

Gallery: *World Refugee Day*

By Todd Shallat

Londoners bring white umbrellas to the annual celebration. Somalis sing a chorus of thanks to the president of Djibouti. Malaysians download an app for a virtual tour of a tent encampment. Flood lights turn UN cyan blue at the Leaning Tower of Pisa. South Africans release orange balloons.

World Refugee Day, internationally celebrated, commemorates the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees – a landmark multinational treaty, the first to acknowledge asylum as a fundamental human right. Its connection to Boise dates back to the cowboy politician who served Idaho in the U.S. Senate at the close of the Second World War. Senator Glen Taylor was an avid proponent of a world federation and asylum for the dispossessed. A half century later, in 2001, the UN designated June 20 as an annual day of awareness. Festivities in Boise began with Bosnian dancing at the Basque Museum.

“World Refugee Day has become a Boise tradition,” said Kara Fink of the Idaho Office for Refugees, a festival organizer. “It’s through celebrations like this that fear is countered and a more welcoming community is formed.”

In 2016 the day began with accordion music and the thumping bass of West African drums. Boys and girls in sashes and scarves linked arms as they jangled and jumped through the choreographed steps of a Bosnian folk dance. The scent of garlic and cilantro rose from kabobs and pastries. A vendor sold African fabrics. In City Hall Plaza, meanwhile, 17 new Americans swore oaths of allegiance, having waited five years and passed their naturalization exams. All refugees resettled in Boise, they were Bhutanese, Bosnian, Burmese, Iranian, Iraqi, Somali-Bantu, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese. Everyone, for the moment, seemed grateful. New citizens clutched tiny American flags.

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world,” said Fidel Nshombo, a Congolese refugee. At age 12, separated from family, he began an 11-year trek through seven African countries, reaching Idaho in 2006. That June 20 was his first refugee day in Boise. Two years later, an accomplished poet, he was master of ceremonies.

“I honestly thought at the time that I was the only refugee here,” said Nshombo, recalling his first years in Boise. “Refugee day wasn’t then what it is now.”

World Refugee Day is now like a family reunion, tearful and joyous, an extravaganza of colors and sounds. On tap for 2017 are Burmese dancers, Burmese dumplings, Somali sambusas, jewelry, textiles, and hand-stitched Ethiopian dolls. New Americans will again crowd into City Hall Plaza for a collective oath of allegiance. Soccer teams will compete for the second annual Refugee Day tournament trophy, before Boiseans sitting under pastel umbrellas in Ann Morrison Park.

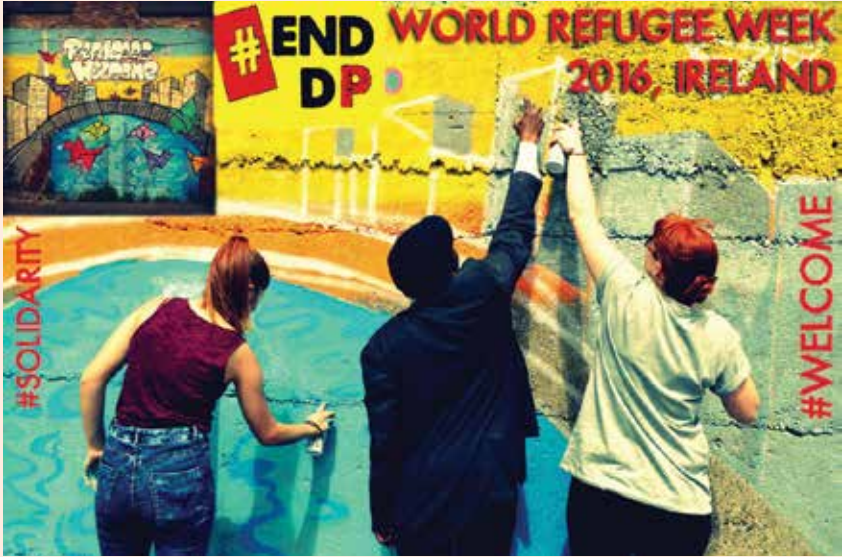


“Refugees would like to have the same problems you have.” World Refugee Day promotion, Buenos Aires, 2010.



IDAHO OFFICE FOR REFUGEES

Karen dancers, The Grove Plaza, Boise, June 20, 2015.



UNHCR

Irish World Refugee Week, Dublin, 2016.



POST OF TAJIKISTAN

Commemorative postage stamp for the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Tajikistan, 2001.

Boise-made African sandals, The Grove Plaza, Boise, June 23, 2012.



Laurie Pearman



Idaho Office for Refugees

Rwandan baskets, The Grove Plaza, Boise, June 23, 2012.



Laurie Pearman

Citizenship ceremony, The Grove Plaza, Boise, June 23, 2012.



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Citizenship ceremony, The Grove Plaza, Boise, June 20, 2015.



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Display of African fabrics by Thara Fashions, The Grove Plaza, Boise, June 20, 2015.



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“Community Peace” art project by Jessica Miceli-Dodd, Boise City Hall, June 18, 2016.



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Rocking The Grove Plaza, Boise, June 20, 2015.

Refugee Worldfest Day performance in Brisbane, Australia, 2015.



ROY CHAMBERS



IDAHO OFFICE FOR REFUGEES

World Refugee Day Soccer Friendly tournament, Ann Morrison Park, Boise, June 18, 2016.



IDAHO OFFICE FOR REFUGEES

Global Lounge Group drummer, Ann Morrison Park, Boise, June 18, 2016.



LAURIE PEARMAN

Festival T-shirt, Boise, June 23, 2013.



JOE JASZEWSKI/IDAHO STATESMAN

Celebrating citizenship in Ann Morrison Park, Boise, 2016.



SYRIAN RELIEF & DEVELOPMENT

Refugee art day in Amman, Jordan, 2014.