

## February 13, 2007: Iraq: USCIRF Letter to Secretary of State Rice on Iraqi Refugees

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February 13, 2007 Contact:

Judith Ingram, Director of Communications, (202) 523-3240, ext. 127

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice

Secretary of State

United States Department of State

Washington, DC 20520 Dear Secretary Rice: On behalf of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, I am writing to congratulate you on the formation of the Iraq Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Task Force. For some time, the Commission has argued that the increasing numbers of IDPs and Iraqi refugees in the region demand urgent U.S. attention. The Commission urges you to make the question of Iraqi refugee resettlement one of your top priorities on the agenda in your upcoming meeting with UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres this week. It is our understanding that the U.S. government and UNHCR are in discussions regarding Iraqi refugee resettlement to the United States and that UNHCR is looking to resettle approximately 20,000 Iraqi refugees here. In particular, the Commission urges that Iraqis fleeing religious persecution, particularly ChaldoAssyrians, Sabeen Mandaean and Yazidis, be given access to the U.S. Refugee Program and included in this 20,000. Specifically, because of the well-documented threats these groups face in Iraq, the Commission recommends that you: Create new or expand existing options for allowing members of Iraq's ChaldoAssyrian, Sabeen Mandaean and Yazidi religious minority communities to access the U.S. refugee program. The Visa 92/93 and Priority Three (P-3) programs are too narrowly focused and unnecessarily limit opportunities for family reunification; Assure the UNHCR that it can count on the United States to play a leading role in contributing the resources necessary to preserve first asylum for Iraqis and provide resettlement places; and Urge that UNHCR take more proactive measures to ensure that the most vulnerable Iraqis in need of resettlement are identified and referred without undue delay. Although they comprise only three percent of the population, UNHCR has estimated that ChaldoAssyrians and Sabeen Mandaean constitute up to 40 percent of all registered refugees and the International Organization for Migration estimates they constitute seven percent of all IDPs. Knowing your concern for human rights and the plight of Iraqi refugees in the region, the Commission urges you to act on the above recommendations. This issue belongs on the agenda along with the refugee crisis in Darfur and the deplorable situation of North Koreans in China, problems the Commission has in the past reported on and written to you about. Thank you very much for your attention to this matter. Sincerely, Felice D. Gaer Chair

Felice D. Gaer, Chair &bull; Michael Cromartie, Vice Chair &bull; Elizabeth H. Prodromou, Vice Chair &bull; Nina Shea, Vice Chair &bull; Preeta D. Bansal &bull; Archbishop Charles J. Chaput &bull; Khaled Abou El Fadl &bull; Richard D. Land &bull; Bishop Ricardo Ramirez &bull; Ambassador John V. Hanford III, Ex-Officio &bull; Joseph R. Crapa, Executive Director