

PROPOSED REFUGEE ADMISSIONS
for
FISCAL YEAR 2007

REPORT TO THE CONGRESS

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
TO THE
COMMITTEES ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES SENATE
AND
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF
SECTION 207(e) (1)-(7)
OF THE
IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY ACT

United States Department of State
United States Department of Homeland Security
United States Department of Health and Human Services



INTRODUCTION

This *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2007: Report to the Congress* is submitted in compliance with Section 207(e) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). The Act requires that before the start of the fiscal year and, to the extent possible, at least two weeks prior to consultations on refugee admissions, members of the Committees on the Judiciary of the Senate and the House of Representatives be provided with the following information:

- (1) A description of the nature of the refugee situation;
- (2) A description of the number and allocation of the refugees to be admitted and an analysis of conditions within the countries from which they came;
- (3) A description of the plans for their movement and resettlement and the estimated cost of their movement and resettlement;
- (4) An analysis of the anticipated social, economic, and demographic impact of their admission to the United States;¹
- (5) A description of the extent to which other countries will admit and assist in the resettlement of such refugees;
- (6) An analysis of the impact of the participation of the United States in the resettlement of such refugees on the foreign policy interests of the United States; and
- (7) Such additional information as may be appropriate or requested by such members.

In addition, specific reporting required by section 602(d) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (Pub. L. 105-292, Oct. 27, 1998, 112 Stat. 2787) (IRFA) on information about religious persecution of refugee populations eligible for consideration for admission to the United States and section 305(b) of the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004 (Pub. L. 108-333, Oct. 18, 2004, 118 Stat. 1287) on information about specific measures taken to facilitate access to the

¹ Detailed discussion of the anticipated social and economic impact, including secondary migration, of the admission of refugees to the United States is being provided in the *Report to the Congress* of the Refugee Resettlement Program, Office of Refugee Resettlement, Department of Health and Human Services.

United States refugee program for individuals who have fled countries of particular concern for violations of religious freedoms, identified pursuant to section 402(b) of the IRFA, is included in this report.

FOREWORD

Throughout its history, the United States has maintained a rich and vibrant tradition of offering refuge to those who have suffered or who fear persecution. The coordination of the admission of refugees to the United States is assigned to the Department of State, which works in concert with other key government agencies -- the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, and Health and Human Services -- international organizations, and non-governmental partners to coordinate the admission of refugees to the United States. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is the global leader in this field and offers admission to the largest number of refugees in need of resettlement. In 2005, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) referred to the United States some 60 percent of the total caseload it referred to all resettlement countries.

The ability to offer resettlement as a durable solution to some of the world's refugees is a critical responsibility in a highly visible policy arena. It is an important part of the President's Freedom Agenda and the President's national security goal of championing human dignity. Third-country resettlement uniquely benefits the refugee, the host country, and the community offering refuge.

This document highlights conditions around the world affecting refugee protection and resettlement. It also summarizes some of the successes and challenges the program has enjoyed over the past year. Finally, although by its very nature refugee resettlement is dynamic and constantly changing, this document will identify some of the groups of refugees whom we will seek to consider for admission to the United States in FY 2007.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is now more diverse than ever. In FY 2006, Refugee Officers with DHS' U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services will have conducted interviews of applicants from some 60 nationalities in over 50 overseas locations. Understandably, the diversity of the program requires more careful planning than ever before. Delays occur frequently due to security and medical issues, travel complications, and difficulties in obtaining exit permission from host governments. While we have had great success in accelerating the admission of some groups, many other refugees have encountered numerous delays before reaching the United States.

Several key events have dramatically changed certain refugee situations. This year, the worldwide refugee population has dropped to its lowest level in 26 years. According to UNHCR, by the end of 2005, the estimated refugee

population worldwide had declined to 13 million - 8.7 million of whom are under the care of the UNHCR. While this is welcome news, indicating that millions of former refugees have been able to find durable solutions by returning home or integrating in their country of asylum, there is still much work to be done. Throughout the world, many refugees continue to live in despair, fear, and precarious situations. For example, Somali, Sudanese, Eritrean, Congolese, Burundi, Rwandan, Chadian, Togolese and Zimbabwean refugees live in camps and urban settings across Africa. Burmese refugees continue to flee Burma and are primarily found in Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh, and India. The Burmese military has renewed its crackdown against the ethnic Karen minority, further displacing thousands. Colombians fear persecution from the paramilitaries and guerrillas and have moved from their homes to neighboring countries in huge numbers. Cubans have continued to suffer from government persecution and many seek refuge in the United States through authorized and unauthorized channels. .

Large numbers of refugees remain caught up in protracted and stagnant situations. More than one hundred thousand Bhutanese have been living in camps in Nepal, most for over 15 years. Eritreans have taken refuge in Sudan for as many as three decades, and repatriation has largely been closed off. Both the urgent and the long-standing situations require immediate attention, and the United States plans to continue to engage fully in the hope of offering durable solutions, including resettlement, wherever appropriate.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has faced a number of challenges in the past year, including the effect of terrorism-related inadmissibility provisions included in section 212(a)(3)(B) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). The Secretary of State, after consultation with the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice, exercised her authority to render the material support inadmissibility provision inapplicable to otherwise admissible Karen refugee applicants residing in Tham Hin camp in Thailand. The decision to exercise the limited material support inapplicability provision was based on the collective assessment that this exercise of discretion serves the foreign policy interests of the United States and that the admission of these refugees will not compromise our national security. Over 75 percent of those who have been interviewed to date have been approved for admission to the United States.

The Administration is considering whether to use the material support inapplicability provision with respect to certain other refugee populations of humanitarian concern to the United States, based on a full consideration of foreign policy and national security factors. It is the Administration's view that important

national security interests and counter-terrorism efforts are not incompatible with our nation's historic role as the world's leader in refugee resettlement. While we must keep out terrorists, we can continue to provide safe haven to legitimate refugees. We will continue to work on ways to harmonize these two important policy interests.

This report outlines various initiatives in greater detail but it is important to note the following key developments. In FY 2006, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program admitted the first North Korean refugees to the United States since the passage of the North Korean Human Rights Act (NKHRA). We hope others will arrive in the coming year. The United States is offering refugee resettlement interviews to a large group of Burundians from one of the most protracted refugee situations in the region. Many fled their country thirty-four years ago. We are also offering interviews to the Congolese survivors of the horrific 2001 massacre at Gatumba refugee camp in Burundi. We hope to begin a program for Tibetans in Nepal and, if possible, to begin interviews of Bhutanese who have been living for more than a decade in camps there.

There has been renewed Congressional and non-governmental interest in addressing stateless populations. In relation to our Refugee Admissions Program, the INA states that the President in consultation with Congress, has the authority to designate as refugee *“any person who is within the country of such person’s nationality, or in the case of a person having no nationality, within the country in which such a person is habitually residing, and who is persecuted or who has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership to a particular social group, or political opinion.”* The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program can offer an effective tool for assisting some stateless individuals or populations in need of protection. Following on the successful experience with the admission of the Meskhetian Turks from Russia, the program will consider other appropriate stateless populations.

In July of this year, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program held its fourth annual public meeting. Many thoughtful ideas were presented which the Administration is considering, including: the expanded use of Targeted Response Teams to investigate resettlement needs and opportunities in various locales around the world; the expansion of processing priorities, and changes in the handling of unaccompanied minors.

As for successes, we interviewed and admitted some 1,500 Vietnamese who had been living in the Philippines without status for over 17 years. In June, we

began interviews of Vietnamese who were eligible for interview but were previously unable to access the Orderly Departure Program in Vietnam. The United States resettled over half of the 450 Uzbek refugees who had fled the May 2005 Andijon massacre. Increased numbers of Iranian religious minorities were resettled through a special program in Austria.

In sum, the United States remains firmly committed to a robust refugee admissions program that protects human dignity and expands the reach of freedom globally. The program has made significant gains, but also encountered some significant setbacks in FY 2006, and further adjustments in FY 2007 will be required. Our goal is to continue to manage the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program in a manner that will ensure the greatest effectiveness and flexibility, thereby permitting resettlement of the maximum number of refugees in need of this important means of protection. We will strive to apply as much of the unallocated reserve included in this proposal as possible to FY 2007 admissions by working to begin processing several new groups during the year.

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I. OVERVIEW OF U.S. REFUGEE POLICY

By the end of 2005, the estimated refugee population worldwide had declined to 13 million - 8.7 million of whom are under the care of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This is the lowest level in 25 years. In large part, this decrease in global refugee numbers has resulted from the achievement of durable solutions – voluntary return, local integration or third country resettlement – in which the United States has played a leadership role within the international community. We actively support all efforts to provide protection, assistance and durable solutions to refugees as these are important foreign policy goals of the United States. Combined with humanitarian diplomacy, U.S. financial contributions to international and non-governmental organizations are vital to achieving these goals. Under the authority in the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962, as amended, the United States contributes to the programs of the office of UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and other international and non-governmental organizations that provide protection and assistance to refugees, internally displaced persons and victims of conflict. These contributions address the legal and physical protection needs of refugees as well as their basic assistance needs for water, sanitation, food, health care, shelter, education, and other services. The United States monitors these programs to ensure the most effective use of resources, maximizing our humanitarian impact for the benefit of refugees and internally displaced persons.

During FY 2006, the United States has continued to support the achievement of durable solutions for refugees through voluntary repatriation programs around the world. In seeking durable solutions for refugees, the United States generally gives priority to the safe voluntary return of refugees to their homelands. This policy, recognized in the Refugee Act of 1980, is also the preference of the international community, including UNHCR. If safe voluntary repatriation is not feasible, other durable solutions are sought, including local integration in countries of asylum or resettlement in third countries. Refugee repatriation operations to countries including Afghanistan, Liberia, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Sudan have proceeded on a significant scale during FY 2006, representing significant progress in the protection of individuals and families, as well as in their home countries' reconstruction and development.

Where peace and opportunities for return remain elusive, the United States pursues local integration. The Department of State works diplomatically to encourage host governments to uphold their responsibilities to protect refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) through local integration and provides assistance to meet these humanitarian needs. Somali refugees in Ethiopia, Burundi in Tanzania and Afghans in Pakistan are among those populations for whom we pursue and support opportunities for local integration.

Resettlement to third countries, including the United States, is considered for refugees in urgent need of protection as well as for those for whom other durable solutions are not feasible. For some refugees, resettlement is the best, or perhaps only, alternative. Recognizing the importance of ensuring UNHCR's capacity to identify and to refer refugees in need of resettlement, the U.S. Government has supported efforts to expand and improve the organization's resettlement infrastructure over the past seven years. Thousands of referrals for refugees in need of third country resettlement have been possible as a result of this initiative.

For many years, the United States was one of ten countries that worked with UNHCR on a regular basis to provide resettlement opportunities for persons in need of this form of international protection or durable solution. The United States has supported UNHCR's efforts to expand the number of countries active in resettlement and has also engaged bilaterally on the issue. In 2006, UNHCR referred refugees to 23 countries for resettlement. The majority (89%) was referred to the United States, Canada, and Australia. Smaller numbers of referrals were accepted by New Zealand, Chile, Brazil, and the traditional Western European resettlement countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and Ireland). In addition, Argentina, Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Switzerland each accepted a few individuals.

While the overall number of refugees referred by UNHCR and the percentage resettled by various countries fluctuate from year to year, the United States aims to provide an opportunity for U.S. resettlement to at least 50% of all UNHCR referrals, depending on availability of funds. We encourage UNHCR to make further strategic use of resettlement and to expand the number of referrals it makes annually. In calendar year 2005, the

United States resettled over 61% of the total number of UNHCR-referred refugees resettled in third countries (see Table IX).

