



# UN GLOBAL COMPACT

## Communication on Engagement Report August 2018

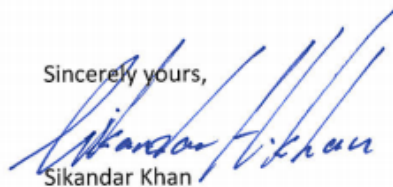
This report serves to demonstrate Global Emergency Response and Assistance's commitment as a participant to the United Nations Global Compact.

## Statement of Support for the UN Global Compact

Global Emergency Response and Assistance (GERA) is a participant of the UN Global Compact and remains committed to the initiative and its principles.

As a humanitarian organization, GERA has an important role to protect human rights, including in relation to the activities of businesses in in supply chain and labor in general.

This report describes GERA's activities and commitment to support the UN Global Compact Ten Principles and the USA Network.

Sincerely yours,  
  
Sikandar Khan  
Executive Director



## Our Story

GERA grew from a fortuitous synergy within our team and our strong presence in the refugee community. We share a background in International Affairs and a passion for human rights. Our diverse cultural backgrounds, talents, and language abilities help us to easily connect with refugee families, interfaith groups, and institutions. Our synergy, and the energy we invest in each refugee family, make GERA unique.

GERA was established in 2014 by Sikandar Khan, who together with Oumar Kouraogo and Valeria Gomez Palacios, strove to make the vision of an organization that upholds the dignity and human rights of the most fragile, a reality. Our passion for humanitarian work comes from our unique experiences in countries plagued by political violence, social injustice, and economic inequality. During his time with the U.S. Army in Afghanistan, Sikandar was deeply affected seeing youth manipulated into joining terrorist organizations because of the destruction of educational and other institutions. Valeria was raised in Nicaragua, where she witnessed social inequality and discrimination. Oumar is from Burkina Faso, where he witnessed extreme poverty and inequality.

In 2014, Peter Kassig, a humanitarian worker in Syria, was captured and tragically killed by ISIS insurgents. Kassig's organization, Special Emergency Response and Assistance, was committed to providing humanitarian assistance to victims of conflict. Khan, inspired by Kassig's story, proposed the idea of GERA, and the three of us committed to honoring Kassig's legacy by continuing his efforts to assist those displaced by conflict.

As GERA grew, Teresa Reynolds, a New Jersey native brought her strength in field outreach, and program planning and coordination to the organization. Our team, with firsthand experience of conflict and deprivation, and our feet firmly in the community, deeply understand that for vulnerable populations, reclaiming dignity and establishing economic independence are equally important outcomes. We've grown GERA from the ground up with an inspired team and expert advisors, and with your support, we look forward to reinforcing our programming and scaling up to integrate our newest neighbors in our communities.

## Mission

The mission of Global Emergency Response and Assistance (GERA) is to protect human rights and to restore the dignity, well-being, and safety of those affected by conflicts and disasters.

## Vision

GERA's vision is to help create, advocate for, and manifest a world in which every refugee, migrant, or displaced person receives the basic necessities to ensure that they live a healthy and just life in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

At GERA we believe that saving the life of one person is a step towards saving all of humanity.

## Our Communication on Engagement



While being a growing humanitarian organization that protects human rights, we take every opportunity to communicate our position on membership of the Global Compact.

We support the UNGC values in any occasion such as events, oral and written advocacy, demonstrating our alignment with the Ten Principles and promoting the Global Goals. We are passionate about the UN values, and we take pride in being a participant of the UN Global Compact. We will continue to support its mission by meeting our commitments as well as supporting its values all around the world as part of our efforts. Below we showcase the initiatives we have taken towards achieving the UNGC principles and the Global Goals.

## Our Initiatives

### *NJ ReBuild*

Refugee resettlement is viewed as a process of establishing economic stability and language proficiency in a host country. Major U.S. resettlement agencies extend a set of established services to refugee families for a period of 3-6 months. Through our grassroots work, we learned that most refugee families suffer enduring trauma, and struggle to attain language proficiency, social acceptance and economic independence in just six months. This led us to recast resettlement as an active, ongoing partnership with refugee families, rather than as short term, one-way service delivery. Through intensive research, we have found out that there are many job opportunities for refugees, but they are not able to navigate the application process successfully due to social and linguistic barriers. The result is NJ ReBuild, GERA's initiative that first addresses refugee families' short term needs, but looks beyond to their future as Arab-Americans and facilitates their active integration into local communities and institutions.

