

**Ranking Member Brian Higgins (D-NY) Opening Statement
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence**

Hearing: "Terrorist Exploitation of Refugee Programs"

December 4, 2012

Every year the United States admits thousands of refugees through the United States Refugee Admissions Program, a program authorized by Congress to support and opportunity to those who live in fear of persecution.

Since 1975, the United States Refugee Admissions Program has admitted over three million refugees.

The United States resettles more refugees than all other countries combined. Resettlement in the United States gives refugees the opportunity to share in America's promise and the ability to have life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

There are many success stories of refugees that have come to America and have been able to prosper and help their communities prosper. For example, a Rwandan is one of the six original entrepreneurs at the West Side Bazaar, an international market in a developing community in Buffalo.

This Rwandan entrepreneur and others like her have received help from the United States and the community organizations that assist in refugee resettlement.

Hence, we can agree that the refugee admissions program is beneficial and that it should be continued. However, vulnerabilities in the program have been exposed.

In 2011, the Department of Justice issued indictments to Waad Ramadan Alwan and Mohamed Shareef Hammadi, two Iraqi refugees, living in Kentucky, for plotting to provide material support to Al Qaeda in Iraq. Since the indictment was issued, both Alwan and Hammadi pleaded guilty to all counts.

The Department of Justice, specifically the investigations of the Joint Terrorism Task Force, should be applauded for their efforts in thwarting potential terrorist activity. Unfortunately, the Joint Terrorism Task Force was not the first entity that had information on one of the convicted terrorists.

In 2005, Alwan's fingerprint was found on a roadside bomb in Iraq. This information was in a Department of Defense database that was not checked during his background investigation when he applied to the refugee admissions program.

This illustrates that we still have not gotten closure in the information sharing gaps that the tragedy of September 11th so greatly exposed.

I would like to hear from today's witnesses on how measures to close gaps in the refugee admissions process are being put in place. In addition, separate and apart from the refugee resettlement program, I would like to hear what measures are being put in place to ensure that the Special Immigrant Visa program, a program for Iraqis and Afghans, is free from vulnerability.

We want to keep the United States as a safe haven for both those in need and those are here by birth or through the naturalization process. One way to do that is to ensure that our government agencies are working together to obtain this goal.