



## H.Res. 185 – Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives regarding the creation of refugee populations in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Persian Gulf region as a result of human rights violations

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### FLOOR SITUATION

H.Res. 185 is being considered on the floor under suspension of the rules and will require a two-thirds majority vote for passage. This legislation was introduced by Representative Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) on February 16 2007. The House Committee on Foreign Affairs agreed to the resolution by unanimous consent on February 27, 2008.

H.Res. 185 is expected to be considered on the floor of the House on April 1, 2008.

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### SUMMARY

H.Res. 185 resolves that:

- For any comprehensive Middle East peace agreement to be credible and enduring, the agreement must address and resolve all outstanding issues relating to the legitimate rights of all refugees in the Middle East, including Jews, Christians, and other populations displaced from countries in the region; and
- The President should instruct the United States Representative to the United Nations and all United States representatives in bilateral and multilateral fora to—
  - Use the voice, vote, and influence of the United States to ensure that any resolutions relating to the issue of Middle East refugees, and which include a reference to the required resolution of the Palestinian refugee issue, must also include a similarly explicit reference to the resolution of the issue of Jewish, Christian, and other refugees from Arab countries; and
  - Make clear that the United States Government supports the position that, as an integral part of any comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, the issue of refugees from the Middle East, North Africa, and the Persian Gulf must be resolved in a manner that includes recognition of the legitimate rights of and losses incurred by all refugees displaced from Arab countries including Jews, Christians, and other minority groups.

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### BACKGROUND

The United Nations General Assembly established the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as an international entity to lead and coordinate the combined efforts of multiple countries in the protection and placement of refugees worldwide. The main objective of the UNHCR is to ensure that all refugees can seek asylum and find refuge in another State, with the option of permanently relocating to the third country. The UNHCR was established on December 14, 1950, and has assisted an estimated 50 million refugees. The UNHCR is almost entirely funded through the direct and voluntary contributions of governments and non-governmental organizations. The United States is the largest contributor to the UNHCR donating nearly \$137.5 million so far in 2008, \$367 million in 2007, and \$329.3 million in 2006. Today, the UNHCR works in over 110 countries and helps 32.9 million persons.



# LEGISLATIVE DIGEST

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The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established after the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict to assist qualifying Palestinian refugees. The UNRWA currently assists over 4.5 million registered Palestinian refugees in the Middle East. The United States donated \$137 million to UNRWA in 2006, and is among the largest contributors to the UNRWA.

The United Nations Convention defines a refugee as "a person who is outside his/her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution." The UNRWA uses a different definition for Palestinian Refugees, and defines a refugee qualifying for UNRWA assistance as "a person whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948 and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict." The UNHCR assists over 40,000 Palestinians not covered under this definition.

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## STAFF CONTACT

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