



Syrian American Medical Society Statement for the Record  
To the House Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security

***“The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program”***

**Thursday, November 19, 2015**

Chairman Gowdy, Vice-Chairman Labrador, and all members of the Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security, thank you for the opportunity to submit a written statement on the important issue of the global refugee crisis and its implications for the United States.

We write to you as a non-religious, non-political, Syrian American led humanitarian organization that provides assistance to over 1.5 million Syrians each year and represents thousands of Syrian American medical professionals in the United States. The Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) is working on the front lines of crisis relief in Syria and neighboring countries to save lives, support doctors and medical professionals, and rebuild healthcare.

SAMS was founded in 1998 as a professional society, working to connect physicians of Syrian descent through educational and professional activities. When the conflict in Syria began in 2011, SAMS expanded its capacity significantly to meet the growing needs and challenges of the medical crisis. SAMS is now a leading organization in the Syria crisis response, impacting the health and lives of millions. We support over 100 field hospitals, clinics, and surgical centers inside of Syria and support over 800 Syrian doctors, nurses, and health workers in Syria who are risking their lives to save others. Our members and supporters have led dozens of lifesaving medical missions to Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey to support refugees regionally. SAMS also supports Syrian refugees in neighboring countries with critical psychosocial support, medical care, and social services.

Civilians are experiencing unthinkable atrocities right now in Syria. Hospitals, schools, markets, and other civilian infrastructure is targeted daily by aerial attacks. On October 20, one of our field clinics in Sarmin, Idlib was hit by two air-to-surface missiles fired from Syrian government / ally warplanes. This strike killed two of our heroic medical staff and 10 civilians. The director of the Sarmin clinic said afterwards, "When I am in the hospital, I feel like I am sitting on a bomb. It is only a matter of time until it explodes. It is wrong - a hospital should not be the most dangerous place. I wish I could say that targeting a hospital in Syria is unique, but is not. The field clinic I direct in Sarmin has been targeted and hit by airstrikes more than a dozen times - by the Syrian government and now by the Russian government. We've seen too many civilians and medical staff die in our hospital to count. The hardest part is knowing that these attacks will

happen again.” This is daily life inside of Syria. Another SAMS-supported surgeon from Aleppo spoke about the aftermath of a barrel bomb attack, describing, “The bodies of a mother and daughter were blown apart but their hands were still clasped together.” These attacks are what civilians flee from each day, becoming internally displaced or refugees in surrounding countries to escape the daily violence.

As a result of these horrific events, the world is witnessing the largest refugee crisis since World War II. More than 12 million Syrians are displaced internally, and more than 4 million Syrians have fled as refugees. For nearly five years, they have been victims of unspeakable violence, losing not only their country and community but also family members and friends. The surrounding countries of Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon have each taken in over one million Syrian refugees seeking protection. The enormous flow of refugees has created a strain on these countries in the region, which are forced to deal with extreme economic pressures, overcrowded hospitals, shortages of basic public services, and growing resentment among host communities. The sheer numbers of refugees and lack of support for host communities threaten their stability. Tens of thousands of Syrians are risking death again to flee to Europe; over 2,500 of them have drowned or disappeared in the Mediterranean in 2015.

SAMS strongly supports the U.S. refugee resettlement program, which resettles tens of thousands of refugees from around the world each year. **It is essential for the U.S. to take a leading role in Syrian refugee resettlement for the protection of Syria’s most vulnerable refugees, for the stability and security of the region, and for the relevance of the U.S. as a humanitarian and global leader.**

Historically, the United States has always taken a leadership role in assisting vulnerable refugees fleeing major disasters. The U.S. has accepted the majority of all UNHCR referrals from around the world. The families and individuals being considered for resettlement face dire protection challenges and often need specialized care. Over 76 percent of Syrian refugees are women and children. Among those being considered for resettlement are victims of torture, women at risk, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ persons facing risk, women-headed households, and those facing acute security threats. **We call on all Congresspeople to maintain policy stances that are open-hearted to the most vulnerable populations and non-discriminatory in nature.**

To members of the House Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security, and to all Members of Congress, we recommend:

- **Working to ensure sufficient staffing and capacity for security vetting agencies to increase their ability to conduct thorough and quick security checks.** We commend the meticulous and exemplary work of the Refugee Admissions Program, coordinated by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration at the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security. All Syrian refugee profiles being actively considered for resettlement are reviewed thoroughly by the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program with support and leadership from the White House and numerous security vetting agencies, including the Department of Defense and Federal Bureau of Investigation. These Syrians go through extensive security background checks, and those being considered for resettlement are among the most vulnerable populations. The U.S. vetting process is the most robust in the world and typically takes more than two years. To prohibit Syrian refugees from the option of U.S. resettlement because of the presence of ISIL and other extremist groups in Syria, and not based on thorough U.S. led security checks and

humanitarian needs assessments, discounts the commendable work of the Department of Homeland Security and Department of State and amounts to blatant discrimination based on nationality.

- **Demonstrating leadership by opposing inflammatory and discriminatory legislation**, including H.R. 3573, the Refugee Resettlement Oversight and Security Act, and H.R. 4038, the American Security Against Foreign Enemies Act of 2015.
- **Fully funding essential humanitarian and refugee accounts**. It is essential that ample assistance is provided to the refugee response in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, which together house 86% of Syrian refugees. With services and assistance at a regional level, more refugees will be able and willing to remain in the region, and fewer will flee to Europe or desperately need resettlement. Furthermore, funding is needed to maintain the stringent and rigorous vetting processes already in place through the Department of State and Department of Homeland Security so that refugees being resettled in the U.S. are properly vetted and assisted once they arrive. We call for funding at the following levels or higher:
  - Migration and Refugee Assistance (SFOPs): \$3.604 billion
  - International Disaster Assistance (SFOPs): \$2.42 billion (\$950 million for EFSP)
  - Refugee and Entrant Assistance (L/HHS): \$2.44 billion
  - Dept. of Homeland Security Refugee Corps (DHS): \$17.3 million in direct appropriations (+ \$32.3 million from anticipated fees for a total of \$49.6 million for DHS to do refugee resettlement screening)
- **Enhancing regional support and renewing efforts to stem flow of refugees by addressing the driver of the refugee crisis – the lack of protection for civilians in Syria**. The U.S. must make immediate civilian protection in Syria and the pursuit of a sustainable political solution to the conflict in Syria its top diplomatic priorities. Until protection is available and the conflict is resolved, Syrian civilians will continue to be killed, displaced, or flee the country, and it will not be safe for them to return home.

**Refugee resettlement is not a partisan issue. It is a human issue.** It is critical that the U.S. take further steps to act as a leader in this unprecedented global refugee crisis. The U.S., founded as a nation of immigrants, must continue and scale up its support for vulnerable Syrian refugees, providing them with the hope of resettlement and a brighter future.

**Testimony of  
Roy Speckhardt, Executive Director  
American Humanist Association  
Before the  
House Judiciary Committee  
Hearing on the Syrian Refugee Crisis and its Impact on the Security of the U.S.  
Refugee Admissions Program  
October 7, 2015**

Chairman Goodlatte, Ranking Member Conyers, Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the American Humanist Association concerning the current Syrian refugee crisis. Humanists are greatly saddened by the situation in Syria and in much of the Middle East, and hope that the recent spate of killings of both religious minorities and nontheists will come to an end as quickly as possible.

The American Humanist Association is an educational organization that strives to bring about a progressive society where being good without a god is an accepted way to live life. We are accomplishing this through our defense of civil liberties and secular governance, by our outreach to the growing number of people without traditional religious faith, and through a continued refinement and advancement of the humanist worldview. Humanism encompasses a variety of nontheistic views (atheism, agnosticism, rationalism, naturalism, secularism, and deism) while adding the important element of a comprehensive worldview and set of ethical values--values that are grounded in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, informed by scientific knowledge, and driven by a desire to meet the needs of people in the here and now.

The crisis in Syria has left many people without a family, without their homes, and without many of the possessions which they had before the current conflict. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, over 7.6 million Syrians are internally displaced as of September 2015, with a further 4.1 million Syrians having fled the country as refugees since the crisis began. There have also been widespread reports of indiscriminate public killings by terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State of nontheistic and secular individuals who have violated blasphemy laws or otherwise broken Islamic law. These killings have served to further isolate the nontheistic community within Syria and Iraq from both the political infrastructure and from society as a whole.

We believe that the United States has a moral and ethical obligation to continue to accept refugees and asylum seekers. But we also wish to encourage the government, through the Refugee Admissions Program, to ensure that refugees are evaluated equally and that preferences for certain types of refugees based on their religious beliefs do not become policy.

New legislation, such as H. R. 3573, would prioritize certain religious minorities when the government considers refugees to resettle from Iraq and Syria, which effectively serves as an attempt to prevent Muslims from being resettled in the United States. We also know that proposals to only help Christian refugees from Syria and Iraq are advancing in both the House and the Senate. We wish to express our sincere opposition to such policies, and instead express our support for policies which do not favor one religion over another, or religion in general over nontheism, when it comes to resettling refugees in America.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, Members of the Committee, the American Humanist Association believes strongly that the United States should do everything it can to take in refugees of all religious beliefs and of no belief that are fleeing violence in their home countries. We have a moral obligation to restore the dignity of those that have lost everything, and who wish to come to America in order to work and create new lives for themselves. We implore the committee to help ensure that the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program aligns with the fundamental values of American democracy by rejecting religious preferences and other forms of discrimination. Your hearing today is a very important effort in doing just that, and we thank you for the opportunity to contribute to it.



**STATEMENT OF THE AMERICAN IMMIGRATION COUNCIL**

**SUBMITTED TO THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES JUDICIARY  
COMMITTEE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND BORDER SECURITY**

**HEARING ON “THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE  
SECURITY OF THE U.S. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM”**

**November 19, 2015**

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The American Immigration Council is a non-profit organization which for over 25 years has been dedicated to increasing public understanding of immigration law and policy and the role of immigration in American society. We write to share our analysis and research regarding refugees coming to the United States and the many safeguards already in place.

As set forth in our publication, [“An Overview of U.S. Refugee Law and Policy”](#) (November 18, 2015) (Attachment A), the United States plays an important role in protecting thousands of the world’s most vulnerable people. The United States is one of 28 countries that resettles refugees. A refugee is a person who either has been persecuted or has a “well-founded fear” of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.<sup>1</sup> This definition derives from the United Nations 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocols relating to the Status of Refugees, which the United States became a party to in 1968.<sup>2</sup>

*Responding to the Syrian Refugee Crisis*

The violence and devastation in Syria has led to the largest number of refugees since World War II. As of September 2015, the United States had taken in 1,500, or less than 0.03 percent of the total in need.<sup>3</sup> This seems like a small number for such a large nation with a long history of welcoming those fleeing persecution. President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry have signaled that the United States will respond more robustly. The President has directed his Administration to accept 10,000 Syrian refugees in Fiscal Year 2016 and to increase the

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<sup>1</sup> 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(42)(A) (2015).

<sup>2</sup> Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, available at, <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Gordon; Alison Smale; Rick Lyman, “U.S. Will Accept More Refugees As Crisis Grows,” New York Times, September 20, 2015, available at; <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/21/world/europe/us-to-increase-admission-of-refugees-to-100000-in-2017-kerry-says.html>.

number of overall refugees to 85,000 from the current level of 70,000.<sup>4</sup> Although the Council believes that more must be done,<sup>5</sup> it is important that the United States remains steadfast in its commitment to providing refuge to those most in need.

Following the attacks that took place in Paris just days ago, some have called for denying entry to Syrian refugees. This is the wrong approach. Syrian refugees are fleeing exactly the kind of terror that unfolded on the streets of Paris. The attacks in Paris sadly reflect the volatile times in which we live. Punishing refugees will not change this. The United States must respond to this crisis by carrying on our long history of welcoming those fleeing such dire situations. As former Secretary of State Madeline Albright reflected, in response to proposals to halt the refugee program:

These proposals are motivated by fear, not by the facts, and they fly in the face of our country's proud tradition of admitting refugees from every corner of the globe and every faith background. We have always been a generous nation, and we have in place a rigorous process for refugee resettlement that balances our generosity with our need for security. It works, and it should not be stopped or paused.<sup>6</sup>

### *The United States Has a Rigorous Screening Process In Place*

The United States has established a rigorous screening process for refugees coming to our country. Before admission as a refugee, a person must pass through an extensive 13 step screening process that usually takes between 18 and 24 months.<sup>7</sup> This process includes having fingerprints and a photograph taken by the U.S. government, an in person interview with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), two different interagency security background checks, a medical screening, and a final security check by Customs and Border Protection (CBP).<sup>8</sup> We currently have systems in place to ensure the safety and security of our nation, while also fulfilling our humanitarian obligations around the world.

### *Post Arrival Steps*

Although refugees are provided assistance in order to support their transition into the country, they are expected to have a job within six months of arrival. Refugee men who have recently arrived are employed at a higher rate than native born (67 percent to 60 percent respectively),

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<sup>4</sup> Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2016, U.S. Department of State, available at <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/docsforcongress/247770.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> The Immigration Council has [joined](#) a broad coalition of organizations to urge the President to increase the number of refugees that we resettle to 200,000 for FY 16, with 100,000 of them being Syrian. [As we explain](#), "After the end of the wars in Southeast Asia, the United States resettled 111,000 Vietnamese refugees in 1979 and then essentially doubled that number to 207,000 in 1980. The United States' rising to the occasion now would both encourage European nations to live up to their refugee protection obligations, and help to prevent further deterioration in the protection climate in the countries bordering on Syria that are currently hosting millions of Syrian refugee."

<sup>6</sup> Madeleine Albright, "Madeleine Albright: ISIS Wants Us to Think Refugees Are the Enemy," Time Magazine, November 17, 2015, available at, <http://time.com/4117333/madeleine-albright-refugees/>.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Committee For Refugees and Immigrants, "Security Screening of Refugees Admitted to the United States: A Detailed, Rigorous Process," available at; <http://www.rcusa.org/uploads/pdfs/Refugee%20resettlement%20-%20step%20by%20step%20USCRI.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Id.

and refugee women are employed at the same rate as native women.<sup>9</sup> Many refugees go on to make substantial contributions to the U.S. economy and their communities. As the Migration Policy Institute noted, “Most refugee populations in the United States have integrated well, becoming productive residents and, often, citizens who enrich their communities and their new country. From Albert Einstein to Google co-founder Sergey Brin, refugees often give back much more than they take.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [Randy Capps](#), [Kathleen Newland](#), [Susan Fratzke](#), [Susanna Groves](#), [Michael Fix](#), [Margie McHugh](#), and [Gregory Auclair](#), “The Integration Outcomes of U.S. Refugees: Successes and Challenges,” Migration Policy Institute, June 2015, available at, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/integration-outcomes-us-refugees-successes-and-challenges>.

<sup>10</sup> Kathleen Newland, “The U.S. Record Shows Refugees Are Not A Threat,” Migration Policy Institute, October 2015, available at; <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/us-record-shows-refugees-are-not-threat>.

ATTACHMENT A



## An Overview of U.S. Refugee Law and Policy

The United States passed its first official refugee legislation to address the plight of displaced Europeans following World War II. Most refugees are displaced from their country of origin to a neighboring country, and then resettled to a third country through international organizations. The United States resettles more refugees than any other country, refugees who go on to contribute to our communities and our economy.

### What is a refugee?

A refugee, as defined by Section 101(a)(42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), is a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her home country because of a “well-founded fear of persecution” due to race, membership in a particular social group, political opinion, religion, or national origin. This definition is based on the [United Nations 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocols](#) relating to the Status of Refugees, which the United States became a party to in [1968](#). Following the Vietnam War and the country’s experience resettling Indochinese refugees, Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, which [incorporated](#) the Convention’s definition into U.S. law and provides the legal basis for today’s U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).

A person who meets the definition of a refugee, but who applies for this status from *within the United States*—either when they are seeking admission at a port of entry or after they have already entered the country in a different status or without status—is an asylee. The United States processes asylees differently than those who enter the country in refugee status; that process is not addressed in this fact sheet.

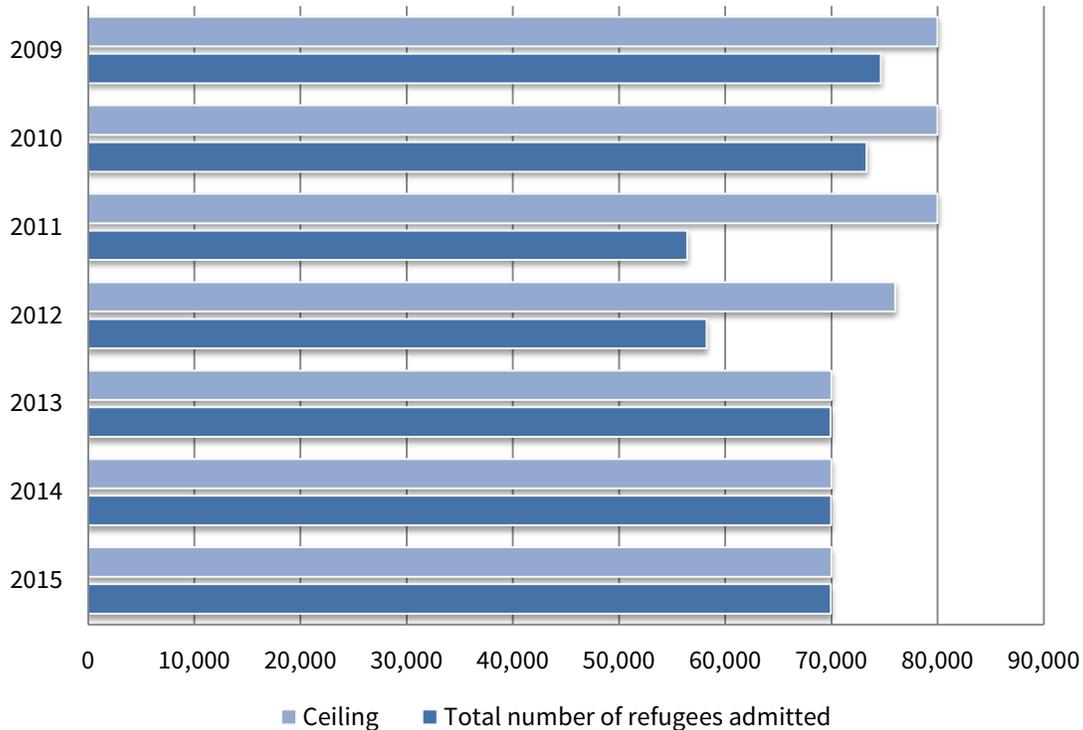
### How many refugees are there in the world?

