

Ersatz Refugees

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Body

To the Editor:

Your idea to offer "emergency protection to a national group whose homeland is racked by armed civil conflict, environmental disaster or other 'extraordinary and temporary conditions' " is seriously flawed ("Make America a Fair Safe Haven," editorial, June 29).

Any national from a country certified under your proposal would be eligible for admission, whether or not that individual was actually in distress.

At some point, legitimate refugee claimants would be displaced by ersatz refugees, including economic migrants, thus undermining the very premise of humanitarianism and fairness on which your proposal is presumably based. It is precisely to defend the interests of genuine refugees that the Refugee Act of 1980, which your proposal would effectively supercede, provides for case-by-case adjudication.

"Safe haven" would involve millions of people if admissions criteria were broadly construed. Imagine, if you will, offering safe haven to the victims of a flooded Yangtze River, earthquakes in Mexico, Ecuador and Italy, a volcano in Colombia, a typhoon in Ceylon, the conflicts in Lebanon, El Salvador, Northern Ireland, the Philippines, South Africa and Sri Lanka, to name but a few. After they had been afforded "temporary" safe haven, what would be their incentive to leave, and how would their departure be enforced? If you have the answers, you're way ahead of the State Department and the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Your "safe haven" notion is a dangerous, ill-conceived and superfluous idea that if enacted will harm many of the people it purports to serve, not the least of whom are the American people.

ROGER CONNER

Executive Director, Federation
for American Immigration Reform
Washington, June 30, 1987

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Ersatz Refugees

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