

Testimony of  
**Mr. Lenny Glickman**

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Chairman Kennedy, Senator Brownback, members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the 19 refugee resettlement, processing, assistance and advocacy organizations who are members of Refugee Council USA, I would like to thank you for convening this hearing on the current crisis in the U.S. Refugee Admissions program, and for giving us the opportunity to testify.

The Refugee Council USA is the coalition of U.S. non-governmental organizations focused on refugee protection. The Refugee Council USA provides focused advocacy on issues affecting the protection and rights of refugees and displaced persons in the United States and across the world. Particular areas of concern are adherence to international standards of refugee rights, the promotion of the right to asylum, political and financial support for UNHCR, and the promotion of durable solutions, including resettlement to the United States. The Refugee Council USA also serves as the principal consultative forum for the national refugee resettlement and processing agencies as they formulate common positions, conduct their relations with the U.S. Government and other partners, and support and enhance refugee service standards.

I would also like to welcome recent statements by Commissioner Ziglar and Assistant Secretary Dewey that show a strong commitment to refugee protection and resettlement. My testimony today will focus on the challenges that lie ahead for the program, and the private sector's enthusiasm to work together in partnership with the State Department, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to meet our commitments.

For refugee advocates - and I believe for all Americans - the United States Refugee Program is a defining element of our country's core values. Through this program we have offered new hope, and new lives, to victims of persecution around the world. Whether they are courageous victims of religious persecution or attempts at stifling political dissent - or are the vulnerable widows, orphans, or torture survivors from vicious civil conflicts across the globe - refugees have looked to us for a chance at a future. In return, refugees have made America home, have revitalized neighborhoods, have helped businesses thrive, and have reaffirmed American values of family, community and love of country. Refugees are truly as much part of America's future as they are part of our past.

Refugee Council USA shares the horror and grief of all Americans at the terrible tragedy of the September 11 attacks. As agencies dedicated to the rescue of refugees around the world, we are troubled that the U.S. refugee admissions program has virtually ground to a halt, stranding over 22,000 U.S.-approved refugees overseas. These refugees - many of whom have fled the extremists and terrorists with whom we are now at war - have been left in harm's way instead of being granted a safe future in America.

We must emphasize, however, that much of the crisis faced by the Refugee Admissions program pre-dates September 11.

The agencies of Refugee Council USA have long enjoyed a public-private partnership with the U.S. government. Overseas, our member agencies help the Department of State and the INS with preparing refugee applicants for their INS interviews, and for life in the United States. Domestically, our networks of local volunteer organizations, professional staffs, and faith-based communities work with the State Department and the Office of Refugee Resettlement to help the refugees find housing, learn English, get employed, and prepare to become citizens of our country.

From this perspective we have seen some positive trends in recent years. The United States remains the leading international advocate for refugee protection. We are also pleased that the refugees recently resettled in the United States represent the most diverse caseload since the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980.

That being said, when the terrorists attacked the United States on September 11, the refugee program was already in crisis. In 1993, when George H. W. Bush left office, the United States resettled nearly 120,000 refugees. In FY2001, after eight years of the State Department driving down refugee admissions levels, less than 69,000 refugees - out of 80,000 authorized - were resettled. With more than 14 million refugees in the world, many of whom desperately need resettlement, it is unacceptable that, year after year, so many refugee admission slots go unfilled.

In late September 2001, while the Administration would only promise 70,000 admissions for FY2002, we agreed to work closely with the State Department to increase U.S. resettlement capacity. The Administration declared that it would incrementally increase admissions and, by FY2006, achieve an admissions level of 90,000 refugees - still significantly lower than several years ago.

Commissioner Ziglar and Assistant Secretary Dewey now advise that they will strive to resettle 70,000 refugees this year. We welcome this modest number because, only a few weeks earlier, the Administration asserted that we should expect little more than half of that number, and well under the target of 75,000 in FY2003. We agree with the Commissioner and the Assistant Secretary that - with proactive leadership and a sense of urgency - the Administration can ensure that 70,000 refugees are rescued from persecution and resettled in the United States this year.

At the same time, we are concerned that this commitment may not be able to be maintained with the President's FY2003 budget request of only \$705 million for the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account. This budget request is \$10 million less than the Administration sought for FY2002. While we are suggesting changes that would make some aspects of refugee processing more cost-efficient, enhanced security measures will likely cause an overall increase in the cost of resettlement. Under these circumstances, a higher level of funding for MRA will be needed.

