



Re: VOTE NO on Kyl Amendment S. 629, Omnibus: Sec. 7093

As human rights, humanitarian, immigration and faith-based organizations committed to the protection of refugees, we are writing to express our urgent concern regarding an amendment to the Omnibus introduced by Senator Kyl on March 6, 2009. The amendment adds the following line to page 942 (lines 14 and 15) of the Omnibus: "Sec. 7093. None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act may be made available to resettle Palestinians from Gaza into the United States." Because the amendment proposes to deny refugee protection based solely on the nationality of the recipients, we strongly recommend a "no" vote. Moreover, because the US is not likely to resettle Palestinian refugees from Gaza in FY09, the amendment is not only discriminatory but also unnecessary.

The recent fighting between Israel and Palestinian armed groups (including Hamas) has left over 1300 Palestinians and 13 Israelis dead. In addition, schools, universities, mosques and thousands of homes in Gaza were destroyed. In surveying the damages in Gaza, an Amnesty International researcher stated, "there is no camera lens wide enough to capture the destruction," adding that Gaza looked like a "moonscape." The conflict only exacerbated the dismal conditions that were set in place well before the fighting broke out between Israel and Hamas. People fleeing persecution, including the wounded, were prevented from entering Egypt or Israel for medical treatment and protection. Many remain in dire need of human rights protection without any avenue for escape.

The US provides world leadership on refugee issues by refusing to discriminate on the basis of nationality, ethnicity or religion when determining who will be admitted as a refugee. Indeed, the goal of the 1980 Refugee Act sought to assure greater equity in the protection of refugees by repealing the previous law's discriminatory treatment of refugees. Contrary to 30 years of extending protection to refugees on the basis of need, the Kyl amendment seeks to discriminate against an entire group based on nationality alone. Any refugee deemed in need of third country resettlement who meets the criteria of the US refugee program and the security protocols of the Department of Homeland Security should have access to our program irrespective of his or her nationality, ethnicity, or religion.

Please ensure the continued protection of refugees without discrimination by voting against this amendment.

Sincerely,

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Amnesty International USA

Kareem Shora, J.D., LLM, Executive Director
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)

Radwan Khoury, Ph.D., Executive Director
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Karen Musalo, Clinical Professor of Law &
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Erol Kekic, Director, CWS/Immigration and Refugee Program
Church World Service

Congregation Justice Committee
Sisters of the Holy Cross
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Heartland Alliance

Irish Apostolate USA

Ralston H. Deffenbaugh, Jr., President
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Joel Charny, Vice-President
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