



# AFRICAN SERVICES

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## COMMITTEE

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August/September 2011

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### Letter from Co-Executive Director, Kim Nichols



**Image from a refugee camp on the Somalia/Ethiopia Border**

Dear ASC Supporters-

As I write this letter to you more than 13.3 million people are in crisis in the Horn of Africa - more than the populations of New York City and Los Angeles combined.

Currently, in the Horn of Africa we are experiencing the worst

drought in over 60 years and it is devastating farmlands, uprooting families and killing tens of thousands in four countries: Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Somalia.

Somalia is dealing with the worst of the crisis, which has been compounded by the instability and conflict in the country. Of the 7.5 million affected in the country, over 4 million are suffering critical food shortages, and 750,000 in Southern Somalia are experiencing full-blown famine.

Ethiopia is another country greatly affected by this crisis, with over 4 million people living in drought-affected areas in the south of the country. In addition to dealing with the health and safety of Ethiopian citizens, the country is also managing the influx of Somalian refugees--up to 1,700 a day--in search of food and water. Refugee camps have been established along the border of Ethiopia and Somalia, and are currently holding about 180,000 refugees.

We at African Services are on the ground in Ethiopia, and recognize the direness of the situation. We recognize that we cannot stand idly by while millions of people suffer. ASC is uniquely experienced and positioned in Ethiopia to assist with mitigating the crisis.

The international community recognizes that humanitarian crises--both natural and political--accelerate the spread of HIV/AIDS. Most vulnerable in these situations are the women, children and people living with HIV/AIDS

(PLWHA). Asfaha Hadera, our Founder and Co-Executive Director, has been leading our Ethiopia HIV and reproductive health clinic efforts and has already begun coordinating with the Administration for Refugee /Returnee Affairs (ARRA), USAID and the United Nations HIV Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) to assess the need for mobile HIV testing and reproductive health services in refugee camps in southern Ethiopia, along the border with Somalia. In the next several months, we hope to set up our mobile tent clinics, and provide reproductive health, HIV prevention, support and linkage to care in several border camps. We also are aiming to provide support for pregnant and lactating mothers in the form of education, multivitamin/mineral supplements, and family planning services.

Stay tuned for future newsletters, to stay up-to-date on our efforts to help stem the crisis that is currently raging in the Horn of Africa.

Thank you again for your contributions for the work we do here in New York City and abroad. None of this work could be done without your support!

Best-

Kim Nichols

## News and Activities

### ASC Takes Leading Role in Immigration Reform Policy



In an effort to gain the perspective of the African community on the burning issue of immigration reform, the White House Office of Public Engagement organized a briefing in Washington D.C. which brought together administration representatives and community leaders from the African immigrant community.

Cecilia Munoz, Director of White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, opened the forum and spoke to the challenges on the road to comprehensive

immigration reform and assured participants of the Obama administration's commitment to "fixing the broken immigration system."

Acknowledging that the campaign for immigration reform had to date been predominantly depicted as Latino movement, Ms. Munoz stated that she hoped that moving forward the campaign would reflect more of the diversity of the various communities in the United States and urged community leaders to continue to mobilize their respective constituencies.

The community leaders shared with the government representatives present, including those from the Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services and from U.S.

Citizenship and Immigration Services, that they have been very active in educating and organizing their community members. African Services gave the example of the last year's national immigration rally in Washington, DC where there had been unprecedented participation of the African community.

Due to the success of the rally, hopes for immigration reform were high but to the dismay of immigrant communities nationwide, there has been an exponential increase in immigrant detentions and deportations which continues to this day. Community leaders asked that their concerns, along with the failure of the DREAM Act to pass the Senate, be relayed to the Administration.

African Services looks forward to ongoing communication with the aforementioned government departments and the work ahead towards a comprehensive immigration reform package for America.

--Bakary Tandia/Amanda Lugg

## Diaspora Activist: Health Care Project in Ethiopia a Success



Several Clients pose in one of ASC's Small Business Projects

This article was featured on Voice of America:

To hear a live recording of this interview click [here](#).

