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UNHCR Awards USCRI and AILA Grant for the National Center for Refugee and Immigrant Children

WASHINGTON DC, January 12, 2005—On December 21, 2004, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) awarded a grant to the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) in partnership with the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) to establish the National Center for Refugee and Immigrant Children. To be launched this spring, the Center will help hundreds of immigrant children obtain lawyers free of charge for their immigration proceedings.

Made possible by a generous donation from UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Angelina Jolie, the two-year \$500,000 grant helps fill a gap in services to children released from federal custody into the care of a family member or other caregiver. "The ability of unaccompanied children to have full and meaningful access to the U.S. asylum process is a top priority for UNHCR, and we welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with USCRI and the AILA," said UNHCR Regional Representative, Kolude Doherty.

"From all over the world, immigrant children--many of whom have experienced trafficking, abuse, persecution, domestic violence, or other horrors--are alone in our country trying to navigate our legal system," said USCRI Executive Director Lavinia Limón. "USCRI is honored to help these children find lawyers to guide them through the long and difficult process."

Key to the Center's success is the commitment of large law firms to provide pro bono services in their communities. "Through our training and mentoring programs, we will build a corps of law firm attorneys ready to counsel children in all areas of need," said AILA Executive Director Jeanne Butterfield. "Many firm attorneys learn tremendously from their experiences representing immigrant youth and feel an incredible connection to their clients." Kathy Moccio, a Minnesota AILA member, has already made a full-time commitment to work with this project for the next year.

Based at USCRI's Washington, DC offices, the Center will hire staff to coordinate and support the referral network. It will be overseen by USCRI Director of Policy Analysis and Research Gregory Chen, who spent five years representing unaccompanied children in San Francisco. The Center will also work closely with the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement and local non-profit agencies that already assist children in many cities nationwide.

The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) is a non-profit, nongovernmental organization that has served refugees and immigrants and defended the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons worldwide since 1911. USCRI's resettlement program and network of community-based partner agencies help thousands of refugees build new lives in the United States each year. USCRI publishes the World Refugee Survey and Refugee Reports.

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- 2005
- 2004
- 2003
- 2002

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