- According to [UNHCR](#), at the end of the 2014 there were an estimated 14.4 million refugees (a 19 percent growth from the previous year). According to [2015 statistics](#), it is estimated that there are over 4.2 million Syrian refugees.
- The [top origin countries](#) for refugees in 2013 were Afghanistan (2.6 million), Syria (2.5 million) Somalia (1.1 million), Sudan (650,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (499,600), and Myanmar (480,000).

### How many refugees does the United States admit?

Each year the President, in consultation with Congress, determines the numerical ceiling for refugee admissions. For Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, the proposed [ceiling is 85,000](#).

## Refugee Ceilings and Admitted Refugees to the United States, FY 2009-2015



(Source: [Refugee Processing Center](#))

- Over one-third of all refugee arrivals ([35.1 percent](#), or 24,579) in FY 2015 came from the Near East/South Asia—a region that includes Iraq, Iran, Bhutan, and Afghanistan.
- Another third of all refugee arrivals (32.1 percent, or 22,472) in FY 2015 came from Africa.
- Over a quarter of all refugee arrivals (26.4 percent, or 18,469) in FY 2015 came from East Asia — a region that includes China, Vietnam, and Indonesia.

### How does the U.S. refugee resettlement process work?

The Refugee Admissions Program is jointly administered by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) in the Department of State, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and offices within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) within DHS conducts refugee interviews and determines individual eligibility for refugee status in the United States.

There are [three principal categories](#) for classifying refugees under the U.S. refugee program:

- **Priority One.** Individuals with compelling persecution needs or those for whom no other durable solution exists. These individuals are referred to the United States by UNHCR, or they are identified by a U.S. embassy or a non-governmental organization (NGO).

- **Priority Two.** Groups of “special concern” to the United States, which are selected by the Department of State with input from USCIS, UNHCR, and designated NGOs. Currently, the groups include certain persons from the former Soviet Union, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Iran, Burma, and Bhutan.
- **Priority Three.** The relatives of refugees (parents, spouses, and unmarried children under 21) who are already settled in the United States may be admitted as refugees. The U.S.-based relative must file an Affidavit of Relationship (AOR) and must be processed by DHS.

Before admission to the United States, each refugee must undergo an extensive interviewing, screening, and security clearance process conducted by Regional Refugee Coordinators and overseas Resettlement Support Centers (RSCs). To qualify, individuals generally must not already be firmly resettled in any other country. Not everyone who falls into the three preceding categories is admitted to the United States.

- The INA requires most prospective refugees to prove their individual case of “well-founded fear,” regardless of the person’s country, circumstance, or classification in a priority category.
- Refugees are subject to the grounds of exclusion listed in Section 212(a) of the INA, including health-related grounds, moral/criminal grounds, and security grounds. They may also be excluded for polygamy, misrepresentation of facts on visa applications, smuggling, and previous deportations. Waivers exist for certain grounds of exclusion.

After a refugee has been conditionally accepted for resettlement, the RSC sends a request for assurance of placement to the United States, and the Refugee Processing Center (RPC) works with [private voluntary agencies](#) (VOLAG) to determine where the refugee will live. Refugees resettled in the United States do not need to have a U.S. “sponsor.” If a refugee approved for admission does have a relative living in the United States, every effort will be made to place the refugee near his or her relative.

- If a person is accepted as a refugee for admission to the United States, it is conditioned upon the individual passing a medical examination and all security checks.
  - According to a [Human Rights First](#) report, the processing times of the U.S. refugee resettlement program “can be quite prolonged, leaving some refugees stranded in dangerous locations or in difficult circumstances.” According to the [Department of State](#) the entire process can take an average of 18-24 months to complete. These issues have improved in recent years; in a 2014 report, the [Obama Administration](#) cited “interagency coordination and processing procedures” as one of the reasons for increased admissions.

Once this assurance of placement has been secured and medical examinations and security checks have been completed, RSCs work together with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to schedule and arrange refugee travel to the United States.

- Before departing, refugees sign a promissory note to repay the United States for their travel costs. This travel loan is an interest-free loan that refugees begin to pay back six months after arriving in the country.
- Upon receipt of the IOM travel notification, the VOLAG arranges for the reception of refugees at the airport and transportation to their housing at their final destination.

## What happens once refugees arrive?

- A VOLAG is responsible for assuring that most services are provided during the refugee's first 90 days in the United States. They arrange for food, housing, clothing, employment counseling, medical care, and other necessities.
- One year after admission, a refugee may apply for Lawful Permanent Resident ("LPR") status. If they adjusted to LPR status, they may petition for naturalization five years after their arrival in the United States.
- In [FY 2014](#), new refugee arrivals went to 46 states. Top recipient states were California (3,068), Michigan (2,753), Texas (2,462), Illinois (1,064), and Arizona (973).
- Refugees are [expected](#) to have a job within six months of arrival. Refugee men who have recently arrived are employed at a [higher rate](#) than native born (67 percent to 60 percent respectively), and refugee women are employed at the same rate as native women.



AMERICAN  
IMMIGRATION  
LAWYERS  
ASSOCIATION

**Statement of the American Immigration Lawyers Association**

**Submitted to the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee**

**November 19, 2015 hearing  
“The Syrian Refugee Crisis and its Impact on the Security  
of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program”**

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The American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) is the national association of immigration lawyers established to promote justice and advocate for fair and reasonable immigration law and policy. AILA has over 14,000 attorney and law professor members.

The world is witnessing the largest refugee crisis since World War II, with an estimated 60 million people currently forcibly displaced from their homes due to war, civil conflict, and persecution who are seeking safety either within their countries or in other countries. By itself, the civil war in Syria has forced over 4 million Syrians to flee as refugees into neighboring countries, and within Syria, nearly 12 million people are displaced internally.

Following the violent, tragic attacks in Paris and Beirut last week, some of our nation’s leaders are calling for the suspension of the U.S. refugee resettlement program or a ban on Syrian refugees. These refugees are fleeing exactly the kind of terror that unfolded last week and deserve international protection from persecution. We urge Congress not to pass legislation that would impose such restrictions on the U.S. refugee program which saves thousands of lives every year.

The U.S. refugee program already has a rigorous security screening process. Before being selected and brought to the U.S., refugees undergo screening that involves multiple agencies, checks with government intelligence and security databases, and in-person interviews—a process that typically takes two years or more. This process minimizes the risk that someone intending to do harm would ever enter the U.S. through the refugee program. In fact, not a single reported act of terrorism has been committed on U.S. soil since the refugee program was begun in 1975.

**Protecting Syrian refugees**

Each day, thousands of Syrians make the terrifying decision to flee having borne witness to the destruction of their homes and neighborhoods, and the senseless killing of their family, friends, and neighbors. According to the U.N., more than half of all Syrian refugees are under the age of 18. Children fleeing this horrible violence are at risk of falling ill, becoming malnourished, and

being abused and exploited. The perils of remaining in Syria are so great that many risk everything to make the dangerous journey to safety. In 2015, more than 2,500 refugees have died in the Mediterranean trying to attempt the journey.

On September 10, 2015, the Obama Administration pledged to resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees for the fiscal year 2016. This was a welcome step, but only an initial step that must be followed by a more comprehensive plan to protect the millions in need. Other smaller and less affluent countries across the Atlantic are hosting far greater numbers of Syrian refugees, with a total of about 4 million being hosted in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. Several European countries have stepped up as well, most notably Germany, which committed to accepting 35,000 Syrian refugees, in addition to Syrian asylum seekers.

The United States has the capacity to resettle at least 200,000 refugees in a single year. In 1980, the U.S. government accepted over 200,000 Vietnamese refugees, and in other years, similarly high numbers from Cuba, Northern Iraq, and Kosovo.<sup>1</sup> Our nation has always been a beacon of hope for those fleeing persecution and oppression, and we should accept far more than the 85,000 total refugees planned for the next year. AILA calls upon our nation's leaders to increase our resettlement of refugees worldwide to 200,000 for the current fiscal year beginning October 1, 2015. Of that total number, 100,000 should be refugees from Syria.

### **Rigorous security and background checks for refugees**

Some commentators have recommended that the United States place additional restrictions on the refugee resettlement program to ensure national security and public safety. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. government has implemented a detailed and rigorous security screening process for all refugees who are candidates for resettlement to the United States. These security protocols are extremely rigorous, and it is unnecessary for Congress to mandate additional measures.

First, refugees are referred to the U.S. by the UNHCR, a U.S. embassy, or a trained non-governmental organization. Refugees then undergo a series of biometric and investigatory background checks, including collection and analysis of personal data, fingerprints, photographs, and other background information, all of which is checked against government databases. All refugees must also appear for a detailed interview by trained DHS personnel. Where any security concerns exist, refugees must undergo additional screening by way of a Security Advisory Opinion, which requires clearance from multiple U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies before resettlement may be approved.

### **Stopping fearmongering against Muslims**

In the media and public discourse, a dangerous sentiment against those of Muslim faith is taking hold. Some have suggested that the U.S. refugee resettlement program should exclude Muslims outright or prioritize other religious groups. Such a change to our laws and traditions would be a terrible mistake. Restricting refugee protection to certain faiths would be inconsistent with U.S. and international asylum law which do not discriminate against any religious group. Exclusion of Muslims from the U.S. resettlement program would leave thousands of people who have suffered horrific violence and persecution at the hands of ISIS or other warring factions without

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<sup>1</sup> The United States resettled 111,000 Vietnamese refugees in 1979 and then doubled that number to 207,000 in 1980.

humanitarian protection. We call upon Congress to demonstrate leadership by speaking out against the scapegoating of any group during this time of crisis.

AILA supports efforts to increase the capacity of DHS and the Department of State to process security and background checks for Syrian and other refugees so they can be efficiently cleared for resettlement.

### **America must ensure humanitarian protection for Central American refugees**

In addition to aiding Syrian and other refugees that are overseas, the U.S. has a responsibility to protect those who come to our borders, in particular those from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala who are fleeing persecution and violence that qualifies them as refugees. For the past several years the escalating violent crime, gang violence and domestic violence that has raged beyond control within those countries has resulted in thousands of children and families fleeing and seeking refuge in the United States and other countries in the region. Instead of humanitarian protection, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) has implemented an aggressive border deterrence strategy that has resulted in the massive detention of family asylum seekers. This shameful practice must end.

In initial interviews with government asylum officers, these individuals are qualifying as refugees at extremely high rates, demonstrating that they should be protected under U.S. asylum laws. For example, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) data shows that the vast majority – nearly 90 percent – of detained families have established that they have bona fide claims for asylum or other protection under U.S. law. Further indication of the strength and veracity of their claims is the extremely high success rate of asylum grants when the women and children have their cases finally reviewed by immigration judges.

Instead of welcoming them and ensuring their safety, since summer 2014, DHS has embarked on a deterrence strategy that is intended to show force on the border and turn back these asylum seekers. The DHS strategy has included rapid, so-called “expeditious,” deportations that have abrogated due process protections and in many cases resulted in the unlawful return of women and children without giving them the meaningful opportunity to seek asylum. The principle of *non-refoulement*, under Article 33(1) of the 1951 Refugee Convention, protects both refugees and asylum seekers by prohibiting states from returning them to territories where there is a risk that their life or freedom would be threatened on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. As a country, we must ensure that fundamental protections are provided to asylum seekers, and that instead of being intimidated and turned back, they are treated in a dignified and humane manner.

Under U.S. law, individuals facing deportation, including children and family asylum seekers, are still not guaranteed counsel paid for by the government, even for those who are indigent and have little or no understanding of our laws. In some cases, the government places such onerous restrictions on volunteers and pro bono lawyers who are trying to assist families in detention that meaningful assistance of counsel is effectively denied. Since July 2014, AILA lawyer members from across the country have volunteered in New Mexico, Texas, and Pennsylvania at family detention facilities and, in early 2015, AILA established the CARA Family Detention Pro Bono Project in partnership with other legal service providers to assist families in detention in Texas.

Despite the private, in-kind nature of these volunteer efforts made by hundreds of lawyers and professionals, DHS has repeatedly obstructed the ability of counsel to speak with detainees – including detainees whom the government knows to be represented by counsel – for legal consultation at family detention facilities. DHS has also employed coercive tactics that undermine the ability of these detained asylum seekers to assert their rights, including, in at least one instance, going from cell-to-cell demanding the names of detainees who spoke with their lawyers about their concerns regarding the terms of their release, telling the detainees that lawyers have nothing to do with the matter.

Finally, as part of its border deterrence strategy, the U.S. government has dramatically increased the use of detention against families and currently is incarcerating more than 2,000 children and mothers who are seeking asylum and other protection under U.S. law. Private for-profit prison companies run the two largest family detention facilities and now hold contracts for the only alternatives to detention programs DHS offers. Daily, our volunteers and staff are helping these families and are bearing witness to the suffering borne by these mothers and children – some breastfeeding infants – including severe loss of weight, psychological trauma, and inadequate medical treatment. AILA and other organizations have sent formal complaints to the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties documenting these and other deleterious consequences of the Administration's family detention policy.

Instead of being subjected to detention and expedited removal procedures that limit their ability to seek counsel and adequately present their claims, these families should be placed into the regular removal process, given the opportunity to tell their story to an immigration judge and released from physical detention so they can join the families and friends who are willing to support them while they prepare their cases.

The mass incarceration of asylum seekers not only violates our country's laws but also contradicts America's most cherished principles and values. We call upon Congress and the Administration to end family detention.

The United States needs to open its doors to those fleeing from persecution and violence whether they fled from war in Syria, or from gangs, rape, or domestic violence in Honduras, Guatemala, or El Salvador. No matter from which shore, country or continent these refugees have fled, America must stand behind our laws and guarantee them humanitarian protection.



**The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee**

Statement for the Record on the

***The Impact of ISIS on the Homeland and Refugee Resettlement***

before the

U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

And

***Lessons from the Paris Terrorist Attacks:***

***Ramifications for the Homeland and Refugee Resettlement***

November 17, 2015

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American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee

**To: Senator Ron Johnson, Chairman of Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**

### *Introduction*

I am writing to you on behalf of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), the country's only national Arab-American organization. ADC has a long history of supporting the human and civil rights of all Americans and opposing racism, discrimination and bigotry in any form. ADC was founded by former U.S. Senator James Abourezk in 1980. Today, ADC is the largest grassroots Arab-American civil rights and civil liberties organization in the United States. ADC is non-profit, non-sectarian, and non-partisan, with members in every State of the United States. ADC routinely works with a broad coalition of national organizations to address immigration, refugee, and humanitarian crisis in the Middle East and Arab region. ADC respectfully takes this opportunity to provide a statement for the record to U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on *Refugee Resettlement in the United States*.

### *Statement*

The fact that a number of governors have rejected Syrian refugees does not demonstrate any concrete fact or reliable evaluation of anything but their decision to cave into sensationalized propaganda aimed to cultivate fear. Our governmental agencies – the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), the Department of Defense (DOD), and the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) have the capacity to properly screen refugees prior to entrance into the United States.<sup>1</sup> “The length and thoroughness of the U.S. vetting system sets it apart from the chaotic, dangerous process for refugees fleeing into Europe by sea,” said Geoffrey Mock, the Syrian country specialist for Amnesty International USA.<sup>2</sup> Actually, the United States has one of the most comprehensive and vigorous in-depth security check processes, if not the top in the world, for screening refugee applications. Contradictory positions are merely opinion unfounded in objective reliable reports.

The United Nations Refugee Agency conducts an extensive vetting process that can take several months to a year with multiple levels of clearances before the U.S. vetting and security checks process even begins. These strict security measures have also been drastically enhanced in the past few years, including but not limited to required biometrics processing – eye scans and fingerprinting, collection of all biographical data, thorough interviews in person, and the cross-checking of asylum applicant names through a variety of government databases. The U.N. Refugee Agency security scrutiny applied to refugee applications referred to the U.S. is not conduct to refugees seeking refugee status in Europe, the vetting occurs after their entry.

<sup>1</sup> See U.S. Refugee Admission Program, <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/admissions/index.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> See Linda Qiu, *Jeb Bush: 'It takes almost a year for a Refugee to be processed in the United States'*, POLITIFACT, Nov. 15, 2015.



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The numerous and vast strictly enforced security measures are beyond adequate and efficient to protect the security of the United States.<sup>3</sup> Upon referral of a refugee application from the U.N. Refugee Agency, the U.S. makes the ultimate determination of whether the U.S. will accept or allow the refugee to enter the U.S. Multiple federal agencies – DOD, DHS, FBI, NCTC, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services agency and the U.S. Department of State are intricately involved in the rigorous review process of each and every refugee application. The U.S. decided which refugee applications to approve and which refugee applications to deny.

DHS conducts several security checks and interviews overseas to make sure refugees meet the legal definition for a refugee – requiring demonstrable proof that were persecuted or feared persecution in their home country. Plus additional strenuous security provisions have been put in place for special screening and vetting of Syrian refugees that requires a minimum of 18-24 months for Syrian refugees to be fully examined.<sup>4</sup> Syrian refugees as coming from an active war zone are scrutinized at the highest level security analysis<sup>5</sup>, where multiple checks are conducted on all biographical information and biometrics, and cross-referenced with the DOD, DHS, among other intelligence agencies to assure true identity and criminal background. There is also a pre-departure check that is conducted against accepted refugee's right before their scheduled travel to the U.S. and health testing done by the U.S Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>6</sup>

Syrian refugees must meet the basic requirements like all refugees and are subject to the same bars. Refugee applications will be denied and/or barred from refugee status where applicants have been involved in terrorism, torture, extrajudicial killings, genocide, acts that qualify as serious violent felonies under U.S. law, or engaged in fraud or misrepresentation of a material fact to gain admission to the U.S.<sup>7</sup> The U.N. and U.S. governmental agency vetting process has been applied and used to aid refugees seeking safe haven from other similarly situated war torn and labeled “dangerous countries”, whom nationals have also been subjected to terrorism, including but not limited to Iraq, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and the Central African Republic.

The strict security measures demonstrate that the terminology “safety and security” is being used as a tool to limit refugees because of anti-Arab sentiment and Islamophobia. “Empirically,

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<sup>3</sup> Syrian Refugees Eyeing America See Long Waits and Extensive Vetting, WALL STREET JOURNAL, Nov. 9, 2015, [http://www.wsj.com/video/syrian-refugees-eyeing-america-see-long-waits-and-extensive-vetting/4F0CA055-6E95-42DA-821F-15873247B4C1.html?mod=WSJ\\_World\\_VideoCarousel\\_1](http://www.wsj.com/video/syrian-refugees-eyeing-america-see-long-waits-and-extensive-vetting/4F0CA055-6E95-42DA-821F-15873247B4C1.html?mod=WSJ_World_VideoCarousel_1).

