



Refugee Law Project

Faculty of Law, Makerere University



15 NOVEMBER 2001

RLP FACT SHEET NO. 2

JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE URBAN PROGRAMME SUSPENDED

Current Situation:

On the 1st November 2001 the Urban Program of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Uganda was suspended. The JRS Urban Programme, based in Kampala, has been offering a number of services, including humanitarian assistance to vulnerable asylum seekers in the process of having their refugee status determined by the government and a micro finance scheme that gives urban refugees the opportunity to become self sufficient.

In a meeting with the JRS Country Director, the Refugee Law Project (RLP) learned that the Urban Programme is undergoing an assessment in order to improve and focus its services in light of the dwindling donor funds for refugees. It is hoped that the program will restart in January 2002. The Jesuit Refugee Service has a number of highly regarded programs for refugees in Uganda and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in southern Sudan. The RLP applauds the commitment of JRS to assisting forced migrants in the Great Lakes region.

The Impact on Asylum Seekers:

The most vital service provided by the JRS Urban Programme is assistance to vulnerable asylum seekers. The time from when an asylum seeker begins the process to be registered as a refugee until he or she is actually granted refugee status is often many months. While refugees are eligible for assistance from the government of Uganda and the international community, such assistance is not given to individuals who have not yet been formally recognised as refugees. Asylum seekers include single mothers with children, indigent individuals with no friends or family in Kampala, unaccompanied minors, the elderly and the infirm. For these vulnerable groups, the JRS Urban Programme is the last safety net and final hope of avoiding extreme deprivation that threatens their very survival.

Recommendations:

While the RLP appreciates the difficulty with which the decision to suspend the operations of the Urban Programme was taken in light of the need for organisational restructuring and restricted funds, the RLP makes the following recommendations:

- That the country office of the Jesuit Refugee Service expedite its assessment and restructuring in order to avoid unnecessary suffering by vulnerable asylum seekers.
- That the donor agencies examine the role of the JRS urban program and recognise the critical role it plays in ensuring the human rights and dignity of asylum seekers who have been forced to flee their homelands.