

2015

Annual Report



African Refugee Development Center

המרכז לקידום פליטים אפריקאיים

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Mutasim Ali

Letter from the Director

As a young child in Darfur, my parents taught me two core values: the necessity of education and the importance of helping others in need. They were both teachers at the only school in the village of Daba Naira, and for them, these two values were linked. Through education I could earn a better life for myself and my family, and also I could learn how to more effectively advocate for my community. By helping those in need, we preserve human dignity. We all rise by lifting others.

In early 2005, the Sudanese government burned our village to the ground. The books, magazines and newspapers became ashes. However, they could not destroy the morality that my father and mother instilled in me. For these reasons, I joined a political movement against the totalitarian regime in Sudan. I was arrested, humiliated, tortured. When I had to leave Sudan, it was not just for my own personal protection but to continue to do what I do best --to be the voice of the voiceless.

In 2009, I arrived in Israel and found myself in the midst of another struggle. Though physically safe, asy-

lum seekers are denied basic rights. I joined the African Refugee Development Center (ARDC) because it is the only community-based organization in Israel that advocates for the rights of all African asylum seekers. At ARDC, I could advocate for my community and support those who are vulnerable and disempowered. I truly believe in Israel as a democratic state, but it should have a fair and transparent asylum policy.

In 2014, I was sent to the Holot detention center and had to leave my position at ARDC. I spent fourteen months in the desert detention center, which was built solely to convince asylum seekers to leave Israel. Though international law prevents Israel from forcibly deporting Sudanese and Eritreans back to their home countries, the government instead encourages "voluntary departure" by making conditions so hopeless that asylum seekers feel they have no choice but to leave. Fortunately, I did not give up hope and was released by court order last summer.

I returned as Director of ARDC in July. Each seeming win for the community came with challenges.

After the High Court ordered the release of nearly 1200 asylum seekers from Holot in August, they were prevented from living in Tel Aviv and Eilat, cutting them off from their support system. Though the maximum detention in Holot was dropped to 12 months instead of 20, the High Court will no longer oppose its entire structure as unconstitutional as it did in the past. Also, sadly in October we mourned the loss of Habtom Zerhom, an Eritrean man who was mistakenly shot and beaten to death in Be'er Sheva. Almost 2000 people attended his memorial service in Levinski Park and mourned how his journey to refuge ended in tragic death.

We must advocate that dignity and not fear be the cornerstone of Israeli policy.

I have the honor to lead ARDC with an excellent staff committed to promote intrinsic human values. Despite the challenges we face, we work tirelessly to bridge the gap between Israeli society and asylum seekers. We give tours to soldiers and students and interviews to the media in an effort to fight stereotypes and increase awareness. We promote a fairer asylum policy through our paralegal work, advocacy and partnerships with other NGOs. We give tools to community members to increase their self-advocacy skills and opportunities through training, higher education support and rights education.

In the coming years, we will continue to work for the community. ARDC will not only be the voice of the voiceless but will give them their own voice through continued empowerment activities. We will continue to advocate that the government grant proper status to asylum seekers so that we may live in an honorable and dignified way. As my parents taught me, ***we all rise by lifting others.***



ABOUT US

The African Refugee Development Center (ARDC) is a grassroots, community-based, non-profit organization that was founded in 2004 by African asylum seekers and Israeli citizens, in order to assist, protect and empower African refugees and asylum seekers in Israel. To date, the ARDC has served over 12,000 refugees and asylum seekers from Eritrea, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and the Ivory Coast.

PROTECT.

SUPPORT.

EMPOWER.

Vision

To enable and ensure that all refugees and asylum seekers are free from persecution, live in dignity and have an opportunity to realize their aspirations.

Mission

To empower, protect and assist African refugees and asylum seekers in Israel by advocating on their behalf and enabling processes that increase their awareness, ensure participation and inspire policy change.

Staff 2016

Mutasim Ali | Executive Director

Ori Lahat | Finance Manager & Deputy Director

Naomi Caplan | Operations & Communications Manager

Anne Sapir | AAA Program Manager

Emily Primack | Education Manager & AAA Deputy Manager

Yohanes Fesshaye | Community Organizer & Translator

Assaf Yinon | Technical Claims Coordinator

Sumia Omer | Translator

Kehase Berhane | Translator

Meaze Melke | Translator



Board 2016

Osman Ali Keddy | Board Member

Ian Jaffe | Board Member

Konneh Vayabatee | Board Member

Kayla Zecher-Rothman | Audit Committee Member

Togod Nadim | Audit Committee Member

And a special thank you to Dijana Mujkanovic, Yikealo Beyene, Itamar Skalka, Oscar Olivier, Idan Moldavski, Habtom Mehari and our 150 volunteers and interns who helped us make our work possible the last year!

