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Lieberman Amendment on Refugee Warehousing Passes Senate

Washington, DC, July 19, 2005 The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) applauds the Senate for passing a Lieberman amendment to the FY06 Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill yesterday, urging the State Department to develop new programs to assist refugees outside of traditional camp settings and ensure access to basic rights under the 1951 Refugee Convention, such as the right to work and primary education. In a moving floor statement, Lieberman called the \$900 million Senate appropriation for refugee assistance a “worthy expenditure of America’s money.” The amendment closely mirrors a resolution senators introduced on World Refugee Day (June 20th) encouraging the protection of refugee rights. The amendment was backed by Senators Brownback (R-KS) and Kennedy (D-MA) and passed the floor with the support of ranking appropriators Senators McConnell (R-KY) and Leahy (D-VT). “The amendment is a significant victory in the global campaign against refugee warehousing,” says USCRI President & CEO Lavinia Limón.

Under current models of assistance, a majority of the world’s refugees live in a state of enforced idleness and dependence on international handouts. Lieberman pointed out that the absence of permanent solutions to exile leads to situations for refugees that are “neither temporary nor a solution....Generations of refugees are born and die in camps. They cannot support their families. Their inherent potential as human beings...is suppressed and squandered.” USCRI’s anti-warehousing campaign has focused on the human rights violations of the more than 7 million refugees around the world who have been warehoused; confined to camps or segregated settlements or otherwise deprived of basic Convention rights for five years or more.

Anti-warehousing programs would facilitate refugee access to schools, health care, and other local services in the communities where camps are located, said Lieberman. “Our aid can pay for doctors and teachers in facilities that are shared by the refugees and the local communities, thus benefiting the local community as well, or for job-training and job-creation programs.” Lieberman also emphasized the necessity of creating incentives for host communities so that they see refugees as “an opportunity, not a threat.”

“The commitment of Senator Lieberman and his colleagues to protecting refugee rights is commendable, and we thank him for upholding the moral obligations of the United States,” says Limón. “USCRI looks forward to working with Secretary Rice and other State Department officials to monitor the implementation of the amendment and development of new programs.” In passing this amendment the United States takes an important step toward ending refugee warehousing by promoting a rights-based donor policy that helps refugees to live free, dignified, and self-reliant lives while in exile. “Helping to improve the lives of refugees will take work, it will take money, and it will take perseverance,” said Senator Lieberman. “But it is all that this country is about. It is worth it.”

The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) is a nonprofit, 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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