

Moving on, not settling down

by Roger Zetter

In 2007, as the new Director of the Refugee Studies Centre, I will have the enormous pleasure of leading its 25th anniversary celebrations.

When the RSC was established in 1982, the world of refugees and the patterns and processes of forced displacement were far simpler than today – at least it seems that way in retrospect. The label ‘refugee’ was clear-cut and the development of a humanitarian assistance regime seemed to have its own rationale. Yet little independent academic research was being conducted into these remarkable phenomena.

The RSC pioneered multidisciplinary study of the causes and consequences of forced migration. It quickly earned a worldwide reputation for its ability to provide critical insights and objective analysis. A key to its success has been its strong commitment to linking scholarship to practice through dialogue and cooperation with forced migration practitioners in governments, intergovernmental agencies and NGOs. The RSC’s global outreach to practitioners – through publications such as *Forced Migration Review*, electronic resources such as Forced Migration Online,¹ training programmes and documentation – has helped enhance understanding of the world of refugees and how agencies and practitioners respond to humanitarian emergencies.

Forced displacement and the humanitarian needs of millions of people driven from their homes are increasingly perceived as long-term global challenges set within a developmental context of rapid social, political and economic transformation. Alongside the RSC’s primary focus on refugees, it also embraces other forcibly displaced populations – people displaced internally as a result of conflicts and those displaced by natural or environmental disasters, famine or development projects. The popular phrases the ‘asylum/migration nexus’ and the ‘mixed movement of peoples’ convey something of this new complexity. They point to the difficulty which many countries have – notably in the developed world – ‘managing’ migration in a charged political climate

which resists the arrival of migrants in general and refugees in particular.

I have had a long association with the RSC both as founding editor of the *Journal of Refugee Studies*² – which RSC publishes with Oxford University Press – but also as a researcher. As the fourth director of the RSC, I have the privilege and the challenge of standing on the shoulders of predecessors who, in different ways, addressed these vital issues. With committed colleagues they have made the RSC the pre-eminent centre in forced migration studies, combining world-class academic research and teaching with a commitment to understanding the experience and impact of displacement from the perspective of those directly affected. Combining both fundamental and applied research, the RSC’s unique achievement is the effective dissemination of its scholarship in order to inform and enhance policy and practice.

Now, with a new Director and in the context of a rapidly evolving field of refugee and forced migration studies, RSC is poised for another era. We will not be rebuilding or changing the RSC’s basic format, role and orientation but I hope that under my stewardship the RSC will enhance its capacity in a number of ways. We aim to:

- recapture and reinforce the RSC’s engagement with the ‘global south’ (primarily Africa and South East Asia but also the Middle East)
- link with and promote regional networks and capacity building in regions most impacted by forced migration – supported by DFID funding
- develop, expand and explore synergies between our successful outreach and dissemination functions – the Library, *Forced Migration Review* and Forced Migration Online
- continue cutting-edge research on forced migration, seeking to

engage with the critical questions about contemporary patterns and process of forced migration and their impacts in order to provide better understanding

- enhance the way our research informs and influences policy making by governments, intergovernmental agencies and NGOs
- continue our highly regarded Summer School, which attracted over 70 participants in 2006, enabling practitioners to reflect on and share experiences, and explore ways of developing the Summer School as an in-region programme
- serve the next generation of scholars and practitioners by reinforcing our doctoral programme and ensuring that our flagship MSc offers not only the best scholarship but also a distinctive set of aims to attract high-calibre students from around the world.

RSC has achieved remarkable impacts but, like the refugees it serves, it has always had a sense of restlessness, that there is more to be done. That is why we will continue to be moving on.

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1. www.forcedmigration.org

2. <http://jrs.oxfordjournals.org/>

25th Anniversary events

During 2007, the RSC will be presenting a series of public and academic lectures, workshops and conferences to celebrate the achievements of the Centre, to showcase the scope of our current academic work and to help shape our future development. The RSC will also be engaging with local refugee communities and the wider public through a range of cultural events, including exhibitions and performances.

Full details at: www.rsc.ox.ac.uk