2015

Year in Review

ARDC remains the heart of the community and the first place that many asylum seekers turn when they need support and answers. Some highlights from our last year:



5797

VISITORS RECEPTION

Nearly 6000 asylum seekers visited our office for assistance.

931

REFUGEE APPLICATIONS

Our Community Outreach & RSD teams completed 931 refugee status determination forms.

23

COMMUNITY TRAININGS

ARDC held 23 trainings for community members in Tel Aviv, Eilat, Ashdod, Netanya, Holot and Haifa.

28

RELOCATION SUCCESSES

Our Relocation team assisted 28 asylum seekers in reuniting with their families in Europe and Canada.

205

STUDENTS HIGHER ED

More than 200 asylum seekers received assistance in pursuit of higher education.

60

STUDENTS VOCATIONAL

60 asylum seekers received vocational training assistance.

23

MEDIA INTERVIEWS

ARDC's team gave 23 interviews to reporters from Israeli and international media.

OUR IMPACT

2759 Facebook English followers
↑ 52% increase from 2014

815 Facebook Hebrew followers
↑ 44% increase from 2014

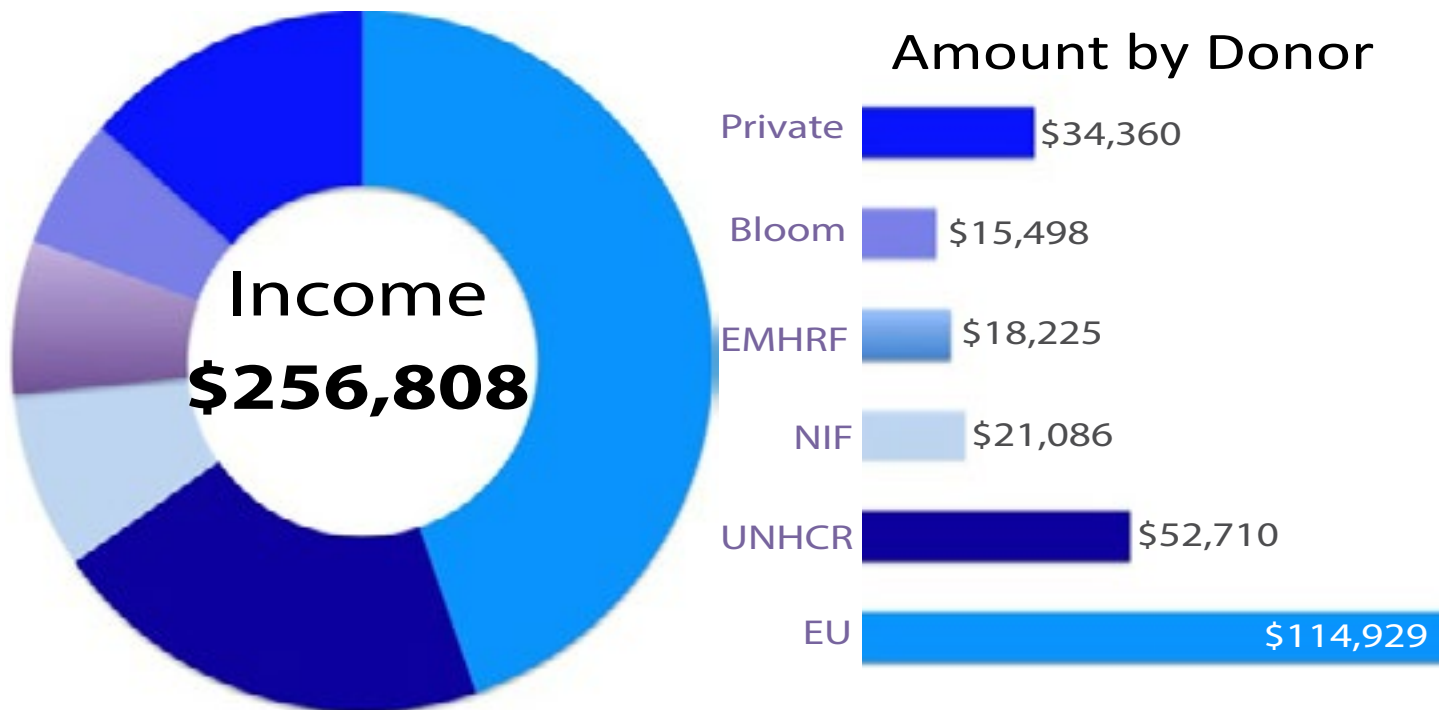
883 Twitter followers
↑ 21% increase from 2014

