

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1401

August 26, 2010

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
Secretary
Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

I write to inform you of a report I released on July 21, 2010 entitled "Abandoned Upon Arrival: Implications for refugees and local communities burdened by a U.S. resettlement system that is not working." The report assesses the U.S. government's system for refugee admission and resettlement – as well as proposes recommendations for enhancing the efficiency of this humanitarian program long supported by the American people. As you know, since 1975, the United States has offered safe-haven to nearly 3 million refugees facing persecution in communist-controlled and conflict-ridden regions of the world.

While resettlement reflects our nation's noblest traditions and should continue, we must also acknowledge that significant costs are associated with this activity. The report found that the Administration's responsibility to ensure that federal resources are matched with refugee admissions is being neglected. Consequently, resettlement efforts in some U.S. cities are under-funded, over-stretched and exacerbating pressures on local communities already burdened by the challenges of a troubled economy.

In January 2010, Eric Schwartz, Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration, announced that the initial reception and placement grant awarded to refugees for the first 30-90 days after arrival would be increased from \$900 to \$1800. Prior to this action, refugees were essentially consigned to poverty upon entering the United States, as the decades-old grant level had declined by more than 50 percent in real terms due to inflation. However, such an increase - in the absence of comprehensive reforms - will likely only delay the incidence of poverty, as many refugees lack a legitimate shot at becoming employed, conversant, and self-sufficient under the current system. The ramifications of this problematic scenario, especially during the current economic climate, are proving a strain on local community resources and relations.

The purpose of this report is to contribute additional perspectives to the important interagency discussions currently underway within the Administration, led by the National Security Council, through elevating the ideas and concerns of leaders within local resettlement communities for whom minimal consultation has been afforded. I have

also asked the Government Accountability Office to undertake a comprehensive review of the U.S. refugee resettlement system to ensure a full diagnosis of the challenges is available to inform reform efforts at the federal level.

Enclosed are a number of questions necessitating responses from your staff within the Population, Refugee and Migration Bureau, which will better inform my constituents and staff of the status of the interagency review as well as the Administration's overall vision for this program. A similar letter and request is being sent to Secretary Sebelius and National Security Advisor Jones.

I appreciate your cooperation in this regard and wish you every continuing success in your important public service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard G. Lugar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Richard" being the most prominent.

Richard G. Lugar
United States Senator

Enclosure

RGL/gja

Cc:

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
On Labor, HHS and Education

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
On Labor, HHS and Education

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Chairman
Senate Judiciary Subcommittee
On Immigration, Refugees and Border Security

The Honorable John Cornyn
Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Subcommittee
On Immigration, Refugees and Border Security

Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM)

1. What is your vision of U.S. resettlement in the context of global refugee protection? What are the main goals resettlement in the United States is meant to achieve?
2. In light of UNHCR's estimate that roughly 800,000 refugees from around the world are in need of resettlement, what are your thoughts on how the international community can address this need? Describe the nature of your engagement with other countries in encouraging them to expand their resettlement programs.
3. How is PRM working to improve cooperation with other agencies? What other steps are needed to further enhance cooperation with ORR, states, voluntary agencies and local communities to ensure that refugees and communities welcoming them receive adequate support?
4. How is PRM working with UNHCR, OPEs, ORR, DHS and voluntary agencies to improve data collection and sharing, particularly in relation to demographics, medical cases, special needs, etc.? What other areas of data collection and sharing are PRM working to improve? Please provide examples.
5. Describe the nature of PRM's efforts to examine the institutional processes and practices of voluntary agencies, including but not limited to factors that influence the scope of an agency's annual refugee resettlement proposal submitted to PRM, organizational structure, and administrative overhead to ensure an adherence to best practices and a resettlement program that is sensitive to local community capacity.
6. What changes in placement policy has PRM considered that might improve decisions related to the placement of refugees? For example, how will PRM ensure a smoother transition for highly traumatized Darfurian refugees? Will PRM strategically identify cities positioned to handle a large influx of highly traumatized refugees and prepare the communities with key personnel in advance of the transfer?
7. What can be done to improve mental health identification and treatment overseas for refugees that are being resettled to the U.S.?
8. From the U.S. perspective, what does expedited processing actually mean? What plans are in place to develop a formalized U.S. procedure to expedite the resettlement of refugees who face imminent risk? What types of cases are expedited and how long does the process take?
9. The "one-size fits all approach" has been signaled as one of the characteristics of the program that prevents resettled populations from receiving adequate support.

What PRM-initiated reforms have been considered that might better respond to the diverse needs and characteristics of the populations currently resettled?

