

Set My People Free's Full Oral Statement
HDIM 2019
WORKING SESSION 9
3–6 p.m.

Humanitarian issues and other commitments, including:

- Combating trafficking in human beings
- Refugees and displaced persons
- Persons at risk of displacement

20 September 2019

Set My People Free's Recommendations to participating states:

- **Increase Resettlement spots as a durable solution with a priority for survivors of violence who face continued persecution in the countries they flee to.**
- **Train migration workers in the vulnerabilities of ex muslims: converts, atheist and religious dissenters,**
 - **Follow the *UNHCR Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status and Guidelines on International Protection* - acknowledge that in regards to conversion *sur place*, knowledge questions are of limited value, rather, the interviewer needs to ask open questions and try to elicit the motivations for conversion and what effect the conversion has had on the converts life.¹**
 - **Respect the asylum seekers preference of interpreter, to ensure the individual feels comfortable to share their story completely and without prejudice.**
 - **Do not question the choice of the individual to believe or not believe but ask questions on how they came to their decision and how they practice, to assess credibility.**
 - **Set My People Free agrees with the recommendations made by ADF International and other civil society member in regards to convert cases and would like to include Sweden and Finland as states where there has been concern in how they have dealt**

¹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status and Guidelines on International Protection Under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, April 2019, HCR/1P/4/ENG/REV. 4, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5cb474b27.html> [accessed 26 September 2019] para. 35.

Rather, the interviewer needs to ask open questions and try to elicit the motivations for conversion and what effect the conversion has had on the claimant's life.

with convert cases, in that they have used knowledge questions which have been shown to be of limited value.²

- **Consider expediting the resettlement cases of ex-muslims as many times they risk *refoulement*.**

An example of vulnerable individuals in need of resettlement are Christian Pakistanis and others in Thailand who flee religious persecution as a result of Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Societal actors have killed 80 people for the mere allegation of blasphemy in Pakistan. Hmong and Montagnard Christians from Viet Nam are another group who are doubly vulnerable due to their conversion and since they come from an indigenous group.³ Due to the trauma they have been through and their poor background, many being illiterate, they are unable to retell their story in a way that satisfies the UNHCR, citing exact dates etc, they are then rejected on credibility claims. An example is Talib Masih, who is a survivor of violence due to blasphemy allegations in Pakistan.⁴ UNHCR rejected his asylum claim in 2014 and again in 2016, Jubilee Campaign (NGO) were able to reopen the case of Talib Masih and his asylum case was granted.⁵ He and his family however, remain stuck in Thailand, risking detention by the Thai authorities.⁶ There is a similar case in Egypt where being a recognised refugee holding a UNHCR cards does not suffice to hinder repatriation. A Sudanese convert from Islam was going to attend a church in Egypt when the police saw his name on his ID card and they arrested him and sent him back to Sudan.

It should be noted how resettlement provides the refugee with a peaceful resolution to the trauma they have suffered, and saves them the legal limbo.

Given these cases, Set My People Free would like to urge OSCE states to increase resettlement spots.

In regards to the program question about changing the narrative regarding asylum seekers - the best way is to create a positive environments. The ODIHR "Local authorities' migrant integration guide" gives excellent recommendations. One of which mentions how local authorities can facilitate regular contact between host and migrant populations based on shared interests through channels such as sports clubs, women's organizations, hobby and interest groups. An example from Sweden is "Mr. Vattenpolo" whose interest in the water polo sport was shared with a Syrian asylum seeker

² UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status and Guidelines on International Protection Under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, April 2019, HCR/1P/4/ENG/REV. 4, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5cb474b27.html> [accessed 26 September 2019] para. 35.

Rather, the interviewer needs to ask open questions and try to elicit the motivations for conversion and what effect the conversion has had on the claimant's life.

³ <http://dvov.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Stateless-Hmong-Montagnard-Christians-03-06-19.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/03/pakistani-christian-refugees-in-thailand-continue-to-protest-unhcr-unfair/>

⁵ Hearing on "A Global Crisis: Refugees, Migrants and Asylum-Seekers", U.S. House of Representatives House Foreign Affairs Committee: Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations February 26, 2019.

⁶ Between A Rock and A Hard Place: Thailand's Refugee Policies And Violations Of The Principle Of Non-*Refoulement*. © Amnesty International, 2017.

and former water polo coach. Together they have been able to share their love for the sport with local and asylum seekers in their small community.⁷

Recommendations on what actions can be undertaken by participating states, OSCE institutions and other relevant actors to foster a positive narrative regarding refugees, asylum seekers and migrants:

- **Encourage local initiatives which engage host and migrant populations together based on shared interests through channels such as sports etc.**

⁷ <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/avsnitt/974027?programid=3103>