EVENTS ADVOCACY

Our staff members led **15 tours** of South Tel Aviv, walking groups through the history of African asylum seekers in Israel. We also gave **27 info sessions** on the history and current political dynamic facing asylum seekers in Israel. **723** people attended these **42** tours and info sessions in 2015. These numbers include Israelis and internationals, students and soldiers.

Financials 2015

* All Figures converted from NIS at the December 2015 rate of 3.88887 NIS to USD.*



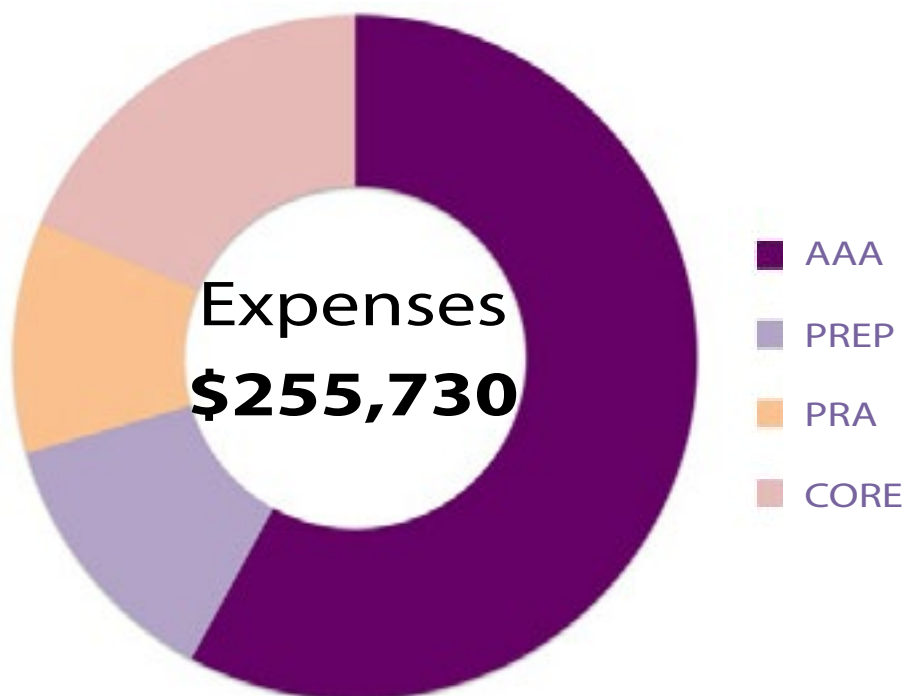
Most costs are associated with our three main programs: Asylum Application Assistance (AAA), Practical Refugee Education Program (PREP) and Public Relations & Advocacy (PRA.) Our core costs include management, office space and other non-program costs.

Accountability

In recent years, ARDC has maintained conservative financial policies, strict financial oversight and increased transparency. A certified accountant and financial manager review all accounts and transactions, and quarterly financial reports are uploaded to our website. We pledge to maintain a high standard of financial accountability and continue to deserve your trust.

Volunteer-Based

As a small community-based organization, ARDC relies on our volunteers and community support.





Timeline 2015

Asylum Seekers in Israel

January

Authorities confirmed the existence of agreements with third countries for the “voluntary” transfer of asylum seekers.

February

Data revealed that 3165 Sudanese nationals filed asylum requests between 2009-2015. As of February 2015, the government had responded to only about 1% of the requests and had not granted any refugee status.

March

In March 2015, dozens of Eritrean asylum seekers detained in Holot detention center received letters summoning them to interviews with the Israeli Immigration authority, where they would be forced to choose between one of two options: voluntary transfer to a third country, or indefinite detention in Saharonim prison, as a result of “refusing to cooperate.”

April

In response, ARDC volunteers and staff went 3 days to Holot to complete emergency RSD forms for asylum seekers.

Three Eritrean men who were kidnapped and executed by Islamic State in Libya were discovered to have previously been asylum seekers from Israel.

