

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 20, 2004

Secretary of the Nansen Refugee Award Committee
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
P.O. Box 2500, 1211
Geneva 2
Switzerland

Dear Secretary of the Nansen Committee,

It is with great honor that we nominate the U.S. Committee for Refugees for the prestigious Nansen Refugee Award. We nominate the Committee in recognition of the organization's 46 years of extensive, groundbreaking field research on refugee issues, which has paved the way for policies that achieve tangible results for uprooted people. The Committee is known throughout the world for its flagship campaign against refugee warehousing in recognition of the fundamental human rights enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, but routinely denied in practice throughout the world. The Committee's annual publication, the *World Refugee Survey*, is renowned for its public information and advocacy on refugee issues, and its domestic partnership with Immigration & Refugee Services of America provides refugees around the world with invaluable assistance in developing new lives in the United States.

The Committee was founded in 1958 in response to President Eisenhower's call for a coordinating committee to facilitate U.S. participation in the International Year of the Refugee. For many years, the Committee served as the sole non-governmental organization providing comprehensive policy analysis and public education on displaced populations worldwide. The annual *World Refugee Survey* is one of the most widely respected and eagerly anticipated publications in the field, comprising a wealth of vital statistics on the world's population of refugees and internally displaced persons. In 1983, the U.S. Department of State ceased publication of its own *World Refugee Report*, because the Committee's survey was so comprehensive. The first *World Refugee Survey* was published for the International Year of the Refugee 1960-61 and stated:

It is the rather special role of this Committee, as a matter of fact, to goad the conscience of the American people and of their Government and try to prevent them forgetting that the problem of the refugee is their problem. And if one may put it so, it is our duty to plague the American conscience with the deeply human distress of the refugee. We want to awaken their sympathy and their generosity, indeed their hospitality; and we want to keep them steady in this long, discouraging but not unrewarding ministry to these people who are, in so many cases, the senseless end result of the deep rooted ferment of our time.

The Committee's reputation, built on decades of service as a credible, essential source of knowledge, enables the organization to make its policy recommendations heard at the highest levels of both bilateral and multilateral agencies. The Committee is consistently a principled advocate for increased overseas direct refugee assistance as well as resettlement, aiding UNHCR in identifying the gaps in their funding to advocate for unmet needs. The Committee's comprehensive analysis and advocacy brought the war in Sudan to the level of international concern during the 1990's through the appointment of a special envoy by the United States and, millions of dollars in U.S. development aid for rebel-controlled areas of southern Sudan.

The Committee's partner, Immigration and Refugee Services of America, has provided hundreds of thousands of refugees around the world with the durable solution of a new life in the United States through its resettlement program. In the past 20 years, IRSA's network of 40 community-based organizations has resettled over 120,000 refugees. The network also provides citizenship, legal services, inter-ethnic and inter-generational conflict resolution support, cultural orientation, mental health services, language education, and a variety of other programs to refugees. It has also administered overseas programs serving refugee women, youth and children in Croatia and Rwanda, and has operated resettlement offices in Singapore and Saudi Arabia.

In 1987, the Committee and IRSA established *Refugee Voices* to capture the stories of refugees through audio and print media in the belief that the best advocates for refugees are refugees themselves. By allowing others to hear the first-hand testimony of refugees, the general public becomes better informed about the conditions refugees endure, and refugees are empowered to contribute their own voices to end conflicts and help all refugees rebuild peaceful, stable lives. This program has made *Refugee Voices* a major participant in the way refugee policy evolves over time.

In the last year, the Committee has successfully launched an unprecedented international campaign against refugee "warehousing," the practice of confining refugees to camps and segregated settlements or depriving them in other ways of basic rights to earn a livelihood and enjoy freedom of movement. More than half of the world's refugees have endured such conditions for 10 years or more. The Committee pioneered this campaign with the release of its *World Refugee Survey 2004—Warehousing Issue*.

Prior to the release of this year's survey, it was commonly known that numerous protracted refugee situations existed in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The Committee's groundbreaking work has made the scope of this problem more real to the world by giving these populations a name and a face. The warehousing campaign is a challenge to the international community to renew its commitment to the refugee protection standards in the 1951 UNHCR Refugee Convention. Donor countries, host countries, and UNHCR all have a role to play in seeing that the articles of the Convention relating to human rights are honored. This noble and exemplary call will require substantial effort by all who care about these issues.

Last year, the United States was the largest contributor to agencies assisting refugees. Yet, we must strengthen our own commitment as well, which is why we have introduced legislation in the Senate encouraging the protection of the rights of refugees, denouncing warehousing, urging the State Department to actively pursue models of refugee assistance that permit refugees to enjoy all the rights recognized in the Convention, and urging other donor countries to shift the incentive structure of refugee assistance toward the greater enjoyment of human rights.

The Anti-Warehousing Campaign is the most innovative policy approach to refugee protection that we have seen in our years as refugee advocates. We commend efforts to initiate refugee protection programs to assist vulnerable groups beyond those covered by the Convention, such as assistance to internally displaced persons, and we are especially pleased when refugee advocacy organizations focus on aspects of the Convention itself that have not been applied. The Committee has given us all a way of considering refugee protection that enables us to confront the harsh reality of refugee life and compels us all to do our part to help refugees live as free people.

We are impressed with the widespread support which the warehousing campaign has mobilized as shown by the more than 100 endorsements of the Committee's Statement Calling for Solutions to End the Warehousing of Refugees. Endorsements of this Statement include two dozen international and U.S. based organizations; 20 Australian, Canadian, and European non-governmental organizations; four Nobel laureates; and leading scholars and social scientists on refugee issues. This broad outreach and North-South mobilization is essential to the direction of the anti-warehousing campaign in bringing donor and host country governments together to make refugee protection a genuinely international responsibility that includes far more than meeting basic subsistence needs in isolated refugee camps.

Through the Committee's efforts, the anti-warehousing campaign has significantly increased awareness of refugee rights in print, radio, television and on the internet. On September 28, the *New York Times* published an editorial, also carried in the *International Herald Tribune*, entitled, "End Refugee Warehousing." The Committee has discussed its recent fieldwork on preventing 'warehousing in the making' in Chad on the Voice of America weekly news program, "Africa Journal" on a panel with Dr. Francis Deng and Deputy Chief of Mission Adel Bagi Kabeir of the Sudanese Embassy in Washington. The Committee's commentary has also been regularly sought and featured in other media outlets such as the BBC World Service, CNN, C-Span, Newsweek, Radio Free Asia, *Agence France Presse*, the World Bank Group, and the Associated Press. The Committee's website, one of the premiere sources of worldwide refugee information, now features the anti-warehousing campaign, with links to the work of other organizations.

The Committee has a longstanding history of being a consistent and tireless voice for refugees around the world, and has made a substantial contribution to the international humanitarian community. We are confident that the Committee will continue to find

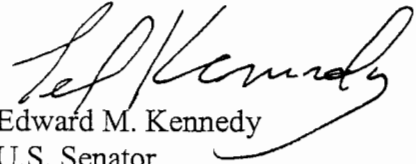
effective ways to challenge the world to improve the plight of refugees, and we enthusiastically recommend the Committee for this year's Nansen Award.

With respect and appreciation,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sam Brownback". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "S" and "B".

Sam Brownback
U.S. Senator

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ed Kennedy". The signature is highly stylized and cursive.

Edward M. Kennedy
U.S. Senator