunteers give their time and talents without monetary compensation, and as such, their work is considered a donation to the Institute. Service-Learning Students, Interns, and Practicum students are also considered volunteers.

### The Role of Volunteers, Interns and Practicum Students

Community volunteers will provide program, administrative and client support. Recognizing that in today's climate volunteers increasingly desire to be included in meaningful work that is clearly focused on the Institute's mission, the paid staff will endeavor to include volunteers in direct service wherever possible. Volunteers will be expected to perform in cooperation with Institute staff and comply with Institute guidelines at all times.

International Institute volunteers support our clients on their journey to self-sufficiency. In your role, there are many ways to show your support. The section titled "Gaining Cultural Awareness" and your job-specific training will help you better understand who Institute clients are and what will be most supportive to them.

#### **Please Note:**

The agency reserves the right to refuse the services of any individual without stating a reason. Should complaints arise with regards to a volunteer, the volunteer's supervisor will follow the established course of action, which may include termination. In any case, a volunteer can be dismissed at the discretion of the agency with or without cause. Volunteers shall not be eligible to use the Institute's established Grievance Process.

### The Role of Volunteer Coordinator

The Volunteer Coordinator will strive to:

- be an innovative agent for change and progress
- be a passionate advocate for volunteering
- welcome diverse contributions and ideas
- develop trusting and positive work environments in which volunteers and other resources are effectively engaged and empowered
- ensure the safety and security of volunteers
- develop networks and facilitate partnerships to achieve desired results
- be guided by and committed to the goals and ideals of the mission towards which we are working, and to continually expand our knowledge and skills
- communicate sensitively and accurately the context, rationale, and purpose of the work we are doing
- learn from volunteers and staff in order to improve the quality of our work

*(from the Universal Declaration on the Profession of Leading and Managing Volunteers, written by members of the Association for Volunteer Administration)*

## Philosophy of Volunteer Involvement

Volunteers expand the Institute's ability to provide critical educational and social services to our clients. Volunteers work one-on-one, in small groups and classes, and at special events to make a meaningful difference in the lives of our clients and in our community. As role models, volunteers help new Americans build confidence and become self-sufficient. Dedication, willingness to learn, and sincere efforts toward helping clients make volunteers strong community advocates for the agency and new Americans.

Institute staff work closely with volunteers to find meaningful work where volunteers feel they make a difference. The Institute encourages volunteers to grow as individuals while learning and improving practical skills. Institute staff members recognize the many contributions of volunteers as essential to the growth of the agency and actively support those efforts.

### Why Volunteer?

People volunteer for many reasons, but most never stop to think about ways their volunteer experience can benefit them as well as the agency. At the International Institute, we understand and appreciate the time and commitment each volunteer gives us. With your contributions in mind, we will strive to make your experience personally fulfilling.

Please take a moment to think about the benefits you want to receive in exchange for your dedicated service. The list below may help you begin.

- Satisfaction of helping others
- Making new contacts, socially and professionally
- Increased self-esteem and pride
- Better understanding of group dynamics and teamwork
- Improved communication skills
- Opportunity to work with different types of people
- Better understanding of ethical standards
- Valuable, practical experience that can be transferred to professional opportunities
- Interaction with new Americans
- Increased understanding and appreciation of diversity
- Awareness of issues affecting refugees and immigrants
- Increased cultural sensitivity

*(The Universal Benefits of Volunteering, Walter P. Pidgeon, Jr.)*

The list below will help agency personnel begin to think about the benefits of volunteering to agency clients.

- Interaction with Americans
- Building relationships with the community
- Improved English and communication skills
- Increased self-esteem
- Increased understanding of American culture and systems
- Gain knowledge and contacts in various subjects and fields

The list below will help staff and supervisors begin to think about the benefits of volunteering to agency staff.

- Volunteers allow us to expand one-on-one services to clients
- Volunteers have expertise in professional areas beyond the expertise of staff
- Volunteers bring a sincere desire to make a meaningful difference for clients by supporting paid staff and the efforts of the department
- Volunteers can assist clients in ways that staff with multiple program and supervisory responsibilities cannot on a daily basis



## **Volunteer Rights and Responsibilities**

### **Rights**

- You have the right to an appropriate assignment.
- You have the right to sufficient orientation, training and supervision.
- You have the right to be treated as a professional.
- You have the right to ask questions, and to voice your comments or concerns at any time.
- You have the right to feel as though your work is meaningful.
- You have the right to know how your contributions of time and energy have helped the Institute.
- You have the right to be recognized for your achievements.

### **Responsibilities**

- Complete assignments as agreed upon.
- Be on time for your scheduled shift.
- Inform your supervisor as far in advance as possible when you will be absent.
- Sign in and sign out each time you work and wear your *Volunteer* badge.
- Allow your supervisor and other staff to provide you with direction in your work.
- Focus on your strengths.
- Voice your comments and concerns so that we can make your experience a positive one.
- Enjoy yourself.
- Be proud of your work and your contributions.

# Policies and Procedures

## I. Application and Screening Process

All volunteers must complete the volunteer application; complete a personal interview; submit at least one letter of reference and submit to criminal background checks. Interns and practicum students can submit a cover letter and resume in place of the volunteer application.

The Volunteer Committee will determine the level of background check required for each volunteer position. **The background check must be completed upon application and before beginning work at the Institute.**<sup>1</sup>

*Please Note:* The application process may take several weeks to complete. Volunteers should begin the application process early.

## II. Selection and Placement

You have been selected to volunteer and placed into your new position based on the following criteria:

- You meet the qualifications for a specific job as outlined in the job description
- Your personality, work-style and availability are a good match for the job, department and supervisor
- Your references are favorable
- Your background check is favorable
- Job openings exist in your area of interest

*Please Note:* All applicants for similar jobs are selected and placed according to the same criteria to ensure a non-discriminatory process.

### Non-acceptance into Volunteer Program

The Institute's application and selection process is selective. There is no guarantee that any particular applicant for a volunteer position will be accepted and placed at the International Institute of St. Louis. The Institute reserves the right to refuse the services of any individual without stating a reason (see Volunteer Guidelines). Volunteers may be turned down for any number of reasons, including lack of qualifications or unsuitability for a given position. Volunteers may not be turned down for being a member of a protected class.

If a volunteer is deemed unsuitable for a specific position, the Volunteer Coordinator will attempt to offer another, more suitable position within the Institute.

If a volunteer is deemed generally unsuitable for any position at the Institute, the Volunteer Coordinator will document any concerns and will advise the Executive Director in writing. The applicant will be contacted in a sensitive manner with the decision.

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<sup>1</sup> A volunteer will not be placed in an unsupervised position until the background check is returned with a satisfactory outcome. The program will, however, allow for provisional placement of volunteers into clerical and other administrative work or supervised client contact positions pending receipt of criminal background check. In such cases, volunteers will be allowed to complete orientation and training, and to begin work on a provisional basis. Provisional placement is at the discretion of the Volunteer Relations Specialist and Department Supervisor.

All volunteers actively working at the Institute as of 7/01/02 will be grandfathered into the new screening policies. The Institute will assume the cost of any background check needed to bring them into good standing. Volunteers will be allowed to continue working with clients while the background check is conducted. In the future, all volunteers will be strictly held to the new screening policies and will submit to annual background checks.

### III. Orientation and Training

General orientation to the Institute and to your new role as a volunteer will be completed with the Volunteer Coordinator. This orientation is mandatory and must be completed before beginning your volunteer job, practicum or internship. Orientations are held bi-weekly or more if need arises.

Your Department Supervisor or Field Instructor will conduct job-specific training during the first days and weeks of your commitment. On-going training will be provided as necessary.

Orientation:

1. New volunteers will be asked to provide demographic information for statistical reporting purposes only. This demographic information may include age, gender, race and country of origin<sup>2</sup>.
2. New volunteers will be given a "Request for Information about Disability" form. This information is collected so the Volunteer Coordinator and Department Supervisor may make the position accessible to the new volunteer<sup>2</sup>.
3. New volunteers will be asked to provide emergency contact information if they did not include this on the application. Such information will help the Institute reduce program risk.
4. The Volunteer Contract will be explained in detail with adequate time for questions from new volunteers. These Guidelines clearly and objectively delineate the Institute's required standards of performance and behavior for volunteers. The Guidelines also state that any abrogation of the policies can result in dismissal.

Training:

Providing volunteers with appropriate training for their job ensures good performance, volunteer confidence, and clear documentation that the volunteer has been given what he/she needs to work competently and responsibly. Every volunteer must receive training, including one-time special event volunteers. Training may be formal or on-the-job.

The Department Supervisor/Field Instructor will conduct volunteer training. Content and technique of any training will be determined by the specific requirements of the position and by the readiness and characteristics of the volunteer.

The supervisor will also provide on-going training as necessary to further develop skills and knowledge. The supervisor may increase a volunteer's responsibility where appropriate.

Each department will have a thoughtfully developed and consistently implemented volunteer training program. The training program will be evaluated regularly by the Department Supervisor to be certain it is sufficiently preparing volunteers for their work.

Training will include

- reviewing and signing the Volunteer Agreement
- establishing the length of volunteer commitment
- setting goals
- the importance of and how to document volunteer hours
- job requirements and duties
- reviewing and signing Job Description

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<sup>2</sup> Please note that this information will only be collected after volunteers have completed the application process and been officially placed into a position, and thus it is not considered when placement is being determined.

- a tour of the department
- all department-specific policies and procedures

During training, supervisors and volunteers will establish goals for the volunteer position. These goals will be used as part of the evaluation process. Volunteers will also be introduced to Institute staff and will be given an appropriate workspace.

#### **IV. Volunteer Files**

Each volunteer will have a file in which his or her application materials, screening information, evaluations, and other appropriate forms will be held. These files are confidential and can only be accessed from a secure file cabinet by the Volunteer Coordinator. Department Supervisors will be given a copy of volunteer's file (with social security number removed) that must also be kept in a secure location.

#### **V. Supervision of Volunteers, Interns and Practicum Students**

Supervision plays a key role in evaluating your performance and experience. Day-to-day supervision of interns/practicum students will be the responsibility of the appointed Field Instructor. Day-to-day supervision of volunteers will be the responsibility of the appointed Department Supervisor.

- Supervision should consist of providing direction to volunteers in carrying out the duties of their job. Emphasis in supervision should be placed on building a relationship with the volunteer and promoting his/her personal and professional development while effectively carrying out the Institute's mission.
- Effective supervision will enhance the volunteer's experience and thus increase volunteer retention.

**Absences:** Notify your Department Supervisor or Field Instructor by leaving a message on his/her voicemail as far in advance of the absence as possible.

#### **VI. Evaluation**

Evaluation is essential to the success of our volunteer and internship program. Supervisors and volunteers must be given the opportunity to process and evaluate all components of the volunteer program. This includes but is not limited to policies and procedures, orientation and training, performance of job duties, and supervision.

##### Goals of Evaluation

- Reveal areas of success
- Uncover areas that need improvement
- Determine if the volunteer received his/her expected benefits

Volunteers will be asked for their feedback, comments and suggestions regarding the program in which they volunteer. Department Supervisors and Field Instructors will give all volunteers and interns the opportunity to complete a written evaluation; however, volunteers are encouraged to provide feedback at any time. Evaluative comments can be directed toward individual Department Supervisors or to the Volunteer Coordinator verbally or in writing (including over e-mail).

The Volunteer Committee will strive to incorporate volunteer feedback regularly to improve programs for both the volunteer and agency clients.

Department Supervisors will also regularly evaluate all volunteers in his or her program to ensure that volunteers are meeting job requirements and following guidelines.

#### **VII. Correction/Probation/Dismissal of Volunteers and Volunteer Grievance Procedure**

##### Identifying the Problem

Open communication and consistent, appropriate supervision will help keep problems from developing. Recognizing and responding to problems early and with an open mind will help prevent bigger problems.

### Correction and Probation

Supervisors will privately discuss any problems with the volunteer and attempt to find solutions.

Unacceptable volunteer performance or behavior is such that it

- threatens to interfere with achieving the program's goals and/or the work environment for both volunteers and paid staff,
- has a negative impact on Institute clients or the general public, and/or
- puts the Institute or individuals at personal or legal risk.

Such performance or behavior will be handled by Department Supervisors and Field Instructors. If appropriate, the Institute will allow the volunteer a probationary period with concrete objectives and a finite time for achieving them. Any agreements will be put in writing and signed by both volunteer and supervisor.

### Dismissal of Volunteers

When no other course of action appears to be reasonable, and all of the appropriate steps have been taken (*as outlined in the Volunteer Management Manual*), the volunteer can be dismissed.

The agency reserves the right to refuse the services of any individual without stating a reason. Should complaints arise with regards to a volunteer, the volunteer's supervisor will follow the established course of action, which may include termination. In any case, a volunteer can be dismissed at the discretion of the agency with or without cause. Volunteers shall not be eligible to use the Institute's established Grievance Process.

**This process will be applied consistently with all volunteers.**

### Volunteer Grievance Procedure

Volunteers shall **not** be eligible to use the Institute's established Grievance Process. However, if a volunteer has concerns or complaints regarding his/her experience, the volunteer shall (1) discuss the concern with his/her Department Supervisor and/or (2) discuss the concern with the Volunteer Coordinator. Volunteers are not required to approach his/her Department Supervisor if the volunteer is uncomfortable doing so. The Volunteer Coordinator will work with each volunteer to appropriately address concerns and complaints to ensure a trusting and positive work environment.

## **VIII. Documenting Hours**

The complete and accurate tracking of all volunteer and intern hours is vitally important to the Institute. The agency reports this data to the government as well as many corporate and foundation funding sources. In some cases the agency is eligible for a cash match equal to the dollar value of the volunteer's gift of time and talent. The cash match paid to the agency is income that enables us to continue providing social services to our clients. For example, Yasmin works as a practicum student in Youth Services for 50 hours over the summer. Her generous gift of time is valued at \$9.66 per hour. Her 50 hours of service amount to \$483.00. What a significant contribution!

The number of volunteer hours contributed and their total value in dollars is published in the agency's Annual Report and is required in some funding applications. This information exemplifies one facet of the agency's overall health, and it shows that people throughout the metro area are supportive of the agency's work and committed to helping new Americans start new lives in our community.

Tracking your hours also helps the Institute recognize your efforts. Recognition takes many forms and is done within the Institute as well as publicly. Hours served can be submitted to:

- schools and employers requiring and/or encouraging community service
- colleges and universities as part of an application for admission or scholarships
- student honors and service organizations

- families and churches as record of your service and hard work
- prospective employers

**All volunteers, interns & practicum students must record their hours served each month.**

On-site Work

Documentation of volunteer hours begins when you sign in and out each day at the front desk (**Green Volunteer Sign In Form**). The Volunteer Coordinator will collect this form each month and record hours served in a database. **If you leave the building on Institute business, please mark “Yes” in the “Out on Institute Business” column so these hours may be counted.**

If you are participating in more than one volunteer activity at the IISTL, please sign in separately for each activity. For example, if you work as a literacy tutor from 1-3:30 and after school tutor from 3:30-5:30, it is essential that you sign in and out for each task.

**Please clearly abbreviate your department code and job code on the sign in sheet every time.** Some codes for the most common volunteer jobs are indicated below. Ask you supervisor for details.

**Department and Job Codes to use on Sign In Form:**

Volunteer Job (Full name)	Department Code	Job Code
After School Tutor	EDU	YOU
Literacy Tutor	EDU	LT
Teacher’s Aide	EDU	TA
Intern	varies	INT
Practicum	varies	PRAC
Education Department	EDU	
Social Services	SS	
Mental Health	MH	
Employment	EMP	

Example sign in sheet:

Name	Sign In	Sign Out	Out on Institute Business?	Sign in	Sign out	Department	Job
Suzy Strawberry	9:00am	12:00pm				EDU	TA
April Apricot	1pm	2pm	Yes - home visit	3pm	4pm	SS	PRAC

Off-site Work

We also want to include the important work that you do outside of the Institute’s building. The only way for the Institute to know how much time you are spending outside of the building is for you to turn in a log of these hours each month.

Interns are encouraged to keep track of his/her hours in a day planner. **Make a list of your total off-site hours and turn this in to the Volunteer Coordinator by the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of each month.**

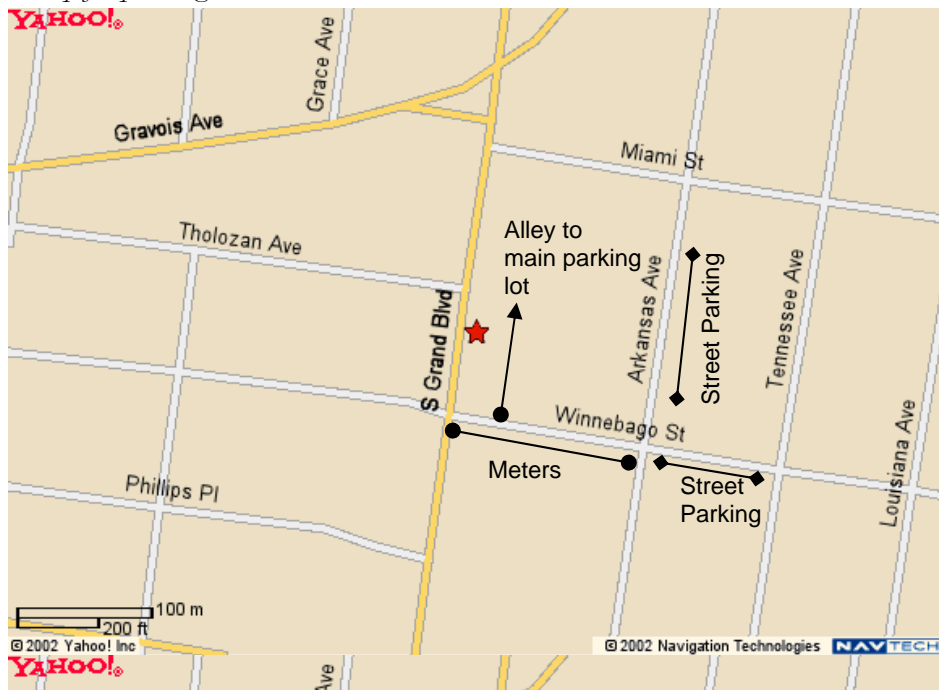
Supervisors and Volunteers alike must understand the importance of such documentation and comply with the established procedures. Failure to do so can result in significant losses to the Institute, its clients, and to you, the volunteer.

**IX. Insurance**

The International Institute carries insurance for all volunteers provided the volunteer is acting at the direction of the Institute and the work is within the scope of the program for which they are volunteering. Volunteers may see a copy of the policy endorsement by contacting the Volunteer Coordinator.

## X. Parking

- The Institute has 2 parking lots – the small lot off Winnebago and the large, gated lot (down the alley). Currently, there is not enough parking to accommodate all staff and volunteers.
- Volunteers are welcome to park in the lots if space is available.
- If space is not available in the lots, volunteers may park at the meters on Winnebago or at non-metered, off-street parking on Winnebago and Arkansas.
- Volunteers must observe all street regulations and sign postings. Do not park in restricted areas, the alley, or empty grass lots.
- **The Institute is not responsible for volunteers' cars and/or parking fines.**
- *Please see map for parking details.*



## XI. Quarterly Potluck

Each quarter, the Institute holds a Staff Potluck. All volunteers are enthusiastically invited to attend. If you would like to contribute to the Potluck, please contact Christina Juelfs, Community Relations Specialist at extension 121. The Potluck will be advertised throughout the Institute. Please join us for fabulous food and good conversation. Hope to see you there!

## XII. Equal Employment Policy & Procedures

The Agency is committed to ensuring equal opportunities and equal consideration to all applicants and volunteers in matters including recruitment, placement, or termination. Within those parameters, such decisions will be made at the sole prerogative of the President. In accordance with federal and state laws, the best-qualified volunteer will be placed without regard to race, color, sex, national origin, religion, age or handicap (except where age, sex, or physical condition is a *bona fide* occupational requirement).

The Agency shall not limit, segregate or classify applicants and employees so as to tend to, or to deprive, any applicant of employment opportunity or adversely affect the opportunity of such persons. Reasonable accommodation shall be made for handicapped persons who are applicants and for volunteers who are otherwise capable of performing the essential qualifications of their positions.

In accordance with Missouri law, the Agency will not discriminate against any applicant with a visual, aural or physical disability by interfering, directly or indirectly, with the use of an aid or appliance, including a guide dog, hearing dog or service dog of such person. Finally, the City of St. Louis, by ordinance, prohibits discrimination in

employment on the basis of familial status, marital status and sexual orientation and is so observed by the Agency.

### **XIII. Agency Diversity Statement**

The Agency values the diversity and creativity of its many employees and volunteers and recognizes the strength such diversity brings to the organization, its programs and procedures.

### **XIV. Alcohol & Drug-Free Environment**

It is the goal of the Agency to protect the public health and environment of members of the Agency community by promoting an alcohol and drug-free environment.

The unlawful manufacturing, distribution, dispensing, possession or use of a controlled substance or being under the influence of alcoholic beverages, illegal drugs or other intoxicants by volunteers at any time on Agency premises or while on Agency business is prohibited. Volunteers must not report for duty or be on Agency property while under the influence of, or have in their possession while on Agency property, any alcoholic beverage, marijuana or illegally obtained drug, narcotic or other illegal substance.

As a condition of volunteer service, any volunteer convicted for a violation of a criminal drug statute occurring at the Agency or during an volunteer's work shift must notify the agency's President in writing no later than five calendar days after such conviction. Within 30 calendar days of receiving such notice, the President will (1) take appropriate personnel action against the affected volunteer, up to and including termination, consistent with the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended; or (2) require such volunteer to participate satisfactorily in a drug abuse assistance or rehabilitation program approved for such purposes by a Federal, State, or local health, law enforcement, or other appropriate agency.

At the sole discretion of the President, the Agency reserves the right to test any volunteer for whom a reasonable suspicion or belief of illegal drug use or alcohol abuse exists. Refusal by the volunteer to submit to such testing may result in sanctions up to and including termination of his or her employment.

Referrals to drug counseling and rehabilitation programs are available to the Agency staff. Information about counseling and drug programs may be obtained from a volunteer's Administrative Supervisor or the President, and such requests will be held in the strictest confidence.

Referrals to drug counseling and rehabilitation programs are available to the Agency staff. Information about counseling and drug programs may be obtained from an employee's Administrative Supervisor or the President, and such requests will be held in the strictest confidence.

### **XV. Dress Policy**

The Agency dress policy requires staff and volunteers to use good judgment and common sense when dressing for work. Decisions about dress should be made according to the type of work being done, where it is being done, and with whom the volunteer will be working. If volunteers expect to be considered professionals, they must look and act accordingly.

At least annually, Agency management will share further details with the staff and volunteers.

### **XVI. Grievance Policy & Procedures**

The agency reserves the right to refuse the services of any individual without stating a reason. Should complaints arise with regards to a volunteer, the volunteer's supervisor will follow the established course of action, which may include termination. In any case, a volunteer can be dismissed at the discretion of the agency with or without cause. Volunteers shall **not** be eligible to use the Institute's established Grievance Process.

## **XVII. Prohibition of Harassment**

It is the policy of the Agency to provide an environment free of harassment as defined below. It is against the policy of the Agency for any employee to harass another employee, volunteer, or client. In so far as possible, it is also the Agency's policy to prohibit harassment of employees by volunteers, clients or visitors to the Agency.

Any employee or volunteer who has a complaint or concern relating to sexual harassment or any other form of harassment, abusive, taunting or demeaning behavior should report such conduct to his or her Administrative Supervisor or to the Agency's President. It is not necessary for the complaining person to follow the chain of command in reporting incidents of harassment. The volunteer may contact any individual in the above-listed capacities he or she is most comfortable speaking with about the problem.

To the fullest extent possible and subject to its commitment to completely investigate matters about which it becomes aware, the Agency will take appropriate steps to ensure confidentiality of those who report harassment as well as those who participate in or cooperate with an investigation. The Agency will respond to complaints or concerns promptly and take remedial action where appropriate.

