

State Department Uses Wrong Criteria in Conferring Refugees' Eligibility

BY MARK KRIKORIAN

Ann Corcoran over at Refugee Resettlement Watch points out that Refugees from Bhutan are the third-largest group of refugees resettled so far this year in the United States. The perversity of this policy is clear when you learn that they're ethnic Nepalese kicked out by the Bhutanese government and living in refugee camps in — Nepal! I'm sure Nepal's glad to palm them off on us, but coping with their compatriots is their business, not ours. The State Department is using resettlement to serve a transnational human-rights agenda that has nothing to do with promoting our vital national interests. In effect, our foreign-policy elite views the actual U.S. as a sort of hinterland where they can dump their overseas problems.

We've seen this with other groups as well. Meskhetian Turks, for instance, were deported by Stalin from Georgia (not our Georgia, the other one) to Central Asia during the war, but after the fall of the Soviet Union were filtering back into Russia, Georgia, and Turkey. The ones in southern Russia came into conflict with the locals, so instead of moving on to Turkey, where they should have gone, our State Department decided to move more than 11,000 of them to Atlanta (Georgia!) and elsewhere in the United States.

Likewise with the Somali Bantu. These are the descendents of slaves shipped by the Arabs to Somalia from the slave markets of Zanzibar (any Arab potentates visited there recently to apologize?) in the 1800s. To this day they're considered subhumans by the Soma-

lis. Some ended up in refugee camps in Kenya and the Somalis certainly didn't want them back. Tanzania offered to welcome back its kidnapped cousins, so long as we and other developed nations helped out financially. But, as the BBC writes, "But the plan was aborted at the eleventh hour due to what was described as lack of resources." Instead, we've moved some 12,000 of them here (in addition to tens of thousands of ethnic Somalis).

It's the same story with refugees from Burma, who are in camps in Thailand and, frankly, should be Thailand's problem. And the Palestinians in Iraq—in a sense, we're responsible for their plight since we overthrew their sugar daddy Saddam, but since their Arab brethren never tire of bemoaning the plight of the Palestinians, our responsibility extends no farther than buying them bus tickets to Riyadh, not flying them to Rochester.

The central problem is that we are not making decisions about what refugees will be resettled here based on a person's individual characteristics and circumstances. Instead, we are making sweeping grants of eligibility based on group membership, regardless of a person's specific situation or alternatives. As CIS Fellow Don Barnett writes:

The U.S. State Department admits these individuals under a group designation offered to those who fit the profile of the selected group. The vast majority of refugees admitted to the United States since the Refugee Act of 1980 have been admitted under a group designation or have been family members of someone admitted under a group designation. They become groups of "special concern" to the U.S. government and, for many, group membership automatically confers the main criterion for refugee status: "a well-founded fear of persecution."

Refugee resettlement should be reserved only for the most desperate persecuted people in the world, who face imminent death if they stay where they are and will never have anywhere else to go. If they think about it at all, this is what ordinary Americans think the refugee program is doing already, but it isn't. ■



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