

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 20, 2011

The Honorable Janet Napolitano  
Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Madam Secretary:

We write to request information and a briefing on the application process for the special immigrant visa (SIV) program for certain Iraqis. According to the State Department's statistics, as of March 31, 2011, four years after the expansion of the SIV program in Section 1244 of the Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, only 3,151 principal visas have been issued out of a possible 25,000. For Fiscal Year 2011, only 154 principal visas had been issued by March 31, 2011, out of the 5,000 authorized. Meanwhile, individuals eligible for this visa program continue to face grave threats as a result of their service to the United States.

The Iraqis assisted by this program and other SIV programs risked their lives to help protect and assist the servicemen and women, diplomats, and other governmental and non-governmental entities that supported the U.S. mission in Iraq. Delays in processing are leaving these Iraqis and their families vulnerable to retaliation, including death, for their service to the United States. As the U.S. military presence is reduced in the coming months, this population may face an even greater risk.

Thorough and rigorous background checks of all applicants for admission to the United States are essential, and vital to our national security. However, the application process for the SIV program must also be conducted in a timely and transparent manner, with accountability built in at every level.

We respectfully request that the Department of Homeland Security provide us with information on the following specific issues:

- 1) What is the size of the current backlog of SIV applications at the Department? What is the average processing time for SIV applications? What is the Department doing to clear the current backlog of SIV applications?
- 2) What is the Department doing to create a more transparent and accountable process which informs applicants of application requirements, the status of their application, and upcoming decisions?

3) Section 1236 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011 requires you to develop a plan with the Secretaries of State and Defense to expedite resettlement of U.S.-affiliated Iraqis at risk as the United States withdraws from Iraq. What is the status of that plan?

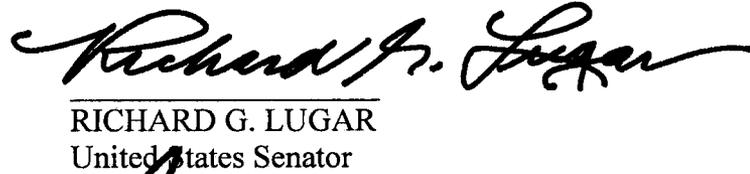
4) What is the current security screening process applied to each SIV application, including the types and number of security checks?

We request a written unclassified response to this letter. We also request that you arrange a briefing for Members of Congress and staff to discuss these issues in greater detail. Finally, we request that the officials who provide the briefing be prepared to discuss any similar delays in processing SIV applications for eligible Afghans.

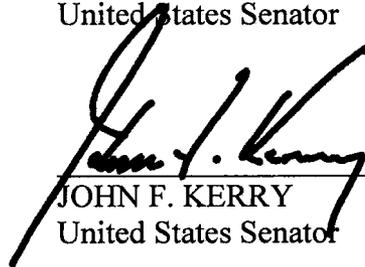
Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

  
PATRICK LEAHY  
United States Senator

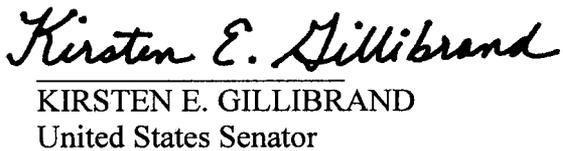
  
RICHARD G. LUGAR  
United States Senator

  
CARL LEVIN  
United States Senator

  
JOHN F. KERRY  
United States Senator

  
RICHARD J. DURBIN  
United States Senator

  
BENJAMIN L. CARDIN  
United States Senator

  
KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND  
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State