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Dear IRAP Community,

The past year has been one of global change, but IRAP has remained steadfast in our commitment to empowering displaced people through direct legal services, litigation, and systemic advocacy. Through political uncertainty and turmoil, extreme weather events that profoundly disrupted peoples’ lives, and the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, IRAP continues to approach our work with determination and creativity so that refugees can live safe, dignified lives, no matter the circumstances.

We were devastated to witness the haphazard and chaotic evacuation of U.S. government employees and other at-risk Afghans during the U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, which left many individuals and families in peril. During the evacuation period, our team worked around the clock to help as many people as possible reach safety through direct legal aid, and we leveraged systemic advocacy and strategic communications to hold the government accountable to its promises to provide refuge to its Afghan partners. We continue fighting for those who were left behind, including pushing for urgently needed new and expanded pathways to safety for Afghans. We are grateful to you for supporting our emergency response efforts and standing with our Afghan clients throughout their long journeys ahead.

In the United States, the present time is a historic moment of possibility to advocate for an improved and expanded U.S. refugee resettlement program. We are taking a leading role in helping to shape refugee policies and practices for years to come, while holding the new administration accountable for its promises to welcome refugees and migrants and treat them with dignity. At the same time, we continue to strategically grow our global programmatic work and geographic reach in order to remove the barriers that displaced people face on their journeys to safety around the world.
This year, we are excited to have formally registered IRAP Europe and opened a new office in Berlin, Germany, which serves as the hub for IRAP’s work assisting refugees seeking pathways to safety in Europe and enhances the capacity of our legal staff in Jordan, Lebanon, and the United States.

We recognize that responsible growth requires increased staff support and we are investing in our global team, with special thanks to our colleagues in our Operations and IT departments, who have enabled IRAP’s legal advocacy to continue seamlessly even as we remain physically apart due to COVID-19. Our people and systems are the backbone of our work, and we have undertaken key initiatives to ensure that IRAP remains strong and adaptable. All staff are participating in a comprehensive strategic planning process – our first ever – to ensure that our growth is scalable, sustainable, and informed by the needs expressed by displaced people themselves. As part of this effort, we launched a new Monitoring and Evaluation department to measure and evaluate our impact and enhance our use of data to guide our programming and strategy. By elevating and centering the voices of clients through this work, we seek to ensure that program development is driven, first and foremost, by the priorities of the people we serve.

IRAP is committed to living our values as a more diverse, equitable, and anti-racist organization, and we recognize that racial and social injustice lie at the root of human displacement. Over the past year and a half, our staff around the globe have been engaged in a long-term Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) effort to identify areas for organizational improvement – both internally and externally – and enact meaningful, durable solutions. We are ensuring that these priorities are reflected throughout our strategic plan and IRAP’s work globally, as part of our collective responsibility for justice.

As we look ahead, we remain dedicated to standing with displaced people, elevating their voices, and pursuing innovative solutions through a refugee-centered approach, so that all people can have a safe place to call home. It is with gratitude to our community of supporters and optimism for tomorrow that we continue the privilege of this work.

Sincerely,

Becca Heller
Executive Director
International Refugee Assistance Project
This past year, IRAP leveraged its global virtual law firm to provide direct legal assistance to a total of **3,627 individuals from 47 different countries**. The clients we served include*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>U.S.-affiliated Afghan and Iraqi allies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Survivors of violence or torture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Medically vulnerable people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18%</td>
<td>Unaccompanied or at-risk children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17%</td>
<td>Survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and at-risk women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>Persecuted LGBTQIA+ people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>People facing religious persecution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Client risk factors may intersect

**85%** of cases IRAP represented had a positive outcome, which includes resettlement, family reunification, and other legal benefits.**

**Outcomes are based on a sample of refugee cases with full legal representation from IRAP, where the case reached a known final resolution in fiscal year 2021.
Action for At-Risk Afghans

For the past decade, IRAP has been a persistent voice calling on the United States government to protect its Afghan allies. When the Biden Administration first announced its withdrawal timeline in April 2021, we immediately advocated for a prompt, organized evacuation and ramped up our direct legal services and systemic advocacy for U.S.-affiliated Afghans seeking safety.