*ReBuild works at three levels:*

**Families:** We first spend time with each family understanding their personal and professional backgrounds, strengths, and needs. We help establish a legal identity, access housing and schooling, connect with counseling, job training, and other services, including our new English as a Second Language program.

**Communities:** We facilitate exchange between refugees and interfaith communities to develop social and professional networks. We aim to surpass the "charity" event, dispel stereotypes, and pave the way for families' respectful entry into communities.

**Institutions:** Through advocacy with local government and media, we raise awareness of new Syrian families in the area, and build connections between refugee families, local residents, and community leaders.

Currently, we work directly with 30 families, and integrate many more in our community-building activities. We collaborate with several organizations, including

North Jersey Interfaith Cares, UNICEF, Embrace Relief, local congregations, and public agencies such as Passaic One-Stop Career Center to leverage synergies in our mutual work.

In the future, ReBuild seeks to forge partnerships with governmental and educational institutions to strengthen ESL programming, and offer therapeutic services, academic support, access to higher education, employment training, and other programs. We invite philanthropic support from individuals and institutions to support NJ ReBuild's ongoing development and scale up. We also welcome you to volunteer with us – with greater numbers we can reach even more families with much-needed services.

## ***NJ REBUILD ESL***

ESL: One-on-one coaching and group teaching. Practice-based learning.

NJ ReBuild's ESL program offers a stimulating, hands-on program for adult members of refugee families. We combine group and individual teaching to customize learning and rapidly build language proficiency. The ESL pilot program began in September 2017 with 12 students, with plans to scale up to 50 students in January 2018. Director of Education, Heba AbouBakr and ESL expert Jessica Egger co-designed the ESL program and tailored it to meet the needs of adult refugees.

All volunteers receive an initial two-hour training and ongoing direction and supervision from GERA staff. Starting January 2018, all adult volunteers with direct contact with learners are required to complete background checks.

Classes are offered three times a week (one weekday and both weekend days). We are actively seeking foundation funding to add modules for workplace readiness and financial literacy. Students learn to read, speak, listen, and write in English with the help of volunteer coaches.

A new 8-session Writer's Workshop will run for the first time during Spring 2018. NJ ReBuild volunteers are collaborating with a local young adult author to design curriculum specifically for our high-school age refugee youth.

The NJ ReBuild ESL program is designed to be welcoming to Arabic-speakers, yet volunteers need not have any Arabic knowledge to coach program participants. All lessons are prepared by our Director of Education, and a Lead Instructor is present during all program hours.



Learners are expected to advance to the intermediate level ESL course, and continue with the program until they attain English proficiency. The program now has a waiting list.

Fluency in English is critical for adults to secure housing, find work, and build relationships with school personnel and community actors. NJ Rebuild's ESL program delivers a stimulating, hands-on program to refugee families that builds language confidence and workplace readiness. The ESL program began in September 2017 with 18 students, and is poised to scale up in January 2018 to 50 students. Classes are three times a week (one weekday and both weekend days), and the Beginner course runs from September through December 2017.

A youth enrichment program runs parallel to the ESL program in the same location, and offers tutoring, homework help, outdoor games, and arts and theater activities for children ages 5 - 13. The pilot was overwhelmingly well-received by participants, enabling parents to learn together while their children are safe and also engaged in supportive activities. With additional volunteer support, we are poised to add more



English language learning activities for more children during Spring 2018.

We invite philanthropic support from individuals and institutions to further develop and scale our ESL initiative over the next few years. We are also currently recruiting volunteers to help with the ESL and Enrichment programs.

