

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Aperture Foundation and FilmAid International will co-host a reception in New York on June 20, 2008 to commemorate World Refugee Day at the Aperture Gallery 547 West 27<sup>th</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> floor NY NY 10001**

**(New York, NY) June 4, 2008** – On Friday, June 20, 2008, from 5-8 pm in celebration of World Refugee Day, The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Aperture Foundation and FilmAid International will co-host a reception. On this occasion, internationally renowned photographer and former Afghan refugee Zalmai will share his experience as a refugee and present select photographs from his upcoming book *Silent Exodus: Portraits of Iraqi Refugees in Exile* (Aperture/UNHCR, October 2008) at the gallery of the Aperture Foundation.

The event is an open reception and will also include speaker Abraham Awolich, one of the “lost boys of Sudan” (“the lost boys” refers to the more than 27,000 boys who were displaced and/or orphaned during wars in South Sudan in recent decades). He will speak about his powerful personal story as a refugee from South Sudan and his work as an activist for the New Sudan Education Initiative (NESEI). Also included in the evening are media presentations by UNHCR and FilmAid on the global efforts being made to protect and support refugees around the world. Supporters from the art, photography, film, and humanitarian aid fields are expected to gather that evening in celebration of the day.

The United Nations General Assembly designated June 20th as World Refugee Day to recognize and celebrate the contribution of refugees throughout the world. Since then, World Refugee Day has become an annual commemoration marked by a variety of events in over a hundred countries. On World Refugee Day, people remember the millions of refugees who are trying to pick up the pieces of their once-peaceful lives. As different as they are from each other, one thing connects them all: hope for a better future and a chance to rebuild their lives.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports that an estimated 4.4 million Iraqis are currently displaced from their homes as a result of the war. While nearly half were uprooted internally, the remaining citizens escaped to neighboring countries. Today, the situation of most refugees remains dire; months and years into forced flight, many are running out of money, food and the goodwill of their hosts. In *Silent Exodus*, photographer Zalmai chronicles the plight of Iraqi refugees in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Over the course of several trips in 2007, made with the support of Human Rights Watch, he interviewed them, collected their individual stories, and photographed them in their homes, where many remain in uncertainty. Although running out of options for survival abroad, they are still afraid to return to Iraq, given the instability and violence that lingers there.

This event at the Aperture Foundation will be among the key events to raise awareness on refugee issues and celebrate the indomitable spirit and courage of the world's refugees. *Silent Exodus* will be published by Aperture this fall.

### **About the Photographer**

Zalmai was born in Kabul in 1964. He studied photography at the School of Creative Photography in Lausanne, and at the Center for Professional Education in Photography, Yverdon. He has worked as a freelance photographer for various publications and organizations including *The New York Times Magazine*, *D-Repubblica*, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and *Le Temps*. He has traveled widely, covering stories on topics such as Tibetan and Sudanese refugees, the 40th anniversary of the Cuban revolution, and the plight of Central Africa's Pygmies whose land is being destroyed through deforestation. His work has appeared in numerous group and solo shows, including an exhibition on victims of anti-personnel mines produced by the ICRC in twelve European cities. He has won several awards, among them the prestigious World Press Joop Swoop Master Class award (1997). He divides his time between Geneva and New York and returns to Afghanistan as often as possible to continue his work of documenting a society undergoing reconstruction.

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### **About UNHCR**

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established on December 14, 1950, by the United Nations General Assembly. The agency is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and strive to assist in finding solutions to refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally, or to resettle in a third country. In more than five decades the agency has helped an estimated 50 million people restart their lives. Today, a staff of around 5,000 people in more than 120 countries continues to help some 20 million persons. [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

UNHCR New York: 220 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, Suite 3000, NY NY 10017

### **About Aperture Foundation**

Aperture is a nonprofit foundation dedicated to advancing photography as a unique form of artistic expression. This purpose includes illuminating social, cultural and environmental issues through photography. Aperture strives to enhance awareness and understanding of the human condition and its potentials. Founded in 1952 by six gifted individuals: photographers Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange, Barbara Morgan, and Minor White; historian Beaumont Newhall; and writer/curator Nancy Newhall, among others, these visionary artists created a new periodical, *Aperture* magazine, to serve photographers and photography enthusiasts worldwide. As the medium flourished, so too did Aperture, expanding to include the publication of books; limited-edition photographs; educational programming; and traveling exhibitions. [www.aperture.org](http://www.aperture.org)

Aperture Gallery: 547 West 27<sup>th</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> floor NY NY 10001

### **About FilmAid International**

FilmAid International is a nonprofit 501(C3) humanitarian aid organization that uses the power of film to educate, entertain and inspire refugees uprooted by war or violent conflict throughout the world. Through strategic use of film and video, FilmAid communicates life-saving information to refugee audiences on critical social and health issues such as HIV/AIDS and malaria, conflict resolution, sexual and gender based violence, human rights and repatriation. By creating a cinematic event that crosses cultural, literacy, gender and age barriers, FilmAid is able to reach out to every member of the refugee community, resulting in messaging that has reached over 30,000 refugees in a single night. By conveying educational messages in an entertaining format, FilmAid also aims to engage the minds and imaginations of those who have suffered the effects of war and poverty, stimulating physical well-being and alleviating psychological trauma. [www.filmAid.org](http://www.filmAid.org)