August

On August 11, the Israeli High Court of Justice decided by an overwhelming majority (8-1) that the 20-month period of detention was excessive and could constitute a substantial deprivation of freedom. They ordered the release of nearly 1200 asylum seekers who had been detained in Holot for more than 12 months.

After the High Court order, Israel released 1,178 African asylum seekers from Holot but forbid them from living or working in Tel Aviv or Eilat. If caught, they risked being sent to Saharonim Prison.

In response, ARDC together with local community centers opened a temporary shelter in Ashdod for those who were released and had no place to stay.

October

In October, Eritrean Habtom Zerhom was shot and brutally attacked in Be'er Sheva after a mob misidentified him as a terrorist. ~ 2000 people came out to his memorial in Levinski Park.

December

In December, Holot almost reached capacity with more than 3000 asylum seekers detained. The government plans to expand it.

Silvan Shalom resigned as Minister of the Interior after only five months. 10,000 asylum applications remain unanswered.



Infiltrators? Labor Migrants? Or Refugees

African asylum seekers make up less than half a percent of the population in Israel, a small number compared even to the total of foreign workers in Israel (43,186 asylum seekers vs. 77,192 foreign workers). As issues of migration take center-stage in the world right now, the need for a fair and efficient asylum process is more important than ever. To understand their claims for asylum, we must ask: Why did they leave their homes? And why can't they return?

Eritrea: Nearly three-quarters of asylum seekers in Israel come from Eritrea. The east African nation has one of the harshest dictatorships in the world today, and it is now one of the largest refugee-producing countries. Many have fled Eritrea due to its indefinite forced conscription; since 1995, every Eritrean citizen (excluding some women) over the age of 18 is required to complete their last year of high school in military training at Sawa. This military service can be extended indeterminately, and the International Labor Organization has labeled it forced labor since it also extends beyond basic military tasks and includes compulsory labor in infrastructure and agriculture. When citizens refuse to serve or are caught attempting to leave the country, they are detained, imprisoned and

tortured without trial in prisons with appalling conditions. Once they leave the country, they are considered an enemy of the state and may be imprisoned or tortured upon their return.

Sudan: Almost 20% of asylum seekers in Israel come from Sudan, with a large number from the embroiled region of Darfur. Sudan is a dictatorial republic, where the president is both the chief of the state and the head of government. He has been accused of war crimes, including genocide. He has sponsored attacks on ethnic groups that destroyed villages, killed hundreds of thousands and displaced millions. The conflict in Darfur is ongoing, and it has been made even worse by the devastating drought in the western regions. Arab

militias, the Janjaweed, have pillaged and ethnically cleansed villages, with help from the Sudanese army. Activists are arbitrarily detained and tortured. Moreover, Israel is an enemy state of Sudan, and it is a punishable crime to enter the state of Israel, further complicating a potential return of asylum seekers to Sudan.

South Sudan: A small number of asylum seekers come from South Sudan. This new country, formed in 2011, has been ravaged with civil war since 2013 between the Dinka and the Nuer contending for government hegemony. Currently, the humanitarian situation continues to decline: each cease-fire agreement has been violated. Thousands have died and even more are without food. Rape and violence against women are common.

Ethiopia: A small but growing number of asylum seekers are from Ethiopia. Political opponents and journalists in Ethiopia face harassment, threats and detainment. Security personnel have used excessive force against protesters, at times resulting in deaths. The government also forcibly displaces indigenous communities from areas they want to develop, and it criminalizes same-sex relationships.

Words Matter

Despite the small size of the community, asylum seekers have been the target of domestic policies that frame them as "infiltrators" or "labor migrants" and increasingly aim to coerce them into leaving Israel. The main difference between an infiltrator, labor migrant and refugee is in why they left their native country. Many asylum seekers in Israel fled due to a well-founded fear of persecution, torture or situations akin to slavery. Though thousands of African asylum seekers have filed for refugee status in Israel, very few (less than 1%) have received it. Israel's current policies aim to coerce asylum seekers into leaving Israel. However, for many asylum seekers, returning home is not yet a safe option.



asylum seekers to leave Israel. The government employs such tactics as arbitrary detention in the Holot detention center, threats and sentences to Saharonim prison and withholding legal status to coerce people into leaving. The Ministry of the Interior (MOI) also offers \$3500 to individuals who choose to leave as an added incentive.