The overall foreign policy interests of the United States have often been advanced by our willingness to work with first asylum and resettlement countries to address refugee issues. In some locations, the prompt resettlement of politically sensitive cases has helped defuse regional tensions. During the past few years, U.S. resettlement efforts in Africa, the Middle East, and East Asia have helped energize efforts by UNHCR and other countries to ensure that resettlement is accorded to those in need and that first asylum is maintained for the larger population.

During its 26-year history, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has responded to changing refugee circumstances. Even before the events of September 11, 2001, the end of the Cold War had dramatically altered the context in which the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program operates worldwide. Having shifted its focus away from large groups concentrated in a few locations, primarily refugees from Vietnam, the former Soviet Union, and the former Yugoslavia, the program began to offer resettlement to refugees of 50-60 nationalities per year, conducting interviews in often remote locations. Since the events of September 11, 2001, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has been working to balance humanitarian commitments and national security concerns.

Refugees resettled in the United States contribute positively to the diversity and enrichment of our country. The U.S. program emphasizes the goal that refugees become economically self-sufficient as quickly as possible. Department of Health and Human Services-funded programs administered by individual states and the District of Columbia provide cash and medical assistance, training programs, employment, and other support services to arriving refugees. A variety of institutional providers perform these services, including the voluntary agencies that provide initial reception and placement services under cooperative agreements with the Department of State.

Domestically, the Department of State has worked with agencies participating in the Reception and Placement (R&P) Program to ensure that the agencies have been able to provide services according to established standards. Increasingly fewer resettled refugees have close family members living in the United States who are able to provide support and facilitate the

integration process. When combined with the linguistic diversity, wide-ranging educational and employment histories of the refugee population, and the shortage of available affordable housing particularly in urban areas, resettlement agencies have had to adjust their practices to meet the increasing needs of refugees in the program.

II. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM FOR FY 2007

Proposed Ceilings

TABLE I
REFUGEE ADMISSIONS IN FY 2005 AND FY 2006,
PROPOSED REFUGEE ADMISSIONS BY REGION FOR FY 2007

REGION	FY 2005 ACTUAL ARRIVALS	FY 2006 CEILING	FY 2006 PROJECTED ARRIVALS	PROPOSED FY 2007 CEILING
Africa	20,749	20,000	17,200	22,000
East Asia	12,071	15,000	5,800	11,000
Europe and Central Asia	11,316	15,000	11,500	6,500
Latin America/Caribbean	6,700	5,000	3,000	5,000
Near East/South Asia	2,977	5,000	4,000	5,500
Regional Subtotal	53,813	60,000	41,500	50,000
Unallocated Reserve		10,000		20,000
Total	53,813	70,000	41,500	70,000

In addition to the proposed regional allocations, the President specifies that special circumstances exist so that, for the purpose of admission under allocations established above and pursuant to INA § 101(a)(42)(B), certain persons, if they otherwise qualify for admission, may be considered as refugees of special humanitarian concern to the United States although they are within their countries of nationality or, in the case of persons having no nationality, within the country in which such persons are habitually residing. The FY 2007 proposal recommends continuing such in-country processing for specified groups in Cuba, Vietnam, and the countries of the former Soviet Union as well as for extraordinary individual protection cases for whom resettlement is requested by a U.S. ambassador in any location in the world, with the understanding that individuals will only be referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program following consultation with USCIS.

Unallocated Reserve

The unallocated numbers for FY 2007 would be funded under the President's FY 2007 budget request and used only upon notification to Congress as needed.

The U.S. Government continues to strive for balance between humanitarian commitments and national security concerns. In recent years and most notably in FY 2006, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has been affected by changes to the terrorism-related inadmissibility provisions of the INA that were enacted to protect national security and support U.S. counter-terrorism efforts. Provisions in the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 and the REAL ID Act of 2005 established standards for determining inadmissibility on terrorism-related grounds, including broad definitions of "terrorist activity," "terrorist organizations," and what constitutes "engaging in terrorist activity." The expansion of the scope of the terrorist activity inadmissibility provision has meant that some individuals and groups who are engaged in opposition to repressive regimes, including some who present no apparent national security risk and to whom the U.S. is sympathetic, may now be barred from admission into this country. These caseloads are not presently included in the regional allocations above. In fact, a number of key refugee populations have been omitted from this plan because of terrorism-related inadmissibility provisions.

The U.S. Government is working on short- and long-term approaches that would ensure that this humanitarian program reaches those in need while maintaining necessary security screens. If it becomes clear that we will need to increase regional allocations to accommodate additional caseloads as a result of these efforts, we will notify Congress of our need to access the unallocated reserve.

Finally, we have several large groups under development in Africa and South Asia which we hope to begin processing for resettlement during FY 2007. If we are able to do so early enough in the year to generate arrivals during FY 2007 from any of these groups, we may also need to access unallocated reserve numbers.

Admissions Procedures

Eligibility Criteria

U.S. law allows for the admission of persons of special humanitarian concern to the United States who can establish that they have suffered past persecution or have a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The legal basis of the refugee admissions program is the Refugee Act of 1980, Pub. L. No. 96-212, § 201(b), 94 Stat. 103. With some modification, the Act largely adopted the definition of "refugee" in the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, as amended by its 1967 Protocol. The U.S. definition (INA § 101(a)(42), as amended) is as follows:

The term 'refugee' means: (A) any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, or (B) in such special circumstances as the President after appropriate consultation (as defined in section 207(e) of this Act) may specify, any person who is within the country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, within the country in which such person is habitually residing, and who is persecuted or who has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

The term 'refugee' does not include any person who ordered, incited, assisted, or otherwise participated in the persecution of any person on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

For purposes of determinations under this Act, a person who has been forced to abort a pregnancy or to undergo involuntary sterilization, or who has been persecuted for failure or refusal to undergo such a procedure or for other resistance to a coercive population control

program, shall be deemed to have been persecuted on account of political opinion, and a person who has a well-founded fear that he or she will be forced to undergo such a procedure or be subject to persecution for such failure, refusal or resistance shall be deemed to have a well-founded fear of persecution on account of political opinion.

Applicants for refugee admission to the United States must meet the following criteria:

- Meet the definition of “refugee” contained in the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act at INA § 101(a)(42);
- Be among those refugees determined by the President to be of special humanitarian concern to the United States;
- Subject to certain statutory exceptions and waivers, be otherwise admissible under the INA; and
- Not be firmly resettled in any foreign country.

Applicants who meet the above criteria may be admitted to the United States in the exercise of discretion. The admissions program is the legal process for identifying refugees of special humanitarian concern and adjudicating their claims for refugee admission. Applicants who fall within the priorities established for the relevant nationality or region are presented to USCIS for determination of eligibility for refugee status and admission under INA § 207.

Worldwide Priority System for FY 2007

The worldwide processing priority system sets guidelines for the orderly management and processing of refugee applications for admission to the United States within the established annual regional ceilings. These processing priorities are distinct from the issues of whether an applicant is legally admissible to the United States or meets the statutory “refugee” definition. A determination that a person falls within a particular processing priority only permits access to apply to the admissions program and does not entitle that person to admission to the United States.

Priority 1: Individual Referrals

Priority 1 is available to individuals with compelling protection needs or those for whom no other durable solution exists who are identified and referred to the program by UNHCR, a U.S. Embassy, or a designated non-governmental organization (NGO). This processing priority is available to persons of any nationality.

Priority 2: Group Referrals

Priority 2 is used for groups of special humanitarian concern to the United States designated for resettlement processing. It includes specific groups (that could be defined by their particular nationalities, clans, ethnicities, religions, location, or combination of such characteristics) identified by the Department of State in consultation with USCIS, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), UNHCR, and other experts. Some Priority 2 groups are processed in their countries of origin.

In-country processing programs included in Priority 2:

Former Soviet Union

This Priority 2 designation applies to Jews, Evangelical Christians, and Ukrainian Catholic and Orthodox religious activists identified in the Lautenberg Amendment, Pub. L. No. 101-167, § 599D, 103 Stat. 1261 (1989), as amended (“Lautenberg Amendment”), with close family in the United States.

Cuba

Included in this Priority 2 program are human rights activists, members of persecuted religious minorities, former political prisoners, forced-labor conscripts (1965-68), persons deprived of their professional credentials or subjected to other disproportionately harsh or discriminatory treatment resulting from their perceived or actual political or religious beliefs or activities, and persons who have experienced or fear harm because of their relationship -- family or social -- to someone who falls under one of the preceding categories.

Vietnam

This Priority 2 designation includes the few remaining active cases eligible under the former Orderly Departure Program (ODP) and

Resettlement Opportunity for Vietnamese Returnees (ROVR) programs. In addition, it includes the Humanitarian Resettlement initiative opened during FY 2006 to permit consideration of individuals who, due to no fault of their own, were unable to access the ODP program prior to its cut off date. It also includes Amerasian immigrants, whose numbers are counted as refugee admissions.

Groups of Humanitarian Concern outside the country of origin included in Priority 2:

The admissions program will continue to process several Priority 2 groups outside their countries of origin, including Burmese in Tham Hin Refugee Camp, Iranian religious minorities (primarily in Austria), certain Burundi refugees in Tanzania, Kunama in Ethiopia, Tibetans in Nepal, and Congolese Banyamulenge in Burundi. The program will continue to expand and include new Priority 2 groups during FY 2007. These groups may include Bhutanese in Nepal and, subject to interagency consultations and further consideration of the use of the material support inapplicability authority where necessary and appropriate, Burmese at other camps in Thailand.

Priority 3: Family Reunification Cases

An underlying principle in the administration of the refugee admissions program is the importance of maintaining family unity. In FY 2007, Priority 3 eligibility for a refugee interview is extended to nationals of 17 countries who are the spouses, unmarried children under 21, or parents of persons admitted to the United States as refugees or granted asylum, or persons who are lawful permanent residents or U.S. citizens and were initially admitted to the United States as refugees or granted asylum. Eligible nationalities are included following review of UNHCR's annual assessment of refugees in need of resettlement, prospective or ongoing repatriation efforts and U.S. foreign policy interests. Eligible nationalities for FY 2007 are listed below.

Afghanistan
Burma
Burundi
Colombia
Congo (Brazzaville)

Cuba
Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
Eritrea
Ethiopia
Haiti
Iran
Iraq
Rwanda
Somalia
Sudan
Uzbekistan

Eligibility for interview will be established on the basis of an Affidavit of Relationship filed by the relative in the United States and reviewed by USCIS. All Priority 3 applicants must be located outside their countries of nationality or habitual residence and be able to establish a refugee claim independently. Anchor relatives in the United States may also file, within two years of their refugee admission, an I-730 Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition with USCIS to reunite derivative family members. Beneficiaries of an I-730 petition may be located in their country of origin and need not establish a refugee claim. Given these factors, the I-730, or "follow-to-join" process may often be considered the preferred method of reuniting spouses and unmarried minor children with their parents.

DHS/USCIS Refugee Adjudications

Section 207(c) of the INA grants the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) authority to admit, at his discretion, any refugee who is not firmly resettled in a third country, who is determined to be of special humanitarian concern, and who is admissible to the United States. The authority to determine eligibility for refugee status has been delegated to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). During FY 2006, USCIS restructured the Refugee Affairs Division and established the Refugee Corps. The Refugee Corps is staffed by USCIS officers dedicated to adjudicating applications for refugee status. The Refugee Corps provides USCIS with the necessary resources and flexibility to respond to an increasingly diversified refugee admissions program.

