

**Prepared for the Public Meeting on the President's FY 2007 Refugee Admissions  
June 28, 2006**

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**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR:**

**Religious Minorities**

Jubilee Campaign USA is pleased to have the opportunity to present a statement for the FY 2007 Refugee Admissions Program. Jubilee Campaign USA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit agency whose primary mission is to promote human rights and religious liberty in the international community. We count it a privilege to provide the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration with information on the plight of religious minorities and North Korean refugees as they relate to admissions for FY 2007.

**Iraq (Mandaeans and Chaldo-Assyrians)**

The Iraqi situation has changed for many religious and ethnic minorities since regime change. Many ethnic and religious minorities, who were safe under Saddam, are now persecuted by numerous Islamic insurgent groups because of the lack of security, and these extremists are performing numerous atrocities. The insurgents have committed repeated cases of violent killings, kidnappings and bombings. Among the religious minorities who endure these atrocities are the Chaldo-Assyrians and Mandaeans.

The Chaldo-Assyrians are a group dating to antiquity that has been Christian since the first century. This Christian minority in Iraq makes up less than approximately 3% of the population.<sup>1</sup> Under the Saddam regime, this group had relative security. But now with the rise of Islamic insurgents, this group has been displaced and targeted for persecution. Christians who fled Iraq are unable to go back to their ancestral villages in Northern Iraq, while Kurdish militia claim these villages now belong to them.<sup>2</sup>

The Mandaeans have also experienced persecution by Islamic insurgents. An ancient group dating back to the time of John the Baptist, the Mandaeans are culturally distinct from other Iraqis; their religious practices and beliefs make them distinct.<sup>3</sup> This allows immediate recognition and persecution by insurgents. In addition, they are not considered "People of the

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Kassab, Chaldean Federation of America, *Annual Report* (2006).

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> Mandaean Society of America, *Annual Report* (2006).

Book” and therefore are considered *infidels*. This creates a greater risk of persecution for the Mandaean who have not fought against the insurgents because they are pacifists by code and refuse to resort to violence. Most Madaeans are professionals and craftsmen, often goldsmiths by trade.<sup>4</sup> Many Iranian Madaeans have been resettled here in the United States; we are encouraged by this and thank the US for processing these cases. Many of these resettled Iranian Madaeans have gone on to successful careers in a wide variety of professions, and there are no documented cases of their receiving aid from the government.<sup>5</sup> We thank the US for its recognition of particular cases of the Iranian Madaean; however, Iraqi Madaeans have not been as fortunate. Although they are similar to their Iranian co-religionist in every respect, Iraq Madaeans have not been recognized.

The persecution of Iraqi Madaean and Iraqi Christian families has resulted in an estimated 50,000 Christian and 1,400 Madaean families seeking refuge during the last three years.<sup>6</sup> Host countries for these populations include: Syria (30,000), Jordan (25,000), Lebanon (2,500) and Turkey (1,000), and lesser numbers have relocated to Western Europe and elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> According to the Madaean Society of America, “[m]any of these refugees are single or widowed mothers with children who are unable to go back to Iraq and want to be settled in the United States in order to be re-united with their families, relatives or community members.”<sup>8</sup> We ask the US to consider the processing of these Iraqis in accord with P2 status designation because of their shared protection needs and their unique vulnerabilities or a P3 status as an extended family reunification program.

### **Eritrean Christians**

Eritrea’s population is composed of nine ethnic groups, mostly divided equally between Christian and Muslim.<sup>9</sup> Although the Constitution of Eritrea promulgates a right to religious freedom and assembly, over the past few years Eritrea has become one of the world’s leading religious persecutors. Prior to December, there were “at least 1,750 Eritrean Christians were confirmed to be jailed in police stations, military training camps and prisons in twelve locations across the East African nation.”<sup>10</sup> All Christian worship or Bible study is forbidden by the repressive regime unless conducted according to the officially recognized Orthodox, Catholic or Lutheran traditions.<sup>11</sup> Even members of each of these groups have suffered religious-based persecution in the past year. The Eritrean government denies that such persecution takes place and rebuts these accusations by claiming these groups have resisted mandatory military service.<sup>12</sup> We commend the US for perceiving and classifying Eritrea as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) in 2004 and 2005.

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<sup>4</sup> Id.

<sup>5</sup> Id.

<sup>6</sup> Id.

<sup>7</sup> Id.

<sup>8</sup> Id.

