

International Refugee Rights Initiative



Refugee Rights News

Volume 4, Issue 1

January 2008

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SPOTLIGHT:

Dr. Mohammed Ahmed Receives Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Prize

On November 16, 2007, in a high-ceilinged room with burgundy drapes in the Russell Senate office building, American policy makers and activists gathered together to hear a doctor and psychiatrist from a faraway Darfur talk about the horrors that he had witnessed there.

Against a backdrop of flags bearing the names and nationalities of the award's previous winners, the doctor was introduced by Senator Ted Kennedy. Senator Kennedy recalled the room's special significance as the one in which his brother Bobby (Robert F. Kennedy), in whose honor the prize was given, had announced his candidacy for president of the United States. Although Bobby was killed before he was able to contest in those elections, his commitment to justice and human rights is remembered through this award, honoring activists who have shown courage and commitment to defending the rights of vulnerable communities. Senator Kennedy reflected that this year Bobby would have been particularly proud to meet the man

who was honored in his name.

Dr. Ahmed was the first person from his village to get a medical degree. Since then, he has not only served as a respected member of his community, he has served as a mentor to other doctors. When the conflict in the region reached crisis proportions in 2003, Dr. Mohammed and his colleague sprung into action, forming the Amel Centre for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture. The Centre has mobilized a team of volunteer

doctors who are able to treat victims of torture who might otherwise have been turned away. Thousands have been treated thanks to his courageous work.

When Dr. Mohammed took the floor he reflected on the long distance he had travelled. When he was travelling five days on foot to reach a school, he never imagined that he would have the opportunity to stand in the United States and address its policymakers. He thanked so many for coming and for helping to ensure that his voice and the voices of victims of the atrocities in Darfur were heard.

Unfortunately, he brought sad news about the situation on the ground. The atrocities were continuing, children were thrown into fires, women were raped and millions were still being forced from their homes. And the situation had only deteriorated since the Darfur Peace Agreement was signed in May 2006.

As a doctor, he reflected that he had recently observed an increase in the rate of infectious diseases in the camps, and risked rising to levels where they would be difficult to control. He reflected that this risk was exacerbated by the evacuation of some humanitarian personnel, particularly from international organizations which had been providing more than 90% of services in the camps, due to the security situation.

Even now, the doctor reported, people were being taken by force from the camps, some of them had disappeared.

Dr. Mohammed and the organizations he works with are trying to beat back the tides, offering hope to the victims. His team looks after the physical and mental healing of survivors. Many of these victims have turned in on themselves and they need support in order to be enabled to heal and to be accepted once more by their communities. At the same time the organization provides a network of lawyers who look after the rights of victims. They conduct investigations and document abuses.

But more has to be done to resolve the crisis. Dr. Mohammed Ahmed urged his listeners that political dialogue must move forward. And it must move forward with engagement from civil society and traditional leaders, some of whom had been prevented from travelling to Libya for the most recent round of talks. Darfurians were not sufficiently consulted in the design of these talks and were not able, for example, to voice their concerns and be heard about the inappropriateness of Libya as a venue.

The protection of civilians remains the most urgent priority. Dr. Mohammed Ahmed called on those in the room to ensure that effective peacekeepers were deployed and that issues of accountability were addressed, in particular by ensuring that indicted criminals were handed over to the ICC.

His words inspired others to focus on what could be done. Senator Kennedy chided listeners, saying that we could surely take more effective measures to address the crisis. He noted that effective peacekeepers needed to be deployed. He called for enforcement of an arms embargo and a no fly zone. He also called for passage of the Sudan Divestment

Act, which provides national support for localized efforts to ensure that Americans are not investing in companies profiting from the destruction. (This measure has since been signed into law.)

Mia Farrow, who reflected on her seven previous trips to Darfur, also called for action. In particular, she stressed the need for a full-time US envoy on Sudan, for full funding of peacekeeping efforts and to put pressure on China to use its influence to move Khartoum.

She ended by reflecting that Darfur required a long-term commitment in order to re-emerge from this conflict. The voice of Dr. Mohammed Ahmed has already inspired some. We just need to harness that inspiration.