In March 2015, there was a notable increase in the government's efforts toward voluntary departure. The Israeli MOI announced to the media that they would be implementing a proactive procedure for the "removal of infiltrators" to a third country. Under this policy, any asylum seeker residing in Holot who had not applied for refugee status, or whose refugee status determination (RSD) request had been rejected, would be eligible for deportation or indefinite imprisonment in Saharonim.

In Focus: "Voluntary" Departure

Over the last few years, Israeli authorities have employed various methods to break the asylum seekers' spirit and coerce them into leaving Israel under the "voluntary departure" procedure.

What do we know? In January 2015, Israeli authorities confirmed that the State of Israel and two unnamed African countries—known to be Rwanda and Uganda—had reached an agreement allowing African asylum seekers to "voluntarily" leave Israel for a third country. Details of this agreement are still largely unknown, except that (1) Israel must provide individuals with valid travel documents, flight arrangements, and necessary accommodations for their exits to a third country and (2) the

receiving countries will not return individuals to their countries of origin from which they are still seeking asylum.

As a result of this policy, from the beginning of 2015 through the end of March 2015 alone, 747 asylum seekers left Israel under the voluntary departure process.

Is it truly voluntary? The Israeli government has made it clear through both actions and words that they want the

Sure enough, in April 2015, Eritrean asylum seekers detained in Holot received letters summoning them to interviews with the Israeli Immigration Authority. These letters said they would need to choose between one of two options: voluntary transfer to a third country, or indefinite detention in Saharonim as a result of "refusing to cooperate."

In response, ARDC Program Managers led a three-day mission to Holot in order to assist people with RSD applications and provide paralegal advice.

Are asylum seekers safe if they leave?

We now know that voluntary departure is not a tenable solution. While ARDC does not support this policy, our team offers follow-up support for those who have agreed to go to a third country. Our team members have heard from former clients about their struggles once they leave Israel. Individuals who left Israel under the voluntary departure program report that their travel documents were confiscated by local authorities upon arrival in Rwanda and Uganda. Some faced arbitrary arrest, demands for bribes or encountered problems accessing the asylum process due to lack of documentation. Others were forced to leave the new country shortly after arrival. This information has proven crucial for the NGOs in filing an appeal against this policy.

WHERE DOES
ARDC FIT IN?

PROGRAMS



AAA

**Asylum Application
Assistance**

PREP

**Practical Refugee
Education Program**

PRA

**Public Relations &
Advocacy**

The goal of the Asylum Application Assistance (AAA) program is to safeguard the rights of African refugees and asylum seekers in Israel from harmful and unfair policies that violate international law through individual casework management.

ARDC's Practical Refugee Education Program (PREP) aims to empower asylum seekers through education and self-development. By ensuring access to education, asylum seekers will be able to mitigate social exclusion through increased opportunity.

The goal of the Public Relations and Advocacy (PRA) program is to generate change in public policy and opinion regarding African refugees and asylum seekers in Israel through advocacy, awareness raising and community leadership training.

ASYLUM APPLICATION ASSISTANCE



RSD applications completed



Visas secured as a result of ARDC action



Cases successfully referred to pro bono lawyers



Families successfully reunited

After a long and dangerous journey, often on-foot and across the Sinai Desert, the next considerable challenge that an asylum seeker faces is the determination of his or her status as a refugee. The right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution is a human right enshrined in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the State of Israel is a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. However, it is a right that it is not yet fully protected in Israel today under domestic law as less than 200 individuals have been granted refugee status since the State ratified the Convention.

The AAA program manages cases of individuals looking for assistance with refugee status determination and relocation to a third country. Through community outreach, the project also provides information and training for community members on how to navigate the asylum process and/or how to find durable solutions for life outside of Israel. In its entirety, the program offers comprehensive paralegal support, with legal representation for the strongest cases provided through formal partnership with HIAS Israel and an extended network of pro bono lawyers. Together with our partners, we engage in strategic litigation by identifying and utilizing the refugee cases that will allow legal precedents to be set.

On a monthly basis, the AAA program screens over **400 asylum seekers** for assistance with RSD, Relocation and visa issues.

Refugee Status Determination

Refugee status determination (RSD) is the procedure that determines whether those seeking asylum fall within the definition of a refugee in need of protection in accordance with international law. The process requires an asylum seeker to submit a written explanation for his or her application, followed by an in-depth interview, research into the conditions of his or her country of origin and a decision as to whether that person meets the legal criteria for refugee status. ARDC assists applicants through every phase of this difficult process.