The U.S.-based African Services Committee's (ASC) HIV prevention and treatment project in Ethiopia has proved highly successful. ASC Co-Executive Director Asfaha Hadera said the program, which was launched eight years ago in the capital, Addis Ababa, is multi-faceted.

"It's a one stop shop," said Hadera. "It is counseling and testing, it is treatment, and outreach, reproductive health, family planning, nutrition, and income generating activities for destitute mothers and their children."

Hadera expressed gratitude to those who have been encouraging and helping ASC fulfill its mission. The fact that so much has been accomplished with such limited resources is "magic and a blessing," he said.

The funding for the organization, he said, comes from contributions by "generous Americans, United Nations Population Fund, as well as Ethiopia's St. George Brewery and Castel Wineries." Hadera said ASC has also partnered with the U.S. firm I-Tech on "mobile counseling and testing" activities.

The Ethiopian-born humanitarian activist said regional and federal health bureaus in Ethiopia have been supportive of his group's project. He expressed hope that ASC's efforts will be further recognized down the road so "we get our fair share and we can do more and better work."

In addition to the project in Ethiopia, ASC addresses the needs of newcomers in the United States. It provides health, housing, legal, educational, and social services to about 10,000

African and Caribbean immigrants each year.

African Services Committee was founded in 1981 in the Bronx. Hadera reflects on what inspired him to launch the organization.

"When I came [to the US] as a political refugee in 1979, there was no organization to guide and walk us through the system, access us to social security, healthcare, housing, employment and so forth."

He couldn't just stand by and watch, he said, and he decided he should fill the void. He said he launched his ambitious project by taking baby steps. "The program was initiated in my own small apartment in the Bronx."

Hadera said his group's efforts got a boost when "the Unitarian Universalist Society's Community Church of New York offered us free office space in Manhattan." But he said funding was in short supply.

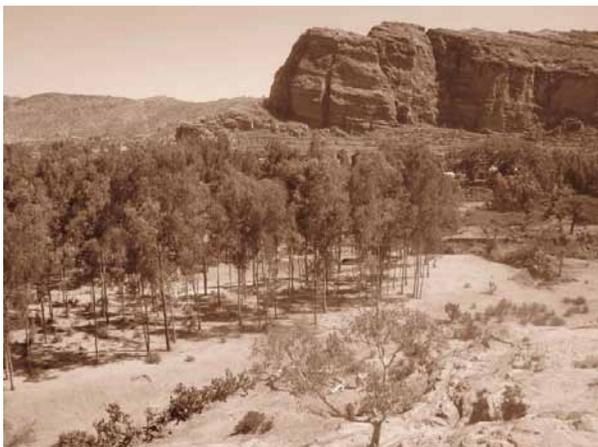
The Ethiopian-born activist said nearly 30 years after its founding, resources remain a concern for the African Services Committee and its ever-increasing projects. All the same, Hadera said, he takes pride in what he and his colleagues have accomplished both in the United States and in Africa. He credits his wife, Kim Nichols, for her "unflinching support" for the cause.

**--Ashenafi Abedje, Voice of America (Washington, D.C.)**

## On the Ground in Ethiopia: A Volunteer's Story

*In the Fall of 2010, Natasha Pirogovksy approached African Services Ethiopia with a desire to donate her talents in the area of communications and marketing. In early 2011 Natasha embarked on a month-long adventure to Ethiopia where she had the opportunity to visit our clinics, and assist them with developing new communications material to utilize in the field. For the next 3 newsletters, she will get the opportunity to share her experiences and observations from the field...so stay tuned! Here is Part One: The Adventure Continues North.*

The long drive North to the Kombolcha clinic begins before sunrise. The landscape leading from Addis to Kombolcha is one of the most diverse and lush I have witnessed overseas. The undulating mountains and unending fields of mineral-rich red soil provide the backdrop for a rural landscape unlike any other. Traffic and congestion on the road are caused by herds of cattle clumsily crossing the road, donkeys meandering about to carry hay to the market, young men selling carrots and zeitun (guavas) grown on family farms and children scurrying about.





