

# Refugee Coordinator



RANDY BERRY

EMBASSY KAMPALA, UGANDA

The job of a refugee coordinator is to track, analyze, and report on refugee movements and the situations that produce them, as well as assess needs and evaluate activities and interventions funded by the U.S. government. The refugee coordinator also plays a key role in alerting Washington to emerging crises in the region and suggesting ways the U.S. government might intervene to improve conditions for or protection of refugees.

Randy Berry, 37, serves as the regional refugee coordinator for the Great Lakes and Central Africa region. He is based at a Embassy Kampala, a medium-size post in East Africa. There are about 55 American employees at the embassy — including representatives of the State Department, USAID, the Peace Corps, the Centers for Disease Control, and the Defense Department — and 320 Ugandan employees. Randy travels 30 to 35 percent of the time, covering refugee affairs in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Gabon, and the Central African Republic. Armed conflict, natural disasters, and minimal infrastructure all contribute to making the region an especially challenging one in which to live and work.

The refugee coordinator serves as the primary field link between the U.S. government and international and local organizations supporting refugee work. Refugee coordinator positions are supported by the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. Randy liaises directly with a number of United Nations agencies (most often the U.N. High Commission for Refugees, known as UNHCR), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the national Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies, and international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved with humanitarian work. In most cases, he works with each of these groups in several different countries. Randy monitors implementation of projects funded by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, which are carried out by UNHCR, ICRC, and NGOs in the region. In each of the countries in his region, Randy also works with government officials on policy issues and on protection and assistance to refugee communities.

"Nobody enjoys life as a refugee," Randy explains. "It is an extremely difficult, harsh, and bewildering experience." The aim of U.S. government refugee assistance is to find ways to help people live with greater dignity and pride, even in a temporary refugee camp. "By providing the means to access clean water, a school, a micro-loan to start a small business, or by providing tools and seeds to allow refugees to care for themselves more independently, we enable them to regain greater control over their own lives," says Randy.

When Randy is in the field, he spends much of his time assessing conditions in refugee camps and settlements. The focus is usually on key issues such as water and sanitation, health care, and sexual and gender-based violence prevention education. During one trip through Tanzania, Randy observed a repatriation under way of Burundians returning

home from Tanzania; visited a soap-making cooperative founded



and run by refugees; and monitored a U.S. government-funded gender-based violence drop-in center in the Kitali Hills Refugee Camp in Ngara, where victims of violence can come for medical care, counseling, legal rights information, and access to psychological support. Randy also spends a lot of time talking about clean water and latrines — key issues in refugee camps — and thinks he probably knows more about the various types of latrines than most other Foreign Service officers.

Meeting the people who live and work in or near refugee camps has been a highlight of Randy's work as a refugee coordinator. He has been awed by the heavy burden of work that African refugee women bear, and sees support for the efforts to strengthen refugee women's abilities to care for their families as one of the most significant contributions made by the State Department's refugee program in his region.

When he is in the capitals of the countries he covers, Randy meets with numerous international and local organizations, as well as government representatives, to obtain briefings and information on humanitarian programs. When he is in Kampala, he spends much time going over the vast amount of information he has collected during monitoring trips, maintains e-mail contact with people he works with in the field, writes detailed monitoring and evaluation reports, and reviews project proposals and makes recommendations for or against funding. Randy also manages to remain part of mission life by serving as the embassy's housing board chairman and Equal Employment Opportunity officer, and filling in as a consular officer. He even spent three months as the acting deputy chief of mission.



Visiting the Agago Primary School at Achol-pii Refugee Camp for Sudanese in northern Uganda.

the Foreign Service in 1993, and has served in Dhaka, Bangladesh; Cairo, Egypt; and back-to-back tours in Kampala, first as a political officer and then as refugee coordinator. His next assignment is in Washington as a country desk officer for South Africa.

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Prior to joining the Foreign Service, Randy was an in-flight safety instructor for America West Airlines. He has a B.A. in education from Bethany College, and pursued M.A. coursework in art history at the University of Adelaide. He grew up in Custer County, Colorado. Randy joined