

PRESS RELEASE

March 10, 2010

Contact: Emily Blout
202-225-4376

Moran, Stark & Watson Demand Safe Haven for Refugees

Trio introduce bill to support asylum seekers fleeing violence and persecution

Washington D.C. – Today, Representatives Jim Moran (D-VA), Pete Stark (D-CA) and Diane Watson (D-CA) introduced the Restoring Protection for Victims of Persecution Act [H.R. 4800], a bill to eliminate the arbitrary rule that bars asylum for anyone who has been in the United States a year or longer. The existing limitation hurts refugees fleeing abuse and gender-based persecution in their native countries, often forcing them to return home to life-threatening situations.

"The United States has always been a beacon of hope for refugees fleeing discrimination, whether political, religious or gender-based," said Congressman Moran. "The one year filing deadline for asylum applications is unnecessary, and its elimination will guarantee all qualified individuals have the opportunity to restart their lives free of persecution."

As part of the Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, individuals were barred from applying for asylum if they arrived in the United States more than a year prior to their application. Since then, the one-year bar has been used to deny asylum to more than 35,000 people.

"Victims of torture and gender-related persecution who flee to the United States are being sent back because of this arbitrary one-year bar," said Rep. Stark. "Our legislation eliminates this bureaucratic rule that automatically denies asylum to individuals who desperately need sanctuary."

While there are limited exceptions to the one-year bar, exceptions have been narrowly construed, applied inconsistently, and individuals who are victims of persecution and violence are regularly sent back to their home countries. The Restoring Protection for Victims of Persecution Act would immediately eliminate the one year bar on asylum applicants effective immediately.

"As legislators, we have an obligation and a chance to correct policy that has hurt the very people it was meant to protect. It is imperative that when people have a well founded fear of returning to their homeland and seek asylum protection in the United States, applications be approved or denied based on the merits of each individual case," said Rep. Diane Watson.

For more information on how the one-year ban has resulted in the return of refugees to countries where they face persecution, please visit: <http://go.usa.gov/IFs>