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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

FRANK G. LOWENSTEIN, STAFF DIRECTOR
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July 20, 2010

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Acting Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

The Obama Administration announced a target goal of admitting some 80,000 refugees into the United States for FY2010. If this target is achieved, it will represent a continued significant upturn in our admissions – up substantially from 60,000 in FY08.

While this increase reflects both America's commitment to remaining a beacon of hope for the world's most oppressed populations and also a deep appreciation for the important contributions made by such individuals to our nation's history, culture and economy, we must acknowledge the costs associated with this activity. Concerns are growing regarding the strained resources and absorptive capacity of those domestic entities responsible for providing the services that will assist in the integration and resettlement of these refugees. I therefore request that GAO examine the resettlement policies and practices of the United States government, as well as those of all relevant entities involved at the local level, in order to identify redundancies, inefficiencies and the inappropriate devolution of federal funding responsibilities to local resettlement communities.

Such an examination should consider the following:

- 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.
- oversight and accountability metrics used by PRM for monitoring voluntary agencies as well as mechanisms for assessing internal strengths and inefficiencies within PRM's administrative processes, the nature of PRM's consultations with local and state elected officials, and the factors influencing the annual cap of refugees admitted to the United States.

- mechanisms used for assessing internal strengths and inefficiencies in the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Department of Health and Human Services, the nature of ORR's consultations with local and state elected officials, and the extent of ORR's capacity to oversee voluntary agency grantees, address the unique needs of refugees, fact-find into community capacity shortfalls as well as monitor the impact of secondary migration – potentially through some type of targeted census.
- the relevance of existing metrics for evaluating refugee integration, including but not limited to qualitative and quantitative measurements of employment levels, language acquisition, community interaction, etc.
- inter-agency coordination, including information sharing and planning coordination between ORR and PRM as well as the potential value added by establishing a centralized position to coordinate long and short-term refugee policy housed within or reportable to the White House.

Please ensure that your staff consults with state and local elected officials, as well as local community leaders and service providers so that we may better understand their viewpoint on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard G. Lugar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "L".

Richard G. Lugar
Ranking Member