Grassroots Network for Refugees and the Public Private Partnership

I would like to underscore the breadth of public support for refugee resettlement. The U.S. refugee admissions program is an excellent example of a public-private partnership. In refugee resettlement, core American values are put into action through joint efforts of the government, a coalition of national refugee agencies and a vast network of local organizations and volunteers who provide services to refugees and help them integrate into American society.

Below are brief descriptions of many of the Refugee Council USA's member networks illustrating the depth of involvement of Americans across our country in the refugee protection movement.

" Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) is a cooperative agency of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod and the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Together, these church bodies include more than 17 thousand congregations around the country with nearly 8 million members. LIRS and its 27 affiliates and 16 sub-offices around the country resettled approximately 13,000 refugees per year before the crisis.

" World Relief is the relief and development arm of the National Association of Evangelicals, which represents 43,000 congregations in the United States. World Relief has 27 refugee resettlement offices nation-wide and worked with nearly 2,000 churches. World Relief's volunteers are dedicated to helping refugees rebuild their lives by providing their time, resources, and dedication. Since 1998, World Relief has had over 10,000 volunteers from churches and local communities assist refugees in their resettlement offices.

" The Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program (CWS/IRP) is a network of ten national Protestant denominations, representing over 30 million people and 45 local affiliate offices serving the needs of refugees as they resettle in the United States. CWS/IRP seeks to involve the local congregations of these ten denominations in life-giving ministry to refugees from around the world. As refugee sponsors, congregations live out the biblical call to "welcome the stranger" by creating hospitable communities for refugees and providing for their material needs upon their arrival.

" The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) is the Jewish Community's international migration agency. HIAS, at 120 years old, is the country's oldest migration and assistance organization and includes over 100 affiliated Jewish communities that resettle refugees across the United States. Services are provided by HIAS, local Jewish Family and Children Services and Jewish Vocational Services offices, and are supported by the local Jewish Federations.

" The Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC) is a community-based organization dedicated to serving newcomers from around the world while maintaining a focus on Africans. Through its refugee resettlement, health education, social services, cross-cultural understanding and micro-credit programs, ECDC assists a diverse community of refugees and immigrants to become self-sufficient and make contributions to their new homeland. ECDC is dedicated to improving opportunities for strengthening communities and individual advancement among newcomers by coordinating with over 40, mainly African, community-based organizations around the country.

" The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is a leading nonsectarian organization that normally resettles nearly 10,000 refugees in over 21 cities across the country. IRC has an extensive volunteer network of over 1,000 persons committed to assisting refugees resettled in their communities. IRC's experience and knowledge as a resettlement agency are enhanced by its provision of emergency assistance to refugees and other populations displaced by violence and oppression, in over 30 countries worldwide.

" Migration and Refugee Services of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops coordinates the refugee resettlement activities of the Catholic Church in the United States and is the largest resettler of refugees in the nation. Through more than 100 diocesan affiliates across the nation, MRS/USCCB resettles approximately one-quarter of the refugees brought into the United States each year. In FY 2001, MRS/USCCB helped resettle close to 17,000 refugees of 102 ethnicities and fifty-five nationalities.

" Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), which serves as the refugee assistance and advocacy arm of the Episcopal Church serves 26 dioceses throughout the U.S., encompassing 38 different U.S. communities. Churches and private volunteers figure strongly in EMM's assistance to about 3000 refugees annually.

" The Immigration and Refugee Services of America (IRSA) has served the needs of refugees and immigrants since 1917 when its affiliate structure assisted in the resettlement and reunion of families after the ravages of World War I. IRSA is composed of a national headquarters in Washington, DC; a network of 35 community-based partner agencies throughout the United States that provide resettlement and integration services to all refugees from all ethnic groups; and the US Committee for Refugees, its public information and advocacy arm.

" The Center for Victims of Torture, based in Minneapolis and St. Paul, was established in 1985 as the first U.S. comprehensive treatment center for victims of torture. There are now 34 programs in 19 states assisting victims of torture and organized in the National Consortium of Torture Treatment Programs. Many of the National Consortium members receive financial support through the Torture Victims Relief Act, which authorizes the Office of Refugee Resettlement of the Department of Health and Human Services to support these programs.

" The Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) is the national advocacy and capacity-building organization for Americans who arrived in this country as refugees from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. SEARAC's national network includes over 130 community-based nonprofit organizations known as "mutual assistance associations" (MAAS) that are managed by and for Southeast Asian Americans. SEARAC focuses much of its effort on working with the twenty-two MAA members of its Southeast Asian American Advocacy Initiative.

