

**Statement  
Of  
Dr. Pary Karadaghi  
Kurdish Human Rights Watch  
On  
FY 2008 Refugee Admissions  
Iraqi Refugees  
To  
Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration  
U.S. Department of State**

**June 3, 2008**

I would like to start by thanking the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration for calling this public hearing. I will focus my remarks primarily on the situation of Burmese refugees. My name is Pary Karadaghi, president of Kurdish Human Rights Watch, (KHRW).

### **Iraqi Refugees:**

According to a recent UNHCR report indicates that three decades of war and internal conflicts has uprooted over 5 million Iraqis. It is estimated that at least 1.2 million to 1.5 million Iraqi have in the past 4 years fled Iraq and sought refuge in the neighboring country of Syria and an additional 750,000 Iraqis in Jordan as a result of the US invasion, almost two-thirds of the post-invasion Diaspora. Iraqis have come to Syria because of geographic proximity, no entry visa requirements, access to services and the presence of an Iraqi community. The largest group of the Iraqi displaced population resides in Damascus and Amman generally in poor neighborhoods. The Iraqi refugees in Syria and Jordan primarily live in rented accommodation and increasingly Iraqi families are sharing accommodation with other families in order to manage the high rental and living costs. With no legal status or right to work, their prospects are bleak. The wealthy and well-connected found their way to richer countries, and Syria's dysfunctional relations with the West have hamstrung efforts to provide assistance.

Neither Jordan nor Syria is a signatory of the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees which guarantees refugees certain minimal rights. Neither government refers to the Iraqis in their country as “refugees,” but rather as “guests.” Syria has been more flexible in accommodating Iraqis than Jordan, which probably accounts in part for the larger number of refugees in Syria.

Both countries—but especially Jordan—are concerned that the Iraqi refugees not become a permanent, long term presence like the Palestinian refugees who for years have outnumbered Jordanian citizens.

We know that women and girls in war are among the most vulnerable groups in the world. It's seen in many occasions that women and girls are targeted for sexual violence, abuse and exploitation. An increasing problem is the growing practice of prostitution by Iraqi refugee women and girls. Given the deteriorating economic situation of those refugees, a United Nations report found last year, that many Iraqi women in “severe need” for funds and food are resorting to prostitution, in secret, or even with the knowledge or involvement of family members. KHRW staff and other aid workers say thousands of Iraqi women work as prostitutes in Jordan and Syria and point out that as violence in Iraq has increased, the refugee population in Jordan and Syria has come to include more female-headed households and unaccompanied women.

The largest obstacles confronting the U.S. Resettlement Program has been the “material support” and related bars of inadmissibility. There has been some minor progress on this issue. To date approximately 5,000 refugees and asylees have been granted “material support” group waivers and have thus been admitted to the U.S. However, the “waiver”

authority remains discretionary and is very limited. Very limited judicial review of a determination to grant or revoke has been granted. In addition these waivers if approved are extremely slow, time consuming and bureaucratic. There is currently no administrative procedure for status adjustment cases on hold for material support. Only legislatively, can this be addressed effectively otherwise “material support” will continue to plague the U.S. Resettlement Program. We urge the Administration to offer strong leadership in seeking Congressional action aimed at revising the overly broad definition of “terrorist activity.”

### **Iranian Refugees**

Iranian refugees remain faced with obstacles and hardships. Recent shelling of villages on the Iran-Iraq boarder, arrests of political opponents in Iran has led many to leave their homes in Iran and become refugees. Especially Iranian ethnic minorities. We are grateful to the US Refugee Admissions Program and the Government of Austria for providing Iranian religious minorities with a route to freedom through Vienna to the United States. However, given the Austrian consulate issues 85 visas/week, there is now a two year wait for more than 10,000 refugee applicants who cannot leave Iran. We urge the United States to urgently pursue additional venues for the OPE to process cases in order to alleviate that backlog and to allow Iranian ethnic minorities such as Kurds, Balochis, Ahwazi Arabs, Azeris and other ethnic minorities persecuted in Iran to apply in Vienna, Austria to the US refugee admissions program.

### **Resettlement Recommendations:**

We support the expansion of resettlement of Iraqi refugees in FY08 to 20,000 Iraqi. Some possible groups for consideration include:  
give priority to nationals of Iraq:

- Who were employed by the United States Government, United States companies and contractors, media, and nongovernmental organizations
- Iraqis who are members of particularly vulnerable refugee populations, including Iraqis from ethnically mixed families and Iraqis who are members of religious or other minority groups, including Chaldo Assyrian Christians, Sabian/Mandaens, Yazidis, Jews, and Baha'is;
- Women heads of household or/and victims of SGBV and sex trafficking

Lastly let me mention that we continue to be concerned for the situation of the women heads of household and girls in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, Iran and elsewhere

The situation of the Iraqi refugees in those countries continues to be problematic and desperate. We understand that these governments have reassured UNHCR that they will not pursue the policy of forcibly returning Iraqi refugees. However, there is no system in place to monitor the situation of these returnees. We urge the US government to continue advocating with these governments and UNHCR for a comprehensive solution to the situation of Iraqi refugees in Middle East.