



Statement - Material Support Legislation Refugee Council, USA February 6, 2008

I would like to extend my deep appreciation to each of you here today for the important work you have accomplished on behalf of refugees around the world, particularly those who have lived in limbo due to the definitions of material support and terrorism in our laws.

On a daily basis, I receive reports in my office about the atrocities suffered by displaced persons, whether IDPs or refugees, in regions of conflict – these stories are heartbreaking. Tragically, the only reason those members of the ethnic and other groups are prevented from entering our country is overly broad definitions in our law, definitions that do not even make exceptions for individuals forced to provide support under duress or coercion. The senseless depicting of refugees as “terrorists” over the past few years has been deeply disturbing, but I hope that the new law will now correct those problems.

It is vital that our nation find a balance, and I hope we have in this new law, so that we protect our national security while maintaining our openness toward refugees. The inscription on the Statue of Liberty says, ‘Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free...’ It is my sincere hope that refugees who should have been resettled here from groups like the Hmong, Montagnards, Karen, Arakan, Alzados, Mustangs, and others, will now be promptly resettled so that they can live in safety.

It still astounds me that a nation like ours has barred people who are legitimately defending themselves against ruthless dictators. The ethnic people of Burma are engaged in defending themselves from the attacks of a brutal military dictatorship intent on destroying many of them. In fact, the desire of the junta, composed of members of the Burman ethnicity, is to ensure that it remains the “master race,” or *maha bama*. In 1988, the regime issued a blood assimilation order which stated, “With a view to attain success in accordance with our basic aspiration, which holds that our one race, the Burmans alone must inherit prosperity with an achievement of a long standing dominion. The easiest way to realize our above aim, we, the superior sons of the mainland of Burma are to employ the strategy of ‘Blood Assimilation’ against the female members of other non-Burman ethnic races. Our objective is to take marital possession of their women.” Soldiers are instructed to dilute the bloodlines of the ethnic minorities in order to “purify” them and make them more Burman. While some might dispute the use of the term genocide in relation to this situation, it is clearly, *at the very least*, ethnic cleansing. The ethnic peoples of Burma have asked for and deserve our help, including resettlement in the U.S., should they seek it.

It is vital that as the Congress and the Administration continue to consider legislation to protect our nation and work against terrorists, we also strongly ensure that we do not hurt, but we actually help, those who need our assistance.

Once again, I would like to thank each of you here today who has worked courageously and tirelessly on behalf of refugees around the world. Today is a celebration of each of you and a celebration that we can continue to assist refugees and displaced persons with honor and dignity in the way that they deserve.