" The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights has, since 1978, worked to promote human rights and to protect the rights of refugees in the United States and abroad. The Lawyers Committee grounds its work on refugee protection in the international standards of the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol as well as other international human rights instruments. It advocates adherence to these standards in U.S. law and policy. Through its Asylum Program, the Lawyers Committee operates one of the largest and most successful pro bono asylum representation programs in the country.

" The Institute of International Law and Economic Development has advised a number of small states on their constitutional development and supported human rights seminars both in Africa and the Pacific. Currently it is engaged in an examination of emergency mass asylum and the development of specialized training materials for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

" The United States Association for UNHCR is an organization with members in all 50 states. It exists to support the work of UNHCR, primarily by accepting private donations to augment United States Government contributions. USA for UNHCR conducts outreach and awareness projects that build support for UNHCR in communities across the United States.

This combined movement constitutes the active commitment of the American public to provide an essential safety net for newly arrived refugees, and its shared responsibility to facilitate the smooth functioning of the United States government's policy in the refugee arena.

Problems with the U.S. Refugee Program Prior to September 11

U.S. Refugee Program Increasingly Inaccessible

With over 14 million refugees in the world, why has it been so difficult for the United States to find 70,000 to resettle?

The simple answer is that the U.S. Refugee Program has become increasingly inaccessible, notwithstanding specific recommendations from Refugee Council USA, members of Congress, and others on how to make it more responsive to those in need of rescue and refuge.

Since 1995, the UNHCR has nearly doubled the number of refugees whom it referred for resettlement in the United States. This is no small feat, given that the overall number of refugees admitted to the United States has declined by more than 30% over the same period. During this time, the United States has increasingly made the office of the UNHCR the gatekeeper to the U.S. Refugee Program. Do not get me wrong - we welcome and encourage UNHCR's increasing use of resettlement as a tool of protection and as a durable solution for refugees, and strongly believe that UNHCR should be encouraged to refer refugees in need of resettlement to the United States. At the same time, expecting UNHCR to be the primary source of refugee referrals for the U.S. program is unrealistic, inefficient and an abdication of our leadership.

UNHCR has a mandate to protect millions of refugees all over the world. This mission is overwhelming for the agency and where, in some regions, there is only one protection officer for every 500,000 refugees. Under these circumstances, UNHCR Protection Officers, among many other duties, are expected to identify individuals for status determination and resettlement. Such refugees must endure two lengthy UNHCR interviews and adjudications concerning their persecution, conditions of first asylum and need for resettlement. Protection Officers must provide extensive written justification for their decisions in each of these adjudications.

Once these steps are completed, the UNHCR Protection Officer must find a way to get the refugee physically in front of what the State Department calls the "Overseas Processing Entity" (and what we still prefer to call a "Joint Voluntary Agency") for another interview and preparation of yet another redundant and lengthy INS refugee application form, the I-590. Once

the I-590 is completed, the refugee must be interviewed for the fourth time - now by the INS. In Africa, there are only three regular INS refugee processing posts on the entire continent, and in the fifteen countries which once made up the USSR, there is only one processing post - incredible hurdles to overcome.

With a screening process like this, UNHCR Protection Officers deserve great credit for referring any refugees for resettlement. However, with three lengthy forms and four interviews that the refugee must endure, this process almost always takes many months, and often takes years. During this time, the refugee is seldom able to get any information about the status of his case. If he or she is screened out by UNHCR during the process, there is no appeal. As a result, the so-called "Priority One" resettlement referral process is often more an exercise in the survival of the fittest than the protection of the most vulnerable.

In such a system, refugees in hiding, torture victims, widows, and children stand little chance of being resettled.

We do not entirely blame UNHCR, however. While their exhausting procedures should be streamlined and improved, they are in place to ensure that UNHCR officers do not stray from established resettlement criteria. INS could also help make the referral process more efficient by allowing UNHCR referrals to submit simplified INS application forms that are not redundant to the exhaustive forms already completed by UNHCR. It could also show more flexibility in choosing interview sites.

