

Refugee Council USA

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ADMINISTRATION'S PROPOSED REFUGEE BUDGET FALLS FAR SHORT OF NEEDS

Refugee Council USA -- the nation's leading coalition of refugee resettlement, human rights, and humanitarian organizations -- expressed its disappointment yesterday with the Administration's proposed fiscal year 2005 budget for programs to rescue and assist refugees. In a statement by Mark Franken, Chair of Refugee Council USA, the coalition pledged to work with the Administration and Congress in the coming months to ensure the United States restores its historic commitment to refugees.

The world's refugee crisis persists, with more than 13 million refugees -- 80 percent of whom are women and children -- in need of durable solutions. Refugees waiting for such solutions remain in vulnerable situations with insufficient food, clothing, and shelter. Despite the Administration's goal of admitting 70,000 refugees in each of fiscal years 2002 and 2003, the United States accepted only 27,100 refugees in fiscal year 2002 and only 28,422 refugees in fiscal year 2003. The President's budget proposal would provide only enough funding to admit an estimated 45,000 refugees in fiscal year 2005 and it slashes spending for assistance to refugees in their camps of first asylum.

The text of Mark Franken's statement follows:

"While the Administration has articulated its commitment to refugee protection, assistance and resettlement, its budget proposal does not reflect this commitment. Rather, funding cuts continue to erode the United States' historic role as a leader in refugee protection. The Administration's budget proposal under funds the Department of State's Migration and Refugee Assistance by \$197 million and the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement by \$177 million. These shortfalls come as humanitarian assistance and protection needs around the world are increasing and when the United Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees is being called upon to strengthen its protection mandate."

"Sufficient funding must be made available to enable our country to resume its role as a compassionate leader in caring for people who have been persecuted because of their race, ethnicity, religion, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Refugee Council USA intends to work closely with both Congress and the Administration in the coming months to ensure that new life is breathed into the Administration's stated commitment to assist the world's refugees and displaced persons."