### Workplace Harassment

The Agency will not tolerate conduct from its employees or volunteers, which might create an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment and which has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or otherwise adversely affecting an individual's employment opportunities. Harassment includes harassment based on an individual's race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, sexual orientation or disability as well as that of one's relatives, friends or associates.

Prohibited conduct includes but is not limited to:

- Epithets, slurs, negative stereotyping or threatening, intimidating or hostile acts, or
- Written or graphic material denigrating or showing hostility or aversion and that is on the employer's premises or circulated in the workplace.

### Sexual Harassment

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has issued guidelines setting forth the Commission's interpretation regarding sexual harassment as a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Accordingly, it is against the policy of the Agency for any employee or volunteer to sexually harass another employee, volunteer, or client by:

- Making unwelcome sexual advances or requests for sexual favors or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature,
- Making submission to or rejections of such conduct the basis for employment decisions affecting the employee, or
- Creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment by such conduct.

Sexual harassment does not refer to behavior or occasional compliments of a socially acceptable nature. It refers to behavior that is not welcome, that is personally offensive, that fails to respect the rights of others, that lowers morale and that, therefore, interferes with the Agency's work effectiveness.

## **XVIII. Prohibition of Smoking**

Volunteers are strictly prohibited from smoking inside the Agency or in Agency-leased/owned vehicles.

Restrictions will vary regarding smoking at Agency-sponsored events held off-site. In such cases, the decision will be made by the office of the President with due regard to the configuration of the site and its smoking policy.

#### **XIV. Use of Agency Computers**

Volunteers, Interns and Practicum students will use agency computers for assignments. These computers are to be used strictly for agency-assigned tasks. **The use of web mail (like Yahoo, MSN, etc.), instant messaging and personal internet surfing is prohibited.** Our virus protection is limited and does not safeguard against viruses that can be sent via instant messaging. A general mailbox (called “Intern”) has been assigned for the purpose of emailing documents. Ask your supervisor for access to the Institute Web Mail program and the password. Please do not compromise the work of the agency through irresponsible computer usage.

#### **INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY**

The agency service offices are rarely closed for inclement weather. However, whenever in doubt, **please call the Institute to check for a message left on the main switchboard (314-773-9090).**

*English classes and the After School Tutoring program are dependent upon the determination of the St. Louis Public Schools.*

- When **St. Louis Public Schools (aka, St. Louis City Schools) are closed** due to inclement weather, **English classes and the After School Tutoring program will be suspended, too.**
- If St. Louis Public Schools are **on a “snow schedule” with delayed openings, afternoon and evening ESL classes may NOT be cancelled.**
- Please **watch the TV (channels 2, 4, & 5) or listen to the radio** for school closings and snow schedules. Call the Institute for clarification, if necessary.
- Afternoon and Evening volunteers should call in for confirmation before leaving home.

*Note: Volunteers are not expected to place themselves or their vehicle at risk to meet their service commitment during times of inclement weather or hazardous road conditions.*

If at any time you feel that it would be a safety risk to you or your vehicle to come in to volunteer, **please call and let us know as soon as you make the decision not to arrive** at the scheduled time.

**The International Institute is closed for all services and classes on the following days:**

New Year’s Eve (after 1:00 p.m.)	Labor Day
New Year’s Day	Thanksgiving Day
Martin Luther King’s Birthday	Thanksgiving Friday
Presidents’ Day	Christmas Eve (after 1:00 p.m.)
Memorial Day	Christmas Day
Independence Day	



## **VOLUNTEER CONTRACT**

The International Institute places a high value on volunteers and your dedication to public service. We depend on volunteers of various backgrounds and appreciate the contributions of time, skills, and commitment that you give. As a result, we consider it important that our volunteers are informed of and agree to certain guidelines.

*Attendance:* You and your supervisor will mutually agree upon a volunteer schedule. The Institute staff and clients are depending on and plan for you to be present and punctual during your scheduled time. If for some reason you cannot keep your schedule, please call your supervisor as far in advance as possible so other arrangements can be made and staff can be notified.

*Dress:* Volunteers at the International Institute work with people who come from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. Many of them are newcomers to the U.S and still making cultural adjustments having come from cultures that are more restrictive than ours. In an effort to be culturally sensitive, the agency dress code should be followed. The agency dress code requires volunteers to use good judgment and common sense when dressing for work. Your attire should always be neat and clean. Clothing should not be a distraction from the services you are providing the client(s). No shorts, tight clothing, or clothing that bares your chest or midriff is permitted. Specific dress codes may be required for certain events.

*Volunteer Badge:* At your orientation, you will receive a name badge. Each time you arrive to volunteer at the Institute, sign in and put on your volunteer badge, which you are expected to wear for identification during your volunteer service every day. Those who volunteer off site will not be expected to wear a volunteer badge unless required by your supervisor.

*Record Keeping:* It is your responsibility to keep accurate volunteer time records. If you volunteer on site at the International Institute, each day you work, sign in and sign out at the 1<sup>st</sup> floor reception desk. If you volunteer off site, you will be requested to sign in and sign out on a volunteer sheet at the site or will be given an individual sheet (purple card) to be turned in to your supervisor at the end of the month. By keeping accurate records, it helps the Institute to track hours of public service and account for volunteers serving in programs. Volunteer hours are also considered a donation and may be reported to funders of the International Institute. Volunteer hours will be recorded on a monthly basis at a central location within the agency.

*Conduct:* Volunteers are seen as being representatives of the International Institute when they are working with agency clients, service providers and the general community. Therefore it is your duty to act in a professional manner at all times while volunteering. Please maintain a professional relationship with all clients at all times (on and off site) while you are serving as a volunteer of the Institute.

### *Boundaries:*

As a volunteer it is your duty to maintain professional boundaries with the clients served by the International Institute. You may not exchange phone numbers, addresses or other contact information. Contact with any clients must be arranged through an International Institute employee and, when applicable, approved by your supervisor. The Institute does not permit contact with our clients outside the scope of your volunteer duties/hours unless your volunteer supervisor has granted permission. We welcome your family and friends to join you in your volunteer activities; however, prior to client contact, all volunteers and their guests must go through the application process.

Should a client come to you with problems other than those related to your volunteer duties, please contact your volunteer supervisor before attempting to solve this problem. Many times, Institute staff are working with clients on these issues and your involvement may actually inhibit a speedy resolution.

*Gifts/ Donations:* We are continually working on clients' needs. Gifts made directly to clients may have unforeseen consequences. If you would like to make a donation, please contact your volunteer supervisor to discuss the situation.

*Transportation:* No volunteer should transport a client without prior approval from your volunteer supervisor.

*Photography Policy:* Volunteers are not permitted to take photos at the International Institute and its events without prior permission by their supervisor. Photos of clients/students are absolutely prohibited. You can request a photo from a staff person if it is required for a school project or other purpose.

*Publishing Materials:* Volunteers and Interns should adhere to the International Institute style guide when creating flyers, brochures and other printed materials. Please see your supervisor to obtain the style guide and the administration department must approve your materials before publishing.

*Media:* NO ONE shall contact the media on his or her own or respond to a media inquiry without first having cleared the activity through your supervisor and the President of the International Institute or her designate. If a media person contacts you for information or to ask a question, do not respond unless the request has been cleared in advance with the President's office. (The media understands this kind of policy, since it is a policy which many other businesses in St. Louis also follow). It is important that information we distribute or give in response to a media inquiry be accurate and that all responsible individuals at the agency be aware of such activities.

*Electioneering:* Volunteers may not promote one political party or candidate over another at the International Institute of St. Louis. This includes the prohibition of political buttons, t-shirts, stickers, etc. inside the International Institute or anytime you are with our students and clients.

*Dismissals:* The agency reserves the right to refuse the services of any individual without stating a reason. Should complaints arise with regards to a volunteer, the volunteer's supervisor, upon review of the specifics, shall determine the appropriate course of action, which may include termination. In any case, a volunteer can be dismissed at the discretion of the agency with or without cause. Causes for dismissals include but are not limited to some of the following:

- Repeated absences without sufficient notice.
- Destruction or theft of the Institute's or another individual's property.
- Possession of firearms, alcohol or controlled substances on the Institute's property or reporting to volunteer under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs.
- Displays of abusive or disruptive behavior including abusive language or conduct towards clients, staff, volunteers, or the public.
- Invasion of privacy or a breach of confidentiality of clients, the agency, staff, or other volunteers.
- Unapproved contact with the media.
- Violating the Non – Proselytizing Agreement.
- Misuse of any Institute records or equipment, including electronic data.

The Institute staff is open to your suggestions and comments, which may help better serve you and the Institute clients. If you have any questions about policies, procedures, or your job duties, please discuss them with your supervisor. We want to make your volunteer experience a meaningful one.

**I have read the above and agree to the terms.**

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*Volunteer Signature*

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*Date*



**INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ST. LOUIS  
POLICY FOR VOLUNTEERS REGARDING  
CONFIDENTIALITY OF CLIENT INFORMATION**

Whereas the Agency considers protection of client confidentiality to be a high priority, the Agency therefore makes a directive that all client confidences with volunteers or in Agency files not be disclosed to the public, other government agencies, friends and relatives of the volunteer, or to other volunteers without a written release from the client or in special limited circumstances when it is either absolutely necessary for some substantial benefit to the client and the written release is not possible and permission of the Agency's Executive has been obtained or when the client or some other person is in serious danger. Consultations between volunteers directly related to a client's service needs are exempt.

This policy is effective as of March 1, 1989, by order of:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Anna E. Crosslin  
President/Executive Director

**CONFIDENTIALITY OF CLIENT INFORMATION AGREEMENT**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, am a volunteer with the International Institute and do hereby swear that I will abide by its Policy for Volunteers Regarding Confidentiality of Client Information and will do nothing to be in conflict with it.

I further understand that any unauthorized, intentional disclosure of identifying confidential information by me to a member of the public may result in personal liability for resulting negative consequences.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Volunteer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## **INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ST. LOUIS POLICY FOR VOLUNTEERS REGARDING NON-PROSELYTIZING**

The policy of the International Institute is that no proselytizing is allowed, either at the Institute or outside the Institute grounds, with any of the clients/students one encounters while at the International Institute.

Specifically this means that, as a volunteer of the International Institute, any contact with the clients/students of the International Institute will be of a professional nature. There will be no attempt to convert one from one faith or belief to another or to otherwise promote one faith over another, nor will the volunteer act in such a way that can be taken as an attempt to convert to or promote a particular faith.

I have read and understand this statement, and agree to conduct myself in accordance with such policy.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Volunteer's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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### **Consent to be Photographed**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to be photographed, audio taped and/or  
Print Volunteer Name  
videotaped in activities sponsored by the International Institute, which may be used in communications efforts produced by the International Institute or other media outlets to promote the agency.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Volunteer Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Information for Interns and Practicum Students**

The following lists were compiled by a former Social Work practicum student. While they specifically refer to MSW students, most suggestions can be applied to any academic or professional internship.

### **How does a MSW student find a practicum compatible with his/her interests?**

- First and foremost, take time to explore and identify your career aspirations and related work ethics.
- Ask a Faculty Practicum Liaison, if available, for a list of potential sites that he/she feels may serve as a good match.
- Review your program's lists of practicum sites at which previous students have worked.
- Review your program's list of practicum site student evaluations.
- Attend local and university career/practicum fairs.
- Ask fellow students and professors for suggestions.
- Set up brief, informal meetings with faculty whose research or practice experience interests you and ask them for names and contact information of potential sites.
- Contact professors in other related academic departments for ideas or potential practicum opportunities (e.g., public policy, psychology, etc.).
- Peruse university bulletin boards for possible opportunities.
- Check local job postings and contact to see if they could create an internship tailored to meet both of your needs.
- Contact organizations and institutions you hear about and see in the media (i.e., local newspapers, television, billboards, and/or other alternative community newspapers/pamphlets).

### **After identifying potential practicum sites, how does a MSW student choose the best one?**

- Interview with at least 3 potential practicum sites.
- Interview with a diverse range of sites.
- Upon the interview, make certain that the MSW supervisor has a concrete, realistic project or set of tasks for you to work on.
- Go into the interview with knowledge of the institution or organization so you have an idea of what opportunities may exist.
- Do not choose a site based on if it is a paid practicum; choose based on the capacity of the site (and supervisor) to offer you an array of diverse and challenging experiences. You want to learn new skills and/or gain confidence by rehearsing the skills you already have at hand.

### **How to take advantage of your practicum experience at the International Institute:**

- Be a self-starter.
- Make your learning agreement goals realistic yet challenging.
- Conduct an in-depth scientific literature review pertaining to your learning agreement goals and discuss with supervisor, other Institute staff, and/or practicum students.
- Set weekly and monthly goals.
- Independently seek to collaborate on projects with other MSW/BSW practicum students.
- Bring up any concerns, questions, or recommendations for service improvement with your supervisor.
- Ask questions.
- Join and participate in the Refugee & Immigrant Consortium of St. Louis.
- Attend conferences addressing immigrant and refugee issues to get a more comprehensive picture of the hardships facing such populations.
- Attend quarterly Information Sessions to get a better understanding of the range of acculturation issues facing immigrants and refugees.
- Have fun.

## **Information Sessions for Volunteers, Interns and Practicum Students**

In an effort to provide on-going training and information sharing with our volunteer corps, agency departments will host Information Sessions during the first month of each quarter (January, April, July, October). All volunteers, interns and practicum students are invited to attend.

- Information Sessions will take place during one week each quarter
- All meetings will take place from 3:30-5 p.m.

## **Tax Information for Volunteers**

From [www.bankrate.com/brm/itax/tips/20010402a.asp](http://www.bankrate.com/brm/itax/tips/20010402a.asp)

### **Driving home deductions**

Volunteer work itself does not produce a tax deduction. However, your travel expenses getting to and from the volunteer location are deductible. If you use your car to help out once you get there (for example, delivering food to the needy for your church), that counts, too.

You can take a standard deduction of 14 cents per mile on your tax return. Or, if it's more advantageous and you kept track, you can deduct the actual cost of your gas for your philanthropic driving. With either choice, you also can include any parking fees or tolls paid.

### **Out-of-pocket expenses**

Similarly, if you pay for some of a qualified organization's expenses and aren't reimbursed, these costs can count as charitable deductions. This might be buying stamps for a group's mailings or purchasing office supplies for the organization's administrative operations.

And if your volunteer work requires you wear a uniform -- say, as a Red Cross hospital aide -- the cost of the clothing and of keeping it clean are deductible.

# International Institute and Refugee Information

## National Movement & History

In the first two decades of the last century, 15 million people immigrated to the United States, the highest level of immigration since the birth of the republic. The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) recognized the need for specialized services for the foreign-born, creating a department of Immigrant and Foreign Communities to oversee field office projects called International Institutes. Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago, a predecessor of the affiliated agency there today, created a model for meeting immigrant needs: it was located in an immigrant neighborhood, provided social and humanitarian services, taught English, and created opportunities for cultural expression and civic growth.

Learning from this model, Edith Terry Bremer started the first International Institute in New York City in 1911. In 1919 Ruth Holliday Watkins and a group of caring YWCA members founded the International Institute in St. Louis. Jane Addams served as the agency's keynote speaker at its November 19th dedication.

By 1925, there were 55 International Institutes in the United States, primarily in the industrial northeast, Midwest, and California, which already led the nation in immigrant population, with 52 percent of Californians being immigrants and their children. Today, these pioneers are joined by immigrant-serving projects in Travelers and Immigrants Aid Societies, YMCAs, Nationalities Service Centers, and others to form the Immigration and Refugee Services of America (IRSA) partnership of organizations.

In St. Louis, today's International Folkfest has its origins in the International May Festival, first held in 1920. Organized by the International Institute, the May Festival was one of the earliest multicultural celebrations in the nation. It took place 8 years before the first National Folk Festival, also held here.

In 1923, the St. Louis Institute separated from the YWCA and expanded its services to include men as well as women. That year, the Institute became a member of the Community Chest, United Way's predecessor. In 1934 the Institute organized its first "Festival of Nations" for the formal dedication of the Municipal Auditorium (Kiel). Today, the Institute's annual Festival of Nations celebrates multicultural St. Louis with a large-scale outdoor festival each July.

Since 1980, the Institute has become nationally known for its innovative programs for refugees. Today, the tides of refugees seen at the Institute are continually shifting, from Southeast Asia, to Eastern Europe, to Africa and the Caribbean. In the past decade, its services have also grown to reach new populations of immigrants-in-need. Thus, more than 8,000 newcomers from more than 40 countries annually receive vital adjustment services at the Institute.

## Mission Statement

Since 1919, the International Institute has been strengthening the St. Louis community by helping immigrants and their families become secure and successful Americans and by promoting the value of ethnic diversity in the social, cultural and economic life of the region.

## Institute Services

*This section of your Handbook is designed to familiarize you with the many programs and services of the International Institute. Please refer to this information for your general knowledge and when writing papers or preparing presentations to meet your academic requirements. If you have questions beyond the information in this section, please see your Department Supervisor or Field Instructor.*

The Institute, a United Way agency, specializes in dealing with the needs of immigrants and refugees by helping to reunite families, obtain visas and citizenship papers, find jobs and housing, teach English as a Second Language, provide translation and interpreter services, and, at all times, help each individual achieve self-

sufficiency and independence. It also works to increase cross cultural understanding and relations. Annually, the agency provides direct services to more than 10,000 new Americans representing more than 70 ethnicities.

### **I. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)**

ESOL programs at the International Institute help speakers from other languages develop the English language skills and knowledge of American culture they need to live, work and study successfully in the United States. The Education Department annually serves approximately 3,000 non-native adult students from 50 different countries. Students must be 16 years old and not enrolled in a secondary education institution.

FREE programs throughout the year provide training in:

- English Conversation & Grammar
- Practical and Academic Reading & Writing
- American Culture and Customs
- Citizenship Preparation
- Literacy Skills
- Basic Computer Skills
- Field Trips to Local Attractions

### **Classes are funded in collaboration with St. Louis Public Schools AEL.**

A. Programs and Services:

1. Core ESOL Classes
  - 9:00 am - 12:00 pm, M - F
  - 1:00 pm - 3:30 pm, M - Th
  - 6:30 pm - 9:00 pm, M - Th
2. Job Success Class
  - 1:00 pm - 3:30 pm, M - Th
3. After-School Tutoring and Skills Development
  - 3:30 pm - 5:30 pm, M - Th
4. Citizenship Prep Classes
  - a) Students 60+ years of age: 1:00 - 3:00 pm, T - Th
  - b) Intermediate-level students:
    - 6:30 pm - 9:00 pm, T & Th
    - 9:30 am - 12:30 pm, M & W
5. Saturday Field Trips
  - Saturdays, times vary
7. Literacy Tutorial
  - 1:00 pm - 3:30 pm, M - Th
  - 6pm - 8:30 pm, T - Th
8. Michigan Testing
  - By appointment

B. Why our ESOL programs are EFFECTIVE?

1. Classes are FREE
2. Students taught at appropriate level:
  - Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced classes
  - Students placed according to their English language abilities
  - Placement and Progress tests assess each student individually
  - Students advance at own pace
3. Relevant and dynamic instruction:
  - Focus on self-sufficiency in everyday English for real life situations
  - Student-centered activities with immediate feedback

- Maximum class practice; little or no homework required
  - Low-stress learning environment
  - Saturday field trips for families
4. Professional Instructors and Staff:
- Teachers all have at least a B.A./B.S. degree; almost one-half hold advanced degrees, most in teaching ESOL
  - Teachers are state-certified in Adult Education and have experience and training in ESOL
  - Most staff members speak another language & have lived abroad
  - Staff is caring and conscientious
5. Flexibility:
- Morning, Afternoon & Evening classes accommodate schedules
  - Open enrollment -- students can enter any time

Contact Information

Registration for classes: Mon - Wed

- 8:30 am - 1:00 pm for daytime classes
- 6:00 pm - 7:30 pm for evening classes

For registration information

314-773-9090 ext. 101 or 108

To make an appointment for a Michigan test

314-773-9090 ext. 153

For Morning and Citizenship programs, Michigan Testing & Curriculum / Resource Manager

314-773-9090 ext. 153

For general information or to speak to the Department Director

314-773-9090 ext. 107

**II. Elderlinks: Empowering Elderly Refugees**

The Elderlinks program provides refugees 60 years and older with socialization opportunities, social services, English and citizenship training. The program aims to help elderly refugees become active players in their own lives and links them to mainstream senior services. Elderlinks is underwritten by a grant from Office of Refugee Resettlement and Department of Health and Human Services.

A. Program Objective:

Elderlinks program aims to

- Empower refugees of 60 years of age and older become active players in their own lives.
- Assist senior refugees in gaining better access to mainstream programs and services.
- Assist in moving through Naturalization/Citizenship process.
- Help increase cultural competency and linguistic capabilities.

B. Services For Elderly:

1. Assessment Services

- Meet with refugees 60 years or older to identify short and long-term needs.

2. Referral Services

- Link participants with existing mainstream networks for benefits. Refer those in need to appropriate mental health counseling, physical health care services, housing agencies and other pertinent social services.

3. English Language/ Citizenship

- Offer English language classes and specially modified Citizenship training to meet the needs of elderly refugees.
- 4. Senior Meetings
  - Provide elderly refugees a place to socialize, participate in planned activities and have lunch with peers.
- 5. Education/ Awareness Services
  - Provide information to seniors on various health and social services and events.
  - Invite presenters on various topics such as history, culture, health etc.

Who is eligible

- Refugees in the city and county of St. Louis who are 60 years of age or older.
- The services offered are free of cost.
- Currently the program is serving primarily three ethnic communities - Bosnian, Vietnamese and Somali.

**III. Employment Services**

The Employment Department of the International Institute leads the St. Louis metropolitan area in developing beneficial cross-cultural relationships between New Americans and local employers. We accomplish this by providing specialized employment services that move refugees and immigrants toward productivity and self-sufficiency while strengthening our local economy with a willing and consistent source of labor.

**Client Information**

Why use the Employment Programs at the International Institute to Job Search?

- Our staff places more than 1,000 New Americans in jobs each year.
- Our employment services are entirely free to both employers and our clients.
- We have established relationships with hundreds of area employers.
- Individualized assistance throughout the job search and job orientation process:
  - Job readiness classes
  - English for non-native speakers
  - Transportation to interviews
  - Bus training
  - Completing job applications
  - Resume writing
  - Job upgrade & career counseling

We have a variety of employment services for immigrants, refugees or asylees, upon proof of immigration status and legal authorization to work in the US.

**Programs**

A. Matching Grant Program

1. Services

- employment services
- case management
- cash assistance
- employment bonuses

2. Helps clients attain self-sufficiency within 4 months

3. Eligibility

- Refugees enrolling in first 30 days in US or asylees enrolling within 30 days after asylum granted
- Commitment to employment in 4 months
- Priority for those needing additional services for self-sufficiency

4. Contact: 314-773-9090, ext. 138

## B. Refugee/Asylee Employment

### 1. Services

- job counseling
- placement
- supportive services for initial US employment

### 2. Eligibility

- For refugees and asylees not eligible for Matching Grant program

### 3. Contact: 314-773-9090, ext. 165

## C. Work Links

### 1. Services

- Specialized support and employment case management

### 2. Eligibility

- Refugees up to 5 years after arrival or
- Asylees up to 5 years after asylum granted,
- with multiple barriers to employment, such as:
  - Child care issues
  - Physical or emotional limitations
  - Risk of family abuse
  - Low level English & no advancement in 6 months
  - Poor success at jobs (lost 2+ jobs)
  - No formal education / not literate

### 3. Contact: 314-773-9090, ext. 178

## D. Dislocated Worker Program

### 1. Services

- individualized counseling
- assessment
- job readiness training
- placement and retention

### 2. Eligibility

- immigrants, or
- refugees in US more than 5 years or
- asylees more than 5 years from date of asylum
- permanently laid off, fired, or working at site shutting down within 180 days

### 3. Contact: 314-773-9090, ext. 162

## E. Upgrade Program

### 1. Services

- Individualized job counseling, placement and retention

### 2. Eligibility:

- Refugees/asylees who:
  - Have been in US less than 5 years (5 years from asylum for asylees)
  - Were employed at least 6 months or recently laid off
  - Are seeking a better shift, higher wages, or improved benefits

### 3. Contact: 314-773-9090, ext. 162

## F. Adult Services Program

### 1. Services

- individualized counseling
- assessment

- job readiness training
  - placement and retention services
2. Eligibility
- Immigrants, or
  - refugees in US more than 5 years, or
  - asylees more than 5 years from date of asylum
  - Must meet Workforce Investment Act (WIA) income guidelines
3. Contact: 314-773-9090, ext. 165

## **Employer Information**

### Why Hire Through the International Institute?

- Our staff places more than 1,000 New Americans in jobs each year.
- Unlike many other agencies, our employment services are entirely free to both employers and New Americans.
- Hiring New Americans is cost-effective because they are typically good workers.
- Like immigrants who came before them, refugees are reliable, industrious, productive, loyal, and show an eagerness and enthusiasm not often found in the entry-level workforce.

