

May 1, 2006

Dear Senator:

We urge you to support the Leahy-Coleman amendment to protect vulnerable refugees. Thousands of vulnerable refugees are currently being denied a chance to resettle in the United States because of language in the Patriot Act that bars admission to the U.S. for anyone who provided any “material support” to any armed group – even if the group is not designated a terrorist organization, and even if the refugee was forced to provide the support.

An estimated 10,000 to 20,000 innocent refugees are currently being denied safe haven in the United States because of this bar. Those hurt by this bar include Burmese, Cuban, Colombian, Liberian, Hmong, Montagnard, and Sudanese refugees. Many of these refugees are being denied entry to the United States for supporting movements that the United States itself supports. Many are also being denied for unwillingly providing their support under threat of extreme violence to those groups considered a terrorist organization.

U.S. refugee program reflects our finest humanitarian tradition and we are dismayed that the material support provision is operating to bar those who resisted the tyranny and oppression which made it necessary for them to flee and seek refugee status in the first place. While the material support provision is intended to exclude from protection those who make common cause with terrorists, the overly broad definitions of “terrorist organization” and “material support” have in practice worked to exclude from protection *victims* of terrorism whose very struggle to be free now makes them inadmissible to the United States.

The amendment proposed by Senators Leahy and Coleman is narrowly tailored to correct this problem. It would ensure that refugees who in no way support terrorism but are in fact its victims are not barred from the protection of the United States. And it would include an exception to the “material support” bar that would protect refugees who are forced against their will to provide food, shelter, or other coerced “support” to terrorist groups. These two changes will ensure that vulnerable refugees who have no connection to terrorism and will no longer be denied admission into the United States.

We urge you to support the Leahy-Coleman amendment. By supporting this amendment, you will ensure that the law does not label victims of terrorism as terrorists, and you will honor our nation’s historic commitment to providing safe haven to refugees.

Respectfully,

Organizations:

American Jewish Committee

American Jewish Congress

Anti-Defamation League

Christian Freedom International

Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and Council Migration Service of Philadelphia

Jesuit Refugee Service USA

Jewish Community Action

Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago

Lutheran Community Services, Northwest

Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Lutheran Social Services of Michigan

Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota

Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area

Lutheran Social Services of Northern New England

Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota

National Council of Jewish Women

World Evangelical Alliance

World Relief

Individuals:

Rev. Terry Burke
Ecumenical Officer, Council of Christian Churches
Unitarian Universalist Association

The Reverend Anne C. Fowler
St John's Episcopal Church
Jamaica Plain, MA

The Rev. Miriam C. Gelfer
Rector, Grace Episcopal Church
Newton, MA

Lydia C. Hews
Pastor, Beth Eden Baptist Church
Waltham, MA

Rabbi Paul H. Levenson
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Fr. Tom Papazoglakis
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