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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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USCR Acutely Concerned Regarding U.S. Government Decision to Bar Admission of Iraqi Refugees

Washington, D.C., January 10, 2003—Today, the U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR) learned that the U.S. government has suspended the admission of all Iraqi refugees already scheduled to arrive in the United States. USCR is gravely concerned about this development, which puts at risk ordinary people who have fled persecution at the hands of the Iraqi government and who had been promised protection by the U.S. government.

"The Iraqi refugees affected by this ban in the United States are victims of Saddam Hussein's tyranny," said USCR executive director Lavinia Limón. "Hussein's regime tortured, imprisoned, or persecuted them; that is why they fled Iraq."

Iraqi refugees scheduled for resettlement in the United States have proven that they were persecuted in Iraq not only to the United Nations, but to the U.S. government itself. They have undergone new, very rigorous security reviews by the FBI and CIA that were put in place after September 11. The United States offered to resettle them because they remain in danger in the countries where they are living as refugees. Flights are already booked for many of them. To now deny them the protection that we promised them is not only wrong, it sends a worrisome message that the United States does not care about Hussein's Iraqi victims.

"Before World War II, the United States—to its enduring shame—refused entry to the refugees on board the St. Louis who were seeking safe haven at our shore," said Limón. "Now, as another war seemingly looms, we are denying entry to victims of the very regime we are seeking to change because of its brutality to its own people and threat to the international community. If the United States rejects this small number of Iraqi refugees, will Iraq's neighbors follow suit if a war starts and close their border to fleeing Iraqis, denying them protection?"

USCR urges the Administration to reconsider this decision, which has broad and potentially perilous implications for many innocent Iraqis.

*"USCRI is a public information and advocacy program of Immigration and Refugee Services of America, a nongovernmental, non-profit organization. Defending the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced persons worldwide"*

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