> EMERGENCY RESPONSE: EVACUATION TO SAFETY

When last minute evacuation efforts finally began and the withdrawal deadline neared, chaos erupted at the Kabul airport as individuals sought immediate pathways to safety. We launched into action to help as many Afghans as possible through an extraordinary response effort, while simultaneously holding the U.S. government accountable – through litigation, strategic communications, and advocacy – for the promises it had made to its allies.

IRAP launched a rapid response team to maintain a vital hub for trustworthy information to help Afghans in danger. Working 24/7, the team curated accurate, up-to-date information for our legal resources website that received over 60,000 pageviews in August; responded to urgent email requests daily; and advised countless lawyers and partner organizations. We also deployed a successful communications campaign urging the United States to continue evacuation efforts to the last possible moment that resulted in 155 media hits in major publications, increasing the footprint of our advocacy and mobilizing the community to pressure the Administration to evacuate as many at-risk Afghans as possible.

Our teams worked tirelessly to provide critical legal aid to our 574 current clients in Afghanistan seeking sanctuary. When evacuations officially ended on August 31, 139 IRAP clients had made it out safely, and we continue working closely with clients who remain in Afghanistan to inform them of their options as the situation evolves.

Our systemic impact teams also worked on multiple fronts to ensure that the United States did not abandon its Afghan allies. In July 2021, Congress passed an emergency bill making 8,000 additional Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) available, providing a pathway to safety for an estimated 32,000 Afghan allies and their families, due in large part to IRAP’s advocacy. The bill expedites the SIV process and expands protections for surviving spouses and children of slain applicants, among other procedural changes recommended by IRAP. In August 2021, our advocacy led the Administration to create a Priority-2 refugee resettlement category for certain at-risk Afghans who do not qualify for the SIV program, such as U.S.-affiliated journalists and nonprofit workers, allowing those eligible for this category access to U.S. resettlement.
Our litigation team also filed groundbreaking emergency petitions for protection with the U.S. Department of State on behalf of all Afghan applicants in the SIV program, demanding the U.S. government fulfill its legal obligation to protect allies by evacuating them and their families to safety immediately. This was the first time the Department of State had been formally petitioned to exercise its statutory duty under the Afghan Allies Protection Act, which requires it to protect SIV applicants when they are in “imminent danger.”

CLIENT STORY: Mohammad, Naimah, and Khan*

In early 2021, Mohammad*, a husband and father of six, was assassinated by the Taliban in front of his ten-year-old son in retaliation for his work with the United States in Afghanistan. At the time of his murder, Mohammad had been waiting more than a decade to receive a Special Immigrant Visa.

His widow, Naimah*, knew that if she did not get out of Afghanistan immediately, she and her children would meet a similar fate. IRAP staff, alongside supporters, partner organizations, and members of IRAP’s Touro Law Center chapter, successfully advocated for the family to receive humanitarian parole in the United States, where they now live safely.

However, when the U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan began and the Taliban took control of the country, Mohammad’s brother-in-law, Khan*, who had also worked for the United States, and his family were still in Kabul. IRAP lawyers were able to secure the family’s visas just in time, and Khan and his family were among the lucky ones able to get on an evacuation flight to join Naimah in the United States.

*Names have been changed to protect client identity
IRAP’s attorneys, working with our pro bono network, will provide expert legal aid to all clients in harm’s way and assist those who got out on their journey to secure permanent legal status. Our team remains dedicated to helping Afghans – including those airlifted to the United States, those in third countries, and those still in Afghanistan – access their legal rights and pathways to safety.

IRAP is committed to being the most reliable and comprehensive source of legal information for Afghans seeking safety. We are continuously updating our legal resources website and providing Afghanistan-related legal trainings and tools to our partners.

In the United States, we are pushing for a bill that would secure resettlement benefits for Afghans who were evacuated without refugee status, and a bill to fast track their pathway to a green card. We are also advocating for a critical provision to enable evacuees in third countries to be granted entry into the United States while their applications for legal standing are pending. Additionally and critically, we are protesting inhumane detention conditions in third countries.

