

Testimony of
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION, BORDER SECURITY
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Thank you for this opportunity to give you my assessment of the achievements and prospects for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. Through this program, the United States provides an extraordinary opportunity for resettlement to tens of thousands of refugees fleeing persecution. As President Bush said last June, it is important that America be a welcoming society. We lead the world in offering resettlement to those in need, and we encourage other countries to develop resettlement programs.

First, I want to thank you for your continued support, which reflects the strong humanitarian impulse in the American people that I witness whenever I travel around the country. Your support has helped us implement many new initiatives. These initiatives, which I will discuss, helped us attain our ambitious goals for the fiscal year 2004 program. After two years of adjusting to the changes brought about by 9-11, and continuing to respond to the end of Cold War, we have made a robust program. When September 30 arrives, based on anticipated developments, we project that refugee admissions will have increased nearly 80 percent over fiscal 2003, despite logistical and security challenges that kept per capita costs high--\$3,500 per refugee admitted compared to \$2,200 in FY 2001. So long as we receive adequate funding, I am confident that we have a system in place that is capable of sustaining or increasing admissions numbers in coming years.

But before I talk about the future, let me reflect for a few moments on the past. I have been in humanitarian operations for some time, serving under three Administrations and for the United Nations. Major geopolitical earth shifts during that time have profoundly affected the U.S. refugee admissions program.

From the mid-1970s until the mid-1990s at least three-quarters of refugees coming to the United States were from two principal locations -- the former Soviet Union or Southeast Asia. Processing sites were few and they were safe: The Soviet Union, the Philippines, Thailand, Hong Kong and Indonesia readily allowed us to process refugees.

Now, we process refugees--a few hundred or a few thousand at a time--in about 46 locations and representing 60 different nationalities. Some of these widely scattered places are remote; some are dangerous. Based on an assessment of terrorism threats, the impact of the war in Iraq and other factors, some traditional processing sites have been eliminated. My Bureau and Homeland Security's Bureau of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services have collaborated to redirect resources to locations providing adequate safety for U.S. personnel. We have spent millions of dollars on physically moving thousands of refugees and on "hardening" processing facilities around the world. Much of this effort has been in Africa. Additionally, after the tragic events of 9/11, we have implemented more stringent namecheck and other security requirements. So compared to the old days, costs are much higher and the process much more labor-intensive.

In last year's report to Congress we acknowledged the program was at a crossroads. We had two choices: limit the size and scope of our program, allowing the program to wane; or mount the most extensive and expensive rescue operation in the history of the U.S. refugee admissions program. Of course we chose the latter.

In doing so, we expanded the concept of "rescue" to include refugees who have been living in protracted unresolved situations, like the Meskhetian Turks in Russia, who had been rootless for decades, or 15,000 Lao Hmong living in a closed camp in Thailand for about a decade. We are resettling these groups. We are also identifying other populations in Southeast Asia in need of resettlement, and resettling long-suffering Somali Bantu in Kenya, and Liberians oppressed by the Taylor regime who continue to be at risk. As I said in an op-ed published earlier this month in the Washington Times, "long-staying" refugees are not commodities; they are vibrant human beings. We are resolved not to let them languish in further dependency and even despair. We will continue to seek out vulnerable people--especially women and children--who have waited years or even decades for rescue.

The refugee outlook is brighter now than it has been for years. The overall number of refugees in the world continues to decline -- the global refugee population has dropped by approximately 20% over the last two years, from 12.1 million at the end of 2001 to 9.7 million at the end of 2003. The predominant reason cited by the United Nations for this progress is the option to voluntarily repatriate. The dramatic changes in Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Angola and Iraq have made it possible for refugees to return to those countries. Large-scale repatriations are or will soon be underway for hundreds of thousands of refugees in Africa. The more than 3 million who have returned to Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban make up one of the largest repatriations in history. As Afghanistan continues to protect the rights of its citizens, particularly women, the environment becomes fertile with hope and opportunity. The U.S. government remains the major contributor - both to making repatriation solutions happen, and to making them last through employment opportunities such as the Afghan Conservation Corps. In Iraq, over the next 2-3 years, we anticipate that U.S.-Iraqi-international cooperation will lead to the return of about 1.5 million Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons, some of whom have been in exile for decades. As freedom and liberty continue to be embraced around the world, there is good reason to expect fewer situations resulting in refugees.

When resettlement is the appropriate durable solution for refugees, the United States steps up to the plate. Despite the shrinking pool of refugees, the disqualification of many previously

approved family reunification cases because of fraud, and the logistical and security challenges I mentioned, I am happy to report that as of today we have admitted over 48,000 refugees this fiscal year; we expect that number will rise to more than 52,000 by September 30. More than half are from Africa. Furthermore, we will enter FY 2005 with a healthy pipeline of approved cases in the final stages of processing.