Relocation

The Relocation case-workers provide individual guidance to clients to evaluate their relocation options, contacting the necessary governmental entities and referring them to relevant organizations. Our team assists with applications for family reunification visas to third countries, including Italy, Belgium, Norway and Sweden, as well as through private sponsorship programs to Canada. We are working to grow our contacts in Canada to better facilitate and streamline the process for applicants through private sponsorships. Due to the increased pressure on asylum seekers to choose voluntary return, ARDC also provides counseling on this issue to those who are considering it.





In Focus

Community Outreach

In November, ARDC significantly increased its Community Outreach efforts with five events throughout the country. Following ARDC's mission to not only assist and protect African asylum seekers but also to empower them, our staff and volunteers held trainings and information sessions in Holot, Netanya, Tel Aviv and Haifa.

Starting at the Holot open detention center on Tuesday November 3, our Director Mutasim Ali and our Community Organizer Yikealo Beyene met with detained asylum seekers to better gauge their concerns and provide updated infor-

mation on policies and processes. On November 10 and 24, Mutasim and Yikealo organized events at community centers in Netanya and Haifa to meet with the African asylum seeker community there. As the only organization run by African asylum seekers in Israel, ARDC remains at the core of the community for those in Tel Aviv and the periphery.

On Saturday November 21, a Relocation team volunteer organized a 5-hour information session on the Canadian SAH (Sponsorship Agreement Holder) application and procedure. The event was

held at the Eritrean Women's Community Center (EWCC), and ten asylum seekers were trained on how to complete the applications online and assist others in doing them.

Our fifth Community Outreach event in November was held on Friday, November 27. Together with the EWCC, ARDC held another RSD Form Filling Event to meet the growing demand in the community to complete applications for Refugee Status Determination (RSD). Trained community members and volunteers assisted in completing RSD forms and answering questions from asylum seekers.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Tel Aviv | Jan 5, 2015
 Tel Aviv | Feb 8, 2015
 Tel Aviv | March 17, 2015
 Holot | April 5, 2015
 Holot | April 6, 2015
 Holot | April 7, 2015
 Holot | April 18, 2015
 Haifa | May 8, 2015
 Eilat | June 5, 2015
 Tel Aviv | June 30, 2015
 Tel Aviv | July 1, 2015
 Ashdod | July 28, 2015
 Tel Aviv | July 29, 2015
 Tel Aviv | Aug 4, 2015
 Tel Aviv | Aug 11, 2015
 Tel Aviv | Aug 18, 2015
 Holot | Nov 3, 2015
 Netanya | Nov 10, 2015
 Tel Aviv | Nov 21, 2015
 Haifa | Nov 24, 2015
 Tel Aviv | Nov 27, 2015
 Tel Aviv | Dec 3, 2015
 Ashdod | Dec 8, 2015
 Tel Aviv | Dec 11, 2015
 Netanya | Dec 15, 2015
 Arad | Dec 22, 2015
 Eilat | Dec 26, 2015
 Tel Aviv | Dec 31, 2015

PRACTICAL REFUGEE EDUCATION PROGRAM



We believe that education is the key to empowering refugees and asylum seekers. Through education, asylum seekers can cultivate the skills and knowledge needed to become leaders, establish economic self-sufficiency and contribute to civil society in their home countries and within Israel. Unfortunately, asylum seekers in Israel face many barriers in their daily lives including restrictions on documentation, language issues and seemingly impossible financial demands.

Without proficiency in Hebrew and English, refugees and asylum seekers remain disadvantaged, isolated and marginalized. They find themselves trapped in low-skill and low-paid jobs.

ARDC's Practical Refugee Education Program (PREP) aims to empower refugees and asylum seekers through education and self-development. We believe education to be the key tool that refugees and asylum seekers can use to better assimilate into the Israeli culture and create an improved future for themselves, their families and their communities. Our three programs (listed below) support our education mission.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The higher education team assists asylum seekers in their pursuit of university (both in Israel and online) and vocational training. ARDC's formal and informal partnerships with universities, vocational schools, and technical programs have helped over 75 students continue their educational and career-based goals!

LANGUAGE CLASSES

English and Hebrew classes were offered in the evenings at ARDC for semesters of 8-10 weeks. ARDC used English curriculum produced by PREP teachers, which focused on reading, writing, speaking and listening. Volunteer teachers received training along with constant support. Over 150 students enrolled!