The Eligibility Determination

In order to be approved as a refugee, an applicant must establish that he or she has suffered past persecution or has a well-founded fear of future persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, as specified in INA § 101(a)(42). A person who has ordered, incited, assisted or otherwise participated in persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion is, by definition, not a refugee. Likewise, an applicant who has been “firmly resettled” in a third country may not be admitted under INA § 207, and applicants are subject to various statutory grounds of inadmissibility, including criminal, security, and public health grounds, some of which may be waived.

The USCIS officer conducts a face-to-face interview of each applicant in a non-adversarial manner designed to elicit information about the applicant's claim for refugee status and any grounds of ineligibility. The officer asks questions about the applicant's experiences in the country of origin, including problems and fears about returning (or remaining), as well as questions concerning the applicant's activities, background and criminal history. Background information concerning conditions in the country of nationality is considered, and the applicant's credibility and claim are assessed.

Actions on Admission

Refugees are authorized for employment upon admission. After one year, a refugee may be granted adjustment of status to lawful permanent resident. Five years after admission, a refugee who has been granted lawful permanent resident status is eligible to apply for citizenship.

Processing Activities of the Department of State

Overseas Processing Services

In most processing locations, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) in the Department of State engages an NGO, an international organization, or U.S. Embassy contractors to manage an Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) to assist in the processing of refugees for

admission to the United States. All of the OPEs pre-screen applicants to preliminarily determine if they qualify for one of the applicable processing priorities and to prepare cases for USCIS adjudication. The OPEs assist applicants in completing documentary requirements and schedule USCIS refugee interviews as appropriate. If an applicant is approved for resettlement, OPE staff guide the refugee through post-adjudication steps, including obtaining medical screening exams and attending cultural orientation programs. The OPE obtains sponsorship assurances, and, once appropriate clearances are obtained, refers the case to IOM for transportation to the United States.

In FY 2006, NGOs worked under OPE contracts with PRM at locations in Austria, Kenya (covering East Africa), Ghana (covering West Africa) and Thailand (covering East Asia). International organizations (IOM and the International Catholic Migration Commission [ICMC]) support refugee processing activities in Egypt, Russia, Pakistan, and Turkey. The Admissions program operates under “in-house” arrangements at U.S. Government (USG) installations in Cuba and Vietnam. PRM hopes to solicit proposals for a regional OPE in Kathmandu in coming months.

Cultural Orientation

The Department of State strives to ensure that refugees who are accepted for admission to the United States are prepared for the significant life changes they will experience by providing cultural orientation programs prior to departure for the United States. It is critical that refugees arrive with a realistic view of what their new lives will be like, what services are available to them, and what their responsibilities will be. Every refugee family receives *Welcome to the United States*, a resettlement guidebook developed with input from refugee resettlement workers, resettled refugees, and state government officials. *Welcome to the United States* is produced in 11 languages: Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, English, Farsi, French, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Through this book, refugees have access to accurate information about initial resettlement before they arrive. The material in *Welcome to the United States* is also provided in some locations in DVD and VHS formats. In addition, the Department of State enters into cooperative agreements for one- to three-day pre-departure orientation classes for eligible refugees at sites throughout the world.

Transportation

The Department of State makes funds available for the transportation of refugees resettled in the United States through a program administered by IOM. The cost of transportation is provided to refugees in the form of a loan. Refugees are responsible for repaying these costs over time, beginning six months after their arrival.

Reception and Placement (R&P)

PRM currently funds cooperative agreements with ten organizations, including nine private voluntary agencies and one state government agency, to provide initial resettlement services to arriving refugees. The R&P agencies agree to provide initial reception and core services (including housing, furnishings, clothing, food, and medical referrals) to arriving refugees. These services are now provided according to standards of care developed jointly by the NGO community and U.S. Government agencies in FY 2001, and implemented in FY 2002. The ten organizations maintain a nationwide network of over 370 affiliated offices to provide services.

The R&P agreement obligates the participating agencies to provide the following services, using R&P funds supplemented by cash and in-kind contributions from private and other sources:

- Sponsorship;
- Pre-arrival resettlement planning, including placement;
- Reception on arrival;
- Basic needs support (including housing, furnishings, food, and clothing) for at least 30 days;
- Community orientation;
- Referrals to health, employment, and other services as needed;
- and
- Case management and tracking for 90-180 days.

III. REGIONAL PROGRAMS

TABLE II
PROPOSED FY 2007 REGIONAL CEILINGS BY PRIORITY

<u>AFRICA</u>	
Approved pipeline from FY 2006	6,000
Priority 1 Individual Referrals	2,500
Priority 2 Groups	6,000
Priority 3 Family Reunification Refugees	7,500
<u>Total Proposed:</u>	<u>22,000</u>
<u>EAST ASIA</u>	
Approved pipeline from FY 2006	1,600
Priority 1 Individual Referrals	300
Priority 2 Groups	9,000
Priority 3 Family Reunification Refugees	100
<u>Total Proposed:</u>	<u>11,000</u>
<u>EUROPE / CENTRAL ASIA</u>	
Approved pipeline from FY 2006	3,500
Priority 1 Individual Referrals	350
Priority 2 Groups	2,500
Priority 3 Family Reunification Refugees	150
<u>Total Proposed:</u>	<u>6,500</u>
<u>LATIN AMERICA / CARIBBEAN</u>	
Approved pipeline from FY 2006	1,850
Priority 1 Individual Referrals	100
Priority 2 Groups	3,000
Priority 3 Family Reunification Refugees	50
<u>Total Proposed:</u>	<u>5,000</u>
<u>NEAR EAST / SOUTH ASIA</u>	
Approved pipeline from FY 2006	200
Priority 1 Individual Referrals	2,200
Priority 2 Groups	3,000
Priority 3 Family Reunification Refugees	100
<u>Total Proposed:</u>	<u>5,500</u>
SUBTOTAL, REGIONAL CEILINGS	50,000
UNALLOCATED RESERVE	<u>20,000</u>
<u>TOTAL PROPOSED CEILING:</u>	<u>70,000</u>

In the following regional program overviews, a description of refugee conditions and religious freedom in each region is provided. In addition, prospects for voluntary repatriation, resettlement within the region, and third country resettlement are discussed.

AFRICA

Fiscal year 2006 saw continued progress on several fronts for major refugee populations in Africa. A comprehensive peace agreement in Sudan and successful elections and new governments formed in Burundi and Liberia have laid the groundwork for potentially large-scale returns in coming years. Recent elections in DRC may result in improved conditions there, leading to increased returns beginning in late 2006. At the end of FY 2006, UN-organized repatriations were underway for refugees from Sudan, Burundi, parts of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Somalia and nearing completion in Liberia and Angola. At the same time, continuing violence in eastern DRC, the Darfur region of Sudan, southern Somalia, Chad, and Central African Republic have created new refugee flows or threatened refugees in their countries of first asylum. Smaller but significant numbers of Eritreans continue to seek asylum in neighboring countries due to political tensions and an onerous national service requirement. In Zimbabwe, a mix of government-sponsored persecution and a grave economic situation have led to population outflows as well.

The principle of first asylum is still honored by most African countries. Traditionally, refugees in Africa have been allowed to remain – and in many cases to integrate locally – until voluntary repatriation is possible. In most cases, however, this is *de facto*, and not *de jure* local integration, and does not include granting of citizenship or voting rights. In addition, the African tradition of tolerance toward refugees has been challenged in recent years in countries that have hosted large numbers of refugees for decades, such as Tanzania.

There are approximately 3.2 million refugees across the African continent, slightly more than 25% of the worldwide population of refugees.

Religious Freedom

In sub-Saharan Africa, people are typically free to practice their chosen religion. Religious tolerance is a generally accepted and widely

practiced principle in many countries, though in others religious freedom is limited, particularly in the midst of ethnic and other conflicts. Ethiopia, with its rich Muslim and Christian traditions, is a good example of religious tolerance competing with intra-religious tension. The Government of Eritrea, however, has in recent years engaged in serious religious repression, shutting down independent Protestant churches and arresting hundreds of Protestant worshippers. The Government has increased its involvement in two of the four registered religious groups, by appointing a lay administrator to run the Orthodox Church and instructing the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church to take over the administration and liturgy of the Evangelical Episcopalian congregation. Eritrea has also targeted Jehovah's Witnesses, who like other religious groups not recognized and registered by the government have had their places of worship closed. Jehovah's Witnesses have lost certain basic rights of citizenship for not participating in the 1993 national referendum and have been imprisoned --three individuals for more than ten years -- for not participating in required national military service.

There are also places where communal violence has been motivated by religious differences, such as in Nigeria. In northern Nigeria, in some cases, non-Muslims have been adversely affected by certain social provisions associated with Shari'a law, which has been adopted in some form by 12 states. In Sudan, the new constitution adopted as part of Sudan's January 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement generally limits the application of Shari'a to the north and recognizes the principle of freedom of religion throughout the country, but it has not yet been implemented fully. Sudan continues to have a documented record of human rights abuses.

The Secretary of State has designated both Eritrea and Sudan as Countries of Particular Concern for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program continues to be available to Sudanese, Eritrean and other refugees who are victims of religious intolerance through Priority 1 referrals. Refugees from Eritrea and Sudan also have access to the program through the family reunification priority (Priority 3).

Voluntary Repatriation

Despite a number of protracted refugee situations throughout Africa, voluntary repatriation to a secure environment remains the most common and desirable durable solution. Since the beginning of UNHCR's official

Liberian repatriation in October 2004, UNHCR has facilitated returns for close to 70,000 refugees and estimates that an additional 200,000 have returned spontaneously. UNHCR is planning for an additional 100,000 returns by the end of 2006. On the other side of the continent, more than 80,000 refugees have returned to Southern Sudan from DRC, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Egypt, Kenya and Uganda in the past year, according to UNHCR. The UN anticipates an upswing in spontaneous and organized repatriation to southern Sudan in 2006 and 2007, bringing the total to near 140,000 by the end of 2006. (Despite the welcome signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement, Sudanese refugees from Darfur now in Chad are not widely expected to return home in the near term.)

In the DRC, more than 52,000 Congolese refugees have returned from eight host countries since October 2004, mostly to Equateur and South Kivu provinces. The DRC political transition process begun in 2002 culminated in nationwide elections in July. UNHCR has noted increased returns to several provinces in DRC since voter registration began in 2005, and more than 100,000 refugees were expected to return to the DRC in 2006, either through UNHCR's organized return program or through spontaneous movements, depending on political events. In Burundi, more than 290,000 Burundians have returned home since 2002, mostly from Tanzania. In Angola, UNHCR expects some 50,000 spontaneous returns from Zambia and DRC by the end of 2006 when officially organized returns are scheduled to end. In addition, UNHCR intends to assist approximately 3,000 Somalis to return to Somaliland from Djibouti in 2006.

Local Integration

In the 1960s and 1970s, many African countries accepted significant numbers of refugees and provided them land to cultivate. In the years since, however, large refugee outflows combined with increased pressure on land in most African countries have resulted in African refugees' increasing confinement to refugee camps or settlements. As a result, local integration is often an interim solution, rather than a durable solution for most African refugees. However, there are some notable exceptions. In 2005, Guinea stated its willingness to offer local integration to Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees who were unwilling or unable to go home, and in 2006, UNHCR undertook a local integration project for some 1,500 Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea. In Uganda, the government expanded a self-reliance strategy for Sudanese refugees in 2004, which included the

provision of land and integration of children into the national education system, and will review the program in 2007. While the governments of Kenya, Uganda and Zambia have stated intentions to provide refugees with local integration opportunities and citizenship, none of the three governments has passed legislation that creates the pathway to these benefits.