<sup>4</sup> Elise Foley, Refugee Screenings Are More Intensive Than Some Politicians Would Have You Think, Huff Post, Nov. 17, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/refugee-screening-process-syrians\\_564b55ecec4b045bf3df0ece7](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/refugee-screening-process-syrians_564b55ecec4b045bf3df0ece7).

<sup>5</sup> Refugees seeking safe haven as nationals from Eastern Europe and Asian have not been forced to undergo such scrutiny as Syrian refugees.

<sup>6</sup> Office of Refugee Resettlement, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/programs/refugee-health>.

<sup>7</sup> Bars & Security Screening in the Asylum & Refugee Processes, HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST, <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/HRF-Security-Safeguards.pdf>.



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historically, we don't see terrorists trying to embed people in refugee flows exactly because they are so highly vetted," agreed Gary Shiffman, former chief of staff for Customs and Border Protection at DHS and the CEO of Giant Oak, a company that analyzes large data sets to help address terrorism and crime problems.<sup>8</sup> Congress must uphold its responsibility to help the millions of people that have been forced to flee their homes in Syria since 2011 to escape indiscriminate violence, ongoing civil war, rape, torture, and death. We are undisputedly facing a global refugee crisis that requires the United

States to provide safe haven. There are over 4 million registered Syrian refugees and 8 million Syrians internally displaced. The United States has only accepted 1,600, less than 1 percent of the entire need, with 20,000 pending Syrian refugee referrals from the United Nations Refugee Agency. By contrast, Germany has said that it will accept 800,000 refugees in 2016 and is willing to accept 500,000 more each year for the next few years. Jordan has provided safe harbor to half a million Syrian refugees. The United States has committed to accepting at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the next fiscal year, but much more is needed. This is a crucial time for the United States to take the leadership role in the international community during the largest humanitarian crisis in recent history and encourage other nations to pull their weight and responsibility.

Congressional actions that contradict and/or attempt to undermine the purpose and existence of the refugee program including but not limited to H.R. 3999<sup>9</sup> and H.R. 3573<sup>10</sup>, to save human lives, through measures to effectively shut down the refugee program and/or engage in national origin and/or religious profiling of refugee applications must be prohibited. Both H.R. 3999 and H.R. 3573 are in direct violation and/or contrary to the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees policy of non-discrimination, non-penalization, and non-refoulement.<sup>11</sup> The aforementioned U.N. Convention recognized as customary international law, and the Immigration and Nationality Act § 101(a)(42) demand and reinforce the fundamental principle that refugee status be applied without discrimination. Refugee status is granted and/or extended to provide temporary protection in the U.S. for all persons subjected to persecution or in fear of persecution based on a protected characteristic including religion and national origin. The United States cannot pick and choose based upon a person's race, national origin, or religion whether to grant refugee status. How can we single out and treat people differently who are seeking protection for their very lives for the

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<sup>8</sup> Rachel Oswald, GOP, Democrats Gear Up to Clash Over Refugee Program, CQ NEWS, Nov. 12, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> American Security Against Foreign Enemies (SAFE) Act of 2015, H.R. 3999, <http://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20151116/BILLS-114hr-AI-Foreign.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Refugee Resettlement Oversight and Security Act of 2015, H.R. 3573 <https://www.congress.gov/114/bills/hr3573/BILLS-114hr3573ih.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>.



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exact same reason? All Syrian and Iraqi refugee lives must be protected and are worth saving, not only Syrian Christians and Iraqi Christians.

Terrorism and the threat of terrorism are not solely confined to a particular country or religion. However, H.R. 3999 specifically signals out refugees coming from Syria or Iraq as requiring unanimous certification by the Secretary of DHS, the Director of the FBI, and the Director of National Intelligence to Congressional committee that the refugee accepted by the federal agency is not a threat to the security of the U.S. This is clearly an attempt by Congressional members to add additional burdens to elongate, and prevent refugee resettlement, and to create more bureaucratic loopholes and hurdles. As the requested federal intelligence and government agencies are already required to and enforce through their respective strict policies and procedures multiple cross-security checks to verify and assess the national security risk of each refugee. In addition, U.S. immigration law bars entry from the U.S. for any person “who is believed to be seeking to enter the U.S. to engage in unlawful activity” and “people who have been associated with a terrorist organization and intend to engage in activities in the U.S. that could endanger the welfare, safety, or security of the U.S.

The Refugee Resettlement Oversight and Security Act of 2015, H.R. 3573 if enacted would amend the INA to limit and effectively prohibit the number of refugees allowed to enter the U.S. where there is an unwillingness or inability to work together. The language of H.R. 3573 prohibits the acceptance of refugees approved through the federal agencies screening process unless a joint resolution is enacted into law by Congress that sets the number of refugees for the fiscal year. This is seriously troubling for several reasons: 1) the U.S. needs the flexibility to be able to sufficiently respond to refugee crisis and humanitarian needs as they fluctuate and/or an unanticipated armed conflict, war, genocide and/or environmental disaster occurs, and not be confined to a specific number; and 2) where there is not bipartisanship, politics will determine whether or not we can provide a safe haven to refugees fleeing for their lives, rather than capacity and feasibility.

Section 5 of H.R. 3573 goes further and impermissibly authorize selective discrimination on the basis of religion, by providing that refugees from religious minority groups are given preferential treatment and are prioritized for entry. Not only is this impermissible but refugee eligibility on the basis of persecution because of one’s religion is already provided for and identified as a protected characteristic. This demonstrates that the underlying intention of this provision and the legislation overall is to allow only for Christian refugees to be granted entrance into the U.S., which is fairly due to Islamophobia and improper correlation of Islam with terrorism.



American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee

### *Conclusion*

All Syrian refugees fear ISIS and terrorism as much if not more than Americans, like any human being. Syrian refugees are the daily targets and victims, suffering immense direct persecution by ISIS. The only difference is their chance of birth in a country that cannot protect them. Syrian refugees have been forced to live under siege, military invasions, plane and suicide bombings, rubble and destruction – terrorism – many for most of their lives. From World War II to Vietnam, America has always opened its doors to those in need of safe harbor, welcoming half a million refugees from Cuba and three quarters of a million from Vietnam, and today should be no different.





**Written Statement of Asian Americans Advancing Justice**

**House Judiciary Committee  
Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security**

**Hearing on “The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Security of the  
U.S. Refugee Admissions Program”**

**November 19, 2015**

Asian Americans Advancing Justice (Advancing Justice) is a national partnership of five non-profit, non-partisan organizations that work to advance the human and civil rights of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (APIs) through advocacy, public policy, public education, and litigation. We are based in Washington D.C., Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

We appreciate this opportunity to submit a statement concerning today’s hearing on America’s refugee policies. The overwhelming majority of Asian Americans today are immigrants or the children of immigrants. Many Asian immigrants came and still come to the United States as refugees due to volatile conditions, war or strife in their countries of origin. Between 1975 and 2006, the United States admitted 1,306,355 East Asians as refugees to the United States, more than half of the total 2,671,012 refugee population. Asian refugees increased in recent years and now many Burmese and Bhutanese nationals come to the United States as refugees. For example, in 2011, more than half of new refugees arriving in the United States are from Burma and Bhutan combined. As a result of our own community’s experience, we are deeply committed to strong and robust humanitarian protections for refugees and asylum-seekers.

Around the world, more than 60 million individuals are displaced from their homes. Due to the Syrian crisis alone, more than eight million people are internally displaced and four million are seeking refuge in the region and in Europe. Seventy-six percent of these refugees are women and children. Advancing Justice is deeply disappointed that this Subcommittee chose to focus today on the alleged “terrorist” threat from refugees. We call upon this Subcommittee to use this opportunity to discuss how the United States can welcome more people fleeing harm and provide better support for refugees already in our communities, rather than closing our doors.

Since 9/11, and even before, immigrants have been unfairly targeted for suspicion of terrorism or other threats to national security. In 2002, the Department of Homeland Security established the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) program, requiring male visa-holders over the age of 16 from predominantly Arab and Muslim countries to register with local immigration offices. Around 84,000 Arab and Muslim men registered voluntarily and over 14,000 of them were deported for complying with the program, sending shockwaves through Arab and South Asian communities. Many individuals who came forward and registered under

the NSEERS program were detained and deported for infractions of immigration law, principally overstaying a visa. While the NSEERS program was rolled back in 2011, thousands of Arab and South Asians are still battling removal proceedings as a result of the initiative, and the religious fear politics of 9/11 continues to be used to justify discrimination against Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim and South Asian individuals.

Moreover, we have seen a continuation of these overreaching government policies that rely on the pretext of national security to unfairly target the communities we serve. For example, we have learned that DHS has adopted a de facto policy of flatly denying parole and imposing disproportionately high bond to Bangladeshi asylum seekers fleeing political persecution as members of the opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP), which DHS claims without credible basis is a Tier III terrorist organization. Even putting aside the hypocrisy of this position in light of the fact that the U.S. was an ally of the BNP when it was Bangladesh's ruling party as recently as in 2004,<sup>1</sup> DHS's position is a prime example of why we must question a rush to judgment that entire refugee populations are somehow suspect as terrorist threats.

Concerns about national security have also more broadly and directly affected refugees and asylum-seekers. In 2009, Human Rights First reported at the time "over 7,500 cases pending before [DHS] are on indefinite hold based on some actual or perceived issue relating to the immigration law's 'terrorism'-related provisions."<sup>2</sup> Further, the "overwhelming majority" of those cases on hold were family reunification petitions or applications for permanent residence filed by people granted asylum or refugee status several years ago.<sup>3</sup>

Given that many of today's displaced persons and refugees are from Syria and other predominantly Muslim countries, we are disappointed that today's hearing appears to be triggered by unfounded concerns about the motivations or intentions of refugees and asylum-seekers from certain countries. The refugee resettlement program is already the most difficult way to enter the United States, routinely taking individuals several years to be processed. All refugees undergo thorough and rigorous security screenings prior to arriving in the United States, including but not limited to multiple biographic and identity investigations; FBI biometric checks; in-depth, in-person interviews by Department of Homeland Security officers; medical screenings; investigations by the National Counterterrorism Center, and other checks by U.S. domestic and international intelligence agencies. In addition, other measures such as mandatory supervisory review of all decisions, random case assignment, and forensic document testing are in place to maintain the security of the refugee resettlement program.

Our existing immigration laws related to terrorism are overly broad and unfairly deny relief to many otherwise eligible individuals seeking shelter. While we must protect against real threats to

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., OFFICE OF THE COORDINATOR FOR COUNTERTERRORISM, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE, 2004 COUNTRY REPORTS ON TERRORISM 72-73 (2005), available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/45322.pdf> (noting that in 2004, Bangladesh supported the global war on terror and that the United States was assisting Bangladesh's capacity to combat terrorism).

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights First, "Denial and Delay: The Impact of Immigration Law's "Terrorism Bars" on Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the United States," (November 2009), available at <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/RPP-DenialandDelay-FULL-111009-web.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

national security and public safety, we should not let fear and prejudice guide our decisions about whom to welcome to America.

Sadly, in the aftermath of recently deadly and brutal attacks in Paris, Beirut and Baghdad, even limited efforts by the United States to resettle more Syrian refugees in the United States are being met with a brutal political backlash designed to incite fear and foment hate. Since the attacks, dozens of governors have declared they will not help resettle Syrian refugees in their states. Indeed, some members of this committee have urged President Obama to stop admitting Syrian refugees during this time of great need. And news reports indicate the House will vote this week to temporarily halt the admission of Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

We must be careful not to act impulsively in response to this violence; instead we must have a measured and focused response more likely to actually address the root cause. The security of our country and its residents is paramount. But the kneejerk response of many, to blame refugees, does not reflect our country's history and values. Advancing Justice strongly urges this Subcommittee to devote its time and resources to developing strong policies that promote the human rights, peace and security of people across the globe.

Nov. 19, 2015

Dear Congressperson,

As national Catholic organizations advocating for justice and peace, we speak from the experience of our members who serve on the ground around the world with those who are suffering, including refugees fleeing from violent conflict. We know their stories, their heartbreak, their fear, and their persistent efforts to survive, even flourish.

We repudiate the recent attacks in Beirut, Paris, Baghdad, Raqqa and in too many other places around the world. We know families and communities are suffering and our prayers are with them. We deeply believe that violence will not prevail and that the memories of those who have been killed will inspire sustainable solutions to such horrific violence.

We cannot, however, let our grief and fear blind us to the desperation and despair of another group of victims: the millions and millions of refugees fleeing for safety from Syria. For many years, people in Syria and Iraq have been inundated with violence in their home countries and fleeing from the same type of violence we saw in Beirut and Paris. The world watched with horror as the body of a three year old Syrian boy washed onto Turkey's shore, yet families continue to lose their lives daily as leaders debate how to respond.

Pope Francis proclaimed that "refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are children, women, and men who leave or who are forced to leave their homes...the flesh of Christ is in the flesh of the refugees: their flesh is the flesh of Christ."

That many governors and presidential candidates would have the United States stop accepting Syrian refugees or accept only Christians is both deplorable and a form of structural violence. The faithful response is to open our hearts and our homes to Syrians of all faiths in recognition of our sacred call to protect and nourish life.

To reject Syrian refugees out of fear would be wrong. The U.S. government handpicks and thoroughly vets the refugees who resettle here. All refugees resettled in the United States undergo rigorous security screenings by the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the Department of Defense and multiple intelligence agencies; these include biometric checks, forensic testing, medical screenings and in-person interviews.

This is not an either/or situation. The United States can continue to welcome refugees while also continuing to provide an environment of safety. We must do both.

Further, we strongly urge your support for the diplomatic efforts being made in Vienna to de-escalate the violence in Syria, which will be a significant step to mitigating the refugee crisis.

In sum, it is precisely the willingness to welcome the other, i.e. the virtue of hospitality, and the practice of inclusion, that groups like ISIS oppose. If we refuse to welcome refugees in urgent need, we risk becoming like those we claim to deplore. We pray that in your discernment, compassion for the plight of refugees will touch your hearts.

Sincerely,

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good  
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach  
Conference of Major Superiors of Men  
Faith in Public Life, Catholic Program  
Franciscan Action Network  
Ignatian Solidarity Network  
Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States  
Leadership Conference of Women Religious  
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby  
Pax Christi USA  
Pax Christi International  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Institute Justice Team



The  
CENTER for  
VICTIMS of  
TORTURE

**Statement Submitted by the Center for Victims of Torture to the  
U.S. House Judiciary Committee  
“The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the  
Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program”  
November 19, 2015**

The Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) welcomes the opportunity to submit a statement for this timely and important hearing on the Syrian refugee crisis and the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). CVT provides healing services to survivors of torture and severe war atrocities at its clinics in the United States, the Middle East and Africa and engages in training and capacity building initiatives in support of torture survivor rehabilitation programs worldwide.

CVT’s largest program serves urban refugees in Jordan. In 2015, CVT provided inter-disciplinary counseling, physical therapy and social work services to over 1,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees who come to us with severe psychological and physical wounds resulting from torture and other traumatic experiences. For example, a CVT psychotherapist trainer recounted the story of her client, “Jana,” who was detained and tortured when she was almost 11 years old:

*Jana was put with the other children in a dungeon underground in the dark for 22 days. They were beaten by four soldiers using guns and hoses, and were humiliated verbally... [She] witnessed the death of another child as a result of being tortured. The boy was beaten on his head using a hose and he was crying for help. The child was left bleeding until he died... Jana was extremely affected physically and psychologically by this experience... [She] developed severe PTSD symptoms, depression and anxiety... [She] became socially withdrawn, had nightmares about watching her friend being killed, guilt feelings as she recalled the boy’s voice crying for help as he was bleeding and she couldn’t help him. She would re-experience her trauma when she heard other children at home cry or scream, reminding her of the other children who were tortured.<sup>1</sup>*

As the House Judiciary Committee considers the Syrian refugee crisis and the role that USRAP can play in saving the lives of Syrian families and offering them new hope, CVT urges the honorable members of the Committee to not conflate the victims of terrorist activities and/or mass government-sponsored atrocities with the perpetrators of such horrific acts. At all of CVT’s programs that are helping survivors heal from severely traumatic experiences associated with war, violence, terrorism and government repression, we see the psychological, physical, economic, and security-related impacts of such horrors every day. CVT abhors the brutal and inhumane tactics that have been employed in the course of the Syrian conflict and by terrorist organizations with roots or bases in Syria. We stand in solidarity with efforts to bring perpetrators on all sides of the conflict to justice. We also support measures to ensure that the United States is not a safe haven for human rights violators and that USRAP is not exploited as a way for terrorists to enter the United States. At the same time, we believe that national security protections and a robust refugee resettlement program are not mutually exclusive.

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<sup>1</sup>Abbasi, Reem, “The Joy of Seeing Joy, Hope, Dignity and Spirit Restored in Victims of Torture,” MinnPost, October 2, 2015, <http://www.minnpost.com/community-voices/2015/10/joy-seeing-hope-dignity-and-spirit-restored-victims-torture>.

As explained in greater detail below, Syrian families are suffering. Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey are overwhelmed by the numbers of refugees in need of protection within their borders. Desperation is leading Syrians to assume huge risks in taking the dangerous journey to Europe and the refugee crisis in the Middle East has become a crisis in Europe. Believing that the United States can and must do more, CVT continues to call for the United States to commit to resettling 200,000 refugees in FY 2016, with 100,000 of them being Syrian. Likewise, given the high prevalence rates of torture and trauma among all refugee populations, including Syrians, CVT continues to call for increased investments in specialized trauma rehabilitation services for refugee survivors of torture in the United States.

### **The Syrian Refugee Crisis**

As the conflict in Syria shows few signs of subsiding and its spill-over effects are increasingly evident—including through the rise and expansion of ISIS and the escalation of violence in Iraq—the levels of suffering, damage and despair throughout the region are immense. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that over 4 million Syrians are registered as refugees, with the majority in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.<sup>2</sup> The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that 7.6 million people are displaced internally in Syria, with 12.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>3</sup>

Without the prospect of returning home in the near future and conditions for refugees in highly strained host communities ranging from challenging to hostile to impossible, refugees are becoming more frustrated and more desperate.<sup>4</sup> As United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres stated, “One thing is clear: the situation in the region has become utterly unsustainable,” calling the crisis, “a cancer that risks spreading and metastasizing.”<sup>5</sup>

At CVT’s program in Jordan, clients report that life is extraordinarily challenging for refugees. One CVT client commented, “We are like the living dead here.” Work authorization is highly restricted and most refugees in Jordan do not have permission to work legally and earn a living. Simultaneously humanitarian assistance is being reduced or cut, leaving refugees in an impossible situation of having neither the means nor the opportunity to meet their basic needs of shelter, food, medical assistance and education. A CVT staff member in Jordan explained, “Syrians are feeling anger and frustration. Before they had the belief about returning, now they are stuck and they don’t know what to do.”

