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August: How Do Women Bring about Democracy?

## Art for Refugees in Transition

By: **Art for Refugees in Transition (A.R.T.)**

Millions of people around the world are currently considered internally displaced persons, and are living in refugee camps within their own countries. In Colombia for example, the continuing armed conflict has displaced nearly four million Colombians since 1985, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. Art for Refugees in Transition (A.R.T.), a non-profit organization founded by Sara Green, is working to enrich the lives of displaced groups in Colombia through their own native arts and crafts.



A.R.T.

**Adela, an expert in indigenous basket weaving and active teacher in the A.R.T. program in Colombia, demonstrates her craft. [View Larger >](#)**



We know the pictures all too well--horrifying scenes of refugees pouring into tent cities. They arrive in a state of trauma with the most basic of needs--food, clothing, shelter. Over time, long after those needs are cared for, these displaced populations settle into the harsh daily routine of refugee life. What happens next is another kind of tragedy, one not seen on our television screens.

New generations are born into and grow up in refugee camps and communities. Unable to return home but never fully accepted in their new land, millions of adults and children languish for days, years, and sometimes decades. The communities often act as little more than human warehouses – isolated worlds where the inhabitants have no hope or identity, and where children have are deprived of the joys of childhood. Long after relief organizations have provided food, clothing, shelter, medical care, sanitation and schooling, refugees need help to create and maintain their sense of community, and to prepare them to get on with their lives in a foreign world.



A.R.T.

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A.R.T.

A.R.T. is a not-for-profit organization that develops programs which enable long-term refugee populations to preserve their traditional art forms and pass them on to younger generations. Revitalizing indigenous arts provides a catalyst for rebuilding displaced communities and helping to heal the wounds of war, famine, flight, and other trauma. A.R.T. develops specific curricula for each ethnic group based on its own indigenous arts to help refugees to re-establish intergenerational relationships rooted in their own culture, and thus help to rebuild their communities. A.R.T. replaces patronage with partnership so that the community itself decides which art forms will be taught and passed on to the next generation being raised in these communities. A.R.T. acts merely as a facilitator, with the interests of the children being its primary focus. At the same time, A.R.T. provides an important tool to these communities. By helping to re-establish the refugees' own sense of community and cultural traditions, children and adults find a way to articulate--and thus begin to resolve - their fears and anger engendered by war and displacement. They build for themselves a foundation for healing and moving forward toward a richer future.

In 2005, A.R.T. turned its focus toward Colombia. Colombia is currently undergoing a humanitarian catastrophe: armed conflict has caused mass displacement throughout the country, where over four and a half million of its forty-five million inhabitants have become refugees. A.R.T. began its first Colombian program with internally displaced refugees in barrio Tintalito in Bogotá, Colombia. Working with A.R.T., elders from the community taught the children dances, songs and handicrafts. Building on its success in Tintalito, A.R.T. expanded into Carmen de Viboral, Antioquia, Colombia--a rural community outside Medellin--in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (I.O.M.). The program helps to revive the native ancient art of the creation, production and decoration of ceramics. This area of Colombia has one of the highest rates of child soldiers, and the after-school program developed by A.R.T. helps to

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A.R.T. prevent the children in the community from joining or being taken into the armed forces by the guerrillas, paramilitary or drug lords.

A.R.T.'s next program in Colombia will focus on the community of Siloe, home to a vulnerable population in Cali. The region has been deeply affected by the forced recruitment of civilians by illegal armed groups and the displacement and trafficking of both adults and children. Currently, Siloe has a population of 65,000, 90 percent of which belongs to the lowest economic level in the country and 70 percent of which is displaced. Working with single mothers and their children, the focus of the program will be the reconstruction of their local history and customs, such as weaving, dances and folklore. To provide these single mothers with a skill that will earn them an income and some control over their lives, a partnership has been formed with Red Empresario por Colombia, which will help to train the mothers to make saleable goods.

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For more information on Art for Refugees in Transition--and to learn how you can help--visit [www.artforrefugees.org](http://www.artforrefugees.org).

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