### Employer Services

- Screening, matching, and referral of qualified applicants
- Assistance with interviewing through interpreting and translation of job-related documents
- Post employment assistance and retention services
- Enriching your workforce through diversity
- Cross-cultural training in the workplace

### Job Preparation for New Americans

- Job readiness classes emphasizing:
  - Workplace communication
  - Following directions
  - Employer expectations
  - Punctuality, using time clocks
- Transportation to interviews and bus training
- Job counseling, job placement, and job market orientation
- Job upgrade services, career counseling, certification research and resume writing
- English for non-native speakers

### Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Employment

1. Are the Institute's clients legal to work here?
  - Yes. Work authorization documents are required as part of our pre-screening process.
2. What can I do to promote diversity in my company?
  - Become knowledgeable and comfortable with different cultural habits, and your employees and customers will follow. We provide cross-cultural training in the workplace, and teach our clients to meet employer expectations.

### Contact Information

- Contact our Placement Manager with your job openings at: 314-773-9090, Ext. 165, or go to our website at [www.iistl.org](http://www.iistl.org)

## **IV. International Institute Business Solutions Center: Interpretation and Translation Services**

In 1996, the Institute established Language Links, a program to provide skilled interpretation and translation in over 45 languages spoken in the St. Louis area. The Institute's Language Links program is the largest and most diverse interpretation and translation agency in St. Louis. We create a communication link between our community's institutions and the non-English speaking population in vital situations such as medical or mental

health appointments, educational assessments, and employment-related meetings. Language Links holds contracts with state agencies, courts, and police while also serving hospitals, mental health providers, Medicaid programs, employers, and schools, both city and county. We excel in our services and employ non-biased, qualified, and confidential interpreters to effectively bridge the language barrier.

**Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964** prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin by any entity that receives federal financial assistance. Under that law, hospitals, HMOs, social service agencies and all other entities that receive federal financial assistance are required to take the steps necessary to ensure that individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) can meaningfully access the programs and services free of charge.

### Services

#### A. Oral Interpretation

- Trained, professional interpreters are available seven days a week, 24-hours a day in any setting including: medical appointments, court hearings, educational conferences, emergency medical and/or legal situations, INS appointments and business meetings.

#### B. Document Translation

- We offer translation of personal and business, legal, technical, and academic documents. Translations can be received and submitted by fax, disk, email, and hard copy or in person, quickly and efficiently. Estimates are free.

#### C. Interpreter Training

- Language Links also offers specialized skill building and professional development training classes for interpreters. Each class is designed to address a particular setting in which the community interpreter works. The curriculum now includes: Community Interpreting 101, Interpreting in the Educational Setting, An Orientation to Court Interpreting, and Interpreting for the DFS-Child Abuse and Neglect Unit.

#### D. Provider Workshops

- In addition to our interpreter training classes, we offer workshops for professionals working with interpreters. The workshop provides guidelines on working with interpreters, liability issues, and more. These workshops can be tailor-made to address site-specific or staff-specific topics.

### To Request Services

#### A. To request oral, on-site interpreting services:

- Please call the Language Links office at (314) 773-9090, ext. 152 for interpreter availability and fees.
  - General office hours are Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
  - During weekends, evenings, and holidays, customers can obtain emergency interpreter services by calling Language Links' 24-hour service at (314) 962-7770.

#### B. To request an estimate for translation services:

- Please call the IIBSC office at (314) 773-9090, ext. 151 to make an appointment with the translations services specialist.

For more information visit our website at [www.iistl.org](http://www.iistl.org) or call the Language Links program manager at (314) 773-9090, ext. 179.

### V. Mental Health Services

Why specialized Mental Health Services?

Virtually all refugees and many immigrants arrive in the U.S. with the long-lasting emotional and psychological effects of being forced to flee their home. Upon arrival to St. Louis, they often exhibit various reactions to trauma, including:

- depression,
- anxiety and panic attacks,

- frequent nightmares,
- feelings of guilt and shame,
- psycho-somatic symptoms, and/or
- shattered assumptions and values that are core to the human existence.

The effects of trauma strike all spheres of a survivor's life, including physiological, psychological, legal, social, familial, and economic, preventing a productive and meaningful life. These trauma effects are intensified by the enormous challenges of resettlement for the foreign born, e.g., linguistic, cultural, social and occupational.

#### Professional and Caring Practitioners

- The International Institute's mental health staff is experienced in addressing the specialized psychological and emotional needs of refugees and immigrants
- Our staff have specialized training in treating war and torture-related trauma, with an in-depth knowledge about the migration experience that is based on working with many different populations
- Staff professionals include therapists, art therapists, social workers and mental health caseworkers

#### Language and cultural sensitivity

- Our approach in treating clients is sensitive to both cultural and displacement issues
- All treatment is provided in the client's native language either through an interpreter or a bilingual therapist

#### **Mental Health Services**

The agency offers the following mental health services:

- Individual counseling
- Home visits
- Art therapy
- Crisis intervention
- Support groups
- Therapy groups
- Community support and referrals
- Healing Touch treatment
- Couples and family therapy
- Continuous casework support
- Interpretation during session

#### Fees

- All services are free for refugees in the United States less than five years. Other refugees and non-immigrant refugees may also be served on a sliding-fee scale. Consultations and training are available to community professionals and agencies on a fee-for-service basis.

#### A. Assessment

- An assessment is completed to determine the best treatment modality for the client - verbal therapy, art therapy, healing touch, couples therapy, family therapy.

#### B. Verbal Therapy

- In-depth individual therapy addresses post-trauma symptoms as well as underlying emotional and cognitive issues.
- Therapeutic techniques are selected to best suit the needs of the client.

#### C. Crisis Intervention

- Skilled social workers work directly with community resources to provide individual and family support, assistance and resources during times of crisis.

#### D. Support Groups

- Support groups are formed to provide social and cultural information among specific populations.
  - These groups are facilitated by department staff, with group participants actively involved in the planning of the group.
- E. Therapy Groups
- Therapy groups are developed according to client psychological and cultural/linguistic needs.
  - Therapy groups are led by the therapist and assisted by an interpreter who is a member of a given ethnic group.
- F. Case Management
- Specially trained caseworkers maintain contact and provide support to clients during and in-between counseling sessions/group participation.
  - Caseworkers establish regular contact with the client, providing 'supportive care' and follow-up.

**For more information or to make a referral, call 314-773-9090 ext. 168.**

## **VI. Social Services and Resettlement**

### Objectives

Social Services are a vital link for successful refugee and asylee adjustment. Upon arrival to St. Louis, refugees and asylees enter an environment that few are familiar with. Not only is language a barrier, but cultural customs and personal expectations also contribute to the challenges faced by our clients. The Social Services Department provides assistance and services to foster client self-sufficiency.

### Staff

Most of our direct service staff members are immigrants and refugees themselves, who speak the language and understand the culture of our clients. They are especially capable of helping refugees and asylees navigate their way through new systems and this new culture to help them build a new life in the United States.

### Eligibility

- The Social Services Department is able to provide a wide range of social services to refugees and asylees.
- Unless otherwise noted below, services are available for five years.
- For refugees, the five-year period is measured from the date they entered the country; for asylees, this period is measured from the date asylum was granted.
- Refugees or asylees who have recently relocated to St. Louis or were resettled by another agency are eligible for all social services with the exception of resettlement services noted below.
- A caseworker is assigned to the client and the clients' situation and needs are addressed on an individual basis.

### A. Resettlement Services

- Services are provided through federal funding to newly-arrived clients sponsored by the Institute.
- Services include:
  - airport meet
  - case management
  - benefits application
  - healthcare enrollment
  - school enrollment for children
  - health screening & immunizations
  - apartment set-up and housing assistance
  - cultural orientation
  - community referrals
  - utility assistance

#### B. General Social Services

- A variety of social services are provided to refugees and asylees after initial resettlement.
- These services are funded through the State of Missouri, and include a variety of case management services to help the refugee or asylee move towards self-sufficiency.

#### C. Benefits Outreach Program (BOP)

- The BOP program assists clients with applications for federal and state benefits.
- BOP staff determine client eligibility for benefits (Medicaid, medical assistance, food stamps, utility assistance, financial assistance, etc.) and submit the appropriate applications.

#### D. Immigration Assistance

- We provide current information and assistance for legal status changes and family sponsorship.
- The Immigration desk also takes passport photos and voter registration.
- These services are open to all immigrants, and are available regardless of length of time in the United States.

#### E. Information and Referral

- Staff is available to provide information and referral services to community agencies on an as-needed basis.
- These services are available without regard to length of time in the United States.

#### F. Health, Wellness and Prevention

- Through local funding, Social Services staff and SLU nurses provide in-home 'house parties' to refugee women and families.
- In addition to health and wellness information, topics also include appropriate use of the Emergency Room and how to request an interpreter.
- This program is open to refugees and asylees without regard to length of time in the United States.

**For more information or to make a referral, call 314-773-9090 ext. 169.**

# REFUGEE 101

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### REFUGEE:

Someone who has fled his/her country because he/she fears persecution based on race, religion, nationality, social group, or political opinion. The definition is sometimes expanded to include people fleeing war or other armed conflict.

### ASYLUM SEEKER:

Someone who claims to be a refugee. Often, an asylum seeker must undergo a legal procedure in which the host country decides if he/she qualifies for refugee status. International law recognizes the right to seek asylum, but does not oblige states to provide it.

### INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSON:

Someone who has been forced from his/her home for refugee-like reasons, but remains within the borders of his/her own country. Because the person is still under the jurisdiction of a government that might not want international agencies to help him/her, an internally displaced person might still be vulnerable to persecution or violence. See also Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement: *Handbook, Manual, and Annotations*. There are more internally displaced people than refugees, and they are a growing concern to the U.S. Committee for Refugees.

### UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR):

Established in 1951, UNHCR is the branch of the United Nations charged with the international protection of refugees. UNHCR has increasingly been asked not only to protect refugees, but also to provide assistance to them. Mr. António Guterres is the current High Commissioner.

### 1951 U.N. REFUGEE CONVENTION:

On July 28, 1951, world governments adopted the “Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.” The Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol established the legal standards for refugee protection.

### DURABLE SOLUTIONS:

Refugee protection and assistance organizations generally promote three “durable solutions” to refugees’ plight: voluntary repatriation, local integration in the country of first asylum, or resettlement in a third country.

### VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION:

When conditions in the home country have changed so much that refugees no longer believe their lives or liberty are threatened, they may return home voluntarily.

### LOCAL INTEGRATION:

When it is not safe for refugees to return home after a prolonged period in exile, a host government may decide to allow refugees to integrate locally in the first-asylum country.

### THIRD-COUNTRY RESETTLEMENT:

Third-country resettlement is usually the last option of the three potential solutions. When repatriation would be unsafe and the first-asylum country refuses local integration, a third country must be found to accept the refugees.

## FAQs about Refugees and Immigrants

### 1. Who is a refugee?

Generally, a refugee is a person who has fled his/her country because of fear of persecution. U.S. law incorporated the refugee definition contained in the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Adopted in Geneva in 1951, which defines a refugee as 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.”

### 2. What is the difference between refugees and immigrants?

Refugees have fled because of persecution while immigrants have left their home countries for other reasons.

### 3. How many refugees are there worldwide?

At the end of 2004, UNHCR had an estimated population of concern of 19.2 million worldwide. This number includes refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced persons, among others. Refugees make up 48% of this category, making 9.2 million refugees worldwide at the end of 2004.

### 4. Is the global refugee population increasing or decreasing?

The 9.2 million refugees estimated at the end of 2004 indicated a 4% decrease in the number of refugees from the beginning of 2004 and the fourth consecutive year in which these numbers decreased. Over this four year period, the global refugee population fell 24%, with sharper decreases in the first half of the period. In regional terms, Southern Africa recorded the largest reduction in the refugee population during 2004 (-20%), followed by West Africa (-12%). Reductions in the refugee population were also reported in Europe (-6%), the Americas (-4%), CASWANAME (Central Asia, South-West Asia, North Africa and Middle East) (-3%). However, a few regions recorded increases, including Asia and Pacific (+2%), Central Africa and the Great Lakes region (+1%), and East and Horn of Africa (+0.3%). Decreases in the refugee population are often the result of refugees having access to durable solutions, in particular voluntary repatriation.

### 5. Where do most of the world's refugees come from?

Afghanistan continues to be by far the largest country of origin of refugees under UNHCR care. By the end of 2004, 2.1 million Afghan refugees were reported by 78 asylum countries, constituting 23 per cent of the global refugee population. Despite continued repatriation, the number of Afghan refugees dropped by only two per cent during the year. Other major refugee origins experiencing important decreases during 2004 were Burundi (-9%) and Iraq (-15%). The strong fall in the Burundian refugee population reflects the repatriation of refugees from the United Republic of Tanzania. Significant decreases in the refugee population, often as a result of durable solutions, were also recorded for refugees from Angola (-101,000) Bosnia and Herzegovina (-62,000), Iraq (-51,000), Serbia and Montenegro (-33,000), and Liberia (-18,000).

However, some refugee nationalities recorded an increase in the population during 2004. The number of Sudanese refugees increased by almost 125,000 persons (+21%) due to mass outflows, mainly to Chad. The number of refugees from the Russian Federation increased by 11,000 (+12%) while the number of Indonesian and Colombian refugees increased by more than 11,000 (+72%) and 9,000 (25%) respectively.

### 6. Where do most of the world's refugees go?

The vast majority of the world's estimated 9.2 million refugees are in the developing world. The Middle East hosted the largest number of refugees as of 2005. Iran, alone, hosted over 1 million refugees and Pakistan hosted only slightly fewer. Africa hosted 4.9 million individuals, or approximately 25% of all the people of concern to UNHCR, including refugees and internally displaced persons. At the end of 2004, Europe was also estimated to have a quarter of the world's refugee population, with the Americas hosting 7%. In 2004, Germany was the third largest asylum country.

## **7. Why does the United States receive refugees?**

The United States signed the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, which means that it is obliged not to return refugees to their native countries. The United States has humanitarian and democratic traditions for receiving refugees and participating in international work for refugees. U.S. citizens have long supported these traditions. The United States is obliged to carry out part of its global responsibility for refugees because of its affiliation with international conventions and agreements.

## **8. How much does the United States spend on helping refugees?**

In 2006, the United States pledged to donate \$293.1 million to UNHCR, \$200 million more than the next highest donor. However, in terms of its contribution per capita, the United States gave a rate of \$0.98 compared to \$16.32 for Luxembourg, \$8.25 for Norway, and \$3.52 for the Netherlands. The U.S. Government's Migration and Refugee Assistance budget is \$783 million for fiscal year 2006.

## **9. Who benefits from UNHCR funding?**

About half (54%) of all refugees benefit from UNHCR assistance programs. The number of refugees directly assisted through UNHCR fell by 175,000 persons (-3%) to 5.0 million refugees by the end of the year 2004. Most beneficiaries of UNHCR programs are located in developing countries. Almost 90 percent are living in countries covered by the UNHCR Bureau for CASWANAME (47%) and Africa (40%).

## **10. How many refugees come to the United States each year?**

More than 28,000 refugees arrived in the United States in the year 2003, a slight increase from 27,000 in fiscal year 2002. These historically low levels of arrivals are due in large part to increased security concerns and, as a result, slower processing rates following the September 11 attacks in 2001. An additional 46,200 people applied for asylum in the United States during 2003.

## **11. Where do most of the refugees in the United States come from?**

The United States admitted 52,868 refugees during Fiscal Year 03/04 including 13,331 from Somalia, 6,000 from Laos, 3,482 from Ukraine, 2,959 from Cuba, and 1,787 from Iran.

## **12. How do refugees come to the United States?**

Some refugees travel to the United States on their own and apply for asylum when they arrive on U.S. soil. Many have lost everything before leaving their countries. Every year, the United States also admits refugees through an overseas admissions program. Staff of U.S.-based nongovernmental organizations and the U.N.'s refugee agency help U.S. government officers identify refugees in need of resettlement.

## **13. What services and benefits does the government provide for refugees who are being resettled in the U.S.?**

The U.S. government provides the following for refugees:

- No-interest travel loan to the U.S.
- Eight (8) months Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) and Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA)
- Food stamps
- Housing assistance, furnishings, food, and clothing
- Social Security card
- School registration for children
- Referrals for medical appointments and other support services
- Employment services
- Case management through community-based, non-profit organizations
- Adjustment of status from refugee to legal permanent resident

#### 14. Shouldn't victims of natural and environmental disasters be called refugees too?

The term “refugee” has an important and distinct meaning in international law. There is a growing tendency in Europe and North America in particular to water down the distinctiveness of the term so that refugees are not accorded the protection they require from persecution. In a number of countries, the distinction is blurred between “refugees” and several other categories of migrants, such as “asylum seekers” (persons who have not yet been recognized as refugees and who often will not be found to be refugees), “displaced persons” (often dislocated due to war, famine, and other hardships, but not in fear of persecution if returned), “economic migrants” (often mistakenly termed “economic refugees”), “illegal aliens” (persons without proper travel documents who may or may not be refugees), and “immigrants” (the broad class of persons who enter a country to live, of whom refugees are a subset). Adding the term “environmental refugee” is likely to add to the confusion, rather than adding any clarity to discourse about forced migration. The consequences of blurring the refugee definition are quite dangerous and real. Refugees require special protection—essentially an exception to immigration controls established for all other groups—because at the root of the cause of their exile is a serious human rights violation. Their cases are compelling because of the grave risks to their lives and freedom if forcibly returned. They fear persecution based on five specific grounds: race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The refugee definition also requires that they cross an international frontier. Otherwise, they are known as “internally displaced persons.”

“Environmental refugees,” as compelling as their cases may be from a humanitarian standpoint, do not raise an essential human rights concern in the same legal, historical, and political way. They are not compelled by political circumstances or violence to cross an international border, fleeing from their own government. To the contrary, they normally are able to avail themselves of the protection of their government due their status as citizens of their own countries. While we recognize that the term “refugee” does have a certain emotional appeal, the misuse of the term may actually serve to erode the carefully developed protection regime for persons fleeing persecution. We would therefore strongly recommend use of an alternative term such as “environmental migrants.”

### Immigration Information

#### 1. Who comes to the United States?

- Immigrants, including refugees
- Temporary visa holders
- Undocumented people/ People without status

#### 2. Who is eligible for admission as immigrants?

- Family-sponsored preferences
- Employment-based preferences
- Diversity (DV) Immigrant Category
- Refugees

#### 3. Family-sponsored preferences

##### First:

- Unmarried, adult sons and daughters of U.S. Citizens
- 23,400 plus any numbers not required by fourth preference (annually)

##### Second:

- Spouses and unmarried children (under twenty-one years of age) of lawful permanent residents, and unmarried sons and daughters of lawful permanent residents
- 114,200 plus the number (if any) by which the worldwide family preference level exceeds 226,000, and any unused First preference numbers

- A. Spouses and Children: 77% of the overall Second preference limitation, of which 75% are exempt from the per-country limit
- B. Unmarried Sons and Daughters (21 years of age or older): 23% of the overall Second preference limitation

Third:

- Married sons and daughters of U.S. Citizens
- 23,400 plus any numbers not required by First and Second preferences

Fourth:

- Brothers and sisters of adult U.S. Citizens
- 65,000 plus any numbers not required by first three preferences

#### 4. Affidavit of Support

People in the U.S. who sponsor family to come as immigrants must provide the government with an Affidavit of Support proving their financial capability of supporting the immigrant family. This requires that they show that their household income is equal to or greater than 125 percent of the poverty level for the household size (including those immigrating). For example, a family of four in the U.S. sponsoring two immigrants would need a minimum income of \$33,500 annually to meet this requirement.

### Online Resources

Our website provides many useful links for you to explore.

- [www.iistl.org](http://www.iistl.org)

U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)

- <http://www.refugees.org/>

Office of Refugee Resettlement (part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)

- <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/orr/>

U.N. Refugee Agency's homepage

- <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>

“The Road to Refuge” (a BBC special report regarding refugees)

- [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/in\\_depth/world/2001/road\\_to\\_refuge/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/in_depth/world/2001/road_to_refuge/default.stm)

CIA World Factbook

- <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>

Cultural Orientation Resource Center

- <http://www.cal.org/co/>

## ▪ Gaining Cultural Awareness

This section was designed to help new volunteers better understand the backgrounds and journeys of refugee clients. Following are brief studies of the geographical, historical, political, cultural, familial, and religious backgrounds of some of the ethnic groups our clients represent. We hope this information will give volunteers some insight on how to be most supportive to refugee families who have fled war and persecution.

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### AFGHANISTAN

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Pashtun (42%), Tajik (27%), Hazara (9%), Uzbek (9%), Aimak (4%), Turkmen (3%), and Baloch (2%).

**GEOGRAPHY:** Afghanistan is located in Southern Asia, northwest of Pakistan and east of Iran, and is slightly smaller than Texas. The Hindu Kush Mountains divide the northern provinces from the rest of the country. The capital of Afghanistan is Kabul.

**HISTORY:** Afghanistan gained independence from UK control over foreign affairs in August 1921. In the time following independence, Afghanistan's leader, Amanullah Khan, initiated a series of ambitious efforts at social and political modernization. Unrest brought an overthrow of the government by Nadir Khan, who abolished these modernization measures. His son took control after Nadir Khan's assassination and declared Afghanistan neutral in WWII. Disputes over the Afghan/Pakistan border in the late 1940s brought unrest to that region, labeled by Pashtuns as Pashtunistan. Disputes over the region continued for close to 20 years, during which time the Afghan government modernized its army with help from the Soviet Union.

During the late 1950s, women gained considerable freedom. In the mid 1960s, some who had been dismissed by the government at the time formed the Afghan Communist Party. In 1973, a military coup by the communists, led by Daoud Kahn, overthrew the elected government, abolished the monarchy, and declared a Republic of Afghanistan. This leadership was overthrown in a bloody coup in 1978, at which time Taraki was named president and signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union.

In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Forces trained by the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and others forced the Soviets out. Communist leaders maintained control in Kabul until 1992, when Afghanistan fell into warlordism. From this state of warlordism, the Taliban emerged in 1994 and in 1996 seized control of Afghanistan—except for the northeast region of the country, which remained in Northern Alliance control. The Taliban were known for their human rights abuses, lack of education, and strict adherence to their interpretation of Islamic law. Although the Taliban restricted the rights of many, their denial of women's rights was the most severe. Women were denied the right to show their faces, seek medical care without a male escort, or attend school. The Taliban used "religious police" to regulate their new strict order with the use of threats, harassment, beatings, and arrest. Although the treatment of women was the most severe, men were also at risk under the Taliban regime. They could be punished for beard length, for example, and were at risk of extortion, arrest, gang rape, and abuse in detention because of their ethnicity or presumed political views. Due process was not a reality during the Taliban rule.

