

# SECURITY SCREENING OF REFUGEES ADMITTED TO THE UNITED STATES: A DETAILED, RIGOROUS PROCESS

The United States offers resettlement to less than one half of one percent of the world's refugees. Refugees seeking resettlement in the United States must pass through a number of steps aimed at ensuring that they will not pose a security risk to the United States.

**Step 1.** The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the agency mandated by the international community—including the United States—to protect and assist refugees, must determine that the individual seeking resettlement qualifies as a refugee under international law. A UNHCR legal officer interviews the individual to determine if the reason they fled their country of origin meets with the UN refugee definition.

**Step 2.** If a refugee meets one of the criteria for resettlement in the United States, UNHCR will submit the refugee's name to the U.S. embassy in the host country.

**Step 3.** The U.S. embassy asks a U.S. government-approved resettlement organization or other organization contracted by the U.S. Department of State to compile the refugee's personal data and background information. Caseworkers meet in person with the refugee to compile the information required by the U.S. government.

**Step 4.** The U.S. government-contracted resettlement organization then normally forwards the refugee's case file and application for resettlement to the U.S. embassy.

**Step 5.** The State Department runs the names of all refugees who apply to the United States for resettlement through a standard CLASS (Consular Lookout and Support System) name check. Since September 11, 2001, the State Department has almost doubled the number of names and the amount of information in this lookout system database.



**Step 6.** If the refugee passes the CLASS name check (meaning that the name check did not find any record of security or other concerns regarding the refugee), the U.S. embassy in the host country schedules an interview for the refugee with an officer of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

**Step 7.** A specially-trained INS officer will travel to the host country to conduct a detailed, face-to-face interview with each refugee being considered for resettlement. Based on the information in the refugees' case file and on the face-to-face interview, the INS officer will determine if the individual qualifies as a refugee under U.S. law.

**Step 8.** If the INS officer finds that the individual qualifies as a refugee and meets other U.S. admissions criteria, the officer will approve the refugee's application for resettlement and submit it to the U.S. Department of State for final processing. In most overseas posts, the refugee will then be fingerprinted and photographed. The photos are checked against embassy records at several points in the admissions process to ensure there has been no substitution of applicants.

**Step 9.** Before the admission of refugees of some nationalities can be processed (mostly, though not exclusively, refugees from Middle Eastern countries), the refugee's case is referred to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for a further security review called a Security Advisory Opinion (SAO).

**Step 10.** If the refugee receives a positive SAO clearance from the FBI, then his or her case is submitted to the State Department for final approval for admission.

**Step 11.** Refugees who are considered for resettlement because they have close relatives in the United States also undergo a specific screening process. The files of the relative in the United States are checked to ensure that when the relative first entered the United States, he or she listed the refugee seeking resettlement as a relative. If the claimed relationship is contradicted by anything in the U.S. relative's file, the refugee's resettlement application is not processed.

**Step 12.** Upon arrival in the United States at one of eight designated airports, an INS Inspection and Admissions Officer who will again interview the refugee and compare the refugee with host country U.S. embassy records to ensure that the arriving refugee is the same person who was screened and approved for admission to the United States. If the refugee had not been fingerprinted and/or photographed overseas, he or she will be fingerprinted and/or photographed at this time.

**Step 13.** At the airport, the INS officer also issues the refugee a photo Identification that confirms the refugee's identity and authorizes his or her employment in the United States.