IRAP also filed a new lawsuit challenging the unlawful denial of an Afghan client’s ability to access the SIV program, after his letter of support from a U.S. supervisor could not be re-verified because the supervisor had been kidnapped by the Taliban. Efficiency and accountability are critical to a fair SIV process, and this challenge stands to benefit the tens of thousands of Afghan SIV applicants who must navigate complex and opaque procedures for accessing the SIV program.

The path ahead for Afghan refugees is likely to be arduous, but we are prepared and proud to stand as their steadfast legal advocates on their journeys to safety.

We are now preparing for the long road ahead, in anticipation of the protracted displacement of Afghan people.
Hundreds of thousands of displaced people may be eligible for complementary pathways to safety, like family reunification, that fall outside of traditional refugee resettlement processes. However, these pathways are often difficult to access due to complex legal, documentation, and financial requirements. Our legal team helps separated families around the world reunite in safe third countries and prevents families from being separated in the first place.

In Europe, our new office in Berlin, Germany serves as the operational base for our work with refugees seeking to reunite with family or seeking refuge from danger. Staffed with lawyers expert in the laws of European resettlement countries and complementary pathways to safety, IRAP Europe is establishing partnerships to assist displaced people as they navigate each country’s unique set of regulations.

We work with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and RefugePoint to provide direct legal services to separated families and initiate litigation to challenge structural barriers that keep families apart. Through this partnership, we provide family reunification-related assistance for pathways to Germany, Sweden, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Focusing on representation of unaccompanied refugee children, we have assisted 376 individuals as they seek to reunite with loved ones.

We also work with Equal Rights Beyond Borders in Greece to provide direct legal services and litigation representation to families separated within Europe. Through this collaboration, more than 110 lawsuits have been filed in Germany to challenge decisions keeping families apart, with more than 75% of cases resulting in positive outcomes for the families.
Helping to Reunite Separated Families

> **IN THE MIDDLE EAST**, our offices in Jordan and Lebanon, two of the top refugee-hosting countries worldwide, are critical hubs for providing legal and humanitarian assistance to displaced people, including reuniting separated families. Our staff’s expert knowledge of the region and its legal landscape, combined with their own experiences living and working where our clients are based, enriches their understanding of the challenges facing displaced people in Jordan and Lebanon, and facilitates collaboration with local community-based organizations.

> **IN THE UNITED STATES**, we are providing direct legal services to help reunite separated families, litigating in federal court to ensure that family reunification programs for refugees are made more efficient and equitable, advocating for the full inclusion of same-sex couples under these programs, and hosting clinics with our student chapters to help resettled refugees become citizens, which expands their options for family reunification.

In October 2020, IRAP launched a federal lawsuit on behalf of two resettled Darfuri refugee fathers who have been unable to bring their families abroad to the United States due to excessive bureaucratic delays in the Follow-to-Join process. This family reunification program nearly ground to a halt under the Trump Administration, leading to egregious delays and backlogs. IRAP also issued a report in March 2021 urging the Biden Administration to address unreasonable delays in the Follow-to-Join process and providing recommendations for promptly reuniting separated families.
We are advocating for high refugee admissions numbers and more equitable, humane pathways to safety in the United States to reverse the near-shutdown of refugee resettlement during the Trump era. At the same time, we are encouraging the U.S. government to push other governments to improve their policies on refugee protections and build strong global humanitarian systems.

We are proud that many of our recommendations and advocacy priorities have been incorporated into the Biden Administration’s agenda.

On January 20, 2021, President Biden rescinded the Muslim and African bans, discriminatory policies put into place by the Trump Administration that banned individuals from certain majority-Muslim and African countries from entering the United States. IRAP had challenged these xenophobic policies through litigation and advocacy, and the rescission of these bans is a meaningful step toward the reversal of discriminatory Trump-era immigration policies.

IRAP played a leading role in shaping the priorities of the first-ever refugee rights Executive Order, signed into law on February 4, 2021, signaling a dramatic improvement in the U.S. government’s approach to welcoming refugees and migrants.