Afghanistan has been the target of international attention since the terrorist attacks on the U.S. on September 11, 2001. Following the attacks, the U.S., Allied, and Northern Alliance (local Afghani resistance to the Taliban) toppled the Taliban. In the time that followed the Allied takeover of Afghanistan, the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) took power with Hamid Karzai as its leader. In June 2002, the AIA held a Grand Assembly to elect a president of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (TISA), again choosing Karzai as its leader. The TISA drafted and approved a constitution in January 2004 and held its election to transition from the Transitional

Authority to the Government of Afghanistan on October 9, 2004. National Assembly elections were held in 2005, and the National Assembly was inaugurated on December 19, 2005.

**PEOPLE:** Women are subordinate to men but have primary responsibility for the household, entertaining guests, raising children, etc. To an Afghani male, his family is private and personal, and no person, government, or social agency has the right to interfere in (or even ask about) his family members. In fact, it is a grave breach of manners to ask about a man's women. Women interact with one another socially in village and family life. The oldest and most important women's organization is known as the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA).

Health is a key issue in Afghanistan. Adults are only expected to live into their early forties. The population is plagued with diseases such as typhoid fever, hepatitis A, diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough), and others because of dirty water, infected food, and lack of hygiene education. There is also rampant malnutrition among children.

**RELIGION:** Afghanis are primarily Sunni Muslim (80%) and Shi'a Muslim (19%).

**FAMILY:** The patriarchal and patrilineal tribal organization promotes certain customs and values that are different from those of non-tribal societies. For example, the extended family is the important social and economic unit, not the nuclear family as in the U.S. In this extended family, the power of the eldest male (usually the grandfather) is absolute: he controls the family's money, work, and makes all decisions regarding the family's activities and welfare. The eldest female, usually his wife, runs the household and is in charge of the other women, including her daughters, the wives of her sons, any other wives her husband may have (Islam allows each man to have four wives, but most are too poor to afford this), and any unmarried or widowed cousins, aunts, etc. who live with the family. Each family engages in competition with other families for land, resources, wives, etc; however, they unite with related families against outsiders. Thus, a man's first loyalty is to his extended family, then to his tribe, then to his ethnic group, and only finally to his nation.

**DRESS:** Women wear the *chadri* (or Afghan burqa), which covers a woman from head to foot with a latticed slit for the eyes. The chadri is made of cotton in shades of blue, brown, and black. The restrictions on women's dress have relaxed since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. In rural areas, women working on the land dispense with the chadri but cover their faces in the presence of a stranger. The women near Pakistan's border wear long, full trousers, often red in color, with a loose, long-sleeved tunic dress (rather like the kameez) together with a draped headscarf. This is the basis of many of the women's costumes, and the tunic varies in length and design. In the northern areas, striped material is used (often dyed red from madder or in shades of blue and brown). Loose, sleeveless, hip-length jackets are worn with full-length, striped coats for warmth.

Young girls go bareheaded, but women cover their heads with long headscarves, the colors varying according to the groups to which they belong. The scarves are tied round the head, leaving a long end hanging down the back that can be drawn across the face. A white headscarf signifies the married status.

Men wear a thigh-length, long-sleeved shirt that is belted at the waist, giving a skirt effect to the lower half. A sleeveless waistcoat is worn over the shirt with loose fitting white trousers. Another form of dress is the long-sleeved, ankle-length *chupan*. This is a long coat made of wool, often white in color, and worn by people living in mountainous regions in the winter season. The chupan is worn over a loosely fitting jacket and trousers or is wrapped around the body like a cloak. There is also a similar type of coat that is made with stripes of dark colors.

**LANGUAGE:** Afghanistan has two official languages: Afghan Persian (or Dari), which is spoken by 50% of the population, and Pashtu, which is spoken by 35 %. Other major languages in the region include Turkic languages, such as Uzbek and Turkmen, which are spoken by 11% of the population. There are over 30 other languages, with many Afghans speaking more than one language.

**NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION:** Afghan culture has a particularly indirect communication style relying heavily on nonverbal cues and figurative forms of speech, where information is not explicitly stated. For Afghans, indirect communication relates closely to saving face and respecting an individual's honor. A direct refusal for example, may be interpreted as impolite. Therefore, when conversing with Afghans you should be prepared to interpret comments and gestures beyond their face value.

**OTHER FACTS:**

- Afghanistan is plagued by poverty, a lack of skilled and educated workers, an underdeveloped infrastructure, and widespread landmines.
- Although the U.N. has attempted to resettle Afghan refugees who reside in Iran and Pakistan, their efforts have been only moderately successful, seeing as thousands are still residing in those border countries.
- As of 2005, there were roughly 200,000-300,000 internally displaced persons. Many of these individuals have been displaced due to drought or political instability.

**AHISKA (OR MESKHETIAN) TURKS**

**WHO THEY ARE:** The Ahiska people are an ethnic group that now lives scattered throughout the former Soviet Union. They are considered Turkic people, but they have many cultural and linguistic influences from Georgians, Kurds, Ajars, Armenians, and Franks. Until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, they had lived in Southern Georgia and were either a result of immigration from Turkey or the Turkicization of the local population.

**GEOGRAPHY:** The Ahiskas originally lived in the Meskhetian Range, a region in the south of the Republic of Georgia along the Turkish border.

**HISTORY:** 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. Approximately 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. A new nationalism has grown over the last half century, much of it having to do with Stalin's rejection and deportation of the Ahiskas.

Currently, about 50,000 Ahiskas live in Azerbaijan as refugees. Some have returned to Georgia, while others have been invited to live in Turkey. Still others live in unremitting repression in the Krasnodar region of Russia. The Krasnodar government refuses to legally register the Ahiskas, saying they should move back to Georgia.

Denied legal registration, the Ahiskas are effectively refused state housing, benefits, medical care, state-owned land, and passports. They cannot travel abroad or even around Russia. The U.N. considers the Ahiskas to be Russian citizens. The Ahiskas continue to face discrimination and repression in almost every area of residence.

Ahiska representatives in the Vatan movement have recently made demands about repatriation to Georgia. The Vatan movement has two stated goals: formal recognition that the deportation of 1944 was unjust and official permission for Ahiska Turks to return to their homeland in Georgia. An alternative organization, Hsna, also exists. The organization prefers to use the term Ahiskas in referring to the formerly deported people. Founded in 1992 with substantial assistance from the Georgian government, Hsna generally espouses the governmental view that Ahiskas are Islamicized Georgians with no Turkic roots and thus are not deserving of special cultural privileges for returnees.

Although many Ahiskas would like to resettle in Georgia, the Georgian government refuses to allow them to return unless they replace their Turkish family names with Georgian ones and acknowledge themselves as Georgians. However, most still insist on retaining their Turkish national identity while continuing their efforts to return to Georgia.

**PEOPLE:** Ahiskas are known for their wine production. The unique Georgian grape varieties, such as Tita, Saperavi, and Kharistvala, produced wonderful wine in ancient Meskhetian stone-carved wine presses and this winemaking process was usually accompanied by the polyphonic Georgian folk song *Mravaljamieri*.

Ferrymen are an important part of Ahiska life. In the past, operating ferries was a popular and exotic occupation. The tradition of putting poems to music comes down from the ferryman and it spread throughout the entire region of Samtskhe-Djavakheti.

**RELIGION:** The Ahiska people are mostly Shi'a Muslim.

**FAMILY:** The Ahiska Turk marriage is one of their unique family traditions. The official matchmaking is conducted at the bride's home. There, the girl's father receives the bride price and both families celebrate the betrothal with a banquet. On the day preceding the wedding (which always takes place on a Friday), a *mullah* (Muslim leader) confirms the marriage in the presence of two witnesses. The wedding is a joyous community affair celebrated with colorful costumes and decorations. After the celebration, the wedded couple departs for their new home, which is built especially for them.

**DRESS:** Ahiskas normally wear sturdy, dark-colored clothing that suits their region of the world. Women often wear headscarves.

**LANGUAGE:** The Ahiskas speak Oghuzic Turkish with many Laz Georgian elements. They also speak Russian.

**OTHER FACTS:** The Ahiska Turks still hold to some of their pre-Islamic beliefs in magic and sorcery. The practice of inducing rain by magic is common, along with healing by the use of "moon water," or water that has set overnight under a clear sky.

## **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Bosniak (48%), Serb (37%), and Croat (14%) (Note: there are very few ethnically homogenous areas in the country)

**GEOGRAPHY:** Bosnia and Herzegovina is located in southeastern Europe, bordering the Adriatic Sea and Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro. Within Bosnia and Herzegovina's recognized borders, the country is divided into a joint Bosniak/Croat Federation (about 51% of the territory) and the Bosnian Serb-led Republika Srpska or RS (about 49% of the territory). The region called Herzegovina is contiguous to Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro, and traditionally has been settled by an ethnic Croat majority in the west and an ethnic Serb majority in the east. The capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina is Sarajevo.

**HISTORY:** Bosnia and Herzegovina's declaration of sovereignty in October 1991 was followed by a declaration of independence from the former Yugoslavia on March 3, 1992, after a referendum boycotted by ethnic Serbs. The Bosnian Serbs - supported by neighboring Serbia and Montenegro - responded with armed resistance aimed at partitioning the republic along ethnic lines and joining Serb-held areas to form a "Greater Serbia" In March 1994, Bosniaks and Croats reduced the number of warring factions from three to two by signing an agreement creating a joint Bosniak/Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. On November 21, 1995, in Dayton, Ohio, the warring parties initialed a peace agreement that brought to a halt three years of interethnic civil strife

(the final agreement was signed in Paris on December 14, 1995). The Dayton Peace Accords retained Bosnia and Herzegovina's international boundaries and created a joint multi-ethnic and democratic government charged with conducting foreign, diplomatic, and fiscal policy. Also recognized was a second tier of government comprised of two entities roughly equal in size: the Bosniak/Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Bosnian Serb-led Republika Srpska (RS). The Federation and RS governments were charged with overseeing most government functions.

**PEOPLE:** Bosnia is the only republic of former Yugoslavia established on a geographical/historical basis rather than on an ethnic one. Bosnian refers to someone who lives in Bosnia and Herzegovina, not to a religious or ethnic group. Before the war, Bosnia's population was approximately 44% Muslim, 31% Serbian, and 17% Croatian, along with some Gypsies, Albanians, Ukrainians, Poles, and Italians. There were few ethnically homogenous villages in the Republic. Bosnian Muslims have tended to be a more urban population than their Christian counterparts.

While tensions between the various ethnic and religious groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina still exists, perhaps the greatest challenge for the Bosnian people since war and independence has been the economy. Bosnia and Herzegovina ranked next to Macedonia as the poorest republic in the old Yugoslav federation. Although agriculture is almost all in private hands, farms are small and inefficient, and the republic traditionally is a net importer of food. Industry remains greatly overstaffed, a holdover from the socialist economic structure of Yugoslavia. Bosnia also suffers from a "brain drain," in which many of its brightest citizens fled during the wars or left for better economic opportunity. The diaspora community has had little incentive to return to Bosnia and Herzegovina, so the experience gained by these individuals in other countries is not being brought back.

**RELIGION:** The major religious groups are Muslim (50%), Orthodox (31%), and Roman Catholic (15%). While the majority of Bosnians are Muslim, they are typically less conservative or traditional and only some of the women wear head-coverings.

**FAMILY:** There is an emphasis on nuclear family. It is common for women to work outside the home, especially in urban areas. Traditional gender roles are still practiced. Marriage follows modern customs, rarely being arranged. Family sizes are decreasing, with less emphasis on bigger families. While Bosnian people are very sociable and enjoy the company of neighbors and friends, they are reserved in keeping family issues to themselves.

**DRESS:** Although only a generation ago Bosnia was well known for having the widest variety of folk costumes in former Yugoslavia, little of this variety can be seen today. Most urban Bosnians in their daily dress are indistinguishable from other Europeans. In large cities like Sarajevo, older men might occasionally be seen in the urban Muslim costume of breeches, cummerbund, striped shirt, vest, and fez. Although there is a large Muslim community in Bosnia, the *chador* (literally "tent", which covers the woman from head to toe, especially her hair and face), familiar in orthodox Muslim countries, is not worn in Bosnia, even by the most devout Muslim women. Headscarves and raincoats may have been symbolically substituted for the *chador*, particularly on religious holidays.

**LANGUAGE:** Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian (split from the Serbo-Croatian language)

**NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION:** Firm handshakes, which may be repeated during the same occasion, occur with the older or more ranking person receiving the handshake first. When greeting a woman, the man waits for her to extend her hand. Friends ad a kiss (once to each cheek for Croats and Bosnians, and three times total for Serbians).

**OTHER FACTS:**

- It is extremely common for Bosnians of all religious persuasions to celebrate each other's holidays

- Almost all Bosnian names end in *ic* (pronounced *ich*), which relates in a sense to “child of”, much like the name Johnson. Family names are often an indication of ethnicity. Women’s names tend to end in *a* or *ica* (pronounced *EET-sa*), a feminine diminutive form. In written form, a person’s surname usually precedes the given name.
- Bosnians enjoy cultural, historical, or sporting events, as well as visiting in the home. Favorite sports include soccer, basketball, tennis, swimming, and handball. Older men gather in social halls to play checkers and chess. People watch television in the evening and on weekends. On May Day (May 1), families customarily enjoy games and roast lamb at a picnic. Grilling is common throughout the summer.
- Children begin primary school at age seven and must attend for at least eight years. Secondary schooling lasts four years but is not mandatory. After that, students may attend university-prep high school or a vocational school to learn a trade or craft. After eighth grade, students must pass an exam to get a work permit. Without it, one cannot get a job. Education is free to citizens at all levels. Education is very important to Bosnians, and there is a growing demand for English and German language instruction.

## **BHUTANESE (IN NEPAL)**

**WHO THEY ARE:** 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.

**GEOGRAPHY:** Southern Bhutan is made up of the Shiwalik Hills which are covered in dense, deciduous forests and alluvial lowland river valleys and mountains that can peak at 4,900 feet above sea level.

**HISTORY:** After the migration, contact between the Druk majority in the north and the Lhotsampas in the South was very limited, leading the Lhotsampas to retain their highly distinctive Nepali language, culture, and religion. For the most part, relations between the two groups remained mostly conflict free, with the Lhotsampas coming to enjoy Bhutanese citizenship under Bhutan’s Nationality Law of 1958.

In the 1980’s Bhutan’s king and his government became concerned with the growing number of peripheral ethnic and cultural groups living outside of the Druk tradition. Under policies known as Bhutanization (or, the “one nation, one people” policy), Druk culture, religion, and language was imposed upon Bhutan’s residents, regardless of ethnic group. The Nepali language was banned from schools, and Nepali teachers were thus fired in addition to reports of Nepali books being burned. Furthermore, the government established new eligibility requirements for Bhutanese citizenship that disenfranchised many Lhotsampas, denying them their rights as citizens. Many Lhotsampas as well as other non-Druk Bhutanese were now considered “illegal immigrants” and government programs were put in action to identify and deport them. The Nepali and other non-Druk groups responded by organizing politically and protesting the authorities, leading to violent clashes with the police and army and to mass arrests. A volunteer militia force consisting of private citizens was formed to help quell the protests and many of these militias now stand accused of arresting and torturing the activists. Individuals were then forced to sign alleged “voluntary migration certificates” before being deported from the country. The Lhotsampa migration to Nepal and Indian West Bengal followed this and a December 1990 decree calling for the deportation of all Lhotsampas unable to prove their residency in Bhutan in 1958.

**PEOPLE:** Like the Nepalis residing in Nepal, the Bhutanese refugees divide themselves into castes. Their caste system principally separates people into castes for the purposes of marriage selection and other social

relationships. Because there is equal access to education in the refugee camps, the percentage of refugees with no education does not vary greatly between castes. However, members of the upper castes are more likely to receive postsecondary education.

Most refugees identify themselves as farmers or students for occupational background. Other occupations include teachers, social workers, tailors, weavers, and housekeepers.

Traditional gender roles are practiced and strictly adhered to. Girls are expected to carry a heavier household workload than boys and will face this distinction into adulthood and marriage. Women do not have equal access to information and resources and are not given an equal position when it comes to decision-making in the family and community. For certain social groups, divorced or widowed women are viewed as inferior within their extended family and are often forced to raise their children without the support of their family members. Female victims of sexual abuse and their families are typically ostracized and harassed by the community.

**RELIGION:** The Bhutanese refugees are predominantly Hindu.

**FAMILY:** Families typically average around 8 members and consists of elderly parents, married sons and their wives and children, and unmarried children. Extended family members, like aunts, uncles, and cousins, are considered part of the immediate family. Women traditionally move into their husband's household after marriage.

Although it is not a common practice, polygamy is present. Most often, the two women are sisters or other blood relatives and one of them is disabled or otherwise in need of special care.

**DRESS:** Many of the refugees can still be found wearing traditional Nepali clothes, which vary depending on which region the family can be traced to.

**LANGUAGE:** Nearly all the Bhutanese refugees speak Nepali as a first or second language.

**NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION:** Traditional Nepali culture still heavily influences the refugees. Dance and music are used to depict themes and stories from everyday life, such as marriage rites, crop harvestings, and war stories.

**OTHER FACTS:** Although the majority of refugees welcome the idea of resettlement, a group of politically active refugees actively opposes it, stating that repatriation to Bhutan is the only viable solution.

## **BURMA**

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Burman (68%), Shan (9%), Karen (7%), Rakhine (4%), Chinese (3%), Mon (2%), Indian (2%), Other (5%).

**GEOGRAPHY:** Burma has an area of 678,500 square kilometers, which is slightly smaller than Texas. Bangladesh, China, India, Laos and Thailand all border Burma. The country's coastline is 1,930 kilometers. The administrative capital is Nay Pyi Taw (where government offices are located) but many still view Rangoon as the capital.

**HISTORY:** Burma's recent history begins with the invasion of the British. Between 1824 and 1885, the British waged three wars upon Burma to gain control of the country, which resulted in the British annexing Burma to India until 1937. Under British command, Burma's economy boomed dramatically, from being largely a farming community to becoming a key exporter.

During WWII, the Burmese Army aided the Japanese military to push the British out of Burma and then eventually sided with the British against the Japanese. At the end of the war, Burmese General Aung San insisted that the British give up control over Burma and grant the country independence. Britain's leaders agreed, and Burma officially gained independence in 1948 as a democracy.

Unfortunately, due to political and ethnic divisions, the new government suffered. The military temporarily ruled in 1958 to restore order. But conflict resumed and in 1962, General Ne Win conducted a military coup and overthrew the constitutional government and established a military regime. Ne Win appointed himself President and ruled until 1988.

The late 1980's were characterized by rebellions and demonstrations. Opposition to the ruling regime caused the military to depose of Ne Win and create the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). Many people who opposed the military regime were killed by SLORC to maintain order.

In 1990, parliamentary elections were held and the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of Aung San, won by a landslide. The SLORC refused to acknowledge the win, disbanded the parliament and continued to harass and imprison those opposed to the ruling regime. The SLORC changed its name to State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), although it did not change its policies on autocratic rule, distrust of democracy, violence and unlawful imprisonment of political agitators and control of the media.

Many minority ethnic groups were targeted by the military regime. Since 1948, several ethnic minorities resisted the government and continually asked for their independence. The government has maintained the Four Cuts policies (cut funds, information, food and recruits to the opposition groups) since the 1960's. Ethnic minorities have been subject to this policy and have been forced to relocate within Burma as Internally Displaced People (IDP) or to surrounding countries as refugees and asylum seekers.

**PEOPLE:** Burma's population is estimated to be about 52 million, although no census has been taken since 1983. As mentioned, many different ethnic groups have been forced to relocate due to the government. Estimates show that over half a million IDPs have been required to move within Burma. Hundreds of thousands more have fled to surrounding countries.

The International Institute has been fortunate enough to serve 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 the Four Cuts policy and ethnic cleansing.

Mainly Buddhist, the Karen have made a living by farming and keeping to themselves. Women are considered the leader in the home, while men are considered to have the power outside the home. Usually, boys play sports such as soccer but girls are encouraged to dance and abstain from sports.

They are known for strong morals, colorful clothing, eating spicy food, and being very proud of their culture. The Karen tend to be cooperative and gracious which might be confused as being shy. They usually will decline acts of kindness at first, so it is important to ask at least twice. In Karen culture a proper greeting consists of holding your right elbow in your left hand and extending your right hand to shake the other person's right hand.

**RELIGION:** Buddhist (89%), Christian (4%), Muslim (4%), animist (1%), other (2%).

**FAMILY:** The extended family in Burma is considered to be very important but due to the current political situation the family structure consists more often as just a nuclear family. In Buddhism, parents are to be held sacred by the children and disobedience may be considered a sin. The beginning of adulthood starts at age nine

for children and for the boys, involves a “shin-pyu” ceremony and a stay in the monastery. For girls, they get their ears pierced during the “nahtwin” ceremony.

**DRESS:** The over one hundred ethnic groups have many different styles that make each of their traditional dress unique. Many wear the traditional “longyi” (sarong) and “eingyi” (shirt) in a variety of colors and patterns special to their ethnicity. For example, the Kayin men wear a traditional sarong in solid red outlined with horizontal stripes in the middle, while the Kachin men wear “longyi” in a black, green or purple checked pattern. Some ethnic groups may wear trousers in place of the sarong. “Longyi” styles are further varied by ethnic minority women and may include unique patterns, colors, and accessories, like a belt. “Eingyi’s” are similar in their variance across ethnic lines and can have many colors and lengths. The traditional shirts can be decorated with materials like metal and thread. It is also common for people in Burma to wear western style clothing.

**LANGUAGE:** Burmese (65%) is the official language, there are over 100 languages spoken in Burma and include Chin, Karen, Shan, Kachin, Mon, Rakhine and many others.

**NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION:** The head is the highest part of the body and would be considered rude to touch. Shoes are taken off in the home. Pointing at another person is considered bad-mannered in Burma.

**OTHER FACTS:**

- About 25% of teens attend high school.
- The United States has imposed economic sanctions against Burma in response to the military government’s atrocities.
- Although renamed Myanmar, the democratic party and many other democracies outside Burma do not recognize the name change made by the military government.
- The climate in Burma is tropical monsoon.

## **BURUNDI:**

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Hutu (Bantu) 85%, Tutsi (Hamitic) 14%, Twa (Pygmy) 1%

**INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE/REFUGEES:** *refugees (country of origin):* 9,849 (Democratic Republic of the Congo) IDPs: 100,000 (armed conflict between government and rebels; most IDPs in northern and western Burundi) (2007)

**GEOGRAPHY:** Central Africa, east of Democratic Republic of the Congo, south of Rwanda

**GOVERNMENT:** Republic; Capital: Bujumbura

**EDUCATION:** Until 1954, all education was provided by religious missions; it was almost entirely limited to the primary grades. Education is now compulsory for children between the ages of 7 and 13. Primary education lasts for six years. The languages of instruction in schools are Kisundi and French. General secondary education lasts for seven years, while vocational secondary education usually lasts for five. As of 1999, 45% of primary-school-age children were enrolled in school, while only about 5% of eligible young people attend secondary or technical schools.

**HISTORY:** The original inhabitants of Burundi were the Twa, a Pygmy people who now make up only 1% of the population. Today the population is divided between the Hutu (approximately 85%) and the Tutsi, approximately 14%. While the Hutu and Tutsi are considered to be two separate ethnic groups, scholars point out that they speak the same language, have a history of intermarriage, and share many cultural characteristics.

Traditionally, the differences between the two groups were occupational rather than ethnic. Agricultural people were considered Hutu, while the cattle-owning elite were identified as Tutsi. Supposedly Tutsi were tall and thin, while Hutu were short and square, but in fact it is often impossible to tell one from the other. The 1933 requirement by the Belgians that everyone carry an identity card indicating tribal ethnicity as Tutsi or Hutu increased the distinction. Since independence, the landowning Tutsi aristocracy has dominated Burundi. The Burundi Democracy Front's candidate, Melchior Ndadaye, won the country's first democratic presidential elections, held on June 2, 1993. Ndadaye, the first Hutu to assume power in Burundi, was killed within months during a coup. The second Hutu president, Cyprien Ntaryamira, was killed on April 6, 1994, when a plane carrying him and the Rwandan president was shot down. As a result, Hutu youth gangs began massacring Tutsi; the Tutsi-controlled army retaliated by killing Hutus.