Third Country Resettlement

Resettlement in third countries outside the region is an essential durable solution for some African refugees. Third country resettlement is an important element of protection, given the political and economic volatility in many parts of Africa. With limited opportunities for complete, permanent integration in countries of asylum and often-protracted periods in refugee camps before voluntary repatriation becomes an option, the need for third country resettlement of African refugees is expected to continue despite the current overall diminution of the refugee population on the continent. In recent years, UNHCR has increasingly viewed resettlement as an important tool of protection and a durable solution for refugees in Africa. All resettlement countries, in particular the United States, Canada, and Australia, process refugees for resettlement from Africa, but the United States resettles far more than any other country.

FY 2006 U.S. Admissions

We anticipate admitting some 17,500 refugees from Africa in FY 2006. Four countries of origin (Somalia, Liberia, Sudan, and Ethiopia) account for the majority of refugee arrivals. Refugees of many other African nationalities are also being resettled in smaller numbers. Admissions from West Africa will fall short of original planning estimates due to the temporary suspension of Priority 3 family reunion processing of Liberians to avoid interfering with ongoing repatriation to Liberia. Following discussions with UNHCR and other partners, Priority 3 processing was halted for several months, but will resume in late FY 2006, likely leading to a surge in Liberian admissions in FY 2007.

Admissions from East Africa will likewise fall short of our original plan, largely due to delays in processing several groups, most notably a group of the “1972 Burundians” in Tanzania. Although we entered FY 2006 hoping to complete USCIS interviews on a portion of the caseload, delays in

UNHCR's registration in Tanzania – a massive undertaking given the more than 500,000 refugees in Tanzania – have prevented this. Although we anticipate offering resettlement to about 10,000 “1972 Burundians” in Tanzania, it was necessary to hold off all processing activities until the nationwide registration was completed in order to maintain the integrity of the 1972 group data. We have provided additional resources to UNHCR to complete the registration and anticipate commencement of OPE pre-screening in early FY 2007.

FY 2006 saw continued improvement in the security conditions in processing locations in Africa, with several new locations cleared for USCIS interviews. Circuit rides continued in Kakuma and Dadaab Camps in Kenya throughout the year without incident. Circuit rides in Ethiopia continued to increase in FY 2006, with sites cleared in Axum, Dire Dawa, and Jimma, in addition to Addis Ababa.

Improved efficiency in completing the Security Advisory Opinion (SAO) component of the security clearance process, which once greatly impacted arrivals from Africa, now keeps delays of refugee admissions to a minimum. SAO processing time continues to decrease with the ongoing automation of the system and the improved coordination with intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

Finally, USCIS has continued to verify claimed family relationships between U.S. anchor relatives and refugee applicants in the Priority 3 caseload in order to address the historically high levels of relationship fraud in the African Priority 3 program. Through its Refugee Access Verification Unit (RAVU), USCIS has been able to screen out many fraudulent applications and has thereby increased the productivity and integrity of adjudications overseas.

FY 2007 U.S. Resettlement Program

The proposed number of African refugees to be admitted in FY 2007 is 22,000. This will allow the United States to respond to the resettlement needs of certain groups of African refugees while recognizing the logistical and political realities of refugee processing in this complex working environment. PRM has actively engaged all appropriate offices within the Department of State, the voluntary agency community, UNHCR, and USCIS to help identify caseloads appropriate for resettlement that would likely

qualify under U.S. law. As a result of these discussions, PRM has identified a number of groups for priority processing during FY 2007.

The estimate of 6,000 individuals in the pipeline of approved refugees who will likely arrive during FY 2007 includes mostly Priority 1 and Priority 3 cases approved during FY 2006. Among these are disabled refugees in Dadaab, Kenya; Eritreans and Sudanese in Ethiopia; Somalis in Dadaab, Kakuma, and Nairobi, Kenya; and Sudanese and Somalis in Cairo. Smaller numbers of DRC Congolese will arrive from the Republic of Congo, as well as Somalis, Congolese, Rwandans and Ethiopians from South Africa, and Somalis from Syria and Saudi Arabia.

PRM continues to work closely with UNHCR to strengthen its resettlement referral capacity in Africa. It is currently funding three resettlement positions in Africa – one each in Ghana, Gabon, and Kenya. PRM anticipates an estimated target of 8,000 referrals from UNHCR in these countries during calendar year 2006 (many of whom will be processed in FY 2007).

In East Africa, we expect to begin processing approximately 10,000 “1972 Burundians” in Tanzania, resulting in up to 3,500 arrivals during FY 2007. We also anticipate processing up to 2,500 Eritrean Kunama in Ethiopia, with the vast majority of those approved arriving in the United States during FY 2007. In Burundi, processing of some 700 Congolese Banyamulenge survivors of the 2004 Gatumba camp massacre will be begun and completed, including movement to the United States. In Dadaab, Kenya, the second half of the caseload of refugees with disabilities will be processed, leading to some 800 additional Priority 1 arrivals in FY 2007.

In West Africa, with Liberian repatriation well underway, the U.S. program will cease accepting Affidavits of Relationship (AORs) for Priority 3 consideration of Liberians in FY 2007 and is no longer processing any large Liberian groups. However, we will process the remaining Liberian Priority 3 caseload on whose behalf AORs were filed prior to the September 30, 2006 deadline. The Liberian Priority 3 caseload is expected to account for approximately half of FY-2007 arrivals from West Africa. In addition, we expect to process up to 500 (mostly) Congolese refugees from Gabon. Priority 1 referrals of particularly vulnerable cases are expected from Ghana, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Benin, Ivory Coast and Senegal.

Currently, refugees located in Southern Africa are processed on a circuit ride basis by OPE Nairobi. The United States would welcome increased referrals of refugees in the region and is prepared to expand its program capacity in the region.

In the Near East region, we anticipate the largest number of African refugees to be processed in Egypt, followed by Syria and Saudi Arabia. In Egypt, we expect a relatively small number of Sudanese referrals from UNHCR, given the Sudan repatriation and the suspension of new registrations for refugee status determinations (RSDs) for Sudanese except for vulnerable cases. As in FY 2006, we expect a higher number of Somali referrals from UNHCR in Cairo in FY 2007. We have begun to accept NGO referrals in Cairo, with those referred so far mostly from Sudan and Somalia. Small numbers of Somalis and Sudanese will continue to be processed in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Proposed FY 2007 Africa program:

<i>Approved pipeline from FY 2006</i>	<i>6,000</i>
<i>Priority 1 Individual Referrals</i>	<i>2,500</i>
<i>Priority 2 Groups</i>	<i>6,000</i>
<i>Priority 3 Family Reunification</i>	<i>7,500</i>
<u><i>Total Proposed Ceiling</i></u>	<u><i>22,000</i></u>

Possible Future Groups

We are already looking beyond FY 2007 at possible caseloads for FY 2008. In 2006, PRM undertook a mission to Sudan to discuss with UNHCR the referral of some of the approximately 117,000 Eritreans living in camps in eastern Sudan. Although a relatively small number will likely be referred in FY 2007, we anticipate significantly higher referrals in future years. We are also monitoring the situation of Congolese Banyamulenge in various countries of first asylum, and will look at residual caseloads of Congolese in Angola, and Angolans in Zambia and Namibia.

EAST ASIA

East Asian countries host a large and diverse refugee population and recent years have seen important developments for these groups, particularly involving the strategic use of resettlement as a durable solution.

Thailand continues to host the largest population of refugees in East Asia. More than 140,000 refugees from Burma, mostly ethnic minorities, are recognized by UNHCR and live in nine Thai-administered refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border. UNHCR completed a comprehensive registration of this population in August 2005.

The United States had planned to start resettlement processing in the Tham Hin camp in the first quarter of FY 2006, but this schedule was modified to accommodate interagency consultation concerning the applicability of the terrorism-related inadmissibility provisions of the INA to the camp population. Extensive consultations between the Departments of State, Homeland Security and Justice culminated in the Secretary of State exercising her discretionary authority to render inapplicable the material support inadmissibility provision to the Burmese Karen refugees at the Tham Hin camp who provided material support to the Karen National Union and its armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army. These refugees have been identified as a population of special humanitarian concern to the United States due to their persecution by the Burmese government and their residence at the Tham Hin camp. The decision to exercise the material support inapplicability provision was based on the collective assessment that this exercise of discretion serves the foreign policy interests of the United States and that the admission of these refugees will not compromise U.S. national security.

Interviews of eligible refugees in Tham Hin camp began in June 2006. We estimate that up to 1,500 people from the camp will be able to travel to the United States before the end of the fiscal year. Depending on the outcome of ongoing interagency consultations, the U.S. Government plans to discuss with UNHCR and the Thai government the submission of an additional group referral of 10,000 or more individuals from other camps on the border.

Since 2003, UNHCR Malaysia has operated the largest refugee status determination program in the world. As of the end of 2005, UNHCR had

registered some 44,000 persons of concern. They include asylum seekers from Burma (mainly Chin, Rohingyas, and other Burmese Muslims) and Acehnese from Indonesia. Malaysia is not a party to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol and arrest, detention, harassment, and deportation of asylum seekers is common. UNHCR hopes to use resettlement as a strategic tool to assist a significant number of refugees in Malaysia. In the first quarter of FY 2006, UNHCR referred 467 Chin refugees to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, but in January 2006, UNHCR announced a suspension of new referrals to the U.S. program after many cases were placed on hold because of the possible applicability of the terrorist activity inadmissibility provisions.

As of June 2006, there were about 200 Vietnamese Montagnards under UNHCR protection in Cambodia. (Cambodia is the only country in Indochina to have acceded to the 1951 UN Convention and its 1967 Protocol.) The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by UNHCR and the Governments of Cambodia and Vietnam in January 2005 has expired, but UNHCR anticipates that all parties will continue to act in accordance with the terms of the MOU. The MOU facilitates both voluntary repatriation and third country resettlement. UNHCR access to the Central Highlands has increased significantly since the summer of 2005. UNHCR international staff has monitored more than 50% of the Montagnards who have returned to Vietnam from Cambodia and has found no systemic problems. The United States remains open to UNHCR referrals of Montagnards who are under its protection and in need of third country resettlement.

In December 2005, the U.S. Government and the Government of Vietnam jointly announced the start of the Humanitarian Resettlement (HR) initiative. The HR is accepting new applications from Vietnamese citizens who might have been eligible under three categories of the former Orderly Departure Program (ODP) for consideration for resettlement to the United States. This process is open only to those who were unable to apply or who were unable to complete the application process before the ODP closed on September 30, 1994. Individuals have until June 2008 to apply. As of June 2006, the U.S. Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City had received more than 14,000 completed applications and reviewed more than 4,000. Approximately 11% of the people applying appear eligible for further consideration. USCIS began interviewing applicants in June 2006.

More than 230,000 Burmese Rohingya refugees have been repatriated from Bangladesh over the past ten years and UNHCR continues to facilitate repatriation of those who wish to return home. Over 20,000 remain in two UNHCR camps in southern Bangladesh. Conditions in the camps have deteriorated recently and have reached emergency levels, necessitating consideration of expediting durable solutions for this group. These Rohingya are unwilling or unable to repatriate. In addition, some who have previously repatriated have returned to Bangladesh and are living there without UNHCR protection.

In August and September 2005, USCIS interviewed a group of more than 2,000 Vietnamese who had long resided in the Philippines. More than 1,500 individuals were approved and almost all traveled to the United States in FY 2006. Other countries have followed the U.S. lead and offered resettlement to some members of this group. We continue to urge the Government of the Philippines to make efforts to regularize the status of those in this group who were not approved for the U.S. program.

