

# Introduction: culture in exile

The new millennium may inspire hope and good intentions for the future of our world but it carries with it the burden of conflicts of the past and those, inevitably, of the future. We have invited a number of individuals to write a short piece for this FMR (pp29-34), highlighting one or two issues related to forced migration which they believe need to be tackled with urgency in this, the first decade of the new millennium. Each writer urges action on issues close to their hearts and usually central to their work; some mention developments which give them hope while others find little to support optimism. The topics they discuss are all of major significance to those working with refugees and internally displaced people.

In the light of these and given the pressures on all agencies' resources - both financial and staffing - it may seem that our priorities will need to be ever more tightly focused on the most immediate needs of displaced people, such as shelter, food and protection. Yet there are other, less tangible needs at stake and in this FMR we make space for a different focus, inviting contributors to discuss the significance of art and culture for displaced communities and for those who work with them.

Freedom to express one's cultural identity can be a powerful way to maintain a community's mental and even physical health. Freedom of expression is also a right and, as our language of assistance moves from needs-based to rights-based, respect for the empowering forms of cultural expression should inform our thinking and planning.

*When people flee from the threat of death and total dispossession, the things and stories they carry with them may be all that remains of their distinctive personhood to provide for future continuity.*  
(David Parkin)

Enabling displaced people to retain "all that remains of their distinctive personhood" may be vital for their future, for their health, for holding them together as a community, and for maintaining or restoring their dignity after the trauma of exile. The first three articles focus on this aspect.



Kosovan refugee children play games in Stenkovik Camp 1, FYR Macedonia

**Sandra Dudley**, in 'Traditional culture and refugee welfare in north-west Thailand', describes the concrete links between a refugee group's use of dress and their mental and physical wellbeing. She highlights the need for those working with displaced communities to develop greater awareness of and sensitivity towards cultural issues, in order to maximise the effectiveness of their assistance programmes. In 'Music and refugee lives', **John Bailly** examines the role of music in the lives of two different groups of Afghan refugees, in Iran and California, focusing on questions of community solidarity and the continuity of traditional culture. **Clare Harris** looks at how the Tibetan refugee community, during the last 40 years, has consciously constructed a community in exile. In 'Images of exile', she describes the community's objectives in retaining certain aspects of its pre-exile traditions while rejecting others.

The next three articles move from the question of self-expression by displaced people to examining how agencies can use elements of art and culture to improve the health and wellbeing of displaced individuals and communities.

In 'The role of art in psychosocial care and protection for displaced children', **Bo Viktor Nylund, Jean Claude Legrand and Peter Holtsberg** of UNICEF analyse elements of UNICEF's programmes using

art, drama, dance and music in the psychological care and protection of displaced children. The article draws on examples from Kosovo, Colombia, Sri Lanka, Algeria, Croatia and Rwanda. This is followed by a short article by **Nazim Akhundov**, entitled 'Psychosocial rehabilitation of IDP children', which focuses more closely on using music, art, theatre and sport in working with IDP children in Azerbaijan. Lastly, **Helen Scott-Danter**, in 'Theatre for development: a dynamic tool for change', examines the role of theatre in promoting reconciliation and in helping post-conflict communities in Mozambique address their most pressing social issues.

This feature section also includes a piece on 'Cultural activities in Alghahin refugee camp in Yemen' by **Liban Abdikarim**, a Somali refugee in Yemen; an extract from **David Parkin's** writing on 'Mementoes'; and part of a poem by **Joseph Abuk**.

We need to broaden our awareness of what is important for displaced people around the world. Vital though it is to erect shelters, feed families, build clinics and prevent abuses, the continuation of displaced communities' culture in its many forms is also essential and should be inextricably linked to the provision of more tangible forms of assistance.

The Editors