

CONTINUED...

America

Continued from page 1

considerably since Sept. 11, as the federal government has instituted restrictions on refugee admissions, and stopped flying as many personnel as it once did to refugee camps to interview applicants for admission to this country.

"There are many people who are disillusioned and hopeless in the camps," said Malith, who lived in a Kenyan camp.

He added that he understands why the United States has clamped down on refugee admissions, which may reach an all-time low this year, according to Refugee Council USA, a coalition that includes the U.S. bishops' Migration and Refugee Policy office. However, Malith and the other refugees said the U.S. government should reconsider its current stance toward Sudanese refugees because many black Sudanese are eager to come here and become good citizens. That's because Malith and the others stressed they all fled the long arm of the same man the U.S. government blames for actions that set off the post-Sept. 11 immigration restrictions — Osama bin Laden.

"The southern Sudanese are the victims of this man," Malith said. Yet, bin Laden's terrorist attacks against America have now led to this country becoming a less likely destination for those fleeing his form of militant Islam in Sudan.

"We are victims twice," Malith said.

Endless war

Santo Makuach, 19, a Sudanese refugee who came to the United States in March 2001, recalled how he felt on Sept. 11 last year.

"I said that wherever we go, the war will follow us."

"The war" to which he referred is a civil war that has raged in Sudan for years. But what does a war in Sudan have to do with the current war on terrorism? Plenty, according to U.S. government and relief agency sources.

Saudi Arabian bin Laden fled his homeland in 1991 because he opposed his country's Gulf War alliance with the United States, and the stationing of U.S. troops in his country. He first went to Afghanistan and then to Sudan, which had admitted hundreds of terrorists in the '90s as part of its policy of solidarity with militant Islamic activists.

Sudan has seen two civil wars over the issue of Muslim dominance, one in the 1960s and '70s, and the current one, which started in 1983. The government that persecuted Makuach and his fellow black Sudanese is the same government that embraced bin Laden. However, international pressure led Sudan to expel bin Laden, who went back to Afghanistan in 1996. Nonetheless, his supporters have been active in Africa, and reportedly had a hand in bombing the U.S. embassies in Kenya, Sudan's neighbor to the south, and in Tan-



Bishop Paride Taban demonstrates how to use one of several bomb shelters located near the Comboni Boys' School in Narus, southern Sudan. Students frequently must run from classes to the shelters to protect themselves against bombing raids by the Sudanese government.

zania in 1998.

Makuach and several other Sudanese refugees have been resettled by Catholic Family Center over the past two years. He is among the famous "walking boys" of Sudan. Separated from their parents by war, these thousands of young males actually walked to Ethiopia and Kenya away from their homeland, enduring disease, starvation, wild animals and murderous attacks by their fellow humans as they sought refuge. Literally thousands of the boys died or were killed, and Makuach's friends in Rochester bear the scars of their travails. For example, Deng Agoth, 21, was shot in the right hand, a thigh and a leg during an attack on his Sudanese community by an Arab militia.

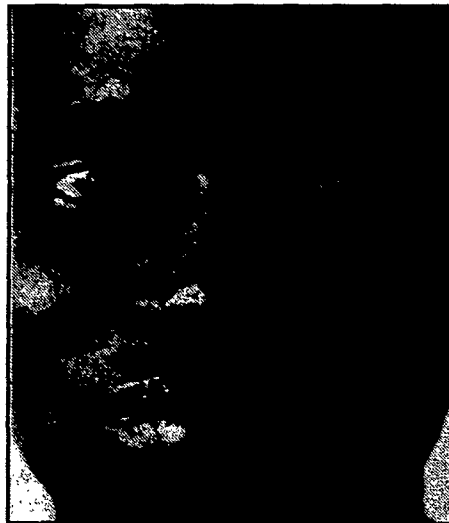
"A lot of people died that day, and many people run away," Agoth said, recalling that some tried to jump in a river that ran by his village only to be confronted by crocodiles. Agoth hid for eight days in the bush, wounded, until he could flee. Only in recent months has he regained use of his hand, which was surgically reconstructed at Rochester's Strong Memorial Hospital.

The walking boys' stories were a litany of horrors, including nighttime raids by Ethiopians and Kenyans paid by Islamic militants to kill them; tales of people eating shoe leather because they had no other food; and people dying from drinking their own urine because there was no other water around.

In the refugee camps, they found life only a little better, standing in long lines to obtain water and food, and fearing violence.

"It was a miserable life," said David Garang, 21, who came to Rochester in April of last year.

All of the Catholic Family Center refugees had been separated from their parents or lost loved ones to murder by Is-



Sudanese refugee Awak Malith recently settled in Rochester with the help of Catholic Family Center.

lamic extremists. Each had his own tale of woe. Pete Ater, 21, expressed sadness over not knowing where his parents were. Andrew Machok, 21, was grazed by a bullet during an attack on his village. And Santo Makuach expressed a desire to find peace in his new homeland, which was attacked by the allies of his enemies in Africa.

