

Remarks by Kelly Ryan
Deputy Assistant Secretary
U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM)

Organization of American States
SPECIAL MEETING ON CURRENT TOPICS
IN INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE LAW
January 29, 2008

Ambassador Alvarez, distinguished Delegates, and esteemed colleagues, it is an honor to be here with you today. I would like to thank the panelists for the stimulating and constructive presentations made on this important topic. As an attorney now serving in the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, I have spent my entire working career devoted to international protection, especially international refugee law. Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and stateless people are often among any country's most vulnerable populations, and the legal protection they receive is a good measure of a country's commitment to human rights for all.

What I want to do in these brief remarks is highlight the U.S. commitment to refugee assistance and resettlement, and mention some of the work we are doing, together, in the Western Hemisphere.

The United States has been a leader in refugee issues since the establishment of the United Nations Refugee Resettlement Agency after World War II. Even before that, there has been a long tradition, in the Americas, of accepting refugees from Europe and, to a lesser extent, from Asia.

Today the State Department, through the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, is a major player in both refugee assistance and resettlement. In fiscal year 2007 we spent over \$1 billion on programs to protect and assist refugees and other conflict victims, including over \$170 million to resettle refugees in the United States. The United States has a strong commitment to contributing to multilateral efforts on this issue. We have demonstrated this commitment by being, for several years now, the largest single donor to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, contributing about 24% of UNHCR's Global Appeal in 2007. Altogether, we contributed over \$354 million to UNHCR last year, including over \$9 million for programs in the Western Hemisphere. And for the past several years, the US has funded UNHCR's entire Caribbean budget.

Even though resettlement receives a lot of attention from the media, our assistance programs reach even more people in need, and represent the bulk of our funding. In 2007, our funding for assistance programs in Latin America, Europe, the Asia-Pacific region, the Near East, and Africa totaled \$847 million. Most of this money went to

programs run by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The remainder went to other international organizations and to NGOs, both those from the United States and those based in other countries. Mercy Corps International, for example, has a program in Colombia that helps 650 newly displaced, primarily Afro-Colombian families in three municipalities on the Atlantic coast. The families, many of which are headed by women, receive housing benefits, food supplements, access to mental health care, and job training.

On the resettlement side, our bureau also works closely with the US Department of Homeland Security and with overseas processing entities such as International Organization for Migration (IOM). The United States accepts more refugees for resettlement than any other country, even after the increased screening we introduced after September 11. Last fiscal year we admitted 48,281 refugees from around the world, including 2,981 from Latin America and the Caribbean. This year we hope to be able to admit even more refugees for permanent resettlement.

One of the more recent challenges, of course, is that of internally displaced people. The world is struggling with how to reconcile the dueling legal principles of sovereignty and human rights. Today we heard from two Colombian experts on how international agencies, the national government and NGOs are working together to improve the lives of people who have fled their homes due to violence or the threat of violence. This situation is all too common around the world. Meetings like those held today make it more likely that solutions will emerge.

Thank you.