As reflected in the North Korean Human Rights Act (NKHRA), the United States is very concerned about the human rights situation of North Koreans both inside the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK) and in certain neighboring countries. The United States began resettling North Koreans in 2006 and we plan to continue these efforts. We will continue to work closely with UNHCR, governments in the region and NGOs to offer U.S. resettlement interviews whenever appropriate.

Religious Freedom

While many governments in East Asia permit freedom of worship, religious believers face serious persecution in several countries. The DPRK severely restricts religious freedom, including organized religious activity, except that which is supervised tightly by officially recognized groups linked to the Government. While the DPRK Constitution provides for "freedom of religious belief," genuine religious freedom does not exist.

The situation in other countries such as China, Vietnam, Burma, and Laos is complex and varied. While the constitutions of these countries ostensibly provide for freedom of religion, in practice these governments restrict or repress activities of some religious organizations. Many independent religious activities may be either prohibited or severely

restricted, and dissenters may face possible physical mistreatment or imprisonment.

Despite dramatic increases in religious observance in China, the government continues to harass and interfere with unregistered religious groups, most notably the unofficial Catholic churches loyal to the Vatican, Protestant "house churches," some Muslim groups, Buddhists loyal to the Dalai Lama, and the Falun Gong spiritual movement. There are many cases of arrest, imprisonment, and alleged torture of religious believers in China. In Laos, we have seen modest improvements in religious freedom; however, problems remain, particularly in Savannakhet and Attapeu Provinces, where Christians occasionally have been detained or asked to renounce their faith. The DPRK, China, Vietnam, and Burma remain "Countries of Particular Concern" (CPCs) with respect to religious freedom.

Vietnam has made significant progress on many religious freedom issues since it was designated a CPC. The USG and Government of Vietnam signed a Religious Freedom Agreement in May 2005, which requires Vietnam to fully implement its new legal framework on religion. Vietnam has banned the practice of forced or coerced renunciations of faith, released a number of prominent prisoners of conscience, and reopened a number of churches that had previously been closed and encouraged them to register. The U.S. Government will continue to closely monitor religious freedom issues in Vietnam.

Nationals of the DPRK, Vietnam, China and Burma have access to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program through Priority 1 individual referrals. In addition, the United States continues to operate in-country Priority 2 processing for Vietnamese refugees. Certain Burmese will also be processed in FY 2007 under Priority 2. Burmese and North Korean refugees also have access to processing through the family reunification priority (Priority 3).

Voluntary Repatriation

The pace of repatriation of the Rohingyas remaining in Bangladesh remains slow and does not appear to be a viable solution for many. Some Vietnamese Montagnards in Cambodia have chosen to repatriate and UNHCR international staff has been able to monitor the return of more than 50% of these individuals and found no systemic problems.

Local Integration

Countries in the region are traditionally reluctant to integrate refugees or even to grant temporary asylum. Our commitment to resettle a large number of the ethnic Karen in the Tham Hin camp led the Royal Thai Government (RTG) to take steps to improve the local integration prospects for the refugees from Burma. The RTG's commitment to local integration may be tied to the international community's success in resettling a large percentage of the Tham Hin population. The Government of Malaysia has been somewhat receptive to the efforts of UNHCR and the USG to find a local solution for the Rohingyas and the Acehnese, but we have yet to see concrete results.

Third Country Resettlement

The United States and other resettlement countries, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the Nordic countries, continue to process refugee cases from East Asia referred by UNHCR. In FY 2006, the United States processed UNHCR-referred refugee cases in Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and China. The United States also continues to administer an in-country program in Vietnam, managed by the Refugee Resettlement Section at the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City.

FY 2006 U.S. Admissions

We proposed an admissions ceiling of 15,000 for East Asia in FY 2006. The number included over 9,000 ethnic minority refugees from Burma in the Tham Hin camp, as well as a group of 1,400 urban Burmese whose processing was delayed in FY 2005 because they were moved to the border camps. While the broadened terrorist activity inadmissibility provision impacted the processing of some groups, we anticipate some 5,000 admissions from the region during FY 2006.

FY 2007 U.S. Resettlement Program

We propose the admission of 11,000 from this region. Included will be 3,000 Burmese refugees from Tham Hin camp who were referred to the program in FY 2006. In Vietnam, we will continue processing cases via the Humanitarian Resettlement initiative and may admit some 3,000 Vietnamese

refugees in FY 2007. Refugees from Burma are eligible for Priority 3 consideration, but we do not expect more than 100 such admissions in FY 2007. We also will continue processing approved I-730 Refugee/Asylee Relative Petitions for a spouse and unmarried children under 21 living in Vietnam of refugees already resident in the United States.

Proposed FY 2007 East Asia Program:

<i>Approved pipeline from FY 2006</i>	<i>1,600</i>
<i>Priority 1 Individual Referrals</i>	<i>300</i>
<i>Priority 2 Groups (including HR)</i>	<i>9,000</i>
<i>Priority 3 Family Reunification</i>	<i>100</i>
<u><i>Total Proposed Ceiling</i></u>	<u><i>11,000</i></u>

Possible Future Groups

Depending on continuing interagency consultations and the success of processing in the first camp locations along the Thai border, we may pursue group referrals of others in FY 2008. We are also considering the possibility of resettling Burmese Chin and other refugees in India.

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

The situation for refugees and displaced persons in Europe and Central Asia offers a complicated good news/bad news picture. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, important steps have been taken by many nations in Eastern Europe, as well as some nations in Central Asia, in the direction of democratization, rule of law, civil rights, and tolerance. For example, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are vibrant free-market democracies, members of NATO and the European Union, and each of these governments respects the human rights of its citizens, including freedom of speech, press, and religion. Countries such as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia have made significant progress in consolidating democratic institutions and instituting the rule of law. In general, the nations that once comprised the Soviet Union have for over a decade demonstrated a wide divergence of both political progress and economic growth. Russia, while achieving certain basic elements of democracy and progress on many market

economy reforms, should do more to discourage attacks against foreigners without a fair complexion, immigrants, and refugees within its borders.

The deteriorating conditions in Uzbekistan contributed to the refugee crisis that began following the violence in Andijon in May 2005, which caused at least one thousand Uzbeks to flee to neighboring countries. A group of 527 individuals fleeing to Kyrgyzstan were initially placed in a UNHCR-administered temporary camp near the Uzbek/Kyrgyz border. Four persons were forcibly returned, and despite moving them to a safer camp further from the border, the remainder of the group faced ongoing protection concerns. 439 of the asylum seekers were eventually evacuated to Romania, where they were processed by UNHCR for third-country resettlement, including to the United States. The cooperation of the Government of Romania on this important humanitarian undertaking was critical to its success and greatly appreciated by the international community. Several months after the crisis, the Government of Uzbekistan directed UNHCR to close its offices in Uzbekistan, claiming the organization had “fully implemented its tasks”, although an estimated 1,800, mostly Afghan, refugees remain in the country.

At the end of 2005, UNHCR reported that there were some 3.8 million asylum seekers, refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), or other persons “of concern” throughout Europe and Central Asia. Most had fled conflicts outside the region, such as in Afghanistan, but persons allegedly experiencing persecution within the countries of the former Soviet Union are also included. Furthermore, even those nations that are abandoning totalitarianism and pursuing democratic governance have been slow or reluctant to recognize, protect, and integrate refugees and at-risk individuals. Although UNHCR has been working with many of these governments on asylum processes and refugee protection laws, this work has produced limited results.

Nationals of the countries of the former Yugoslavia continue to be represented among the population of asylum seekers in Europe, albeit in very small numbers. While both the human rights situation and repatriation opportunities continue to improve, neither is ideal—particularly for returning minorities. Actions taken under the Protocol on Voluntary and Sustainable Return to Kosovo seek to improve conditions for returns. Since 1989, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has accepted applications from certain religious minorities in the nations that made up the former Soviet

Union who also have close family ties to the United States. Under the Lautenberg Amendment, Jews, Evangelical Christians, and certain members of the Ukrainian Catholic or Ukrainian Orthodox Churches benefit from a reduced evidentiary burden when seeking eligibility for refugee status.

In addition to those eligible under the Lautenberg Amendment, individuals of all nationalities throughout the region may be referred for Priority 1 processing.

Religious Freedom

Freedom of religion varies widely in Europe and Central Asia. Most states regulate religious groups and activities to some degree, by identifying so-called “traditional” religions that enjoy privileges sometimes denied to other, newer religious groups. These same states sometimes view other groups as “dangerous sects and cults.” Many states have enacted restrictive legislation to govern the activities of foreign missionaries, especially those from Protestant or “nontraditional” denominations. In many cases, registration with state bodies has been required, not only to establish a group as a legal entity able to rent or own space, but in some cases to hold religious services, a practice which is inconsistent with the right to freedom of religion. In many eastern European countries, onerous membership and legal requirements restrict new religions from enjoying the privileges of traditional religions, such as the right to appoint military and prison chaplains and receive state subsidies.

Restitution of religious properties seized by Communist regimes and the Nazis is an issue that has not yet been fully resolved, and in some countries progress on this issue has been frustratingly slow and uneven.

Anti-Semitic statements by elected officials, demonstrations by extremist groups, and vandalism of cemeteries and monuments have been reported, most often in the western successor states, where most of these sites are located, such as Russia and Belarus. In addition, attacks on individuals, synagogues and other places where religious groups gather have been reported in Russia. In the Caucasus and Central Asian states, the remaining small Jewish communities enjoy reasonably amicable relations with their Muslim compatriots. Jewish communities from Azerbaijan in the Caucasus to Bukhara and Tashkent in Uzbekistan report societal and governmental support. In contrast, anti-Semitic attacks on individual Jews

have continued to occur in Russia. President Putin and the Russian government have condemned such acts and the perpetrator of an attack on a Moscow synagogue was recently brought to trial.

Observant Muslims across Europe and Central Asia have complained of being treated as potential Islamic extremists in some cases. This treatment may consist of legal prohibitions against wearing clothing or beards marking one as an observant Muslim in certain public contexts, frequent requests for identification documents; and closing of some mosques, detentions and arrests in Central Asia and Russia, including the possibility of torture in Uzbekistan.

Religion and ethnicity are closely intertwined in the Balkans, so it is often difficult to identify acts as primarily religious or primarily ethnic in origin. The refugee admissions program has provided protection for persecuted Muslims, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians, as well as individuals of other religious minorities and mixed marriages. We will continue to work with UNHCR, non-governmental organizations, human rights groups, and U.S. missions to identify victims of religious persecution for whom resettlement is appropriate.

Voluntary Repatriation

In the countries that comprise the former Soviet Union, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program considers applications for refugee status from individuals who meet the criteria for the Lautenberg Amendment while still in their countries of origin. For these cases, voluntary repatriation is not an option.

Voluntary repatriation is also not an option for Meskhetian Turks and other de facto stateless populations. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, their former homes are now in new countries with new citizenship laws that do not currently provide them with any legal status.

International efforts are being made to repatriate Afghans and citizens from certain African nations, such as Angola, because of changing country conditions and increased stability in their home nations.

With many displaced persons awaiting the results of the process that will determine Kosovo's future status, the rate of ethnic minority returns

declined somewhat during 2005, with UNHCR reporting a total of 2,048 cross-boundary, minority returns. The international community continues to support efforts to create favorable conditions for the return of minorities in the region. While the security environment remained relatively stable in 2005, there were continued concerns about economic opportunities for returnees and uncertainty about Kosovo's future status. In June 2006, a new Protocol on Voluntary and Sustainable Return to Kosovo was signed which seeks to improve the conditions for return by focusing on three elements: ensuring the safety of returnees; returning property to the displaced and rebuilding their houses; and creating an overall environment that sustains returns.

