

Testimony of Deputy Assistant Secretary Kelly Ryan
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
Department of State
Before the
Senate Special Committee on Aging
Hearing on
Health and Welfare Needs of Elderly Refugees and Asylees
December 5, 2007

Chairman Kohl, Senator Smith, members of the Committee, it is a pleasure to appear before you today regarding the United States Refugee Admissions Program and the health and welfare needs of elderly refugees and asylees.

Background

As this is the first time that an official from the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) has appeared before this Committee, I would like to open by providing you with a brief description of my bureau's responsibilities within the Department of State and the U. S. Government. Then I will explain the U.S. role in protecting and assisting aging refugees worldwide and in the U.S. PRM has three primary responsibilities:

Refugee Assistance and Resettlement:

PRM's mandate is to provide protection, assistance, and sustainable solutions for refugees. Though leadership in humanitarian assistance policy and the provision of humanitarian assistance, the Bureau:

- Works to ensure effective, timely and equitable responses from the U.S. and the international community to provide protection and life sustaining relief for refugees and conflict victims;
- Works to obtain and maintain first asylum and humane treatment for refugees worldwide;
- Provides emergency assistance for unexpected, urgent refugee and migration needs;
- Supports refugee self-sufficiency in countries of first asylum until voluntary repatriation becomes a viable option;

- Supports voluntary refugee repatriation and reintegration in safety and dignity; and
- Provides U.S. resettlement to refugees of special humanitarian concern to the United States, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Migration Policy:

Through leadership in international migration policy and programs, the Bureau:

- Encourages the creation of orderly, legal and humane migration regimes and discourages illegal migration;
- Promotes the integration of legal migrants into host country societies;
- Supports and promotes the protection of the human rights of all migrants, including victims of trafficking; and
- Funds activities to combat trafficking in persons, including international return and reintegration assistance for victims of trafficking. These activities are conducted in close collaboration with the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons and the inter-agency Senior Policy Operating Group, which coordinates and oversees federal activities and policies related to implementation of the Trafficking Victims' Protection Act.

Population Policy:

Through leadership in international population policy matters, the Bureau:

- Works to promote healthy and educated populations, with a particular focus on maternal and reproductive health care; and
- Supports a pro-family approach to international population and reproductive health care issues, works to protect human dignity at international organizations, and strengthens cooperation and policy coordination within the U.S. Government with other donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Regarding humanitarian and migration-related program activities, the Bureau uses funds appropriated by Congress to the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account and the Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) fund. The majority of these funds are used for

contributions to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, other UN and international organizations, and NGOs to support programs that provide life-sustaining protection and relief to the most vulnerable populations, including women, children, and the elderly. In terms of the protection and assistance of elderly refugees overseas, international and NGO partners ensure that services are designed with the most vulnerable in mind. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees' Age, Gender, and Diversity Mainstreaming project is specifically focused on tailoring services to meeting the needs of the population, including the elderly, whether by designing appropriate food distribution systems, providing mental health support as part of comprehensive health care, or emergency shelter assistance, particularly for those without other family members in camp or urban refugee setting to help their elderly relatives. Assistance funds, in particular, support programs to provide basic assistance needs at internationally-accepted standards, such as food, shelter, health care, and water and sanitation.

In FY 2007, PRM administered appropriations totaling nearly \$1.1 billion dollars. Of this amount, some \$847.4 million was expended on overseas assistance programs and \$171.9 million was used to administer the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).

Refugee Protection and Assistance

Violence, insecurity, and persecution continue, causing people to flee, and resulting in the need for humanitarian protection and assistance. Our humanitarian aid is a hallmark of U.S. foreign policy engagement. The USG leads the way on key humanitarian initiatives. This includes supporting durable solutions for refugees and other conflict victims through a combination of diplomacy, program expertise and financial support for voluntary returns, local integration, and resettlement in the United States.

Where peace and opportunities for return are elusive, PRM strives to achieve durable solutions through local integration and resettlement. The Refugee Admissions program is a critical humanitarian undertaking demonstrating America's compassion for some of the world's most vulnerable people. It is also a critical foreign policy tool allowing us to protect refugees from further harm through resettlement.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)

Refugee resettlement to all third countries benefits no more than one percent of the world's refugee population annually. However, it is vitally important for those refugees who will not be able to return to their home countries when conditions change or who are unable to integrate locally in their country of first asylum.