The frequency of ethnic clashes increased, developing into a low-intensity civil war. A six-nation regional proposal to send troops into Burundi to maintain peace and order was devised in July 1996. Distrustful of the scheme, the Tutsi-dominated army led a coup deposing the Hutu president and installed Maj. Pierre Buyoya that month. More than 300,000 people have been killed in the civil war since 1993, with the Tutsi-dominated army and the Hutu rebel forces responsible for the slaughter. After several aborted cease-fires, a 2001 peace plan included a power-sharing agreement that has been relatively successful: Buyoya, a Tutsi, governed the new transitional government for the first 18 months; then, in April 2003, a Hutu president, Domitien Ndayizeye, assumed power. In Aug. 2005, former Hutu rebel leader Pierre Nkurunziza was elected president by parliament. The peaceful transfer of power to a democratically elected leader seemed to indicate that Burundi's 12-year civil war was truly at an end. Peace talks between the government and Burundi's only remaining rebel group continued through 2008 and a peace deal was recently reached in May 2008, which is still in place now.

**PEOPLE:** 8,691,005

*NOTE:* estimates for this country take into account the effects of excess mortality due to AIDS; this can result in lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality, higher death rates, lower population growth rates, and changes in the distribution of population by age and sex than would otherwise be expected (July 2008 est.)  
Life Expectancy: total population: 51.71 years; male: 50.86 years; female: 52.6 years (2008 est.)  
Literacy Rates: total population: 59.3%; male: 67.3%; female: 52.2% (2006 est.)

**RELIGION:** Christian 67% (Roman Catholic 62%, Protestant 5%), indigenous beliefs 23%, Muslim 10%

**FAMILY:** Households are made up of nuclear families that, at least in the ideal, are independent economically from the extended family. Strong social ties, however, bind the extended family. People feel deep ties to cousins, nieces, and nephews. Uncles and aunts often assume care and responsibility for their siblings' children. Men are seen as the natural heads of their households and communities. Traditionally, men farm while women and girls carry the workload of the home. Women have more duties than rights and are expected to subordinate themselves to male family members. They are in charge of firewood collection, cooking, laundry, and childcare. Although women may marry as young as 16, there is no pressure for them to do so. Marriages are sometimes arranged by families, but there is no evidence of young women being forced into such unions against their will. Some men have more than one wife, but this custom has been disappearing. Overcrowding and the cost of educating children have led to smaller families. The extended family, friends, and acquaintances may correct another person's child. If they do not correct bad behavior, they may be accused of shirking their duty to the community.

**DRESS:** Burundian traditional clothing consists of cloth wraparounds (*pagnes*). Women, girls, and elderly men still wear them in rural areas. Male herders wear two pieces of cloth, which hang down to the knees, with a chord around the waist. Many people go barefoot in the villages. In Bujumbura, the capital, fashionable men and women, known as *sapeurs*, wear the latest fashions. The men dress up in suits and ties, and the women wear Western dresses and shoes. Young people are fond of blue jeans and T-shirts.

**LANGUAGE:** Kirundi, French, Swahili (along Lake Tanganyika and in the Bujumbura area)

## **OTHER FACTS:**

- slightly smaller than Maryland
- Burundians are sociable people and visit each other without announcing it ahead of time.
- They typically greet each other by shaking hands with the right hand. Friends often greet by touching cheeks three times.
- Friends of the same sex give each other a firm hug, grasping each other's shoulders.
- There is a set of gestures for pointing to people and calling people that is special to Central Africa. They point to someone by holding an arm out with the hand open and palm upward.
- Pointing at someone with the index finger is considered very rude. A person beckoning someone else extends an arm with the palm turned down and brings the fingers toward the wrist.

## **CUBA:**

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** mulatto 51%, white 37%, black 11%, Chinese 1%

**GEOGRAPHY:** Caribbean; island between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean; 150 Km south of Key West, Florida; Largest country in Caribbean

**GOVERNMENT:** Communist state; capital: Havana

**HISTORY:** Cuba has survived more than 40 years of US sanctions intended to topple the government of Fidel Castro. It also defied predictions that it would not survive the collapse of its one-time supporter, the Soviet Union.

The native Amerindian population of Cuba began to decline after the European discovery of the island by Christopher Columbus in 1492 and following its development as a Spanish colony during the next several centuries. Large numbers of African slaves were imported to work on the coffee and sugar plantations. Spanish rule, marked initially by neglect, became increasingly repressive, provoking an independence movement and occasional rebellions that were harshly suppressed.

The United States intervened during the Spanish-American War in 1898 that finally overthrew Spanish rule. The subsequent Treaty of Paris established Cuban independence, which was granted in 1902 after a three-year transition period. Fidel Castro led a rebel army to victory in 1959; his iron rule held the subsequent regime together for nearly five decades. He stepped down as president in February 2008 and was replaced by his younger brother, Raul Castro.

Raul Castro has eased some restrictions on personal freedoms by lifting bans on mobile phones and home computers. But his choice of first vice-president came as a shock to those hoping that a new generation might begin shaping the country's future. He picked Machado Ventura - a hard-line communist member and one of the original leaders of the revolution.

Cuba's Communist revolution, with Soviet support, was exported throughout Latin America and Africa during the 1960's through the 1980's. The country is now slowly recovering from a severe economic downturn in 1990, following the withdrawal of former Soviet monetary support, worth \$4 billion to \$6 billion annually. Cuba portrays its difficulties as the result of the US embargo in place since 1961. Illegal migration to the US - using homemade rafts, alien smugglers, air flights, or via the southwest border - is a continuing problem. The US Coast Guard intercepted 2,864 individuals attempting to cross the Straits of Florida in fiscal year 2006.

**PEOPLE:** 11,423,952 (July 2008 est.); total population: 77.27 years; male: 75.02 years; female: 79.64 years  
Literacy Rates: definition: age 15 and over can read and write

total population: 99.8%  
male: 99.8%; female: 99.8% (2002 census)

**RELIGION:** 85% Roman Catholic prior to Castro assuming power; Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, and Santeria are also represented

**FAMILY:** Most Cubans share a small house with their extended families. So it's not unusual for grandmothers, grandfathers, their children, and grandchildren all to co-exist under the same roof. Unemployment is high, and most families struggle to survive; monthly income for the average family is \$15-\$25. There isn't enough food in the country to feed all of the Cuban population. The reason for this is mostly due to the US economic embargo imposed against Cuba starting in 1960. As a consequence of chronic food shortages, Cubans are issued with ration cards that determine how much of everything that a person or a family are entitled to on a daily/monthly basis.

**EDUCATION:** Education in Cuba has been another major accomplishment of the Revolution. Before the Revolution, education was unavailable to over half of Cuban children. In 1960, the revolutionary government began a war on illiteracy. Where nearly a quarter of the population hadn't been able to read before, the campaign ended with an illiteracy rate of 3%. Now, compulsory education through the ninth grade exists in Cuba. From there, students can choose what they want to do next. Some students choose to go to a pre-collegiate school, technical school, or none at all. If they graduate from the college preparatory school, they can attend college for free if they choose. Around 7% of the population has graduated from college and 4% have degrees. In addition, there are 1.3 million graduates of technical schools in Cuba.

**LANGUAGE:** Spanish

**OTHER FACTS:**

- There are only 75 telephones per 1,000 people (2005 estimate).
- Cuba's locale makes it a prime target for hurricanes.
- Baseball is the most popular sport in the country due to the United States' influence on Cuban culture.
- The currency is the peso.
- Cuba is a little smaller than Pennsylvania.
- The internet is highly regulated by the government and the citizens' access to computers and the internet is limited.

## **DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** There are more than 200 ethnic groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), most of which are Bantu. The four largest tribes are the Mongo, Luba, Kongo (all Bantu), and the Mangbetu-Azande (Hamitic). These four tribes make up 45% of the total population.

**GEOGRAPHY:** The Democratic Republic of the Congo is located in Central Africa and is slightly less than one-fourth the size of the United States. It borders Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, the Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. The capital of the DRC is Kinshasa, which is located on the western side of the country.

**HISTORY:** The Democratic Republic of the Congo was once a colony of Belgium. In pre-colonial times, the territory was home to many independent states and cultures before their arbitrary incorporation into the territory by the Belgians. The colony took its name from the Kongo, a state in present day Angola. Originally under the direct control of Belgium's King Leopold, the government of Belgium took control of the colony after the

human rights abuses from the economic exploitation escalated. In 1959, Belgium reluctantly announced that the DRC would receive independence in one year. Political parties, formerly banned, were legalized, and many regional leaders emerged vying for leadership. Patrice Lumumba, who became the country's first president, was one of the few leaders with arguably national appeal. However, his centralizing approach to the government in the DRC combined with his firm anti-imperial rhetoric soon aroused fears of regional advocates within the country and Cold War concerns of the West.

In 1960, the Congolese army mutinied, and Katanga province attempted to break away starting a civil war. Lumumba asked for U.N. assistance, but was quickly frustrated after the troops did little to reunite the country. He then asked the Soviet Union for assistance. However, this confirmed western fears of Lumumba's communist leanings. The United States authorized a Belgium assassination of Lumumba. The U.S.-backed general Mobutu came to power soon after in 1965.

Renaming the country Zaire, Mobutu ushered in an intense program of Africanization and economic exploitation of the country. During this time, resistance grew, escalating after 1994 when neighboring Rwanda was torn apart by genocide directed against the Tutsis by Hutu extremists. In 1997, the anti-Mobutu coalition led by Laurent Kabila overthrew Mobutu and renamed the country the Democratic Republic of Congo. Despite winning back the country, conflict soon arose amongst the former allies. In 1998, rebels supported by Rwanda and Uganda rose against Kabila's government. Kabila was in turn supported by Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia, yet the war, often called Africa's World War, continued as the rebels split into two main parties: the Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC) supported by Uganda, and the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) with the backing of Rwanda.

In 2000 the U.N. Security Council authorized the U.N. to monitor a ceasefire, but fighting continued. In 2001 Laurent Kabila was killed and his son, Joseph Kabila, was chosen to head the interim government. Later that year, Rwanda, Uganda, and the rebels agreed to a U.N. pull-out plan, starting a gradual end to the war, which had claimed over 2.5 million lives since 1998 from fighting and war induced conditions.

The war in Congo has had an economic side as well. Since colonial times, economic exploitation of the country's vast mineral wealth has been common. The Belgians were infamous for their exploitation of the country's rubber resources. After independence the most valued resources became diamonds and the mineral coltan (short for Columbite-tantalite), which is used to hold electric charges in cell phones, TVs, computer discs, and other electronics. Rebel groups and allied countries' armies all sought to monopolize these resources and illegally sell them to outside markets. The problem of conflict diamonds and coltan exploitation continue today.

In mid 2002, peace agreements were signed between the DRC and Rwanda, and later Uganda. Sporadic conflict continued, but in 2003 a new constitution was implemented. Kabila's government, with a power-sharing agreement with the former rebel leaders, would rule for two years, with upcoming elections planned for mid-2005.

Despite the continuing problems with rival militias, Kabila's government has attempted to improve conditions. The country received the United States' Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) status in 2003, and has begun receiving outside assistance with rebuilding. Negotiations with leaders throughout the country in 2004 and an early 2005 with support from South African president Mbeki produced a revised constitution in 2005 which established guidelines for the upcoming elections scheduled for the latter part of the year.

**PEOPLE:** *Mfummu ya ntoto* (literally "The Chief of the Earth") is the traditional chief who is held in great esteem by the people in the area. He is a principal source of wisdom, as well as arbiter in all matters of civil disputes, and is the symbolic holder and protector of all ancestral lands that belong to the clans to whom he is responsible.

Women typically form very tight social circles and share many of their labors, such as raising the children and agriculture. Women's roles are very labor-intensive, as they are the ones that take care of the fields. Men participate in hunting during the day.

The DRC is yet another country that has been adversely affected by the onslaught of AIDS cases, an epidemic that is affecting life expectancy and population and growth rates. This is very widespread among both men and women. Additionally, there is malaria and Bubonic plague in some regions of the country.

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic (50%), Protestant (20%), Kimbanguist (10%), Muslim (10%), other syncretic sects and indigenous beliefs (10%)

**FAMILY:** The members of the family all work together to ensure everything gets done. Men are the ones who hunt and begin the process of farming on the land. The Congolese people take part in a "slash and burn" method of farming, in which new land is cut and burned in the dry season in order to make farming possible later on. After the men partake in this activity, women pick up the work with hoeing and harvesting the fields. Women are expected to take care of the children and the home. Also, elders are treated with a great deal of respect.

**DRESS:** A typical dress for a woman is a cotton, wraparound dress. Western dress is also present, but is usually worn to indicate that the woman is unmarried. Men generally wear a loose-fitting T-shirt or button-down shirt with lightweight pants.

**LANGUAGE:** French is the official language of the DRC. Other spoken languages include Lingala (a trade language), Kingwana (a dialect of Kiswahili), Kikongo, and Tshiluba.

**NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION:** Handshaking is customary as a greeting form.

**OTHER FACTS:**

- Men enjoy socializing in temporary huts that are build in the forest, as places to take refuge when hunting in rainy weather.
- A specialized job within the DRC is to make pots and jugs out of clay. Not many people know how to do this so there is usually one person within the village who does this job for the whole community.
- Palm-winemaking is a profession which many men have a rudimentary knowledge of but only devoted palm tappers make the really good stuff.
- Always ask permission before taking a picture of people, and do not photograph official buildings or installations.

## **ETHIOPIA**

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Oromo (40%), Amhara and Tigre (32%), Sidamo (9%), Shankella (6%), Somali (6%), Afar (4%), Gurage (2%), other (1%)

**GEOGRAPHY:** Ethiopia is located in Eastern Africa and is slightly less than twice the size of Texas. It borders Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, and Sudan. The capital of Ethiopia is Addis Ababa.

**HISTORY:** While Ethiopia has not had to face many of the hardships faced by other African countries, there have been many problems nonetheless for this country. Ethiopia, home to an empire for hundreds of years, was the only African country to defeat attempts at colonialism, with their famous defeat of the Italians in the Battle of Adowa in 1896. However, the country endured a short-lived occupancy when Mussolini invaded in 1935, combining Ethiopia with Eritrea and Italian Somaliland to form Italian East Africa. In 1941, the Italians were

driven out with the combined forces of British troops and the Ethiopian resistance. Following WWII, Ethiopia was also able to expand with the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie's annexation of Eritrea in 1962.

In 1975, the emperor died in mysterious circumstances, and his successor was overthrown by Mengistu Haile Miriam. His ensuing social revolution, known to others as the "Red Terror," led to the deaths of thousands of his opponents. Two years later brought an international conflict with Somalia as Somalia was seeking to reclaim its border lands invaded Ethiopia. In 1978 Somalia was defeated with help from the Soviet Union and Cuba, and a peace treaty was signed the following year.

The peace lasted; however, another tragedy occurred with the massive famine in 1985, which led to the forced resettlement of thousands from the Eritrean and Tigre provinces. In 1987, Mengistu introduced elections and was elected president. His rule as president lasted until 1991, when the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front captured Addis Ababa. A referendum granted Eritrea independence in 1993, and Ethiopia implemented a new constitution dividing the country into ethnic regions in 1994.

Unfortunately, border conflicts with Eritrea escalated into war in 1999. In June 2000, Ethiopia and Eritrea signed a ceasefire agreement that provided for a U.N. observer force to monitor the truce and to supervise the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Eritrea territory. A peace agreement was also signed between these two countries in December 2000 in Algeria. This agreement formally ended the two years of conflict. It also established commissions to delineate the disputed border and gave provisions for exchanging prisoners and the return of displaced people. Peace now exists between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Today Ethiopia is a multi-party democracy led by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and President Girma Woldegiorgis.

A note should be made that there are continuing problems concerning Somalia and the southern border of Ethiopia. Before the eras of rigid boundary lines, Somalis traditionally migrated with their herds onto what is now Ethiopia's land. While Ethiopia insists on maintaining its current borders, many Somalis feel they have a right to the land that they occupied before the colonial era.

**PEOPLE:** Due to the internal and external problems that have plagued Ethiopia, it remains one of Africa's poorest states, with a very low income per capita and a population that is almost two-thirds illiterate. In 2004, approximately 50% of the total population was considered below the poverty line. The economy is based on agriculture, but with frequent droughts and poor cultivation practices, many people need food assistance, even though agriculture accounts for 80% of total employment. These factors and the recurrent problems with Eritrea have also caused more problems for the agricultural sector of Ethiopia. However, there are hopes that things will get better, especially due to good rainfall and the hopeful cessation of external problems.

There is also the problem of the AIDS epidemic within Ethiopia. Affecting men and women alike, this epidemic has caused changes in the population growth and lifespan. The average life expectancy at birth for an Ethiopian is just under 50 years. Many people also fall victim to starvation and diseases caused by poor drinking water.

**RELIGION:** Muslim (45%-50%), Ethiopian Orthodox (35%-40%), animist (12%), other (3%-8%)

**FAMILY:** Ethiopian families are quite large including, on average, seven children. Everyone works to support the family. Frequently children must forsake their schooling in order to help care for siblings or to help with farm work.

As noted earlier, Ethiopian families face conditions of extreme poverty. There has been a general consensus among the Ethiopian community of women's inferiority to men. Ethiopia also known for the practice of "female circumcision" (which carries definite health risks), which is done to ensure that the girl is pure for her husband. Because marriage is seen as a form of economic security, circumcision is one way to guarantee that the girl will be fed.

**DRESS:** In Ethiopia there is a distinctive style of clothing. The women's colorful dresses are made of cotton and are homemade. Each dress has its own design. The women wear long necklaces and gold and silver bracelets on their feet. They also usually wear bracelets on their arms made of gold, silver, and ivory.

The men usually like to wear green, yellow or red because the colors are in the flag of Ethiopia. They wear a hat, which looks like a cowboy hat. They usually have a tail made from horsehair in their hands.

Ethiopian traditional dress is worn during holiday times and during Sunday church. However, in the last 40 or 50 years some have changed to a western style dress. In the countryside, some of the conservative Ethiopians still wear the Ethiopian traditional dress. In the United States, many Ethiopians continue to wear the traditional dress at church.

**LANGUAGE:** English is the major foreign language taught in schools, but there are a variety of languages spoken (more than 80 in all). Examples include: Amharic, Tigrinya, Oromigna, Guaraginga, Somali, Arabic, and other local languages.

**NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION:** Shaking hands is a very common greeting among Ethiopians. When greeting friends, kissing and hugging is also part of the normal greeting. It is common to see women kissing women, women kissing men, and men kissing men on the cheek in public including in the office. In some Muslim groups, this type of interaction may not be as common between men and women. Additionally, when speaking with a person of the opposite gender, particularly someone with whom you are not close, it is generally not acceptable to touch.

Total avoidance of eye contact while speaking can be interpreted as a sign of having something to hide, while speaking with a high voice is a sign of anger or disappointment. Pointing fingers at someone while speaking is considered very rude. Most people do use their hands and other body language to express approval, disapproval, satisfaction, consent, etc. Thus it is important to watch body language during conversations.

#### **OTHER FACTS:**

- Ethiopia is the oldest independent country in Africa and the former Ethiopian empire was one of the oldest in the world – at least 2000 years.
- Ethiopia is the only country in Africa that has never been colonized, and its people have a proud tradition of fighting for their independence.
- *Injera* is the mainstay of the Ethiopian diet. This bouncy bread is made from the peculiarly Ethiopian *teff* cereal.
- Ethiopia is a country of great natural beauty and is the most mountainous country in the continent.
- Coffee is thought to have originated in Ethiopia.

## **IRAN**

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Persian (51%), Azeri (24%), Gilaki and Mazandarani (8%), the Kurd (7%), Arab (3%), Lur (2%), Baloch (2%), and Turkmen (2%).

**GEOGRAPHY:** Iran is located in the Middle East, bordering the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, and the Caspian Sea. It shares a border with Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan-proper, Azerbaijan-Naxcivan exclave, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, and Turkmenistan. The area of Iran is slightly larger than that of Alaska, and the capital is Tehran.

**HISTORY:** Once known as Persia, the country officially became known as Iran in 1935. During World War II, the pro-Axis allegiance of the Shah led to the Anglo-Russian occupation of Iran and the deposition of the Shah.

By 1953, however, with the help of western backing, mainly due to oil interests in the country, the Shah overthrew Mossadeq (the prime minister since 1950) in a coup. Beginning in 1963, the Shah began a campaign to modernize and westernize the country. He launched the “White Revolution,” a program of land reform and social and economic modernization. During the following years and into the late 1960s, the Shah became increasingly dependent on the Secret Police (SAVAK) to control the opposition movements critical of his reforms. The storm swelled until, in September 1978, the Shah’s policies alienated the clergy and his authoritarian rule led to riots, strikes, and mass demonstrations. Following this, martial law was imposed, and in January 1979, the Shah and his family were forced into exile. By the beginning of February, the Islamic fundamentalist, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, returned to Iran following fourteen years of exile in Iraq and France for opposing the regime. Later that same year, the Islamic Republic of Iran was proclaimed as the official new name.

The next years brought more problems and instability for the people of Iran: the Iran-Iraq war. Beginning in September 1980, Iraq invaded Iran following border skirmishes and a dispute over the Shat al-Arab waterway. This marked the beginning of a war that would last the next eight years. In 1985, after the U.S. and Soviet Union halted arms supplies, the U.S. attempted to win the release of hostages in Lebanon by offering secret arms deals. This would later become known as the Iran-Contra affair, which took place under the Reagan administration.

In 1988, Iran accepted a cease-fire agreement with Iraq following negotiations in Geneva under the sponsorship of the United Nations. In 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini died, and the following day President Khamene’i was appointed the new supreme leader. The following year brought a major earthquake, which killed approximately 40,000 people. It was during this same year that Iraq invaded Kuwait. Iran remained neutral through this event, denouncing both Baghdad’s conquest of Kuwait and any long-term presence of U.S. forces in the region.

In 1995, the U.N. imposed sanctions against Iran for allegedly sponsoring terrorism by seeking to acquire nuclear arms and for hostility to the Middle East process. Iran denied these charges. By 1998, Iran was in conflict with Afghanistan because the Taliban admitted to killing eight Iranian diplomats and a journalist. After this, Iran deployed thousands of troops on its border with Afghanistan.

Pro-democracy movements were being oppressed during this time as well. For example, in July of 1999, a group of pro-democracy students at Tehran University held a demonstration following the closure of a reformist newspaper. Clashes with security forces led to six days of rioting and the arrest of over 1,000 students.

August 2000 also saw senior clerics issue a religious decree allowing women to lead religious congregations of women worshippers. Also, in April 2001, Iran and Saudi Arabia signed a major security accord to combat terrorism, drug trafficking, and organized crime. However, by January 2002, U.S. president George Bush included Iran as an “Axis of Evil,” thus sparking outrage among reformist and conservatives alike, including Iran’s reform-minded president Mohammad Khatami. Later that same year, Russian technicians began construction of Iran’s first nuclear reactor, despite strong objections from the United States.

**PEOPLE:** Key current issues affecting the country include the pace of accepting outside modernizing influences and reconciliation between clerical control of the regime, popular government participation, and widespread demands for reform. Fifty-three percent of the population in Iran lives below the poverty line.

Iran’s economy is a mixture of central planning, state ownership of oil, and other large enterprises, village agriculture, and small-scale private trading and service ventures. President Khatami had indicated that he would try to diversify Iran’s oil-reliant economy, however, he made little progress toward that goal. The current president, Mahmud Ahmadinejad, is much more conservative than Khatami had been and has sparked new issues among Iranians. The nuclear issue, however, is one area where most Iranians agree. They believe strongly that Iran has the right to develop nuclear technology and it has become a nationalist issue.