The extraordinary effort that produced this result has had the full support of the President and is testimony to his steadfast commitment to a vibrant, diverse, and secure refugee resettlement program. The success of this year's program owes a debt as well to the outstanding cooperation among partners both inside and outside government over the past three years. The Departments of State, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services have worked closely to overcome significant obstacles. We have worked with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to mainstream resettlement within its overall program of activities. Refugee advocates in the NGO community--especially Refugee Council USA and InterAction--played key roles in the identification and sponsorship components of the resettlement process. Our NGO partners in the U.S. have helped streamline sponsorship processes to expedite departures this year and prepared receiving communities for the increased number of arrivals.

Let me specifically mention our efforts to promote greater identification and referral capacities within the government and by the UNHCR and NGOs. The time-consuming and often politically sensitive task of caseload identification is critical to maintaining a healthy admissions pipeline. Over the past two years, our contribution of over 14 million dollars has supported 46 full-time resettlement related positions in UNHCR and resulted in a much larger number of referrals. This year, we expect UNHCR to refer at least 21,500 individual refugee cases to the United States through this initiative.

UNHCR's improved ability to identify resettlement cases also helps further our mutual goal of increasing the number of countries involved in resettling refugees. The rest of the world combined takes less than half as many refugees as the U.S. does; this year, some 20-25,000 vice 53,000 for the United States. Canada and Australia took more than 10,000 each in calendar year 2003, but after that the numbers drop significantly. Many European nations claim that they are contending with large numbers of asylum seekers and are unable to voluntarily accept refugees from overseas as well. The U.S. receives asylum seekers, too, but that in our view in no way diminishes our commitment to resettle refugees. We will continue to work with UNHCR and other countries to encourage the expansion of resettlement as a durable solution for refugees in need.

We also recognize that NGOs may be aware of individuals for whom U.S. resettlement would be appropriate. Accordingly, we have held two training programs on case identification and referral in Africa over the past eighteen months. We will offer this training to NGOs in Asia later this year and wherever it might be warranted in the future.

In addition to the development of individual case referral mechanisms, we initiated field visits in collaboration with UNHCR, host governments, and NGOs to explore potential groups for resettlement consideration. In the past year, we fielded the first of these Targeted Response Teams to Mozambique, Uganda, Guinea, and Ghana. We found this to be an effective approach to group caseload identification, particularly for populations that have long been in protracted

situations. In part through the work of a U.S. government official detailed to UNHCR, we have been firmly committed to the complementary work UNHCR has undertaken in the area of group referrals. Through a systematic, analytical methodology under development, UNHCR can designate entire groups for resettlement consideration. This permits UNHCR to better promote the strategic use of resettlement to resolve refugee situations.

These are just some of the initiatives we have undertaken. In addition,

? We added new staff to augment both overseas processing and identification of new needy populations. The creation of the Department of Homeland Security's corps of refugee officers also will be a critical part of this effort.

? We have expanded Family Reunification: Having instituted additional fraud prevention measures in the program, we were able to increase from four to nine the number of nationalities eligible for P-3 processing in FY 2004 and propose a further expansion of the family reunification component of the program to 14 nationalities in FY 2005.

? We have commissioned a comprehensive study of refugee admissions. Professor David Martin, a renowned expert in the refugee field, has recently completed an independent study of our program. Drawing on the experience and ideas of United States government agencies, NGOs, international organizations, and refugees, his report includes a number of important recommendations that we are now reviewing. The report will be made available to the public and will inform the process of determining the shape of further reforms.

We believe we have accomplished all of the initiatives set forth in last year's report to Congress with the lone exception of developing targeted strategies to improve the protection of unaccompanied minors. This will be a focus in FY 2005. The FY-2005 Presidential proposal includes several program modifications worth noting here. They include revised definitions of processing priorities, and expansion of Priority 3 family reunification eligibility, and limited universal in-country processing authority. During FY-05, we also intend to examine possible statutory and regulatory changes that could better improve and streamline the admissions process without compromising national security. We also will explore additional measures to counter fraud and corruption, and to enhance the physical security of all refugees overseas.

The Administration's FY 2005 proposed ceiling of 70,000 refugees, with 50,000 regionally allocated at present, reflects the President's commitment to a continued sustained recovery in our program to resettle refugees in the United States. Given the level of effort and resources expended in FY 2004, and continuing security challenges, the per capita cost of resettling each refugee is likely to remain high. In order to be able to admit refugees through the 20,000 unallocated numbers included in the FY 2005 proposal, in the coming months, we will work to identify additional refugees in need of resettlement and the funding to support them while continuing to support critical humanitarian assistance requirements.

The United States refugee admissions program represents an important component of our rich tradition as an immigration country: offering refuge to the oppressed. The Administration has demonstrated that, with sufficient resolve, resources, and commitment, we can continue to demonstrate robust U.S. leadership in refugee resettlement. It has been tremendously satisfying

to see our efforts of the past three years pay off in significantly increased admissions in Fiscal Year 2004. Working together with our resettlement partners, and with availability of adequate resources, we have shown that we can realize the President's commitment to grow the program - even in the challenging environment after 9-11. The US will not be deterred in our role as a beacon of freedom to those that have known only war and oppression.

Thank you. I would be happy to take your questions.