<sup>9</sup> Embassy of Eritrea, *Eritrea: Exemplary Model of Religious Harmony*, Press Release (May 9, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Compass, *Government Rounds up Leaders from Five Churches: Asmara Security Police Arrest 40 Protestant Christians in Past Two Weeks*, Compass Direct: Global News from the Frontlines (Jan. 4, 2006), at <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/newslongen.php?idelement=4144&id=17&critere=&countryname=&rowcur=25>.

<sup>11</sup> Id.

<sup>12</sup> Roundtable Discussion with the Ambassador of Eritrea (May 9, 2006).

According to UNHCR's *2005 Global Relief Trends*, there were 143,594 Eritrean refugees at the end of 2005. Eritreans have sought refuge in many countries including Libya, Ethiopia, and Somalia. In light of the aforementioned persecution and the government's denials, we urge the US along with UNHCR to seek an alternative durable resettlement solution other than repatriation. We urge the US to consider resettlement assistance, and UNHCR speedily to recommend these cases to the US.

### **Burmese Christians in light of Material Support**

Burma is run by a military junta known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). The SPDC has subjected the people of Burma to numerous atrocities and much persecution. As recently as April 2006, the SPDC had stationed battalions in districts throughout the Karen and Karenni States, displacing villagers destroying food supplies and burning homes, according to the Karen Human Rights Group.<sup>13</sup>

One of the ethnic national groups under persecution is the Karen. An indigenous people, there are about 14 million Karen living in Burma.<sup>14</sup> The three primary religions practiced within the Karen community are Animism, Buddhism and Christianity.<sup>15</sup> Traditionally peaceful farmers,<sup>16</sup> after enduring the atrocious acts of the government, the Karen formed the Karen National Union (KNU) in an effort to thwart the repressive regime.<sup>17</sup> The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) is an extension of that effort.<sup>18</sup>

Another group under the oppression of the Burmese military junta is the Karenni. In 1875, the British declared that the Karenni State was "under the control of neither the British nor [the] Burmans."<sup>19</sup> After Burma gained its independence in 1948, there was much dispute as to the denomination of borders and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), formed in 1957 to "re-establish the right of independence,"<sup>20</sup> has been fighting for the State's democratization ever since.<sup>21</sup> The feuding between these neighbors has resulted in an almost fifty year war. The SPDC's policy of targeting civilians and its continued presence in the Karenni State has led many Karenni, including a large population of Christians, to seek refuge in Thailand.

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<sup>13</sup> Karen Human Rights Group, *An Independent Report by the Karen Human Rights Group KHRG #2006-B6*, Karen Human Rights Group News Bulletin (June 1, 2006), at <http://www.khrg.org/khrg2006/khrg06b6.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Karen Website, *Karens Around the World Unite*, at [www.karen.org](http://www.karen.org) (last visited June 21, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> Karen Human Rights Group, *Documenting the Voices of Villagers in Rural Burma*, at [http://www.khrg.org/background\\_on\\_burma.html](http://www.khrg.org/background_on_burma.html) (June 21, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, *Karenni State*, <http://www.unpo.org/member.php?arg=29>, (last visited June 21, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Vicky Bamforth et al., *Conflict and Displacement in Karenni: the Need for Considered Responses*, 34 (Burma Ethnic Research Group May 2000), [http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/Considered\\_responses-2.pdf](http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/Considered_responses-2.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

The Chin, another group within Burma, have been persecuted by the SPDC. Estimated at about one million people, the Chin ethnic group is over 80% Christian.<sup>22</sup> The SPDC prohibits the Chin from printing Bibles.<sup>23</sup> In some instances the military junta has destroyed crosses and religious symbols and replaced them with Buddhist pagodas and statues of monks.<sup>24</sup>

Many of the religious minorities do not fight for the KNLA or the KA. Despite this fact, simply by providing a blanket to those who would help rescue their homes, these religious minorities are considered to be guilty of aiding and assisting terrorists and thus become ineligible for refugee status, according to the broad language of the material support bar. When the SPDC, a repressive regime the State Department has recognized as performing various acts of human rights violations, burns the homes and destroys the food of these religious minorities, it is a misidentification to deem these minorities as terrorist aids when they simply offer assistance to those who would help. We thank the US for the recognition of the nature of this problematic misclassification and request renewed efforts that we are confident will result in a solution to this unintentional effect, thereby allowing the US to recognize numerous refugees.

