

Proposed FY 1991 Refugee Admissions Levels



United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs
Washington, DC

Following is a statement by Lawrence S. Eagleburger, Deputy Secretary of State, before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Washington, DC, October 3, 1990.

I am here today to discuss the global refugee situation and to present the President's proposed refugee admissions levels for fiscal year (FY) 1991. I would like to begin with a brief discussion of the trends in refugee affairs over the past year. I will then turn to some specific areas of concern, including the US response to Soviet emigration, the comprehensive plan of action for Indochinese refugees, and the current situations in the Persian Gulf and Liberia. Finally, I will summarize the proposed admissions levels for refugees for the coming fiscal year.

Recent Trends in Refugee Affairs

The ideal solution for any refugee situation is that the conditions which caused the refugees to flee be brought to an end. The opportunity to reconstruct a life in one's homeland—with one's own language and culture—is a far more humane solution than to become an outsider in a foreign land. The enormous changes in world politics since we consulted on refugee concerns 1 year ago have had a significant impact on this potential for voluntary repatriation of refugees.

The warming of relations between the superpowers has meant that many regional conflicts may be on the road to resolution. The progress in Afghanistan and Cambodia offers the possibility that refugees created by those conflicts may have the opportunity to return in safety and in dignity to their homes in the not-

too-distant future. Repatriation programs have been planned for each and have begun to be implemented for the Afghans.

There have also been major repatriation efforts over the past year in Central America for Salvadorans and Nicaraguans. By March of this year, more than 11,000 Salvadorans had returned home from Honduras, and we are in the midst of the repatriation of thousands of Nicaraguans to their home country following the democratic election in February and the establishment of the Chamorro government. Approximately 12,500 Nicaraguan refugees from both Honduras and Costa Rica, as well as more than 8,000 Nicaraguans previously associated with the resistance in Honduras, have returned home. While the pace of the returns is affected by the absorptive capacity of these countries, we are especially gratified that more than 30,000 Central Americans are now back in their home countries.

In Africa, some 43,000 Namibians have returned home after long years in exile to help launch the world's newest independent state.

Another major political change since last year has been the spread of democracy and freedom of expression in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. While this, too, may lead to large repatriations, especially to East European nations, the rapid change in governments has also unleashed long repressed ethnic tensions in those regions. The fear of ethnic strife plus a legacy of official persecution—particularly in the Soviet Union—has prompted many Jews, evangelical Christians, and other religious and ethnic minorities there to seize the

opportunity to emigrate. This has presented us with some major challenges in our resettlement program, to which I will refer in a moment.

For the majority of the world's 15 million refugees, however, repatriation is not a viable option. Mr. Chairman [Senator Joseph Biden], over the past year you and your colleagues in the Congress have paid particular attention to the needs of these refugees. Integration and acceptance by the country of asylum is available only to a limited number of these refugees, and resettlement to a third country is available to even fewer.

Many refugees who will not be resettled or repatriated have been in asylum for an extended period of time. They need food, water, shelter, the provision of sanitation facilities, and medical care. They also need international organizations to monitor their protection. As refugees wait for political and social conditions to enable them to return home, the international community must be prepared to provide the resources necessary to sustain them.

A major thrust of congressional attention to refugee affairs worldwide this year has been the dire financial straits of the international organizations which assist refugees and conflict victims. Severe fiscal crises have resulted from a rapid growth in the number of refugees, with a steady, but not concomitant, increase in international donor contributions. This situation reached a critical point in 1989 and mandated severe cutbacks in the program levels of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). A consensus has been reached, however, on the

UNHCR budget for 1990, and we expect that budget to be fully funded. While the ICRC has cut its original program projections by one-third, it maintains a resilient will to respond when needed in a crisis, as demonstrated by the situation in the Persian Gulf.

Smaller but serious financial difficulties have threatened programs of the UN Border Relief Operation on the Thai-Cambodian border (UNBRO) and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). US responses to these latter two organizations from both the regular migration and refugee assistance (MRA) appropriation and the emergency refugee and migration assistance (ERMA) fund have been instrumental in ameliorating their fiscal crises.

