

Testimony Before the State, Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee

Rep Brian Babin, TX-36

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to address the State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee.

At this critical time in our nation, I believe it is very important that Congress does everything within its power to support the President and his Administration's efforts to strengthen our national security. He has taken strong and important steps to put the safety and security of the American people first, and I hope that this subcommittee will build on those efforts.

I would encourage the Committee to provide funding for no more than 50,000 refugees in FY 2018. This is consistent with the President's Executive Order on "Protecting The Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into The United States." And as much as it is in the purview of the Subcommittee, I ask that sufficient money be provided to improve screening and vetting protocols and procedures associated with the US Refugee Admission Program.

There are a number of troubling aspects of our current refugee admission program. Among them is the glaring under-representation of religious minorities – Christians in particular – being admitted from the Middle East through our nation's refugee program. As they're currently performed, refugee admissions to the United States largely come from those being served in refugee camps run and administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Many reports have demonstrated that Christians simply do not feel safe in UNHCR refugee camps. There are fears among Christians that they will face extreme persecution, rape, extortion, exploitation, and even death. These are very real and legitimate fears. Given this fact, it is little wonder that among the refugees entering the U.S. through this UN-run program, there are few Christians.

There is a way around this for some refugees, but the Obama Administration failed to utilize this Priority 2, or P-2 refugee recognition process.

Given these shortcomings, I believe it is necessary that we consider other avenues by which we can ensure that persecuted Christians can access the refugee program to address the discriminatory nature that currently characterizes the admission of refugees from the Middle East region. Specifically, I ask that the Committee consider language that would direct embassies to work closely with and consider prioritizing referrals from NGOs that

are working with persecuted Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East region.

This might help address this glaring under-representation of Christian refugees from Syria and the Middle East, and enable these highly persecuted refugees to access the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) through an alternative route. Embassies are already permitted to make referrals to the USRAP, but my understanding is that this channel is rarely used. We should encourage U.S. embassies to work with NGOs working in disaster and war-torn areas abroad accept for review NGO refugee recommendations so that religious minorities are not excluded due to discriminatory practices within UNHCR camps.

Thank you for consideration of what I consider a very serious issue. Encouragement by this subcommittee along the lines I have suggested may enable this subcommittee to have a significant impact on the lives of the most persecuted peoples on the face of the earth.

Thank you for your attention to this issue and I look forward to working with you and your staff to address this issue in the Fiscal Year 2018 State Foreign Operations Appropriations Act.