The Thailand Burma Border Consortium's current estimate of the refugee population in the nine border camps at the end of May 2006 was 147,942. According to figures from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 838 Burmese refugees have departed for resettlement so far this year. Sixty-four of these have gone to the US; the rest have gone to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Finland, Sweden, Norway and the UK. As we seek a solution to the concerns raised by the Material Support bar, we urge recognition of these as refugees through additional exercise of group designation within the waiver provision of the legislation.

As has been pointed out by the Refugee Council USA statement today, the waiver authority is so arduous to apply that in the past four years it has only been implemented in one refugee camp, the Tham Hin camp in Thailand. We applaud the announcement by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice last month and the hard work of PRM to accomplish this waiver with colleagues in the inter-agency process, but even this waiver created an additional hurdle for refugees to overcome a "membership" issue within their status determinations. Until a legislative fix can be accomplished, we encourage PRM to continue to identify additional groups eligible for group waivers and work with their inter-agency colleagues to devise the waiver criteria for the eligible refugee groups.

### **Christian Hmong and Montagnards of Vietnam**

The Christian Montagnards and Hmong in Vietnam are continual targets of persecution. According to the law, "only those Hmong [and Montagnards] who converted before the end of

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<sup>22</sup> Salai Za Uk Ling & Salai Bawi Lian Mang, *Religious Persecution: A Campaign of Ethnocide Against Chin Christians in Burma*, Chin Human Rights Organization (Feb. 2004), [http://www.chro.org/CHRO\\_images/ReligiousPersecution.pdf](http://www.chro.org/CHRO_images/ReligiousPersecution.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Eunice K. Y. Or, *Chin Launch Campaign against Burmese Christian Persecution*, Christianity Today (January 28, 2005), <http://www.christiantoday.com/news/missions/chin.launch.campaign.against.burmese.christian.persecution/237.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> Id.

French rule in 1954 are officially recognized as Christians.”<sup>25</sup> Subsequent converts are “considered subversives,”<sup>26</sup> and as such are subjected to many abuses. Government officials perform many acts to get the Christians to recant their faith. The officials’ efforts may include imprisonment and beatings while these prisoners are detained.<sup>27</sup> Christians have been detained for up to seventeen years for their religious beliefs.<sup>28</sup> Some Christians were even injected with drugs to force renunciation.<sup>29</sup> In the past, government authorities have targeted Christian clerics who have much influence in their communities.<sup>30</sup>

Jubilee raises the cases of these Christian groups to urge the US to continue its awareness of the plight of persecuted religious minorities in Vietnam, and to address the continued need for resettlement due to oppressive conditions. Some of the group of Montagnards denied refugee status determination by the UNHCR last year and repatriated to Vietnam reported subsequent persecution and arrests. We urge the US to seek re-adjudication of these cases.

### **Falun Gong in China**

Falun Gong, also known as the Falun Dafa movement, originates from the Buddha School of the *qigong*.<sup>31</sup> Falun Gong espouses the principles of truthfulness, compassion and forbearance,<sup>32</sup> yet the Chinese government has declared “[t]he Communist Party must vanquish Falun Gong.”<sup>33</sup> In response to China’s renewed efforts to crackdown on spiritual movements, the followers of Falun Gong assembled in a peaceful protest of over 10,000 people on April 25, 1999.<sup>34</sup> Subsequently, the practitioners of Falun Gong have been oppressed and beaten for their practices.

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<sup>25</sup> Chuck Colson, *Letting Our Friends Down*, Free Republic (April 19, 2005), at <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1406483/posts>.

<sup>26</sup> Id.

<sup>27</sup> Human Rights Watch, *No Sanctuary Ongoing Threats to Indigenous Montagnards in Vietnam’s Central Highland*, 18 Human Rights Watch 4c, 5 (June 2006), [http://hrw.org/reports/2006/vietnam0606/Vietnam\\_0606web.pdf](http://hrw.org/reports/2006/vietnam0606/Vietnam_0606web.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Id. at 4.

<sup>29</sup> Chuck Colson, *Letting Our Friends Down*, Free Republic (April 19, 2005), at <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1406483/posts>.

<sup>30</sup> Human Rights Watch, *No Sanctuary Ongoing Threats to Indigenous Montagnards in Vietnam’s Central Highland*, 18 Human Rights Watch 4c, 16 (June 2006), [http://hrw.org/reports/2006/vietnam0606/Vietnam\\_0606web.pdf](http://hrw.org/reports/2006/vietnam0606/Vietnam_0606web.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> Li Hongzhi, *FALUN GONG* 1 (4th trans. ed., April 2001), [http://www.falundafa.org/book/eng/flg\\_1.htm#1](http://www.falundafa.org/book/eng/flg_1.htm#1).

