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**STATEMENT OF CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA
JACKSON LEE**

SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND CLAIMS

OVERSIGHT HEARING ON ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

ISSUES

RAYBURN 2237

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I would like to first thank Chairman Lamar Smith for holding this oversight hearing on issues dealing with illegal immigration. Illegal immigration has been a perennial

problem in the United states. Many believe that the failure of prior Administrations to stop illegal immigration is the root cause of the recent backlash against legal immigration.

The INS recently estimated that there are approximately 5 million resident illegal aliens living in the United States, defined as those who have lived here continuously for at least 12 months. Half of these resident illegal aliens came to the U.S. by illegally crossing the border. The other half entered the U.S. legally, but then overstayed the terms of their non-immigrant visas. In addition to the resident illegal aliens, there are countless others who enter the U.S. temporarily for seasonal work and then return to their home countries. This hearing is about the forty-percent who "overstay" their visas, and about the alien smuggling rings that need to be stopped.

ALIEN SMUGGLING

There is a growing consensus in the United States and other countries that criminal organizations increasingly threaten security and diminish the quality of life. One of the lesser known, but increasingly important, criminal activities is alien smuggling.

The number of illegal aliens brought into Europe and North America alone exceeds several hundred thousand persons each year, providing organized criminal groups with Eight Billion dollars of annual revenue. Alien Smuggling is not a "victimless" crime; smugglers corrupt government officials, engage in torture and other forms of violence, and frequently force the aliens into various types of involuntary servitude. Moreover, the proceeds and the smuggling infrastructure associated with this activity support other organized illegal enterprises.

INS has made significant headway in the war on alien smuggling by working with the FBI, U.S. coast Guard, and

other law enforcement agencies. Operation Seek and Keep was a criminal enterprise, which had been in operation for at least three years, was smuggling as many as 300 Indian nationals into the United states every month at a cost of more than \$20,000 per alien, and grossing more than \$200 million. INS was successful in shutting this business down. Twenty-four individuals have been arrested in the United States, Bahamas, Central America and the Dominican Republic.

Operation Over the Rainbow II was an alien smuggling investigation that led to the crippling of a criminal syndicate responsible for smuggling as many as 150 Chinese nationals per month into the United states across the U.S. Northern border.

As Members of Congress we should be sensitive to funding and resource concerns. I look forward to hearing the testimony of the agency officials before us today and hope they will address how they are using the resources that Congress has appropriated to them in combating the problem of alien smuggling.

VISA OVERSTAYS

Currently, there are estimates that the illegal alien operation is more than five million illegal aliens in the United States, and that forty percent of those aliens are "visa overstays." Visa overstays are aliens who originally entered the United states legally on a temporary visa (tourist or student visa) and then remained here after their visa expired. I am aware that Mr. Bromwich, the Inspector

General of the Department of Justice is here to share with us his findings of a report that he issued examining the effects of visa overstays in the United States.

I am aware that in his report the tone of the conclusions that he has reached is that,"visa overstays are a disturbing and persistent problem because these visitors may be taking jobs and other benefits that by law are reserved for legal residents." I strongly believe that the INS must track the immigrants who enter the United States on a temporary visa in an efficient and timely manner. I believe that the INS should use information from other enforcement programs to identify and remove overstays.

However, I do have some concerns Mr. chairman. IN 1996, 10,000 overstays were apprehended and some 5,200

deported last year. The numbers apparently indicate that two-thirds of those deported were of Hispanic heritage. I think it is very important that all visa overstays must be targeted and deported, not just one particular group and I will be very interested to what the INS and the State Department has to say on this matter.

Lastly, on the housing of criminal aliens in Federal prisons. At the end of FY 1997, the Bureau of Prisons estimated that out of 113,000 inmates in federal and federally contracted correctional facilities, 27% were non-citizens-many of whom were subject to removal proceedings. I strongly believe that the INS must do everything in its power to remove criminal aliens from the federal penal system and not release them into American society, but

deported to their country of destination. Illegal immigration is a problem Mr. Chairman. I do not support it nor condone it. It is not good for our country, nor for my constituents in Houston. It is up to both the Congress and the Executive Branch to work together as a partnership to combat this problem. THANK-YOU.