

REFUGEE COUNCIL USA

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March 21, 2006

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

The Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), a coalition of non-governmental organizations committed to finding durable solutions for refugees, writes to express its views on the appropriate level of fiscal year 2007 (FY07) funding for refugee admissions, overseas refugee assistance, and refugee resettlement.

Sufficient federal funding is essential if this life-saving work is to be accomplished. As the Committee begins to develop its FY07 appropriations bills, we strongly urge you to provide adequate funding to continue and expand our nation's ability to aid the millions of refugees overseas and to increase the number of refugees offered protection through resettlement in the United States. To achieve this end, we recommend that the Committee appropriate—

- MRA Account: At least \$1.2 billion for the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration's (PRM) through its Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account in FY07;
- ERMA Account: At least \$55 million for the Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) account in FY07;
- ORR: At least \$798 million for the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in FY07;
- Refugee Corps: At least \$20 million for other essential refugee-related budget items, such as the new Refugee Corps within the Department of Homeland Security in FY07; and
- Fiscal year 2006 (FY06) Supplemental Funds: \$117 million in supplemental MRA and \$30 million in supplemental ORR funds for FY06.

Migration and Refugee Assistance

Without these levels of federal funding, the nation will not be able to revive the U.S. refugee program by providing the durable solution of resettlement to 90,000 refugees — the goal announced by President George W. Bush in his 2001 Report to Congress. An MRA total of \$1.2 billion would allow for an allocation of \$333 million for the United States to admit 90,000 refugees in FY07. Additionally, this overall MRA funding level would allow for an allocation of \$780 million to enhance our overseas refugee assistance funding to a level that could more adequately address critical overseas needs. This MRA figure would also allow the other two items within the MRA account — aid to refugees resettling in Israel, and the administrative costs of the State Department's refugee bureau — to be funded at expected levels.

Increased funding for refugee protection as described above is essential to avoid massive shortfalls in food, medicine and other vital supplies that continue to affect refugees across Africa and elsewhere. It would also support the work of international relief organizations — including U.S.-based charitable agencies — that are providing humanitarian assistance and protecting refugees from further harm. This funding level for overseas assistance would reverse the effects of inflation and other cuts, and would facilitate the United States' continued leadership in refugee assistance and protection.

Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance

The State Department's Refugee Bureau anticipates utilizing all or virtually all of its ERMA balance for FY06 -- leaving it for the first time -- with no ERMA funding. Without a sufficient ERMA replenishment, the State Department will not be able to respond to refugee crises in the Near East, South Asia, Africa, Caribbean, or other areas. We therefore support the Administration's request of \$55 million for this crucial account, including the Administration's request that Congress waive the limitation on the amount of funds that may be deposited in the ERMA account at any one time.

Office of Refugee Resettlement

ORR's ever-expanding mandate requires at least \$798 million for FY07. Of this amount, \$397 million should be available for transitional and medical services to refugees, including \$75 million for the Matching Grant program, which leverages private sector funds to help refugees reach rapid self-sufficiency rather than resort to welfare dependency. This level of appropriation would also permit an allocation of \$187 million for Social Services, an important line item that funds programs for refugees with special conditions, unanticipated arrivals programs, and community integration programs. These programs provide services to approximately 122,204 refugees, asylees, Cuban-Haitian entrants, victims of trafficking and victims of torture, who are eligible for services for up to five years. Furthermore, our recommendation for ORR would allow \$21 million for human trafficking programs and \$30 million for programs under the Torture Victims Relief Act.

As you know, the Homeland Security Act of 2002 required ORR to take on the duty of caring for the more than 7,000 unaccompanied alien children who come into federal custody each year. We understand that ORR's new responsibility for unaccompanied alien children will require at least \$105 million in FY07, and we are pleased that the Administration asked for this amount in its FY07 budget submission. We strongly support the Administration's request.

Other Fiscal Year 2007 Appropriations Items

In addition to the refugee program functions in the Departments of State and HHS, sufficient funding is needed for the Department of Homeland Security to adjudicate refugee claims and ensure that appropriate security measures are undertaken in the U.S. Refugee Program. Among the most important new initiatives that should receive direct funding is implementation of the Refugee Corps within the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. We urge that adequate funding be available for the Refugee Corps, which we believe should be at least \$20 million. Also, the DHS Bureau of Customs and Border Protection must be provided with sufficient resources to inspect and admit refugees, as well as to fulfill statutory requirements that Employment Authorization Documents be provided to refugees upon entry in a manner that does not restrict refugee admissions or unduly increase the per capita costs charged to the State Department's refugee budget. Sufficient USAID and other U.S. foreign assistance funding should be requested for services to internally displaced persons as well as victims of torture, trafficking, gender-based violence, conflict, and oppression worldwide.

Fiscal Year 2006 Supplemental Needs

Finally, we strongly urge the Committee to provide supplemental funds during FY06 for both the MRA and ORR accounts. As you know, the final levels of FY06 refugee protection and assistance funds that were enacted into law were well short of the amounts that the Administration requested. We believe that

supplemental FY06 appropriations of \$117 million for the MRA account and \$30 million for ORR are urgently needed to begin to meet this year's needs. We welcome an opportunity to discuss these needs with you and your staff in the coming weeks.

Our organizations have long valued our partnership with the government to provide assistance, protection and resettlement to refugees around the world, and we look forward to continuing our mutual work to help meet the needs for nearly 12 million refugees worldwide and more than 21 million internally displaced persons affected by conflict and humanitarian disasters. While we are clearly aware of the numerous competing requests during these times, we hope that your committee will appropriate sufficient funding to respond to the full scope of refugee needs. The freedom from fear and despair that America represents to refugees around the world can only be fully realized with a robust budget.

We in the Refugee Council USA look forward to working together with the Committee as you develop the relevant FY07 appropriations bills.

Respectfully,



C. Richard Parkins
Chair, Refugee Council USA

Director, *Episcopal Migration Ministries*

On behalf of the following agencies:

Angela Colaiuta, Washington Representative
Center for Victims of Torture

Joseph Roberson, Director
Church World Service/Immigration and Refugee Program

Tsehay Teferra, Executive Director
Ethiopian Community Development Council

Gideon Aronoff, President & CEO
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)

Cha Lee, Executive Director
Hmong National Development

Johan Ketelers, Secretary General
International Catholic Migration Commission

George Rupp, President
International Rescue Committee

Fr. Kenneth Gavin, S.J., National Director
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA

Dr. Pary Karadaghi, Executive Director
Kurdish Human Rights Watch, Inc.

Ralston H. Deffenbaugh, Jr., President
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Mark Franken, Executive Director
Migration and Refugee Services/United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Doua Thor, Executive Director
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Lavinia Limón, President & CEO
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

Carolyn Makinson, Executive Director
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