

## **Refugee Council USA**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### ***Fewer Refugees Being Rescued* Concern Expressed by the Refugee Council USA**

Due to funding shortfalls, the number of refugees rescued by the United States, in the form of resettlement to the United States, may actually be lower this year than last, this at a time when there is a growing number of refugees worldwide in need of resettlement.

More than half of the world's refugees remain in squalid refugee camps for ten years or more due to a lack of durable solutions, such as return to their home countries, integration within their countries of asylum, or resettlement to a third country. The number of such refugees has been growing in recent years, leading to greater vulnerability and an increasing sense of hopelessness among them.

The Bush Administration has taken a number of steps to expand and bolster the U.S. response to the needs of refugees. In fiscal year 2004, the State Department's management of the refugee admissions program resulted in an 80% increase in refugees admitted last year. And, the Refugee Council USA welcomed the administration's FY2006 budget request, which included funds necessary to offer resettlement opportunities for more refugees next year, to increase resettlement-related assistance for refugees after being admitted, and to restore refugee eligibility for Social Security Income. We also applaud the initiative to establish a specialized Refugee Corps within the Department of Homeland Security.

At the beginning of the current fiscal year, President Bush announced that 70,000 refugees would be admitted for resettlement in the United States. While the Refugee Council USA believes that the United States should be admitting more refugees in need of resettlement, this earlier announcement was welcomed, because it represented an increase over the previous year's admissions level of 53,000 refugees. Earlier this month, however, the administration, citing budget constraints, indicated that only as many as 43,000 refugees would be admitted in FY 2005.

In reaction to this latest announcement, the Chair of the Refugee Council USA, Mark Franken, said "Our nation has historically provided critical, life-saving assistance to refugees in need of resettlement by opening our doors and hearts to some of the world's refugees. U.S. leadership remains critically important; not only are refugees' lives and hopes for a future lying in the balance, but the international community is watching what we do in response to the plight of refugees. To allow the number of refugees our country will admit this year to decline sends the wrong message about who we are as a nation."

Last week, the House of Representatives took an important step toward addressing the budget shortfall in refugee admissions. The House-passed version of the Tsunami Supplemental

Appropriations includes \$103.4 million for the State Department's Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account, some of which may be available to increase resettlement this year beyond the current plan of 43,000 refugees. The Senate is due to take this measure up in early April and we call on that body to urgently appropriate the funds necessary to admit more refugees this year.

"We call on the administration and Congress to find the funds necessary to admit as many of the 70,000 refugees authorized by the President this year," Franken said. "This is an urgent matter, with people's lives at stake."

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