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September 10, 2006

Dear Friend of IRM:

When I started as Executive Director of Interfaith Refugee Ministry (IRM) more than a year ago, I had no idea I would be working on a secret mission.

As I met people around the state, I was surprised to discover that despite the thousands of refugees IRM has resettled over the past 25 years, very few knew of our organization. What's more, people were unaware of the longstanding federal refugee resettlement program and some had to be reminded that refugees are not only here legally, but are thoroughly screened and invited to come to the US by the State Department. The process is long and thorough. For example, the Ahmed family of six from Somalia, who fled civil war in 1991, waited 15 years in refugee camps before finally coming to New Haven this year.

There is no reason why such a noble program -- founded on principles inscribed on one of America's proudest symbols, the Statue of Liberty -- should be kept a secret.

IRM immediately embarked on a campaign to promote and celebrate this great American tradition of refugee resettlement. We developed partnerships, spoke at events around the state, and encouraged press coverage. The public response has been heartening. We see that the more people know about refugee resettlement, the more they like it, and the more they want to support the program. I am writing to ask you to join them and show your support for our work with a gift of \$50, \$100 -- whatever you can afford. For the families we serve, your contribution will mean a step towards self-sufficiency and a new life in Connecticut.

IRM believes that all groups -- from houses of worship to social clubs, from businesses to schools - should be given the opportunity to welcome refugees, who are not only our new neighbors, but also our newest Americans. A personal welcome from a community group helps a refugee feel at home. We are working hard to broaden the appeal of participating in the resettlement process. Your gift will help us welcome more families and, in the process, show the best of what America and Americans -- and the people of Connecticut -- have to offer.

Raising our profile and widening our base are not the only changes we've made. In June, we moved our office to 235 Nicoll Street in the East Rock area of New Haven, where we have three times the space of our old office at a comparable rent. The larger office allows us to expand our services. We now offer daily English language classes because learning English is such an essential skill. We opened a new legal services program, staffed by law school interns and an experienced immigration attorney, because refugees and immigrants need high quality affordable legal aid. The new office has a proper food pantry, a conference room for meetings and training programs, workstations for volunteers and clients, and storage for furniture and other donations. Friends like you make these services possible. Please let us count on your support for these improved services.

All of these changes -- raising our profile, broadening our approach, and improving our office and services to refugees -- were leaps of faith. While we firmly believe they are the right things to do, we need your support to sustain them. Will you and other citizens of Connecticut continue to welcome refugees?

I believe you will. Please support our mission, and show refugees fleeing persecution what a warm and wonderful place Connecticut is, with a generous donation today. You can send your tax-deductible contribution to our office in the enclosed envelope, or visit our website at www.interfaithrefugee.org.

It's no secret; refugee resettlement is an American tradition you can be proud of, and a program you can be part of. Please join us! **And please join us at our Open House on Thursday, September 28, from 4:00 to 7:00 pm.**

Thank you,

Chris George

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