

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

March 27, 2003

The Honorable Thomas Ridge
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Ridge:

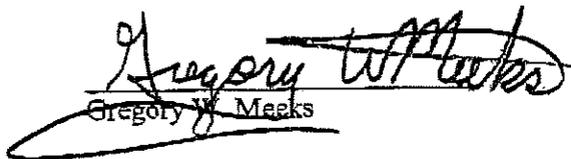
As representatives of the people of this great nation, we pride ourselves in providing a safe haven for those in search of one. For this reason, we are writing to express our concern regarding your possible issuance of new regulations that threaten women and girls seeking asylum in the United States. We urge you not to issue regulations that will reject gender-related violence as a basis for asylum.

We have learned that prior to the Immigration and Naturalization Services being absorbed into the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice was contemplating issuing regulations that could severely limit the ability of women fleeing trafficking, sexual slavery, honor killing, domestic violence, and other gender-related human rights abuses from seeking asylum in the United States.

We are deeply concerned that regulations drafted by the Department of Justice may have opposed the current policy and made it more difficult for anyone who has been persecuted by non-state actors to gain asylum protection. The implications of this change could be enormous- the end result for many women and girls being death. Also, this change could mean denying protection to whole categories of extremely vulnerable people, including, for example, victims of horrific mutilation and abuse by the RUF, a rebel group in Sierra Leone notorious for its campaign of mutilation and organized sexual violence against girls and women.

Now that you have jurisdiction over this important issue, we encourage you to carefully consider the far-reaching implications of issuing the gender regulations. The United States has had a tradition of protecting women from violence outside their control. In honor of this tradition, we ask that you refrain from issuing regulations that would reject gender-related violence as a basis for asylum in the United States.

Most Respectfully,


Gregory W. Meeks


John Conyers

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