TUTORING

Through our tutoring program, students were able to meet with qualified volunteer tutors for a diverse group of subjects including English, Hebrew, Economics, Business and Algebra. Students had the option to meet one-on-one or in a study group. Ninety-four students received tutoring support this year!

* Successful launch to the PREP Up Initiative!

On Thursday November 12, ARDC hosted its first annual PREP Up *Back to School Party*. The event marked the beginning of the higher education scholarship initiative PREP Up and celebrated the launch of its new website. Held at Kuli Alma in Tel Aviv, the fundraising event raised money for five university students participating in the pilot initiative. The five students are all currently enrolled at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya (IDC) and were chosen for their strong dedication and commitment to their studies.

The PREP Up scholarship initiative is the creation of ARDC's Education Program Manager, Emily Primack. The mission of the scholarship program is to support refugees and asylum seekers in pursuit of higher education. Financial obstacles strongly deter asylum seekers from pursuing educational opportunities. PREP Up donations are contributed towards tuition costs in order to encourage and promote higher learning.

In addition to financial contributions, the event raised awareness of the importance of higher education and result-

ed in many in-kind donations (mainly laptops) which were donated directly to the students.

Primack spoke to the attendees describing the program's importance. She proved the program's indispensability by stating, "Education is not a privilege, it is a right." With the support of the PREP Up scholarship initiative, asylum seekers are able to gain that right.

Attendees were invited to hear from each student about their previous experiences, university studies, and plans after receiving their degree. Many partner organizations, institutions and donors attended the event, leading to a successful night.

21-year-old Usumain Baraka is in his first year at IDC Herzliya studying Government in the Hebrew program. He fled the violence in his home of Darfur at the age of thirteen in hopes of an education. At the fundraiser, Baraka spoke of PREP Up, "Sometimes I'm thinking I don't have any parents and I'm alone here... that's not right, ...a lot of people (are here to) help me." After he completes his degree, Baraka would like to return to his home in Darfur (when possible and safe) and help rebuild the country.





Public Relations & Advocacy

The goal of the Public Relations and Advocacy (PRA) project is to **generate change in public opinion and policy** toward African refugees and asylum seekers in Israel by strengthening community leadership and engaging in advocacy, awareness raising, and reconciliatory dialogue with Israelis. The PRA project works with stakeholders within and outside of Israel, to create the necessary momentum that will lead to policy change. The PRA project engages local and international stakeholders – media, policy-makers and the public – to raise awareness on issues concerning African asylum seekers in Israel. Advocacy work is carried out through tours, site visits, policy briefings and updates, as well as social and mainstream media.

To date, ARDC has published a number of research papers on the condition of African asylum seekers in Israel, held dozens of tours for local and international audiences, and administered several reconciliatory initiatives to **engage Israelis and Africans**.



Advocacy & Awareness-Raising

in 2015, ARDC engaged over 700 local and international individuals in tours and solidarity visits to raise awareness of the situation facing asylum seekers in Israel and ARDC's work in the field. Participants included Israeli soldiers, students, diplomats, policy-makers, academics and other interested local and international parties. Additionally, ARDC maintains an active presence on social media with relevant updates for our followers. Over the last two years, ARDC's Facebook English, Facebook Hebrew and Twitter following has grown significantly. Moreover, ARDC has facilitated publication of dozens of news articles, reports, and documentaries on asylum seekers in Israel. Over the years, ARDC has submitted reports and expert analysis on the asylum seeker community in Israel to international NGOs and relevant stakeholders. In 2015, ARDC's work and perspective were featured in local and international news articles, TV reports and radio shows.

Community Leadership & Advocacy

After two successful leadership courses in Tel Aviv and the Holot Detention Center in 2014, ARDC worked with Shatil (a New Israel Fund initiative) to create an even more impactful program for 2015. Leaders in the asylum seeker community were chosen to take part in this course, with the aims of enhancing their capacity to represent the community and to advocate on their behalf. The training provided them with the skills, knowledge and practice needed to address pertinent issues within the community and to encourage independent thinking. Participants learned how to map community needs and relevant stakeholders, to identify and replicate successful initiatives, to engage through nonviolence, to utilize media tools for visibility, to build partnerships and collaborations and to develop work plans for action. The initiative will secure existing leadership structures and harness them for long term sustainability by engaging trained leaders with new students.

