

Conference Summary

The Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc. (ECDC) held its 20th national conference April 30 – May 3, 2014, in Arlington, Va., bringing together more than 150 leaders and stakeholders in refugee and immigrant affairs. This year’s conference, *African Refugees and Immigrants: Pathways to Security, Integration and Empowerment*, highlighted the extraordinary experiences of African refugees and explored the current issues facing the African refugee and immigrant population in the U.S. and abroad. As in previous years, the conference occurred in conjunction with ECDC’s National Resettlement Training, which allows affiliate agency members to participate in conference plenary and workshop sessions, as well as training activities.



Meeting at the White House with African Refugee and Immigrant Leaders.

The conference began April 30, 2014, with ECDC’s Advocacy Day, which included 50 meetings with members of Congress and Congressional staff on Capitol Hill and a “Meeting with African Refugee and Immigrant Leaders” at the White House, led by the Domestic Policy Council, and attended by representatives of several federal agencies. Advocacy Day set a positive tone for the week’s events and laid the groundwork for efforts called for in the conference keynote address.



Salih Booker

Specialist on U.S.-Africa Relations, African Development, and International Human Rights

ECDC President, Dr. Tsehaye Teferra, opened the conference with welcoming remarks, followed by greetings from the White House delivered by Yohannes Abraham, and a keynote address by Salih Booker. During his speech, Booker, a Specialist on U.S.-Africa Relations, African Development, and International Human Rights, emphasized the need to increase awareness and support for African refugees and immigrants. He called on supporters to define a Pan-African agenda of priorities for the African Diaspora in the U.S. and to advocate based on the most salient issues identified in this agenda. After a rousing speech, the conference continued with a series of plenary and concurrent session speakers from government, non-government, community-based and academic stakeholders speaking to current events and issues facing this population today.

Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Simon Henshaw, Bureau of Population, Refugees, Migration (PRM), U.S. Department of State, followed the keynote speech with remarks about the U.S. Government's policy and response to current refugee crises in Africa. His speech highlighted the situations in South Sudan and Central African Republic, among others. He also spoke to the abuses occurring against asylum seekers in Egypt, urban refugees in Kenya, and LGBT refugees and advocates in Uganda. He expressed that humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy to governments to keep borders open to refugees remained crucial to PRM's mission.



Panel featuring senior officials from PRM, USCIS, and UNHCR: Larry Bartlett, Barbara Strack, and Larry Yungk, respectively from left.

Plenary sessions then followed the theme's trajectory of challenges and successes associated with the individual search for safety, belonging, integration, and eventual empowerment and accomplishment experienced by newcomers to the United States. Experts from diverse backgrounds presented their insights on topics ranging from current refugee flows in Africa to challenges and opportunities for collaboration among stakeholders serving refugees in the United States. Senior officials from USCIS and UNHCR provided updates on the processing and admission of African refugees, as well as on federal programs.

Concurrent sessions examined concrete strategies and ideas for addressing the challenges faced by service providers committed to the U.S. refugee and immigrant population. Topics included: Strength-Based Case Management, Refugee Youth, Employment, Effective Advocacy, Forced Marriage in Immigrant Communities, Refugee and Immigrant Contributions, Health Needs of Refugees and Immigrants, and Successful Business Ownership for Refugees. Deo Mwano, Congolese refugee and Speaker, Multicultural Activist and Dancer, shared his inspirational life testimony during a lunch-time address.



Conference attendees pose questions to lunchtime guest speaker, Deo Mwano, after his speech.

Friday morning started with a session on the Challenges to Serving Newcomers to the U.S. in the Face of Budgetary Constraints. The speakers were Mark Greenberg, Acting Assistant Secretary, Administration for Children and Families, and Eskinder Negash, Director, Office of Refugee Resettlement. Concurrent sessions followed and included Integrating Refugee and Immigrant Contributions into the Fabric of the Global Society; Addressing the Health Needs of Refugees and Immigrants; and Working toward Common Goals to Better Serve Newcomers to the U.S.

With over 150 guests, ECDC's annual banquet was a fun-filled evening, which highlighted African immigrant achievements and successes. Maureen Bunyan, Co-Anchor, ABC 7-WJLA, hosted the event. The evening's keynote speaker, Emira Woods, Co-Director of Foreign Policy in Focus at the Institute for Policy Studies, delivered a passionate, captivating, and inspirational address. Cheick Hamala Diabate performed solo and with his ensemble, the Griot Street Band, inspiring merriment on the dance floor.



Maureen Bunyan, Co-Anchor, ABC 7-WJLA, served as Mistress of Ceremonies for the banquet.



Emira Woods, Co-Director, Foreign Policy in Focus, Institute for Policy Studies

Continuing its tradition, ECDC honored leaders whose lives and work have exemplified excellence in service, encouraged partnerships between communities, and supported individual and community aspirations. ECDC's 2014 Honorees included Felicia Escobar, Senior Policy Director for Immigration at the White House; Emira Woods, Co-Director, Foreign Policy in Focus, Institute for Policy Studies; and Gatluak Ter Thach, the founder and Executive Director of the Nashville International Center for Empowerment in Nashville, Tennessee. This year's raffle drawing included an HP Laptop, a Nook Simple Touch e-Reader, a Kindle Fire tablet, and more! The grand prize was a round-trip ticket

on Ethiopian Airlines to any of its global destinations.



Cheick Hamala Diabate



The Griot Street Band performed at the banquet alongside Cheick Hamala Diabate.