**RELIGION:** Shi’a Muslim (89%), Sunni Muslim (9%), Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha’i (2%)

**FAMILY:** Iranian culture is class based, traditional, and patriarchal. Class in its simplest form is mainly based on income and financial status or family genealogy. Kinship is a primary source of security and financial support for low-income families. For the affluent; kinship is a source of emotional and psychological support and welfare.

Division of labor could be a relatively simple division between the public (men's work) and domestic (women's work) for the poor and/or uneducated, or a technical division in sophisticated work environments for highly trained and educated professional males and females. Generally the lower and uneducated classes may regard females as inferior or entitled to a lesser position in the society. On the other hand, the modern classes normally strive to guarantee the equality of sexes and eliminate gender discrimination.

**DRESS:** Iranians are very conscious about the way they dress and they generally dress well. Dress codes are very important in distinguishing modern and traditional groups. Generally, among the affluent, men and women are expected to dress fashionably with expensive jewelry and accessories (mainly watches and rings for men) and drive luxury cars.

After the Islamic Republic was proclaimed in 1979, women were forced by law to wear a chador – a flowing black cloak – or long shapeless coats in dark colors, topped with plain, unflattering scarves. Fashion police – known locally as The Sisters of Zeinab, a sarcastic reference to the Prophet Muhammad's granddaughter – roamed the streets arresting women who wore makeup or bright colors, or allowed too much hair to escape from underneath her headscarf. Currently in Iran, women still must cover up – it is illegal to go outside without a scarf and coat to the knees. But gradually women have been challenging the system and every year it seems coats get a bit shorter and slightly more hair is shown from under the scarf. Also, women are opting for headscarves designed by Versace or Dior and tailored pea coats instead of the dark, solid-color scarves and longer, looser cloaks worn in earlier years.

**LANGUAGE:** Persian and Persian dialects 58%, Turkic and Turkic dialects 26%, Kurdish 9%, Luri 2%, Balochi 1%, Arabic 1%, Turkish 1%, other 2%

**NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION:** Conservative Muslims may avoid shaking hands or kissing unrelated individuals from the opposite sex. However, it is acceptable for individuals from the same sex to kiss on both cheeks, embrace, and hug each other whether they are related or not.

**OTHER FACTS:**

- Kurds are a persecuted group. For example, in some areas, they cannot speak their own language. Those who practice the Baha'i religion also face persecution.
- Iran is situated in a strategic location on the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, a vital maritime pathway for crude oil transport.
- While the recent rise in oil prices has helped Iran a bit, they still face structural problems, including encouragement of foreign investment and the containment of inflation.

## **IRAQ**

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Arabs (75-80%), Kurdish (15-20%), Turkoman, Assyrian, or other (5%)

**GEOGRAPHY:** Iraq is located in the Middle East, bordering the Persian Gulf. Iraq is slightly twice the size of Idaho and shares borders with Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey. The capital of Iraq is Baghdad.

**HISTORY:** Beginning in 1920, Iraq was placed by a British mandates under the League of Nations. The year 1921 brought the first king to Iraq, and by 1932, Iraq became an independent state. The year 1958 saw the monarchy overthrown in a military coup, and Iraq was declared a republic.

Another coup came in February 1963, and the Arab Socialist Baath Party (ASBP) ousted the prime minister. A few years later, in 1968, a Ba'athist led-coup ousted President Arif and General Ahmad Hasa al-Bakr became president. Many groups were fighting with one another, and by 1970 a peace agreement was signed between the Revolution Command Council (RCC) and Mullah Mustafa Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

In 1979, President Al-Bakr resigned and was succeeded by Vice President Saddam Hussein. In September 1980, Iran bombed Iraqi border towns, an act that Iraq considers the start of the Iran-Iraq war. In 1988, Iraq was accused of using chemical weapons against the Kurdish town of Halabjah. The U.N. would monitor the ensuing ceasefire.

In August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. The United Nations condemned this action by imposing economic sanctions on Iraq a few days later. In the next few days, against the desires of Kuwait, Iraq announced the merging of Kuwait and Iraq, causing the U.N. and the United States to take action. By January 1991, the Gulf War started when coalition forces began an aerial bombing of Iraq – called “Operation Desert Storm.” The war continued until March 1991, when Iraq accepted a ceasefire. In April of that year, a plan was approved to establish a U.N. safe-haven in northern Iraq to protect the Kurds, and the U.S. ordered Iraq to end all military activity in this area. By November 1994, the Iraqi National Assembly recognized Kuwait’s borders and its military independence.

With the sanctions still in place in 1995, the U.N. created the “oil-for-food program.” However, it was not accepted by Iraq until May 1996 and not implemented until December 1996. Hussein also won a referendum in 1995 allowing him to remain president for another seven years.

In 1998, Iraq was suspected of having weapons of mass destruction, but refused to cooperate with the U.N.’s commission. The refusal prompted the U.S. and UK-led bombing campaign, “Operation Desert Fox,” to destroy Iraq’s nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons program. Weapons inspectors did not return until September 2002. In May 2001, Saddam’s son Qusay was elected to the leadership of the Baath Party, causing speculation that he was being groomed to succeed his father. By March 2003, U.S. President George W. Bush gave Saddam and his sons 48 hours to vacate Iraq or face war. By April 2003, Kurdish fighters and U.S. forces had taken control of the northern cities of Kirkuk and Mosul.

In May 2003, the U.N. approved a resolution backing a U.S.-led administration in Iraq and lifting the economic sanctions. The U.S. administration abolished the Baath party and institutions of the former regime and created the Coalition Provisional Authority. The Coalition then signed an interim constitution and created the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) in March 2004, after U.S. arms inspectors found no evidence of biological or chemical weapon stockpiles in Iraq, which had been the main justification for the invasion. At this time, information also arose of the abuse of Iraqi prisoners, which caused global dismay.

In June 2004, the Coalition transferred sovereignty to the Iraqi Interim Government (IG), which held elections in January 2005, electing President Ghazi al-Ujayl al-Yawr, a Shiite, and Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, a Sunni. Iraq’s permanent constitution was approved in October 2005 and elections for the 275-member Council of Representatives mandated under the constitution were held in December 2005. The Council of Representatives’ approval of most of the cabinet members in May 2006 marked the transition from the interim government to the full-term government. Currently Iraq is led by President Jalal Talabani and Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

Coalition forces remain in Iraq to help restore the infrastructure and deal with insurgency against the new Iraqi government. The insurgency is mainly within Baghdad and areas west and north of the city. There are currently concerns that the level of fighting between Sunnis and Shiites will lead to civil war.

**PEOPLE:** The people of Iraq have had to face many ups and downs in the recent past. These include the damage caused during the war with Iran and the ensuing sanctions brought about by the U.N. in 1990. Improvements were seen after the implementation of the oil-for-food program. However, the situation again became bleak during the U.S.-led coalition's invasion in March-April 2003. Much of Iraq's infrastructure was destroyed in the fighting.

The process of reconstructing Iraq is slow and costly, leading to insecurity and lawlessness within Iraq. For women, the streets of Baghdad are a more dangerous place, and an upsurge in religious fervor means they must stick to Islamic dress if they want to be left alone.

**RELIGION:** Shi'a Muslim (60-65%), Sunni Muslim (32-37%), Christian or other (3%)

**FAMILY:** Arabs traditionally do not have last names parallel to U.S. family names. Each extended family has a name, and in recent times those names have come to be used as last names, especially in Western circles where last names are a requirement.

The social position of one's extended family is viewed as a constant. While in Western society, an individual can rise through education or attainment of wealth or sometimes good looks, one's status in Arab society is determined by the place of one's extended family, and that status is unchangeable. Individual behavior is very much motivated by the desire not to bring shame upon one's family.

Marriage is expected of everyone. Children belong to their father's family, and in the case of divorce the father is automatically awarded custody. Women do not join their husband's family. A family can be located in a particular area or can have branches in several geographically distinct locations.

**DRESS:** With Saddam Hussein's government brought down, women are now called on to wear more traditional Islamic attire: an Islamic headscarf and a long black abaya. Under the abaya, it is common for women to wear any type of clothes they desire, including pants, dresses, and different types of shirts.

Traditional Kurdish clothes for men consist of loose trousers with a shirt and jacket, cummerbund, and a skullcap over which is worn a turban folded from a large square material. Traditional dress for women consists of the loose trousers (somewhat similar to old-fashioned pantaloons), a long loose overdress (sometimes two or three dresses are worn at the same time, for warmth), a vest, and a headscarf covering the hair. These days, many Kurds dress in western fashion, especially the younger generation, although the women avoid the more extreme or revealing fashions.

**LANGUAGE:** Arabic, Kurdish (official in Kurdish regions), Assyrian, Armenian

**OTHER FACTS:**

- In Islam, Friday is the holy day when Arabs are expected to go to the mosque to pray and hear a sermon. The weekend in many Arab countries consists of Thursday and Friday; in Iraq it is just one day, Friday.
- Because of Iraq's connections with Britain over the last century, English has for some time been the Western language of choice among Iraqis.

## **KAZAKHSTAN**

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Kazakh/Qazaq (53.4%), Russian (30%), Ukrainian (3.7%), Uzbek (2.5%), German (2.4%), Tatar (1.7%), Uygur (1.4%), other (4.9%)

**GEOGRAPHY:** Kazakhstan, a country that is slightly less than four times the size of Texas, borders China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Its capital is Astana. It borders the Aral Sea, and its terrain extends from the Volga to the Altai Mountains and from the plains in western Siberia to oases and desert in Central Asia.

**HISTORY:** Kazakhstan gained its independence from the Soviet Union in December 1991. Kazakhs, a mix of Mongol and Turkic nomadic tribes, do not have a history of national unification. They migrated to the area in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and lived as such until the 18<sup>th</sup> century when they were conquered by Russia. Russians eventually claimed the entire territory of Kazakhstan. Tragically, about half of the Kazakh population was killed during the Russian Civil War of the 1920s and 1930s. During this time, many fled to China and Mongolia.

Kazakhstan became a Soviet Republic in 1936, and during the 1950s and 1960s, Soviet citizens (mostly Russians) moved into northern Kazakhstan to cultivate the land there, upsetting the native/non-native resident balance. When independence came, many of these Russians left to return to their native land. Kazakhstan was left seeking national identity, economic development, and peace with China over territory.

Kazakhstan is currently a republic under authoritarian presidential rule. It has enjoyed economic growth in recent years, in large part due to the opening of a pipeline from its oilfields to the Black Sea. Kazakhstan has settled or is in the process of settling all border disputes with neighboring countries and is seeking cooperation to control migration, illegal activities, and trade across these borders.

#### **PEOPLE:**

The urban Kazakh woman is the most modern woman of Central Asia. Kazakh women are the least restricted by traditions and religion. They are also the most self-confident in the region. The nomadic life and the communist system, which banned religion, were quite effective on the status of Kazakh women today. Kazakh women have adapted to the post-independence liberal economy. The Zigoli Market in Almaty, is the most significant indicator of this.

Health: Life expectancy in Kazakhstan is 59 for men and 69 for women. There have been no major disease outbreaks in recent years, according to the World Health Organization. Kazakhstan boasts a 95+% literacy rate.

**RELIGION:** Muslim (47%), Russian Orthodox (44%), Protestant (2%), other (7%)

**FAMILY:** The structure of the Kazakh family is patriarchal, or male-dominated, but this is gradually changing. Legal authority that once belonged to the male head of the household has now been shifted to the head of the collective farm.

**DRESS:** Western style dress is common among the Kazakh men and women living in the cities. However, the rural Kazakh workers generally wear loose, colorless shirts with baggy trousers that are tied at the waist. This outfit is similar to the Kazakh clothing of the past.

**LANGUAGE:** The state language is Kazakh (Qazaq), and is spoken by 64.4% of the population. Russian is an official language, and 95% of the population speaks it.

#### **OTHER FACTS:**

- Southern Kazakhstan is susceptible to earthquakes
- Only 8.28% of the land is considered arable
- Export commodities include oil and oil products (58%), ferrous metals (24%), and chemicals (5%)

## **KUNAMA OF ERITREA**

**WHO THEY ARE:** In Eritrea, they are one of the smallest ethnic groups, making up only about 2 percent of the population. Most of the 100,000 estimated population live in remote and isolated areas between the Gash and Setit Rivers, near the border of Ethiopia. Discrimination and violence has been common throughout their lives. In the most recent Ethiopian/Eritrean War, which lasted from 1998-2000, more than 4,000 Kunama people were forced to flee their homes to nearby refugee camps in Ethiopia.

**GEOGRAPHY:** Eritrea is located along the Red Sea in East Africa between Sudan and Djibouti. The region in which the Kunama people inhabit is a small area in the southwest part of the country, along the Ethiopian border between the Gash and Setit Rivers. This plains area is very fertile and is often referred to as the “breadbasket of Eritrea”.

**HISTORY:** The Kunama are believed to have been the pre-historic inhabitants of the region. As a smaller group of people, they are often invaded by neighboring ethnic groups who want their fertile land. The most recent conflict was the war broke out between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998, and lasted for two years, displacing many of the inhabitants of the region, particularly the Kunama people. Most were forced to flee across the border to Ethiopia and many remain there today in refugee camps.

**PEOPLE:** They are very community oriented and spend most of their time as farmers and pastoralists, as they live on some of the most fertile land in the region. They are also skilled in sewing, weaving, and repairing.

Most Kunama adults have not been formally educated beyond grades 2 or 3, and literacy rates stand at about 20% of the population that can read and write. However, about 40% of children in refugee camps attend school.

**RELIGION:** Traditional Kunama religion is monotheistic and some of the Kunama people still practice the traditional tribal beliefs, but most of their inhabitants have converted to either Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism) or Islam. Interreligious marriage is common as most Kunama are not practicing members of their given religion.

They practice rites of initiation that are performed by the elders of the community. This includes the practice of female genital mutilation which is performed on most female between the ages of 5 and 12.

**FAMILY:** They are a matriarchal society in which the mother is the head of the household. According to the social system, a child is not considered a member of the Kunama people unless the mother is a member of the community. Although they practice a traditional matriarchal society, women hold the traditional role in the household. They cook, work in the household, raise the children, and typically do not work outside the house.

It is very common for much older men to marry girls as young as 13 or 14 years old. Most only have one spouse, but children with multiple partners, even after the marriage has taken place.

**LANGUAGE:** The Kunama speak a Nilo-Saharan language, unrelated to the dominant spoken languages in Eritrea and Ethiopia. With their close proximity to Ethiopia, a small number of highly educated Kunama also speak Tigrinya, a language widely spoken in its country. A smaller select few of the population can speak Amharic and Arabic and an even smaller percentage can speak English.

### **OTHER FACTS:**

- The Kunama diet is similar to that of the Ethiopian diet. Their meal consists of injera (a kind of pancake) and shiro (sauce made from chickpeas).

- Although traditional medicinal methods are used more frequent today, traditional herbal methods are still practiced, such as the burning of one's cheeks to relieve a headache.

**SOURCES:** [www.refugeesinternational.org](http://www.refugeesinternational.org), [www.culturalorientation.net](http://www.culturalorientation.net), [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

## **LIBERIA**

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Indigenous African tribes, including the Kpelle, Bassa, Gio, Kru, Grebo, Mano, Krahn, Gola, Gbandi, Loma, Kissi, Vai, Dei, Bella, Mandingo, and Mende (95%); Americo-Liberians: descendents of immigrants who had been slaves in the United States (2.5%); Congo People: descendents of immigrants who had been slaves in the Caribbean (2.5%)

**GEOGRAPHY:** Liberia is located in western Africa, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, between the Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone. Liberia is slightly larger than the state of Tennessee. The capital of Liberia is Monrovia, located on the northern part of the country on the Atlantic coast.

**HISTORY:** Liberia is Africa's oldest republic and was founded as an American colony by freed American slaves. Despite their ideals, tension soon arose between the preexisting governments in Liberia and the American immigrants. Through the past couple of decades Liberia has been plagued by several coups, bringing many years of instability. Beginning in 1980, Master Sergeant Samuel Doe staged a military coup, suspended the constitution, and assumed full powers in controlling Liberia. In 1989, a civil war began in which Charles Taylor, a former follower of Doe, began an uprising against the government. By 1990, Doe had been killed by a small faction of Taylor's group. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sent peacekeeping forces in at this point, but attempts at peace were not realized. The civil war lasted until 1996 and destroyed much of Liberia's economy. By 1997, a democratically elected government was installed, incurring massive international debts.

While internal problems were causing damage to the people of Liberia, external problems were also brewing. Charles Taylor's government was accused of supporting the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) – rebels in Sierra Leone. The subsequent fighting, both internally and externally, led many people to flee Liberia. The year 2001 also brought an arms embargo by the United Nations because Taylor had been found trading weapons for diamonds from rebels in Sierra Leone.

The 14 year civil war finally ended with a comprehensive peace agreement signed in August 2003, and Charles Taylor was exiled to Nigeria. Liberia was then headed by the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) composed of rebel, government, and civil society groups, and led by Gyude Bryant. The U.N. mission remained in the country and a successful disarmament program was concluded in 2004. After the interim government's two year mandate ended, Liberians held elections in 2005. The current leader is President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

**PEOPLE:** The people of Liberia are currently working to rebuild their county. Priorities remaining include successfully integrating former combatants into society and providing needed social services such as more schools and regional infrastructures.

**RELIGION:** Indigenous beliefs (40%), Christian (40%), Muslim (20%)

**FAMILY:** Liberia is a male-dominated society. However, women do have a good amount of control over household issues. Women are also taking a larger part in the lives of the family and society because so many of the men have been at war. This forces many women to handle not only household issues, but farming duties as well.

**DRESS:** Dress standards are very modest in Liberia. In Monrovia especially, one may see firsthand both the African and American, especially from the South, influences in the dress. Women may affect Western dress or wear long cotton skirts in bright colors, with bandanas loosely wrapped around their heads.

In the rural villages both men and women wear a *lapas*, a one-by-two meter piece of cotton cloth, wrapped around their waist. Women often wear no clothes on top. Children are usually naked. Nobody wears shoes or sandals.

**LANGUAGE:** English (20%) is the official language and some 20 ethnic languages, of which only some are written and used in correspondence

**NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION:** The greeting of one Liberian to another involves when shaking hands grasping the middle finger of your friend's right hand between your thumb and third finger and bringing it up quickly with a snap. The custom had its origin in the days of slavery when it was not uncommon for a slave owner to break the finger of his slave's hand to indicate bondage. When the freed slaves colonized Liberia, they began this ritualistic greeting as a sign of their freedom.

**OTHER FACTS:**

- Liberia, its name derived from the Latin *liber*, meaning "free," was founded by freed American slaves in the early nineteenth century.
- Goat Soup is the national soup and is served at every important state function.

## **NIGERIA**

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Of the more than 250 ethnic groups that inhabit Africa's most populated country, the most numerous and politically influential are: Hausa and Fulani (29%), Yoruba (21%), Igbo/Ibo (18%), Ijaw (10%), Kanuri (4%), Ibibio (3.5%), and the Tiv (2.5%)

**GEOGRAPHY:** Nigeria is located in Western Africa, bordering the Gulf of Guinea. It is situated between Benin (to the east) and Cameroon (to the west). The area of this country is quite large – slightly more than twice the size of California. The capital is located in Abuja.

**HISTORY:** Nigeria is one of Africa's most populous and diverse countries, and before it was divided into several British protectorates, the area of Nigeria was home to many African states and empires. Northern Nigeria was home to the Islamic Hausa states that were active in West African trade. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a religious revolution in the North led by Usman dan Fodio established the Sokoto Caliphate of the Fulani people. Southern and central Nigeria were divided among states, including the well known Yoruba states and decentralized Igbo communities.

Under British colonialism, Nigeria was divided into a northern protectorate and southern territories which were administered more directly. At independence in 1960, the country led by Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Belewa faced the monumental task of uniting people with long histories of independent governments of their own into one nation. The subsequent process has not been smooth and has resulted in a number of military coups and a civil war, when the Biafra territory attempted to secede in 1967. The civil war ended in 1970 and leaders attempted to restore harmony. In 1999, military rule was ended and a new Constitution was adopted which recreated greater regional autonomy under a federalist system of 36 states. The April 2003 elections brought President Olusegun Obasanjo to power with more than 60% of the vote.

Since 2003, Nigeria has been challenged by issues of corruption and management of the country's sizable oil resources. The introduction of Islamic law in the north also challenged issues of regional autonomy and the central government's authority. However, Nigeria has also been a leader in West Africa, as an active member of

the regional trade organization ECOWAS (Economic Commission of West African States), and a lead instigator of Africa's new economic recovery program NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development).

**PEOPLE:** The former rulers of Nigeria were unable to diversify the economy away from over-dependence on oil. Furthermore, the agricultural sector, formerly very productive, has been unable to keep up with the growth in population and is now forced to import food.

Northern Nigeria is home to the Hausa, Fulani, and the Kanuri. In the middle of the country are many other people. Especially in northern states, Islamic law has been adopted, causing anxiety among the country's Christian populations. Despite the political and territorial restructuring of the country, tensions among some potential separatists remain.

The people of Nigeria, like many in Africa, have been hit hard by the AIDS epidemic. Not only have many people died from this disease, but there are many implications of this as well: a lower life expectancy, higher infant and mortality and death rates, lower population and growth rates. In 2003 there were an estimated 3.6 million people living with AIDS in Nigeria, and the life expectancy at 47 years. 60% of the population is considered to be living below the poverty line.

**RELIGION:** Muslim (50%), Christian (40%), indigenous beliefs (10%)

**FAMILY:** Just as in the United States, there are a variety of types of family structures in Nigeria. Extended family is very important, and it is not uncommon to be polygamous. In rural Nigeria, it still seems to be the rule that older people are cared for by their children, grandchildren, spouses, siblings, or even ex-spouses. Traditionally, extended kinship groups and local authorities handle family problems with spouses or children. For the most part, this practice continued in the rural areas. In urban settings, social services are either absent or rare for family conflict, for abandoned or runaway children, for foster children, or for children under the care of religious instructors.

**DRESS:** Due to the many different ethnic groups that make up Nigeria, there are a variety of styles that are unique to each group. As with most other African countries, loose-fitting clothes are the rule. Head wraps are common for women, as are wraps, which go around the lower torso for both men and women. Also popular are colorful, flowing shirts.

**LANGUAGE:** English (official), Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulani

**NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION:** In Nigeria, men shake hands with other men frequently, but it is normally initiated by the person more senior. Handshaking between the sexes is rare, and women do not initiate the gesture. In Northern Nigeria, men may communicate indirectly with a woman by addressing her husband as an intermediary. Additionally, people tend not to gaze directly at their superiors eye-to-eye, which would be seen as confrontational and rude. Traditionally, this tendency is transferred to other environments as well. Some people find it unsettling when you gaze into their eyes, not necessarily because they have anything to hide, but because of their cultural upbringing.

Touching or making gestures when speaking is very common in Nigeria and should not be interpreted as having any sexual undertone. Touching mostly depends on the familiarity between the two people communicating and the kind of gestures depends on the ethnicity, because people tend to bring their native gestures into official communication circles. The same is true for intonation, which is influenced by their local dialects. Facial expressions and tone of voice are also important in Nigerian communication.

#### **OTHER FACTS:**

- Nigeria is the world's 10<sup>th</sup> largest oil producer.
- Even in the more cosmopolitan cities, more than 90% of marriages are within rather than between ethnic units, or at least within identical regions and language groups.

- Nigerians are well known for their entrepreneurial spirit.
- One of the predominant early independence leaders of Nigeria, Nnamdi Azikiwe, studied in the United States at the University of Pennsylvania.

## **NORTH KOREA:**

Cited as potential refugee population in the 2009 year by International Institute Director Anna Crosslin on World Refugee Day (June 20<sup>th</sup> 2008)

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** racially homogeneous; there is a small Chinese community and a few ethnic Japanese

**GEOGRAPHY:** Eastern Asia, northern half of the Korean Peninsula bordering the Korea Bay and the Sea of Japan, between China and South Korea.

