

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 15, 2020

SIoux FALLS WORLD REFUGEE DAY GOES VIRTUAL

#EveryActionCounts

Saturday, June 20, 2020

Sioux Falls...Every year on June 20th, a day designated as World Refugee Day by the United Nations, the world pauses to acknowledge the long, dangerous and difficult journeys families have endured while forced to leave their home countries for fear of persecution, or because of war and natural disasters. 2020 marks 40 years since the U.S. Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, building the U.S. refugee resettlement program that has saved over 3 million lives from danger.

In South Dakota, Lutheran Social Services' Center for New Americans Refugee Resettlement Agency began as early as 1948 with a vision to provide resettlement services to displaced people from Europe following World War II. In 2019, 130 refugees were resettled in South Dakota. 58 of those refugees were under the age of 18. Refugees resettled in South Dakota come from countries like the Congo, Eritrea, Ukraine, Burma, Chad, Bhutan, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Eritrea. While the world is witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record, unfortunately, the number of refugees to be resettled in 2020 in South Dakota will be the lowest number since World War II – fewer than 60.

Many of the refugees who resettle in South Dakota have become “essential” workers and contributors to the diversity and life of our State. COVID-19 pandemic made visible their contribution in the workforce. In an official Proclamation signed by Paul Ten Haken, the Mayor of Sioux Falls acknowledges the sacrifices our city's refugees made during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic: “Whereas, the heroic contributions of refugees to the workforce and community during the COVID-19 pandemic exemplifies the values they bring from their country of origins and their generosity to share the richness and beauty of their cultures with the community of Sioux Falls.”

A large majority of refugees who resettle in South Dakota are persons of color. They have a story that we all need to hear. “The recent protests have made it quite clear how important it is to listen to the voices of our black and brown neighbors so that we may be bound in love and mutual respect, not divided by prejudicial judgements,” comments Laura Smith-Hill.

Due to social distancing measures in effect during this time of pandemic, Sioux Falls World Refugee Day will be celebrated virtually on Saturday, June 20, 2020 at 10:00 am with a live panel featuring two refugees residing in Sioux Falls, one from Nepali, the other from Chad.

This Facebook Live event will offer you the opportunity to take one small step in understanding with your mind what is their experience, to allow their stories to transform your hearts towards greater empathy, and to impel us together to take steps toward the creation of a more harmonious and compassionate world.

Sponsors: Lutheran Social Services Center for New Americans, Pax Christi South Dakota, Presentation Sisters of Aberdeen, SD; Refugee Congress, United Nations Human Rights Council, Siouxland Libraries, South Dakota Voices for Peace

For more information: Contact Laura Smith-Hill at Laura.SmithHill@lsssd.org or Clara Hart at refugeehart4@gmail.com Follow and like Facebook page "South Dakota World Refugee Day"; Twitter - #EveryActionCounts