At the same time, we are holding the Biden Administration accountable; when the White House postponed its decision to increase refugee admissions for fiscal year 2021, IRAP and other refugee organizations strongly denounced the delay. In response to the outcry, the Biden Administration finally raised the refugee admissions cap from its historic low of 15,000 to 62,500. We continue to maintain pressure on the Biden Administration, which has led to the administration’s announcement that it intends to raise the refugee admissions target for fiscal year 2022 to at least 125,000.

Client Story: Majidah*

Majidah*, her husband, and their four children, were forced to flee their home in Syria when armed conflict erupted in their community. After arriving in Jordan, they learned they had left not a moment too soon; their home had been destroyed by bombs. Without authorization to live in Jordan, the family could not access the UNHCR resettlement process and other critical resources, and lived in fear of being deported back to Syria.

Staff in IRAP’s Jordan office collaborated with a pro bono partner to help the family reunite with Majidah’s sister Asma*, a U.S. citizen. In May 2021, the family was approved for their I-130 visas to the United States.

Our offices in Jordan and Lebanon provide critical legal services to displaced people seeking lasting refuge in the United States.

*Names and photo have been changed to protect client identity
IRAP has also increased its capacity to engage at the state and local level, working with the Refugee Advocacy Lab and other coalition partners, to provide technical assistance and toolkits for advocates engaging with government officials on pro-refugee policies.

We are excited to have pivoted to an affirmative agenda to rebuild and expand pathways to safety in the United States, while continuing to advocate for government accountability and just, equitable policies toward displaced people at the federal, state, and local levels.

➢ DEFending the InTegrITy of the u.s. reSeTTelement systeM

In January 2021, a federal appeals court upheld our victory in a legal challenge to a Trump-era Executive Order that would have given state and local governments the power to veto refugee resettlement in their jurisdictions. Alongside co-counsel Shearman & Sterling LLP, we defended the integrity of the U.S. refugee resettlement system and established strong precedent against any future attempts by states or localities to obstruct resettlement. Through our successful litigation and policy advocacy, we helped galvanize local commitment to refugee resettlement, which encouraged the Biden Administration to revoke the original Executive Order in February 2021.

➢ SuPporTIng reFugees Through priVate sponSirIshIOn

IRAP, alongside a diverse coalition of partners, potential future sponsors, and supporters, is leading the development of a robust private sponsorship program in the United States. Private sponsorship expands resettlement opportunities and connects resettled refugees with civil society groups, businesses, religious institutions, and families, building community support for refugee resettlement.

In June 2021, IRAP published a report in partnership with Amnesty International USA and the Niskanen Center, offering recommendations to the government for a private sponsorship program designed with direct input from refugee communities, clearly-defined goals and outcomes, and which centers DEIA principles in its design and implementation.

Our advocacy has led the government to move forward with a pilot program in early 2022.
Supporting Asylum Seekers

CLIENT STORY: Rubén*

Facing political persecution, Rubén* fled Nicaragua to Mexico, but in Mexico, he was still not safe. He lived in fear of violence and discrimination for being gay and HIV positive. While trying to reach the U.S. border to seek asylum, Rubén was kidnapped and sexually assaulted. When he finally made it to the border, he was turned away under Title 42, a policy exploited by the Trump Administration and continued by the Biden Administration to turn away and expel asylum seekers en masse. Forced to return to Mexico and live in a shelter, Rubén continued to experience harassment and did not have reliable access to life-sustaining medical care.

IRAP staff sought an exception to Title 42 on Rubén’s behalf, and he was successfully granted humanitarian parole into the United States. Our partner, Miles for Migrants, covered the cost of his travel to New York City to reunite with his brother-in-law.

To date, IRAP has assisted with requesting exceptions to Title 42 on behalf of 274 individuals, to allow them to safely await processing of their asylum claims in the United States before U.S. Immigration Courts.