Local Integration

Since the Presidential Determination establishing refugee admissions program levels each year allows for the in-country processing of nationals of the countries that were formerly republics of the Soviet Union who meet the criteria of the Lautenberg Amendment, integration in the country of first asylum is not applicable for those cases.

Local integration is always considered for third country nationals identified as refugees by UNHCR. Given the xenophobic policies of most governments in the region, however, local integration is generally not a viable option. There are also particular difficulties in local integration of those who entered Russia from other former Soviet republics before 1992. Although such individuals are legally entitled to Russian citizenship, many remain unable to receive passports and regular legal status.

Third Country Resettlement

The United States and other resettlement countries continue to accept refugees from the region. UNHCR has referred and will continue to refer to the United States, Canada, and other resettlement countries a number of at-risk individuals fleeing various forms of persecution within the region, as well as Afghan and African refugees who are unable to repatriate. Jewish emigration to Israel continues, with some 9,296 individuals from the former Soviet Union availing themselves of this opportunity in 2005.

A multilateral effort provided third country resettlement to Uzbek asylum seekers who fled to Kyrgyzstan in May 2005. UNHCR, IOM, the

Government of Romania, and a variety of resettlement countries worked together to evacuate over 400 individuals facing immediate protection needs from Kyrgyzstan to Romania for resettlement processing. The refugees were eventually resettled in nine countries, notably including the Czech Republic, which had never before resettled refugees. As of June 2006, 228 persons from this group had arrived in the United States.

FY 2006 U.S. Admissions

In FY 2006, we estimate 13,000 admissions from Europe and Central Asia. A significant portion of these admissions will be Meskhetian Turk refugees processed in Krasnodar Krai, Russia. Religious minorities processed under the Lautenberg Amendment from countries of the former Soviet Union also constitute a significant portion of the caseload, although the number applying for this program continues to decline each year. During FY 2006, circuit rides took place to process refugees in Almaty, Ashgabat, Baku, Belgrade, Bishkek, Chisinau, Kiev, Skopje, Tashkent, and Tbilisi.

FY 2007 U.S. Resettlement Program

The proposed FY 2007 allocation of refugees from the region is 6,500. It includes a significant number of individuals who will be in the final stage of admissions processing at the end of FY 2006, as well as new cases approved in FY 2007. Priority 2 includes individuals who will be processed under Lautenberg guidelines in the former Soviet Union. As Uzbekistan was added to the Priority 3 program in FY 2006, we anticipate the processing of some beneficiaries during FY 2007.

Proposed FY 2007 Europe & Central Asia Program:

<i>Approved pipeline from FY 2006</i>	<i>3,500</i>
<i>Priority 1 Individual Referrals</i>	<i>350</i>
<i>Priority 2 Groups</i>	<i>2,500</i>
<i>Priority 3 Family Reunification</i>	<i>150</i>
<u><i>Total Proposed Ceiling</i></u>	<u><i>6,500</i></u>

Possible Future Groups

Our success with resettlement of Meskhetian Turks in FY 2006 is furthering consideration of other minority groups long resident in Russia or other countries in the region that are unable to obtain citizenship or legal status.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

According to UNHCR, at the end of 2005, the number of refugees, asylum seekers, and other people of concern in Latin America and the Caribbean totaled over 2.5 million. The ongoing conflict in Colombia generated the most significant numbers of refugees and IDPs in the region. According to government estimates, there are between two and three million displaced people in Colombia, 1.6 million of whom are officially registered. In surrounding countries, more than 500,000 Colombians live in refugee-like situations, but only some 50,000 have been registered. Several countries in the region with significant refugee populations, such as Venezuela, Panama, the Dominican Republic, and Peru, are developing asylum processes with assistance from UNHCR.

The number of Colombian asylum seekers in Ecuador continues to rise, although the rate of increase is slower. As of April 2005, there were 31,000 Colombian refugees and asylum seekers in Ecuador, and as of December 2004 a total of 9,039 individuals were recognized as refugees. In Panama, there are approximately 829 Colombians recognized with official temporary status and another 11,883 Colombians recognized as refugees in Costa Rica. In 2004, Venezuela undertook a registration exercise, "Mission Identidad" which documented 300,000 individual asylum-seekers, refugees and economic migrants. As this exercise was limited to urban areas, the actual number of refugees and asylum seekers may be much higher. Since the establishment of their Refugee Eligibility Commission in August 2003, Venezuela has registered 4,555 asylum-seekers, but processed only 394 applications and recognized 244 as refugees.

In response to the dangers faced by certain professions, including police, lawyers, judges, and others in Colombia, the United States began a Priority 1 resettlement program in 2002 to resettle Colombians referred by the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá. As instability continued, we expanded the

program. We now also interview Colombians referred for resettlement consideration by UNHCR in Ecuador and Costa Rica.

In FY 2005, UNHCR referrals of Colombians to the U.S. program dropped significantly after many cases were placed on hold because of the possible applicability of the terrorist activity inadmissibility provisions. As of June 2006, a total of 1,206 Colombian refugees have been resettled in the United States.

The situation in Haiti remains fragile. The elections during the year contributed to a reduction in the out-migration of refugees and asylum seekers. The United States continues to support UNHCR's efforts in the Caribbean to help governments address the needs of Haitian and other asylum seekers and would welcome referrals from UNHCR to the U.S. program. The United States will continue to pursue with UNHCR and NGO colleagues cooperation with Caribbean countries, including the Dominican Republic, for referral of appropriate cases for interview.

Religious Freedom

In Latin America, religious freedom is widely recognized and enjoyed. The exception is Cuba, where the government engages in efforts to monitor and control religious institutions, including surveillance, infiltration, harassment of clergy and church members, evictions from and confiscation of places of worship, and preventive detention of religious activists. The Cuban government also uses church registration as a mechanism of control; by refusing to register new denominations, it makes religious minorities vulnerable to charges of illegal association. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program offers resettlement to Cubans persecuted for religious activities.

Voluntary Repatriation

Although UNHCR considers repatriation for Colombian refugees, given the political turmoil in Colombia, as well as the violence from non-state actors, very few refugees are able to repatriate. UNHCR has provided some assistance to Haitians in Jamaica and Cuba who have chosen to return voluntarily.

Local Integration

The Governments of Ecuador, Costa Rica and Venezuela have maintained liberal asylum policies to allow Colombians in need of protection to obtain asylum and integrate locally. However, despite such policies, their capacity to review applications and confer refugee status remains limited. Further, as more refugees have fled to these countries, living conditions for Colombians have deteriorated as asylum seekers wait longer for status determinations and are unable to gain the right to work. Additionally, some Colombian asylum seekers in Ecuador, Costa Rica, and Venezuela have begun to experience continued persecution by Colombian insurgent groups operating in these countries. For asylum seekers in Panama, the situation is worse as the government is reluctant to receive Colombian refugees or confer even minimal protection. Many Colombians in need of protection who enter these countries irregularly must hide in remote border areas or in the shantytowns of larger cities, and some are moving to more secure communities further inland.

PRM is currently supporting UNHCR's efforts to assist the Dominican Republic and other Caribbean countries in developing systems for making refugee status determinations for Haitians and other asylum seekers.

Third and In-Country Resettlement

In the recent past, local integration has been the most suitable solution to regional refugee problems in Latin America. In recent years, however, third country resettlement has become an important alternative for those who face physical risks and have urgent protection needs. Canada and the United States offer resettlement to at-risk Colombian refugees in the region for whom resettlement is the appropriate durable solution. Canada also operates an in-country humanitarian program in Colombia through which many Colombians are resettled each year. Currently, the United States accepts referrals from the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá or from UNHCR and processes these cases in Ecuador or Costa Rica. Under the "Solidarity Resettlement Program," a component of the Mexico Plan of Action, other countries in the region including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela are working with UNHCR and IOM to develop their capacity to offer resettlement to refugees.

The United States also facilitates the resettlement to other countries of migrants, mostly from Cuba and Haiti, who are interdicted by the U.S. Coast Guard or who enter Guantanamo Naval Station illegally and are found by USCIS to have a well-founded fear of persecution or torture if repatriated. From 1995 through 2006, such migrants have been resettled to twelve different countries, mostly within the region, with a small number going to Europe, Australia, and Canada.

The U.S. Government continues to operate an in-country refugee resettlement program in Cuba. Under the U.S.-Cuba Joint Communiqué of September 9, 1994, the United States is committed to approving at least 20,000 Cubans for lawful migration to the United States each year. The refugee admissions component of that overall number is managed through an in-country program. Traditionally, Cuban refugee admissions had averaged approximately 2,500 per year. Following 9/11, the number of actual refugee admissions fell, due in large part to delays caused by increased security measures. Since then, we have taken measures to ensure that all Cubans eligible for consideration have access to the program and that approved cases travel as soon as possible. These improvements have greatly increased the number of applications received and have reduced processing time of refugee applications. Unfortunately, disruptions in communication with approved applicants have impeded travel planning so that as many as 2,000 Cuban refugees originally projected to arrive during FY 2006 will be unable to travel by the end of the year.

Cubans currently eligible to apply for admission to the United States through the in-country program include the following:

- (1) Former political prisoners;
- (2) Members of persecuted religious minorities;
- (3) Human rights activists;
- (4) Forced labor conscripts (1965-68);
- (5) Persons deprived of their professional credentials or subjected to other disproportionately harsh or discriminatory treatments resulting from their perceived or actual political or religious beliefs; and
- (6) Persons who have experienced or fear harm because of their relationship – family or social – to someone who falls under one of the preceding categories.

FY 2006 U.S. Admissions

We anticipate resettlement of 3,000 refugees from Latin America and the Caribbean during FY 2006. Cubans comprise the overwhelming majority of refugees resettled from the region. Historically, most Cuban admissions have been former political prisoners and forced labor conscripts who served sentences in the 1960s and 1970s. The program was expanded in 1991 to include human rights activists, displaced professionals, and others with claims of persecution. The expanded criteria remain in effect today.

We expect some 50 Colombian refugees to be admitted to the United States during FY 2006.

FY 2007 U.S. Resettlement Program

The proposed 5,000 ceiling for Latin America and the Caribbean for FY 2007 included Cuban refugees eligible for the in-country Priority 2 program, a small number of UNHCR-referred Priority 1 Colombians, as well as a small number of Priority 3 family reunion cases.

Proposed FY 2007 program for Latin America and the Caribbean:

<i>Approved pipeline from FY 2006</i>	<i>1,850</i>
<i>Priority 1 Individual Referrals</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>Priority 2 In-Country Cubans</i>	<i>3,000</i>
<i>Priority 3 Family Reunification</i>	<i>50</i>
<i><u>Total Proposed Ceiling</u></i>	<i><u>5,000</u></i>

NEAR EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

Despite the changed conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan, which have expanded the possibilities for refugee repatriation, the Near East/South Asia region remains host to millions of refugees, primarily Afghans, Palestinians, Iraqis, and Iranians. Few countries in the region are parties to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and/or its 1967 Protocol. Nonetheless, to their credit, many host governments generally continue to tolerate the presence of refugees.

UNHCR, the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), and other humanitarian organizations work with refugees in the region. Some countries have provided long-term protection, mainly to Palestinians, Afghans, and some African nationals.

