

# NEW ASYLUM GUIDELINES RECOGNIZE GRAVITY OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE CLAIMS

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## **Body**

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The Clinton administration issued new guidelines Friday to immigration officers to help them identify women who should be granted asylum in this country because sexual violence has been used for political persecution in their homeland.

By issuing the guidelines, the United States joined the United Nations and Canada in recognizing that women may experience gender-based discrimination that in some cases rises to the level necessary for refugee status, the Immigration and Naturalization Service said.

The new guidelines "educate asylum officers about gender-based discrimination and provide them with procedures and methods for evaluating whether individual claims meet the refugee standard," said Immigration and Naturalization Service Commissioner Doris Meissner.

U.S. law says asylum or refugee status can be granted only to those who show a well-founded fear that returning home would subject them to persecution on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or their political opinions.

Harvard Law School instructor Nancy Kelly, who coordinates the school's Women Refugees Project, hailed the guidelines, along with a recent decision by the U.S. Board of Immigration Appeals, as "a major breakthrough for the recognition of asylum claims for women."

The immigration service said the new guidelines were based on a proposed set of guidelines submitted by Kelly's project last year and on those issued by Canada in 1993 and by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

The guidelines "recognize the need for more sensitive and thorough interviews of women asylum applicants, many of whom suffer psychological and physical trauma from their experiences of rape and other forms of sexual violence," Kelly's project said in a statement.

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