## Goals

The goals of the program are to:

- Assess participant language skills and customized learning for participants,
- Develop participants’ receptive English language skills in listening and reading

<b>Listening:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Demonstrate understanding of simple words, phrases, and expressions relating to personal information or physical location</li> <li>- Demonstrate understanding of high-frequency commands and expressions of courtesy</li> </ul>	<b>Speaking:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Express basic needs using simple phrases</li> <li>- Repeat words and phrases to improve pronunciation</li> <li>- Answer simple questions with “yes” or “no”, or one word response</li> </ul>
<b>Reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Distinguish between uppercase and lowercase letters</li> <li>- Demonstrate eye movement from top to bottom and from left to right</li> <li>- Demonstrate knowledge of numerals</li> </ul>	<b>Writing:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trace shapes and letters</li> <li>- Copy letters of the alphabet and numerals</li> <li>- Copy basic information pertaining to identification on a form</li> </ul>

comprehension,

- Develop participants’ productive English language skills in speaking and writing,
- Keep learning grounded in everyday tasks,
- Build a portfolio of work for each participant with their accomplishments, and
- Provide a welcoming and culturally appropriate learning environment.

The ESL Beginner’s course is focused on:

The program intends to offer Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced levels of ESL programming. Students will exit the program with the ability to use English to meet social, academic, and vocational demands with confidence.

In the long-term, the NJ Rebuild ESL program will enable participants to:

- Participate in casual and extended English conversation,
- Understand English descriptions and narrations of factual material,
- Read standard materials such as English newspapers and technical materials,
- Follow directions in English and function in the workplace, and
- Write descriptions, summaries, and responses to questions on forms and applications in English.

### ***FUTURE PROGRAM: YOUTH-AT-RISK***

It is an undeniable truth that having decent college access is pivotal to college and career success. Unfortunately, a large sector of students do not receive adequate college access opportunities in low income communities to be fully capable and able to achieve their desired dreams.

Studies have found that when students were asked of their preference to attend a university or collegiate institution, 95% of those asked in low income communities agreed they would like to attend college. However, only 10% of low income students are able to earn a college degree at some point in their lives with the resources they have access to.

At GERA, we hope to bridge that gap and provide the tools, resources, and support necessary to ensure that each of our students is able to embrace their desired futures.

GERA envisions a world in which every student is confident and empowered to reach his or her full potential starting with admission to college. That's why GERA is committed to reaching every student in need in our immediate communities. By instilling values of Leadership, Responsibility, Honesty, Involvement, and tools to reach Happiness we work to students into the best versions of themselves in the classroom, in their communities, and wherever they may pursue their dreams and futures.

## *YOUTH-AT-RISK: Approach*

**RECRUIT:** Before working with students, we will recruit professionals from various different field including public office and private professionals such as doctors, among others as well as current students from different universities. Providing students access to efficient tools and resources combined with experienced mentor guidance is at the core of student success.

### **IDENTIFY:**

Then, we gain access to youth who are at risk. We plan to gain access through:

- Paterson's and Passaic County juvenile department
- Schools within the area
- Passaic County's OneStop Career center

### **ASSESS:**

Once a list of students is compiled, the youth would meet with a GERA staff member/program directors for assessment to identify each of their interests. Additionally, a needs assessment will be performed.

### **MEET:**

Based on the assessment, GERA will recruit a professional to mentor each student to create a annual plan.

## *Mentorship: The Missing Element*

Many organizations have put emphasis on college and career paths for youth at risk, yet the students are not provided with the guidance they need. We are committed to maximizing the effects of long-term professional and developmental careers for our students, which starts at mentorship. The program requires identifying potential career interests based on skill sets and interests of each student, which is often missing in other programs. Second, we aim to identify college matches and realistic university options for our students in order to establish a plan for successful admission, enrollment, financial aid and graduation thus maximizing their college access and eventual college success.



# Highlights: Events and Advocacy

## *Outreach and Partnerships*

### Peace Meal in support of UNICEF Refugees Welcome Campaign

*February 2017*

UNICEF's Refugees Welcome campaign began on Valentine's Day. The campaign asked to host refugees for dinner to celebrate love and empathy on valentine's days. GERA attended the peace meal at UNICEF headquarters as part of a Valentine's Day / friendship celebration with interfaith leaders, NGO partners, and other UNICEF supporters.

### Noble Leadership Academy

*March 2017*

GERA was honored to bring some of our refugee clients to an event hosted by the Noble Leadership Academy. One of our child clients, Mohammad, was asked to speak after the Noble Leadership Academy found out that he had lost part of his leg and his arm after being affected by an air strike. "I don't like living in America as much as I did Syria," Mohammad said, "but I have no choice."

