

Statement of

# **The Honorable Russ Feingold**

United States Senator  
Wisconsin  
September 27, 2006

Statement of U.S. Senator Russell D. Feingold  
Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship  
Hearing on "Oversight Hearing: U.S. Refugee Admissions and Policy "  
September 27, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing, and I want to thank the witnesses for testifying today. Let me take a moment to express my thoughts about the direction of U.S. refugee resettlement policy.

As an advocate for human rights, I am proud that the United States has a long history of protecting and resettling refugee populations. Our country has resettled more than 2.6 million refugees since 1975. It is therefore disturbing to see a drop in refugee resettlement figures this year - a result of the passage of the REAL ID Act, which has prevented legitimate refugees from being resettled in the United States.

It is time for Congress to fix the problems created by the REAL ID Act for our refugee admissions policy. This is not about whether we should resettle people engaged in terrorist activities. There is no question that we must protect our borders and ensure that we do not admit those who seek to harm us. The vast majority of refugees, however, do not pose a terrorist threat to our country. Most refugees are victims of political or humanitarian tragedies - they are victims of warfare and persecution and face uncertain futures in refugee camps. Refugees live without stable housing or employment, lack access to health care and education, and are dependent upon their temporary host countries for protection.

We should ensure that our national security concerns are addressed without creating unnecessary obstacles that delay the resettlement of legitimate refugees who could benefit from resettlement to our country. Since the enactment of the REAL ID Act, there have been noticeable delays and a subsequent reduction in refugee resettlements. In 2005, the United States admitted 53,813 refugees, compared to just over 41,000 this year. Waits are longer, too. Refugees are often forced to wait in squalid camps and without the proper medical care for themselves and their families. The longer wait means continued instability for those living in the camps, increased costs of housing the refugees for international refugee assistance organizations, and increased costs for the temporary host countries that provide protection.

I know that the Administration is aware of the impact that the REAL ID Act is having on our refugee admissions efforts. The Departments of Homeland Security, State, and Justice have made

decisions to waive the restrictions placed on a number of innocent refugees seeking resettlement. But that approach is not a realistic long-term solution to the current and burdensome resettlement policy. I encourage DOS, DOJ, and DHS to immediately resolve the status of refugees whose cases are in limbo because of the requirements of the REAL ID Act. I also believe Congress should act soon. Congress needs to fix those provisions that have made the resettlement process cumbersome and unwieldy. I hope that these departments will work with Congress to develop a viable solution that allows for an efficient resettlement process while protecting the United States from terrorist threats.

I want to again thank the witnesses for testifying today. I hope we can continue to work together to ensure that legitimate refugee populations are provided the opportunity for a new life and future through resettlement to the United States.