

Administration Offers Plan to Ease Rules on Asylum

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 11 — After months of pressure from lawmakers, conservative groups and advocates for immigrants, the Bush administration announced plans on Thursday to seek legislation that would provide relief to thousands of refugees and asylum seekers who have been inadvertently denied refuge because of antiterrorism laws.

The laws, including the USA Patriot Act and the Real ID Act, deny entry to anyone who belongs to or has provided material support to armed rebel groups, even if that support was coerced and even if the armed groups fought alongside American troops or opposed authoritarian governments criticized by the Bush administration.

The new legislative proposal would allow the resettlement of combatants and members of those armed groups, including refugees fleeing the authoritarian government of Myanmar, formerly known as Burma; hundreds of refugees from Vietnam and Laos who fought alongside American troops in the Vietnam War; and dozens of Cubans who supported armed groups opposed to [Fidel Castro](#) in the 1960s.

The Bush administration would also exercise its authority to provide waivers to allow the resettlement of thousands of refugees from Myanmar, Vietnam, Tibet and Cuba who provided material support to rebel groups. It would also, for the first time, provide relief to the 5,600 people from those countries whose asylum claims have been placed on hold here or who have been admitted as refugees but prevented from becoming permanent residents here because of the antiterrorism laws.

The administration would also allow some individuals who were forced to provide support to groups deemed as terrorist to be resettled or granted asylum here. Many were barred because the statutes broadened the definition of terrorist groups to include any group of two or more people who take up arms against a state, even if the group supports the aims of American foreign policy and do not appear on the government's designated list of terrorist groups.

Refugee advocacy groups, including Human Rights First and [Human Rights Watch](#), and conservative groups like Concerned Women for America and the National Association of Evangelicals, had pressed for such changes for months. And officials acknowledge that many

refugees suffered from the “unintended consequences” of the antiterrorism laws, remaining stranded in bleak refugee camps or in American jails while [immigration](#) courts debated their fates.

But Paul Rosenzweig, acting assistant secretary for international affairs at the [Department of Homeland Security](#), told reporters that the administration expected to present legislation to Congress by the end of the month and to exercise most of its waivers within a day or so. The waivers allowing for relief for Hmong and Montagnard refugees, who fought with American troops in Vietnam, are also being processed.

“There isn’t anybody in this room who doesn’t wish we could have moved more quickly than we have,” Mr. Rosenzweig said.

Advocacy groups hailed the decision as an important step forward, but warned that it would still leave many people vulnerable.

Under the new plan, for instance, refugees and asylum seekers forced to cooperate with groups on the government’s list of terrorist groups would be ineligible for resettlement or asylum here. That would affect Colombians forced to support their country’s largest rebel group, the [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia](#), among others.

The process would also leave out individuals who do not belong to the ethnic groups named in the waivers.

“I think they have made some real progress, and as a result more people will be protected,” said Jennifer Daskal of Human Rights Watch. “But many people will continue to be barred and put at real risk. There’s a need to go further.”