* Reflection: Community Leadership & Advocacy

Yikealo Beyene, an asylum seeker from Eritrea, first joined ARDC as a student in the Community Leadership & Advocacy (CLA) class. Later he formally joined our staff and became the teacher for this important course. Below is a reflection he wrote on his experience as both a participant and as a teacher.



The importance of the course for asylum seekers in Israel was profound, timely and relevant. There were a number of large demonstrations and other non-violent actions (such as the Rabin Square demonstration and ‘March for Freedom’ march from Holot to Jerusalem), which were initiated and managed by asylum seekers with the support of some NGOs and human rights activists in Israel. Nevertheless, no matter how big the demonstration or the march was, they yielded no specific outcomes. They rather left the asylum seeker community in despair and frustration. But why did the beautiful and technically “successful” actions bear no tangible outcomes? In the CLA course we tried to answer.

Although the course has a theoretical foundation, it was tailored to the needs of community leaders, and the needs of the community in general. Prospective participants were asked what skills they would like acquire to become better leaders. The first CLA course was developed and facilitated by Shatil, and two different groups were facilitated simultaneously - one in Tel Aviv and one in Holot, with each group having about ten participants.

I was one of the participants in Tel Aviv, and I attended every session. It did not just affect me, but it transformed me to the wider world of the

social justice movement. It confirmed my often intuitive ideas about the subject, and the course boldened me to see there are people who truly believe in these ideals. But most of all, the knowledge I gained on strategic activism and community organizing was eye-opening. I had taken leadership courses during my college studies but not at the community level. I knew that I would give the knowledge back to the community.

Then, I was offered the position in ARDC to coordinate and facilitate the course as part of my job as Community Organizer. I wanted to tailor it better to the community members. I conducted around 17 personal meetings with community leaders to map the needs. Based on the skills list I gathered, I developed a revised curriculum with permission from Yael, my teacher who agreed and volunteered to mentor me. I first held the course in English but then used Tigrigna to encourage deeper understanding and engagement with the students.

A strong group of 8 people met every Thursday evening for four months; some of them would come from as far as Hod Hasharon and Petah Tikva to attend the meetings. It was experiential; participants told stories and life experiences, discussed current issues and shared personal issues. We had guest lecturers, who enriched

the course from their personal stories and professional domains.

However, there were two challenges: time and Holot summons. Although we outlined the ground rules together, some participants were not punctual and we always half hour late. The second challenge was more difficult to deal with. Towards the end of the basic course, three of the participants were summoned to Holot. Although, they managed to finish the course, they were distracted and discouraged. Others were not sure if they would stay for the advanced course, which was planned for another two-month period.

The participants found the course to be “crucial.” They all suggested that it should be given to more people in the community. I saw that the notion of activism and advocacy was not something new to them because they are involved in many activities in the community. However, the idea of doing it strategically was eye-opening. They said that they could use the knowledge not only in Israel but also in their home country. The structure of the course was built in a way that showed how strategic and nonviolent activism could address discriminatory actions in Israel as well as support the greater fight against dictatorship in their native countries.






GET INVOLVED

ARDC relies on our generous donors, dedicated volunteers and supporters like you. Read more about how you can support our work.

LEARN MORE

- *To book a group tour or informational session, please contact tour@ardc-israel.org
- *Keep up-to-date with our newsletter! Register on our website: www.ardc-israel.org
- *ARDC offers a range of long-term and short-term volunteer options. Please contact volunteer@ardc-israel.org for more information

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Shatil

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“ARDC takes the lead in providing grassroots responses to some of the most difficult issues that asylum seekers in Israel face today. The work of ARDC is highly commendable, creative and trustworthy. It is a pleasure to support and work closely with such a committed organization and we plan to continue our partnership with ARDC to support vulnerable persons of concern to UNHCR in Israel”-
UNHCR

Our Partners

The ARDC maintains close partnerships with a variety of community and human rights organizations, including HIAS Israel, the Eritrean Women’s Community Center, Hotline for Refugees & Migrant Worker, Refugee Rights Clinic at Tel Aviv University and others. The ARDC has been an implementing partner of UNHCR since 2009.

The ARDC also cooperates with a range of other partners locally and internationally that are not listed here.

“As Director of HIAS I have worked closely with ARDC leadership and management, who, time after time, demonstrate the ability to be innovative and responsive to the constantly changing environment that asylum seekers face in Israel. The organization’s staff and volunteers impressed me as incredibly dedicated and competent individuals and it is always a pleasure to work with them.”-
HIAS Israel



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