What is the answer? In addition to encouraging UNHCR referrals, the State Department should reinvigorate its use of the so-called Priority 2, or P-2, category to allow access to the U.S. Refugee Program. This mechanism allows specific categories of refugees chosen by our own Government- such as religious minorities from Iran, ex-detainees and victims of ethnic cleansing from Bosnia, Jews and Evangelicals from the former Soviet Union, and pro-democracy activists from Burma - to apply for refugee status without having to spend years navigating the UNHCR protection bureaucracy. Registration without a UNHCR referral can be a much more cost-effective and expeditious means of resettlement. And remember, to be admitted under Priority 2, each individual must still establish that he or she meets the U.S. definition of a refugee - an individual with a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of race, religion, political belief, nationality, or membership in a particular social group.

The Refugee Council USA has had a long and frustrating experience attempting to work with the State Department to develop new P-2 categories.

In 1999, we identified a number of refugee groups who should have been allowed to access the U.S. program without a UNHCR referral. One of these, the Somali Bantu, was adopted by the State Department. While there are almost 10,000 Somali Bantu languishing in an extremely dangerous refugee camp in Kenya, at the border with Somalia, not a single one has yet entered the U.S. as a refugee.

In 2000, we identified a similar number of refugee groups who should be able to access the U.S. program without a UNHCR referral. Not a single one of these were implemented.

Finally last year, the State Department asked us for our recommendations of categories of refugees who should be able to access the US program without a UNHCR referral. We recommended no less than a dozen specific groups for the State Department's consideration. In June, UNHCR wrote to the State Department agreeing with many of our recommendations and, to its great credit, identified an additional four categories of refugees who should be given access to the U.S. program without a UNHCR referral.

Again, thus far no concrete action has been taken on these recommendations.

Our first recommendation is that the State Department should permit direct registration of refugee caseloads. It should stop relying to such a degree on UNHCR referrals, when UNHCR itself, together with Refugee Council USA, has suggested numerous vulnerable caseloads which could be adjudicated much more efficiently without a UNHCR referral.

My colleague from the US Committee for Refugees, a member agency of the Refugee Council USA, will provide additional information about specific groups of refugees in need of this type of processing and protection in separate testimony.

#### Near Abandonment of Family Reunification in Refugee Processing

From the experience of the Holocaust, when immigration restrictions prevented many American families from reuniting with their relatives in Europe, refugee advocates are familiar with the anguish felt by Americans whose relatives are stuck as refugees overseas. After World War II, the U.S. learned from this experience and made family reunion a cornerstone of its refugee resettlement program. Family reunion rescues the persecuted, helps Americans reunite with their families, and facilitates the successful integration of refugees into our society.

In recent years, that corner stone has been chipped away.

While many refugees have links to Americans, very few would be eligible for immigrant visas without waiting for years and years. Today, only a half dozen nationalities are eligible to gain access to an INS refugee interview based on having immediate family members in the U.S. This is the so-called P-3 category. Unlike in years past, the siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, or married children have no access to the refugee program, regardless of nationality. This was covered by the now extinct P-4 category.

Increasingly, the only hope families have of reuniting with relatives who are living as refugees overseas is through referrals from the over-burdened UNHCR bureaucracy. Such referrals are far too few.

Year after year, the agencies of Refugee Council USA have urged the State Department to facilitate family reunification for refugees with immediate family members in the U.S. without a UNHCR referral, regardless of nationality. We have also urged that, with certain large refugee caseloads, the U.S. allow refugee siblings, grandparents, grandchildren and married children of Americans to have direct access to the U.S. program. UNHCR has been supportive of these requests, indicating that the INS is in a better position to verify family links to the United States than is UNHCR.

That being said, in the recent past INS has paid too little attention to verifying family links. Today, INS has taken the opposite extreme, suspending processing of its entire family reunification caseload. Every single family reunification case is now required to undergo a Washington, D.C. audit prior to approval. With few new cases eligible and all old cases tied up at INS headquarters, family-based refugee processing is now in a state of paralysis.

As with our other recommendations, our requests for the State Department to expand family reunification have been repeatedly ignored.

To summarize, our second recommendation is that the State Department employ a "universal P-3" designation to facilitate the processing of refugees, regardless of nationality, with close relatives in the United States. When dealing with large and vulnerable caseloads, it is also appropriate for the State Department to also give priority to refugees who have more extended family links to the United States.

### Victims of Religious Persecution

Under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, the Attorney General is instructed to provide training to all officers adjudicating refugee cases on the nature of religious persecution abroad. Given recent events, we have to question whether this statute has been implemented.