In each of these cases, the United States has vigorously pressed other donors to carry their share of these needs. New demands on scarce resources, coupled with budgetary constraints in all donor nations, will continue to require careful planning and the setting of priorities by both international organizations and the governments which support their activities. We shall continue to build on the close working relationships we have established with other donors and each of the international organizations that work with refugees and conflict victims. In FY 1991, the President's budget request includes a greatly needed increase in regional refugee assistance of some \$46 million as well as a \$25 million replenishment of the ERMA fund, which will help all of these refugee organizations.

In short, the refugee world is an extremely dynamic one, with a continuous series of new challenges. We cannot always anticipate needs or predict how particular programs will develop, but the United States can—and does—provide strong and constructive leadership. Leadership comes not only from the total amount of funds we provide annually but from the numbers of refugees we resettle. We demonstrate leadership in the policy and program proposals we make to the refugee community, to refugee-hosting governments, and to other donor and resettlement nations. No other nation monitors world situations with the expertise and steadfastness that we bring to refugee- and conflict-victim issues.

I would like now to turn to four regional situations which are currently receiving priority attention.

Soviet Refugee Admissions

Rarely does the State Department have an opportunity to announce a plan of action to resolve a major problem and return only 12 months later able to report a resounding success. I am proud to say that this is the case with regard to Soviet refugees.

For many years, the United States and other nations have advocated greater freedom of emigration for Soviet citizens. We have devoted considerable effort and resources to support the resettlement of persecuted religious and ethnic minorities allowed to leave that country. The 50,800 Soviet refugees we will resettle this year in the United States set a new record and parallels unmatched levels of Soviet Jewish emigration to Israel.

Last year, I described our plans to close the Rome-Vienna pipeline for Soviet refugee applicants and to transfer all processing to Moscow. We discussed a nascent Washington processing center and a new system in which most of the paperwork for refugee applications would be handled in this country, with files shuttled back and forth to our embassy in Moscow. We have now completed these changes, with the result that we can handle the same number of refugees at a substantially lower cost to the MRA budget. This new system has proven so successful that we are now considering it as a model for other types of visa processing.

Indochinese Refugees

I characterized the Vietnamese refugee problem last year as long standing and extraordinarily complex. It is no less so now than then. However, we still believe that the comprehensive plan of action (CPA) that resulted from the 1989 international conference on Indochinese refugees represents the best mechanism for addressing humanely the concerns of all involved nations. Implementation of the CPA is a difficult task, but we have been steadfast in our commitment to the practice of first asylum and our opposition to forced repatriation of Vietnamese.

The most serious difficulty we have encountered has been Malaysia's refusal to offer safe landing to Vietnamese boat people. The United States has protested—and continues to protest vigorously—Malaysia's failure to abide by the CPA's provision that all arriving Vietnamese boat people are to be offered first asylum. Other items of concern with regard to the CPA include: conditions in

campes in Hong Kong; the relatively slow pace of screening; and the need for the quick and effective operation of committees in each first asylum country to provide special attention to unaccompanied minors.

At the same time, however, there has been progress in several key areas of the CPA. For example, resettlement of the longstayers has been a success, and we are ahead of the schedule agreed to at the conference. The orderly departure program also has been vastly expanded with good cooperation from Vietnam, in particular in the implementation of last summer's agreement for the resettlement of former reeducation center detainees. Refugee screening programs are underway in each first asylum nation, too, representing a major new activity on behalf of Indochinese asylum seekers. And, voluntary repatriation programs under the CPA have enabled over 4,000 Vietnamese and nearly 2,000 Lao to return to their homes.