ACTION AND ADVOCACY:

World Leaders Are Urged 'Not To Look Away' at the Fourth Global Day for Darfur

For the fourth time in two years a coordinated global effort was made to raise awareness of the dire situation in Darfur, Sudan on September 16, 2007. Thousands of activists and concerned citizens took to the streets and participated in events in more than 30 countries for the fourth Global Day for Darfur. Their message was aimed at world leaders taking part in the UN General Assembly and the message was clear: Don't Look Away Now. Blindfolds were the trademark for this Global Day for Darfur, and an electronic action featured a pungent picture of world leaders wearing blindfolds was sufficient to bring the message across.

A day of action

September 16, 2007, the day chosen for the Global Day, which was just two days ahead of the formal opening of the UN General Assembly, marked the second anniversary of the adoption of the "responsibility to protect," by the Assembly when governments agreed that they had the responsibility to act collectively to stop genocide and mass atrocities. Despite this commitment, the international community has so far failed to stop the atrocities in Darfur. In over 200 cities worldwide, people protested, lobbied, debated, walked in vigils, attended workshops, signed petitions and tuned into radio and television programs to learn more about the violence taking place in Darfur.

Member of the Darfur Consortium (a network of more than 50 Africa-based and Africa-focused NGOs which are committed to working collaboratively on the crisis in Darfur) organized a Ramadan iftar in Egypt, a text message petition and street advertisements in Bahrain, a media forum in Nigeria, a seminar on the responsibility to protect in the Darfur context in South Africa and media outreach in the Gambia. Details of the individual events can be found online at

http://www.darfurconsortium.org/member_events/

World leaders respond

When the UN General Assembly opened it was clear that the message had hit home. The Day for Darfur theme of not looking away was taken on board by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon who, in his opening remarks at the UN General Assembly, said that he would “leave no stone unturned to end the tragedy in Darfur,” and “that the government of Sudan must live up to its pledge to join comprehensive peace talks and implement a ceasefire.”

Ultimately more than 80 world leaders mentioned Darfur in their remarks, underscoring their commitment to resolving the crisis. Though some world leaders shied away from mentioning Darfur in their speeches, various African leaders called strongly for a resolution to the situation in Darfur. Senegalese President Maitre Abdoulaye Wade, for instance, stated that “Resolution 1769 open[ed] new angles for definitely resolving this painful crisis.” Rwandan President Paul Kagame also welcomed the creation of the UN-AU hybrid peace-keeping force, and called for “its speedy deployment.” Vice-President Joseph Nyumah Boakai of Liberia urged all countries that had pledged logistical and other support to “fulfill their promises to ensure the timely deployment of the peace-keeping forces.”

The next Day for Darfur is planned for April 13, 2008 and the planned focus will be on children.

Please do not hesitate to contact Olivia Bueno at olivia.bueno@refugee-rights.org if you are interested in organizing an event or in participating in the development of messaging.

FEATURES AND ANALYSIS:

Thousands of Kenyans Displaced as Election Outrage Unearths Festering Ethnic Tensions

Commonly acknowledged as a pinnacle of African stability and democracy, Kenya has descended into social and political turmoil that has seen the igniting of ethnic tensions, mass displacement and the deaths of hundreds of civilians. Shortly after President Mwai Kibaki was announced winner of the December 27 national election, the nation erupted in violence amidst allegations of electoral misconduct. Opposition leader Raila Odinga refused to accept the results, which have been widely disputed by Kenyans and international observers. Despite various attempts at international mediation, hopes for an expedient resolution have been deferred as negotiations reached a stalemate.

Background

Speculation around electoral fraud first emerged during the tallying of votes. Raila Odinga, popular leader of the opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), whose party had made significant gains in earlier parliamentary elections, was enjoying a

comfortable lead over President Kibaki until the eleventh hour of the tallying process when the count shifted markedly to put Kibaki on top. ODM and independent election observers contested the figures but the government failed to heed their protests. The Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) announced that Kibaki had won the election by a margin of 230,000 votes, and shortly thereafter he was sworn in as President in a hurried private ceremony at the State House. Following these events, ECK Chair Samuel Kivuitu revealed that he was unsure whether Kibaki had won the election and that he had felt pressured to announce the result quickly, despite the need to verify the tally.

