

**Statement of Chairman Jerrold Nadler  
House Judiciary Committee  
Hearing On: “The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program”**

**Thursday, February 27, 2020 at 2:00 p.m.  
2141 Rayburn House Office Building**

For decades, our nation has been a world leader in refugee resettlement, and I am proud to represent a community that welcomes refugees. This is in keeping with our nation’s fundamental values and ideals. Both Republican and Democratic administrations have long recognized refugees’ importance to our economy, our national security, and our foreign policy interests.

But the Trump Administration has upended decades of bipartisan compromise and consensus, setting historically low levels of refugee admissions and taking actions that jeopardize the future of the U.S. refugee program, as well as the tens of thousands of individuals whose lives hang in the balance.

Since passage of the Refugee Act of 1980—which established the modern refugee program—refugee admissions have averaged 80,000 per year and have never dipped below 70,000. This year’s presidential determination for annual refugee admissions, however, is a paltry 18,000.

Worse still, according to the latest State Department data, the Administration is not even on track to meet this historically low goal. Last year, Canada, a country with fewer people than California, admitted more refugees than the United States.

This Administration is abandoning our historic commitment to refugees around the world—not just today, but for years to come. For example, the administration intends to drastically reduce the number of referrals for *future* refugees from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, which screens refugees fleeing some of the world’s worst crises and refers them to the United States.

After a referral, it can take years for the United States to vet and screen refugee applicants. By reducing UNHCR referrals, this Administration is stopping the pipeline of refugees that could be eligible in two or three years, potentially delaying refugee admissions for future administrations. The Administration is also leaving these vulnerable refugees stranded in camps or dangerous regions around the world.

Meanwhile, the world is in the midst of one of the worst refugee crises in history. Last year, 27 retired generals and admirals wrote a letter to the President, urging the Administration to maintain the U.S. refugee program because it “serve[s] critical national security interests” while also offering “life-saving assistance” to those who need it most. We cannot abandon our long tradition of leadership in refugee resettlement and support. This tradition is fundamental to our nation’s values. It is also good for our foreign policy and our national security interests.

The Trump Administration claims that they have set refugee admissions according to these interests, prioritizing religious minorities, those from the Northern Triangle, and Iraqi translators assisting our troops overseas. But this is a smoke screen. In practice, admissions for all three groups have dropped significantly since 2016.

For example, the Administration ostensibly prioritized Iraqi translators for refugee resettlement and allocated up to 4,000 arrivals for this group. But its so-called ‘extreme vetting’ procedures have undermined its ability to meet this number in FY 2020.

Without question, vetting is necessary for incoming refugees. And bipartisan experts agree that refugees have long been the most vetted immigrants to enter the United States.

But this Administration ignored those experts and has introduced new, unnecessary ‘extreme vetting’ procedures, bringing the refugee admissions process to a halt for Iraqi and Afghan translators and interpreters who fought alongside our soldiers—leaving them in limbo and putting their lives at risk.

The Administration has indicated to my staff that it is working to improve vetting for these individuals. However, as of February 21, only 64 **Iraqi translators** have been admitted as refugees in this fiscal year. It is unclear whether vetting procedures can be improved drastically enough to admit even 4,000 refugees this year. Cutting refugee admissions for these men and women is an affront to our values and to our troops overseas. It also damages our critical national security interests abroad.

The President is also politicizing the resettlement program for refugees who have already been vetted and approved to come to the United States. He recently issued an unlawful executive order giving states and localities veto authority over refugee resettlement in their jurisdictions. Fortunately, a court has enjoined this unlawful order. And over 37 governors—both Democrats and Republicans—have rejected the President’s efforts. They recognize that admitting refugees is good for our economy and our local communities. They also recognize that welcoming refugees is fundamental to our nation’s values.

The refugees we admit to the United States have overcome incredible suffering and have made it through an intensive vetting process. They are victims of rape, torture, political oppression and terror. When given the opportunity to thrive in the United States, such refugees improve our economy and enrich our communities. By abandoning these individuals, we are abandoning our own values. We must return to our role as a world leader in refugee resettlement.

I want to thank Chair Lofgren and Representative Garcia for holding this important hearing, and I thank all of today's witnesses for participating. I look forward to their testimony, and I yield back the balance of my time.