*Names and photo have been changed to protect client identity

Informed by the experiences of our clients and in partnership with the Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC)’s Estamos Unidos project, in the fall of 2020, IRAP launched a pilot program to provide remote legal advice, community education, and legal representation to people seeking asylum at the U.S. southern border’s Ciudad Juárez/El Paso port of entry.

Xenophobic policies such as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) and the exploitation of Title 42 effectively closed the U.S. border to new asylum seekers and forcibly expelled asylum seekers with pending claims to precarious conditions in Mexico. As a result, thousands of people remain trapped abroad in inhumane conditions due to inequitable processes for continuing or reopening asylum claims.

We have represented 76 clients affected by these policies, helping clients to prepare asylum applications, learn the status of their asylum claims, and gain entry to the United States. IRAP’s work with clients also informs our litigation and advocacy work to address systemic barriers to justice for asylum seekers.

> PROTECTING ASYLUM SEEKERS’ RIGHT TO WORK IN THE UNITED STATES

In July 2020, IRAP, the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP), and Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP challenged the Trump Administration’s efforts to prevent work authorization for asylum seekers. Without work authorization, asylum seekers are hindered from securing food, shelter, and medical care for themselves and their families. In September 2020, we were granted a preliminary injunction in this federal lawsuit defending asylum seekers’ right to work in the United States, halting the exclusionary Trump-era rules for asylum seeker members of ASAP and CASA de Maryland while our case is pending in court. Our case stands to benefit an estimated 150,000 people annually.
CHALLENGING ATTEMPTS TO DEPORT ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM THE UNITED STATES

In October 2020, IRAP won a significant victory in our case with RAICES challenging Trump-era changes to the Credible Fear Interview process, the first step in seeking asylum at the U.S. border. The changes were designed to make it more difficult for asylum seekers to prove a credible fear of persecution. The court voided the government’s changes, ruling them unlawful, and IRAP is now monitoring the implementation of this ruling. **Approximately 91,000 people stand to benefit from this case annually.**

ADVOCATING FOR RESOURCES AND PROTECTIONS FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS IN JORDAN AND LEBANON

IRAP advocates for the rights of asylum seekers worldwide, including for those whose first country of asylum is not a viable permanent home. Staff in our Jordan office fight to ensure that access to humanitarian assistance, like healthcare and financial support, is based on need, not nationality. We elevate the voices of displaced Iraqi, Yemeni, Sudanese, and Somali people awaiting relocation in Jordan, who are often not recognized as asylum seekers. These populations struggle to access humanitarian assistance even when they do have formally recognized claims because most assistance is designated for the Syrian displaced population in Jordan.

In Lebanon, amid an unprecedented economic crisis, political instability, and resource shortages, staff are working tirelessly to make sure vulnerable displaced people with asylum and refugee claims can access the services they need to survive. To meet the needs of our clients, many of whom are currently unable to purchase food or medicine, we have increased cash assistance and humanitarian referrals, while continuing to support clients in their efforts to relocate to countries of resettlement.
Displaced people in the Middle East can access the IRAP Chatbot, designed to provide refugees with tailored information about their eligibility for multiple pathways to safety. Available 24/7, the chatbot reviews users’ information and refers them to legal assistance or our self-help website, which contains 150 legal guides in five languages.

Based on client feedback, we have expanded the chatbot’s function to make these legal resources even more accessible. The chatbot originally launched to provide assistance to Iraqi and Syrian users, and we have now expanded its usability to people across the Middle East. Users can now access the chatbot through Facebook Messenger and Telegram, and we rebranded the chatbot from “Mona” to the “IRAP Chatbot” to offer a depersonalized interface where users may feel more comfortable sharing sensitive information.

▶ THIS YEAR:

6,862 people used the IRAP Chatbot.

33,578 people accessed information on our self-help website.

1,340 chatbot users were referred to IRAP staff for additional screenings, intakes, and legal services.