In recent years the United States has admitted refugees of over 60 nationalities and conducted processing in over 40, often remote, locations worldwide. The program is more geographically diverse and operationally complicated than ever before. We continue to identify ways to make the USRAP more responsive to varied and shifting worldwide refugee circumstances. While the program is subject to many unanticipated logistical complications and political challenges, it offers unparalleled opportunities for saving lives, reuniting families, and ending protracted refugee situations.

The Refugee Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-212, March 17, 1980) created the modern day refugee program, though we have welcomed refugees since the founding of the republic. The Act directs the President to submit an annual report to the Congress on the state of the world's refugees and the Administration's proposal for the level of refugee admissions in the coming fiscal year. The proposal is prepared after extensive discussions within the Administration and with officials of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), other international organizations, as well as human rights and refugee advocacy groups and interested citizens. Following the submission of the report to Congress, the Secretary of State or the Secretary of Homeland Security hold formal consultations with the House and Senate Judiciary Committees before the President issues a Presidential Determination establishing the size and scope of the refugee program for the next fiscal year. For FY 2008 the President authorized the admission of 80,000 as the ceiling for refugee admissions.

PRM is responsible for coordinating and managing the USRAP. A critical part of this responsibility is determining which individuals or groups from among the millions of refugees worldwide will have access to the USRAP, thereby allowing them to apply for refugee resettlement in the United States. PRM coordinates within the Department of State, as well as with the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (DHS/USCIS), HHS (the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention and the Office of Refugee Resettlement within the Administration for Children and Families) and other U.S. Government Departments and agencies and NGOs in carrying out this responsibility.

The number of refugees resettled annually in the U.S., is more than the total of refugees resettled by all other resettlement countries combined. In FY 2007 the U.S. Government resettled 48,281 refugees.

Access to the US Refugee Program:

Unlike some other resettlement countries, age, education level, employability, English language ability, or health conditions are not factors that are evaluated when determining which refugees should be considered for refugee status and resettlement in the United States. Those to whom DHS/USCIS has granted refugee status receive medical screenings, the results of which could either delay or prevent their entry into the United States.

Currently there are three priorities or categories of cases that have access to the USRAP. All three categories operate simultaneously.

- Priority 1 (P1) – Individual referrals of persons of any nationality for whom resettlement appears to be the appropriate durable solution. P1 cases are identified and referred to the USRAP by UNHCR, a U.S. embassy, or a designated NGO. UNHCR which has the international mandate worldwide to provide protection to refugees, has historically referred the vast majority of cases under this priority. NGOs providing humanitarian assistance in locations where there are large concentrations of refugees may also undergo training by PRM in order to be eligible to make P1 referrals;
- Priority 2 (P2) – Groups of individuals designated as having access to the program by virtue of their circumstances and apparent need for resettlement. P2 groups are identified by PRM in consultation with other USG entities, including DHS/USCIS, NGOs, UNHCR and other experts. The process of identifying a P2 group and its characteristics includes consideration of whether the group is of special humanitarian concern to the United States and whether members of the group will likely be able to qualify for admission as refugees; and
- Priority 3 (P3) - Individuals from eligible nationalities granted access to the program for purposes of family reunification. The P3 category

is family-based and only open to designated nationalities. The list of eligible nationalities is identified at the beginning of the fiscal year, but may be modified at any time. Eligible nationalities are selected following careful review of several factors, including UNHCR's annual assessment of refugee resettlement needs, prospective or ongoing repatriation efforts, and U.S. foreign policy interests.

Access to the refugee program under one of the processing priorities does not mean an applicant meets the U.S. statutory refugee definition or is admissible to the United States. The ultimate determination as to whether an applicant can be admitted as a refugee is made by DHS/USCIS in accordance with criteria set forth in immigration law. Applicants who are determined eligible for access to the USRAP are presented to USCIS officers for an interview.

Overseas Processing:

The refugee program assesses and considers vulnerabilities throughout refugee processing. Age related vulnerabilities of both the very young and the elderly are factors in case composition and can also be the basis for requests to UNHCR and DHS for special processing consideration. Elderly refugees who would be left in the country of first asylum without care or support should their family depart without them can be included on refugee's cases at the discretion of DHS.

