



**ROA**

THE REFUGEE ORGANIZING IN ACTION NETWORK



**ROA Preliminary Report:  
Refugee Perspectives on the Two-Year Priorities (2011-2013)  
for the Georgia Refugee Stakeholders**

**June 2011**

Prepared by

**The Refugee Organizing in Action (ROA) Network**

**Leaders from the following communities provided the information in this report:**

*Ethnicities*

*Approximate total # of refugees  
represented by participating  
refugee groups*

Bhutanese	660
Karenni-Burma	150
Iraqi	40
Darfur	95
Eritrean/Ethiopian	200
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2360</b>

*The Refugee Organizing in Action (ROA) Network, a project of Refugee Family Refugee Family Services and supported by the Office of Refugee Resettlement and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (Atlanta), is a partnership of refugee and immigrant community-based organizations, their leaders and members. The working mission is to create a collaborative network that will increase resources and access to inform, build stronger organizations, and advocate for policies that support the successful integration of newcomers and the metro-Atlanta community.*



## **Background**

In May 2011, the Georgia Coalition of Refugee Stakeholders (“Stakeholders”) met on a Thursday, during regular work hours, to make a determination of the Stakeholders’ priorities over the next two years. As the group has often discussed, meetings during regular work hours are usually not well attended by refugees, unless they work for refugee agencies, because they are unable to take time off work on a regular basis for Stakeholder meetings. This Stakeholders meeting was no exception, with very few refugees in attendance who do not work for refugee agencies.

The Refugee Organization in Action (ROA) Network (“ROA Network”), representing the ethnic community-based leadership of several refugee groups, prepared this report in order to contribute refugee perspectives to the decisions of the Georgia Coalition of Refugee Stakeholders concerning its priorities for the next two years (2011-2013). The group worked together to understand, consider and prioritize the five Stakeholder priorities that were under consideration at the May Stakeholders meeting.

Fifteen refugee leaders, representing community groups with approximately 2300 refugees among their membership, participated in preparing this report. Groups in attendance included: the Bhutanese Association of Georgia, the Bhutanese Artists of Georgia, the Karenni Association of Georgia, the Darfurian Community of Georgia, the Eritrean/Ethiopian Community of Georgia and the Iraqi Al-Alta Community Group.

## **Summary**

The ROA Network found that it’s top priority for the Stakeholders over the next two years is to create a more open system of understanding between refugees and refugee service agencies. Refugee leaders determined that many refugees are unaware of or unable to access the services meant to help them achieve self-sufficiency. Further, refugees often have a hard time communicating with service providers, in order to resolve these issues. Refugee leaders believe that the Stakeholders group, with the mission of ensuring effective refugee resettlement, is the ideal body to establish an effective communication system that is open to all and ensures access to services.

The ROA Network also found that almost no refugees would be likely to rely on a website for information about the refugee resettlement process and related services, due to access, language and computer literacy issues.

## **Conclusion**

***The ROA Network leaders urge the Stakeholders to adopt, as a central priority, the establishment of an open system of communication and understanding between refugees and refugee service agencies over the next two years. Further, the leaders urge the Stakeholders to recognize that the website will primarily be a tool for non-refugees involved in resettlement, and to allocate resources to this project accordingly.***



## Findings

The refugee leaders who participated in the preparation of this report discussed and considered the five priorities that were also considered at the Stakeholders meeting. Like the members present at the stakeholders meeting, the community leaders voted for their top priorities out of the following five choices:

- Holding a refugee conference
- Improving the website and social media
- Creating a resource development committee
- Creating a training committee
- Working toward an open system of understanding between refugees and refugee services

The priorities below are listed in order of highest priority to lowest priority.

- **Priority #1-Open System of Understanding:** (15 votes) Because refugees are often not aware of the agency resources to which they are entitled, and because refugees often have a hard time communicating needs or expressing their opinions to agencies, ROA community leaders decided that facilitating an open system of understanding between refugees and refugee services was a top priority. They envisioned a system that would allow refugees to provide feedback to service providers about their services, and also support more effective communications from refugee agencies to refugees regarding services. Refugee leaders cited additional reasons for their support of this priority, including: the need for refugees to have a system to advocate for services when needed; the need to prevent abusive situations from occurring at all levels of service; the need to address incidents of poor quality of service, and the need for refugees to have an open channel of communication for problem solving. The community leaders expressed concern, however, that refugees would be discouraged from participating due to fears of retaliation or because their cultures are not familiar with such open forms of communication.
- **Priority #2-Refugee Conference:** (13 votes) ROA network leaders supported the idea of holding a refugee conference to facilitate idea sharing, network building, and the free flow of communication between refugee communities. Refugee leaders felt that the conference would be a good place to represent their group's overall agenda to other communities and to create plans and goals for the refugee community as a whole. Furthermore, the conference would allow additional opportunities for refugee community members, including women and children who generally have less access to community and leadership opportunities, to learn about American rules and laws in a non-threatening environment and to express their own ideas and views about refugee community development.
- **Priority #3-Training Committee:** (11 votes) Group members supported this priority insofar as it would support the education and training of caseworkers, agencies, and community leaders to become better service providers. Specifically, ROA network members expressed an interest in caseworkers and agencies receiving training on cultural diversity and communication with clients. Group members also supported this priority as a supplement to the refugee conference such that

some of the training committee's responsibilities might be to provide for refugee and agency trainings at the conference.

- **Priority #4-Resource Development Committee:** (6 votes) The ROA Network recognized the importance of resource development and financial support to the survival of the Stakeholders group and, therefore, supported this priority. The refugee community leaders expressed concern, however, over the vagueness of the committee's duties and the allocation of the resources it was required to develop. For example, the community leaders were reluctant to spend the stakeholder group's time and resources on website and social media development. Furthermore, the refugee community leaders recognized that this priority was unlikely to result in a high level of refugee participation, which is currently lacking at the stakeholders meetings.
- **Priority #5-Improve Website and Social Media:** (0 votes) While ROA leaders agreed that having a website and social media targeted at informing and educating the refugee community was beneficial, none of the refugee community leaders present at the network meeting had accessed nor had any knowledge of the website. The group indicated that this was probably due to the fact that most refugees had little or no access to the internet and language barriers and illiteracy often prevented refugees from understanding website content. Because of this, the ROA network group members ranked "improving website and social media" as a low priority, especially in light of the fact that working toward developing the other priorities would have, in the group's opinion, a much greater impact on the refugee community.