



# THE EUREKA REPORTER

## Refugee awareness campaign

4/7/2007

A national refugee awareness campaign will be coming to Arcata's Redwood Peace and Justice Center Friday night.

Baridi Night: One Cold Night for Refugees is an event designed to raise awareness about refugee life in Africa and teach participants what they can do to impact the lives of Congolese refugees, survivors of the civil war also referred to as "Africa's World War" that has ended millions of lives since 1996.

The Swahili word "baridi" translates to "cold," a news release explains.

According to the release, similar Baridi Nights will be held on Friday across the country.

Participants will have the opportunity to step into the shoes of a refugee by eating a standard-issue United Nations refugee meal and pledging to sleep the night without a blanket.

"Once you've spent an uncomfortable night sleeping without anything to cover you, you can't help wanting to do your part for the thousands of refugee children who spend every night cold and hungry," Eric Verprauskus stated in the release. Verprauskus is the organizer of Baridi Night in Arcata and the outreach coordinator for Facilitating Opportunities for Refugee Growth and Empowerment.

"We have neither blankets nor mattresses," an unnamed Congolese woman currently living in Kala Refugee Camp in Northern Zambia explained in the release. "We sleep like animals on the ground on empty bags and suffer from cold due to lack of blankets."

FORGE is a nonprofit organization and operating partner of the United Nations' Refugee Agency. FORGE partners with refugees to create and implement locally tailored, sustainable community development and empowerment projects in African refugee camps, according to its Web site, [www.FORGENow.org](http://www.FORGENow.org). Its Real Refuge campaign works in the U.S. to advocate for refugees and provide them with humanitarian aid; funds raised go to purchase blankets and educational materials for refugees.

"The refugees we work with in Zambia often tell us that they think the world has forgotten them," said FORGE Executive Director Kjerstin Erickson. "By being part of Baridi Night, Americans can show their support for refugees by trying to identify with the plight and the potential of refugees and by helping to raise the funds necessary to give them warm blankets and educational opportunities for the future."

All are invited to Arcata's event. Donations are requested.

The doors will open at 6:30 p.m. with entertainment by a Western Africa Drum Ensemble. Presentations on life in a refugee camp and a screening of a documentary on the conflict that creates refugees will follow, with the night wrapping up at 10:30 p.m.

The Redwood Peace and Justice Center is located at 1040 H St., in Arcata.

For more information, phone Verprauskus at 814-341-4250 or e-mail him at [ericverprauskus@yahoo.com](mailto:ericverprauskus@yahoo.com).