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REFUGEE COUNCIL USA

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REFUGEE NEEDS EXCEED ADMINISTRATION'S 2008 BUDGET REQUEST

Refugee Council USA – the nation's leading coalition of refugee resettlement, human rights, and humanitarian organizations – expressed both hope and disappointment in reaction to the submission on Monday, February 5, 2007, of the Administration's fiscal year 2008 budget proposal to Congress.

In a statement that it released following the Administration's budget submission, RCUSA welcomed the Administration's acknowledgement that additional fiscal year 2007 funds are urgently needed in order to provide a measure of protection to refugees who are mired in crises around the world. But RCUSA also expressed deep concern about the inadequacy of the Administration's fiscal year 2008 request for refugee protection funding. RCUSA pledged in its statement that it would work with Congress and the Administration in the coming weeks and months to ensure that adequate funds are appropriated to address the humanitarian and protection needs of the world's refugees.

Refugee Council USA's statement follows:

“While Refugee Council USA believes that far more funds are needed than the Administration has requested if the United States is to continue its indispensable role in providing protection and assistance to refugees throughout the world, RCUSA welcomes the Administration's request for supplemental fiscal year 2007 Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) and Emergency Refugee Migration Assistance (ERMA) as a starting point in our work to provide for the humanitarian and protection needs of the world's refugees.

“The Administration's request for emergency supplemental fiscal year 2007 funds is an acknowledgement that an infusion of additional funds is urgently necessary if we are to provide hope and assistance to the millions around the world who are trapped in both emerging and protracted refugee situations. However, given the ongoing nature of these crises, it is hoped that future budgets will seek sufficient funding at the outset to avoid resorting to supplemental appropriations to respond to the compelling needs of the world's refugees.

“At the same time that we welcome the Administration's request for supplemental fiscal year 2007 funds, however, we are concerned about the Administration's fiscal year 2008 request for Migration and Refugee Assistance. At a time when the humanitarian assistance and protection needs of the world's refugees are growing and the international community is being called upon to do more, the Administration's fiscal year 2008 request of \$773.5 million for the MRA account is \$66 million less than last year's request. Indeed,



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when supplemental fiscal year 2007 and 2008 requests are taken into account, the Administration has requested \$95 million less in fiscal year 2008 than will be available in fiscal year 2007 for the MRA account.

“In addition to needing additional funds to provide assistance to refugees in countries of first asylum and those who are internally displaced within their own countries, there also is a great need for the United States to continue its role as a leader in offering resettlement to refugees for whom resettlement is the only durable solution to their situation. We are disappointed that the Administration’s fiscal year 2008 budget submission and the fiscal year 2007 supplemental budget request do not ask Congress to appropriate adequate funds to restore the United States refugee admissions and resettlement programs to levels commensurate to global crises impacting refugees. We strongly urge Congress to improve upon the President’s fiscal year 2008 budget request by appropriating \$1.138 billion for the MRA account in fiscal year 2008.

“Refugee Council USA is also pleased that the Administration has requested much-needed increases in the budget for the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). The ORR budget request for fiscal year 2008 is \$655.63 million, which while still not adequate, would be an increase of \$40 million from the request in fiscal year 2007. We particularly appreciate the President’s request for additional funding for unaccompanied alien children. However, the council believes that as more especially vulnerable refugees reach our shores, additional funds are needed to respond to their compelling social service needs. We would also press that the authorized level of \$25 million be provided to assist refugee victims of torture, and that \$12 million be appropriated to both the USAID Torture Victim Fund and the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.

“We further commend the President's budget for recognizing the need to extend eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for elderly and disabled refugees. Under current law, refugees who are unable to naturalize within seven years of arrival in the United States lose access to this life-sustaining cash assistance program causing severe hardship for the most vulnerable.

“Additional funds will be needed above the President’s request for the MRA, ERMA, and ORR accounts if the United States is to maintain its historic leadership in international refugee protection. Richard Parkins, Chair of the Refugee Council USA stated, “the world’s refugee crisis persists, with nearly 11 million refugees – 80 percent of whom are women and children – in need of durable solutions, and often living without sufficient food, shelter, medical care and other vital assistance. We pledge to work with the Administration and Congress in the coming months to ensure that additional funds are made available to offer protection, assistance, and a new life of freedom to refugees, both overseas and in the U.S. To do less is to abandon our moral leadership to be a truly compassionate nation.”

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