For example, in Vienna, INS adjudicates refugee applications from Iranian Jews, Bahai, Christians and Zoroastrians who have fled religious persecution. Up until August 1, 2001, the denial rate for this caseload had averaged 3.6%. Since August 1, 2001, 23% of members of Iranian religious minorities have been denied refugee status by INS - a 600% increase in denials. This denial rate is disturbing, as country conditions for religious minorities remain unchanged in Iran, a country that President Bush has just described as being part of the "axis of evil." Indeed, the State Department has cited Iran as a "country of particular concern for its severe and egregious violations of religious freedom."

Austria admitted these individuals into the country for the express purpose of applying to the U.S. Refugee Program. We owe that nation a great deal of gratitude for maintaining its post-World War II legacy as a transit nation to freedom. The Austrian authorities, however, are now so concerned by the surge in INS denials of refugee applications that it has told the U.S. government that Austria may have to close its borders to religious minorities fleeing from Iran.

To its credit, INS has acknowledged the problem and has started taking steps to re-examine its adjudications in Austria, including those cases that it has already denied. The State Department has been supportive of working with INS and the Overseas Processing Entity/JVA to facilitate reconsideration of these denied cases.

However, our experience causes us to fear that the constant discrimination and oppression faced by Christians, Jews, and Bahais in Iran may not, in INS' view, always be sufficient to warrant the granting of refugee status. In such cases, we urge the Attorney General to follow earlier precedent and allow members of these religious minorities to enter the United States under humanitarian parole so that they will not be forced to return to Iran where they cannot practice their faith in safety and dignity.



Our third recommendation, therefore, is that the U.S. Refugee Program implement the training and guidelines required under the International Religious Freedom Act, and offer humanitarian parole to bona fide members of persecuted religious minorities who should not be forced to return to a country where they would be mistreated on account of their religious beliefs.

### The Refugee Crisis After September 11th

The refugee program was severely impaired prior to September 11. Today, it is virtually paralyzed. However, we believe that, with appropriate resources, refugee processing can be efficient without compromising the security of the United States. So far, such resources have not been dedicated, processing has come to a standstill, and refugees who are trying to flee terror are paying the price.

In the aftermath of the September 11th tragedy, the Refugee Council USA fully understood the necessity of enhancing the integrity and security of the U.S. Refugee Program. However, we were greatly troubled by the length of the review and the absence of any opportunity for us as the voluntary agency partners in the refugee program to provide input based on our decades of experience in overseas refugee processing. Substantively, we were very concerned that while none of the terrorists were refugees, the refugee program was the only "immigration" program that faced a near moratorium. In addition to stopping the admission of already approved refugees, the INS has only been permitted to conduct new refugee adjudications in three sites around the world.

The human costs of this delay have been enormous. Among the refugees placed in limbo waiting for the possibility to find freedom and safety in America were Afghan widows, single women and children in Pakistan, religious minorities from the former Soviet Union and Iran, long-time refugees living in West African refugee camps, and many others. Family members here in the United States became sick with worry.

Officially, the moratorium was lifted on November 21st when President Bush signed the Presidential Determination on the fiscal year 2002 refugee program and the security review was completed. The refugee community was pleased that, despite the lost time, the President recommitted the Administration to reaching this year's goal of 70,000 refugee admissions.

While strengthening security procedures is necessary, the manner in which this has been implemented has had an extremely negative impact on refugee arrivals, thereby exacerbating the crisis for refugees in the field. Our calculations indicate that in the first four months of FY 2002, only 2,981 refugees were admitted compared with over 16,000 in the same period in FY 2001. Reports that the International Organization for Migration has scheduled only 2,600 refugees for admission in February 2002, instead of the usual 5,000-7,000, demonstrates that the ominous shortfall in admissions is continuing. Again, I need to underscore that refugee numbers lost are not numbers alone, but lives of individuals in tremendous need of protection.

To demonstrate the impact on local communities, and the refugee resettlement capacity of the United States, I would like to use my own agency as an example.

During the first three months of FY 2002, nine HIAS affiliates received a total of only 56 refugees. During the same period last year, 102 HIAS affiliates resettled a total of 2,142 refugees. Indicating the impact on local communities, in the first quarter of fiscal year 2002, HIAS' affiliate in Tucson resettled one refugee instead of 34; in San Francisco, three instead of 86; and in New York City, seven instead of 837. As a consequence of the lack of arrivals, affiliates are being forced to retrench resettlement staff. Most are aware that should arrivals pick up later in the year, the linguistically skilled case managers who are being laid off and the dedicated volunteers who are moving on to other programs may not be available to assist in resettling newly arrived refugees.