<sup>31</sup> Falun Dafa, *Falun Dafa: A Brief Introduction*, at <http://www.falundafa.org/eng/overview.htm> (last visited June 21, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Compassion, *What is the Persecution of Falun Gong? Genocide.*, Compassion: A Journal of Falun Dafa Around the World, Vol. V (Spring 2004) (quoting Jiang Zemmin, excerpt from an April 25, 1999 letter to senior Communist Party officials), at <http://www.faluninfo.net/Compassion5/persecution.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> Dr. Michael Pearson-Smith, *Jiang’s Personal Campaign: One Man’s Decision to “Eradicate” the Traditional Chinese Belief of 100 Million People*, Compassion: A Journal of Falun Dafa Around the World, Vol. V (Spring 2004), at <http://www.faluninfo.net/Compassion5/personal.htm>.

Currently, the Association for Asian Research is advocating on behalf of fifty Falun Gong refugees. Many more are afraid to come forward or contact others because of the persecution they would endure. The current status of Falun Gong refugees is as follows: Norway has resettled eight refugees this year; New Zealand has resettled two and is working on five more; and the US resettled one practitioner in 2005 (Li Weixun), one this year (Mu Xiangjie) and is working on three more for this year. Four practitioners are in need of quick resettlement because their high profiles endanger them. The US has been petitioned for their resettlement. The House International Relations Committee has written a letter to UNHCR requesting two of the refugees, currently in Thailand, to be resettled in the US. We encourage the US and UNHCR to act quickly to resettle these cases.

### **Uyghurs in China**

The Uyghurs are located in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of northwestern China, which is still referred by the Uyghurs as East Turkistan.<sup>35</sup> This area was annexed by the Chinese in 1911.<sup>36</sup> The Uyghurs have fought numerous times to regain their sovereignty and have always considered themselves Turks from central Asia.<sup>37</sup> They have sought to remain culturally distinct from the Chinese in the face of much repression and subjugation. The “Uyghurs embraced Islam in A.D. 934 during the Karahanid Kingdom.”<sup>38</sup> Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Chinese government has considered the Uyghurs to be Separatists equivalent with Islamic terrorists and has sought to subjugate this minority population.<sup>39</sup> The many atrocities the Muslim Uyghurs have endured include abuse, kidnapping, torture and arbitrary imprisonment.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the Chinese have repeatedly closed mosques and disallowed the use of the Uyghur language in universities.<sup>41</sup> Most of these atrocities occur under the guise of the government’s crack down on Separatism. The Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) reported that one such abusive case occurred earlier this month, when a 31-year-old trader was suspended by his hands for three days without food and beaten in the torso.

We commend the US for its release of the five Uyghurs in the Guantanamo Bay detention facility and its recognition that these Uyghurs are “No Longer Enemy Combatants” (NLEC). We appreciate the US’s further assistance in contributing to their safe resettlement in Albania. On the heel of this event, we admonish the Chinese government to afford the same treatment to the Uyghur people in northwestern China. To this end, we request that the US continue its efforts to allow this people group access to refugee status determinations.

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<sup>35</sup> Uyghur American Association, *About Uyghurs: An Introduction to the Uyghurs and their Motherland, East Turkistan*, at <http://www.uyghuramerican.org/categories/About-Uyghurs/> (last visited June 21, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Id.

<sup>37</sup> Id.

<sup>38</sup> Id.

<sup>39</sup> Id.

<sup>40</sup> Id.

<sup>41</sup> Id.

## **North Korean Refugees**

Jubilee Campaign commends and applauds the efforts of the Members of Congress and colleagues in the non-government community who have joined together to succeed in processing the first group of six North Korean refugees to be resettled in the United States. It is the evidence of a proactive response to the North Korean human rights crisis and the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004. We trust that this first group is only the beginning of North Korean refugees resettled to the United States. Our organization along with our colleagues hope for continued growth in granting North Koreans refuge in the United States.

Under a dictatorship regime controlled by one man Jong Il Kim, millions of North Koreans have continued to suffer numerous and serious human rights abuses. According to the 2005 North Korea Country Report on Human Rights Practices released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, violations of human rights include the lack of an independent judiciary and fair trials; regulations in speech, opinion, thought, press, information, and assembly; and denial of freedom of religion, workers rights and movement. In addition, an estimate of 150,000 to 200,000 persons are believed to be held in twelve political prisons and labor camps, where they endure systematic torture, extrajudicial killings, disappearances, arbitrary imprisonment, brutal forced labor, forced abortions and infanticide.