"We don't need to destroy everything here," he said, pondering Sept. 11. "We need to unite together."

A wider door

CFC's Walker pointed out that refugees are among the most scrutinized of all immigrants to the United States, and must undergo extensive background checks before they enter. He added that he and others who work with refugees often find them to be the most loyal of U.S. citizens once they are allowed entry and to apply for citizenship. Indeed, Garang said he

would gladly join the U.S. military when he can so that he can fight against bin Laden.

Yet, due to the Sept. 11-inspired crackdown on immigration, only 18,000 refugees have been admitted so far this year, with the total expected to reach about 35,000 by year's end, according to Refugee Council USA. This is little more than half the number of refugees admitted in 2001, according to the council.

The United States suspended all refugee admissions for two months following last year's attacks, and has only slowly restarted its efforts. Refugee advocates point out that under President George Bush, the current chief executive's father, the United States admitted an average of more than 120,000 refugees a year; that figure dropped to more than 80,000 per year under President Bill Clinton. Refugee advocates would like to have the United States allow at least 100,000 refugees come here in 2003, still a drop in the bucket compared to the 35 million refugees displaced by war, unrest and persecution throughout the world.

The U.S. bishops are among those calling for a re-evaluation of current policy toward such refugees as those resettled from Sudan by Catholic Family Center. On Aug. 20, the bishops' migrant and refugee advocates joined other refugee organizations, including Protestant and Jewish groups, in observance of "National Refugee Advocacy Day of Action." The organizations used the day to urge citizens to send letters to President George W. Bush and Congress advocating for refugees. The president is expected to announce the nation's annual refugee quota Oct. 1. The U.S. Committee on Refugees, a private group, published sample letters to the president and congressional members on the Web at www.refugees.org/news/crisis/resettlement/index.htm.

"We believe it is entirely possible for the (Bush) administration working with refugee protection and resettlement agencies to successfully implement this two-year approach to refugee admissions," Refugee Council USA wrote the president in its own letter.

Furthermore, the council wrote: "We are confident that we can still rescue refugees who were unable to resettle in the United States this year because of enhanced security arrangements. In this way, we can ensure that refugee lives will be saved and that refugee families torn apart by persecution will be reunited. The American tradition of welcoming refugees who have fled religious persecution and political persecution will be reinvigorated."

Meanwhile, the Sudanese refugees in Rochester will continue to improve their English while working at such jobs as housekeeping for a local hospital. And they'll remember that they were sustained through horror after horror by thoughts such as the one that sustained Malith.

"As long as you were still breathing, you were fine."

USCCB warns against combining INS, Homeland Security

WASHINGTON (CNS) — A Bush administration proposal to move all functions of the Immigration and Naturalization Service to a new Department of Homeland Security could cause grave damage to both domestic security and immigration, according to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In testimony presented to the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Miami Auxiliary Bishop Thomas G. Wenski warned that proposals to put all immigration functions under Homeland Security would be a mistake for the new agency and for how immigrants are treated.

Bishop Wenski's testimony was presented to the subcommittee by the director of migration and refugee policy for the USCCB, Kevin Appleby. The same testimony also was delivered to the Senate Judiciary

Subcommittee on Immigration. Both committees held hearings on the subject in late June.

The U.S. bishops have no objection to the creation of the new department, Bishop Wenski wrote, but moving all immigration functions there would cause more problems than it would solve.

Enforcing and implementing immigration law and processing applications for visas, change of status and naturalization represent "a broad mission which is not easily handled under current resources and structure of the INS," Bishop Wenski said in the testimony. "Handing these broad duties to a new department will both distract from its national security mission and diminish our immigration function because of neglect."

He said he fears that immigration services and even immigrants themselves

could be grievously harmed by moving an already overburdened system to a new agency with "a wide-ranging set of unfocused missions."

Most immigration enforcement efforts have nothing to do with terrorism, he noted. "Instead, they relate to such mundane but important functions as preventing the entry of undocumented immigrants on our southwestern border, enforcing our laws against the hiring of undocumented immigrants, detaining criminal aliens and removing inadmissible aliens from the United States."

Bishop Wenski also said the administration's proposal could diminish the nation's historic commitment to newcomers and fundamentally change how immigrants are perceived and treated.

Transferring INS functions to Homeland Security "would send a stark and clear

message to the world that the United States views foreign-born persons, generally speaking, with suspicion and fear and not as neighbors who bring skills, culture and faith to benefit our communities, towns and cities."

He said he fears that over time that valid and legal newcomers, along with refugees and asylum-seekers "would, instead, be viewed through a 'terrorist' lens."

Instead of being buried in a wide-ranging agency, those functions should receive higher prominence and resources, he wrote.

"The best course is for the INS to remain completely outside of the Department of Homeland Security, but reorganized," he said. Both the House and the Senate have bills pending to reorganize the agency, some portions of which the USCCB supported.