

Washington, DC -- U.S. Representative Michael A. Arcuri (D-Utica) spoke to Utica-area residents today about his recent Congressional delegation mission to Africa, including visits to Chad, Ethiopia and Kenya, where he met with high-ranking military officials and humanitarian aid organizations.

“During my visits to Chad, Ethiopia and Kenya, I learned first-hand the devastating impact of rebel groups, scarce resources, and regional instability on the daily lives of people in that part of the world,” **said Arcuri**.

Before traveling to Africa, Arcuri met with leaders at the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees to learn about the issues facing the local refugee population and become better informed for the mission.

“The Mohawk Valley is home to thousands of refugees, many of them from conflict-torn Eastern Africa. This trip allowed me to better understand the instability and violence our new neighbors faced before coming to America,” Arcuri said. “Although I will never fully know the hardships, I have a far better understanding of why so many people travel halfway around the globe to join our community and how we can help them fully integrate into our area.”

“We were pleased to be a resource to the Congressman in his preparations for his trip to East Africa,” **said Peter Vogelaar, Executive Director of the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees**. “We shared with him the political, economic and cultural dimensions we have learned about the region and some of the wonderful experiences we have had working with people from East Africa. We look forward to working with Congressman Arcuri in the months and years to come welcoming our new neighbors, refugees and immigrants and continuing to create a home we at the center call ‘Many Cultures, One Community’.”

While abroad, Arcuri also met with NATO commanders and top military and strategic officials in each country to learn what is being done to combat terrorism and extremist cells that threaten American security.

“What happens in Africa really does impact American safety,” **said Arcuri**. “In many African countries there are wide areas of ‘ungovernable spaces’ where rebel groups and terrorist cells are able to form strongholds – threatening stability in the region and security around the world.”

“Our role in Africa is to remove the conditions under which terrorism might grow through assistance and cooperation. By working with African governments, American military and strategic forces can stamp out groups like Al Qaeda and make cities and towns in Upstate New York, and around the country, safer.”

Arcuri’s Itinerary in Africa Included:

- Tour of local village and American Navy Seal training area for Chadian forces, Chad;
- Meetings with U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia Donald Yamamoto, U.S. Ambassador to the African Union Cindy L. Courville, and Ethiopian Minister of National Defense Kuma Demeksa;
- Tour and briefing at the Centre For Peace and Stability, Kenya;
- NATO and AFRICOM Briefings.

Arcuri spoke today at the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees in Utica, NY.

In the past 25 years the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees (MVRRCR), in collaboration with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration at the Department of State, has resettled over 12,000 refugees from more than 31 different nationalities into a city of 60,000 – including over 500 refugees from African countries. This phenomenon has attracted the attention of national and international media, and is the inspiration for many communities and refugees around the world.

In addition to programs for refugees, MVRRCR is recognized for its professional Interpretation and Translation and Cultural Competence Trainings for area hospitals, businesses, legal and social service providers and others.

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