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Fact Sheet: Iraqi Refugee Processing

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The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the U.S. Department of State (DOS) have been committed to streamlining the process for admitting Iraqi refugees to the U.S. while at the same time ensuring the highest level of security. Starting in May 2007, DHS and DOS have worked cooperatively to administer the overseas component of the U.S. refugee admissions program (USRAP).

DOS' Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) has overall management responsibility for the USRAP and has the lead in proposing admissions ceilings and processing priorities. Within DHS, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has responsibility for interviewing refugee applicants and adjudicating applications for refugee status.

Through its cooperative agreements with Overseas Processing Entities, PRM handles the intake of refugee referrals from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and U.S. embassies, and the prescreening of cases. USCIS and PRM share responsibility for initiating security checks. Part of the refugee program's important humanitarian mission is to offer resettlement opportunities to especially vulnerable Iraqi refugees who are unable to return to Iraq due to persecution.

Refugee Admissions Program

USRAP is an inter-agency effort involving a number of governmental and non-governmental partners, both overseas and domestically, whose mission is to resettle refugees in the U.S. In the last year, the USRAP expanded its capacity dramatically to consider Iraqi refugees for resettlement.

- Since the program began last spring, a total of 20,412 Iraqi individuals have been referred for resettlement to the USRAP. USCIS has interviewed a total of 11,192 Iraqi refugees, and a total of 3,559 Iraqi refugees have been welcomed to the U.S. thus far.
- In FY 2007, between May and September alone, a total of 11,787 Iraqi individuals were referred for resettlement to the USRAP. USCIS interviewed 4,493 Iraqi refugees, and the U.S. admitted 1,608 Iraqi refugees.
- In FY 2008 so far, a total of 8,625 individuals been referred for resettlement to the USRAP. USCIS has interviewed over 6,700 Iraqi refugees, and the U.S. admitted 1,951 Iraqi refugees.

Process for Resettlement

In identifying cases for referral to the USRAP, the UNHCR and DOS have been prioritizing processing of individuals who are affiliated with the U.S. Government and religious minorities, among several categories of especially vulnerable refugees.

Iraqi refugees may gain access to this program through referrals by UNHCR, a U.S. Embassy, or a nongovernmental organization (NGO). Iraqi applicants who worked for the U.S. government, a U.S. contractor, or a U.S.-based media organization or NGO and their family members, can apply directly without a UNHCR referral in Jordan and Egypt. In addition, Iraqi applicants will be considered for resettlement if an eligible family member applies on their behalf in the U.S. The vast majority of cases processed so far by the USRAP have been referrals from UNHCR.

USCIS officers are interviewing Iraqi refugee applicants primarily in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, and Lebanon. In addition, DOS and DHS have begun in-country refugee processing in Iraq for U.S. Embassy staff (direct hires) who have decided to avail themselves of this opportunity. This will allow these individuals to seek resettlement in the U.S. while they continue to assist coalition efforts in Iraq.

Determining Eligibility for Refugees

Eligibility for refugee status is decided on an individual, or case-by-case, basis. A USCIS officer conducts a personal interview of the applicant designed to elicit information about the applicant's claim for refugee status. During the interview, the officer confirms the basic biographical data of the applicant; verifies that the applicant was properly given access to the USRAP; determines whether the applicant has suffered past persecution (or has a well-founded fear of future persecution) on the basis of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion in his or her home country; determines whether the applicant is admissible to the U.S. and whether

he or she has been firmly resettled in another country; and assesses the credibility of the applicant.

Ensuring Security

We are committed to conducting the most rigorous screening that will ensure that the Iraqi refugee population is not infiltrated by individuals seeking to harm the homeland. On May 29, 2007, DHS announced and implemented an Administration-coordinated, enhanced background and security check process for Iraqi refugees applying for resettlement in the U.S. No case is finally approved until results from all security checks have been received and analyzed. The enhanced security checks do not impede the flow of genuine refugees to the U.S., since this process runs concurrently with other out-processing steps. On average, the total processing time for Iraqi cases is significantly less than for any other refugee group worldwide.

Procedures for Iraqi Citizens Currently in the U.S.

Iraqis currently in the U.S. who are not able to return to Iraq because they have been persecuted or fear they will be persecuted on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion may apply for asylum with USCIS. Information on the process of applying for asylum in the U.S. can be found on our website: www.USCIS.gov. To view the asylum information, click on the *Services and Benefits* link, then *Humanitarian Benefits* and then *Asylum*.

Procedures for Iraqi Citizens Living Outside of Iraq

Refugees and asylum seekers should seek to comply with all legal requirements of the country in which they are located, including registration with host governments if required. In addition, all Iraqi asylum seekers located in third countries should register with the nearest UNHCR office.

UNHCR has the international mandate to provide protection and assistance to refugees and can provide a protection document and possibly other assistance if needed. For a small number of extremely vulnerable individuals, this could include referral to the USRAP or another country's resettlement program. UNHCR will identify individuals for resettlement referral based on an assessment of their vulnerability at the time of registration.

Iraqi asylum seekers eligible for USRAP processing in Jordan or Egypt must meet certain criteria which have recently been expanded by legislation. Eligible categories include full-time interpreters/translators for the U.S. Government or Multi-National Forces, Locally Employed Staff engaged by the U.S. Government, employees of U.S. contractors and U.S.-based media organizations and NGOs, and certain family members of these individuals. Please visit the DOS/PRM website: www.state.gov/g/prm/ for additional information.

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