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Post-9/11 Laws and Policies are Closing United States to Refugees and Immigrants Nationwide; Florida Report Sheds New Light on National Immigration Policy

Washington, D.C., May 3, 2005—New policies and laws since 9/11 have prevented thousands of refugees and immigrants from entering the United States to seek safe haven and new opportunities, according to a major new report by the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center (FIAC). These changes, which have an effect nationwide, have also devastated the lives and well-being of newcomers throughout the United States, particularly women and children.

“Anti-immigrant measures and enforcement tested in Florida have a rippling effect nationally,” says FIAC Executive Director Cheryl Little. “We see immigrants’ rights threatened constantly. Individually, each new policy and/or law that the Bush administration applied with the intent of strengthening our borders, controlling the immigration flow and improving our databases is having a devastating effect; collectively their force is overwhelming.”

Adds Kathie Klarreich, the report’s co-author, “Even those familiar with immigration issues will be shocked at how profoundly misguided our current anti-terrorist policies are. The breadth and depth of their impact is ongoing and will continue until this information is disseminated and understood.”

The release of the report coincides with Congress’s consideration of the anti-immigrant REAL ID Act for a vote next week. “The REAL ID Act exemplifies wrong-headed policy that does nothing to protect the United States from terrorism, yet threatens legitimate refugees, wastes money better spent on effective security programs and undermines our nation’s values,” says Wendy Young, director of external relations, Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

According to FIAC’s report, *Securing Our Borders: Post-9/11 Scapegoating of Immigrants*, these policies include: the prolonged detention of Haitians on the basis of “national security;” requiring many asylum seekers to wear ankle bracelets upon release; criminally prosecuting asylum seekers using false documents to enter the country; deputizing local law enforcement officers to enforce immigration law; and implementing unreasonable restrictions on obtaining driver’s licenses.

The report provides a comprehensive examination of policies and practices that affect refugees and immigrants across the country, documents how their lives have changed and offers recommendations for changes to ensure that our safety and basic civil rights remain intact. American Immigration Lawyers Association Executive Director Jeanne Butterfield has endorsed the report, as have Sens. Harry Reid and Edward Kennedy, among other national figures.

“Women, children, and families who came to the United States in search of freedom and prosperity have paid a disproportionately heavy price in the search for national security,” says Young. “While we all have a critical interest in ensuring our nation’s safety, we must avoid adopting policies that wreak havoc on the lives of the innocent and at the same time do little to actually identify those who do wish us harm.”

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