Misgivings about the results have also been expressed by the European Union Electoral Mission and other observers. The EU mission asserted that irregularities were present in numerous constituencies. In the district of Molo for example, 25,000 votes were illegitimately attributed to Kibaki. Other anomalous activity included abnormal voter turnout in constituencies which strongly supported either Kibaki or Odinga, as well as lack of access for observers in some tallying stations, particularly in central Kenya where Kibaki is highly favoured.

Election misconduct sparks ethnic clashes

The contentious election brought to the fore longstanding inter-ethnic resentment among many Kenyans and has sparked a wave of violence that has mainly targeted members of Kibaki's tribe, the politically and economically dominant Kikuyu. Violence, looting and attacks on civilians, mainly Kikuyus, have been particularly concentrated in Nairobi, Mombasa, Eldoret and Kisumu. Reports have asserted that at least 600 Kenyans have died in the violence.

Raila Odinga had built his campaign upon a promise to end Kikuyu privilege and ensure socio-economic empowerment of other ethnic groups. Millions of Kenyans thus felt betrayed by the controversial results which suggested perpetuation of the Kikuyu dominance that has characterized the Kenyan political landscape since independence. The response of the Kibaki government, hastily swearing in him in and banning live television and nationwide protest rallies, further fueled the notion that the regime was manipulating results to hold on to power and squeezing the space available for legitimate protest.

While violence seems now to be subsiding in Nairobi and other urban centres, it continues to rage in rural areas of the Rift Valley where ethnic tensions are more acute and where the conflict may prove to be far more protracted. There, clashes have been enacted with machetes, clubs and stones and Kikuyu shops have been looted and torched. Horrific brutality has ensued - at least 30 women and children were burned alive in a Rift Valley church where they sought refuge on New Years Day.

The current conflict is mainly between members of the Kalenjin and Kikuyu tribes and emulates a similar outbreak of violence between these groups in 1992, a previous election year. Conflicts here are rooted in political grievances, mainly over land. These date back to independence when President Jomo Kenyatta, a Kikuyu, redistributed most of the land

acquired from Britons to Kikuyu from other areas, rather than to the impoverished Kalenjin and Masai that had inhabited the region for centuries.

Amidst chaos, nearly 250,000 Kenyans displaced

Mass numbers of Kenyans have been forced to flee their homes in search of safe havens and protection for their families. Hundreds of thousands of Kenyans have been displaced internally—as many as 250,000 according to [the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre](#). Thousands more have fled to neighboring Uganda to escape the violence. Long a sanctuary for approximately 270,000 refugees from East, Central and the Horn of Africa, Kenyans are now themselves becoming the focus of massive relief efforts.

Although the recently displaced are receiving international attention, internal displacement in Kenya is not new. Always a politically sensitive issue, the situation of the displaced has been difficult to monitor, but UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported in May 2006 that up to 431,153 Kenyans were displaced at that time. Some of those have been displaced due to flooding and other natural disasters, but others were displaced as a conflict around the transition to multiparty politics in the early 1990s and ongoing conflicts over local politics and resources.

In addition to the staggering numbers of IDPs, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has reported that approximately 5,400 Kenyans have crossed into Uganda to seek refuge in border towns among three eastern districts: Tororo, Busia and Manafwa. Make-shift reception centres have been established in primary schools and churches to shelter the refugees. Food and drug supplies that have reached refugees are reportedly, however, being quickly depleted. The delivery of food aid to the border towns has been difficult due to fuel scarcity in Uganda, itself an indirect consequence of the violence. Resource scarcity is compounded by the fact that new refugees are arriving daily and it is unclear when the inflow will stop.

Regional implications

While the political crisis in Kenya has given rise to yet another internal humanitarian crisis, it has also hindered other relief operations in the region as food and other aid supplies have been unable to reach beneficiaries in Uganda, southern Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). With Kenya boasting sea ports that serve much of East Africa and the Great Lakes region, considerable economic damage has resulted from the difficulty in moving goods and fuel.

The way forward?

The Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) has appealed to the national authorities to agree to engage in political dialogue with Odinga's ODM under international mediation. It has also called on the leader of the opposition to entreat his supporters to remain calm during the protests and to publicly announce that all individuals responsible for human rights violations will be prosecuted.

KHRC has also urged the international community, and more specifically the African Union, to propose a mediation mechanism for reaching a political solution and to explore the possibility of establishing an international independent commission to investigate on the electoral process and subsequent events.

So far international efforts have failed, however, to produce results. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, for example, has agreed to go to Nairobi to act as mediator between Kibaki and Odinga in negotiating power-sharing terms. Yet, Kibaki's government has rejected the international mediation. Minister John Michuki told reporters, "If Kofi Annan is coming, he is not coming at our invitation." Other luminaries such as Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, Ghanaian President John Kufuor and South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu have also been reported to be planning a mediation role. Kibaki's government maintains that they have won the elections, and therefore there is no warrant for international mediation.

This reluctance to negotiate has diminished hopes for a prompt end to the current stalemate. Conflict thus continues as Kenyans hope for the reforms that will address the grievances over access to social, economic and political rights that have been at the root of the violence—legitimate grievances that have regrettably manifested in reprehensible brutality on all sides.

Repatriating the Kibati Group: Some Return, but Solutions Remain Elusive

Some of the most critical challenges to refugee protection in the Great Lakes region were highlighted in the recent repatriation of Rwandan refugees from Uganda. As a result of the controversial October decision, thousands of refugees who had settled in the Kibati section of the Nyakivale camp in the Isingiro district of Western Uganda were ordered to return to Rwanda after years in Uganda and found themselves yet again perilously on the move.

The repatriation exercise

This repatriation of approximately 3,000 members of the so-called 'Kibati group' began in early October 2007 on the principle that peace has been established in Rwanda and that there were no security threats for returnees. This stance had been affirmed in July when a tri-partite agreement was reached in Kigali by Rwanda, Uganda and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). UNHCR has not been officially active in the repatriation process, however, as most members of the Kibati group had not been legally recognized as refugees. Only about 20 members of the group carried refugee identification papers and were therefore permitted to stay by Ugandan authorities.

The majority of the group had found their way to Kibati after the Tanzanian government issued public statements starting in 2001 indicating that they were no longer welcome in the Tanzanian settlements which had been their homes since fleeing the aftermath of the

1994 Rwandan genocide. Many of the refugees remained unwilling to return to Rwanda. Fearing possible mass expulsion and deportation, many of the refugees slipped across the border to Uganda, seeking a safe haven.

Allegations of forced repatriation

While Rwandan and Ugandan officials assert that the repatriation is a positive step, reports of coercion and forced removal have raised questions concerning the legitimacy of the operation. According to an October 4th article in Uganda's *New Vision*, returnees claim that they were not informed about the removal until police and local defense surrounded the refugees and proceeded to forcibly remove them from the settlements in the night. They stated that although were able to take some belongings, they had to leave livestock and other property behind. In the midst of such reports, government officials continue to insist that the repatriation was voluntary.

The legality of the move though, has been publicly questioned by local media and NGOs, including the [Refugee Law Project \(RLP\)](#) at Makerere University in Kampala. One of the concerns cited was the possibility that individuals who should have been protected by the right of non-refoulement, the international legal principle forbidding the return of those who might face serious harm in their home countries, might have been removed. Among those who had spoken of fears about return were those concerned that they would will be punished under the *gacaca* system for crimes committed in the genocide, whether they had participated or not. With limited independent monitoring of the human rights situation in Rwanda generally, and the operation of the *gacaca* courts specifically, it is difficult to assess the credibility of this threat.

RLP charged that Rwandans with official refugee status may have been unlawfully removed and that many asylum seekers had not been afforded the opportunity to exhaust all legal channels to regularize their stay in Uganda. Although the Ugandan government claimed that all of those who were removed had been screened for refugee status and found not to qualify, RLP expressed concerns that there may have been irregularities in the process of refugee status determination.

These events have also incited apprehensions among Burundians in Kibati, who fear that they too may be expelled.

The way forward: building new identities?

