

Rigali asks relief in tsunami deporting;

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The Philadelphia Inquirer

JANUARY 13, 2005 Thursday CITY-D EDITION

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The Philadelphia Inquirer

Found on Philly.com

Section: LOCAL NEWS PHILADELPHIA & ITS SUBURBS; Pg. B03

Length: 434 words

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Body

After Hurricane Mitch hit Honduras in 1998 and earthquakes flattened whole swaths of El Salvador in 2001, their citizens in the United States illegally or in limbo were given the temporary right to live and work here.

Now, after the tsunami in Asia, the archbishop of Philadelphia has asked federal immigration authorities to grant the same "temporary protected status" (TPS) to Indonesians, who number more than 5,000 in this region.

"The recent tsunami in Asia that has caused the suffering and death of countless people will stretch Indonesia's resources to the limit," Cardinal Justin Rigali wrote in a Jan. 7 letter to Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge.

"If Indonesians who are already in this country are allowed to work, they will be able to supplement [the] humanitarian effort by sending back remittances to their devastated homeland."

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced last week that it would stop deporting people from Sri Lanka and the Maldives for four months and let noncriminals from the other tsunami-struck countries ask for the same reprieve.

"Obviously we would hope the Department of Homeland Security would support that in as many cases as possible for those in prison awaiting deportation," said the Rev. William Ayers, head of the archdiocese's migrant outreach office. "But it's a different thing than TPS."

More than 300,000 immigrants from seven countries devastated by armed conflict or natural disasters currently live and work in the United States under temporary protected status, which can be granted for as long as 18 months and later renewed.

A Homeland Security spokesman said the agency was still considering granting temporary protected status to people from tsunami-struck countries.

"There's been some extreme devastation in certain parts of all countries," said Bill Strassberger, the spokesman. "I don't see any one country that's been totally affected. . . . They obviously might not be able to return to certain villages, but is the infrastructure such that they could not return to their country?"

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Philadelphia has one of the country's largest Indonesian populations, the vast majority Christians from Java, which was outside the **tsunami**'s path. Many of them have unresolved petitions for asylum.

On Saturday, a coalition of Indonesian organizations will host a benefit cultural show for Aceh, the Sumatran province most devastated by the **tsunami**, from 7 to 9 p.m. at Maria Goretti High School Hall, 1737 S. 10th St., Philadelphia.

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Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (90%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (90%); **TSUNAMIS** (90%); INDIAN OCEAN **TSUNAMI** (90%); NATURAL DISASTERS (89%); NATIONAL SECURITY (89%); CLERGY & RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS (89%); CHRISTIANS & CHRISTIANITY (78%); RELIGION (77%); POLITICAL ASYLUM (77%); SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE **FORCES** (77%); HURRICANES (73%); WRITERS (70%)

Organization: US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (91%); US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (91%)

Industry: WRITERS (70%)

Geographic: SUMATRA, INDONESIA (79%); INDONESIA (95%); UNITED STATES (94%); ASIA (92%); EL SALVADOR (79%); MALDIVES (79%)

Load-Date: September 6, 2005