PRM engages an NGO, an international organization, or U.S. embassy contractor to manage an Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) to assist in the processing of refugee applicants. OPE staffs pre-screen applicants to determine preliminarily if they qualify for consideration under one of the processing priorities and to prepare cases for DHS/USCIS interviews. The OPEs assist applicants in completing documentary requirements and scheduling DHS/USCIS refugee interviews. If the applicant is approved for refugee status and resettlement in the U.S., OPE staff guide the refugee through post-adjudication steps, including obtaining medical screening exams (in close coordination with HHS) and attending cultural orientation programs. The OPE obtains U.S. sponsorship assurances and, once all required steps are completed, refers the case to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for transportation to the United States.

Medical Examination

Medical clearance is required for refugees prior to their resettlement to the United States, but is particularly important for elderly refugees. In addition to having a higher prevalence of chronic medical conditions, such as high blood pressure or diabetes, these refugees are more prone to developing certain infectious diseases (such as tuberculosis), and more prone to severe complications of certain vaccine-preventable diseases (such as influenza). For these refugees, in addition to performing medical screening mandated by U.S. regulations, the IOM also looks for signs of medical conditions that could require follow-up after resettlement in the United States

Cultural Orientation:

The USRAP strives to ensure that refugees that 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 in the U.S. 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. The publication is produced in 15 languages: Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, English, Farsi, French, Karen, Kirundi, Kiswahili, Nepali, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese. The book provides basic information about the initial resettlement period. Additionally, there is a *Welcome to the United States* refugee orientation video that is available in 14 languages. The Department enters into cooperative agreements for one to three day pre-departure orientation classes for eligible refugees at sites throughout the world. In an effort to further bridge the information gap, for certain groups, brief video presentations featuring the experience of recently resettled refugees of the same ethnic group are made available to refugee applicants overseas.

Transportation:

The State Department funds 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):

Prior to refugees' arrival in the U.S. domestic resettlement agencies receive biographic data on each arriving refugee. This includes age and any physical disabilities or chronic illnesses. This information is used by the receiving agencies to appropriately prepare for the arriving refugee. Consideration of age and physical limitations is used in the selection of housing accessibility and the need for special accommodations, and also provides the opportunity for advance contact with local medical service providers to address medical needs immediately upon arrival.

The Reception and Placement (R&P) program is a unique public-private partnership, which anticipates that resettlement agencies will contribute significant case and/or in-kind resources to supplement U.S. Government per capita grants. PRM currently funds cooperative agreements with ten entities – nine private voluntary agencies (commonly referred to as VOLAGS) and one state (Iowa) government agency – to provide initial resettlement services to newly arriving refugees. Under this agreement, PRM provides voluntary agencies with \$850 per refugee. The VOLAGS are required to expend a minimum of \$425 on each refugee they resettle with the remainder available to cover the affiliates overhead costs. PRM separately funds the overhead/administrative expenses related to refugee admissions activities of the national headquarters of each VOLAG.

The R&P agencies agree to provide initial reception and core services (including housing, furnishings, clothing, food, and medical and employment referrals) to arriving refugees. These services are now provided according to standards of care developed jointly by the NGO community and USG agencies in FY 2001, and implemented in FY 2002. The ten organizations maintain a nationwide network of some 360 affiliated offices to provide services. This program operates in close coordination with HHS-funded grantees.

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

- 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.

Refugees may be lawfully employed upon arrival in the United States. After one year, a refugee is required to apply for adjustment of status to lawful permanent resident. Five years after admission, a refugee who has been lawfully admitted for permanent resident and meets other statutory requirements is eligible to apply for naturalization. This is critical both for integration and for those who need further assistance. Assisting the elderly to obtain U.S. citizenship remains a key resettlement priority.

That concludes my formal statement. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

FY 2007 Refugee Admissions Broken Down by Age Groups

Age Group	Total Arrivals
Under 18	18,229
18 to 65 years	28,666
65 years and over	1,386
Totals	48,281

FY 2007 Refugee Admissions Broken Down by Age Groups
and Processing Priorities

Age Group	Priority	Individuals
Under 18	93	648
Under 18	P1	4,238
Under 18	P2	11,640
Under 18	P3	1,703
Total Under 18		18,229
18 to 65 years	93	731
18 to 65 years	P1	6,896
18 to 65 years	P2	17,866
18 to 65 years	P3	3,173
Total 18 to 65		28,666
65 years and over	93	5
65 years and over	P1	117
65 years and over	P2	1,050
65 years and over	P3	214
Total 65 +		1,386
Grand Total		48,281

