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Terror Laws Cut Resettlement of Refugees

By [RACHEL L. SWARNS](#)

WASHINGTON, Sept. 27 — The number of refugees admitted to the United States fell 23 percent this year because of provisions in two antiterrorism laws that have sharply reduced the number of resettled refugees, State Department officials said Wednesday.

The laws, 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 provisions have derailed the resettlement of thousands of 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 60's, according to the State Department and the [United Nations](#) refugee agency.

Many of the refugees were barred from the United States because, under the new laws, they are deemed supporters of terrorist groups, even though the organizations that they support do not appear on the State Department list of designated terrorist groups.

The statutes have 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.

A result, State Department officials say, is that administration officials will resettle 41,200 of the 54,000 refugees whom they had expected to admit by the end of the current fiscal year, which ends on Sept. 30. That figure is the lowest since refugee admissions plunged for nearly two years after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

The State Department can grant waivers for specific populations that have supported armed groups, if they pose no threat to the United States. In May and August, the department issued waivers for Burmese refugees who have supported the Karen National Union, a group that opposes the government in Myanmar.

But the laws do not allow waivers for refugees who were combatants, received military training from groups deemed to be terrorist organizations or were members of such groups. State Department officials say a change in the law is required to address those populations. In recent weeks, Secretary of State

[Condoleezza Rice](#) has met with lawmakers in the House and Senate to discuss such changes.

Ellen R. Sauerbrey, an assistant secretary of state, told senators on Wednesday that the antiterrorism provisions had prevented the United States from resettling 9,500 Burmese this fiscal year. Of that group, 1,500 are expected to enter by Sept. 30 under issued waivers.

“We had anticipated bringing the majority, if not all of those, to the United States,” Ms. Sauerbrey said at a hearing of the [Immigration](#) Subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

She said the limited waivers meant that the resettlement of many refugees had been indefinitely delayed. In addition to the Burmese, Ms. Sauerbrey pointed to the Cubans and Vietnamese Montagnards.

“We are eagerly looking forward to expanding resettlement,” she said, “to the degree that we can resolve some of these difficulties.”

Refugee advocacy groups, including Human Rights First and [Human Rights Watch](#), and conservative groups like Concerned Women for America, the National Association of Evangelicals and American Values, say officials are not moving swiftly enough.

Representative Joe Pitts, Republican of Pennsylvania, has proposed legislation that would bar only members and supporters of groups designated as terrorist organizations by the State Department.

But State Department officials say they do not expect any movement on such legislation before Nov. 7.

Many refugee advocates fear that administration officials and members of Congress are delaying action because they do not want to be viewed as easing up on terrorism during an election year.

Michael J. Horowitz, a neoconservative who worked in the White House of President [Ronald Reagan](#) and testified at the hearing on Wednesday, said in a statement that it was “inexcusable that for more than two years the administration has dragged its feet” in finding a solution for the refugees who fought alongside Americans in Vietnam.

The antiterrorism provisions have also affected 500 asylum seekers in the United States, whose cases have been delayed and has prevented 700 people, who have already been deemed refugees or granted asylum, from becoming permanent residents here for the time being.

[Senator Sam Brownback](#), Republican of Kansas, urged the administration to redouble its efforts on behalf of the Burmese refugees and others who desperately need to resettle. “I know we have a lot security concerns to watch for,” Mr. Brownback said at the hearing. “But there are huge populations that are absolutely persecuted and have no other option.”

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