

Statement of Senator Benjamin L. Cardin
Co-Chairman
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
Briefing: “The Forgotten: Iraqi Allies failed by the U.S.”
June 11, 2008

I am pleased that the Helsinki Commission is holding this briefing which features the extraordinary work of *The List: Project to Resettle Iraqi Allies*. Founded by a former USAID employee, this organization works to resettle to the United States those Iraqis whose lives have been threatened because of their work for our military, State Department and U.S. contractors in Iraq.

Frankly, there should not have been a reason to create an organization like *The List Project*. The United States government should be the first to provide protection and resettlement to those brave Iraqis who have worked side by side with our troops and our diplomats for the past five years. Sadly – no, I would say tragically -- this has not been the case. *The List* emerged from founder Kirk Johnson’s efforts to save a USAID-employed colleague in late 2006, someone who’s pleas for help fell on deaf ears in Baghdad, and has now expanded to more than 1,000 individuals.

It is interesting to note that our Coalition partner, Denmark, evacuated and resettled 370 Iraqi interpreters and other Iraqis who worked for Danish troops prior to the Danish contingent’s departure from Iraq last year. The British have pledged to do the same for hundreds of Iraqis who worked with their military.

Congress has taken the lead in efforts to assist Iraqi refugees. A bi-partisan effort led by Senator Kennedy amended the 2008 Defense Authorization bill to provide Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) for Iraqi allies to apply directly to the United States for resettlement. Last year I was successful in offering an amendment to the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill that provides six months of eligibility for resettlement assistance to Iraqi SIV holders when they arrive here in the United States, ensuring that these individuals, like those who enter our country through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, are able to make the transition to a productive life in the United States by providing preliminary housing, school enrollment and job training assistance.

I have again joined with my colleagues in requesting an additional \$68 million in FY 2009 funding for resettlement programs for Iraqis with Special Immigrant Visas, as well as increased funding for humanitarian assistance in the FY 2009 budget. This is a step in the right direction, but more needs to be done. I will continue to work in the Congress and with the Administration to provide assistance for Iraqi refugees – especially those who have worked so bravely with us.