Given that children are less at risk of being punished or deported for violating labor restrictions, families are sending them to work, disrupting their limited educational opportunities and upsetting traditional family dynamics as children assume the role of the family’s breadwinner. Meanwhile, as children and as refugees, they are highly vulnerable to dangerous work environments and to being exploited by

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<sup>2</sup> U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees: Syrian Regional Refugee Response, July 15, 2015, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

<sup>3</sup> U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: Syrian Arab Republic Crisis Overview, September 2015, <http://www.unocha.org/syria>.

<sup>4</sup> CARE International in Jordan, Five Years into Exile: The challenges faced by Syrian refugees outside camps in Jordan and how they and their host communities are coping, June 30, 2015, <http://www.care-international.org/uploaddocument/news/publications/english/care%20five%20years%20into%20exile%20exec%20summary%202015%20print%20final%20recut.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Gladstone, Rick, “U.N. Refugee Official Calls Situation in Syria and Iraq ‘Unsustainable,’” The New York Times, April 24, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/25/world/middleeast/un-refugee-official-calls-situation-in-syria-and-iraq-unsustainable.html>.

unscrupulous employers. A Syrian mother lamented about her teenage sons who are now responsible for supporting the family, including her daughter with a rare and costly medical condition, “Three years ago they were children and we had their father and suddenly they became adults with many responsibilities.”

Ultimately, the long-term solution to the Syrian refugee crisis will have to come through a peace process that creates the conditions for refugees to return home safely and voluntarily. However, there are few signs of the conflict ending soon and the immediate needs of refugees and host communities must be addressed in the short term. As part of this, the United States must substantially increase the number of Syrians it resettles in the coming years. Refugee resettlement not only helps address the immediate protection needs of some of the most vulnerable of refugees, it is also a vital component of international-responsibility sharing.

USRAP’s eligibility criteria and scrutiny are so rigorous at each stage refugees are the most thoroughly screened people to travel into the United States. Prior to being admitted, all refugees undergo a series of meticulous security screenings conducted by the U.S. government. These checks include multiple biographic and identity investigations; FBI biometric checks of fingerprints and photographs; in-depth, in-person interviews by specialized and well-trained Department of Homeland Security officers; medical screenings; and other checks by U.S. domestic and international intelligence agencies including the National Counterterrorism Center and National Security Council.<sup>6</sup>

The recent announcement by the Obama Administration of its intention to resettle 85,000 refugees in FY 2016, including at least 10,000 Syrian refugees, is a step forward. Thus far, the United States has only resettled 1,854 refugees.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, given the scale and severity of refugee needs globally, current U.S. resettlement goals are still far more modest than the number of people the United States can and should welcome.

***Recommendation: The United States should commit to resettling 200,000 refugees in FY 2016 with 100,000 of them being from Syria.***

### **Torture Survivors Resettled to the United States**

USRAP seeks to prioritize for resettlement the most vulnerable and those with the greatest humanitarian need. Annually, among the refugees who meet that criteria are thousands of survivors of torture and their families who are being given a chance to rebuild their lives in the United States.

Torture is the intentional infliction of severe pain and suffering, physical or psychological, upon another individual. Torture survivors come from all walks of life and corners of the globe. Some were journalists or pro-democracy activists who were targeted by oppressive regimes for their activities, while some were targeted for trying to practice their religion or live in accordance with their own sexual orientation or gender identity. Others were punished because of the activities of family members or friends, while

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<sup>6</sup> Center for American Progress, “Infographic: The Screening Process for Entry to the United States for Syrian Refugees,” <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2015/11/18/125812/infographic-the-screening-process-for-entry-to-the-united-states-for-syrian-refugees/>.

<sup>7</sup> New York Times, “Paris Attack Intensifies Debate Over How Many Syrian Refugees to Allow into the U.S.,” <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/10/21/us/where-syrian-refugees-are-in-the-united-states.html>, November 16, 2015.

others were targeted because of humanitarian aid activities. Some were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Amnesty International found cases of torture committed by government officials in 141 countries between January 2009 and May 2013.<sup>8</sup>

For nearly 20 years, CVT has estimated that 400,000 – 500,000 refugee torture survivors live in the United States. However, based upon a meta-analysis of previous research studies, CVT has concluded that the number of refugee torture survivors in the United States could be nearly three times the previous estimate, making the refugee torture prevalence rate as high as 44 percent.<sup>9</sup> Applying this percentage to the more than 3 million refugees who have arrived in the United States since 1975, the number of refugee torture survivors in the United States could be as high as 1.3 million without including the number of torture survivors who have been granted asylum status or other forms of immigration relief.<sup>10</sup>

Survivors report being subjected to severe beatings, rape, deprivation, and witness to murder and torture of family members. These experiences commonly lead survivors to demonstrate symptoms such as chronic pain in muscles and joints, headaches, incessant nightmares and other sleep disorders, stomach pain and nausea, severe depression and anxiety, guilt, self-hatred, the inability to concentrate, thoughts of suicide and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Studies suggest that 40-50% of refugees who survived torture experience posttraumatic stress disorder and/or major depressive disorder and thus often require mental health care to facilitate effective integration into communities and economies.<sup>11</sup>

Effective torture survivor rehabilitation programs are able to address a survivor's physical, psychological, legal and social needs to reduce their suffering and restore functioning as quickly as possible. There are more than 40 specialized torture survivor rehabilitation programs operating in 25 states and the District of Columbia. However, all of these programs are under-resourced, under-staffed and face demands that far exceed capacity. Thus, current programming is only meeting a small fraction of the people in need and greater investments are required in order to ensure that survivors of torture have access to this lifesaving assistance.

***Recommendation: Congress should increase funding to the Office of Refugee Resettlement Survivor of Torture program and pass the Torture Victims Relief Act of 2015, a bi-partisan bill championed by Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Congressman Chris Smith (R-NJ/4<sup>th</sup>).***

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<sup>8</sup> Amnesty International, "Torture in 2014: 30 Years of Broken Promises," <http://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/act400042014en.pdf>, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Higson-Smith, Craig, "Updating the Estimate of Refugees Resettled in the United States who Have Suffered Torture," The Center for Victims of Torture, September 29, 2015, [http://www.cvt.org/sites/cvt.org/files/SurvivorNumberMetaAnalysis\\_Sept2015.pdf](http://www.cvt.org/sites/cvt.org/files/SurvivorNumberMetaAnalysis_Sept2015.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration: Refugee Admissions, <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/>.

<sup>11</sup> Steel Z, Chey T, Silove D, Marnane C, Bryant RA, van Ommeren M., "Association of torture and other potentially traumatic events with mental health outcomes among populations exposed to mass conflict and displacement: a systematic review and meta-analysis," Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), August 2009, abstract available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19654388>.



**CRCNA Statement to the U.S. House of Representatives' record on the American Security Against Foreign Enemies Act of 2015  
Thursday, November 19, 2015**

As Executive Director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, I lament the attacks in Beirut, Baghdad, and Paris on November 12 and 13 and would like to express my grief for the victims and their families.

In the wake of these attacks, anti-refugee sentiment has greatly increased throughout the world. Refugees -- who are fleeing from the violence of terrorism -- should not be scapegoated for these extreme acts of violence. As Christians, we must speak clearly and loudly: we are called to welcome the stranger, protect the vulnerable, and love fearlessly. We are called to respond with love even amidst our fear.

The world is still facing the largest refugee crisis in recorded history. We must continue to have compassion for the vulnerable individuals fleeing conflict in Syria. Refugees already go through security screenings that can take up to 1,000 days; unnecessary additions to the process would be neither compassionate nor caring.

The Christian Reformed Church has a long history of welcoming the vulnerable and helping to resettle refugees in safe communities. The CRCNA pledges to fully participate in resettling Syrians of all religions during this current crisis as it has done with refugees from Iraq, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Cuba, Vietnam, and elsewhere.

Sincerely,

Dr. Steve Timmermans  
Executive Director, CRCNA

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# **HEARING: THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SECURITY OF THE U.S. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM**

**In the Wake of Attacks in Paris, Beirut and Baghdad**

**We Urge Justice and Compassion, Not Vengeance and Hatred**

The Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach joins with people of all religious traditions to condemn the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, Beirut and Baghdad, and offer our deepest condolences to the families of the victims and survivors. We pray for an end to the senseless violence in Syria, which has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people these past four years.

For many years now, and in many countries, Columbans have worked with migrants and refugees, offering them hospitality and assistance as they seek to build a new life in a foreign country. In the United States, the Columban Mission Center in El Paso, TX has welcomed unaccompanied minors and migrants fleeing the violence in Central America and Mexico, while the Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach in Washington DC continues to work for comprehensive immigration reform.

In recent months, hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees have fled the violence in their home to seek refuge in Europe. They should not be punished for the acts of terrorists who have taken advantage of the refugee route to commit heinous crimes in other nations. We urge our political leaders and fellow citizens in all nations to open their hearts and borders to the millions of Syrian refugees who have fled their homes in search of safety and asylum.

The refugees are not our enemy: they are our sisters and brothers, families with children, people like us who seek safety and shelter in a time of crisis.

These refugees are victims of the same terrorist violence that killed hundreds of innocent people this past weekend. We must respond to them with justice and compassion, not vengeance and hatred. We must bring to justice those who committed these heinous crimes, but let us also welcome their victims with compassion.

And let us not forget so soon the message of Pope Francis on his recent visit to the United States, when he reminded us:

*“Our world is facing a refugee crisis of a magnitude not seen since the Second World War. This presents us with great challenges and many hard decisions.”*

*“All too often, those most in need of our help are unable to be heard. You are their voice, and many of you have faithfully made their cry heard.”*



## COLUMBAN CENTER FOR ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH

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*“In this witness, which frequently encounters powerful resistance, you remind American democracy of the ideals for which it was founded, and that society is weakened whenever and wherever injustice prevails.”*

We urge our fellow citizens, religious and political leaders alike, to not turn our backs on the Syrian refugees.

Since the beginning of the conflict, nearly 12 million Syrians have fled their homes. This amounts to nearly half of the country’s population, who are now deprived of their basic rights to shelter and adequate housing, security and human dignity. More than 4 million people, most of them women and children, are staying in neighboring countries, and a further 8 million people are believed to be internally displaced.

We urge President Obama and the leaders of Congress to not close our doors to the Syrian refugees. Now more than ever they need our support. Let us respond with justice and compassion.

Ending the war and saving lives must be our top priority. To that end, a return to internationally mediated negotiations is imperative in order to pursue a political transition to a free and democratic state.

But while the war continues, and refugees flee their homes to protect their lives and the lives of their families, we must not turn them away from our borders, or punish them for the acts of the very terrorists from whom they are fleeing.

Remember, as Pope Francis reminded us, we too were once foreigners in a foreign land. Let us not be afraid to respond with justice and compassion.

Rev. Timothy Mulroy, SSC  
U.S. Regional Director  
Missionary Society of St. Columban

*The Missionary Society of St. Columban is a Catholic missionary order founded in 1918.*

*“As missionary disciples of Jesus, we are called to heal, reconcile, build bridges, and create mutual understanding through prophetic dialogue. Our commitment to inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue, solidarity with marginalized people and the exploited earth are ways we participate in God’s mission. Our proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus challenges us to build communities of peace.”*



**CWS Statement to the U.S. House of Representatives' Judiciary Committee, pertaining to its hearing  
*The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program*  
Thursday, November 19, 2015**

As a 69-year old humanitarian organization representing 37 Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox communions and 33 refugee resettlement offices across the country, Church World Service urges the Committee, as it discusses Syrian refugees, to affirm the importance of the U.S. refugee resettlement program, which has the most robust screening procedures in the world. CWS urges all Members of the Committee to reject any proposals that would stop the resettlement of Syrian refugees or put at risk vital funding for refugee protection overseas and resettlement in the United States.

Syria is experiencing the worst humanitarian crisis the world has seen in twenty years, with approximately four million refugees and eight million internally displaced persons. Roughly three-quarters of those displaced are women and children. Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt currently host more than three million Syrian refugees. This crisis is complex and requires a variety of solutions, including refugee resettlement, which plays a strategic role in alleviating pressure on host countries in the region, demonstrating international leadership, and providing durable solutions and opportunities for a new life for vulnerable populations fleeing persecution. While less than one percent of the world's estimated 19.5 million refugees are resettled to a third country, resettlement saves lives and also helps encourage other countries to provide durable solutions for refugees within their borders, including local integration.

The United States is one of 28 countries that resettles refugees. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is a public-private partnership that helps rescue refugees who have no other means of finding safety. To be considered a refugee, individuals must prove that they have fled persecution due to their nationality, ethnicity, religion, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Refugees face three options: return to their home country, integrate in the country to which they first fled or be resettled to a third country. For the millions who are unable to return home due to significant threats to their safety and rejection by the country to which they first fled, resettlement is the last resort. While traditionally a world leader in refugee resettlement, the United States has only resettled about 2,000 Syrian refugees. During World War II, the United States admitted more than 650,000 displaced Europeans, and following the fall of Saigon, annual resettlement numbers ranged from 100,000 to more than 200,000 throughout the 1980s.

The refugee resettlement program is the most difficult way to enter the United States, routinely taking individuals longer than 1,000 days to be processed. Security measures are intrinsic to the integrity of the refugee program, and over the years, the U.S. government has continuously fine-tuned the system to maximize domestic security. All refugees undergo thorough and rigorous security screenings prior to arriving in the United States, including but not limited to multiple biographic and identity investigations; FBI biometric checks of applicants' fingerprints and photographs; in-depth, in-person interviews by well-trained Department of Homeland Security officers; medical screenings; investigations by the National Counterterrorism Center; and other checks by U.S. domestic and international intelligence agencies. In addition, mandatory supervisory review of all decisions; random case assignment; inter-agency national security teams; trained document experts; forensic testing of documents; and interpreter monitoring are in place to maintain the security of the refugee resettlement program. Due to technological advances, Syrian refugees are also undergoing iris scans to confirm their identity through the process. Thus, refugees are the most vetted individuals to travel to the United States.

U.S. communities, schools, congregations, and employers welcome refugees and help them integrate in their new homes. In turn, refugees contribute to their new communities with their innovative skills, dedicated work, and inspiring perseverance. Through the Matching Grant Program, 80% of refugees find employment and become self sufficient within their first four to six months in the United States, an impressive success rate during an economic downturn and given the difficulty of learning a new language and rebuilding one's life in a new country. Refugees provide substantial contributions to the workforce and to local economic development. Many refugees are highly skilled and obtained high levels of education in their home countries. Additionally, refugees frequently begin successful business ventures after resettling in the United States and participate in civic engagement activities to give back to their new communities.

CWS calls on Congress to support resettlement as a lifesaving program and affirm the need to increase the resettlement of Syrian refugees during this time of crisis. Proposals to stop the resettlement of Syrian refugees are reminiscent of sobering times in this nation's history, when U.S. law specifically prohibited persons of Chinese descent from immigrating to the United States, when the coastguard returned Jewish people back to Germany during the Holocaust, and when the military imprisoned Japanese Americans in internment camps. History will judge us all in this moment, when we had the opportunity to stand in solidarity with the victims of ISIS and work together to defeat hate, or to instead turn our backs on them in cruel irony. We call on our elected officials to stand with the millions of Americans across the country who are donating to help refugees abroad and volunteering to welcome refugees in their communities. CWS stands committed to working with both chambers of Congress and the Administration to resettle Syrian refugees as part of the implementation of our foreign policy and humanitarian responsibilities. We urge all Members of Congress to support these efforts to provide safety to vulnerable refugees from Syria and beyond.



DISCIPLES HOME MISSIONS STATEMENT  
TO THE U.S. HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE, FOR THE NOVEMBER 19, 2015 HEARING ON:  
**THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SECURITY OF THE  
U.S. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM**

As a North American Christian faith movement of over 600,000 which was birthed on the American frontier, our congregations have long cherished the principle of freedom of religion for communities of all backgrounds. We are grateful to be part of a faith tradition that has spoken again and again of our key faith value of welcoming the stranger despite religious or cultural background. Since WWII, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the U.S. and Canada has worked through our Disciples Home Missions office of Refugee & Immigration Ministries, in partnership with Church World Service, to resettle over 40,000 refugees in the past six decades.

Now, in these days when our world is facing the worst humanitarian crisis since the end of World War II, we re-affirm strongly our readiness to continue to embrace refugees, and to welcome them without exclusion. We are ready to do so because we are called to love our neighbor as ourselves. Indeed, in light of the reality of over 60 million displaced persons and 20 million refugees in the world, we urge congress to support a greatly increased number of refugee arrivals in the coming years. We are aware that Secretary of State Kerry has requested the U.S. to resettle 85,000 overall refugees in 2016 and 100,000 in 2017.

Instead, we strive for a greater goal of hospitality—one which our history has shown is attainable through strong community and government partnerships. We believe that, just as the U.S. admitted over 650,000 European refugees during WWII, and between 100,000-200,000 Southeast Asian refugees for over a decade and a half after the Vietnam War, we are capable now to safely admit even greater numbers than the recommended 85,000 in 2016 and 100,000 in 2017. We also urge Congress to expedite the processing of Syrian refugee applications, and improve refugee admissions processes to reduce waiting times for long-suffering families. Further, we recognize that the multiple existing levels of refugee security screenings mean refugees are the most heavily scrutinized of all arrivals into the United States. This amount of security is appropriate and of greatest importance. However, we encourage Congress to take note that refugees are the most thoroughly vetted group of people who ever enter the United States, with rigorous screenings that engage the Dept. of Homeland Security, FBI, Dept. of Defense, and multiple intelligence agencies. We must support these screenings, while at the same time continuing to welcome refugees who have the same enemy of "ISIS".