Several rest stops along the way allow for the discovery of some of the most beautiful, secluded churches elevated on hilltops, traditional Ethiopian coffee houses, and interaction with women carrying heavy containers of well-water on their backs.



Kombolcha is one of the poorest cities in Ethiopia, where jobs are too few and government intervention and funding is still insufficient. African Services' Kombolcha clinic is located in the center of town in a large 2-floor office pavilion. The clinic is extremely well-run and the outreach staff dedicates large portions of their day to grassroots outreach initiatives and education throughout the community. This strategy has proven extremely effective in recruiting new patients to the clinic and disseminating information about the services provided. Access to rapid-HIV testing in Kombolcha has also transformed the clinic's ability to quickly provide the full gamut of needed services to those visiting the clinic.



**Kombolcha Clinic Staff**

After meeting with the staff at the Kombolcha facility, we traveled further North to the Tigray region of Ethiopia, to the site of the Mekele clinic. The grounds of the Mekele clinic are the most expansive of the four ASC clinics, with additional potential for growth on-site. The clinic location and staff are of the highest caliber and each individual nurse, clinician and counselor is passionate about the work that they do.

What stood out most to me in Mekele was the mindset that the services provided are intricately tied to the longer-term importance of facilitating income-generating activities. The African Services team understands that while counseling and testing are necessary underpinnings to short and long-term healthcare advances in the country, providing income-generating activities to the people of Ethiopia will be pivotal in elevating standards of living and leveraging economic opportunity. In order to fully maximize this concept, the Mekele clinic site includes a small shop run by HIV-positive women who sell spices, baked goods (including my favorite bread - ambasha!) and other sundry items to help generate income that will ultimately pave the way towards economic self-sufficiency.



In an effort to secure a consistent funding stream for ASC's vital programs in Ethiopia, the ASC team has also developed plans to establish a commercial apiary in the Tigray region, near the Mekele clinic. Through the apiary, staff will cultivate honey and, ultimately, other bee products, for retail and wholesale. In addition to providing reliable income for the organization, this initiative will offer invaluable training and employment opportunities to community members, thereby furthering ASC's mission by supporting their sustained wellbeing.

This innovative concept, alone, singles out African Services as one of the most visionary non-profit organizations - one not solely focused on immediate needs, but possessing the longer-term vision to impact a growing subset of the Ethiopian population.

Thanks for taking the time to read, and check back in the next newsletter for the final installment of my Ethiopia adventure!

--**Natasha Pirogovsky**

## Fun in the City

Stephanie Kaplan, Communications Director recommends...



## Other Israel Film Festival

**Where:** Governor's Island

**When:** November 10th-17th, 2011

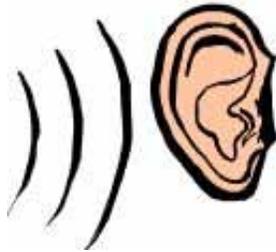
**What:** This festival uses film to foster social awareness and cultural understanding by showcasing award-winning films about minority populations in Israel. Two films, *Homecoming* and *Transparent Black* are particularly appropriate as they shine a light on the immigrant struggle in Israel—not much different from the struggles immigrants face in the US.

*Homecoming* follows three teenagers who were born in Israel to foreign workers. The film follows the Israeli teenagers as they visit their parents' homes - in the Congo, Peru and the Philippines. See the trailer [here](#).

*Transparent Black* is a documentary about African refugees living in Israel. Much of the film takes place in a Hebrew class, where the refugees and their teacher discuss refugees' rights and tenuous status, and the feeling of isolation in an adopted country. See the trailer [here](#).

For more information visit [www.otherisrael.org](http://www.otherisrael.org).

## Overheard in ASC...



We're big fans of the "Overheard" series of websites, and thought we'd start an ASC Overheard column of our own.

### Client speaking with Legal Department regarding his new housing:

"I actually look forward to leaving work and going home now, thanks to you I have my own space..."

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