

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**IRAP CALLS ON SENATE TO AUTHORIZE ADDITIONAL AFGHAN VISAS IN NDAA 2017**

***Fisher: Despite broad bipartisan support for the Afghan SIV program, efforts to authorize additional visas have been blocked, abandoning Afghan allies to serious danger. IRAP calls on the U.S. Senate to ensure that visas are included in the NDAA.***

**New York, NY, June 10, 2016** - The International Refugee Assistance Project at the Urban Justice Center has joined a letter with No One Left Behind, the Ronin Refugee Project, and Veterans for American Ideals/Human Rights First. The letter calls on the U.S. Senate to authorize needed visas for the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program that protects U.S. allies in Afghanistan. The Senate's National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 fails to authorize additional visas or extend the program—threatening to abandon thousands of applicants still in the application process.

Senators Shaheen, McCain, Tillis and Reed offered a bipartisan amendment, S.A. 4604, which would reauthorize the program and allocate additional visas for Afghan allies who served alongside US military personnel and diplomats. Despite broad bipartisan support, that amendment was blocked by Senator Mike Lee, who supports the amendment but insisted that an additional measure also be considered. Without additional visas, the United States will abandon thousands of Afghans who are targeted for their work with the United States.

“We are grateful for the passionate leadership that Senators McCain, Graham, Shaheen, and others have shown in the last week,” said Betsy Fisher, Policy Director of IRAP. “However, we are deeply disappointed that these incredible efforts have not resulted in the life-saving visas that our Afghan allies need. The Senate must take action to allocate visas and demonstrate our commitment to stand with allies who have sacrificed for our country.”

After five years of failing to issue visas to our Afghan allies, the State Department began improving the process in 2013 after intense advocacy by IRAP and a broad coalition. SIV processing continues to be slow, but 4,000 additional visas are needed for the State Department to continue to issue visas to Afghan allies who served alongside U.S. troops and diplomats.

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Dear Senator:

We write to express our most fervent disappointment that the Senate, in voting today to end debate on the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, and move to a vote on the issue, failed to include the amendment ([SA 4604](#)) proposed by Senators Shaheen, McCain, Tillis and Reed that would have reauthorized and increased the allocation of special immigrant visas for interpreters, translators, and Afghan allies who served alongside US military personnel and diplomats in that war.

Senator Mike Lee of Utah refused to allow the Senate to vote on this amendment, insisting that the body consider his proposal on another issue.

We have let down the Afghans who braved danger and risked their very lives to support the United States through years of war. We have sent the wrong signal around the world. We have betrayed their loyalty. If ever there was a bipartisan consensus on an issue, this is the issue.

There is still one last opportunity for the Senate to consider a series of amendments on Monday, June 13<sup>th</sup>. We urge you to act on this package.

As former Ambassador to Iraq and Afghanistan Ryan Crocker has said, “This is truly a matter of life and death.... Today, many are in hiding, praying that the United States keeps its word. We can and must do better.”

International Refugee Assistance Project  
No One Left Behind  
Ronin Refugee Project  
Veterans for American Ideals / Human Rights First

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