In our international partnerships in mission, we have consistently observed families struggling desperately to stay together, and even to remain alive, because of the spiral of violence in their homelands. We commend the U.S. commitment of \$4.5 billion to the region. Yet, as we encourage other international communities to increase their contributions, we advocate for the U.S. to offer additional humanitarian aid to counter root causes in the Middle East, where the majority of refugees remain. Together with multiple faith partners, we urge that a negotiated solution to the Syria crisis be made a top U.S. diplomatic priority, and that armed involvement of partners must cease, together with provision of arms, and training of opposition groups.

We see many Christians, Muslims, Jews, and families of other faiths persecuted. As we support relationships of peace and solidarity across religious divides internationally, we are absolutely opposed to any legislation here in the U.S. that would prioritize Christian refugees at the expense or rejection of Muslim refugees and individuals of other faiths. Rather, we must counter anti-Muslim sentiment at every turn—allowing us to offer protection to Syrian refugees who are our world's most vulnerable. By so doing, we will welcome opportunities for relationship with hard working doctors, lawyers, teachers, business owners, coaches, pastors, imams.

There is a moral challenge directly before us. Our congregations are calling us constantly, expressing their willingness to help house, teach English, mentor, employ, and surround the world's most vulnerable people. Members of Congress, we urge you to do all you can to open these doors of opportunities for the world's most vulnerable persons—and we are ready to continuing to partner in welcoming all who come to our shores.



# Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc.

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*Empowering refugees and immigrants since 1983*

## **Statement for the Record on**

### **“The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program”**

#### **House of Representatives Judiciary Committee**

**Thursday, November 19, 2015**

The Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc. (ECDC) appreciates the opportunity to submit its views on the Syrian refugee crisis and the United States’ security policies. Since 1983, ECDC has been committed to serving the uprooted and helping them establish new homes and lives with their families in the United States.

The Syrian crisis has become one of the most defining emergencies of this decade, with millions fleeing to parts of Europe and other locations around the world. As per the 1951 United Nations Convention definition of a “refugee,” they are moved by their great sense of fear of persecution, and are willing to put their lives at risk in order to attempt to bring themselves and their families toward re-establishing a normal life. These refugees are not proponents of the terrible acts of terrorism in Paris and Beirut. They are seeking shelter and safety from the terror they have experienced in their homeland. Syria is no longer safe for most Syrians, because the country continues to put lives at risk. Throughout our history, the United States has been a world leader in refugee and immigrant resettlement and protection, and even with the recent tragedies across the world we must continue to support all resettlement efforts.

Though there are security concerns associated with resettling victims of the current refugee crisis, we are confident in the ability of the U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) to uphold our top-security vetting programs for incoming refugees and immigrants. We understand that there will be challenges our country will have to face, but we hope the United States government will not lose focus on the priceless cost of saving lives at risk around the world. Refugees referred to the United States by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) are the most vulnerable and highly screened entrants, and our country should not allow state officials to dictate where these legal residents can live.

“Though we are deeply saddened by these recent attacks, this will not deter us from continuing to strongly advocate on behalf of refugees. We hope that the United States Congress will see that we should not dampen our humanitarian activity and presence abroad and appreciate that refugees are safe, contributing members of our society whom we should embrace rather than reject,” ECDC President Dr. Tsehaye Teferra said.

ECDC urges the administration to continue to welcome refugees and asylum seekers impacted by the Syrian conflict and to ensure access to resettlement for the most vulnerable refugees and populations. We are committed to working with Congress and the Administration to resettle the increasing numbers of refugees, and we urge members of Congress to support U.S. efforts to provide safety to vulnerable refugees from around the world.



# Franciscan Action Network

Transforming the World in the Spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare

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## FAN Statement to the House Judiciary Committee for its November 19, 2015 Hearing: The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact

Franciscan Action Network, with 50 institutional members and approximately 12,000 Franciscans across the United States, religious and lay men and women, primarily but not totally Catholic, urges an increase in resettlement of refugees in fiscal year 2016, especially for Syrian refugees fleeing from violent conflict. With over 60 million displaced people around the world, the United States resettled fewer than 70,000 refugees this past fiscal year. Secretary of State John Kerry announced plans for our country to resettle 85,000 refugees in fiscal year 2016 and 100,000 in fiscal year 2017. This increase is very modest compared with the number of 650,000 displaced Europeans during World War II, and, following the fall of Saigon, annual resettlement numbers ranging from 100,000 to 200,000 during the 1980's.

Resettlement security measures are integral to the United States program and the government continually fine-tunes the program to maximize domestic security. All refugees undergo rigorous security screenings. Through the Matching Grant program, 80 % of refugees find employment and become self-sufficient within six months, an impressive rate of integration which also involves learning a new language. Many refugees are highly skilled and educated. Resettlement saves lives and also helps to encourage other countries to provide for refugees within their borders.

As a faith based organization, FAN heeds the call of the Scriptures and our church leaders to welcome the stranger, especially families who are fleeing violence in their home countries. We have special concern for Syrian refugees, yet the United States has resettled only 1,700 refugees from Syria. We call on our government to admit 100,000 Syrian refugees over and above annual resettlement numbers. And we urge members of Congress to heed the message of Pope Francis when he visited our country, to put a human face on the numbers of refugees.



**HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST**  
**Written Statement for**  
**House Judiciary Committee**  
**Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security**  
**2141 Rayburn House Office Building**  
**November 19, 2015**

**THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SECURITY OF**  
**THE U.S. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM**

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We are pleased to submit this statement on behalf of Human Rights First. Human Rights First works in the United States and abroad to promote a secure and humane world by advancing justice, human dignity and respect for the rule of law. Human Rights First is an independent advocacy organization that challenges America to live up to its ideals. We are a non-profit, nonpartisan international human rights organization with offices in New York, Washington D.C., and Houston, Texas.

For over 30 years, we've built bipartisan coalitions and teamed up with frontline activist and lawyers to tackle issues that demand American leadership, including the protecting of the rights and refugees who flee persecution. Protecting the persecuted is a core American value. Reflecting this country's deep-seated commitment to liber and human dignity, as well as its pledge under the 1951 Refugee Convention's Protocol, the United States has long led efforts to protect those who flee from political, religious and other persecutions.

The world is facing the largest refugee crisis since World War II and needs American leadership. The United States can protect its security while also protecting refugees from persecution. Human Rights First has condemned the brutal terrorist attacks in Paris. In the wake of those attacks, the United States

should remain true to its ideals and commitment to protect refugees who have fled persecution and violence. Refugees are more closely vetted than any other group coming to the United States. As further detailed in attached fact sheet, the current system of background and security checks for Syrian refugees being resettled to the United States is the most rigorous vetting process applied to any people coming to the United States. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees first registers refugees, interviews them, takes biometric data and background information. These refugees—overwhelmingly women and children—have been living in Jordan, Turkey or other frontline refugee-hosting countries for years, struggling to survive. The U.S. government then conducts its own extremely rigorous screening process, including health checks, repeated biometric checks, several layers of biographical and background screening, and interview conducted abroad by specially-trained Department of Homeland Security officers. Multiple agencies are involved, including the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center, the State Department, DHS, the National Counterterrorism Center, Department of Defense, and U.S. intelligence agencies. DHS has added an additional country-specific layer of enhanced review for Syrian refugee applications, which includes extra screening for national security risks.

A halt or “pause” in the U.S. resettlement system would send exactly the wrong message to the world – including to U.S. allies and to the refugees who have already been waiting for years in our resettlement process. U.S. allies in the Middle East, including Jordan and NATO ally Turkey, have been struggling for years to host Syrian refugees. They need the United States, the global resettlement leader, to launch a meaningful and robust resettlement initiative for Syrian refugees. This effort is already long overdue.

Globally about 60 million people have been forced to flee their homes. Over 4 million Syrians have fled their country, and many have been stranded for years in neighboring countries where they can't work, cannot support their families, have little access to education, and face shortages in food and other assistance due to massive underfunding of UN humanitarian aid appeals. Syria's neighbors, faced with overwhelming refugee numbers and inadequate international support, have made it more difficult for refugees to enter to seek protection or extend their stays. Meanwhile, the fighting and violence within Syria has intensified, leaving refugees with little hope that they will be able to safely return.

Many are turning to dangerous routes to reach places of safety where they can rebuild their lives. Hundreds of thousands have embarked on risky journeys in an attempt to reach Europe.

How the United States addresses this refugee crisis, particularly in the wake of the Paris terrorist attacks, will be a critical test for U.S. leadership. The United States has played a leading role in providing humanitarian assistance, giving over \$4 billion to relief efforts both within Syria and in neighboring countries. This is consistent both with U.S. leadership on humanitarian relief and its strategic interest in preventing further destabilization of the region. But the U.S. government can and should do more, including by using its unique position as a global leader to champion the protection of refugees trying to flee from Syria and to launch a meaningful resettlement initiative.

The United States has not launched a significant resettlement initiative that would demonstrate to Syria's neighbors a real commitment to share in hosting at least some of Syria's refugees and would encourage other resettlement states to follow suit. A meaningful resettlement initiative, in addition to providing a future to the individual refugees and families it would directly assist, should be seen as part of a broader effort to increase the protection space available to Syrian refugees in the region and globally.

Such a response would also help support the stability of refugee hosting states in the region including key U.S. allies like Jordan. As Ambassador Ryan Crocker pointed out this week in a [piece](#) in the Wall Street Journal: “Increased assistance would protect the stability of a region home to U.S. allies, including Jordan, NATO’s Turkey and Lebanon, all of which are hosting refugees. The infrastructure—water, sewage, medical care and education—of these states is overwhelmed. A major resettlement and aid initiative can relieve that strain. But left unaddressed, the strain will feed instability and trigger more violence across the region, which will have consequences for U.S. national security.”

The United States has long been a leader in protecting refugees and has typically resettled about half of the refugees identified as in need of resettlement each year. The United States has only resettled about 1,800 Syrian refugees since the Syrian conflict began nearly five years ago. Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon are hosting about 4 million Syrian refugees. Meanwhile Germany has announced it can host 800,000. This level of U.S. response falls far short of global leadership, and our resettlement process is much too slow, often taking two years or longer.

The United States must lead, and lead by example. Not only is it the right thing to do, but it is strategically smart. In addition to supporting Europe, a stronger refugee response will promote the stability of states bordering Syria including key U.S. allies in the region such as Jordan.

In light of this global emergency situation, we urge the United States to lead a comprehensive global initiative in partnership with European and other states to improve access to protection for refugees.

We urge the President and Congress to:

1. **Reject Efforts to Halt or “Pause” Refugee Resettlement.** Jordan, Turkey, and U.S. allies in Europe need the United States to lead global efforts to resettle refugees and to improve the pace and scale of U.S. resettlement efforts. Practically speaking, pausing a program that is already moving at a snail’s pace would be devastating. It would also exacerbate the crisis in Europe by signaling that the United States is pulling back on its already minimal resettlement efforts, prompting more refugees to try to reach Europe given the lack of timely and orderly routes to refuge. With respect to the American Safe Act, it would also prolong the already lengthy waits facing Iraqi refugees, including those who are at risk due to their work with the U.S. government or U.S. organizations and media. It would effectively shut down the resettlement of refugee families from the Syria and Iraq region, at least for months or years, and create an unworkable “certification” requirement that would make it nearly impossible to resettle any refugee families from the region given the level of bureaucratic coordination and time this process would require from very high level officials.
2. **Increase Resettlement and other Routes to Protection.** The United States should lead a global initiative that includes many countries to resettle Syrian refugees. The United States should increase its own resettlement commitment to 100,000 Syrian refugees and implement more expeditious routes to protection for Syrian refugees with family in the United States and other at-risk refugees. In the next month, the administration should appoint a high-level coordinator in the White House to oversee the refugee response. This officials should be tasked with securing significant improvements in the pace of the U.S. resettlement program. The U.S. should press other countries to sharply increase resettlement or other admission routes, and call on the European

Union to create safe and legal ways for refugees to reach Europe. Over the next six months, the United States should review and reform its delay-plagued resettlement process to be more timely and effective without compromising security.

3. **Meet humanitarian assistance goal.** The United States should lead a global push to secure 100% funding of the UN's humanitarian appeal for the Syria crisis, set a strong example by further stepping up its contribution to cover a higher percentage of the appeal, significantly increase development funding for refugee-hosting countries, press wealthy states to increase contributions and develop longer term strategies for meeting the front-line needs of refugees and hosting communities.
4. **Champion protection for refugees.** The United States should encourage states in the region neighboring Syria – and in Europe and beyond - to respect the human rights of refugees and migrants, including to allow refugees to work to support their families, to educate children, to facilitate access to higher education, and to respect obligations to protect people from arbitrary detention and return to persecution.
5. **Redouble efforts to find effective multilateral solutions to the political and security crisis** in Syria and to address the human rights abuses causing so many people to flee in search of protection.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, leading Jewish groups, major faith-based groups, and even the [Pope](#) have called on the United States to respond to this refugee crisis. Human Rights First and other leading organizations focused on refugee protection and refugee resettlement have called on the administration to resettle at least 100,000 Syrian refugees in fiscal year 2016. [Various national security professionals](#) including national security experts and officials who served in both democratic and republican administrations have called on the United States to lead by example to commit to resettling 100,000 refugees.

The United States has always led in time of international crises. This country should continue to be a beacon on human rights. Human Rights First believes that America is strongest when our policies and ideals match our actions.

## InterAction Statement of Support for Syrian Refugees

InterAction strongly condemns the devastating attacks on civilians that took place last week in France and Lebanon and all indiscriminate violence against civilians. The international community must stand together at this critical juncture to protect vulnerable people around the world.

We must not jeopardize U.S. leadership in response to the Syrian crisis by imposing new restrictions on funding for Syrian and other refugees fleeing violence and terrorism around the world. For decades, the United States has guarded its own national security while supporting refugees who seek freedom from oppression.

ISIS has claimed responsibility for the Paris and Beirut attacks and uses similar violent tactics on a daily basis against civilians in Iraq and Syria. Thousands of Syrian refugees, many of whom have been victims of violence perpetrated by ISIS, the Syrian government, and other armed actors, are arriving in Europe and Syria's neighboring countries every day searching for safety and security for their children and families. Dating back to its founding, the United States has a long, proud history of welcoming persecuted people. Instead of turning away the victims of violence in Syria, now is the time for the United States to welcome Syrian refugees and provide them with a safe haven.

The public fear of potential ISIS infiltration of the U.S. through refugee resettlement is understandable. However, since 9/11 refugees considered for resettlement in the U.S. have gone through rigorous scrutiny. Refugees are subject to exhaustive background checks, including analysis of fingerprints, photographs and personal data. Moreover, each refugee is personally interviewed by Department of Homeland Security personnel to determine eligibility for admission. This scrutiny has proved its worth over the past decade: not a single person admitted through the refugee resettlement program has been implicated in a terrorist incident in the United States. With these procedures in place, resettlement should remain an option for vulnerable Syrians.

Ultimately, the best way to address the fear of an influx of Syrian refugees is to address the causes of the flow at their source. This means pushing the administration to seek a diplomatic solution to the conflict, while providing humanitarian assistance both inside Syria and in neighboring countries.

### Background

InterAction is the largest alliance of international NGOs and partners in the U.S. Our 189 members work in every country, partnering to eliminate extreme poverty and vulnerability, strengthen human rights and citizen participation, safeguard a sustainable planet, promote peace, and ensure dignity for all people.

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**Written Statement for the Record**

**Submitted by Jennifer Sime, Senior Vice President, U.S. Programs  
International Rescue Committee**

**To, U.S. House of Representatives Judiciary Committee**

**For the Hearing: “The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program”**

**November 19, 2015**

In the wake of the horrific attacks in Paris last Friday, the United States has shown the very best of America’s compassion – the U.S. government has pledged assistance to help the French government bring those responsible to justice and individuals around the country have expressed outrage and solidarity with the victims in Paris.

Unfortunately, the compassion of some has not extended to refugees. We have seen calls to action that are entirely incompatible with fundamental American values. Among these, some elected officials have called to suspend or restrict resettlement of some refugees on the basis of national origin or religious belief. Such actions are based on fear, plain and simple, and are a rejection of American values. Turning away Syrian refugees perpetuates the very narrative of those responsible for the barbaric attacks in Paris and Beirut.

It is deeply disappointing to hear some elected officials equating Syrian refugees to the militant groups that are the very reason for their flight. Unfortunately, this is not the first time that fear has undermined our humanity and our common sense. In the late 1930s, public opinion polls showed Americans overwhelmingly opposed to the U.S. welcoming Jewish refugees to its shores. We all know what persecution awaited the very people many in the U.S. wanted to turn away. Let not history judge us poorly again.

Elected officials calling for a moratorium on Syrian refugee resettlement risk are putting themselves on the wrong side of history. They are also putting themselves on the wrong side of facts. Some officials have expressed concerns that terrorists may infiltrate the refugee resettlement program due to insufficient security measures. Such statements do not reflect reality.

Refugees are the most thoroughly vetted group of people amongst all immigrant groups who come to the U.S. Short of swimming the Atlantic, the refugee resettlement program is the most difficult way to come to the U.S.

Refugees do not self-select to be resettled; they are identified by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) on the basis of specific needs or vulnerabilities, from amongst a population that is registered and documented by UNHCR. And UNHCR meticulously screens and documents refugees' history (and takes biometric data) before even referring them to one of a dozen countries. If among the fortunate few to be referred to the U.S. resettlement program, U.S. security screenings are extremely rigorous, involving the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Defense and multiple intelligence agencies. Highly-trained DHS officials interview each refugee to determine whether they meet the refugee definition and whether they are admissible to the United States. Refugees undergo a series of biometric and investigatory background checks, including collection and analysis of personal data, fingerprints, photographs, and other background information, all of which is carefully checked by specially-trained analysts and vetted against all relevant government databases. The entire process typically takes more than two years – and often much more – before a refugee family arrives in the U.S. This is a secure program.

Maintaining the integrity of the U.S. refugee program is of paramount importance, and the IRC supports efforts by the U.S. government to ensure that program integrity is preserved. However, we are highly skeptical that adding a burdensome role for Congress in the approval of refugee resettlement applications will add any value. In fact, it would further delay the admission of refugees and effectively grind the program to a halt, all at a substantial additional cost to American taxpayers. Funds would be better used in enhancing the human resources available to the federal agencies that actually conduct refugee security checks, so that these can be performed with the same level of integrity but more quickly – bringing at-risk refugee families to safety sooner.

