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[hdessaules@refugeerights.org](mailto:hdessaules@refugeerights.org)**IRAP CONDEMNS CONGRESSIONAL FAILURE TO ALLOCATE SUFFICIENT VISAS FOR AFGHAN INTERPRETERS SERVING U.S. TROOPS AND DIPLOMATS**

***FISHER: “By failing to allocate sufficient visas to provide our Afghan allies with a path to safety, we fail to keep the faith with them—and with our troops and diplomats who rely on them to succeed in their mission.”***

**New York, NY, NOVEMBER 30, 2016** – The International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) at the Urban Justice Center condemns Congress’s failure to adequately protect our Afghan allies. Thousands of Afghans served as interpreters, cultural advisors, and security guards for U.S. troops and diplomats in Afghanistan. As a result of their work with the United States, these brave allies and their families are exposed to death threats and attacks.

Despite the urging of [high-level military officials](#) and [senior diplomats](#), Congress failed to allocate sufficient visas in the final text of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 (NDAA), which was released today. With more than 10,000 applicants awaiting processing, Congress has authorized only 1,500 additional visas, a small fraction of the visas needed to protect these mission-essential Afghan allies. IRAP also remains concerned that this bill will affect eligibility for trustworthy Afghan allies moving forward.

“Our troops and diplomats rely on the help of thousands of heroic Afghan allies who live in constant danger because of their service,” said **Betsy Fisher, Policy Director of IRAP**. “The United States will keep over 8,000 troops in Afghanistan indefinitely. By failing to allocate sufficient visas to provide our Afghan allies with a path to safety, we fail to keep the faith with them—and with our troops and diplomats who rely on them to succeed in their mission. We are deeply grateful to our congressional champions, who valiantly worked to improve this legislation. Nonetheless, we condemn the final, inadequate result, which fails to protect our allies sufficiently.”

After five years of failing to process visas for our Afghan allies, the State Department began improving the process in 2013 after intense advocacy by IRAP and a coalition of veterans’

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associations, faith leaders, and human rights advocates. Since then, SIV processing has improved significantly, but 1,500 additional visas are not enough to process visas expeditiously for Afghan interpreters who have been waiting for them for many years. While the reauthorization of the program for another four years is a positive step, Congress must allocate sufficient visas to the already existing backlog of roughly 10,000 applicants.

Major congressional SIV champions include Sens. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), John McCain (R-AZ), Jack Reed (D-RI); and Reps. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), Adam Kinzinger (R-IL), and Seth Moulton (D-MA). IRAP is also grateful to Beena Patel and Joshua Andrews of FaegreBD Consulting, Veterans for American Ideals, Refugee Council USA, and the Truman National Security Project for their powerful advocacy.

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