



Department of Justice

STATEMENT

OF

BENJAMIN R. CIVILETTI
ATTORNEY GENERAL

BEFORE

THE

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES SENATE

CONCERNING

1981 REFUGEE CONSULTATION

ON

SEPTEMBER 19, 1980

I am pleased to have this opportunity to consult with you, in accordance with the Refugee Act of 1980, regarding the plans of the Administration for refugee admissions and resettlement for FY 1981. With me this morning are Ambassador Victor Palmieri, U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs, and representatives of the other agencies with refugee responsibilities.

The Refugee Act of 1980 represents a major step toward establishing a uniform, coherent, and manageable policy necessary for handling refugee admissions to this country. However, as both the Congress and the Administration recognized at the time of passage and in our first consultation in April of this year, the Act also signals the beginning of the long and difficult task of formulating a more rational and equitable basis for our refugee programs. Our FY 81 proposals and the progress we have made in implementation of the Act since last spring are steps in that direction.

Today I would like to review briefly the increasingly serious refugee problems we have experienced in recent years and expect to see persist in the near future, as well as the specific details of our proposed FY 81 refugee admissions and resettlement programs.

In accordance with the requirements of the Act, you have received a comprehensive set of background materials to

support our program recommendations. As you know, the world-wide refugee problem remains serious, widespread, long-term and growing. Several situations with refugee dimensions were resolved during the year, permitting voluntary refugee repatriation in Zimbabwe . But developments in Southeast Asia, the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan, and the Caribbean have continued to generate large numbers of refugees. Our overall approach remains the pursuit of active diplomacy, economic and security assistance programs, and practical support for progress in human rights, as a means of ameliorating the underlying conditions that give rise to large numbers of refugees. At the same time, it speaks well of our national character and is in our national interest to respond generously to mounting refugee problems.

Since April, the United States has found itself in the position of serving as a first asylum nation. We have come to understand firsthand the enormous burden which falls on first asylum countries. We must bear our own burden with compassion, even though we would hope others would recognize the need to share it -- just as we have consistently aided other countries of first asylum.

Accordingly, the first objective of our refugee policy continues to be joining in international efforts to provide

relief to refugees wherever they are and to facilitate voluntary repatriation wherever possible.

Where resettlement of refugees is a practical necessity, we are willing to continue responding generously, in an effort to relieve human suffering and encourage other countries to do their share in providing resettlement opportunities.

The guiding principles which have shaped the FY 1981 admission levels and groups include the following:

- We continue to give priority to refugees with close ties to the United States through relatives in this country or past employment with the U.S. government.

- Where the United States has stood uniquely as a symbol of freedom from oppression for particular groups, we seek to respond to their aspirations for safe haven.

- We are mindful that refugee resettlement efforts can advance broader foreign policy objectives, in particular to promote stability in friendly, democratic countries of first asylum.

-- We have also taken into consideration the opportunities for resettlement in other countries and the practical limits on United States resources.

For FY 1981, we propose to admit to the United States 217,000 refugees. This figure is 14,700 less than our FY 1980 admissions. The proposed 217,000 includes 168,000 from Indo-China, 33,000 from the Soviet Union, 4,500 from Eastern Europe, 4,500 from the Near East, 4,000 from Latin America, and 3,000 from Africa.

With regard to the Indochinese program, our proposal calls for continuing the 14,000 monthly level President Carter pledged to establish in June, 1979. The situation in Southeast Asia continues to be fraught with uncertainty and hardship, and there are approximately 235,000 Indochinese refugees in first asylum countries, some of whom have been waiting for resettlement offers for more than five years. In addition to the very real and pressing humanitarian concerns, the political problems in the region and the need to maintain stability and support the ASEAN group are in the forefront of our concerns.

In addition, we propose to admit 37,500 refugees from areas that have long been of concern to the United States,

the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe. Emigration from the Soviet Union has unfortunately been subject to more stringent controls than usual in the past year, but we expect that the departure rates will rise again this coming year.

Our proposal for the Near East is set at 4,500. Numbers will be allocated to various groups depending on the emergence of special conditions or needs. Afghans; Iraqi-Assyrians and Iraqi-Kurds have applied for admission as refugees from this area of the world. In addition, large numbers of people are still fleeing the chaotic conditions in Iran, and while there is not yet a clear pattern of persecution, we are prepared to consider applications for refugee admissions on a case-by-case basis.

The recommendation for Latin America is for 4,000 refugee admissions. These numbers would be used for 2,500 Cuban refugees, approximately one-half of whom would come from Madrid before we terminate that program. The remainder would be Cubans who have already been processed and who were ready to travel to the United States prior to the mass exodus from Mariel. Our first priority for the Latin American program will be given to political prisoners and their families and to former political prisoners.

The Latin American figure represents the biggest reduction of any of the groups for FY 1981. The FY 80 proposal was for 20,500, of which 19,500 was to be for Cubans. The reduction reflects the massive influx of Cubans to the United States in contravention of both U.S. law and our guiding principle of refugee admissions -- orderly processing and departure to the United States from abroad.

The proposal calls for admission of 3,000 African refugees, a number double the FY 80 level. This represents our best estimate of the number of eligible refugees who may wish to apply for admission to the U.S. The largest proportion is likely to continue to be Ethiopians but Africans from other regions of the continent are also expected to seek resettlement.

In addition to the refugee groups and numbers I have outlined, the Act authorized adjustment to permanent resident status of up to 5,000 persons in the United States who have been granted political asylum in previous years. The adjustment of these 5,000 brings to 222,000 the total number of admissions and adjustment to permanent resident of refugees for FY 1981. Although large regional disparities in the numbers of proposed admissions remain, we have attempted to modify those disparities

in this proposal in an evolutionary fashion. We are committed to a system which permits refugees in all parts of the world to apply freely for admission to the United States, and we believe we are taking reasonable steps toward that objective.

The cost to the Federal Government of processing, transporting and initially resettling refugees for FY 1981 will be approximately \$690 million. The Department of Health and Human Services administers the bulk of federal assistance to refugees and is the lead federal agency in domestic resettlement in consultation with the U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs.

As you know, the private sector, particularly voluntary agencies, contributes enormously to our refugee efforts, particularly with regard to resettlement. The federal/private agency relationship is the centerpiece of our efforts and its role cannot be overemphasized in the success of our program to date.

Refugee problems are inherently unpredictable, since their causes are usually beyond our control. The Cuban-Haitian crisis of recent months has presented a new and even

more difficult challenge than ever. It has strained the compassion and generosity of the American people and the resources and capacity of government at all levels. We remain committed, however, to upholding faithfully our humanitarian tradition to help those uprooted persons around the world who face persecution. We recognize that this task is made considerably more difficult by circumstances in which our hospitality and values are abused. I am confident we can meet this challenge and continue to contribute in important ways in relieving the misery and suffering of people around the world, some of whom will begin new, productive lives in this country.

Thank you.