

Public Hearing on FY 2006 Refugee Admissions Program  
Wednesday, June 28, 2006  
Refugee Processing Center □ Arlington, Virginia

Remarks by  
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I wanted to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share with you KHRW's recommendations for the 2007 Refugee Admissions Program.

We are a Mutual Assistance Association (MAA) or a Community-Based Organization (CBO) registered with USAID as a Private Voluntary Organization (PVO). We are also an international non-governmental organization registered in Iraq. KHRW represents a network of 7 community-based organizations (CBOs) located around the United States, in addition to our 4 community-based organizations/NGOs in Iraq. Within Iraq, we are an implementing partner of UNHCR as we provide returning refugees and IDPs with legal aide services and assistance regarding contentious property disputes. We work to resettle refugees, assist them to achieve self-sufficiency and integrate or reintegrate them as we provide information, training and technical support to our CBOs. We serve refugees from every part of the globe, but focus primarily on the Middle Eastern refugee community from Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, Turkey, and Iraq. KHRW also works closely with esteemed colleagues as a member of the Refugee Council USA.

Some of the largest refugee-producing countries in the world are in the Middle East, originating from Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, and Iraq. According to UNHCR, Afghanistan continues to be by far the largest country of origin of refugees, constituting nearly 23 percent of the global refugee population. There are still insurgencies and violent civil unrest in Iraq that create new waves of refugees. These refugees flee the civil and human rights abuses, persecution, and repression throughout the Middle East, despite the Coalition's presence there. In its annual World Refugee Survey, the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), revealed the number of refugees worldwide has increased to 12 million, largely due to the instability in Iraq. The deteriorating situation in Iraq has led to the refugee outflow some predicted at the onset of the war. This has only recently materialized and over 40% of the nation's professionals have fled. Syria now hosts at least 47 UNCR registered cases of Iranian Ahwazi Arabs and 351,000 Iraqi refugees. Syria also has the largest population of Iraqi Shi'a Muslims outside Iraq. Jordan hosts 450,000 Iraqi refugees, many of whom are Christian (Chaldo-Assyrians) minorities. Neither Jordan nor Syria, recognize the United Nation's call for temporary protection and both refuse entry to many new arrivals.

Furthermore, we still have countries in the Middle East that commit refoulement. One example of this is the case regarding Mr. Said Saki the Iranian Ahwazi Arab from Syria to Iran, (registered and approved case with UNHCR in Syria). This refoulement act is in direct contravention of the Geneva 1951 Refugee Convention. An important note is that Syria, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Turkey (with geographical limitation barring Iranians from leaving Turkey) and other middle eastern countries are not signatories to this Convention. We urge for an increased admission of Middle Eastern refugees to the United States at yearly levels that equitably reflect

the need that Middle Eastern refugees have for third-country resettlement. Most recently, refugees such as those who resided for many years in the Makhmour camp still live in deplorable conditions and surrounded by refuse with limited access to potable water, income generation opportunities, and limited or no electricity. In recent months some of the former Al Tash camp refugees have been relocated to Sulaimanya and the Kawa Districts. They still live in tents awaiting housing structures to be complete and others live in deplorable conditions with limited access to potable water, income generation opportunities, health services, education opportunities, schools for their children, and limited or no electricity. Special consideration should be given to women and children as it is especially difficult for them because their rights often become marginalized.

We all acknowledge that repatriation is the best and most durable solution for refugee populations. For refugees that spend all or most of their lives in refugee camps or urban ghettos, and are not repatriated in a timely manner, we encourage a mix of social and economic integration within their countries of first asylum. On the other hand, for refugees for whom this is not possible, such as the case of Iranian nationals, Kurds, Ahwazi Arabs, living in Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan. In cases such as these, resettlement to other countries is the most viable solution. If regional resettlement cannot occur, countries such as the United States, a leading refugee host country, could serve as a model that complies with international law and ensures that the principle of non-refoulement is recognized. Therefore, the United States must take a leadership role in developing strategies for refugee resettlement in nearby stable regions and restore refugee processing in the required areas such as Turkey. For the approximately 1,200 Iranian refugees who entered Turkey after having resided for varying periods in Iraq, a safe return to Iraq or Iran their country of origin is not possible. While the Turkish government has accorded these refugees temporary immigration status, they do not give the group access to resettlement from Turkey or be allowed to leave (since some cases have been approved for resettlement to third countries of resettlement) nor is local integration possible in Turkey since non of these refugees due to the geographical limitation signed with UNHCR in Turkey can they work legally,

KHRW's testimony will be incomplete if I do not echo RCUSA's testimony confronting the issue of material support. This legislation potentially jeopardizes the opportunity for refugees worldwide to be resettled in the United States and may condemn thousands to a future of prolonged pain and suffering. It also undermines the principals of the U.S. refugee admissions program. If not resolved, it could well nullify the work of the U.S. Government and its private partners in rebuilding the program after the dramatic decline in refugee admissions following the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001.

We support whatever steps are necessary to enhance the security and protection of this great country. At the same time, we hope the flow of the admissions pipeline will soon be restored and that refugee admission ceilings and arrivals will continue to reflect the great need that Middle Eastern refugees have. We would like to see an increase in the 2007 admissions ceiling for Middle Eastern refugees and recommend that the number be set between 15,000 and 20,000. According to RCUSA, as of March 2006, of the proposed 5,000 refugees to be admitted from the Middle East only 232 have been admitted.

In conclusion, please allow me to restate my appreciation for BPRM's efforts in recent years to raise the number of Middle Eastern refugee admissions, and to urge increased efforts to ensure that the beacon of light still leads those in need to safety for the thousands of Middle Eastern refugees who desire to become contributing members of American society.