

## February 7, 2005: USCIRF releases Congressionally-authorized Report on Asylum Seekers in Expedited Removal

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 7, 2005 Contact:

Anne Johnson, Director of Communications, (202) 523-3240, ext. 27

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) will release the findings of a Report on Asylum Seekers in Expedited Removal and recommendations for the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Justice at an on-the-record press conference on Tuesday, February 8, from 9:30 - 11:00 a.m., in the First Amendment Room on the 13th floor of the National Press Club. Expedited removal, authorized by the Congress in 1996 when it amended the Immigration and Nationality Act, authorizes immigration officials summarily to return people arriving in the United States without proper documentation to their country of origin. To protect those with legitimate asylum claims from being turned away, Congress established certain safeguards. In the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, Congress authorized the USCIRF to appoint experts to conduct a study examining how Expedited Removal is implemented and if the process is sufficiently protecting all legitimate asylum seekers. Congress asked for the study to examine whether asylum seekers subject to Expedited Removal are being detained under inappropriate conditions and whether they are being returned to countries where they might face persecution. "In legislating Expedited Removal, Congress sought to establish a system which protects both U.S. borders and asylum seekers. This major study is an outgrowth of that effort," said USCIRF Chair Preeta D. Bansal. "The study found that while DHS has established several sound procedures and practices for asylum seekers in Expedited Removal, there are also serious and systemic problems in the implementation of the process relating to the protections enacted by Congress. Some of these problems may result in the improper removal of refugees to countries where they may face persecution. In addition, asylum seekers are being detained in inappropriate conditions. Poor intra- and inter-agency coordination at and between the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice has hampered the resolution of these problems, and Expedited Removal has been expanded despite these flaws. This study provides recommendations to address these problems, and examines issues of concern to all asylum seekers in Expedited Removal, not just those fleeing religious persecution." The release of this study comes at a time when immigration has moved to the front of the political agenda. It is the first major study that had access to ports of entry, directly observed secondary inspection, and visited detention centers. It thus answers the questions posed by Congress on the basis of extensive data-gathering and analysis, and makes recommendations on ways to ensure that asylum seekers are treated appropriately. The report represents a unique opportunity to look inside the "black box" of expedited removal. USCIRF Commissioners will be joined at the press conference by the following experts who were designated by the Commission to conduct the study: Mark Hetfield, Esq., Immigration Counsel to USCIRF; Kate Jastram, Esq., Boalt Hall School of Law, University of California at Berkeley; Dr. Allen Keller, M.D., NYU School of Medicine, Bellevue NYU Program for Survivors of Torture; Charles Kuck, Esq., Weathersby, Howard and Kuck, Atlanta, Georgia and Treasurer, American Immigration Lawyers Association; Craig Haney, Ph.D., detention expert, University of California at Santa Cruz; Fritz Scheuren, chief methodologist, Vice President, Statistics, NORC, University of Chicago, and President, American Statistical Association

WHAT: Report on Asylum Seekers in Expedited Removal press conference

WHERE: National Press Club First Amendment Room, 13th Floor 529 14th Street NW Washington, DC

WHEN: February 8, 2005, 9:30-11:00 a.m.

Preeta D. Bansal, Chair

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