



Written Testimony of

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For a Forum on

**“The Impact of Budget Proposals on Justice, Job Creation, Public
Safety, and Civil Liberties”**

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Congressman Conyers, on behalf of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), the national organization established by Lutheran churches in the United States to carry out the churches' ministry with uprooted people, I would like to thank you for the invitation to speak with you about the impact of the House passed FY 2011 Continuing Resolution (CR) on refugees and immigrants. I am dividing up my testimony into two sections:

1. overseas assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons
2. domestic assistance and integration services to refugees and immigrants

1. Overseas Assistance to Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

The U.S. government is a leader in refugee protection, providing aid to millions of refugees who are living in refugee camps or are in other urban situations in search of safety. Refugees often spend years waiting for an opportunity to return to their home country, to integrate into the host country, or wait to be accepted for resettlement to a third country. Every year, the U.S. government resettles a small fraction of the world's refugee population. In FY 2010, the U.S. government resettled 73,311 of the world's 15 million refugees. While resettlement to the United States is a tremendous opportunity to rebuild lives, millions of refugees remain in vulnerable and dangerous situations, the majority in some of the world's poorest countries.

Providing assistance to refugees serves a number of national interests. It enhances our ability to encourage other nations to protect refugees from return to tyranny, torture and civil unrest. It allows the United States to further its foreign policy agenda by promoting peace and security to unstable parts of the world. Finally, it fulfills a moral imperative to assist the world's most vulnerable persons.

The Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) helps save lives and alleviates the suffering of refugees by providing basic life-saving services such as safe shelter, clean water and education. It also funds the admission and initial resettlement of refugees who are welcomed by hundreds of communities across the country.

The CR would cut PRM funding by over \$830 million, or 45% of its programming. Such a drastic cut in funding would have a significant impact on the ability of the U.S. government to provide assistance to areas of the world that are of strategic national security interest. It would also decrease the U.S. government's capacity to meet its target admissions total of 80,000 refugees for FY 2011 and limit our flexibility to respond to emerging refugee crises.

For example, PRM has assisted the return of more than 325,000 Sudanese refugees over the past five years and the return of more than five million Afghans since the fall of the Taliban. A significant cut in PRM funding would curb our ability to assist in these kinds of situations.

The CR would also cut 67% of funding for assistance to internally displaced persons, which is provided through the International Disaster Assistance account. These cuts would drastically reduce the U.S. government's ability to provide life-saving relief services and aid to victims in places like Haiti, Afghanistan and Colombia.

2. Domestic Assistance and Integration Services to Refugees and Immigrants

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Department of Health and Human Services serves refugees, asylees, victims of trafficking and torture, unaccompanied immigrant and refugee children, and certain Cuban and Haitian migrants. In FY 2009, ORR provided services to an estimated 120,000 individuals who recently arrived to the United States. The U.S. government admits the world's most vulnerable refugees, many having experienced torture or trauma overseas, including a growing percentage with severe medical challenges. Iraqi refugees in need of prostheses due to war injuries is one such example. ORR funding has not kept up with the needs of these diverse and vulnerable populations, a situation exacerbated by the fact that it is harder now for refugees to find jobs and become self-sufficient.

The CR would rescind \$77 million in unobligated FY 2010 ORR funding, nearly 10% of ORR's budget. Much of these unused funds come from delays in receiving reimbursements from states that provided cash and medical assistance to refugees. ORR is required to pay back these states. Therefore, this rescission would divert funding from other ORR budget areas in order to meet this obligation to the states for services already rendered and would make it even harder to meet the needs of refugees and other newcomers.

Finally, the CR would cut \$11 million in Department of Homeland Security's Citizenship and Immigration Services funding for integration initiatives which help promote citizenship to immigrants and refugees. The elimination of this funding would undercut current efforts to help provide legal immigrants with information and tools to apply for U.S. citizenship and to encourage the better integration of newcomers in American communities.

Conclusion

On behalf of LIRS, I strongly urge you to work with House leadership, Senate colleagues and the White House to restore FY 2011 funding for refugees and immigrants to ensure the United States continues to meet its commitments to refugees, provide assistance to regions of the world that are of strategic national security interest, and support refugees and immigrants residing in the United States.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you this morning and I will be happy to answer any questions.