



a HEARTLAND ALLIANCE partner

## **GOVERNMENT FAILS TO IMPLEMENT BIPARTISAN RECOMMENDATIONS ON HUMANE AND FAIR TREATMENT OF ASYLUM SEEKERS**

### **National Immigrant Justice Center Urges Congress to Pass Legislation Protecting Human Rights of Asylum Seekers**

CHICAGO – February 9, 2007 –A bipartisan panel criticized the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) yesterday for detaining asylum seekers in penal conditions and denying these individuals the opportunity to find a lawyer.

The bipartisan U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) issued a report two years ago calling on DHS to modify its policies. DHS never responded to the recommendations. The Commission’s “report card,” released Thursday, excoriates DHS for its failure to ensure that asylum seekers are protected and given an opportunity to seek refuge in the United States.

According to USCIRF, DHS made no effort to ensure that detained asylum seekers have access to legal service providers. This inaction occurred despite the USCIRF’s finding in 2005 that asylum seekers who were able to obtain counsel had significantly higher rates of winning asylum in the United States. The USCIRF also found that asylum seekers are typically treated as criminals while they are detained.

The National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) urges DHS to protect the human rights of asylum seekers and release eligible asylum seekers from custody. NIJC identifies detained asylum seekers and seeks to pair them with trained *pro bono* attorneys. Shahid Haque, a Chicago attorney at the law firm of Jenner & Block provided *pro bono* representation this winter to a detained Togolese asylum seeker. “Several months of detention wore on my client’s health,” Haque said. “He had trouble sleeping, and this affected his ability to recall the level of detail required for his asylum hearing.”

Domestic and international law provide protections for asylum seekers. DHS routinely violates these safeguards despite the efforts of the National Immigrant Justice Center and other legal advocates to ensure their compliance. Senators Joseph Lieberman (I-CT) and Sam Brownback (R-KS) are expected to introduce legislation that responds to the Commission’s finding and increases protections under U.S. law for asylum seekers. NIJC encourages Congress to pass legislation this session to protect the human rights of asylum seekers.

To speak with an expert on detention in the U.S. immigration system or arrange an interview with an asylum seeker or attorney, contact Tara Tidwell Cullen at (312) 660-1337 or [ttidwellcullen@heartlandalliance.org](mailto:ttidwellcullen@heartlandalliance.org).

View USCIRF report card at: [http://www.uscirf.gov/reports/ScoreCards/0720262007\\_ScoreCard\\_long.html](http://www.uscirf.gov/reports/ScoreCards/0720262007_ScoreCard_long.html)

*The National Immigrant Justice Center, a partner of Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights, provides direct legal services to and advocates for immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers through policy reform, impact litigation, and public education.*