

**Comments for the June 28 Public Meeting on US Refugee Admissions.**

**Submitted by Mitzi Schroeder, JRS/USA on behalf of the RCUSA members of the Near East South Asia Working Group**

The volatile security situation in Iraq continues to create a movement of refugees out of that country and into neighboring countries where their welcome is uncertain and protection precarious. Of particular concern are members of religious minorities, who have family ties to US citizens and legal residents, and other individuals whose flight has been caused by persecution growing from their real or imputed association with the United States or US related policies and organizations. As detailed in our recent letter to you, we urge the department to develop priority two categories for the resettlement of these groups.

We also wish to note that the State Department's program announcement of April 2005 relating to the US government's policy on Iraqi refugees allows for in-country processing of Iraqi refugees. We urge that Iraqis in immediate danger within Iraq, and refugees of other nationalities "caught in the crossfire" of the present civil unrest be processed for resettlement in-country. The State Department and the Department of Homeland Security should work together to develop a capacity to move such cases on an expedited basis. If security concerns make face to face interviews of these individuals problematic, innovative approaches such as the use of video conferencing should be considered to perform the interviews.

Also of increased concern is the situation of Iranian refugees. We would like to note our continued support of the refugee resettlement program for Iranian religious minorities in Vienna. At a time when Iranian persecution of Christians, Jews, Baha'i, Mandaeans, and Zoroastrians in Iran has intensified, this program provides as a vital lifeline for populations in increasing peril.

We also support the continuation of the successful "fast track" processing procedure for Baha'i refugees in Turkey. The increasing crack down on this group in Iran may also lead to greatly increased numbers entering Turkey in the coming year.

The situation of the Iranian Kurdish refugees in Turkey also requires US attention. Neither local integration nor repatriation appears to be a viable option for this population, numbering approximately 1,200 persons. We urge the US to work with UNHCR and other resettlement countries toward a solution for this population.

We note the continuing needs of the large Somali refugee population in Yemen. We urge the US, in cooperation with UNHCR to identify and move the remaining Women at Risk and other vulnerable individuals subsisting in very difficult conditions in that country. In addition, we urge resettlement of the 800-1000 Oromo refugees located in Kharaz camp.

We would like to call attention to the continued needs of Sudanese refugees in north Africa, and in Cairo in particular. The slow progress toward repatriation of refugees to Southern Sudan, caused by the lack of basic infrastructure, insufficient funding for repatriation and reconstruction, and the continued insecurity of areas of planned return mean that many vulnerable refugees will

have no possibility of return home in the foreseeable future. We were pleased recently to learn that the US is entertaining NGO referrals of Sudanese in Cairo. We urge that the US also work closely with UNHCR so that vulnerable Sudanese in Cairo and elsewhere can continue to receive resettlement consideration.

Finally, we would like to express our continued hope for durable solutions for the resettlement of the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. In light of the recent change of government in Nepal, we urge the US government to exert increased diplomatic pressure to find durable solutions, including a generous resettlement program, for this group.