CLIENT STORY: Jawad*

In 2019, Jawad*, a Syrian man and longtime permanent resident of the United States, reached out through our chatbot asking for help to reunite with his wife Zafirah* and daughter Rayya*. Jawad and Zafirah lived together in Turkey while he was studying for his Ph.D. in engineering and she was pregnant. When their visas were set to expire, Jawad had to return to the United States, but Zafirah and their infant daughter were unable to go with him or return to war-torn Syria. The chatbot referred the family for legal assistance, and IRAP helped Zafirah and Rayya prepare for their visa interview with the U.S. embassy in Turkey. IRAP assisted them in a visa waiver application to overcome the 2017 Executive Order banning Syrians from entering the United States, enabling the family to be reunited in the United States.

*Names and photo have been changed to protect client identity
People forced to move due to disasters and environmental degradation are one of the fastest-growing displaced populations in the world, with already-marginalized communities facing climate disasters on top of economic, health, and housing challenges. Yet, legal protections for these populations lag far behind the need. There are currently no multilateral treaties or domestic laws designed to protect climate-displaced people.

This year, the Biden Administration’s refugee rights Executive Order required U.S. agencies to report on the effects of climate change on migration and options for the resettlement and protection of climate-displaced people. We published recommendations to inform this interagency report and the Administration’s broader agenda, including recognizing climate-displaced people as refugees under the current U.S. refugee definition and broadening eligibility for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to include people displaced by climate change.

Alongside 350.org and the ACLU of Southern California, we convened environmental, immigration, and refugee advocates to share knowledge, formulate strategies, and develop relationships across organizations. We continue to develop resources to build a community movement around climate displacement.

As climate change continues to make many places around the globe less habitable in the years and decades to come, the need for a comprehensive legal framework protecting climate migrants will become ever more important. By working to develop a collaborative, solutions-based framework now, IRAP seeks to proactively defend the rights of climate-displaced people and ensure that their right to live in safety is enshrined in the law.
Our Supporters

IRAP extends profound thanks to our generous supporters this past fiscal year — September 1, 2020 to August 31, 2021.

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Law School Chapters

IRAP seeks to develop the next generation of legal advocates for refugees through our partnerships with law school student chapters.

Over the past year, our student chapters helped 40 clients apply for permanent residency or citizenship. Student chapter members have also conducted important research and outreach projects on climate displacement, the effects of state and local laws on refugees in the United States, the impact of COVID-19 on due process rights in immigration court, and more.

“One thing I’ve learned working on this case is just what an impact the existence of counsel can have on a refugee case. My work with IRAP has inspired me, after I graduate in May, to pursue a career in refugee and asylum law.”

— Rebecca Garfinkel, alum of University of Michigan IRAP chapter

“Our work with IRAP has reinforced the importance of centering impacted communities and clients in both direct service and policy work. Through our time with IRAP, we have better understood the importance of ‘listening first.’ This helps ensure that our work is sustainable, and actually meeting community needs.”

— Suhayla Ahmed, co-leader of University of California at Berkeley IRAP chapter

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University of Chicago Law School
University of Connecticut School of Law
University of Michigan Law School
University of Pennsylvania Law School
University of Southern California, Gould School of Law
University of Virginia School of Law
Yale Law School
In 2020, 1,968 law student and pro bono attorney volunteers provided over 16,000 hours of free legal aid, valued at over $10,800,000, to help displaced people seeking safety.

To honor the indispensable support our pro bono and student networks provide, IRAP celebrated its inaugural Pro Bono Appreciation Week, recognizing individuals, firms, case teams, and project teams with ten awards for their exceptional contributions.

“Working with IRAP over the past few years has been a wonderful experience. Throughout [our work together on] the Lautenberg matter, we have been able to secure meaningful results for our clients. I am ecstatic when I hear that refugees have been able to resettle in the United States, and of course we hope that the work that we’ve done makes it easier for refugees to obtain resettlement in the future.”

“Through working with IRAP, I’ve learned that refugees are not only those fleeing war-torn countries, but can also be religious minorities as well or anyone whose life is at risk because of oppressive conditions. And, as a son of an immigrant who left Central America because of political turmoil, ensuring equitable refugee admissions is something that is personally important to me.”

— Keith Williams, Latham & Watkins LLP, “Excellent Law Firm” award for IRAP’s 2021 Pro Bono Appreciation Week
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