Despite the voluntary return of a large number of Afghan refugees, Pakistan continues to host much of the remaining Afghan refugee population, which has been resident there for many years. Other countries in the region have provided long-term asylum for Tibetan, Bhutanese, Sri Lankan, and Iraqi refugees. With a constitutionally-elected government in place and a commitment by Iraq's leaders to work toward improved security and enhance the delivery of essential services, it is hoped that significant numbers of Iraqi refugees will ultimately be able to return to Iraq. Refugees identified by UNHCR for third country resettlement include Afghans in Pakistan, Iran, and India; Afghans and Iranians in Turkey and Syria; and some Iraqis in various locations.

Religious Freedom

Persecution of religious minorities is common in certain countries in the Middle East and South Asia. In Pakistan, blasphemy laws, anti-Ahmadi laws and other discriminatory legislation have been used to target religious minorities, including Shi'as, Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadis. Sectarian violence between majority Sunnis and minority Shi'as have claimed hundreds of lives in the past years. In India, state and local government responses to extremist violence against religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians, are often inadequate. In Saudi Arabia, Muslims who do not adhere to the officially sanctioned version of Islam can face severe repercussions, and the minority Shi'a Muslim and Ismaili communities are subject to official discrimination. Public worship by non-Muslims is prohibited. In several countries in the region, the conversion of a Muslim to another religion is viewed as a criminal act. In Iran, particularly severe persecution of minority religions continues to be reported.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program provides access in a variety of ways to refugees who suffer religious persecution. In addition to the Priority 2 program for Iranian religious minorities, the U.S. program accepts UNHCR and Embassy referrals of religious minorities of various nationalities in the region. The Specter Amendment enacted in 2004

establishes that Iranian religious minorities designated as category members may benefit from a reduced evidentiary standard for determining a well-founded fear of persecution. Iranian refugees may also gain access to the program through the family reunification priority (Priority 3). Nationals of any country, including countries of concern such as Saudi Arabia, may be referred to the U.S. program by UNHCR or a U.S. Embassy for reasons of religious or political persecution and will be interviewed under Priority 1.

Voluntary Repatriation

Since the fall of the Taliban, voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan has proceeded on a massive scale, both with and without UNHCR assistance. UNHCR estimates that well over 3.5 million Afghan refugees have returned to Afghanistan since UNHCR began assisting repatriation in 2002, almost all of them from Pakistan and Iran. However, this massive and somewhat haphazard repatriation has taxed the capacities of Afghanistan to absorb further refugee returns, and there is little expectation that the three million Afghans still in Pakistan will all return, particularly in light of increased violence in southern Afghanistan. In UNHCR's view, the repatriation of Afghans has reached a new stage, and returns are unlikely to continue. UNHCR's assessment is that the continuing migration of Afghans in both directions across the Afghan-Pakistani border is part of a larger process of economic and social migration that has been occurring for centuries. Most Afghans who stay in Pakistan are no longer seeking refuge from violence or persecution; they are, rather, seeking economic opportunities, fleeing poverty, or visiting family. UNHCR is working with the Government of Pakistan and the international community to develop policies and programs to expedite further returns to the extent possible and to manage the population of Afghans that may remain in Pakistan for the longer term.

It is hoped that significant numbers of Iraqi refugees located throughout the Middle East and Europe will soon be able to return home, although the security situation will remain an important consideration in repatriation.

Local Integration

Few countries in the region offer local integration to refugees. In 2002, UNHCR and the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan signed a Tripartite Agreement that provides for the orderly, voluntary return of

Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan through March 2006. UNHCR is discussing shifting its focus away from assistance to Afghan refugees in South Asia in favor of a more broad-based development plan for the region. The key to successfully transitioning from short-term humanitarian maintenance to long-term development is acceptance by the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan that they are best served by accepting managed migration across their border. Progress has been made in this area: some within the government of Pakistan have publicly acknowledged that some Afghans in Pakistan are likely to stay. Even so, many Afghan refugees who might opt to remain in Pakistan would still face societal discrimination and lack of opportunity. The majority of Afghans who repatriated in the last few years were relatively recent refugees who had fled Taliban rule. The Afghans remaining in Iran and Pakistan are thus the “hard cases,” who left Afghanistan in the early years of the Soviet invasion. They have deeper roots in Pakistan and Iran, and fewer ties back to Afghanistan. A sizeable percentage of them have in fact never even lived in Afghanistan. Many of these Afghans are thus unlikely to ever return.

India does not have a clear national policy for the treatment of refugees, and UNHCR has no formal status there. India recognizes and aids certain groups, including Sri Lankan Tamils and Tibetans, in 130 settlements throughout the country. It permits UNHCR to assist other groups, primarily Afghans, Iranians, Somalis, Burmese, and Sudanese. Many Tibetans and Sri Lankan Tamils in India are permitted to work and receive social benefits.

Third Country Resettlement

The absence of legal protection for asylum seekers in the region leaves many refugees at risk of mistreatment in the country of refuge or refoulement to their country of origin. The situation is especially precarious for Iranians and Iraqis, who are often viewed with suspicion or hostility in neighboring countries.

UNHCR continued its attempts to reduce the backlog of asylum seekers awaiting status determinations in the Middle East. Principal resettlement countries operating in the region include the United States, Sweden, Canada, Norway, Australia, Finland, Denmark, and New Zealand. UNHCR considers family reunification, protection issues, and vulnerability in countries of first asylum when determining which individuals to refer to resettlement countries.

Historically the United States has resettled Iranian, Iraqi, and Afghan refugees from the region. With repatriation now a reality for Afghans, and a possibility for some Iraqis, we expect to process only those vulnerable refugees who cannot return to their homes from those countries.

UNHCR estimates that there are between 750,000 and 1,000,000 expatriated Iraqis in the region, of which some 32,000 are individually known to UNHCR in some capacity. About 29,000 of these currently benefit from temporary protection regimes in Syria (15,800), Jordan (12,500), Lebanon (500) and Turkey (1,400). Late in 2005, UNHCR resumed refugee status determinations for certain Iraqi cases in the region.

Middle Eastern and South Asian refugees in most of Europe avail themselves of the asylum systems of the countries in which they are located. In Vienna, however, certain Iranian religious minorities (Baha'is, Zoroastrians, Jews, Mandaeans, and Christians) may be processed for U.S. resettlement using special procedures authorized by the Government of Austria. The United States also processes Iranian religious minorities (primarily Baha'i) in Turkey through special procedures involving fast-track refugee status determination and referral by UNHCR.

FY 2006 U.S. Admissions

Current estimates are that we will admit some 4,100 refugees from the region in FY 2006. These will consist of about 1,900 Iranians processed in Vienna and 1,500 from Istanbul, as well as 200 Afghans and 500 Iraqis from throughout the region.

Mid-way through FY 2005, the United States resumed active processing of Iraqi cases, which had been on hold since 9/11. Several hundred approved cases awaiting final decision have been cleared for travel and began to arrive in FY 2006. Most of this backlog has now been eliminated. In addition, the U.S. program is once again open to receiving new referrals of vulnerable Iraqi cases from UNHCR.

The United States continues to resettle Iranian religious minorities through programs in Turkey and Austria. We are evaluating possible additional processing sites for Iranian religious minorities to expand access for those who are not able to reach these sites.

FY 2007 U.S. Resettlement Program

The proposed regional ceiling for refugees from the Near East and South Asia for FY 2007 is 5,500 and includes primarily vulnerable Iraqis, Afghans and Iranian religious and ethnic minorities. It also includes some 200 approved refugees who will not have completed processing by the end of FY 2006.

Proposed FY 2007 Near East/South Asia program:

<i>Approved pipeline from FY 2006</i>	<i>200</i>
<i>Priority 1 Individual Referrals</i>	<i>2,200</i>
<i>Priority 2 Groups</i>	<i>3,000</i>
<i>Priority 3 Family Reunification</i>	<i>100</i>
<u><i>Total Proposed Ceiling</i></u>	<u><i>5,500</i></u>

Possible Future Groups

We are hoping to begin processing Tibetan refugees in Nepal as soon as conditions permit establishment of the necessary infrastructure. The United States, in coordination with other interested countries, is also focused on resolving the long-standing stalemate involving Bhutanese refugees currently in Nepal. Our goal is to offer resettlement to Bhutanese refugees by establishing a Priority 2 group designation for resettlement. We are also attempting to increase individual UNHCR referrals of various religious and ethnic groups in the region, including Chaldeans, Assyrians, Mandeans, as well as Iranian Kurds and Iranian Arabs (Ahwazi). In addition, Ahmadi Muslims scattered in many locations, and Afghans in the former Soviet Union, India, and elsewhere are of interest. Various smaller refugee populations in Libya, Algeria, and elsewhere are also being considered for expanded individual referrals. Sri Lankan Tamils in India may be of concern if conditions there deteriorate further.

**TABLE III
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

**RESETTLEMENT ACCESS FOR REFUGEES FROM COUNTRIES DESIGNATED BY
THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE AS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN***

COUNTRY OF CONCERN	PRIORITY 1	PRIORITY 2	PRIORITY 3
Eritrea	X		X
Sudan	X		X
China	X		
Burma	X	X	X
Vietnam	X	X	
DPRK	X		X
Iran	X	X	X
Saudi Arabia	X		

Countries designated in November 2005 in accordance with the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (Pub. L. 105-292, Oct. 27, 1998, 112 Stat. 2787) (IRFA).

IV. DOMESTIC IMPACT OF REFUGEE ADMISSIONS

The demographic characteristics of arrivals from the 20 largest source countries (which contributed over 99 percent of FY 2005 arrivals into the United States) illustrate the variation among refugee groups. (See Table IV.) Median age ranged from 18 years for arrivals from Burundi to 33 years of age for arrivals from Cuba. The median age for all refugees resettled in FY 2005 was 24 years. Fifty-five percent of refugees from Liberia were female. Fifty-two percent of refugees from Sierra Leone and the former Yugoslavia were female. Fifty-one percent of refugees from Columbia were female; and close to fifty-one percent of refugees from Rwanda, Laos, and the former Soviet Union were female. Males were proportionately the majority of refugees from several other countries, namely, Eritrea (76 percent), Iraq (60 percent), and Sudan (59 percent); while male refugees from the remaining countries are represented by a range of 45 percent to 55 percent of the total.

Considerable variation among refugee groups can be seen among specific age categories. Arrivals under the age of five varied from a high of 18 percent of the Laotians to a low of 3 percent of those from Iran. Arrivals of school-age children (five to 17 years of age) varied from a high of 38 percent for those from the Congo (DROC) to a low of 12 percent for those from Eritrea. Arrivals of working-age refugees (18 to 64 years of age) varied from 82 percent for those from Eritrea to a low of 41 percent for those from Laos. Arrivals of retirement-age (65 years or older) varied from a high of 7 percent for arrivals from the former Soviet Union to a low of less than 1 percent from Rwanda, Burundi, the Congo (DROC), and Eritrea. For all arrivals, 10 percent were under the age of five, 28 percent were of school age, 56 percent were of working age, and 4 percent were of retirement age. (See Table V.)

During FY 2005, 77 percent of newly arrived refugees resettled in 16 States. California (14 percent) resettled the largest number of refugees, followed by Minnesota (12 percent), Florida (9 percent), Texas (6 percent), Washington (5 percent), New York (5 percent), Arizona (3 percent), Georgia (3 percent), and Wisconsin (3 percent). The States of Ohio, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Massachusetts, Virginia, and North Carolina respectively resettled just under 3 percent of the newly arrived refugees. Table VI presents refugee arrivals by State of initial resettlement for FY 2005.

