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**PRESS CONTACT**

Sarah Blume, IRAP, [sblume@refugeerights.org](mailto:sblume@refugeerights.org), 646-602-5654

**IRAP & FRESHFIELDS FILE CLASS ACTION CHALLENGE TO EGREGIOUS PROCESSING DELAYS IN SPECIAL IMMIGRANT VISA PROGRAM FOR AFGHAN AND IRAQI ALLIES**

**Washington, D.C.** – On June 11, Afghan and Iraqi individuals who work or worked for the U.S. government to support the U.S. missions in their home countries, challenged the egregious processing delays they experience in the adjudications of their Special Immigrant Visa applications.

The Special Immigrant Visa program was passed by Congress in 2008 for Iraqis and in 2009 for Afghans in order to create a legal pathway to safety for local allies, who had become the target of militias and other anti-U.S. forces due to their work with the U.S. government. This program allows eligible Afghans and Iraqis, who have worked with the U.S. and experienced serious threats as a result, to safely resettle to the United States.

Because applicants are at immediate risk to be attacked or killed, Congress mandated in 2013 that applicants should receive a decision on their visa petitions within nine months after submitting an application. However, plaintiffs have been waiting between 18 months and five years for a decision. Many of them live in hiding and have therefore not been able to live with their families for years.

Plaintiffs seek the Court's intervention to compel action on their applications so that they don't have to remain in dangerous circumstances for longer than absolutely necessary. As a class action, the outcome could bring relief to other Afghans and Iraqis in similar circumstances.

The Plaintiffs are being represented by the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) at the Urban Justice Center and Freshfields.

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40 Rector St., 9<sup>th</sup> Floor, New York, NY 10006

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**Plaintiff John Doe Echo** said: “Every day that I have to wait for a decision on my SIV application is another day that my family and I are in danger of threats and retaliation based on my service to the United States. Knowing that my father was killed because of my work leaves me terrified that members of my family or I will meet the same fate. The uncertainty of not knowing whether my SIV application will be granted has had a very big impact on my life. I have been pursuing this opportunity since 2009 in order to start a new and safe life for both me and my family. I was happy to help both the United States military and the Iraqi people with my work, and I still have a lot of hope that I can have a fresh start in America.”

**Deepa Alagesan, Staff Attorney in IRAP’s Litigation Department**, said: “Our plaintiffs are men and women who have sacrificed their safety and that of their families in order to support the U.S. missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. We need to ensure that the legal programs that were created to get these allies out of harm’s way are actually effective at doing so. Keeping our invaluable partners in limbo for years erodes trust in us and destabilizes our relationships in the region. America needs to keep its promise to these brave allies.”

The complaint was filed in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

In 2015, IRAP and Freshfields filed a lawsuit, *Nine Iraqi Allies Under Serious Threat Because of Their Faithful Service to the United States v. Kerry*, No. 15-300, on behalf of individual Afghan and Iraqi SIV applicants challenging the government’s failure to timely adjudicate the plaintiffs’ SIV applications. After a federal judge denied the government’s motion to dismiss the case, the government entered into a settlement with the plaintiffs in which it agreed to adjudicate their long pending applications.

To view the complaint, [click here](#).

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