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World Relief Testifies in the Senate on U.S. Refugee Policy and Hong Kong Residents

BALTIMORE – Yesterday, Jenny Yang, Senior Vice President of Advocacy and Policy at World Relief and co-chair of the Advocacy Committee of Refugee Council USA (RCUSA) testified before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Border Security and Immigration, for a hearing “Supporting Hong Kong’s Pro-Democracy Movement through U.S. Refugee Policy.” Jenny spoke on behalf of World Relief and Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), a coalition of 29 US-based nongovernmental organizations representing a diverse group of nonprofits that advocate for and with those who are forcibly displaced. The hearing’s first panel of speakers included Senators Robert Menendez and Marco Rubio, who spoke about their Hong Kong Safe Harbor Act bill. The second panel featured Jenny Yang, who spoke on U.S. refugee policy with four witnesses: constitutional law professor Julian G. Ku, and Hong Kong activists Ms. Joey Siu, Mr. Samuel M. Chu and Mr. Nathan Law.

As Jenny noted in her testimony, this year marks the 40th anniversary of the Refugee Act of 1980 which passed unanimously in the Senate. Congress recognized at that time that U.S. leadership was needed to respond to growing numbers of those forcibly displaced and wanted to codify into law a process by which those who are fleeing persecution can gain the protection of the United States in partnership with local communities. As the effects of an oppressive new law are forcing people to live in fear in Hong Kong or flee elsewhere, the United States needs to show leadership again.

“In order for the United States to offer genuine protections to those from Hong Kong, Congress must work with the administration to rebuild the US refugee admissions program (USRAP) that has been systematically dismantled over the past few years. Our ability to welcome anyone fleeing persecution regardless of their race, ethnicity or religion, is a hallmark of our democracy and is a principled position against Communist regimes that stifle and oppress its people.,” said **Jenny Yang, World Relief’s VP of Policy and Advocacy and Co-Chair of RCUSA’s Advocacy Committee**. “The United States’ ability to offer protection through a strong and flexible U.S. refugee admissions program (USRAP) is a direct indicator of our commitment to human rights and will have an impact on our ability to promote democracy abroad. Whether the residents of Hong Kong will avail themselves of the protection of the United States may depend on how agile and efficient the process is.”

The inclusion of residents of Hong Kong in the FY21 Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions is a step in the right direction. But the significantly reduced overseas processing capacity has meant that there is currently a lengthy and arduous vetting process for all refugees that has rendered the U.S. refugee admissions program from what should be a nimble, efficient, life-saving tool into a cumbersome,

lengthy process through which those who need immediate protection are often not able to avail themselves of such through the program.

“The most important steps that Congress and the administration can take to prepare for and operationalize refugee resettlement from Hong Kong are to restore the U.S. refugee admissions program to historical norms and to rebuild and robustly support U.S. refugee admissions program overseas processing and domestic resettlement capacities,” Yang said. “Congress should work with the administration to increase capacity for U.S. Embassy and NGO referrals, schedule ongoing USCIS circuit rides to the region, and break through other logjams in processing.”

The current administration’s severe reduction in the refugee ceiling for FY2021, currently set at a historic low of 15,000, has left many refugees stuck in camps or urban settings, waiting for a safe harbor and reunification with their families. In her testimony, Yang stated, “The ability of the United States to operate a flexible and more robust USRAP will have a direct impact not just on those needing immediate protection from Hong Kong but also on so many around the world who have languished for decades in refugee camps and urban settings with no durable solution in sight.” In addition, Yang noted the recently finalized asylum rule that would significantly hamper if not altogether make impossible the ability for many Hong Kong asylum-seekers to gain asylum.

“The U.S. has the creative capacity and ability with the support of local communities to process and welcome Hong Kong refugees as well as the thousands of others who have nowhere else to go. What it will take is the political will, resources, and leadership from Congress to get the job done. Fewer than one-percent of refugees will ever be resettled to a third country, Congress needs to act now to reform and strengthen what some call the ‘crown jewel’ in U.S. humanitarianism,” said Yang.

As Congress explores the challenges and opportunities with helping the people of Hong Kong and others who may be forcibly displaced, World Relief and RCUSA will work in unison with Congress and the administration to meet these objectives and protect the world’s most vulnerable people.

About World Relief

World Relief is a global Christian humanitarian organization that brings sustainable solutions to the world’s greatest problems – disasters, extreme poverty, violence, oppression, and mass displacement. For over 75 years, we’ve partnered with churches and community leaders in the U.S. and abroad to bring hope, healing and transformation to the most vulnerable.

About Refugee Council USA (RCUSA)

RCUSA is a diverse coalition advocating for just and humane laws and policies, and the promotion of dialogue and communication among government, civil society, and those who need protection and welcome. Individual RCUSA members do not all address all refugee-related issues, nor do all individual members approach common refugee-related issues identically.

Learn more at worldrelief.org and [RCUSA](#).

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