

## June 29, 2007: USCIRF Welcomes Homeland Security Department's Commitment to Respond to Report on Asylum Seekers in Expedited Removal

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WASHINGTON-The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today sent a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff welcoming the Department's commitment to formally respond to USCIRF's Report on Asylum Seekers in Expedited Removal. The full text of the letter follows. June 29, 2007 Michael Chertoff Secretary of Homeland Security Department of Homeland Security Washington, DC 20528 Dear Secretary Chertoff: Thank you for meeting with my fellow Commissioners and myself last month. As with our previous meeting, your understanding of the Commission's concerns regarding asylum seekers in the expedited removal process was particularly appreciated. I particularly welcomed your commitment that the Department of Homeland Security will formally respond to our Report on Asylum Seekers in Expedited Removal. The Commission looks forward to receiving this response, and hopes that it will provide the basis for an ongoing dialogue on the Commission's recommendations between ourselves and the Department. The Commission and I were pleased to hear more about the positive changes implemented by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). We understand that you are still reviewing the recommendation to allow asylum officers to grant asylum at the credible fear stage. We encourage you to make this policy change, as recommended and justified in the Commission's 2005 Report. In the context of follow-up to the Report, Assistant Secretary Myers' efforts to reach out to the Commission merit a word of appreciation. The Commission welcomes the efforts that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is making to review national parole criteria and to train detention center personnel on cultural awareness and asylee population issues. We look forward to meeting with Assistant Secretary Myers again to continue the discussion on parole review. Allow me to reiterate the Commission's recommendation that detention standards be developed that are appropriate to the asylum seeker population, including the opening of other facilities based on the Broward County model. We were pleased that Customs and Border Protection (CBP) sent a representative to the meeting. We noted that quality assurance steps have been taken to monitor inspections and urge the agency to consider the further steps outlined in the Report, including the broader use of videotape. As you know, the situation of Iraqi refugees has been an ongoing concern to the Commission. We applaud your recent decision to allow duress waivers to the material support bar to admission, so that refugee and asylum applicants forced to provide material support to terrorist organizations are no longer barred from the United States for such support solely as a result of such coerced actions. We hope this will be the first of the changes on material support issues that arise during the processing of Iraqi refugees. The Commission urges the Department to clarify that material support will not be a bar to individuals that provided support to groups opposed to the regime of Saddam Hussein. Finally, the Commission and I look forward to working with you, CBP, ICE, and USCIS in the future. We consider it essential for the Department to ensure that American values in favor of refugee protection are reflected in the treatment that asylum seekers receive. Sincerely, Felice D. Gaer Chair cc: Julie L. Myers, Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement W. Ralph Basham, Commissioner, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Dr. Emilio T. Gonzalez, Director, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Stewart A. Baker, Assistant Secretary for Policy Igor V. Timofeyev, Senior Advisor for Refugee and Asylum Policy Felice D. Gaer, Chair &bull; Michael Cromartie, Vice Chair &bull; Elizabeth H. Prodromou, Vice Chair &bull; Nina Shea, Vice Chair &bull; Don Argue &bull; Preeta D. Bansal &bull; Imam Talal Y. Eid &bull; Richard D. Land &bull; Leonard A. Leo &bull; Ambassador John V. Hanford III, Ex-Officio &bull; Joseph R. Crapa, Executive Director