

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact: Elizabeth Campbell
202-541-5402
ecampbell@rcusa.org

REFUGEE NEEDS FAR EXCEED ADMINISTRATION'S 2009 BUDGET REQUEST

Washington, D.C. – Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), the nation's leading coalition of non-profit organizations working to protect the rights of refugees, expressed disappointment and concern about the drastic cuts to key refugee-related accounts in the Administration's fiscal year 2009 budget proposal submitted to Congress on Monday, February 4, 2008. RCUSA pledged to work with Congress and the Administration in the coming weeks and months to ensure that adequate funds are appropriated to address the humanitarian and protection needs of the world's refugees.

“Refugee Council USA believes that far more funds are needed than the Administration has requested for the United States to continue its indispensable role in providing protection and assistance to refugees through its funding for Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA), Emergency Refugee Migration Assistance (ERMA), and Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR).

“At a time when the humanitarian assistance and protection needs of the world's refugees are growing, and the international community is being called upon to increase assistance, the Administration's 2009 request of \$764 million for the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account is 25% or \$259 million less than what Congress has thus far enacted for 2008.

“There is a great need for the United States to continue its role as a leader in offering protection, assistance, and resettlement to refugees who have been persecuted and forcibly displaced from their homes and families. We strongly urge Congress to improve upon the President's budget request by appropriating \$1.7 billion for the MRA account in fiscal year 2009.

“Refugee Council USA is equally disappointed that the Administration failed to request the much-needed increases in the Department of Health and Human Services budget for the Office of Refugee Resettlement. The 2009 request of \$628 million for ORR is \$28 million less than the 2008 request, and woefully inadequate to properly serve the needs of refugees resettled into the United States.

“We are particularly disappointed in the \$36 million reduction of funding for unaccompanied refugee children from last year's request. We would also argue that the \$10 million request to assist refugee victims of torture be doubled in order to meet the needs of those we have recently welcomed into our country. In total RCUSA recommends that \$983 million is needed for ORR to best meet the needs of vulnerable refugees.

“Additional funds will be needed above the President's request for the MRA, ERMA, and ORR accounts for the United States to maintain its historic leadership in international refugee protection and to provide hope and assistance to the millions around the world who are trapped in both emerging and protracted refugee situations. Current 2008 funding levels will not adequately address the protection

needs of the world's refugees. In particular, much more funding is needed to properly respond to the humanitarian crisis facing millions of Iraqi refugees. Still, we ask that future budgets seek sufficient funding to avoid dependency on supplemental funding when responding to the compelling needs of the world's refugees.

“Robert J. Carey, Chair of Refugee Council USA, stated, “the total number of refugees worldwide has recently increased for the first time in many years and now nearly reaches 11 million refugees – many of whom have lived in refugee camps for several years and without sufficient access to food, shelter, and livelihoods.” We pledge to work with the Administration and Congress in the coming months to ensure that additional funds are made available to help refugees overseas and in the U.S. so that the U.S. can continue to lead the world in generously and compassionately responding to the urgent protection needs of refugees.

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