Banning Syrian refugees from resettlement will not make America safer. On the contrary, by feeding into ISIS propaganda that Muslims do not belong or are not welcome in the West, it makes us all less safe. An individual poses a danger to the U.S. when he or she is a violent extremist – not simply because he or she has a specific religious identity or nationality. And the U.S. can best counter violent extremists if it continues to serve as an example of multi-culturalism, religious tolerance and co-existence on its soil. Here, the U.S. is on the right side of the facts. In recent years, polls underscore Muslim-Americans' widespread feelings of integration and sense of belonging in American society. This is not the case in some European countries – where marginalization and lack of integration may be more strongly felt by Muslims. When our own leaders feed into hateful extremists' own propagandist narrative of Muslim vs. non-Muslim, it ignores America's long history of welcoming refugees of all races, religions and national origins, and integrating them into our communities and the fabric of our society. This has been one of the success stories of this country. Now is not the time to abandon this proud tradition.

European leaders recognize the importance of welcoming refugees – both for the sake of humanity and as a means of combating violent extremists. French President Francois Hollande on Wednesday reaffirmed his September pledge to resettle 30,000 Syrian refugees – even as his country still reels from last week's attack – acknowledging that with the proper security checks in place, this could be done without compromising France's national security. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, with President Obama at the G20 summit earlier this week, underscored the importance of distinguishing refugees from those who are violent. Our reaction should be to welcome – not turn away – the refugees who have been driven from their

homes, fleeing the very people who perpetrated the attacks in Paris as well as Beirut. Welcome, not rejection, makes this nation safer.

On Friday, November 13, the world caught a glimpse of what a terrorist group like ISIS is capable of. The over four million Syrian refugees who have fled their country have been subjected not just to ISIS but to violence by government forces and various other militant groups. They have been living with terror for almost five years. The Syrian crisis is a conflict that has been brutal in the indiscriminate killing of civilians. The U.S. must double down in diplomatic efforts to the end the conflict and maintain its commitment to assisting civilians affected by the brutal war – both overseas and here at home. Banning the most vulnerable Syrian refugees from resettlement would put innocent lives at risk.

The U.S. can lead the world by example of how to live together in a free, democratic and plural society. Syrian refugees will be an asset to U.S. communities, not a threat. The true threat is giving in to intolerance and fear.



### IRAP Statement on Paris and Beirut Attacks

Nov. 16, 2015

The International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) condemns the horrific attacks on Paris and Beirut last week. We must not allow these attacks to prevent vulnerable Syrian refugees from reaching safety; many of these refugees are fleeing from a brutal regime and have themselves suffered horrific attacks by ISIS. We should make these refugees feel welcome and wanted by a community that condemns extremism.

The best way to offer a humanitarian solution for refugees and promote national security is to resettle the most vulnerable refugees through the legal resettlement process, which allows the United States to conduct security checks on refugee applicants.

Refugees resettled to the United States go through the most rigorous security checks of any group of people entering our country. These thorough checks involve multiple U.S. intelligence agencies including the FBI, the Department of Defense, the National Counterterrorism Center, and others.

For more information on refugee background checks, please refer to Human Rights First's [fact sheet on refugee security screening](#) and [USCIS Director Leon Rodriguez's statement on Syrian resettlement procedures](#).

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**Statement for the Record**

**Submitted to the House Judiciary Committee**

**Hearing: "The Syrian Refugee Crisis and  
Its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program"**

**November 19, 2015**

Jesuit Refugee Service/USA (JRS/USA) is an international Catholic non-governmental organization whose mission is to accompany, serve and advocate for the rights of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. JRS works in 47 countries worldwide to meet the educational, health, social and other needs of almost 780,000 refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. JRS services are available to refugees and displaced persons regardless of their race, ethnic origin, or religious beliefs.

One of the proudest traditions of the United States has been to welcome the stranger. Through the U.S. resettlement program, we have provided a safe harbor to those fleeing violence and oppression, and an opportunity to make a new life in a country that does not just tolerate, but embraces, diversity.

In the past four decades, America has welcomed more than a million refugees from many countries, including Vietnam, Somalia, Bhutan, Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, Colombia, Burma, and, yes, Syria, to name just a few. All have been selected for vulnerability, and carefully vetted to ensure that these are freedom-seeking people, the kind that you and I would welcome as our neighbors.

Year after year, these refugees have integrated among us, adding the unique qualities of their traditions and cultures to enrich the tapestry of our communities.

To call for a halt to the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the wake of the Paris attack makes little sense. These are people who are fleeing violence visited upon their homes during the Syrian conflict, often by ISIS or by other extremist factions. Out of the millions who have fled, only a few thousands have thus far been selected as resettlement candidates, and these are those who have suffered most greatly – widows with children, trauma and torture survivors, and members of persecuted minorities.

They are, furthermore subject to the most rigorous security screening that our government has ever imposed. From initial identification to final approval, these candidates often must wait from eighteen months to two years in wretched conditions before admission to the United States because of our security standards, by far the most stringent in the world.

It is worth remembering that more than 70 million businesspeople, students, tourists, and immigrants enter the United States each year. The few thousand refugees invited to become part of our community are the most carefully selected and highly vetted of all.

In the current debate over refugee admissions, it is also important to remember that those lucky few offered resettlement are but a tiny fraction of the four million refugees in neighboring countries and ten million people who have been displaced within Syria. The vast majority of those people would far rather return to their homes than to attempt the dangerous path to Europe or endure the long wait for resettlement.

Their desperate need to move onward stems from the severe and deepening suffering and growing despair they are experiencing in their present circumstances, which have made life intolerable. Refugee parents are seeing their children going hungry, deprived of an education, lacking adequate medical care, inadequately clothed and facing another harsh winter in buildings with no windows and no heat. Worse, they can see no end in sight.

As we feel compassion for the terrible loss of the people of Paris, so we must also not forget these other victims of violence struggling to endure in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, and within Syria.

While we should feel pride that the United States has been the most generous donor to the crisis, we, and the international community, must do far more. Adequate resources must be found to relieve their suffering and to address the worsening humanitarian crisis that has led to the march of hundreds of thousands into Europe. Both our American values and our long-term hopes for peace should compel us to insist on a better response.

November 19, 2015

Dear Senator/Representative,

We, the undersigned Jewish organizations, write to express support for refugee resettlement. We urge you to oppose any legislative proposals that aim to halt U.S. resettlement efforts or restrict funding for any groups of refugees, include Syrian refugees.

In 1939, the United States refused to let the S.S. St. Louis dock in our country, sending over 900 Jewish refugees back to Europe, where many died in concentration camps. That moment was a stain on the history of our country -- a tragic decision made in a political climate of deep fear, suspicion, and antisemitism.

Last week's devastating attacks in Paris and Beirut are examples of the brutal violence that Syrian refugees are fleeing. We are disheartened to see many U.S. politicians citing these tragic events as a reason to put safe haven further out of reach for refugees. At this critical moment, when there are more refugees and displaced persons than at any time since World War II, we must protect refugees and asylum seekers, not scapegoat them.

The U.S. government has extensive security measures in place to distinguish between those fleeing violence and those seeking to commit it. In fact, refugees are the most thoroughly vetted of all types of immigrants entering the country. Security is an important part of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, as it must be, but so is compassion.

In 1939, our country turned away victims of persecution and violence. We implore you to not make that same mistake today.

Sincerely,

Ameinu  
American Jewish Committee (AJC)  
Anti-Defamation League  
Association of Jewish Family & Children's Families (AJFCA)  
Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR)  
Habonim D'ror North America  
Jewish Labor Committee  
HIAS  
National Council of Jewish Women  
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights  
Union for Reform Judaism  
Uri L'Tzedek



**House Judiciary Committee Hearing  
The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program**

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious is horrified at the violence we witness in our world and appalled by the recent acts of bloodshed in Paris, Beirut, and throughout the Middle East. We continue to pray for all who suffer as a result of these senseless acts of terror.

We also pray for the strength and courage to respond to this violence with love and mercy. We refuse to let these acts of death and destruction sow the seeds of fear and mistrust that threaten to tear our communities apart and lead inevitably to more violence and harm.

We are witnessing the largest refugee crisis since the Second World War. More than 4 million Syrians have fled violence in their homeland and 12 million more are displaced internally. Syrian refugees are fleeing exactly the kind of terror that we have witnessed in these past few weeks. More than 250,000 Syrians have lost their lives, many more have lost family, home, and community.

At a time when the world is in desperate need of humanitarian relief, some are calling for suspension of the U.S. refugee resettlement program, an end to funding for Syrians, or a rationing of mercy based on religious creed. Such restrictions violate the tenets of our faith and the principles of our nation.

We reject the false choice currently being proffered by some in Washington, state capitols across the country, and on the campaign trail. We need not choose between the gospel call to welcome the stranger and our legitimate need for security. The protection that we rightly promise the world's refugees must not be denied to Syrians fleeing for their lives. The US refugee resettlement program has rigorous and multilayered security screenings to ensure that those we admit as refugees pose no threat to our security.

The present situation presents us with great challenges and many hard decisions. As Pope Francis reminded us just a few short weeks ago in his address to Congress,

Let us remember the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (*Mt 7:12*). This Rule points us in a clear direction. Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated. Let us seek for others the same possibilities which we seek for ourselves. Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves. In a word, if we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities. The yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time will use for us.

As women religious, as citizens of the United States, we choose to stand for life and hope. We will not give in to fear. We will not allow others to divide us by race or creed or nationality and we will not turn our back on our Syrian sisters and brothers in their hour of greatest need.

**Contact:** Ann Scholz, SSND, Associate Director for Social Mission  
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**Statement for the Record on**  
**“The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Security**  
**of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program”**

**House Judiciary Committee**

**Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security**

**November 19, 2015**

**by Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service**

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) appreciates the opportunity to submit its views on the United States Refugee Admissions Program. As the national organization founded by Lutherans to serve uprooted people, LIRS is committed to helping those who have been forced to flee their homes find protection. Following God’s call in scripture to uphold justice for the sojourner, LIRS serves as a leader in calling for the protection of vulnerable migrants and refugees, including children and families from Syria.

For over 75 years, LIRS has worked to welcome over 500,000 refugees to the United States on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In Fiscal Year 2015, LIRS and its refugee resettlement network partners welcomed over 10,500 refugees to their new communities and empowered them to build new lives.

Resettlement in a third country is considered a durable solution and a last resort for only a small fraction of the world’s most vulnerable refugees. LIRS is proud to be one of nine organizations that partners with the federal government, particularly the Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) and the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to be a part of this solution.

LIRS is dismayed that despite the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) registering over 4 million Syrian refugees, half of whom are children, only a precious few Syrian refugees have been resettled in the United States. LIRS has urged the U.S. government to do far more by resettling 200,000 refugees in Fiscal Year 2016, including 100,000 Syrians. In response to past global crises, the U.S. has led the effort to resettle hundreds of thousands of refugees — a tiny fraction of those who are displaced — and America has always been better and stronger as a result.

With the support of local churches and communities, our nation has the capacity to take a bold stance in welcoming far more of these vulnerable refugees into the United States.

The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) that is located within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) agency continually achieves its dual mission to offer resettlement opportunities to eligible refugees while safeguarding the integrity of the program and the United States' national security. To protect U.S. national security, DHS provides advanced training to its refugee adjudicators on security protocols, fraud detection and fraud prevention. In addition, each refugee considered for resettlement in the United States goes through a multi-layered screening process before coming to the United States. These processes include multiple biographic and biometric checks by U.S. security vetting agencies which are routinely updated, in-person interviews with trained adjudication's officers and 'pre- departure' checks. No case is finally approved until results from all security checks have been received and analyzed.

To add unnecessary security screening mechanisms to this already robust process would needlessly harm individuals who need protection by delaying their resettlement. "Sadly, the Syrian refugee population includes severely vulnerable individuals: women and girls at risk, survivors of torture and violence, and people with serious medical needs or disabilities," said Linda Hartke, LIRS President and CEO. "LIRS and our national network stand ready to do what it takes to welcome into U.S. communities the most vulnerable Syrian refugees who cannot return home or integrate in the countries currently hosting them."

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program offers refugees safe haven and a chance at a new life, while also bringing tangible benefits to the communities that welcome them. Having endured incredible hardship and unimaginable horrors in their home countries, refugees often spend years exiled in host countries once they flee, awaiting the opportunity to rebuild their lives. Once they are resettled in a third country, refugees routinely become engaged and productive community members, contributing economically, socially, and spiritually to our communities. The support of welcoming communities, congregations, volunteers, employers, schools, foster families and others makes resettlement a successful public-private partnership. The federal government, particularly PRM and ORR, and state governments play a vital role.

In the case of Syrian refugees, the conflict continues to worsen and host countries in the region are increasingly strained and unable to offer benefits or stability. Desperate refugees are risking their lives and the lives of their entire families making dangerous journeys over land and sea to reach safety. Hundreds of thousands have arrived in Europe with the hope of a permanent solution. While most citizens in affected countries in the European Union have reacted with welcome, some governments are choosing to close and militarize their borders to keep refugees out. It is against this backdrop that LIRS and our partners will continue to call on the Administration to resettle more Syrian refugees.

### **Increased Funding Needs and Necessary Resettlement Reforms**

Resources available to individual refugee families and adults through ORR have remained stagnant for many years. To ensure that Syrian refugees resettled in the United States receive the help they need to locate housing, receive medical attention and employment assistance, among other services, and to promote self-sufficiency and long-term integration this funding must be increased. In addition, Congress must authorize and appropriate funds to meet the needs of the additional 15,000 refugees that the President has authorized for admission in FY2016.

While private support plays an important role in the reception and integration of refugees, federal resources are critical to ensure refugees receive essential services. Refugee populations arriving to the United States have changed significantly since the formal establishment of the resettlement program in the Refugee Act of 1980. Today's refugees are much more diverse and vulnerable than it was more than three decades ago. However, services lack flexibility to be responsive to the diverse strengths and needs of refugees arriving today. Furthermore, ORR's mandate has expanded over the years from serving resettled refugees to include asylees, Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa recipients, Cuban and Haitian entrants, survivors of human trafficking and torture and unaccompanied children. Because funding has not kept up with these changes in ORR's mandate and diversifying client needs, ORR has strained to provide sufficient support and services to all of the populations under its care.

### **Reforms to Terrorism-Related Inadmissibility Grounds**

Under immigration law, an individual cannot be admitted to the United States if they have provided material support, including insignificant material support, to an undesignated terrorist organization; a member of such an organization; or to an individual the individual knows, or reasonably should know, has committed or plans to commit a terrorist activity. In 2001, Congress enacted legislation that significantly broadened the definition of "terrorist activity."

As a result, refugees, including many vulnerable Syrian refugees who pose no threat to national security, face denial of protection and resettlement in the United States due to unintended consequences of the overly-broad application of the "material support to terrorist organizations" bar (and related bars) to admission. Indeed, current law threatens to exclude any Syrians who fought with any armed opposition group in Syria (regardless of whether or not the individual applicant was involved in any violations of international humanitarian law or other crimes), anyone who provided "material support" to any opposition force or opposition fighter, anyone who solicited funds or members for such a force, and even anyone whose spouse or parent is found to have done these things.

These bars are duplicative and carry severe consequences. As mentioned previously, refugees are required to pass intense security screenings and background checks as part of the admission process.

People who commit war crimes, crimes against humanity, or who persecute others are inadmissible to the United States under other provisions of our immigration laws. However, overly broad “terrorism” bars prevent the ability of the United States to provide welcome to bona fide refugees seeking safety.

### **LIRS Recommendations**

LIRS’s expertise, experience, and compassion -- drawn from decades of welcoming vulnerable newcomers -- inspires our advocacy. To address current resettlement needs facing refugees, including millions of Syrian refugees, and improve welcome for refugees in the United States, LIRS makes the following recommendations to Congress:

- **Enact pending legislation to strengthen refugee protections and resettlement**, including the bi-partisan Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act of 2015 (H.R. 1568).
- **Urge the President to authorize the admission of 100,000 Syrian refugees** in Fiscal Year 2016 through an Emergency Presidential Determination on Additional Refugee Admissions pursuant to Section 207(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act.
- **Support alternative mechanisms to resettle more Syrian refugees**, including:
  - Identifying specific groups of refugees in the region as being of particular humanitarian concern to the United States and designating them for group processing.
  - Expanding family reunification opportunities through the USRAP (through the P3 family reunification priority) to allow Syrians in legal status in the United States, even if they did not arrive as refugees, to file affidavits of relationship (AORs).
  - Allowing specific NGOs in the region to make direct resettlement referrals to the United States. The U.S. government should provide increased capacity building and training for these NGO partners so they can identify and refer the most vulnerable refugees for resettlement.
  - Utilizing iris scans and additional biometric data that UNHCR has collected for 65-67% of registered Syrian refugees. The use of this data could help reduce redundancies in the USRAP screening process.
- **Amend problematic anti-terrorism provisions** that define “material support” too broadly.
- **Ensure robust funding** of the Department of State’s, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration and the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee resettlement to better protect and assist refugees overseas and those resettled to the United States, including:

- **Funding appropriate for successful support and resettlement of the authorized 85,000 refugee admissions** in FY 2016.
- **Funding for DHS** to make more **frequent visits to the region** to conduct interviews with refugees slated for potential resettlement. When security concerns make in-person interviews impossible, DHS should consider using video conferencing for interviews.
- **Funding to decrease wait times:** Security checks are a vital part of the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and have proven successful in maintaining the program's integrity. Although these safeguards have been enhanced and updated, Congress should authorize sufficient funds such that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), other U.S. security agencies, and the White House have sufficient resources and staff to eliminate delays and redundancies to reduce the waiting time for refugees at significant risk.
- **Increased per capita funding for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)** to allow these agencies to support programming that assists communities and organizations that resettle Syrian refugees to foster a welcoming climate for them, offer services that are tailored for Syrian refugees, and include a long-term focus on their successful integration.

If you have any questions about this statement, please contact Brittney Nystrom, LIRS Director for Advocacy at [bnystrom@lirs.org](mailto:bnystrom@lirs.org) or 202.626.7943.



# MARYKNOLL OFFICE FOR GLOBAL CONCERNS

*Peace, Social Justice and Integrity of Creation*

*www.maryknollogc.org*

**For Immediate Release**

November 18, 2015

Contact: Susan Gunn, Communications manager

(202) 832-1780, Email: [sgunn@maryknoll.org](mailto:sgunn@maryknoll.org)

## **Maryknoll calls for compassionate welcome of Syrian refugees of all faith traditions**

**WASHINGTON, DC** — The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is shocked and heartbroken over the deaths of hundreds of people in recent terrorist attacks in Beirut, Paris, and Egypt. Together with our fellow members of Pax Christi International, we repudiate these despicable actions and stand in solidarity with the victims and their families.

