

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Terrorist Exploitation of Refugee Programs***

December 4, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee hearing entitled “Terrorist Exploitation of Refugee Programs”:

“Since its inception, the United States has been a safe haven for people who have been unable to sustain their lives in areas of conflict. The United States provides those who were previously living in inhumane conditions or the consistent fear of persecution freedom from fear.

The United States resettles more refugees than all other countries combined. Since 1975, the United States has provided resettlement to over three million people. The United States is known as a country where refugees can resettle, move toward independence, and thrive in their communities.

Unfortunately, we have recently discovered that the refugee program is not without vulnerability. In May 2011, the Department of Justice issued indictments to Waad Ramadan Alwan and Mohanad Shareef Hammadi, two Iraqi refugees, living in Kentucky, for plotting to provide material support to al Qaeda in Iraq. Since this indictment was issued, both Alwan and Hammadi have pleaded guilty to all counts of their respective indictments.

While we applaud the Department of Justice for thwarting this potential terrorist activity, it is possible this case could have been prevented and these potential terrorists could have never entered the United States. In 2005, Alwan’s fingerprint was found on a roadside bomb in Iraq. This pertinent information was documented and placed into a database that was not searched as part of the vetting process for refugees at the time, and Hamaadi admitted to participating in insurgency while he was living in Iraq.

Information sharing, or connecting the dots, has been a sore spot for the federal government since September 11. The 9/11 Commissioners, in both their report and their repeated testimonies before this Committee have warned of the dangers of stovepiping information.

This is not the only time since September 11th that gaps in terrorists have exposed information sharing gaps. Two instances that come to mind are the attempted Christmas Day bombing and the tragedy at Fort Hood. I hope today’s witnesses can explain how measures to close gaps in the refugee process are being put in place.

I also hope that these measures include thorough investigations of potential refugees prior to their entry into the United States, and not a profile of humanitarian organizations and citizens that are currently thriving in American communities. It is my hope that this information sharing gap can be closed, as refugee and resettlement programs have made the U.S. a hallmark for safety to the World.”

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