The major unresolved issue concerns the return of non-refugees to Vietnam. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Thorvald Stoltenberg, has held extensive negotiations with all concerned governments on this subject and has proposed an expansion of the existing UNHCR voluntary repatriation program to include those "who do not object" to returning home. At the ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] post-ministerial conference in late July, Secretary Baker announced US support for the high commissioner's efforts and raised US concerns with the foreign ministers of each of the first asylum countries. Moreover, the Secretary stated the willingness of the United States to join in a multilateral pledge to undertake "best efforts" to accomplish the return or resettlement of all Vietnamese asylum seekers by the end of 1992. At the conclusion of the conference, the ASEAN nations confirmed their willingness to continue to support the CPA.

On September 22, the British and Vietnamese governments, along with the UNHCR, announced an agreement on the return to Vietnam of Vietnamese in Hong Kong who have been determined not to be refugees and who do not object. We expect the UN High Commissioner to provide the necessary safeguards to ensure that there is no force or coercion employed and that the existing system for UNHCR monitoring in Vietnam is expanded to cover all returnees.

Displaced Persons in the Gulf

The August 2 invasion of Kuwait by Iraq has generated a tremendous number of displaced persons. Exact figures are difficult to determine because more people flee Iraq and Kuwait every day. However, the following estimates can be considered accurate to date:

- Over 540,000 people have fled to Jordan from Iraq.
- About 40,000 have crossed the Turkish-Iraqi border.
- Almost 70,000 have entered Syria from Iraq.
- Over 20,000 have crossed the Iraq-Iran border.
- Well over 240,000 people have fled to Saudi Arabia and other gulf states from Kuwait.

Those fleeing are generally not refugees suffering persecution but rather third-country nationals who, until August 2, were employed in Iraq and Kuwait. In most cases, they have escaped with few personal resources and will return home penniless. The overwhelming numbers of displaced persons impose a severe resource burden on countries such as Jordan and Turkey.

Jordan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and other countries have undertaken impressive efforts to care for these displaced persons. Although conditions in some of the camps were initially harsh, there have been no deaths due to starvation or epidemic disease. In Jordan, the worst camps have been closed, and the residents have been moved to new camps with adequate sanitation and shelter. In Turkey, the only victims of hunger and disease are newly arrived displaced persons who developed their conditions while still in Iraq.

The international response to this emergency has grown rapidly and is now effectively meeting the challenge. The Red Crescent societies in Jordan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia have been in the forefront in helping care for the displaced persons. They are now backed up by an array of international agencies and personnel. In Jordan, the UN Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) coordinates the work of several UN agencies. The ICRC and the League of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies are also playing major roles. US and European non-governmental organizations have become active as well.

Perhaps the most critical element in this emergency is the effort to transport the displaced persons back to their home

countries. Egyptians make up the largest number of these individuals. Saudi Arabia and the EC [European Community] have now largely assured steady movement of Egyptians through Jordan and back home. India is stepping up repatriation of its citizens to more than 3,000 per day. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is coordinating transportation arrangements for the other displaced persons, mostly those from South Asia whose governments cannot cover the costs. IOM scheduled the movement of 50,000 persons through the end of September. As a result of those efforts, the number of persons in Jordan has dropped to below 50,000.

The international donor community has committed over \$200 million to this relief effort, including cash, aircraft, food, and other supplies. The United States has committed up to \$28 million—\$10 million for transportation and up to \$18 million in food and other aid. The efforts of the host governments and generous international assistance have stabilized the situation for now. However, the potential for a future crisis remains. Over 2 million foreign nationals remain in Kuwait and Iraq. If and when they make it across the borders, most will require the same short-term care and transportation assistance as those who fled before them.

