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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

October 4, 2005

COMMITTEES:

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
VICE CHAIRMAN

**AFRICA, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS
AND INTERNATIONAL
OPERATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE**
CHAIRMAN

**COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE**
CHAIRMAN

Honorable Jim Kolbe
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Foreign Operations, Export Financing
and Related Programs
HB-26 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Foreign Operations, Export Financing
and Related Programs
1016 Longworth House Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Conferee,

As Members of the House Refugee Caucus, we write to request that as you prepare the conference report for the FY 2006 Foreign Operations Appropriations bill, you fund the Migration and Refugee Assistance account (MRA) at the Senate-passed level of \$900 million. We also request your consideration of language in the Senate bill supporting new programs to assist long-term or "warehoused" refugee populations to obtain work and improve educational opportunities.

Unforeseen and protracted refugee crises in places such as Sudan and Afghanistan have stretched the MRA account beyond the Administration's original budget request of \$894 million. Consultation with the State Department's Bureau for Population, Migration, and Refugees (PRM) has revealed that this agency will spend its entire \$120.4 million in the FY 05 supplemental appropriations this year and that anticipated needs identified for the supplemental would continue in FY 2006.

MRA funds will help meet acute needs for vulnerable and returning populations places such as Chad, the Sudan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Thailand, and Afghanistan. A higher funding level will make a tremendous difference in the lives of significant numbers of refugees in these areas.

We would also like to request inclusion of language passed by both the House and Senate on the development of new programs to assist large numbers of refugees who have been confined to camps and segregated settlements for excessive periods of time. Research shows that more than half of the world's refugees have been confined to camps and segregated settlements for over ten years. These refugees are without access

to basic rights such as the right to work, freedom of movement and basic education as called for by the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.

Both the House-passed State Department Reauthorization bill and the Senate Foreign Operations Appropriations bill contain important language to address this problem by making funds available for programs to "support refugees living or working in local communities, such as integration of refugees into local schools and services, resource conservation, and livelihoods projects designed to diminish conflict between refugee hosting communities and refugees."

We request that the conference keep the language of the Senate FY06 Foreign Ops amendment and advise that funds be made available for a pilot program called for in the State Department Reauthorization bill. We believe that this important language will help initiate a dialogue between the U.S., the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), governments that host refugees, and civil society groups that seek to better address problems with longer-stay refugees and work to ensure that refugees are able to experience basic rights despite their displacement.

While we know that you face overall budget constraints in the bill, we urge you to work to ensure that the conference report for Foreign Operations Appropriations be as close as possible to the Senate figure for the MRA account. This account has long been instrumental in helping to meet the humanitarian needs of refugees throughout the world, providing humanitarian assistance for 13 million refugees as well resources for resettlement into the U.S. for a select number of refugees in cases where no other durable solution is possible.

Thank you for considering our request. We look forward to working with you on important foreign aid initiatives in the future.

Sincerely,

Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, House Refugee Caucus

John Conyers, Jr.
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, House Refugee Caucus

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, House Refugee Caucus

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, House Refugee Caucus

Donald M. Payne
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Luis V. Gutierrez
Member of Congress

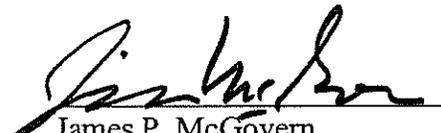

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Member of Congress

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Member of Congress

Sheila Jackson Lee
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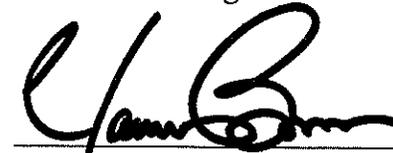

Michael Honda
Member of Congress

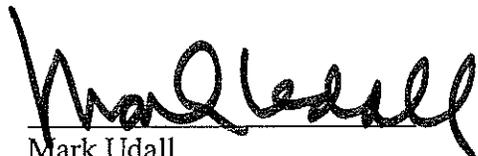

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