

**PRESS RELEASE**  
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Contact: Michael Kagan  
[policy@asylumaccess.org](mailto:policy@asylumaccess.org)

**To protect refugees, the UN must stop withholding evidence from asylum-seekers**

**The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) refuses to give asylum applicants copies of their own interview transcripts and other evidence considered in their cases, risking the safety of refugees in 80 countries and violating its own advice to governments. Asylum Access recommends reforms embracing basic fairness in order to prevent refugees from being unfairly rejected.**

In honor of World Refugee Day, Asylum Access has published a report calling on UNHCR to revise policies that prevent asylum-seekers in 80 countries around the world from seeing the evidence considered in their refugee cases. As a result of this policy, more than 100,000 asylum-seekers every year are at greater risk of being incorrectly rejected based on evidence that may contain errors.

The UNHCR policy has particular impact in southeast Asia, the Middle East and Africa, where UN offices, not governments, often assess refugee applications. People fleeing conflicts and repression in Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Myanmar, and Eritrea are disproportionately affected.

Most strikingly, UNHCR policy prohibits giving asylum-seekers copies of the transcripts of their own interviews, leaving them less able to correct misunderstandings or errors of translation that are often critical in refugee status determination (RSD). Other evidence withheld from asylum-seekers includes medical reports solicited by UNHCR, statements of other witnesses or experts, and country of origin information. Although UNHCR allows its field offices to read back short portions of interview transcripts, this safeguard is not always used and it does not enable refugees to understand all of the evidence that could lead UNHCR to refuse their applications.

Recognition of official refugee status opens doors to humanitarian assistance and possible resettlement to the USA, Canada, Australia and other countries. Rejection may subject refugees to detention or deportation to the countries they originally fled. UNHCR decides more refugee cases than any government.

“Restricting applicants from reviewing their own files is not just unfair; in a refugee context it is dangerous,” says Asylum Access Policy Director Michael Kagan. “UNHCR’s procedures will always be high-risk and unfair until this policy is revised.”

This report will be posted online on RSDWatch.org on June 20, 2008.

**Asylum Access envisions a world where refugees are seen as people with rights, not just needs. To make these rights a reality, Asylum Access provides on-the-ground legal counsel and representation for refugees in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and advocates for refugee rights worldwide. Asylum Access believes that by empowering refugees to assert their human rights, we can create effective, lasting solutions for refugees, throughout the global south and around the world.**