It has been reported that up to one third of those who were repatriated as part of this exercise have already returned to Uganda, indicating that Rwanda's push and pull relationship with this group has not ended.

The Rwandan government has been pushing aggressively to ensure the return of its refugees abroad in an effort to build an image of a strong and ethnically harmonious country emerging from its traumatic past. The reluctance of those still in exile to return, however, shows that many are not assimilating easily into this new image. And that the goal of ethnic harmony remains elusive. Many of those who have returned again to

Uganda are making their fourth and fifth journeys, underscoring the depth of their resistance.

A traditional, refugee rights based approach has been unsuccessful in mediating this tug of war. In this context, a broader focus, based on identity and citizenship rights might provide a useful avenue for pursuing solutions.

For example, research aimed at understanding more fully what the refugees see as obstacles to their reintegration might form the basis for effective reform of the Rwanda laws and policies which are currently impeding return. Exploring alternative, regional understandings of citizenship, for example through the East African Community (to which Rwanda has recently acceded), might on the other hand form the basis of a new set of identities and a new framework within which the rights of this group could be protected.

The International Refugee Rights Initiative is currently beginning to explore these broader issues through our work with the [Citizenship Rights in Africa Initiative \(CRAI\)](#), which seeks to raise awareness about the crisis of citizenship rights across the continent. In addition we are exploring how to build a stronger base of empirical knowledge to tackle these complex policy issues through a partnership with the [Social Science Research Council](#).

LAW AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS:

Europe and Africa Chart the Way Forward

On December 8 and 9, Heads of State and Government from across Africa and Europe gathered in Lisbon to consider the way forward for inter-continental cooperation. The session was aimed at updating and reinvigorating a collaboration initiated at the Europe Africa Summit in Cairo in 2000 and which was hailed as heralding a new era of equality in European-African relations.

While the discussion at the Summit ranged from issues of migration, to trade, to peace and security, advocates on the outside called for greater—and more explicit—attention to be paid to human rights crises on the continent. Activists gathered outside the meeting space in Lisbon protested in particular at the lack of attention to human rights violations in Angola, Zimbabwe and Libya.

A focus on Darfur

Another focus was the crisis in Darfur. Although the Portuguese hosts asserted that no subject was taboo and that everything—including the situation in Darfur—could be discussed as part of the exchange, activists urged that specific time should have been set aside to discuss this major humanitarian and human rights disaster.

In the run up to the conference, the Darfur Consortium (a network of more than 50 Africa-based and Africa-focused NGOs which are committed to working collaboratively on the crisis in Darfur of which IRRI is a member) coordinated a series of actions in collaboration with its Europe based partners aimed at drawing the attention of gathered African and European leaders to the crisis in Darfur. Efforts included a joint NGO letter which ultimately garnered signatures from 44 civil society organizations, petitions of African and European parliamentarians and writers, and a press conference featuring Darfurian colleagues. Darfur/Darfur, an organization which was founded to raise awareness about the crisis through a series of multi-media exhibits, organized an exhibit which featured large, digitally projected photos of the Darfur crisis in the square adjacent to the conference center.

Although the crisis did not figure on the formal agenda, several European leaders, including French President Nicholas Sarkozy and Portuguese Prime Minister Jose Socrates expressed their concerns about Sudan's lack of cooperation with AU and UN efforts to deploy its peacekeeping force in Darfur (UNAMID). European parliamentarians similarly voiced their concerns about the ongoing atrocities. Media coverage of human rights issues generally, and Darfur specifically, figured large throughout the coverage of the Summit.

EU-AU cooperation in managing crises

Inside the conference center the Joint Strategy which was agreed has the potential to significantly impact the way in which Europeans and Africans collaborate to address these crises for the future. For example, the Joint Strategy draws attention to the need to more effectively support African peacekeeping operations. Although initiatives to increase funding have already been put in place, the Joint Strategy recognizes that recent experience has shown that "additional funding is urgently needed, together with sound and accountable management systems" (paragraph 20).

