

April 6, 2006

Dear Senator,

As you debate the recently negotiated immigration reform legislation, we urge you to support the "Secure and Safe Detention and Asylum Act," an amendment (#3253) offered by Senators Joe Lieberman and Sam Brownback that would implement several important recommendations of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) relating to the detention of asylum seekers. We are 55 faith-based, refugee assistance, and other organizations, as well as 25 individuals, who are concerned about the treatment of those who seek refuge in this country.

As you know, a report issued last year by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom concluded that many asylum seekers are inappropriately jailed in prison-like facilities that create a serious risk of psychological harm. USCIRF also found wide disparities in how parole policies are implemented around the country. As a result, asylum seekers in some parts of the country are detained for lengthy periods even when they could and should be released.

More than one year from the time USCIRF issued its report, the Department of Homeland Security has failed to address these problems by making the recommended changes to its detention procedures.

The Lieberman-Brownback amendment (#3253) will provide critical safeguards to ensure that asylum seekers who meet specific criteria are not unnecessarily jailed for extended periods of time. The amendment also supports legal orientation programs, alternatives to detention, and promotes the use of less restrictive detention facilities for asylum seekers. Many of these asylum seekers have experienced severe trauma in their home countries, the effects of which are exacerbated by prolonged detention here.

We understand that the Senate could vote on this important amendment as part of the recent Hagel-Martinez compromise immigration bill. We urge you to vote in favor of the Lieberman-Brownback amendment. Doing so will help ensure that refugees seeking asylum in this country are treated humanely and consistent with the values of this nation.

Respectfully,

Organizations:

American Jewish Committee

Amnesty International USA

Anti-Defamation League

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee

Asian Law Caucus

Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture

Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition

Casa de Esperanza
Summit, NJ

Center for Gender & Refugee Studies at University of California,
Hastings College of Law

Center for National Security Studies

Center for Victims of Torture
St. Paul, Minnesota

Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program

Clinical Law Office, University of Maryland

Cornell Asylum/Convention Against Torture Appellate Clinic

Ethiopian Community Development Council,
African Community Center

Episcopal Migration Ministries

Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center

Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society

Human Rights First

Human Rights Watch

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project,
Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs

International Institute of the East Bay

International Rescue Committee

Jesuit Refugee Service USA

Jewish Council For Public Affairs

Jubilee Campaign

Korean American Resource & Cultural Center

Korean Resource Center

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Midwest Immigrant & Human Rights Center,
Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights
Chicago, IL

Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights

Na Loio - Immigrant Rights and Public Interest Legal Center

National Immigration Forum

National Korean American Service & Education Consortium

National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA

National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women

New York Immigration Coalition

Physicians for Human Rights

Political Asylum Project – Austin
Austin, Texas

Refugee Resource Project
Reading, PA

Refugio del Rio Grande, Inc.
San Benito, TX

Rocky Mountain Survivors Center
Denver, CO

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center

Survivors of Torture, International
San Diego, CA

Tahirih Justice Center

Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

United Methodist Church,
General Board of Church and Society

U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

YKASEC - Empowering the Korean American Community

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