### Girl Scouts fundraising for GERA

*April 2017*

GERA had the privilege of meeting the Girl Scouts of Tenaflly to discuss ideas in raising awareness and understanding the struggles of refugees coming to a foreign country. The brilliant group of young women we got to sit down with were determined in coming up with different ideas to include their school and community to welcome the refugees that have moved to New Jersey. "When I was in elementary, I used to get bullied a lot and it made me feel alone, I want to meet the other girls so I can be their friend too, no one should have to go through difficult times alone," one of the girls told a member.

## Picnic for Refugees

*August 13th*

On August 13th, more than 100 of our refugee clients that we provide relief for came together for a picnic at the Garret Mountain Reservation. The goal of the gathering was



to introduce the participants to local leaders and their neighbors and to one another.

## Advocacy

### HBO Screening “Cries from Syria”

*February 2017*

GERA was invited to attend the screening of the documentary at HBO headquarters. CRIES FROM SYRIA is a searing, comprehensive account of a now six-year conflict from the inside out, drawing on hundreds of hours of war footage from Syrian activists and citizen journalists, as well as testimony from child protesters, leaders of the revolution, human rights defenders, ordinary citizens, and high-ranking army generals who defected from the government. Despite experiencing great suffering, they have never lost hope for the future. The documentary was directed by Oscar® nominee Evgeny Afineevsky, and acquired by HBO. The event also included a discussion panel with director along with a journalist who was featured in the documentary. After the event, GERA was introduced to the director of the documentary, Evgeny Afineevsky, who expressed his enthusiasm to work with our organization to spread more advocacy. See "Upcoming Events" for more information on our partnership.

### Temple Emanu-el Visit

*April 2017*

GERA was invited to Temple Emanu-El of Closter by the New York Board of Rabbis, where we took our new Syrian families to celebrate the unity, oneness, and humanity. Our sincerest thanks go out to Rabbi David Kirshner and the New York Board of Rabies for promoting unity in this time of partiality.

## Campus Screenings of Cries from Syria

*April 2017*

**Monday, April 23th** – Members of our External Affairs committee coordinated a movie screening of the Cries from Syria HBO documentary as well as a discussion and questionnaire panel that succeeded the documentary.

**Thursday, April 27th** – Our GERA sector at Seton Hall University coordinated a movie screening of the Cries from Syria HBO documentary as well as a discussion and questionnaire panel that succeeded the documentary.

## Screening of Cries from Syria followed by a Panel Discussion with the Film Director

*May 2017*

GERA, in collaboration with Thomas J. Duch, Paul Vagianos, and Christine Ordway, hosted a screening of the documentary Cries from Syria. The event took place at The Bright Side Tavern (141 Bright St, Jersey City, NJ 07302) on May 3rd, 2017.

The event featured a Q&A and panel discussion with:

- Oscar- nominated director, Evgeny Afineevsky
- Senior Officer, Humanitarian Emergencies and Executive Communications, U.S. Fund for UNICEF, Michelle Centeno
- Passaic County Freeholder John W. Bartlett
- Prospect Park Mayor Mohamed T. Khairullah



- Activist Hamid Imam



## Meeting with Senator Cory Booker and Congressman Bill Pascrell

*August 2017*

On August 1st, GERA had the honor to sit with Senator Cory Booker, Congressman Bill Pascrell, and one of the refugee families we work with to advocate for refugees. We had a great discussion regarding the current refugee policies and the struggle refugees face here in the United States. As of this past December, a total of 18,007 Syrian refugees have been able to resettle here in the United States. Our mission at GERA is making this transition into a new way of life with a different culture, language, and



history easier for those who have to flee their countries.

## World Humanitarian Day 2017

*August 19th*

GERA' participated in honoring World Humanitarian Day which had as a theme that Humans beings are Not a Target. Our statement for World Humanitarian Day is posted under "Publications" on our website.

## Events

### GERA's First Anniversary Dinner

*February 2017*

On Wednesday, February 15th, GERA hosted our First Anniversary Dinner. The event was held at the American Legion of Woodland Park. The anniversary dinner was a time to reflect on our past accomplishments and to look forward to our future projects. We especially like to thank our speakers; Passaic County Freeholder John W. Bartlett, Prospect Park Mayor Mohammad Khairullah, Co-Director of the US Program at Human Rights Watch, Maria McFarland Sánchez-Moreno, and Activist Jessica Berrocal.