The lack of adequate and timely funding has been a major obstacle to the effective functioning of AMIS, the African Union mission which was responsible for peacekeeping in Darfur until December 31, 2007. The new Joint Strategy commits the European Union (EU) to creating a "predictable and sustainable funding mechanism" (paragraph 20). This new mechanism may help to ensure that future missions do not encounter the same difficulties—and that they are better able to protect vulnerable civilians, including the internally displaced.

Another commitment in the document which may be relevant to the struggle to end the ongoing crisis in Darfur is the commitment to support international justice processes. The Joint Strategy commits African and European governments to fighting impunity in all of its forms and supports the effective functioning of the International Criminal Court (paragraph 30). Unfortunately, despite the stated commitment of many European and African states to the ICC and the Security Council's endorsement of the ICC's investigation in Darfur, the international community has often treated issues of justice as an orphan child in the debates around Darfur. In this context, the explicit recognition of

the ICC is welcome, although the impact that this general commitment will have on ongoing policy debates remains to be seen.

Human Rights in the EU-AU Joint Strategy

More broadly of interest to refugee and other human rights activists are the [Joint Strategy](#)'s commitments to human rights. The Joint Strategy recognizes the promotion of human rights and democratic governance as “a central feature of the Africa-EU dialogue and partnership” (at paragraph 27) and cites a wide range of areas in which further dialogue is needed from children’s rights to fighting corruption.

Building institutions to address human rights issues is another focus of the Strategy. The Joint Strategy calls for increased dialogue between European and African human rights institutions, such as the European Court of Human Rights of the Council of Europe, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and African and European national human rights institutions. The Joint Strategy also welcomes the development of the African Peer Review Mechanism and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. Europe has committed to set up mechanisms to support these initiatives, building on the positive experience of the African Peace Facility (APF), a mechanism that draws funds from European development assistance to support peacekeeping operations. The APF was requested by African states and is led and staffed by Africans. The continued recognition of and practical application of the need for African leadership in the promotion of peace and development on the continent is a positive feature of the Joint Strategy.

Migration and European-African relations

Finally, a major topic of discussion at the Summit which is particularly relevant to refugee activists is the issue of migration. The movement of African migrants to Europe has been a preoccupation for leaders on both sides, as many migrants face dangerous journeys to a Europe which is increasingly seized with debates about how—and whether—to receive them.

The Joint Strategy agreed in Lisbon explicitly acknowledges that migration has occurred throughout human history and that it should be recognized as a positive phenomenon. It recognizes the need to create strategies for harnessing the power of migration—by promoting the use of remittances from migrants abroad for development, for example. It seeks to promote strategies for addressing the root causes of migration, such as underdevelopment and lack of employment, and emphasizes that the human rights of migrants—including refugees and asylum seekers—must be protected (paragraph 68).

The Joint Strategy also lays out plans to assist countries of origin, transit and destination in Africa to better manage migration and to cooperate to control illegal immigration. It identifies several areas where “cooperation needs to be stepped up, including through cooperation on return and readmission of migrants in the context of the Tripoli

Declaration and relevant international agreements, as well as on border control” (at paragraph 70).

While collaboration on managing both the positive and negative aspects of migration is welcome, civil society organizations need to maintain vigilance to ensure that concern about illegal immigration does not operate to undermine the human rights of migrants and the special protections accorded to refugees and asylum seekers. Too often readmission agreements and other tools intended to combat illegal immigration have had the effect of narrowing the scope of protection available to the displaced.

The way forward

In the framework created for continuing the dialogue between Europe and Africa the Joint Strategy provides that bi-annual meetings of the Africa-EU Ministerial Troika are to play a central role in the review and monitoring of the implementation of the Strategy. In addition, major Summits will occur every three years. The EU-AU summit process is an important opportunity for African and European advocates to forge links and build the analysis that will allow them to effectively advocate for summits which promote rather than undermine human rights.

Organizations who are interested in monitoring or engaging with EU-AU consultations can consult the civil society information site at <http://europeafrica.org>, which is maintained by the European Centre for Development Policy Management. The site solicits feedback from African organizations and allows visitors to subscribe to regular update services.

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Refugee Rights News is a publication of the International Refugee Rights Initiative. Dahlia Morched, an intern from Columbia University, contributed to this issue.

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