**GOVERNMENT:** Communist state one-man dictatorship; Capital: Pyongyang

**EDUCATION:** Formal education has played a central role in the social and cultural development of both traditional Korea and contemporary North Korea. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed major educational changes. After the establishment of North Korea, an education system modeled largely on that of the Soviet Union was established. The system faces serious obstacles.

Education in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is strictly controlled by the government. Children go through one year of kindergarten, four years of primary education, six years of secondary education, and then on to universities. Two notable universities in the DPRK are the Kim Il-Sung University and Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, both in Pyongyang.

Kim Il-Sung University, founded in October 1946, is the country's only comprehensive institution of higher education offering bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees. It is an elite institution whose enrollment of 16,000 full- and part-time students in the early 1990s occupies, in the words of one observer, the "pinnacle of the North Korean educational and social system."

**HISTORY:** North Korea, one of the world's most centrally directed and least open economies, faces chronic economic problems. For decades North Korea has been one of the world's most secretive societies. It is one of the few countries still under communist rule.

An independent kingdom for much of its long history, Korea was occupied by Japan in 1905 following the Russo-Japanese War. Five years later, Japan formally annexed the entire peninsula. Following World War II, Korea was split with the northern half coming under Soviet-sponsored Communist domination. After failing in the Korean War (1950-53) to conquer the US-backed Republic of Korea (ROK) in the southern portion by force, North Korea (DPRK), under its founder President Kim Il- Sung, adopted a policy of diplomatic and economic "self-reliance".

The DPRK branded the US as the ultimate threat to its social system through state-funded propaganda, and molded political, economic, and military policies around the objective of eventual unification of Korea under Pyongyang's control. Kim's son, the current ruler Kim Jong-Il, was officially designated as his father's successor in 1980, assuming a growing political and managerial role until the elder Kim's death in 1994. After decades of economic mismanagement, the DPRK since the mid-1990s has relied heavily on international aid to feed its population while continuing to expend resources to maintain an army of approximately 1 million.

North Korea's history of regional military threats and growth of military-related items are of a major concern to the international community. Beginning in August 2003, North Korea, China, Japan, Russia, South Korea, and the US have participated in the Six-Party Talks aimed at resolving the stalemate over the DPRK's nuclear programs. North Korea pulled out of the talks in November 2005. It test-fired ballistic missiles in July 2006 and conducted a nuclear test in October 2006. North Korea returned to the Six-Party Talks in December 2006 and subsequently signed two agreements on denuclearization.

The end of June 2008 marked a potential turning point for North Korea. North Korea handed over a long-delayed list of its nuclear activities to Washington on 26 June, but it is not thought to have given details of uranium enrichment, which the North denies. President George Bush in late June said that he would re-evaluate the situation after 45 days, in which North Korea needed to do more to show its nuclear capabilities.

**PEOPLE:** 23,479,089 (July 2008 est.)

Internally Displaced people risk arrest, imprisonment, and deportation. Tens of thousands of North Koreans cross into China to escape famine, economic hardships, and political oppression.

Life Expectancy: total population: 72.2 years; male: 69.45 years; female: 75.08 years (2008 est.)

Literacy Rates: definition: age 15 and over can read and write

Total population: 99%; male: 99%; female: 99%

**RELIGION:** traditionally Buddhist and Confucianist, some Christian and syncretic Chondogyo

(Religion of the Heavenly Way)

*NOTE:* autonomous religious activities now almost nonexistent; government-sponsored religious groups exist to provide illusion of religious freedom

**FAMILY:** The family is regarded by North Korean authorities as a "cell," or basic unit of society. A person participates in a cooperative, factory or office and individually earns "work points." Although a socialist cooperative payment for work points earned by family members goes to the family unit as a whole, the family head--the father or the grandfather--no longer manages and organizes the family's economic life. In households in which both parents work and no grandparents live nearby, infants over three months usually are placed in a *t'agaso* (nursery). They remain in these nurseries until they are four years old. Although *t'agaso* is not part of the compulsory education system, most families find them indispensable. A wife's inability to bear a son still gives a husband grounds for divorce. If a man desires a divorce, he has to obtain his wife's permission. A woman, however, is able to divorce without her husband's consent.

**DRESS:** North Koreans have traditional clothing with unique textures and are a delight to watch. The traditional North Korean clothing is worn by the Koreans on special occasions. The modern men and women of North Korea have adopted the international dresses like jeans, t-shirts, trousers.

**LANGUAGE:** Korean

**OTHER FACTS:**

- slightly smaller than Mississippi
- North Korea is the least visited country in the world – only 1,800 Westerners make the trip each year.
- North Korea has a "national intercom" cable radio station wired throughout the country that is a significant source of information for the average North Korean citizen; it is wired into most residences and workplaces and carries news and commentary.

**RWANDA:**

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Hutu (Bantu) 84%, Tutsi (Hamitic) 15%, Twa (Pygmy) 1%

**REFUGEE SITUATION:** An estimated 57,000 Rwandan refugees reside in 21 African states, including Zambia, Gabon, and 20,000 who fled to Burundi in 2005 and 2006 to escape drought and recriminations from traditional courts investigating the 1994 massacres; the 2005 DROC and Rwanda border verification mechanism to stem rebel actions on both sides of the border remains in place.

**GEOGRAPHY:** Central Africa, east of Democratic Republic of the Congo, shares border with Uganda to the north, Burundi to the south, and Tanzania to the east

**GOVERNMENT:** republic; presidential, multiparty system; Capital: Kigali

**EDUCATION:** Education is free and compulsory for all children aged 7 to 13, but the law is not widely enforced. Primary school is for seven years, followed by six years of secondary education. There were no public schools in Rwanda until the 1950s, and secondary education was attainable only at a school founded in 1929 at Butare by Roman Catholic missionaries. With independence, Rwanda began a major expansion of its educational programs; in 1989, education accounted for 25.4% of total government expenditure. However, the Catholic Church continues to play the leading role in education. There are now 20 higher education institutes (6 Public / 14 Private) throughout the country. The first university in Rwanda (National University of Rwanda - NUR) was opened by the government in 1963. 49 students enrolled initially at NUR, but by 1999 this had risen to 4550. In 1997, Rwanda had a total of 5,571 students enrolled in higher education. Today this stands at 26,796, 39% of students are female.

**HISTORY:** Rwanda experienced one of Africa's worst genocide in modern times, and the country's recovery was hindered by its intervention in the conflict in neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo. Rwanda is trying to shake off its image associated with the 1994 state-sponsored genocide; the government argues the country is now stable. The country has been dominated by ethnic tension associated with the traditionally unequal relationship between the dominant Tutsi minority and the majority Hutus.

In 1959, three years before independence from Belgium, the majority ethnic group, the Hutus, overthrew the ruling Tutsi king. Over the next several years, thousands of Tutsis were killed, and some 150,000 driven into exile in neighboring countries. The children of these exiles later formed a rebel group, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), and began a civil war in 1990. The war, along with several political and economic upheavals, exacerbated ethnic tensions, culminating in April 1994 in the genocide of roughly 800,000 Tutsis and Hutus.

The Tutsi rebels defeated the Hutu regime and ended the killing in July 1994, but approximately 2 million Hutu refugees - many fearing Tutsi retribution - fled to neighboring Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zaire. Despite substantial international assistance and political reforms - including Rwanda's first local elections in March 1999 and its first post-genocide presidential and legislative elections in August and September 2003 - the country continues to struggle to boost investment and agricultural output, and ethnic reconciliation is complicated by the real and perceived Tutsi political dominance.

Rwanda has been relatively stable under Paul Kagame, elected president in 2003, and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), but the Crisis Group - a conflict-prevention agency - reported in 2002 that the RPF tolerated no criticism or challenge to its authority. The country's increasing centralization and intolerance of dissent, the nagging Hutu extremist insurgency across the border, and Rwandan involvement in two wars in recent years in the neighboring DRC continue to delay Rwanda's efforts to escape its bloody legacy.

**PEOPLE:** estimated at 10,186,063; life expectancy: total population: 49.76 years; male: 48.56 years; female: 51 years (2008 est.)

Major Infectious Diseases: bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis A, typhoid fever, and malaria

Literacy Rates: definition: age 15 and over can read and write

Total population: 70.4%; male: 76.3%; female: 64.7% (2003 est.)

**RELIGION:** Roman Catholic 56.5%, Protestant 26%, Adventist 11.1%, Muslim 4.6%, indigenous beliefs 0.1%, none 1.7% (2001)

**FAMILY:** After Rwanda's civil war, many Rwandans lived in tents in resettlement camps that were protected by foreign peacekeepers, and others fled to refugee camps in neighboring countries. During the war, homesteads were destroyed, families were torn apart, and thousands of children were orphaned. Today, some refugees are returning from other countries, including people who left Rwanda in 1959, and villages are being resettled. However, it will take many years to rebuild Rwandan society.

A *rugo* (traditional Rwandan homestead) consists of several beehive-shaped houses within a larger, fenced compound. The main family house is in the middle. Each house is made of woven branches and grasses, covered with clay. There is no running water, so women and children fetch water for the household every day. In cities, there is some Western-style housing, but most urban Rwandans live in small mud-walled houses with corrugated iron roofs. The term *inzu* in Kinyarwanda can mean family, household or house. An *inzu* usually consists of a husband and wife, children and close relatives. A family without children is considered incomplete, and large families are common. People from several *inzus* who can trace their origins to a common male ancestor form a kinship unit called an *umuryango*. The oldest and most influential male in this group is the *umukungu*, the head of the *umuryango*.

**DRESS:** Today Rwandans wear modern Western-style clothing. However, they buy it at used clothing stores. Some Rwandans can afford to buy new clothing made by tailors in Rwanda. The traditional Rwandan costumes made of animal skins and bark cloth is seen only in museums.

**LANGUAGE:** Kinyarwanda- universal Bantu vernacular; French; English; and Kiswahili

#### **OTHER FACTS:**

- slightly smaller in size than Maryland in the US
- Rwanda is the most densely populated country in Africa
- Rwanda is a poor rural country with about 90% of the population engaged in agriculture.
- The warmest greeting is similar to a hug. Each person's left hand touches the other person's hip. The right hand reaches up to touch the other person's shoulder.

## **SIERRA LEONE**

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** 20 Native African tribes (90%), including Temne (30%), Mende (30%), and other West Africans (30%); Creole/Krio (10%) who are descendents of freed Jamaican slaves who settled in the Freetown area in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century; additional population include refugees from Liberia as well as some Europeans, Lebanese, Pakistanis, and Indians

**GEOGRAPHY:** Sierra Leone is a West African country on the Atlantic coast. It is located north of Liberia and west of Guinea. The capital of Sierra Leone is Freetown.

**HISTORY:** Sierra Leone was once a colony of Britain but became independent in 1961. In 1971, Sierra Leone declared itself to be a republic, and in 1978 Sierra Leone became a one-party state (the All People's Congress is the sole legal party).

Frustration over corruption and government monopolization of resources led to a civil war in 1991. This involved the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) against President Momoh. (This is the RUF group that Charles

Taylor of Liberia has been accused of supporting.) President Momoh was ousted in a military coup, most likely out of frustration of Momoh's inability to deal with the rebels.

In February 1996, a newly elected president was sworn in. Ahmad Tejar Kabbah signed a peace accord with the rebels in November. However, Kabbah was forced to flee to Guinea and seek international support.

This support came from the United Nations in October of 1997 when they imposed sanctions against Sierra Leone. However, the help brought by the United Nations would fall short of bringing peace and stability to the people of Sierra Leone. In January 1999 the Revolutionary United Front seized parts of Freetown. The U.N. intervened in May 1999 to observe a cease-fire, joining troops sent by ECOWAS to maintain order. This was at first greeted with guarded optimism, although by November 1999 U.N. troops were being abducted and attacked. In May 2000, the leader of the rebel group RUF, Foday Sankoh was captured.

In March 2001, U.N. troops were able to be deployed peacefully in rebel-held territory for the first time. It was at this time also that the disarmament of rebels began. By January 2002, war was declared over, and the U.N. decided to set up a war crimes tribunal. In addition the Sierra Leonean government had implemented a Truth and Reconciliation Council to complement the court's activities. Kabbah won the presidential election in May of 2002. Kabbah has asked the U.N. to continue their mandate due to the danger posed by fighting in Liberia. The U.N. Mission in Sierra Leone has maintained over 4,000 peacekeepers in Sierra Leone since 1999.

**PEOPLE:** The current situation is a very dire one in Sierra Leone. The political causes of the conflict have been exacerbated by the lucrative trade in illegal diamonds ("blood diamonds") practiced by both sides. Many children are forced to work in diamond mines in order to benefit those they work for. The involvement of child soldiers in the fighting forces also added to the dilemmas the now peaceful Sierra Leone must address as they attempt to try the war's leaders and reintegrate the child soldiers into society.

In Sierra Leone the law does not require children to go to school. 40% of the children, however, do attend elementary school, and 15% go on to attend high school. There is a University of Sierra Leone, located in Freetown. It is the only university in the country.

Despite the country's vast mineral wealth, most Sierra Leoneans live on less than a dollar a day. All but a tiny fraction of Sierra Leone's diamond revenues end up in the hands of smugglers who purchase them illegally and at relatively low prices from miners and from rebel leaders who recruited children as cheap labor. It is estimated that about 70% of Sierra Leoneans live under the poverty level.

The civil war in Sierra Leone has also caused severe emotional wounds for many of its citizens. Many of its children are growing up suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, a debilitating psychological illness impairing their developmental process. For those under three years of age, the severe trauma can also permanently alter brain chemistry. The life expectancy for Sierra Leoneans is only 40 years.

**RELIGION:** Muslim (60%), indigenous beliefs (30%), Christianity (10%)

**FAMILY:** It is hard to describe any typical family situation in Sierra Leone. This is because of the many years of suffering this country has had to endure. There are countless stories of families being ripped apart by soldiers. Many mothers, daughters, and sisters have been raped and abducted to serve in the army. Boys were also abducted and forced to fight and kill for the army. Because of such atrocities, many children lose their childhood, some as early as 8 or 9.

**DRESS:** The clothing that Sierra Leone's people wear is basically like the clothing that people in warm parts of America wear. They wear cotton, plain color shirts, and shorts. The only thing that is different about their dress is that almost everyone in Sierra Leone wears a small cap.

**LANGUAGES:** English (official) is spoken only by a literate minority; other languages spoken include Mende (in the south) and Temne (in the north) as well as Krio, an English-based Creole language that is understood by 95% of the population.

**NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION:** Whether meeting for the first time or just the first time that day it is usual for Sierra Leoneans to shake hands. If it is someone you have dealt with on more than one occasion, they may continue to hold your hand as the conversation continues, even if you are walking with them after meeting. This is a practice that tends to make a lot of Westerners uneasy, although it is common in a number of countries. If they do not continue to hold onto your hand, they may wish to stand close enough that there is slight body contact, i.e. elbow to elbow, while you converse.

The acceptable distance to keep when speaking to someone depends on the situation and the societal status of the person with whom you are talking. When speaking to an elder or in a formal situation, touching is inappropriate. Sierra Leoneans are very conscious of relative ages and the post they hold. Therefore, the tone of voice and directness varies when dealing with various levels of people. One does not need to be overly polite when dealing with peers. Persistent eye contact during a conversation is a sign of disrespect, especially when talking to elders. Gestures and facial expressions are acceptable among people of the same social status and in any informal gathering.

**OTHER FACTS:**

- One of the most outstanding features of the cultural life of Sierra Leone includes the country's dancing. The Sierra Leone dance troupe is internationally known and the different communities have their own dances and styles of communication.
- The historic example of Sierra Leone as a colony was central to early British debates deliberating colonial expansion.
- Popular foods from Sierra Leone include *Egusi* and groundnut stew.

## **SOMALIA**

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Somali (85%), Bantu and other non-Somali (15%)

**GEOGRAPHY:** Somalia is located in the Horn of Africa. The capital is Mogadishu, which is located in the southern part of the country. Kenya is to the south, Ethiopia to the west, Djibouti to the northwest, the Gulf of Aden to the north, and the Indian Ocean to the east, bordering Somalia. Somalia is a country that is slightly smaller than Texas. Somalia has a semi-arid to arid environment, which is suitable primarily for the nomadic pastoralism, which more than half the population practices.

**HISTORY:** Somalia has a long and varied history. In pre-colonial times, the area was a key trading power known to Egyptian, Ethiopian, and Chinese merchants as the Land of Punt. In more recent years, Somalia was the northernmost port in the extensive Swahili trade network along the coast of East Africa. While the coastal areas were engaged in extensive trading, which during the height of the Swahili trade extended to the Middle East, India, and China, the interior of Somalia was ruled by decentralized clans who lived a nomadic, pastoral lifestyle. Traveling with their herds, inland Somalis were loyal to their clan lineages and developed an extensive oral culture, of which their poetry and traditional legal system were particularly notable. Other groups of Somalis, sometimes known as the Somali Bantu for their cultural ties to more southern parts of Africa, lived a more sedentary, agricultural life. Some of these Somalis were originally brought to Somalia as slaves, and later tended to live a more isolated life from other Somalis. Because of their different lifestyles and culture they also were subject to discrimination, and recently persecution (see the following section on the Somali Bantu for more detail).

During the colonial era, Somalia's traditionally held territory was divided between Britain, France, Italy and Ethiopia. The territory today known as Somalia was divided between the British and Italian colonies. However,

the Somalis traditionally also occupied land claimed by Ethiopia and the French (later renamed Djibouti), and northern Kenya. Thus the flag of Somalia represents a five sided star, commemorating the lost territory.

After the independence and unification of British and Italian Somalia into the United Republic of Somalia in 1960, Somali leaders briefly attempted to reunify their lost territory, to the irritation of other African political leaders. Tension with Ethiopia over the border territories also precipitated Somalia's invasion of Ethiopia in 1977.

Since a coup in 1969, Somalia was under the dictatorship of Siad Barre whose abuses and clan favoritism towards southern clans, convinced leaders in the north that their union with the south was not working. In 1991, a civil war started and the north declared themselves independent. Barre's overthrow soon after led to an escalation of the war in the south as various leaders opted for control. Negotiations sponsored by the United Nations stalemated after leaders were offended by the U.N. attitude. Peacekeepers were sent in 1992, but met with limited success. The conflict continued until 2000 and Puntland in the northeast also declared its independence. In October 2000, a new central government was announced in southern Somalia. This Transitional National Government was given a three year mandate; however the following year military leaders attempted to form their own national government with mixed success.

Recently after extensive negotiations hosted by Kenya the situation appears to be improving. In 2004, Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed was elected as transitional federal president and he named Professor Muhamed Ghedi as his prime minister. In the north Somaliland and Puntland remain independent. While unrecognized by the international community, these communities have been successful in restoring peace, and developing their educational systems and regional trade with the Middle East. Unfortunately, some of these positive developments have been overshadowed recently when Somalia was badly hit by the tsunami disaster which badly damaged roads and homes and contaminated water supplies.

**PEOPLE:** The majority of the population is made up of Somalis, a Cushitic people. However, there is also a small minority of Bantu-speaking people to the south as well as Arabs, Indians, Italians, and Pakistanis. It is estimated that about seventy percent of the people are nomadic. Others are either crop farmers or inhabitants of the few urban centers.

There have been many drastic changes in the daily life of the people of Somalia because of the civil war. Most industry shut down in the early 1990s as a result, and hospital and clinic services have been severely strained.

The people of Somalia take part in a variety of cultural activities. This includes poetry, folk dancing, the performance of plays, and singing. These activities still play a very important role, especially in the more rural areas. Although, more modern influences, such as television, cinema, bars, and restaurants are replacing some of the traditional culture of Somalia.

**RELIGION:** Sunni Islam

**FAMILY:** Somalia is divided into eighteen administrative districts and numerous clan and sub clan factions. These clans are groups that can trace their common ancestry to a single father. These clans are further subdivided into subclass, which combine at a higher level to form clan families. The people of these clans often give greater allegiance to lineage than to the state created.

**DRESS:** Because Somalia is located as an international trade route, Somali attire is quite varied. Young people are very influenced by Western fashion, and at work, school, or some other modern setting away from their homeland, most Somalis wear Western dress. However, for leisure time or in rural areas traditional dress is worn. For men, this includes two lengths of white cotton wrapped around them as a skirt and a shawl, or a brightly colored cloth similar to the Indonesian sarong. They may also wear a Western shirt or shawl and cover their head with a *benadiriy kufiya*, a Somali cap. Women, on the other hand, usually wear full-length dresses that

come in a variety of styles. Married women wear headscarves but usually do not veil, with the exception of more conservative women.

**LANGUAGE:** Somali (official), Arabic, English, Italian

**NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION:** Somalis like to shake hands, but may not welcome a handshake from a stranger. Muslims shake hands only with people of the same sex.

**OTHER FACTS:**

- Somalia has few resources and is prone to drought.
- Soccer is a very popular sport among the people of Somalia.
- Italian cuisine has had a major influence on urban Somali cooking.
- Nomads, in particular, do not like to eat fish because it shows that one is not a good herdsman.
- Historically Somali justice was based on a detailed system of reparations for injuries or crimes. Elders would convene and negotiate a settlement, often in a form of an animal such as a goat or camel.
- One of Somali's famous authors is Nuruddin Farah.

## **SOMALI BANTU**

**WHO THEY ARE:** In Africa, there is a language group of Bantu-speaking peoples (people who speak languages in the Bantu language family). The people belonging to Bantu Language Family B make up part of the population of almost all African countries South of the Sahara. Over three thousand years ago, the ancestors of many in Southern Africa shared a common history as they took part in a slow paced migration from west and central Africa to their present locations. Today they are members of over 300 groups, each having its own language, distinct history, and culture. Some include the Swahili and the Zulu. While the term Bantu is used by linguists to refer to this language group and by some Somalis to differentiate themselves from the rest of the country, it should be noted that in the historical context of other countries, such as South Africa, the term was used in a negative manner to describe the entire African population and some may take offense to the term.

Within Somalia, the Somali Bantu can be divided into three distinct groups: those indigenous to Somalia, those brought to Somalia as slaves and later integrated into Somali society, and those brought to Somalia but who maintained their ancestral culture and language. It is this third group, the *Mushunguli*, which has suffered the most persecution. Distinguishing characteristics of the Somali Bantu include physical features such as hair texture – Bantu tend to have more kinky hair, while non-Bantu peoples have softer hair. The Bantu are found in southern Somalia, and although they have lived in Somalia for approximately two centuries, these Somali Bantu are in many ways viewed and treated as foreigners.

Discrimination against the Somali Bantu has been present in every aspect of their lives, and today the Somali Bantu exist in a state somewhere between sharecropping and slavery. The Somali Bantu's lineage to slavery has been used to force them into second-class status, and has furthermore carried over into the Kenyan refugee camps. Beginning in 2002, over 12,000 Somalia Bantu were moved to the Kakuma refugee camp in northwest Kenya to be interviewed by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalizations Service. After this process, they can be placed in extended family groups in up to fifty cities and towns across the U.S. in 2003 and 2004.

**GEOGRAPHY:** Somalia is situated on the coast of East Africa and is about the size of Texas. The southern part of the country, the middle Juba River valley and the lower Juba River valley are home to the Somali Bantu. It is mostly this area that is the arable, cultivated land of the country. This agricultural region stretches between the Kenyan border to the West and the Indian Ocean to the East. Because of the location the Somali Bantu, people are mainly farmers.

**HISTORY:** Civil war broke out in 1991, and the subsequent clan competition for power had disastrous results for the civilian population in general and the Somali Bantu people in particular. The Somali Bantu were the backbone of the agricultural production and had large stocks of food on their property. Agricultural marketing networks began to stop normal operations, and food became vital to both the normal populace and to bandits and rogue militia. The Somali Bantu were a target, and because they were excluded from the traditional Somali clan protection networks, they had no protection from these attacks. War progressed further, and control of the lower Juba River valley shifted, wreaking havoc on the Somali Bantu farming communities.

