

The Honorable Senator Arlen Specter  
711 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

August 15, 2006

Dear Senator Specter,

The state of Pennsylvania has been a place of welcome for the world's refugees. We are proud that our state resettles between 1,000-2,000 refugees a year through the President's special humanitarian program and urge you to take steps to ensure that the material support bar to admission does not shut down this life saving work.

Thousands of refugees designated by the State Department for the refugee program are currently on hold due to unintended consequences of security-related bars to admission in the Patriot Act and Real ID Act. Any refugee who associated with or provided "material support" to any armed group – even if the group is supported by the United States – and even if the refugee was forced to provide support under duress, is no longer eligible for the protection of the United States. Those denied a chance to resettle include Laotian Hmong and Montagnards who supported U.S. troops during the Vietnam War, Cubans who joined anti-Castro movements, and thousands of Burmese refugees fleeing religious and ethnic persecution. Even a Liberian woman is currently being denied refuge for providing "material support" because she was forced to cook and clean for the rebel soldiers who killed her husband, gang raped her and held her hostage. Innocent victims of terror should not be defined as "supporters" of terrorism, and pro-democracy groups which the U.S. government actively supports should not be labeled "terrorist organizations."

We are aware that a bipartisan legislative proposal was recently put forward by several senators that would have modified the law currently barring refugees from coming to the U.S. However, we are dismayed to learn that you used your position as Judiciary Chairman to stop this proposal from being adopted. We urge you to take a closer look at this issue by holding hearings and supporting changes in the law which would allow refugees to continue coming to Pennsylvania.

We look forward to hearing of your plans to move forward on this issue before the summer recess.

Sincerely,

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