



[Home](#) » [Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs](#) » [Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration](#) » [What We Are Saying](#) » [New s f rom Assistant Secretary Schw artz](#) » [Protecting Vulnerable Populations: The Role of the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration](#)

Protecting Vulnerable Populations: The Role of the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration

BUREAU OF POPULATION, REFUGEES, AND MIGRATION

June 4, 2010

Dear Colleagues:

In my first 11 months on the job, many friends, colleagues and counterparts have asked me about the scope of the humanitarian work of the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), which I am honored to lead. For those of you who already know our Bureau well, this note may not be critical reading. For those who don't, I thought I'd take some time to describe the Bureau and its priorities, and finish by introducing our new Front Office team.

Within the Department of State, PRM serves as the principal humanitarian advisor to the Secretary of State, provides key leadership on population and migration issues, and manages two high-impact foreign assistance accounts that totaled over \$1.7 billion in FY 2009. Our mandate is to provide protection and solutions to the world's most vulnerable people: refugees, conflict victims, stateless persons, and vulnerable migrants, and to do so by integrating diplomacy, advocacy and humanitarian assistance programs. In this effort, we seek to help realize the commitments of President Obama and Secretary Clinton to alleviate human suffering and create the conditions for sustainable recovery, and to build a more effective multilateral system for humanitarian response.

Injecting humanitarian principles into the foreign policy process: PRM seeks to ensure, day in and day out, that humanitarian principles and perspectives inform the national security and foreign policy-making process within the Department of State. At the Department, we plan and implement humanitarian assistance designed to save lives and alleviate human suffering, we work to sustain U.S. leadership and humanitarian partnerships, and we attempt to promote reconciliation, security, and well-being where despair and misery threaten both stability and U.S. security interests. Our Foreign Service and Civil Service professionals use their experience and relationships with regional and functional bureau colleagues to promote effective and sustained responses on humanitarian issues, and, as Assistant Secretary, I work daily with senior Department officials to ensure that humanitarian perspectives impact policy-making.

Special Role in Humanitarian Diplomacy: Most of the humanitarian situations to which PRM responds are rooted in political or security challenges. For this reason, our access to foreign heads of government and other key foreign government decision-makers is critical, as it fosters the integration of humanitarian diplomacy within a full range of U.S. government assistance and protection programs, and leverages these programs to achieve critical humanitarian objectives. Over the past many months, I've pursued international humanitarian objectives in visits with a range of senior foreign leaders and officials, including with President Fernandez of the Dominican Republic on issues relating to the status of Haitians; the Prime Minister of Jordan and the Vice Foreign Minister of Syria on issues relating to Iraqi and Palestinian refugees; and the President, Defense Minister and Foreign Minister on conditions for internally displaced persons in Sri Lanka.



*Burmese Karen boys carry rations across a foot bridge. Ban Don Yang refugee camp, Thai-Burma border.
Photo by Hoa Tran, PRM Program Officer*

Conflict Response: Beyond its work on humanitarian diplomacy, PRM is a key element of the State Department's capacity to manage conflict – from conflict prevention, to response, to post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization. In each instance, PRM provides substantive capabilities and expertise in civilian protection and international humanitarian and refugee law, and strong links to first responders on the ground, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and a wide range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Authorities and funding: The Bureau derives its broad and flexible authorities from the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962 (MRAA), as amended, which authorizes U.S. international assistance to refugees, migrants, and certain other persons of concern and directs support to international organizations by specifying that appropriations are authorized for contributions to the activities of UNHCR, IOM, ICRC and "other relevant international organizations." The Bureau also funds NGOs, and most of its overall funding comes from the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account and a separate Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) Fund. Through these accounts and these institutions, the State Department supports a very broad range of at-risk populations around the world.

Assistance: PRM programs provide immediate life-saving protection and assistance when conflict erupts, as in Central Africa or Yemen. And when conflict abates, PRM's activities contribute to reconstruction and stabilization in strategic areas such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Georgia, the Balkans, Sudan and the Horn of Africa. For example, the Bureau is addressing the critical assistance and protection needs of vulnerable Iraqi refugees throughout the Middle East, as well as conflict victims inside Iraq, and will support the voluntary and safe return of refugees to Iraq once the situation permits. Through UNRWA, PRM provides basic services and essential humanitarian assistance to over 4.7 million Palestinian refugees. The Bureau provides protection and assistance to help foster regional stability in Latin America by assisting Colombians displaced by conflict.



*PRM's support provides a life-sustaining water pipeline to Oure Cassoni refugee camp in eastern Chad, home to almost 30,000 Darfur refugees.
Photo by Geoffrey Parker, PRM Program Officer*

Durable Solutions: The Bureau also works to find durable solutions to displacement, including the voluntary and safe return of refugees and conflict victims to their homes, local integration into host communities, and, for a smaller

6/14/2010

Protecting Vulnerable Populations: The...

number, third country resettlement, when neither return nor local integration is possible. PRM is supporting major voluntary return operations and reintegration programs in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, southern Sudan, and Afghanistan. These long-term solutions support regional stability and reconstruction activities.

U.S. Refugee Admissions Program: PRM administers the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program for those for whom resettlement is the best form of international protection. The United States welcomes more refugees than all other resettlement countries combined, including nearly 75,000 in fiscal year 2009 and over 2.5 million since the Refugee Act of 1980 was adopted thirty years ago.

Best Practices: The Bureau is a repository of expertise on best practices on a wide array of humanitarian and related matters, and serves as the U.S. Government lead in international negotiations on issues such as protection from *refoulement* (prohibition on the return of a refugee to a country where his/her life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, with certain limited exceptions), rescue at sea, and practices affecting unaccompanied minors in transit.