Although the regime does not allow legal emigration and considers leaving the country as an act of treason, according to US Committee for Refugees (USCR) as many as 200,000 to 300,000 North Koreans crossed the border into China to escape starvation and persecution since the 1990s. Under the United Nations Refugee Treaty, these North Koreans in China qualify as refugees, that is, persons within a country not their own that have a legitimate fear of persecution from the government if they return to their home country. If repatriated back to North Korea, they face severe punishment such as detention, forced labor, torture and sometimes execution if they had met with non-Chinese foreigners or Christians.

Despite knowledge of the conditions in North Korea for those repatriated, China continues aggressively to exert efforts to find and repatriate North Koreans in violation of international laws. The Chinese government does not accord North Koreans official refugee status and instead considers them as illegal economic migrants. The Chinese government continues to refuse to allow officers of UNHCR to conduct interview with the North Koreans to determine their status. USCR's 2006 World Survey estimated that during 2005, China has forcibly repatriated 5,000 North Koreans, deporting as many as 100 a week during crackdowns causing a significant decrease in number of North Koreans fleeing into China. Those who are not caught by North Korean or Chinese authorities very often flee from China to neighboring countries.

When North Korean women cross the North Korean-Chinese border, they are at a high risk of being kidnapped and sexually exploited through forced marriages or trafficked into the sex industry in China. Although it is difficult to know the exact figures, Life Funds for North Korean Refugees estimated that there are more than 10,000 victims of trafficking in China. 2005 China Country Report on Human Rights Practices released by Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor reported that many North Korean women are sold to Chinese men in farming villages where there is a shortage of young women for approximately \$38 to \$375 (RMB 315 to

3,000). Children born to North Korean women living in China are stateless. They possess neither Chinese nor North Korean citizenship, they are not able to exercise any rights and are afforded no protection under Chinese law.

In order to protect these refugees without increasing their vulnerability, humanitarian groups have to be extremely discreet in their campaign secretly to aid some of the North Korean refugees in China with food, shelter and occupations, and secretly navigate them out of harms way. This dangerous task has led to the Chinese government's abduction and detention of numerous humanitarian workers. The State Department's 2005 Country Report on Human Rights Practices documented that the Chinese government arrested and detained foreign journalists, missionaries and activists, as well as Chinese citizens, for providing food, shelter and assistance to North Koreans.

A North Korea report by Amnesty International in 2006 reported that the authorities in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia increased forcible repatriations of North Korean refugees who were passing their countries to reach South Korea. Tim Peters of Helping Hands Korea (HHK) has informed us that there are about 500 North Korean refugees who are currently leaving China via third countries to reach safe haven in other countries. Because of the increased forcible repatriations by the government authorities, it has become very difficult for these refugees to find safe havens.

On May 31, 2006, eight North Korean refugees guided by HHK aid workers were on their way from China to another Southeast Asian country when they were detained at the Luang Namtha provincial prison in Laos. When US Embassy was alerted in the crisis, Embassy personnel told the HHK staff that it would be "counterproductive" for the US to become involved. After several days of attempts to rouse UNHCR, US and South Korean governmental action to rescue the eight refugees, and in the face of the police authorities' threats to send them back to China, HHK decided to ransom the eight refugees and the two other North Korean refugees who were also in the same prison for \$500 each. The police then gave them a certificate to travel within Laos for seven days specifying that they were go to the South Korean Embassy and report for processing. Tragically, the ten refugees and two activists were re-arrested on June 3 and were detained in Immigration Detention Center in Pang Mong, Luan Brabang Province. The police argued that their release through the payment of fine was wrong and threatened to turn over the refugees to the North Korean Embassy. Finally on June 10, due to considerable pressure by wide range of NGOs advocating to the Lao and South Korean governments to recognize the plight of the refugees in the event that they were sent back to China or North Korea, the staff of South Korea Embassy in Vientiane took custody of the ten North Korean refugees. Unfortunately, this type of crisis occurs far too often and North Korean refugees as well as those activists assisting them struggle to find help from neighboring governments in East Asia.

### **Conclusion**

As we seek durable solutions for religious minorities and North Korean refugees, we are encouraged by the vast efforts put forth by the State Department. We hope that we can continue to be of assistance as NGOs and the State Department join together to uphold the rights of all both now and into the future.