In FY 2005, the 15 largest source countries contributed over 98 percent of arrivals into the United States. Because of the changing world situation, the number of refugees admitted and the distribution of admissions vary somewhat from last year's figures. Refugee countries of origin included the former Soviet Union (21 percent of all refugees in FY 2005, 17 percent of all refugees in FY 2004), Somalia (19 percent of all refugees in FY 2005, 25 percent of all refugees in FY 2004), Laos (16 percent of all refugees in FY 2005, 11 percent in FY 2004), Cuba (12 percent in FY 2005, 6 percent in FY 2004), Liberia (8 percent in FY 2005, 13 percent in FY 2004), Sudan (4 percent in FY 2005, 7 percent in FY 2004), Vietnam (4 percent in FY 2005, 2 percent in FY 2004), Iran (3 percent in FY 2005, 3 percent in FY 2004), Ethiopia (3 percent in FY 2005, 5 percent in FY 2004), Burma (3 percent in FY 2005, 2 percent in FY 2004), Afghanistan (2 percent in FY 2005, 2 percent in FY 2004), Sierra Leone (2 percent in FY 2005, 2 percent in FY 2004), Democratic Republic of Congo (1 percent in FY 2005, 1 percent in FY 2004), Eritrea (1 percent in FY 2005, less than 1 percent in FY 2004), and Colombia (1 percent in FY 2005, 1 percent in FY 2004). Table VII presents arrivals by country of origin for FY 2005.

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TABLE IV

Median Age and Gender of Refugee Arrivals, Fiscal Year 2005

Rank (# of Arrivals)	Country of Origin	Refugees Admitted	Median Age	% Females	% Males
1	Former Soviet Union	11,175	28.4	50.4%	49.6%
2	Somalia	10,405	21.1	48.4%	51.6%
3	Laos	8,517	20.1	50.5%	49.5%
4	Cuba	6,356	33	47.3%	52.7%
5	Liberia	4,289	21	55.1%	44.9%
6	Sudan	2,205	22.3	40.8%	59.2%
7	Vietnam	2,084	25.4	46.1%	53.9%
8	Iran	1,849	32.3	47.1%	52.9%
9	Ethiopia	1,665	25.2	47.6%	52.4%
10	Burma	1,447	24.7	45.1%	54.9%
11	Afghanistan	902	23.8	47.7%	52.3%
12	Sierra Leone	829	28.2	52.2%	47.8%
13	Democratic Republic of Congo	424	19.4	46.5%	53.5%
14	Eritrea	329	27.4	24.3%	75.7%
15	Colombia	323	25.1	51.4%	48.6%
16	Burundi	214	18.4	45.8%	54.2%
17	Iraq	198	27.8	39.9%	60.1%
18	Rwanda	183	22.6	50.8%	49.2%
19	Former Yugoslavia	138	30.9	52.2%	47.8%
20	Togo	72	23.6	50.0%	50.0%
	All Other Countries	209	24.8	47.4%	52.6%
TOTAL		53,813	24.0	48.9%	51.1%

Former Soviet Union includes countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

Former Yugoslavia includes countries of Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Yugoslavia.

Source: Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Refugee Processing Center

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TABLE V

Select Age Categories of Refugee Arrivals, Fiscal Year 2005

Rank (# of Arrivals)	Country of Origin	Under 5 Yrs	School Age (5-17)	Working Age (18-64)	Retirement Age (=or > 65)
1	Former Soviet Union	8.5%	26.2%	58.8%	6.5%
2	Somalia	11.9%	31.7%	54.3%	2.1%
3	Cuba	5.0%	18.4%	70.7%	5.9%
4	Laos	18.3%	36.8%	40.6%	4.3%
5	Liberia	9.4%	37.3%	51.6%	1.7%
6	Sudan	12.8%	23.2%	63.0%	0.9%
7	Iran	3.2%	16.0%	75.1%	5.8%
8	Vietnam	9.2%	26.3%	63.4%	1.0%
9	Ethiopia	7.0%	19.2%	72.8%	1.0%
10	Burma	10.4%	22.2%	66.4%	0.9%
11	Sierra Leone	4.0%	24.5%	66.7%	4.7%
12	Afghanistan	7.8%	34.4%	56.9%	0.9%
13	Eritrea	5.9%	12.2%	81.9%	0.0%
14	Democratic Republic of Congo	13.2%	38.0%	48.5%	0.2%
15	Colombia	7.4%	30.3%	60.6%	1.8%
16	Iraq	7.8%	22.0%	68.3%	2.0%
17	Rwanda	6.6%	35.4%	57.6%	0.5%
18	Former Yugoslavia	5.7%	13.5%	76.6%	4.3%
19	Burundi	16.7%	35.6%	47.3%	0.5%
20	Togo	15.1%	19.2%	63.0%	2.7%
	Other Countries	4.1%	30.3%	63.8%	1.8%
TOTAL		10.3%	28.4%	57.6%	3.7%

Former Soviet Union includes countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

Former Yugoslavia includes countries of Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Yugoslavia.

NOTE: Totals may exceed 100% due to overlapping age categories.

Source: Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Refugee Processing Center

TABLE VI
Refugee Arrivals By State of Initial Resettlement, Fiscal Year 2005

STATE	Refugee Arrivals	Amerasian Arrivals	Total Arrivals	% of Total Arrivals to U.S.
Alabama	102	0	102	0.19%
Alaska	80	0	80	0.15%
Arizona	1,872	0	1,872	3.48%
Arkansas	12	0	12	0.02%
California	7,505	11	7,516	13.97%
Colorado	901	0	901	1.67%
Connecticut	526	0	526	0.98%
Delaware	19	0	19	0.04%
District of Columbia	42	4	46	0.09%
Florida	4,793	0	4,793	8.91%
Georgia	1,870	0	1,870	3.47%
Guam	5	0	5	0.01%
Hawaii	25	0	25	0.05%
Idaho	534	0	534	0.99%
Illinois	1,463	0	1,463	2.72%
Indiana	493	0	493	0.92%
Iowa	361	4	365	0.68%
Kansas	145	9	154	0.29%
Kentucky	774	5	779	1.45%
Louisiana	205	0	205	0.38%
Maine	151	0	151	0.28%
Maryland	734	3	737	1.37%
Massachusetts	1,279	6	1,285	2.39%
Michigan	866	4	870	1.62%
Minnesota	6,357	0	6,357	11.81%
Missouri	987	0	987	1.83%
Montana	5	0	5	0.01%
Nebraska	225	0	225	0.42%
Nevada	385	0	385	0.72%
New Hampshire	311	0	311	0.58%
New Jersey	713	0	713	1.32%
New Mexico	81	0	81	0.15%

STATE	Refugee Arrivals	Amerasian Arrivals	Total Arrivals	% of Total Arrivals to U.S.
New York	2,561	7	2,568	4.77%
North Carolina	1,259	14	1,273	2.37%
North Dakota	228	0	228	0.42%
Ohio	1,560	0	1,560	2.90%
Oklahoma	136	0	136	0.25%
Oregon	1,024	0	1,024	1.90%
Pennsylvania	1,521	0	1,521	2.83%
Puerto Rico	8	0	8	0.01%
Rhode Island	283	0	283	0.53%
South Carolina	105	0	105	0.20%
South Dakota	214	0	214	0.40%
Tennessee	869	0	869	1.61%
Texas	3,243	2	3,245	6.03%
Utah	753	0	753	1.40%
Vermont	182	0	182	0.34%
Virginia	1,276	0	1,276	2.37%
Washington	2,841	6	2,847	5.29%
West Virginia	3	0	3	0.01%
Wisconsin	1,851	0	1,851	3.44%
Total	53,738	75	53,813	100.0%

Note: Arrival figures do not reflect secondary migration.

Source: Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Refugee Processing Center

TABLE VII
Refugee Arrivals By Country of Origin, Fiscal Year
2005

Country of Origin	Arrivals	
	Number	% of Total
Afghanistan	902	1.68%
Algeria	1	0.00%
Angola	21	0.04%
Burma	1,447	2.69%
Burundi	214	0.40%
Cambodia	9	0.02%
Cameroon	6	0.01%
China	13	0.02%
Colombia	323	0.60%
Congo	43	0.08%
Cuba	6,356	11.81%
Democratic Republic of Congo	424	0.79%
Ecuador	8	0.01%
Equatorial Guinea	25	0.05%
Eritrea	329	0.61%
Ethiopia	1,665	3.09%
Former Soviet Union	11,175	20.77%
Former Yugoslavia	138	0.26%
Germany	1	0.00%
Ghana	1	0.00%
Haiti	8	0.01%
India	1	0.00%
Indonesia	6	0.01%
Iran	1,849	3.44%
Iraq	198	0.37%
Israel	2	0.00%
Ivory Coast	5	0.01%

Country of Origin	Arrivals	
	Number	% of Total
Kenya	1	0.00%
Laos	8,517	15.83%
Liberia	4,289	7.97%
Madagascar (Malagasy Republic)	1	0.00%
Mauritania	3	0.01%
Montenegro	2	0.00%
Namibia	4	0.01%
Nigeria	11	0.02%
Pakistan	9	0.02%
Rwanda	183	0.34%
Senegal	1	0.00%
Sierra Leone	829	1.54%
Somalia	10,405	19.34%
Sudan	2,205	4.10%
Syria	7	0.01%
Togo	72	0.13%
Uganda	10	0.02%
United States of America	7	0.01%
Vietnam	2,084	3.87%
Yemen (Sanaa)	1	0.00%
Zimbabwe	2	0.00%
TOTAL	53,813	100.0%

Source: Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Refugee Processing Center

TABLE VIII
ESTIMATED COSTS OF REFUGEE PROCESSING, MOVEMENT, AND
RESETTLEMENT
FY 2006 ESTIMATE AND FY 2007 BUDGET REQUEST
(\$ MILLIONS)

AGENCY	ESTIMATED FUNDING FY 2006 (BY ACTIVITY)	ESTIMATED FUNDING FY 2007 (BY ACTIVITY)
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY		
<i>United States Citizenship and Immigration Services</i>		
Refugee Processing	\$ 12.1	\$ 15.3
DEPARTMENT OF STATE		
<i>Bureau of Population, Refugee, and Migration</i>		
Refugee Admissions	\$ 165.5*	\$ 222.7
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES		
<i>Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement</i>		
Refugee Resettlement	\$ 569.8**	\$ 614.9**
TOTAL	\$ 747.4	\$ 852.9

* Includes \$4 million in recoveries from prior FY.

** Does not include costs associated with the Transitional Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, or SSI programs. ORR's refugee benefits and services are also provided to Asylees, Cuban and Haitian Entrants, certain Amerasians from Vietnam, victims of a severe form of trafficking who have received certification or eligibility letters from ORR, and certain family members who are accompanying or following to join victims of severe forms of trafficking, and some victims of torture. None of these additional groups is included in the refugee admissions ceiling.

TABLE IX
UNHCR Resettlement Statistics by Resettlement Country
CY 2005
DEPARTURES

RESETTLEMENT COUNTRY	TOTAL	PERCENT OF TOTAL RESETTLED
United States	23,289	60.48%
Canada	5,811	15.09%
Australia	5,117	13.29%
Sweden	1,190	3.09%
Norway	636	1.65%
Finland	584	1.52%
Netherlands	479	1.24%
Denmark	454	1.18%
New Zealand	307	0.80%
Great Britain	242	0.63%
Ireland	116	0.30%
Brazil	76	0.20%
Chile	52	0.14%
Iceland	31	0.08%
Argentina	31	0.08%
Other*	92	0.24%
TOTAL	38,507	100%