

## Government

# Celebrating World Refugee Day with the Refugee Dream Center

The Refugee Dream Center held their annual World Refugee Day celebration in South Providence on Saturday where hundreds of people were treated to food, music and access to important information and services. United States Representative David Cicilline (Democrat, Rhode Island) was the only elected official to address the crowd. World Refugee Day was established by the United Nations (UN) in



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By **Steve Ahlquist**

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Omar Bah

World Refugee Day was established by the **United Nations (UN)** in 2000 to “honor all refugees, raise awareness and solicit support.” The Refugee Dream Center was established by **Omar Bah**, who is himself, along with his family, a Gambian refugee. The Center seeks to “create opportunities within the refugee community to facilitate their resettlement process and integration into their new lives in the United States.”

“As you can see, today is a day for young people. We are leaving it to them. They are running it, we want the to have a voice because that is the theme of this year’s World Refugee Celebration,” said Bah, addressing those in attendance.

More below after these photos of some of the children at the event:



















An American citizen, Bah had some harsh words for President Trump. “Tomorrow, the administration of **Donald Trump** is starting a massive raid of immigrants across major cities in this country. Anybody here who is a community leader, or who cares about human rights and immigrant rights, immigrants and refugees, please tell people about knowing their rights. Don’t speak to anybody without a lawyer, and just be extra careful about opening your doors to strangers without a warrant.”

Trump announced late yesterday that he was **delaying the raids**. Perhaps anticipating this as a possibility given Trump’s mercurial behavior, Bah continued, “Even if it doesn’t happen, it’s the fact that people are going to be panicked. It is really, really important for us to remind refugees that out of all the millions suffering out there, people care. People support us. People want to see the suffering end...

“I have two messages for two entities or two people,” continued Bah. “One is [for] Donald Trump and his government: Please! Refugees are not the enemy. Refugees are your friends and refugees are the most vulnerable people in this world. We want help. All we need is support and help...

Bah's second message was for the the United Nations. "Unfortunately, I tend to agree with **John Bolton** [Trump's National Security Advisor] who said that the UN is a bunch of paid, good-for-nothing individuals... because if the UN was a good and successful entity, we shouldn't be having wars. We shouldn't be having refugees. It's a failure... The UN model is intervention. When refugees are displaced [the United Nations goes] and create[s] refugee camps, and today we have 70 million people displaced in this world. That shouldn't be happening. Every two seconds that's someone displaced as a refugee.

"If the UN was doing their job, nobody would be displaced. There would be preventative measures. There would be preventative actions."



Pastor **Scott Axtmann** from Providence's **Renaissance Church** delivered the opening prayer:



Imam **Farid Ansari** from the **Rhode Island Council for Muslim Advancement** also delivered a prayer:



The event was emceed by **Francois**, who introduced **Night Jean Muhingabo**, who introduced student poets:



A statement from **Kamar**, a refugee from Somalia:



More poetry:



“Our refugee system in this country has always been the crown jewel of our immigration system,” said Representative Cicilline. “America has always been a place, and must remain a place where people who are fleeing war and famine and unspeakable violence can come to America for the same reason my ancestors came to America: To build a better life for their families and themselves.”



David Cicilline

“We are facing some very big challenges as a result of the Trump Administration and their policies that really do not understand or reflect what we all understand and that is that immigrants and refugees have renewed this Democracy in every generation. Welcoming refugees to America is one of the most patriotic responsibilities and one of the greatest manifestations of what it really means to be American: To welcome people from all over the world, to understand diversity, is our strength...

“In Rhode Island we should remember, was founded by a refugee. **Roger Williams** came here because he had to flee the **Massachusetts Bay Colony** because of his religious beliefs. So our state has a special responsibility to understand what it means to welcome people who are fleeing very challenging circumstances in their own country, making very difficult journeys.

“We have a president who is attempting to undermine in every way our responsibilities to refugees. We see at the border that families are being torn apart, children are being taken from their parents, people are being put into cages for nothing more than coming here and seeking sanctuary, safety and protection.

“That is not who we are in this country. Those practices do not reflect our values.”



Another feature of Providence's World Refugee Day celebration is music and dance. Here's a sampling:













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