10. The successful integration and self-sufficiency of refugees have proven to greatly depend on their ability to learn English and get adequate job training. While overseas training and ESL classes might not be appropriate for all populations and displacement settings, for many refugees that must wait months after their cases have been approved, receiving initial training and ESL classes might positively impact their integration in the U.S. Has PRM commissioned studies to understand the feasibility of, and best practices associated with implementing effective ESL and job training programs overseas for refugees that are being resettled to the US?
11. Since the Iraq war began, hundreds of thousands of refugees remain displaced in the Middle East. Do you have a long term commitment to resettlement of Iraqi refugees in the U.S.? Do you have contingency plans should the refugee flow increase after the U.S. troop withdrawal? What in your view could be done to better ensure that after resettlement we are able to utilize their skills to benefit the refugees and the communities hosting them? What can be done to better support the most vulnerable Iraqis, those with medical, psychological and social needs, single women-headed households, the elderly and others who may not be immediately employable?

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1401

August 26, 2010

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

I write to inform you of a report I released on July 21, 2010 entitled “Abandoned Upon Arrival: Implications for refugees and local communities burdened by a U.S. resettlement system that is not working.” The report assesses the U.S. government’s system for refugee admission and resettlement – as well as proposes recommendations for enhancing the efficiency of this humanitarian program long supported by the American people. As you know, since 1975, the United States has offered safe-haven to nearly 3 million refugees facing persecution in communist-controlled and conflict-ridden regions of the world.

While resettlement reflects our nation’s noblest traditions and should continue, we must also acknowledge that significant costs are associated with this activity. The report found that the Administration’s responsibility to ensure that federal resources are matched with refugee admissions is being neglected. Consequently, resettlement efforts in some U.S. cities are under-funded, over-stretched and exacerbating pressures on local communities already burdened by the challenges of a troubled economy.

In January 2010, Eric Schwartz, Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration, announced that the initial reception and placement grant awarded to refugees for the first 30-90 days after arrival would be increased from \$900 to \$1800. Prior to this action, refugees were essentially consigned to poverty upon entering the United States, as the decades-old grant level had declined by more than 50 percent in real terms due to inflation. However, such an increase - in the absence of comprehensive reforms - will likely only delay the incidence of poverty, as many refugees lack a legitimate shot at becoming employed, conversant, and self-sufficient under the current system. The ramifications of this problematic scenario, especially during the current economic climate, are proving a strain on local community resources and relations.

The purpose of this report is to contribute additional perspectives to the important interagency discussions currently underway within the Administration, led by the National Security Council, through elevating the ideas and concerns of leaders within local resettlement communities for whom minimal consultation has been afforded. I have also asked the Government Accountability Office to undertake a comprehensive review

of the U.S. refugee resettlement system to ensure a full diagnosis of the challenges is available to inform reform efforts at the federal level.

Enclosed are a number of questions necessitating responses from your staff within the Office of Refugee Resettlement, which will better inform my constituents and staff of the status of the interagency review as well as the Administration's overall vision for this program. A similar letter and request is being sent to Secretary Clinton and National Security Advisor Jones.

I appreciate your cooperation in this regard and wish you every continuing success in your important public service.

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Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)

1. What is your vision of U.S. resettlement in the context of global refugee protection? What are the main goals resettlement in the United States is meant to achieve?
2. What steps has ORR taken to better provide support for refugees and communities where refugees are resettled? For example, has ORR implemented any changes in the last year to address challenges related to housing, complex medical cases, lack of employment opportunities, or support to highly educated refugees? What type of reforms and programmatic changes does ORR need to implement to address the before-mentioned challenges?
3. Describe the nature of ORR's efforts to examine its capacity to oversee voluntary agency grantees, conduct fact-finding into community capacity shortfalls as well as monitor the impact of secondary migration.
4. Describe ORR's existing metrics for evaluating refugee integration, including but not limited to qualitative and quantitative measurements of employment levels, language acquisition, community interaction, etc.
5. What areas/programs are in need of additional funding to adequately support refugees? Has ORR identified priority funding needs and gaps? How is ORR working to increase the efficiency and flexibility of its current budget?
6. ORR has been reaching out to other agencies and partners to increase cooperation; have these efforts resulted in any concrete actions that would benefit refugees? How is ORR partnering with other federal agencies to better serve refugees?
7. Many refugee communities have achieved great success and established their own forms of support and services through the creation of many Ethnic Community Based Organizations (ECBOs) across the country. What has been the involvement of ORR, voluntary agencies, and state coordinators in the engagement of ECBOs in the successful short and long-term integration of refugees and on policy development and implementation? What are the available resources for ECBOs and how do these resources fare in comparison to resources accessible only to states and/or voluntary agencies?
8. What reforms are being implemented to improve ORR's capability to collect and share data? Has ORR identified priority areas where data collection can provide critical information on refugees and the resettlement program that can better inform programs and policies?
9. How are ORR's programs supporting highly vulnerable refugees? How can ORR better support refugees with long-term needs? What types of reforms are needed in ORR programs to address the needs of this population?

