

Commemorating World Refugee Day

Posted by Farooq Kathwari on June 20, 2011 at 01:51 PM EDT

My journey to America began like those of many who seek refuge away from their home countries. At the age of 21, I left the beautiful mountains of Kashmir, which had become a region of conflict, for the safety of the U.S. I worked hard, going to night school at New York University and by day, working in a company that printed envelopes. A decade later, in July 1976, the bicentennial year of America's independence, I had the privilege of taking the oath of citizenship. For those of us who have lived as refugees in regions of conflict, been separated from loved ones, becoming a United States citizen is a momentous occasion. It is a moment of recognition, restored dignity and pride.

Over the last 45 years, this country has afforded me many opportunities including the opportunity to give back. It has been my privilege to be the Chairman, President and CEO of Ethan Allen for more than two decades, and to have led the reinvention of this great American brand. I am proud that we have made a contribution by our ability to maintain over 70% of our production in the United States in an industry where over 70% has left the country. We have over 4,500 dedicated professionals working at Ethan Allen who have made this happen.

One of the wonderful things about America is its unique culture of giving back both in time and resources to humanitarian causes. In that regard I am privileged to be associated with several non-profit organizations both at the local and national levels, including Refugees International and the International Rescue Committee, both of which advocate for human rights and humanitarian aid for refugees and immigrants around the world. I am also proud to serve on the President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, helping to ensure these diverse communities have access to Federal programs and resources where they may be underserved.

Today, as we commemorate World Refugee Day, let us remember that the American story was written in part by people who sought safety at its shores and that many of us are part of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community whom the President himself has recognized as among the hard-working and talented people who have helped to make America stronger.

The strength of America is its diversity and the rights we all enjoy. I fully believe that by working together, America will continue to inspire and to lead, as we continue to forge proudly into the 21st century.

Farooq Kathwari serves on the President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.