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OVERVIEW OF U.S. REFUGEE POLICY – 2014

In 2014 the estimated refugee population worldwide stood at 16.7 million, with 11.7 million receiving protection or assistance from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The United States actively supported efforts to provide protection, assistance, and durable solutions to refugees because these measures meet both the humanitarian objectives and the national security interests of the United States. The U.S. government worked with other governments, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations to provide protection and assistance to refugees, internally displaced persons, victims of conflict, and other vulnerable migrants.

In seeking durable solutions for refugees, the United States and UNHCR recognized that, for most refugees, safe, voluntary return to their homelands was the preferred solution. Where opportunities for return remained elusive, the United States and its partners pursued self-sufficiency and temporary, indefinite, or permanent local integration in countries of asylum. The Department of State worked diplomatically to encourage host governments to protect refugees through local integration, and provided assistance to meet integration needs by promoting refugee self-sufficiency and community-based social services.

The United States and UNHCR also recognized resettlement in third countries was a vital tool for providing refugees protection and/or durable solutions, particularly for those for whom other solutions were not feasible. For some refugees, resettlement was the best, and perhaps only, alternative. The United States was the world's leader in refugee resettlement, admitting more than three million refugees since 1975, including nearly 70,000 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 through the U.S. Refugee Admission Program (USRAP). UNHCR or a U.S. embassy can refer nationals of any country to the U.S. program for reasons of religious persecution.

AFRICA

The USRAP continued to be available through Priority 1 individual referrals of Sudanese, Eritrean, and other refugees who were victims of religious intolerance. Refugees from Eritrea and Sudan with refugee or asylee family members in the United States also had access to the USRAP through the Priority 3 refugee family reunion program. In FY 2014, 17,476 refugees from 26 African countries were

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admitted to the United States, including some admitted based on religious persecution.

EAST ASIA

Nationals of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Vietnam, China, Laos, and Burma, including victims of religious intolerance, had access to the USRAP through Priority 1 individual referrals. A significant number of Burmese were processed in FY 2014 under a Priority 2 group designation for certain Burmese ethnic minorities in Thailand and Malaysia. This number will decrease markedly in FY 2015 as the pool of eligible Priority 2 applicants in Thailand comes to an end. North Korean and Burmese refugees also had access to family reunification processing through Priority 3. In FY 2014, 14,784 refugees from seven countries in East Asia were admitted to the United States.

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Certain religious minorities in Europe and Central Asia had access to USRAP processing. A Priority 2 designation applied to Jews, evangelical Christians, and Ukrainian Catholic and Orthodox religious adherents identified in the "Lautenberg Amendment" (Public Law Number. 101-167, § 599D, 103 Stat. 1261 (1989), as amended) with close family in the United States. With annual renewal of the Lautenberg Amendment, these individuals are considered under a reduced evidentiary standard for establishing a well-founded fear of persecution. In FY 2014, the United States admitted 958 refugees from 11 countries in Europe and Central Asia, including those under the Lautenberg Amendment in-country processing program.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The USRAP in Havana offered the opportunity for permanent resettlement in the United States to Cubans who were persecuted on a number of grounds, including their religious beliefs. In FY 2014, 4,318 refugees from Latin America and the Caribbean were resettled in the United States, including 4,062 Cubans and 252 Colombians.

NEAR EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

The USRAP provided resettlement access to refugees in the Near East and South Asia, including those who suffered religious persecution, accepting UNHCR and

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embassy Priority 1 referrals of religious minorities of various nationalities in the region. The Specter Amendment (Public Law Number 108-199, first enacted as sec. 213, Division E, of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2004) permits Iranian religious minorities designated as category members to benefit from a reduced evidentiary standard for establishing a well-founded fear of persecution. Iranian refugees also had access to the program through Priority 3. In FY 2014, 32,450 refugees from 19 countries in the Near East/South Asia region were admitted to the United States, including 8,434 Bhutanese, 19,769 Iraqis, and 2,846 Iranians.