Developing Operational Capacity within the Foreign Service: With 28 Foreign Service Officers serving as Refugee Coordinators overseas and 23 Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) in Washington, PRM plays a key role in augmenting the operational experience of the Department's diplomatic service. Over the past 15 years, some 230 FSOs have worked in PRM, substantially augmenting the Department's capacity to manage the new challenges of 21st Century diplomacy.

Partnerships within the Government: PRM works in close cooperation with other offices, bureaus, and agencies throughout the U.S. government to formulate and advocate for refugee and humanitarian policies. USAID's Bureau of Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA) is PRM's principal partner in providing humanitarian relief and advocacy, and together we have guided the implementation of specific UN humanitarian reforms, including a push for greater and more effective coordination of UN humanitarian assistance and more consistent and accountable UN responses to IDP crises. The Bureau also partners with USAID on a range of programmatic issues, including improving health care in humanitarian settings, and providing programs to prevent and combat gender-based violence (GBV). These programs include efforts to address sexual exploitation and abuse in humanitarian crises.

Population Activities: PRM coordinates U.S. international population diplomacy, including advocacy and outreach to global partners to promote effective international reproductive health policies. The Bureau represents the U.S. in the governing bodies of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the UN Commission on Population and Development (CPD). In those bodies, we have the opportunity to advance international population policies that promote universal access to reproductive health, including family planning, and to address maternal mortality and morbidity, GBV, HIV/AIDS, female genital mutilation, and obstetric fistula.

Migration: The guiding principle of U.S. migration policy is support for safe, orderly and legal migration, focusing on the human rights of migrants, protection for asylum-seekers, support for anti-trafficking efforts, assistance to other vulnerable migrants, and encouragement of the rapid and successful integration of legal immigrants. We believe that regional migration dialogues provide one productive means of advancing effective and humane migration, as these allow greater opportunities for concrete and practical outcomes than global discussions.



Boats on the Ile de la Tortue in the earthquake's aftermath. A PRM-funded IOM program in nearby Cap Haitien includes micro-enterprise and agricultural activities to address root causes of out-migration and to discourage Haitians from making dangerous departures by sea.

Photo by Bryan Schaaf, PRM Policy Officer

Structure of Bureau and New Team: Since joining PRM I have been enormously impressed by the dedication of the state.gov/g/prm/rls/news/142901.htm

ALLIA Intranet Doc. No. 10061461. (Posted 06/14/10)

6/14/2010

Protecting Vulnerable Populations: The...

Bureau's Civil and Foreign Service staff and Refugee Coordinators in the field, many of whom have worked tirelessly for years, some for decades, trying to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable populations around the world. We rely on the reasoned advice and seasoned expertise of the PRM staff in D.C. and in regional posts around the world – from Bangkok and Nairobi to Colombia and Moscow.

In Washington, the Bureau is comprised of nine offices: the Office of Policy and Resource Planning (PRP), the Office of the Comptroller (C) and the Office of the Executive Director (EX) handle policy, budget, funding, and management for the Bureau; the Office of Multilateral Coordination and External Relations (MCE) oversees our institutional relationship with international organizations; the Office of Admissions manages the Refugee Admissions Program; and the Office of Population and International Migration (PIM) carries out our migration policy and population portfolio; and our three regional offices -- the Office of International Refugee Assistance for Africa (AFR), the Office of International Refugee Assistance for Asia & Near East (ANE), and the Office of International Refugee Assistance for Central Asia & the Americas (ECA) -- provide policy guidance and program management for our global operations.

PRM's Front Office (FO) is comprised of the Assistant Secretary, a Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (PDAS), two Deputy Assistant Secretaries (DAS), and special and administrative support staff. During recent months we've undergone significant changes to the Front Office, including the departure of former PRM PDAS Sam Witten in April of this year. Sam left a strong legacy of advocacy and ethical support for the world's most vulnerable, as well as many friends in the Bureau.

Upon Sam's departure, I asked Ambassador David Robinson to assume the role of PDAS. Dave's perspectives embody the values that inform the work of our Bureau, and his expertise and experience, as well as his professionalism and collegiality, are a great asset to our work. In addition to overall management of the Bureau, Dave's portfolio includes Admissions, ECA, and EX.

DAS Reuben Brigety joined the Bureau in January, and though he quickly was absorbed into the Department's leadership team responding to the Haiti earthquake -- where he worked for several months -- he has now become a vital voice in the Bureau's efforts to respond to humanitarian crises in Africa. Reuben also oversees MCE and the Migration portfolio. Prior to joining the Department, Reuben worked for the Center for American Progress, USAID, Human Rights Watch, and as an active duty Naval officer.

Kelly Clements, our third DAS, has worked for the Department for 20 years, and her background and expertise on issues relating to resources, strategic and operational planning, and roles and responsibilities, as well as her deep dedication to the mission of the Bureau are crucial assets as PRM engages a range of new and complex challenges. Kelly oversees the Bureau's policy and resource planning office, the Comptroller's office, and Asia and the Near East.

Given her depth of knowledge and experience, I have also asked Margaret Pollack, who directs MCE, to serve as the Bureau's Senior Advisor on Population Issues. In 1994 Margaret led the U.S. delegation in negotiations on the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and her expertise on these issues is an essential component to PRM's responsible stewardship of the Population portfolio.

As you can see, PRM manages a complex set of humanitarian policy issues, as we seek to realize Secretary Clinton's goal of enhancing the quality of our response efforts. I appreciate your taking the time to read about PRM's policy priorities and to learn about the structure of Bureau -- and I look forward to working with many of you in the promotion of these key principles in the months and years to come.

Many thanks, and kind regards,

Eric Schwartz

Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration

[Back to Top](#)

The Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.