At the same time, we are disturbed by the growing backlash to Syrian refugee resettlement in the U.S. More than twenty governors have said their states will not accept Syrian refugees, out of fear of potential terrorists entering the country --- despite the rigorous screening process by the Departments of State, Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, and the FBI. Some members of Congress are calling for the Obama Administration to halt resettlement of Syrian refugees, or to limit resettlement to Christians. Maryknoll does not support such xenophobic rhetoric.

Gerry Lee, director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns said “We stand with more than 400 religious leaders who sent a letter to members of Congress on October 1, calling on the United States to welcome Syrian refugees from all faith traditions.” (Read the full letter at <http://www.maryknollogc.org/article/mogc-signs-letter-congress-urging-us-welcome-syrian-refugees-all-faith-traditions>)

The letter included:

“As the United States joins the world in seeking ways to meaningfully respond to the Syrian refugee crisis, it is paramount that the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) stay true to its mandate to resettle the most vulnerable. Vulnerable individuals from a host of religions, ethnicities and backgrounds have been and should continue to be resettled in the United States.

“Together, representing our various faiths, we decry derogatory language that has been used about our Muslim friends and neighbors. Inflammatory rhetoric has no place in our response to this humanitarian crisis. We ask our elected officials and candidates for office to recognize that new Americans of all faiths and backgrounds contribute to our economy, our community, and our congregations. Refugees are an asset to this country. They are powerful ambassadors of the American Dream and our nation’s founding principles of equal opportunity, religious freedom, and liberty and justice for all.

“As people of faith, our values call us to welcome the stranger, love our neighbor, and stand with the vulnerable, regardless of their religion. We pray that in your discernment, compassion for the plight of refugees will touch your hearts. We urge you to be bold in choosing moral, just policies that provide refuge for vulnerable individuals seeking protection.”

*The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) represents Maryknoll missionaries, who are Catholic men and women serving in impoverished communities around the world. The MOGC provides analysis and advocacy on issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation that affect the countries and communities where Maryknoll missionaries serve.*

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**Maryknoll Sisters • Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers • Maryknoll Lay Missioners**

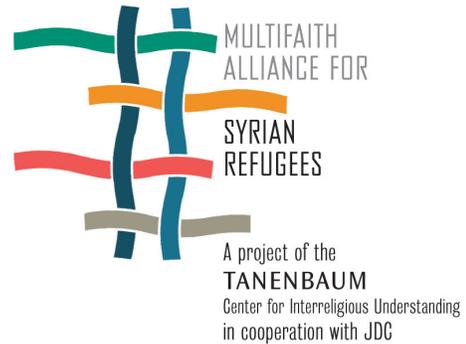
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"Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor."—Leviticus 19:16



U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary  
Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security  
Hearing: The Syrian Refugee Crisis  
and its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

Statement by Dr. Georgette F. Bennett  
Founder  
The Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees  
November 19, 2015

Chairman Gowdy, Ranking Member Lofgren, and Members of the Subcommittee:

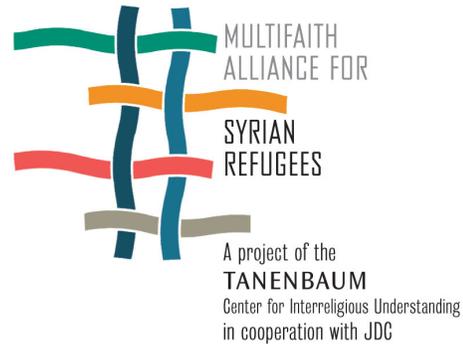
Thank you for the opportunity to submit this Statement, condemning in the strongest terms any overt anti-Muslim rhetoric or legislative or administrative actions that would result in negative consequences to the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Paris.

The Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees, with a membership of more than 50 faith-based and secular organizations, is the nation's leading interfaith response to the Syrian refugee crisis. A project of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, the Alliance's mission is to raise funds to support direct humanitarian assistance; to raise awareness among the public, government leaders and the media about the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II and present policy reforms for its amelioration; and to promote transformative Syrian/Israeli civil society engagement to plant the seeds for future stability in the region.

The Multifaith Alliance condemns the despicable acts of terror committed in Paris, Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon last week. Those horrific attacks, however, cannot justify an overly broad and highly reactive response that would, in fact, harm thousands of innocents rather than the hundreds of last week.

We are distressed to hear American politicians using this terrorism to justify barring Syrian refugees from our great country. We must ask: Why blame the victims of terror for the evil acts of the terrorists? This runs counter to who we are as a nation, which enshrines religious freedom in our Constitution and has always welcomed the distressed from other lands.

“Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor.”—Leviticus 19:16



The most vulnerable of those fleeing Syria are from a number of different religious and ethnic backgrounds, including religious minorities and Muslims alike. To paint Muslim refugees, in particular, as security threats by virtue of their religion defies the compassion and values – and law – that shape and define American history.

Anti-refugee rhetoric runs counter to the key religious principles of the faiths represented in the Multifaith Alliance – Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and others. All our faiths call for helping the needy, the oppressed, the stranger and the disadvantaged. Indeed, the guiding scriptural passage of the Multifaith Alliance comes from Leviticus 19:16 in the Hebrew Scriptures: “Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor.”

We respectfully call on public officials and politicians to desist from inflammatory and misleading pronouncements, and to abstain from hostile, counter-productive actions directed at Syrian refugees and Muslims – especially at this highly emotional time. **The slate of anti-refugee bills currently being proposed in our nation’s capital and in states around the country can only serve to escalate public fears, disseminate erroneous information, and, most importantly, undercut and undermine US efforts to resolve the Syrian refugee crisis.** They should be soundly REJECTED.

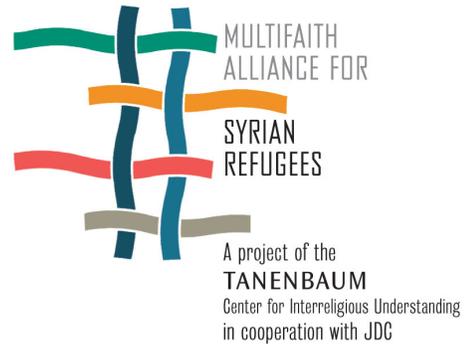
Simultaneously, we stand by our government’s efforts to meticulously screen Syrian refugees coming into our country for resettlement:

- We support initiatives to ensure that terrorists are not sneaking in disguised as refugees.
- We reject watering down our security measures, while supporting some practical fixes that will make the process less complicated, benefiting both our nation’s security and Syrian refugees.
- We support common sense approaches that will make the resettlement process more efficient by allocating more resources to screening, using a uniform algorithm for all screening agencies, and prioritizing women and children along with medical workers – to the benefit of both our nation’s security and Syrian refugees.

We stand ready to assist both Congress and the Administration in implementing these remedies – without punishing the victims.

The fact is that refugees are the most scrutinized population entering the United States. According to Kathleen Newland of the Migration Policy Institute, of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who have been resettled in the U.S., two have ever been associated with terrorist

“Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor.”—Leviticus 19:16



threats. Coming in as a refugee is the most difficult and complicated path into America – leading to bottlenecks in the system and excessively long delays in processing. This is what we must address to promote entry and resettlement of those who need us most.

The Syrian refugee catastrophe is too often discussed through the lens of partisan politics or national security instead of our moral and humanitarian commitment to the most disadvantaged among us. Too much of this rhetoric is a smokescreen for bigotry. We do a disservice to our nation’s values if we allow religious prejudice to influence our response to this crisis. Our nation’s mandate in resettling refugees is to prioritize the most vulnerable. These include millions of women and children who are suffering from assault, abuse, and post-traumatic syndrome and a generation of Syrian children growing up with no schooling. This lost generation is the true threat to us. If we fail to save them and educate them now, they will become vulnerable to radicalization in the future. That will be the price we pay for our current negligence.

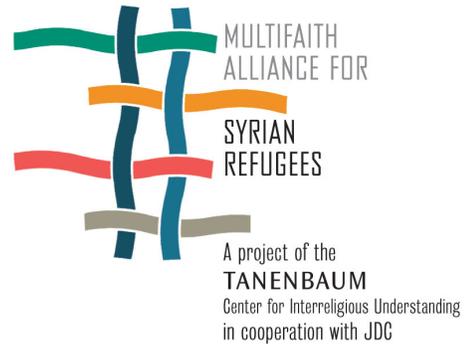
The other price we will pay is the loss of a skilled population that can make great contributions to our country. According to the Syrian American Medical Association, more than 15,000 doctors have fled Syria. There are many underserved communities in the U.S. that have little access to medical care and where these doctors could fill a great need. We already have 10,000 Syrian doctors in the U.S. who have been in this country for 10 or 20 years. They are an affluent, philanthropic group, who make great contributions to their communities. Are these not the kinds of people we need and want in the U.S.? Do we not have depressed cities that are depopulated, which need an infusion of skilled workers to rebuild them?

The United States has the opportunity to lead a global response that honors the human dignity of each and every person seeking freedom from the violent conditions in Syria today. Our country should demonstrate through actions, not words, the values of what it means to be an American.

The multifaith members of the Alliance lift their voices to call upon our elected officials to recognize the human dignity of Syrians reaching out for global support in this time of great need. We call on our elected officials to refrain from politicizing their plight and to instead reach into the wells of our own national values to find the courage and compassion to extend a welcoming hand to those seeking refuge without religious or ethnic discrimination.

Thank you.

"Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor."—Leviticus 19:16



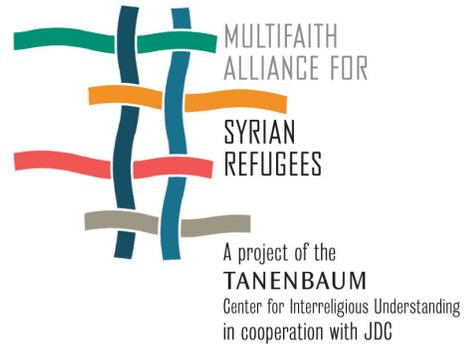
## **The Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees**

The mission of the *Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees* is to mobilize global support to alleviate the Syrian humanitarian crisis, heighten awareness of its growing dangers, and advance future stability in the region. MFA is a project of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding in cooperation with JDC.

With over 50 member organizations—Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, Muslim, Sikh, Evangelical, Lutheran—we are working tirelessly to raise emergency funds for disaster relief agencies on the ground in the Middle East. Our current members:

**American Jewish Committee**  
**American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC)**  
**Anti-Defamation League**  
**Auburn Theological Seminary**  
**B'nai Jeshurun, New York, NY**  
**The Brotherhood Synagogue, New York, NY**  
**Catholic Relief Services**  
**Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA)**  
**Church World Service**  
**Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations**  
**Congregation Beit Simchat Torah, New York, NY**  
**Congregation Beth El, South Orange, NJ**  
**Congregation Kehillath Israel, Brookline, MA**  
**Cure International**  
**The Edgar M. Bronfman Center for Jewish Student Life at NYU**  
**Episcopal Relief & Development**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
**Foa & Son**  
**Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ**  
**Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America**  
**HIAS**  
**Interfaith Center of NY**

"Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor."—Leviticus 19:16



**International Refugee Assistance Project**  
**Jamaica Muslim Center, Jamaica, NY**  
**Jewish Coalition for Syrian Refugees**  
**Jewish Council for Public Affairs**  
**Jewish Federations of North America**  
**The Jewish Theological Seminary**  
**Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago**  
**London School of Economics and Political Science: Faith Centre**  
**Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue**  
**National Council of Jewish Women**  
**New York Board of Rabbis**  
**New York Legal Assistance Group**  
**North Carolina Hillel: UNC Chapel Hill**  
**Orient for Human Relief**  
**Rabbinical Assembly**  
**Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism**  
**Saint Peter's Lutheran Church, New York, NY**  
**Syrian American Medical Society**  
**Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding**  
**Temple Emanu-El, Closter, NJ**  
**UJA-Federation of New York**  
**Union for Reform Judaism**  
**Union Theological Seminary**  
**Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office**  
**United Sikhs**  
**United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism**  
**U.S. Fund for UNICEF**  
**Ve'ahavta**  
**World Jewish Congress**  
**World Jewish Relief**  
**World ORT**

## STATEMENT OF

Marlene M. Johnson Executive Director & CEO

NAFSA: Association of International Educators

BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY, UNITED STATES

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE

SECURITY OF THE U.S. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM

November 19, 2015

Chairman Goodlatte, Ranking Member Conyers, and members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. On behalf of NAFSA: Association of International Educators, I appreciate the opportunity to express our support for the **Administration's proposal to resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees over the next year. However, the United States has the ability and duty to open our doors to an even greater number of people in need. NAFSA urges the Administration and Congress to support policies that would welcome 100,000 Syrian refugees in the coming year, in addition to other global refugees.** We also urge Congress and the Administration to take steps to ensure that Syrian students who seek higher education in the United States have a path to do so. The recent tragedies in Paris and Lebanon remind us that we must remain ever-vigilant against threats of violent extremism; however, closing our borders to Syrian refugees simply because they might share the same nationality or religion as some perpetrators of terror perpetuates fear and isolationism, while failing to recognize that the refugees are desperately fleeing violence themselves.

NAFSA is the world's largest professional association dedicated to the promotion and advancement of international education and exchange. Our more than 10,000 members believe that connecting students, scholars, educators, and citizens across borders is fundamental to building mutual understanding among nations; preparing the next generation with vital cross-cultural and global skills; and creating the conditions for a more peaceful world. A commitment to fostering peace and security through international education demands that we go beyond providing the basic necessities of some of the world's most vulnerable people. As an association that was founded to respond to the needs of European students following WWII, we recognize that in order not to lose a generation of minds to the ravages of war and terror, we must educate them.

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As Nelson Mandela said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” The United States has a proud history of promoting mutual understanding through international education and exchange. In the decades since World War II, U.S. institutions of higher education have welcomed and educated millions of students from all over the world, with many becoming world leaders and some of our closest friends and allies. These students are among our greatest foreign policy assets, for it is through their time here that they come to understand our country firsthand.

The United States should move quickly to facilitate the matriculation of eligible refugee students to study at U.S. institutions of higher education. Specifically, to ensure Syrian students are able to study in U.S. institutions of higher education, Congress must call on the Administration to streamline the F-1 Visa process in order to make it easier for Syrian students to obtain Foreign Student Status. Currently, in order to be eligible for an F-1 Visa, foreign students must demonstrate, among other things, that they have no intent to immigrate to the United States. Given the current conflict, U.S. consular officers may assume Syrian visa applicants intend to immigrate to the United States. Applicants should be allowed to assert that they intend to return to Syria when it is safe to do so. Continuing their education will make it more feasible for them to return and contribute to rebuilding their country.

Second, to complete their visa application process, students are required to have face to face interviews at U.S. consulates. The U.S. Department of State should make accommodations to allow Syrian students expedited access to appointments at various locations to compensate for the severe logistical challenges refugee students face.

Finally, the Department of State should create an Exchange Visitor Program to provide another avenue for Syrian refugees to study at U.S. institutions of higher education.

To be sure, even when visa issues are resolved, enabling Syrian refugees to study in this country will require the cooperation of institutions of higher education as well as other stakeholders in the private sector. To that end, the administration should convene a working group of relevant parties in the government, higher education and the private sector to collaborate on addressing the practical hurdles—travel costs, application fees, missing transcripts and test scores, tuition and living expenses—Syrian students are

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likely to face. U.S. institutions of higher education must pledge to accept as many refugee students as possible and to waive application fees and document requirements. Corporations, foundations and other NGOs must work independently and in public/private partnerships to provide funding to offset travel and tuition expenses. Taken together, these actions would benefit Syrian refugees in the short term and foster the goodwill essential to building mutually beneficial partnerships among nations in the future.

It is imperative that we move quickly to offer safe refuge to 100,000 desperate Syrians, and to provide those who want to continue their education in the United States with the means to do so. If we fail to offer educational opportunities to qualified Syrian refugees we risk fostering the isolationism that helps to drive anti-Western sentiment. On the other hand, offering them safety and an education will build good will and cross-cultural understanding that enhances our own national security. Clearly, we must choose the latter.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on this critical matter.

A Statement by the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
November 17, 2015

HEARING: THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT  
ON THE SECURITY OF THE U.S. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM

Since the Order of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd was founded in France in 1835, the Order has dedicated itself to serving poor and marginal people. The work of the Sisters in 70 countries in 5 continents, 17 States, and 2 U.S. Territories is based on the belief that everyone, regardless of age, sex, culture or religion, has the right to a basic quality of life; adequate income, shelter, opportunities for education and employment, quality health care, and nutrition. As Catholics, our faith requires that everyone should be treated with the utmost dignity and respect.

Based upon that belief system, the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd urges you to keep the United States a welcoming home to people of all religions who are fleeing violence in their home countries. Keeping Syrian refugees out of this country based on their religion sends the wrong message to the rest of the world about who we are as Americans. We are a welcoming country with a religiously diverse society and our resettlement program should continue to reflect this. To not do so only feeds into ISIS' propaganda and makes us all less safe.

Speaking of the plight of refugees, Pope Francis recently said, "They are human people, I stress this, who are appealing for solidarity and assistance, who need urgent action but also and above all understanding and kindness. God is good, let us imitate God. Their condition cannot leave us indifferent. Moreover, as Church we should remember that in tending the wounds of refugees, evacuees and the victims of trafficking, we are putting into practice the commandment of love that Jesus bequeathed to us when he identified with the foreigner, with those who are suffering, with all the innocent victims of violence and exploitation."

We urge you to avoid knee-jerk reactions that politicize the events in Paris, to reject misplaced blame that creates an atmosphere of fear, and to stand in solidarity with Syrian refugees, who are themselves the victims of ISIS. Thank you.

Dear Honorable Members of the United States Congress,

As religious leaders from a variety of backgrounds, we are called by our sacred texts and faith traditions to love our neighbor, accompany the vulnerable, and welcome the sojourner. War, conflict and persecution have forced people to leave their homes, creating more refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people than at any other time in history. According to a recent United Nations report, 60 million people are currently displaced – 1 in every 122 people on earth.

This nation has an urgent moral responsibility to receive refugees and asylum seekers who are in dire need of safety. Today, with more than four million Syrian refugees fleeing violence and persecution, the United States has an ethical obligation as a world leader to reduce this suffering and generously welcome Syrian refugees into our country. This is why we are calling on the Obama Administration and U.S. Congress to show bold leadership and increase the number of Syrians refugees resettled in the United States, in addition to the recently announced global resettlement admission numbers. The United States has a rich history as a leader in refugee resettlement, with significant precedent, including after World War II and after the fall of Saigon.