10. What plans are underway to screen refugees for trauma history and mental health challenges in refugee health screenings? If such screening is applied, what will be the follow-up both to map where these individuals are and to ensure they receive the necessary treatment? What can ORR do to support increased mental health funding, for example, for refugees who have been in camps for 20 years before their resettlement and have profound psychological issues?
11. How is ORR preparing for the anticipated arrival of significant numbers of highly traumatized Darfur refugees over the next several years? Even the best local resettlement agencies and places with specialized rehabilitation centers for torture survivors do not have the resources to provide support to a large group of low-skilled and highly-traumatized refugees for an indefinite period of time. How is ORR going to help communities prepare and assist these refugees, being more proactive in that support and not reactive when communities hit crisis point? With regard not only to Darfur refugees but also to all other vulnerable populations in coming years –how will ORR help prepare communities and local stakeholders with adequate resources to welcome and integrate these refugees?
12. Do you have plans to institute an effective mechanism for collecting, disseminating and discussing best practices among federal, state and local stakeholders? There are many examples throughout the U.S. of successful resettlement programs, but there does not appear to be a functioning system for collecting data on what works and what doesn't.
13. In your view, what are the roles of the State Refugee Coordinator and the voluntary agencies in educating local communities regarding incoming refugee populations? Do you believe more resources need to be invested in community outreach? Do you plan to make a greater investment in this area and what are the barriers to such an investment from your perspective?
14. Has thought been given to strategies for standardizing the resettlement program to ensure that all refugees receive the minimum basic package necessary to begin their life in the United States? Currently, the level of assistance and the services available to refugees vary state by state and often community by community.
15. What concrete steps has ORR taken to increase consultation on budget planning with service providers and receiving communities, so as to ensure that federally funded programs match current priorities and needs?

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WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1401

August 26, 2010

The Honorable James Jones
National Security Advisor
National Security Council
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear National Security Advisor Jones:

I write to inform you of a report I released on July 21, 2010 entitled “Abandoned Upon Arrival: Implications for refugees and local communities burdened by a U.S. resettlement system that is not working.” The report assesses the U.S. government’s system for refugee admission and resettlement – as well as proposes recommendations for enhancing the efficiency of this humanitarian program long supported by the American people. As you know, since 1975, the United States has offered safe-haven to nearly 3 million refugees facing persecution in communist-controlled and conflict-ridden regions of the world.

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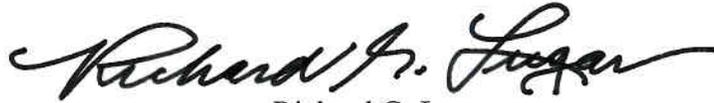
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review of the U.S. refugee resettlement system to ensure a full diagnosis of the challenges is available to inform reform efforts at the federal level.

Enclosed are a number of questions necessitating responses from your staff within the Office of Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights, which will better inform my constituents and staff of the status of the interagency review as well as the Administration's overall vision for this program. A similar letter and request is being sent to Secretary Clinton and Secretary Sebelius.

I appreciate your cooperation in this regard and wish you every continuing success in your important public service.

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National Security Council (NSC)

1. Roughly one year ago the NSC initiated a review process of the resettlement program. This process reportedly includes inter-agency regular meetings and stakeholder consultations.
 - a. What are the central findings of this process with regard to reforming the resettlement program? Has the NSC formulated initial recommendations on reform?
 - b. Has this process led to changes in the resettlement program? How do short-term measures relate to the long-term process? Has the NSC analyzed the impact of those measures?
 - c. When will the NSC be announcing long-term, structural reforms? Can you share priority areas where the NSC is working to provide reforms?
2. Was a comprehensive examination of the resettlement program undertaken as part of the NSC review? Was an examination of institutional processes and practices of voluntary agencies, the factors that influence the scope of an agency's annual refugee resettlement proposal submitted to PRM as well as the organizational structure and administrative overhead of voluntary agencies included in the review, in order to ensure an adherence to best practices and a resettlement program that is sensitive to local community capacity?
3. Has the reported inadequacy of resources been signaled as one of the major challenges of the resettlement program in providing adequate support for refugees and communities? If so, what areas of the resettlement program are in urgent need of additional resources? Has the NSC process looked into other issues affecting resources, such as lack of flexibility, inefficiency, formula funding, etc?
4. As part of the reforms that the NSC is considering, are there areas that would require legislative action?
5. Cooperation between agencies and other actors that are part of the resettlement program are central to address some of the challenges of the program. While the NSC is leading the review process, what long-term entity/mechanism will exist to ensure that collaboration, information sharing, interdepartmental program management, etc. are sustainable?