Liberian Refugees

I would like to draw attention to an area of the world where there is a grave humanitarian situation that has not received adequate attention of donor nations. I refer to the Liberian refugee crisis which began some 8 months ago. Since June, the number of refugees seeking protection in the neighboring nations of Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, and Sierra Leone has doubled. There are now more than 500,000 Liberians in asylum—more than one-fifth of the country's population. Although assistance organizations have launched new efforts to care for these refugees, the response of the donor community has been extremely disappointing. The United States has committed over \$5 million in funding, including 30% of the initial UNHCR appeal, and nearly all the food that has been made available for these refugees. The rest of the international community has, so far, contributed only \$4.3 million toward this emergency appeal of the UNHCR. We continue to urge other donor nations not to ignore their responsibility toward these refugees. We are

concerned, in particular, about food deliveries to the refugees in the forest region of Guinea; logistical problems have hampered efforts to reach this area. Malnutrition rates there are high, which affect children most severely. And, in each case, the impact on the citizens of the neighboring countries of asylum has been substantial. We have asked the United Nations to develop a coordinated plan to reach all affected persons over the coming 6-9 months, as the situation inside of Liberia remains unstable and uncertain.

I have touched on some of the more visible refugee programs that the United States funds. But there are still millions of victims of persecution and war whose circumstances we have not had time to describe. Let me assure you that the United States remains committed to protecting and promoting their well-being no matter how long their exile. My hope is that next year we will be able to report a decrease in the number of refugees worldwide, as many of those now in asylum are repatriated safely to their home countries.

I would now like to turn to the President's proposal for refugee admissions in FY 1991.

Refugee Admissions

Historically, part of the American response to refugee situations worldwide has been to offer resettlement opportunities to a sizable number of refugees. Those who have been resettled in this country have a long tradition of bringing special talents to the American "melting pot." This tradition is at the core of today's hearing on the President's proposed refugee admissions level for FY 1991.

The President's proposal for 131,000 worldwide refugee admissions in FY 1991 includes the following regional levels:

• Africa	4,900
• Near East/ South Asia	6,000
• East Asia	52,000
• Eastern Europe	5,000
• Soviet Union	50,000
• Latin America/ Caribbean	3,100
TOTAL	121,000

In addition to the total funded admissions level of 121,000, we propose to continue the successful private sector initiative program with an authorized

ceiling of 10,000, available for refugees from any region of the world. Thus, the worldwide total of the President's proposal is 131,000.

A detailed justification of each of the admissions levels has been provided in the document entitled Proposed Admissions for FY 1991, as submitted for the record.

Ambassador Lafontant-Mankarious has included in her prepared statement a regional description of the admissions programs we envision. I would like to review for you how we intend to fund these admissions levels.

As I have noted, the President's proposal for a worldwide admissions level of 131,000 refugees includes 10,000 admissions from any region of the world to be sponsored privately under the ongoing PSI program. PSI refugees require no federal funding and are only admitted if the requisite private sector funding is provided. The question therefore, with the budget process not quite completed, is how we will fund all the numbers in the remaining 121,000 ceiling.

The President's proposal for 121,000 funded refugee admissions reflects the fine-tuning of the refugee admissions program that the consultations process provides; each of the regional admissions totals has been revised since earlier estimates were included in our FY 1991 budget presentation. As a result of this process, the total of 121,000 funded admissions represents a net increase of 11,000 above the budget request level, most of which falls within the ceiling for the Soviet Union. In FY 1990, up to 8,000 Soviet refugees were resettled through private funding by the Jewish community. We fully appreciate the magnitude of that effort and recognize that it cannot easily be repeated in FY 1991. We have, therefore, raised the funded level of Soviet refugees in FY 1991 to 50,000.

The 121,000 figure is of course a ceiling, not a quota. Nevertheless, we believe that through cost-saving measures and new approaches to financing transportation costs, funding appropriated at the President's original budget request level can finance the projected 121,000 admissions. Let me be clear: Our ability to make use of these additional numbers will be dependent on:

1. The appropriation of funds at the President's requested level for Fiscal Year 1991,

2. Successful participation of refugees and their sponsors in financing a portion of transportation to the United States, and

3. Our ability to implement other cost-saving measures. Subject to these constraints, we are fully committed to covering the full 121,000 admissions within the authorized ceiling.

In closing, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide this update on some of our ongoing refugee policy concerns, and our plans for refugee admissions in the coming year. Your committee's continued support of our refugee programs worldwide is integral to our success. ■

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3