## GERA's Annual Iftar Fundraiser

*June 15th*

On Thursday, June 15th, we had the honor of hosting our second annual Iftar dinner at the Woodland Park American Legion. The goal of the event was to raise awareness about the refugee crisis our world faces today and to raise funds in order to continue our mission of helping refugee families who desperately need our help. We had several guest speakers, including GERA's Advisor John Bartlett, Mayor Khairullah of Prospect Park, Passaic County Freeholders Bruce James and Theodore Best, Jim Andreano from North Jersey Interfaith Cares, along with members of GERA. Thank you to those who showed your support.



## World's Children Day 2017

*November 20th*

On November 20th, 2017, Nanse, an eleven-year old refugee from Syria and GERA client, gave a speech on the challenges and success of refugee children at the United Nations in celebration of World's Children Day 2017, organized by UNICEF.



## NJ ReBuild Graduation

December 20th

Thank you to everyone who came out to our first ever NJ ReBuild ESL Graduation! The ESL program began in September 2017 with 18 students, and is poised to scale up in January 2018 to 50 students. The students are grateful that the program exists and we wouldn't be able to provide it for them if it wasn't from the help and dedication coming from our volunteers and supporters.

### ***GERA in the News***

- East West Institute recognizes GERA as an organization working to create positive change.
- GERA in North Jersey News for our Winter Clothing drive.
- Thank you MENTOR for the opportunity to tell our story on #WorldRefugeeDay. Read the blog post [here](#) to learn more about how GERA's mentors work hard to make refugees feel welcomed in their community by helping them overcome the language barrier and helping them gain their independence.
- Thank you to USA Today for covering GERA's summer picnic in partnership with North Jersey Interfaith Cares.
- Thank you to NorthJersey.com for covering GERA's first ever NJ Rebuild Graduation.



THE NATIONAL MENTORING PARTNERSHIP



## *Updates & Accolades*

- GERA gave a warm welcome to four new members of our Advisory Council: Francesco De Flaviis US Fund for Unicef, Laura Pitter from Human Rights Watch, Adil Syed Ahmed and Abdul Hamdan .
- GERA also gained two fundamental team members: Director of Education, Heba AbouBakr, and ESL expert, Jessica Egger, who both co-designed the NJ ReBuild ESL program and tailored it to meet the needs of adult refugees.
- Two GERA chapters were officially established at Seton Hall University and Rutgers New Brunswick, serving as clubs to continue our mission in the name of the organization.
- GERA attended a climate forum at the United Nations.
- Congratulations to our Executive Director, Sikandar H. Khan, for being awarded the 4th Annual Passaic County Young Professional Recognition Award in the area of Community Organizing and Non Profit Management. To celebrate the accomplishment, Passaic County Freeholder, Theodore "T.J." Best, hosted a brunch in the recipients' honor.
- Congratulations to our Executive Director of Program Management, Valeria Gomez Palacios, for being awarded our "Women in Leadership Award" in commemoration of Women's History Month 2017.
- Congratulations to our Executive Director, Sikandar H. Khan, for being awarded the 4th Annual Passaic County Young Professionals Award in the area of Community Organizing and Non Profit Management.
- GERA's Co-Founder and Program Director, Valeria Gomez Palacios, was recently published by Greenhaven Press, an educational publishing house that focuses on producing quality materials for the library and classroom markets. Her article on



the plight of refugees, which was first published in Foreign Policy Journal in 2014, appears in the book titled Migrants and Refugees which is a part of Greenhaven's books series "Global Viewpoints". The title examines opinions from policy makers, special interest groups, academics, journalists, and GERA's very own Co-Founder on the subject of Migrants and Refugees

## Conclusion

We are more motivated than ever to advance the work we are doing in the areas of Human Rights, Labor, Environment, and Anti-Corruption as we are submitting our first ever Communication on Engagement report. Global Emergency Response and Assistance (GERA) strives to meet its commitments to the UN Global Compact through various initiatives as demonstrated above. Our organization fully supports the UN Global Compact initiatives and instruments that promote human rights and labor in particular. We look forward to continuing our efforts.