In October 1992, some Somali Bantu began to flee southern Somalia for refugee camps in Kenya. Those Somali Bantu who had not been integrated into Somali society had originally sought resettlement in Tanzania in 1993 and 1994 and to Mozambique in 1997 and 1998, before they were considered for resettlement in the United States in 1999.

**PEOPLE:** The Somali Bantu have been described as resourceful, hard working, humble, hospitable, and capable of easily adjusting to any situation. The Somali Bantu are culturally different from the Somali nomads and the coastal people, because the latter generally disdain agriculture and value a clan lineage system that does not include the Somali Bantu. Most Somali Bantu identify themselves by their place of residence. Since Somalia's independence in 1960, the governments have tried to promote the idea that Somalia is a homogenous group; however, this is not the case. This myth promotes the idea that the dominant nomadic culture is the nation's only culture and tradition.

The standard of living for the Somali Bantu is quite low. They typically have no running water or electricity and few material possessions. Most Somali Bantu farmers in the region are small holders, which can provide subsistence and limited surpluses to the commercial market. These farmers contribute the highest percentage to Somalia's staple food stocks (maize, millet and sorghum for example). Previously, the Somali Bantu had been forced to accept their station in life, and they did this without speaking out. However, once in the refugee camps, the Somali Bantu began to speak out and defend themselves against their mistreatment.

**RELIGION:** There are indigenous ceremonies and beliefs from the ancestors of the Somali Bantu from southeast Africa. However, there are also some Somali Bantu who converted to Islam, which became a popular choice for some Somali Bantu because Muslims are prohibited from owning Muslim slaves. Since moving to refugee camps some Somali Bantu have also converted to Christianity. Whatever religion the Somali Bantu are, most still practice some ancestral traditions or rituals.

Ceremonies and dance groups are strongly linked to their community structure and spiritual well being. Festivals are mainly religious; however, there are some non-religious festivals.

**FAMILY:** Marriage usually occurs between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. Traditional Somali Bantu marriages include a dowry paid by the father of the groom to the family of the bride. Weddings are festive occasions and the groom's parents also arrange a large party after the ceremony. Somali Bantu also practice polygamy. The average family consists of four to eight children and a nuclear family typically includes grandparents, uncles, aunts, and other relatives. The man is generally considered the main provider and the woman is the manager of the family's domestic affairs.

Somali Bantu children typically work alongside their parents. There is a high birth rate and no family planning among the Somali Bantu. Children are given the father's name, while the wife keeps her father's name. The Somali Bantu should be addressed by their first name. Traditionally, a child is given a name on the third day after birth. Islamic names are predominantly used, although some Somali Bantu still use traditional names. Divorce is not uncommon.

**DRESS:** Women wear a headscarf if married, and a blouse with a large wraparound cloth around their waist. This is similar to the Indian sari. Men traditionally also wear a wraparound cloth; however, more men are wearing pants due to the increase in manual labor jobs.

**LANGUAGE:** Most Somali Bantu are at least bilingual. Af Maay is spoken in the Juba River valley; however, some traditional Somali Bantu villages do not understand this language. There are also other languages spoken, and Swahili is occasionally used as a common language. In the refugee camps some Somali Bantu have learned English, while others have increased their proficiency in Swahili in order to communicate with the Kenyan aid workers.

The Somali Bantu are largely illiterate, especially because they have been excluded from the Somali educational system. However, this is changing with the addition of primary and secondary education offered to all refugees in the Kenyan camps.

#### **OTHER FACTS:**

- Important aspects of their culture are passed down from one generation to the next through story-telling, singing, and oral recounting of their history.
- Somali Bantu have a very strong sense of family and community.
- The Somali Bantu have local healing techniques and the use of herbs is common.
- They use weather markers or particular events rather than specific dates to answer questions about dates of birth and other family history. Therefore, they sometimes have problems with interviews like the Western world uses.

## **REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN**

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Tajik (79.9%), Uzbek (15.3%), Russian (1.1%), Kyrgyz (1.1%), other (2.6%)

**GEOGRAPHY:** Tajikistan is located in Central Asia, west of China. It is about the size of Wisconsin. It borders Afghanistan, China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Tajikistan is landlocked. There is a mountainous region dominated by the Trans-Alay Range in the north and the Pamirs in the southeast.

**HISTORY:** In the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC the Bactrians had a large empire covering most of what is now northern Afghanistan, while their contemporaries, the Sogdians, inhabited the Zeravshan valley in present-day western Tajikistan, until displaced by the Arab conquest of Central Asia during the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The invaders succeeded in bringing Islam to the region. At the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century came a succession of Turkic invaders. Despite the different ethnicities, the two races cohabited peacefully, unified by religion – the Persian-speaking Tajiks absorbed Turk culture and the more numerous Turks absorbed the Tajik people. Both were subject to conquests by the Mongols.

Russia soon moved in to capture Tajik resources. Russia was eager to exploit the unclaimed area in the border with Afghanistan and China, mainly in its pushed to open up possible routes into British India. Following the revolution of 1917, the Tajiks found themselves part of two Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs). Muslim guerillas resisted Bolshevik rule for four years in which villages were razed and mosques destroyed. The first ever official Tajik state was formed in 1924. In 1929 the Tajik state was upgraded to a full union republic.

In the mid-1970s the underground Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) was founded, gathering popular support as a rallying point for Tajik nationalism. The first serious disturbances were in early 1990 when it was rumored that Armenian refugees were to be settled in Dushanbe, which was already short on housing. This piece of Soviet social engineering sparked off riots, deaths, and the imposition of a state of emergency.

When the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991 and Tajikistan declared independence, the country quickly descended into civil war. Emomali Rahmonov, a Kulyabi, has been head of state since 1992, but opposition, particularly

from the Islamic-democratic coalition, has been strident. The Kulyabi forces embarked on a program of ethnic cleansing directed at anyone connected with the Kurgan-Tyube or the Garm valley. Somewhere between 20,000 and 50,000 people were killed in the fighting, and there are half a million refugees.

Although a peace agreement was signed in June 1997 between President Rahmonov and Islamic opposition leader Sayid Abdullo Nuri, tensions are still high. Rahmonov is propped up by Russian-dominated CIS forces, mainly because Russia wants to protect the border with Afghanistan. Thousands of Tajik rebels are based in northern Afghanistan and cross-border raids and smuggling persist. Rahmonov's government is unwilling to share power (opposition parties were outlawed for elections in 1994) and uninterested in reform. The president was re-elected for a second term in 1999 by what was reported as a nearly unanimous vote. Given the oppression of opposition, the result was hardly a surprise. This result was repeated in 2003 where a referendum gave Rahmonov the green light to run for another two consecutive terms, until 2020.

Attention by the international community in the wake of the war in Afghanistan has brought increased economic development assistance, which could create jobs and increase stability in the long term. Tajikistan is in the early stages of seeking World Trade Organization membership (it is listed as an observer) and has joined NATO's Partnership for Peace.

#### **PEOPLE:**

Maternal and infant mortality remain serious problems in Tajikistan. In 1988 Tajikistani women were 1.6 times more likely to die in childbirth than were women in the Soviet Union as a whole. There is a low incidence of both drug use and AIDS.

**RELIGION:** Sunni Muslim (85%), Shi'a Muslim (5%), other (10%)

**FAMILY:** The Soviet era saw the implementation of policies designed to transform the status of women. However, it was difficult to implement these policies. For example, women who appeared in public without the traditional all-enveloping veil were ostracized by society or even killed by relatives for supposedly shaming their families by what was considered unchaste behavior.

World War II brought an upsurge in women's employment outside the home. In the early 1980s, women made up 51% of Tajikistan's population and 52% of the work force on collective farms, but only 38% of the industrial labor force, 16% of transportation workers, 14% of communications workers, and 28% of civil servants. In some rural parts of the republic, about half the women were not employed at all outside the home in the mid-1980s.

Many women remain in the home not only because of traditional attitudes about women's roles but also because many lack vocational training and few childcare facilities are available. Women provide the core of the work force in certain areas of agriculture, especially the production of cotton and some fruits and vegetables. Women are underrepresented in government and management positions relative to their proportion of the republic's population.

Tajik social norms and even de facto government policy still often favor a traditionalist, restrictive attitude toward women that tolerate wife beating and the arbitrary dismissal of women from responsible positions. The core of the traditional social structure of Tajiks and other sedentary peoples of Central Asia is usually the extended family, which is composed of an adult couple, their unmarried daughters, and their married sons and their wives and children. Such a group normally has joint ownership of the family homestead, land, crops, and livestock. Monogamy is the more typical form of spousal relationship because of the high bride-price traditionally required of suitors. Marriage across nationality lines is relatively uncommon. Ethnically mixed marriages are almost twice as likely to occur in urban as in rural areas.

**DRESS:** The female suit in mountain areas (Karategin and Darvaz) consists of a shirt-dress (*kurta*), wide trousers (*eʒor* or *poychama*), quilted dressing gown (*chomp*), and headscarf (*rumol/numol*). Recently women began to wear *kamzul*, an outer garment like a coat tight in the waist. The female oriental robe does not differ from the men's.

In the past the woman in mountain areas did not wear oriental robes. It was considered that there was no need for women to wear outer clothing. Headscarves are made of white muslin; women also wear white factory knitted scarves.

The man's suit consists of a shirt, wide trousers, a dressing gown, belt-scarf and a skullcap. The man's shirt (*kurta*) has the same design as a female *kurta*. It is a little bit shorter with tighter and shorter sleeves, in some cases is slightly beveled. The shirt is worn over the pants, belted with the belt-scarf made of silk or cotton fabric, embroidered on four sides. The most popular skullcap is the *chusti*. In cold seasons the men both in mountain and plain areas tie head scarves on or put on a fur cap over the skullcap.

**LANGUAGE:** Tajik (official), Russian

**OTHER FACTS:**

- Tajikistan has the lowest per capita GDP among the 15 former Soviet republics.
- Only 5% to 6% of the land area is arable.
- Agricultural products include cotton, grapes, and livestock.

## UKRAINE

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Ukrainian (77.8%), Russian (17.3%), Belarusian (0.6%), Moldovan (0.5%), Crimean Tatar (0.5%), Bulgarian (0.4%), Hungarian (0.3%), Romanian (0.3%), Polish (0.3%), Jewish (0.2%), other (1.8%)

**GEOGRAPHY:** Ukraine is located in the heart of the European/Asian border, and is the second largest country in Europe. It is slightly smaller than Texas, and the capital city is Kiev.

**HISTORY:** Ukrainians are deeply affected by the country's long history that predates the independent state by some 1,500 years. In 988, Kiev's Prince Volodymyr the Great introduced Christianity to Kiev making it the official religion of Kyivan-Rus. This move played an important role in Kiev's political development and cultural relations with the European and Near Eastern countries. In 1240, Kiev was invaded by the Tatar-Mongols led by the grandson of Genghis Khan. The city was captured and its glory fell into decline during the period of almost century-long rule by the Tatar-Mongols.

For many centuries thereafter Ukraine was attacked and ruled by Poland and Lithuanian in the Rzecz Pospolita Commonwealth, Russia, Germany and others. During this time Ukrainian Kozack armies were formed which were led by a Hetman (military leader). One of the most famous Hetman is Bohdan Khmelnytsky who inspired one of the greatest Cossack uprisings that led to the liberation of Kyiv in 1648. He was considered by some a traitor after he signed the Treaty of Pereyaslav which authorized protection from the Russian Czar. This treaty joined Ukraine and Russia into one and led to a long period of domination by the Russian Empire and ultimately the Soviet Union.

After the revolution of 1917 Vladimir Illyich Lenin and his Bolshevik Party seized power and expanded their sphere of control into Ukraine.

Ukraine experienced a brief period of independence when on January 22, 1918, the Ukrainian Central Rada (Council) formally issued a proclamation for Ukraine's independence. But shortly thereafter in 1919, the Ukrainian National Republic was defeated in a war against Polish expansionists and overrun once again.

Eventually, Bolshevik and Communist forces retook Ukrainian lands, and as a means to control the population, leader Josef Stalin caused the Great Famine of 1932-33 by forcibly collecting grain and deliberately starving to death nearly ten million people. Nazi Germany then began World War II and entered Kyiv in September 1941 razing the city. In November 1943, Soviet forces retook the city in fierce fighting and began their final domination of Ukraine for almost the next fifty years.

Attention from the West turned to Ukraine after the nuclear meltdown at the Chernobyl power plant in April 1986. Since then, Ukrainians felt the decreased political power wielded by the Soviet Union's Communist leaders. After the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic proclaimed Ukraine's sovereignty in July 1990, Ukrainians fulfilled their dream of independence during the failed Soviet coup of August 1991. In a referendum held on December 1, 1991, the people of Ukraine endorsed independence and voted Leonid Makarovich Kravchuk as Ukraine's first ever democratically elected President. The United States recognized Ukraine's independence on December 25, 1991; and the first American Ambassador, Roman Popadiuk, arrived in Kiev on June 8, 1992.

Ukrainians elected a President Viktor Yushchenko after protests over a supposedly fraudulent election in 2004. Yushchenko's run for office was highlighted in international media when it came to light that Yushchenko was suffering from dioxin poisoning.

**PEOPLE:** Over 99% of Ukrainians are literate. Unfortunately, Ukrainians are facing high unemployment and other issues as well. The greatest current social problem is the sex trafficking of Ukrainian women.

**RELIGION:** Ukrainian Orthodox - Kiev Patriarchate (19%), Orthodox (no particular jurisdiction) (16%), Ukrainian Orthodox - Moscow Patriarchate (9%), Ukrainian Greek Catholic (6%), Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox (1.7%), Protestant, Jewish, none (38%)

**FAMILY:** In Ukraine, women have high status as mother, sister, and wife. Throughout history, Ukraine had not been characterized by the traditional patriarchal family structure that existed, for example, in Russia; gender roles in Ukraine contrast sharply with female dependency and submissiveness. There were no male-dominated marriage relationships, and Ukrainian women held high positions in both family and community settings. This was due in part to socio-cultural circumstances. Intimacy was considered to be harmonious with nature and male-female relationships. The marital agreement was based on mutual desires of both the male and the female to establish a family. Mutual respect for male and female was the norm, as well as respect for responsibilities in housekeeping and child rearing. In Ukrainian customs, tradition, and especially folklore, it is hard to find accounts of either physical or mental abuse of women, or inequalities in family relationships between husband and wife.

The considerable decrease in the standard of living of the majority of population of Ukraine, unemployment growth, redistribution of labor resources from the legal sector of economics into the "shadow" one, the deepening of the polarization of the society in accordance with the living standards have been much due to the social and economic recess of the 90s. The educational potential of the family has undergone serious transformations. The increase of violence and cruelty that is observed in the country has a negative effect on the bringing up of the youngest generations.

**DRESS:** Developed during the Kyivan-Rus era, the main elements of dress were the shirt, trousers, cloak, sheepskin vest, overcoat, cap, footcloths, stockings, and boots. Princes and boyars (the upper ruling class) wore clothes influenced by Byzantine fabrics and ornaments. During the Kozak period, the nobility dressed in Renaissance styles prevalent in Europe, with the addition of long overcoats and sheepskin jackets to protect against the climate. Kozak officers adapted this dress to military needs, with short caftan or *zhuban*, wide trousers or *sharovary*, and cloak or *kyreia*. Townspeople imitated the fashions of the nobility to some extent, while the Kozak style influenced the dress of the peasants. The features of dress that evolved during the Kozak period among the townspeople and peasants were preserved with some changes, while the nobility adopted European baroque fashions. The golden age of Ukrainian folk costume was the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when regional variations reached their peak. Availability of factory-made fabrics in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century changed the fabric used in the fashions, but the general features of folk dress persisted in small towns and villages until the First World War. After the First World War, folk dress began to disappear in the countryside because of the low price of urban clothing and the peasant's desire to dress like townsfolk.

**LANGUAGE:** Ukrainian (official) (67%), Russian (24%), small Romanian-, Polish-, and Hungarian-speaking minorities

**OTHER FACTS:** Once called the “Breadbasket of Europe,” Ukraine is rich in natural resources. This includes excellent agricultural land and a substantial industrial base consisting of coal and mineral resources, and aerospace and chemical industries. Despite this wealth of resources, the Ukrainian economy has suffered badly since the nation’s independence in 1991.

## **UZBEKISTAN**

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Uzbek (80%), Russian (5.5%), Tajik (5%), Kazakh (3%), Karakalpak (2.5%), Tatar (1.5%), other (2.5%)

**GEOGRAPHY:** Uzbekistan is located in Central Asia, north of Afghanistan, and is slightly larger than California. The capital of Uzbekistan is Tashkent. The country shares borders with Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.

**HISTORY:** Uzbekistan was conquered by Russia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The socialist republic was set up in 1924 after resistance to the Red Army was suppressed following World War I. The Soviet era consisted of intensive “white gold” (cotton) and grain production, with extreme overuse of agrochemicals and depletion of water supplies. The overuse led to the poisoning of Uzbekistan land and shrinkage of the water sources, including the Aral Sea, resulting in growing concentrations of chemical pesticides and desertification.

The Soviet period allowed for great developments in education, transportation, and society, but also imposed brutal and intrusive customs through political terror. The standard of living rose significantly after WWII, as whole factories were transported from Russia to Uzbekistan during the war, and livelihoods flourished. In 1966, however, an earthquake destroyed Tashkent, leading to a massive rebuilding program through the Soviet republics and Warsaw pact countries.

In March 1990, President Islom Karimov was elected by the Supreme Soviet. Uzbekistan then gained independence from the Soviet Union September 1, 1991, and drafted a new constitution at the end of 1992. Remaining a republic, the January 2000 elections again found President Karimov with the popular vote for another seven-year term, and Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyayev was elected head of government in December 2003.

In 2002, the borders with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were closed, which almost paralyzed Uzbekistan’s consumer market. In 2003, the government accepted the obligations of Article VIII under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to provide for full currency convertibility. However, due to strict currency controls and tightened borders the effects of convertibility were lessened and lead to some shortages and stifled economic activity.

Since the time of independence, Uzbekistan has gradually decreased its dependence on agriculture and instead developed its mineral and petroleum reserves. The lower ranks of society, however, suffer from the sharp increase in the inequality of income distribution since independence. Uzbekistan is currently concerned with terrorism by Islamic militants, economic stagnation, and the cut back of human rights and democratization.

**PEOPLE:** The population of Uzbekistan is mainly rural and dependent on farming. The country consists of a young and dynamic population, with most of people under the age of 30 years old.

**RELIGION:** Muslim (mostly Sunni) (88%), Eastern Orthodox (9%), other (3%)

**FAMILY:** Uzbek people experience the traditional family-centered lifestyle. Communities are divided into *maballas*, which is loosely translated into “neighborhoods,” but are also seen as the lowest unit of local government. The family structure is that of classic patriarchy, with male at the head of the household. Following WWII, population growth was very high, and it was common to have families of 10 or more children. Families now typically have 3 or 4 children, as families are moving towards a smaller, nuclear structure in which it is acceptable for elderly parents to live on their own.

**DRESS:** Uzbek men typically wear somber colors, except for the bright-colored sash older men use. Nearly all wear the *doppa*, a black, four-sided skullcap embroidered in white. Uzbek women usually wear dresses in sparkly cloth, often worn as a knee-length gown with trousers of the same material underneath. One or two braids indicate a married woman; more braids signify a single woman. Grown together eyebrows are considered attractive and are often supplemented with pencil for the right effect.

**LANGUAGE:** Uzbek (74.3%), Russian (14.2%), Tajik (4.4%), other (7.1%)

**OTHER FACTS:**

- Uzbekistan is a major producer of gold with the largest open-pit gold mine in the world and has substantial deposits of copper, strategic minerals, gas, and oil.
- Some of the world’s most audacious and beautiful examples of Islamic religious buildings are to be found in Uzbekistan’s Bukhara, Khiva, and especially Samarkand.

## VIETNAM

**ETHNIC GROUPS:** Kinh/Viet (86.2%), Tay (1.9%), Thai (1.7%), Muong (1.5%), Khome (1.4%), Hoa (1.1%), Nun (1.1%), Hmong (1%), others (4.1%)

**GEOGRAPHY:** Vietnam is located in southeastern Asia, and borders the Gulf of Thailand, the Gulf of Tonkin, and the South China Sea. Land borders include China, Laos, and Cambodia. Vietnam is slightly larger than New Mexico, and the capital of Vietnam is Hanoi.

**HISTORY:** Vietnam was originally a colony of France. In 1946, the war of resistance to the French colonial power began, and by 1950, Vietnam was recognized by China and the USSR. The party in power, the Viet Minh, began attacking French military outposts, and by 1954, Vietnam was split into North and South Vietnam.

During the following years, there was a communist movement in both parts of the country. In 1963, the Viet Cong, communist guerrillas in South Vietnam, defeated the South Vietnamese Army and thus overthrew the then president of South Vietnam. The next year saw the United States entering the war in Vietnam and subsequent bombings of North Vietnam. More and more American troops were brought into Vietnam, and in 1968 a combined assault by Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese army on the U.S. troops began.

In 1975, North Vietnamese troops invaded South Vietnam and took control of the whole country. This signaled the end of the war, and by 1976, reconstruction became an issue. This year also saw thousands of people fleeing to other countries, these people being referred to as “boat people”.

More years of instability ensued, but by 1992, a new constitution was adopted, allowing certain economic freedoms; however, the Communist Party remained the leading force in Vietnamese society. This was further demonstrated in 1999, when a former high-ranking member was expelled after calling for more democracy and freedom of expression.

Currently, Vietnam is a poor, densely populated country that has had to recover from the destruction brought on by war and the loss of financial support from the old Soviet Bloc. In 2001, a U.S.-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement entered into force with the hopes of increasing Vietnam's exports to the United States. Under this agreement, the U.S. is also assisting Vietnam in implementing the legal and structural reforms that were called for in the agreement.

**PEOPLE:** Vietnam is a largely agricultural country, with two-thirds of the workforce partaking in agricultural careers.

There are several types of popular artistic forms within Vietnam, which include traditional painting produced on frame-mounted silk; an eclectic array of theatre, puppetry, music and dance; religious sculpture; lacquer ware and ceramics.

Vietnamese cuisine is especially varied – there are said to be nearly 500 different traditional dishes that include exotic meats and fantastic vegetarian creations (often prepared to replicate meat and fish dishes). However, the staple of Vietnamese cuisine is plain white rice dressed up with a plethora of vegetables, fish (which is common in Vietnam), meat, spices and sauces.

**RELIGION:** Buddhist (9.3%), Catholic (6.7%), Hoa Hao (1.5%), Cao Dai (1.1%), Protestant (0.5%), Muslim (0.1%), none (80.8%)

**FAMILY:** Immediately following World War II, many traditional practices were still upheld, including dowries and having large families. However, these views began to change after some time. By the 1980s, birth control was being supported and there was a greater push for the equality of men and women in Vietnamese society. Today families are especially influenced to take part in family planning because of the quickly growing population, and there are generally only two children per household.

**DRESS:** Traditional costumes tend to be very simple and modest. Men wear brown shirts and white trousers. Their headgear is simply a piece of cloth wrapped around the head and their footwear consists of a pair of plain sandals.

Young women wear light brown-colored short shirts with long black skirts. Their headgear consists of a black turban with a peak at the front. To make their waist look smaller, they tightly fasten a long piece of pink or violet cloth. On formal occasions, they wear a special three-layered dress called an *ao dai*, a long gown with slits on either side.

**LANGUAGE:** Vietnamese (official), English (increasingly favored as a second language), some French, Chinese, and Khmer; mountain area languages (Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian)

#### **OTHER FACTS:**

- The official name of this country is the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.
- There is only one political party – the Community Party of Vietnam.
- Four great philosophies and religions have shaped the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people: Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and Christianity. Over the centuries, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism have melded with popular Chinese beliefs and ancient Vietnamese animism to form what is known as *Tam Giao* (or “Triple Religion”).

#### **NOTE**

**This resource is always under construction.** If you have any information on these groups that you would like to share, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator. We are constantly working to include all of the groups we are serving. Your patience is appreciated as we continue to improve this resource.