These dramatic shortfalls can be seen throughout the networks of the Refugee Council USA member agencies. In polling our members to determine the current and anticipated impact of low arrivals, and consequent drop in revenues to support local programs, we see alarming developments. Agencies report between 10% and 60% reductions in staff at the affiliate level due to lack of revenues. And, if the network is diminished further, our ability to gear back up when U.S. policy requires assistance for future arrivals will be made all the more challenging. Our objective of enhancing the quality of the resettlement experience for newly arriving refugees will be in jeopardy under these circumstances.

#### Post-September 11 Mixed Messages from the Administration

Based on projected admissions figures alone, FY 2002 will be a crisis year of monumental proportions. At the current rate, the United States will not even admit half of the 70,000 refugees whom the Administration pledged to admit even after September 11. Other groups of immigrants, temporary workers and visitors to the United States have not been similarly impacted. We can still resettle 70,000 refugees this year if the U.S. Government takes an aggressive and creative approach to refugee processing and admissions. Time, however, is running out.

In January, Refugee Council USA was concerned to learn from the Department of State that they believed no more than 45-50,000 refugees could be admitted in FY 2002, and so had decided to reprogram \$38 million from resettlement to other refugee assistance needs. While all Refugee Council agencies are strong supporters of overseas refugee assistance, and some provide this assistance themselves, we believe both assistance and resettlement are essential components of refugee protection, and require appropriate funding to fulfill their missions. Particularly when the admissions program is already struggling to meet the President's goals, we believe that processing funds should not be cut, thereby dooming hopes for this crucial protection tool.

Against this background, we were encouraged by INS Commissioner Ziglar's public declaration in early February that the Bush Administration would take the steps necessary to meet the target of 70,000 admissions.

However, in the immediate aftermath of this reassuring news, refugee advocates were disappointed to see that the President's FY 2003 budget request does not seek an increase for the Migration and Refugee Assistance account that would allow badly needed protection to reach more refugees. The budget request seeks \$705 million for this account - a funding level that is the same as the FY 2002 final appropriation, but \$10 million less than the President's own FY 2002 proposal. Sadly, the message of this budget is the contraction of the United States'

commitment to refugees. It does not promote the growth and expansion of this critical tool of the United States' humanitarian and foreign policy, to which the State Department just last year told us they were committed.

Finally, I would like to identify several key problems relating to the new security measures that have had a devastating impact on this year's refugee program. We firmly believe that each of these difficulties can be resolved with additional resources and an energetic common sense approach that fulfills both our legitimate security needs and our commitment to refugee protection.

" The system is so slow on the U.S. side that only 30 refugees can be scheduled per flight because refugees, unlike other immigrants and nonimmigrants, must undergo a special security screening upon arrival at each airport.

" There are only four ports of entry where refugees may be admitted - New York, LA, Chicago, and Miami.

" New fingerprints are required at ports of entry, but insufficient staffing and equipment has been made available to admit refugees in a timely manner.

" There is a terrible backlog in the processing of Security Advisory Opinions (SAOs), thereby holding up refugees stranded abroad. For example, in Vienna, SAOs are taking two months to process.

" New requirements that all family reunion refugee cases be sent back to Washington for additional review has caused indefinite delay for thousands of refugees, and has had a particularly negative impact on refugees in Africa.

" While upcoming INS activity may improve the situation to some degree, the United States government has not expeditiously addressed the need to begin adjudicating or even registering new refugee cases.

" Further affecting refugee processing is the new requirement that the Regional Security Officer must declare overseas sites to be "secure" before INS can conduct interviews there. Last week, there were only two such "secure" sites worldwide, and this week, there are a total of three - Vienna, Havana, and Moscow.

My colleague from Migration and Refugee Service of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, a member agency of Refugee Council USA, will address these new processing impediments in greater detail in separate testimony.

## Conclusion

Again, I would like to thank you for inviting me to testify here today on behalf of Refugee Council USA. We hope that now, when confronting a true crisis in the refugee program, the Administration will join fully with the refugee community in identifying groups who should be given access to the refugee program without having to wrestle with the UN bureaucracy. We also

urge that it promote reunification of refugees with their families in the United States. We request that they ensure that oppressed religious minorities are not returned to countries that routinely and egregiously violate religious freedom. With the recent statements supporting expanded resettlement, we hope the United States will fulfill this pledge and reverse the downward trend of the previous eight years and restore its commitment to refugee protection. Finally, we look forward to a building of our communities' partnership with the State Department under the new leadership of Assistant Secretary Gene Dewey.