The U.S. Refugee Resettlement program has been and should remain open to those of any religious tradition who face persecution on account of the reasons enumerated under U.S. law. We write today to specifically state opposition to any legislation or proposal that would prevent Muslim refugees and individuals from other faiths from accessing the U.S. refugee resettlement program. Proposals that would have the U.S. State Department perform a religious litmus test on people fleeing persecution fly in the face of the very principles this nation was built upon, contradict the legacy of leadership our country has historically demonstrated, and dishonor our shared humanity.

As the United States joins the world in seeking ways to meaningfully respond to the Syrian refugee crisis, it is paramount that the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) stay true to its mandate to resettle the most vulnerable. Vulnerable individuals from a host of religions, ethnicities and backgrounds have been and should continue to be resettled in the United States.

Together, representing our various faiths, we decry derogatory language that has been used about our Muslim friends and neighbors. Inflammatory rhetoric has no place in our response to this humanitarian crisis. We ask our elected officials and candidates for office to recognize that new Americans of all faiths and backgrounds contribute to our economy, our community, and our congregations. Refugees are an asset to this country. They are powerful ambassadors of the American Dream and our nation's founding principles of equal opportunity, religious freedom, and liberty and justice for all.

As people of faith, our values call us to welcome the stranger, love our neighbor, and stand with the vulnerable, regardless of their religion. We pray that in your discernment, compassion for the plight of refugees will touch your hearts. We urge you to be bold in choosing moral, just policies that provide refuge for vulnerable individuals seeking protection.

Sincerely,

**National and International Leaders**

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Rev. Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ

Rev. A. Roy Medley, General Secretary, American Baptist Churches and Chair, National Council of Churches

Bishop Warner H Brown, Jr, President of the Council of Bishops, The United Methodist Church and Resident Bishop, The San Francisco Area

The Reverend George Francis Flowers, Executive Director, Global Witness and Ministry, African Methodist Episcopal Church

Rev. Dr. Michael D. Castle, President, Alliance of Baptists

Dr. Steve Timmermans, Executive Director, Christian Reformed Church in North America  
Stanley J. Noffsinger, General Secretary, Church of the Brethren  
Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the U.S. and Canada  
Rev. Dr. Ronald Watkins, President, Disciples Home Missions, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the U.S. and Canada  
Jonathan Greenblatt, National Director, Anti-Defamation League  
William Bernstein, Executive Director, Jewish World Watch  
Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and Senior Vice President, Union for Reform Judaism  
Mark Hetfield, President & CEO, HIAS  
Nancy K. Kaufman, CEO, National Council of Jewish Women  
Debbie Hoffmann, President, National Council of Jewish Women  
Rabbi Jill Jacobs, T'ruah: the Rabbinic Call for Human Rights  
Jim Winkler, President, National Council of Churches  
Rev. John L. McCullough, President and CEO, Church World Service  
Rev. Dr. Earl D. Trent Jr. Chairman of the Board of Directors Church World Service  
Linda Hartke, President and CEO, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service  
Stephan Bauman, President, World Relief  
Jim Wallis, President and Founder, Sojourners  
Rev. Peter Morales, President, Unitarian Universalist Association  
Fr. Timothy P. Kesicki, S.J., President of the U.S. Jesuit Conference  
Sister Simone Campbell, Executive Director, NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby  
Marcia Allen, CSJ, President, Leadership Conference of Women Religious  
Sr. Patricia Chappell, Executive Director, Pax Christi USA  
Sister Margaret Magee, OSF, President, Franciscan Action Network  
Sister Patricia McDermott, RSM, President, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas  
Bishop Francis E. Krebs, Presiding Bishop of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
Sr. Ellen Kelly, RGS, Congregational Leader Elect, Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd  
Gerry G. Lee, Director, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns  
Rev. Ron Stief, Executive Director, National Religious Campaign Against Torture  
Diane Randall, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation  
Anwar A. Khan, CEO, Islamic Relief USA  
Salam Al-Marayati, President, Muslim Public Affairs Council  
Sayeed Siddiqui, President, Muslim Youth of North America  
Catherine Orsborn, Director, Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign  
Atiya Aftab, Esq., Co-founder and Chair, Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom  
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Written Testimony of the

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA

Submitted to the House Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security

Hearing: The Syrian Refugee Crisis and its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

November 19, 2015

Over many years, the National Council of Churches has often expressed our aspirations and sorrows, our confidence and fears, related to an eventual peace in the Middle East.

At this time,

- Inter-communal violence is consuming Israel and the Palestinian Territories
- Terrorism and civil conflict are raining fire upon Syria and Iraq
- Horrific acts of terrorism have recently taken place in Paris, Beirut and Baghdad and many other cities around the world
- Afghanistan is sliding back into chaos
- Refugees are fleeing the region and entering Europe in large numbers with no end of suffering on the horizon
- Religious minorities are being persecuted, and sectarian strife is affecting Christian, Muslim and Jewish populations.

As we approach the celebration of the birth of Christ our hearts are filled with sorrow and fear that peace will remain out of reach in the Middle East for much longer than we could ever have imagined.

We have no illusions that establishing peace will be easy. We lament that the two-state solution for Israel and Palestine is ever more elusive and negotiations are not taking place. We pray for a peaceful solution to the Syrian conflict. We call upon religious communities to build upon their historic legacies of inter-religious relationships, dialogue and action. When all these are in sight, we can envision peace. And yet such a vision seems hard to fathom today.

Still, we remain people of hope. The Lord we follow, Jesus Christ, died a violent death. But he was resurrected from the dead in the singular miraculous event that is at the core of our belief. Thus the hope of resurrection, and of the eternal life and profound peace it symbolizes, permeates our being and calls us to be vigilant in our hope for peace in the region where he lived among us.

We witness to this hope for peace with our fellow Christians in the region. We stand together with our Muslim and Jewish and other sisters and brothers of goodwill who seek peace there. As the National Council of Churches, we will continue to encourage our churches and congregations to

support a renewed peace settlement as the only option. And we call upon the United States government and the United Nations to enforce previous commitments towards a just peace and do everything to ensure that a just peace has a chance to emerge from today's chaos and destruction.

*Adopted by the NCC Governing Board, November 17, 2015.*

National Council of Jewish Women  
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National Council of Jewish Women

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NCJW Statement to the U.S. House of Representatives' Judiciary Committee, pertaining to its hearing *The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program* Thursday, November 19

### **Despite Terrorist Attacks, NCJW Calls on US to Welcome Refugees**

November 18, 2015 Washington, DC – The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) today expressed deep sadness about the recent terrorist attacks and protested efforts to close borders to refugees seeking sanctuary from the same terrorism. NCJW CEO Nancy K. Kaufman released the following statement:

“Our prayers go out to the families and communities affected by the terrorist attacks in Paris and Beirut. NCJW mourns the senseless loss of so many and the trauma inflicted in order to sow terror.

“We must also remember that the millions of refugees from Syria and Iraq are trying to escape the same destructive force. We must rise above prejudice and fear to open our communities to the men, women, and children who seek sanctuary in the United States. While we can exercise due diligence in admitting refugees, we cannot use tragedy as an excuse for bigotry, silence, or inaction.

“Today, more than half of all state governors are speaking out against helping refugees, and there are bills proposed in Congress that, if passed, could stop the Syrian and Iraqi refugee resettlement program altogether. We must also speak out against the bigotry and anti-Muslim vitriol echoing in the chambers of the federal and state governments.

“It is a disgrace to stand idly by as innocent refugees flee violence and persecution. As Jews we are taught *va’ahavtem et ha-ger* — as we were once strangers, so must we love the stranger. Our nation must find the moral courage to welcome those seeking refuge from fear, persecution, and hate.”

The [National Council of Jewish Women](#) (NCJW) is a grassroots organization of volunteers and advocates who turn progressive ideals into action. Inspired by Jewish values, NCJW strives for social justice by improving the quality of life for women, children, and families and by safeguarding individual rights and freedoms. More information on [Facebook](#) and on [Twitter at @NCJW](#).

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**Statement for the Record of the Niskanen Center\***  
**Submitted to**  
**The House Committee on the Judiciary**  
**Hearing on**  
**“The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee**  
**Admissions Program”**  
**November 19, 2015**

The terrorist attack in Paris has led to inquiries concerning the security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). Lawmakers and the public should be able to feel confident that the program is secure. However, a thorough understanding of the USRAP process and history leads to the conclusion that while refugees are unlikely to become terrorists, they can be important assets in the war against the Islamic State.

**Paris attacks are not applicable to the U.S. refugee vetting process**

All of the confirmed Paris attackers, including the mastermind, were natives of Europe, highlighting the fact that homegrown terrorism played a more significant role in these attacks than terrorism originating abroad.<sup>1</sup> A fake Syrian passport, copies of which have reportedly been used by as many as eight other individuals in Europe,<sup>2</sup> was found near the body of one of the attackers, leading to the suspicion that a Syrian national may have been involved in the attack.<sup>3</sup>

The passport holder apparently entered the European Union (EU) on a boat from Turkey through Greece and applied for asylum in Serbia.<sup>4</sup> According to German Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere, however, the passport may have been a “planted lead,” saying that it is “certainly unusual that such a person would have faithfully registered in Greece and Serbia and Croatia, while we’re constantly pressing for registration and aren’t happy that is isn’t happening to the necessary extent.”<sup>5</sup>

Supposing that the attacker was a Syrian national, however, reveals nothing about the U.S. refugee resettlement process. This individual was not vetted by intelligence agencies, designated as a refugee by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), or granted refugee status by any country. This case is simply not applicable to the U.S. refugee program, which requires extensive vetting prior to admission. Unfortunately, Europe does not have the same capabilities as the United States.

**U.S. refugee is not an attractive avenue for terrorist activity**

The U.S. refugee resettlement program is, according to the State Department, “the most stringent security process for anyone entering the United States.”<sup>6</sup> The process for most refugees, including all Syrian refugees, begins with designation as a refugee by UNHCR. The UN only refers refugees for resettlement if the individual has no hope of return to their country of origin, and there is a complicating factor requiring their resettlement

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\* The Niskanen Center is a libertarian 501(c)(3) nonprofit think tank located in Washington, D.C. founded in 2014. <https://niskanencenter.org/about/>

outside of the area. Some examples include ethnic or religious persecution, health issues, or children with special needs. UNHCR refers less than one percent of the 14.4 million refugees for resettlement.<sup>7</sup> A terrorist, looking to gain entry to the U.S. through UNHCR referral, would have very low odds of succeeding without any screening at all.

If a refugee is referred to the United States for resettlement, overseas Resettlement Support Centers managed by the State Department collect biometric and biographical information from the applicants. This information is then immediately compared to the State Department's Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS), which includes terrorist watch list information.<sup>8</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services refugee officers with special training for Syrians and Iraqis then interview the applicants.<sup>9</sup> They attempt to find inconsistencies in the applicants' statements and test whether the person has firsthand knowledge of events that they claim to have witnessed.

The Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Defense, the Director of National Intelligence, and other security agencies check the information gathered against information held by the government. Biometric checks are then conducted. These databases include the FBI's Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System and DHS's Automated Biometric Identification System. Individuals are also run through the DOD's Automated Biometric Identification System, which holds fingerprints from weapons and explosives from Iraqi insurgents.<sup>10</sup>

This entire process takes between two and three years during which time the refugee remains in UNHCR refugee camps. On its face, this process is an unlikely avenue for terrorist infiltration. It would require a two- to three-year investment with no knowledge of whether the mission would result in resettlement in the U.S. There are much faster legal means for an individual to enter the United States, such as student or tourist visas, and there are much easier ways for the Islamic State to send attackers, such as individuals with European passports. It simply makes no sense for a terrorist to attempt to infiltrate the U.S. refugee resettlement process.

### **The history of U.S. resettlement shows that the vetting process works**

Since 1980, the U.S. has welcomed about three million refugees, including hundreds of thousands from the Middle East. Since 9/11, more than 750,000 have been resettled, including a large population from Iraq. Over that period, there have been dozens of terrorist attacks on American soil but not one of them involved refugees<sup>†</sup> brought over under the U.S. refugee resettlement program.<sup>11</sup> This fact alone demonstrates that the U.S. refugee vetting process and law enforcement can together handle threats from terrorism.

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<sup>†</sup> Some have claimed that the Boston bombers, the Tsarnaev brothers, change this conclusion. But the brothers were not refugees. Their parents came to the U.S. on a travel visa and were awarded *asylum*—which is not subject to the normal UNHCR referral process—and the brothers were children and not subject to the vetting process. The case simply does not show that refugees cannot be vetted properly. Even if we do include asylees—and their foreign-born children—in this analysis, the risk of terrorism from an asylee or refugee is less than a million-to-one chance, one in every 1.8 million admissions.

There have been six cases in which refugees have been convicted of terrorism-related charges, all well before their plans could be carried out and most not targeting the United States.<sup>12</sup> These cases show that the threat of refugee-related terrorism is one that is manageable through law enforcement and also very small—one person linked to terrorism for every 494,000 refugee admissions. For comparison, one American out of every 23,000 committed murder last year,<sup>13</sup> and yet none of the would-be attackers were as successful as these American murderers.

The U.S. government does not report cases rejected based on terrorism-related concerns, so there is no way to verify how often the process screens out terrorists. But the refugee resettlement caseload only has a 50 percent approval rate (including pending cases),<sup>14</sup> and at least one terrorist, the Los Angeles airport shooter in 2002, had his asylum claim rejected due to vetting.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, if ISIS wanted to attack the United States, it need only dispatch one of the many foreign fighters who have come from the U.S. or the E.U. to do so. It would not need to attempt a two to three-year mission with a very low probability of success.

### **Accepting Syrian refugees is an important part of the fight against ISIS**

Since 2011, more than 210,000 people have been killed in Syria, meaning about 140 people have died every single day in Syria. The result has been an exodus of over 4 million people from Syria. The Islamic State considers the fugitives from its “caliphate” to be traitors and have repeatedly condemned the flight of Muslims from the region. Its propaganda describes the abandonment of their caliphate as apostasy, which is punishable by death in ISIS-controlled territory.<sup>16</sup>

If the United States announced that it would no longer accept refugees from Syria and Iraq, ISIS would immediately introduce into their propaganda the message that America and the West hate Muslims and are willing to push them back to Assad. Combating ISIS propaganda is as important as any weapon the U.S. has. Since the beginning of the conflict, every single ISIS fighter killed has been replaced by a new recruit or foreign fighter.<sup>17</sup> Without winning the propaganda war, the U.S. and its moderate Muslim allies will not win the actual war.

Some have suggested the creation of a “safe zone” or “humanitarian corridor” as an alternative to refugee resettlement. But whether this is a good idea or not, this does not replace refugee resettlement or solve the refugee crisis. There already is a de facto “safe zone” in Turkey that refugees are abandoning due to its squalid and dangerous conditions. Extending that safe zone down a few miles into Syria will not change the equation for most Syrians or would-be refugees.

Safe zones have a very mixed history as well. In 1994, the French established a safe zone in Rwanda to stem the tide of refugees into Zaire, but the mission had little long-term success at preventing the exodus from the country once the French left.<sup>18</sup> In 1995, the U.S. attempted to support a safe city in Bosnia for Muslims that were victims of ethnic

cleansing. The city ultimately became a target for attacks and failed to protect the civilian population.<sup>19</sup> In 2009, a United Nations safe zone for refugees in Sri Lanka was attacked by the Tamil Tigers organization.<sup>20</sup> Whether a safe zone can protect some civilians in this case is unclear, but it is clear that it will not stop the refugee crisis.

Safe zones will also not alleviate the need for U.N. to resettle refugees in special humanitarian circumstances. U.N. camps cannot provide for the needs of many refugees with special health or mental issues, childcare needs, or protection from persecution in the country in which the refugee is currently residing. Refugees also cannot hope to become self-sufficient in refugee camps. This fact partly explains the large numbers who flee camps in search of opportunity in Europe.

During the Cold War, we used refugee resettlement to gain foreign policy assets, spies, allies, and spokesmen to refute the enemy's propaganda. In the fight against ISIS, allies gained from aiding refugees will be as important as any weapon we have.

### **Recommendation**

The U.S. should resettle the full 20,000 refugees referred by UNHCR on the condition that they take a loyalty oath, publicly condemning the Islamic State—an act of further apostasy under its law—and expressing their support for freedom of religion. If America closed its doors during what the U.N. has called the humanitarian crisis of our time, it would be a dark chapter in our history. We should look to find ways to address the security concerns without abandoning our moral leadership in the world.

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<sup>1</sup> The New York Times. "Finding Links Between the Paris Attackers as the Manhunt Continues." November 18, 2015. [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/11/15/world/europe/manhunt-for-paris-attackers.html?ref=collection/newseventcollection/attacks-in-paris&action=click&contentCollection=europe&region=rank&module=package&version=highlights&contentPlacement=2&pgtype=collection&\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/11/15/world/europe/manhunt-for-paris-attackers.html?ref=collection/newseventcollection/attacks-in-paris&action=click&contentCollection=europe&region=rank&module=package&version=highlights&contentPlacement=2&pgtype=collection&_r=1)

<sup>2</sup> Drury, Iain. "The Syrian passports to terror: EIGHT migrants have got into Europe with same papers as those found on stadium suicide bomber." Daily Mail. November 18, 2015. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3322960/The-Syrian-passports-terror-EIGHT-migrants-got-Europe-papers-stadium-suicide-bomber.html>

<sup>3</sup> Walker, Marcus; Noemie Bisserbe. "Paris Stadium Attacker Got to Europe Using Fake Syrian Passport." Wall Street Journal. November 16, 2015. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/paris-stadium-attacker-entered-europe-via-greece-1447698583?alg=y>

<sup>4</sup> Maltezou, Renee; George Georgiopoulos. "Holder of Syrian passport found in Paris traveled through Balkans." Reuters. November 15, 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/11/15/us-france-shooting-asylum-idUSKCN0T40EB20151115#bU3JcsFZRhhgTVFm.97>

<sup>5</sup> Donahue, Patrick; Rainer Buergin. "Syrian Passport in Paris May Be Planted, German Minister Says." Bloomberg. November 17, 2015. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-11-17/syrian-passport-in-paris-may-be-planted-german-minister-says>

<sup>6</sup> Koran, Laura. "How do Syrian refugees get into the U.S.? Explaining the process." CNN, November 17, 2015. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/16/politics/syrian-refugees-u-s-applicants-explainer/>

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR. "Resettlement: A New Beginning in a Third Country." UNHCR. Accessed November 9, 2015. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a16b1676.html>

<sup>8</sup> Barbara Strack. "Terorist Exploitation of Refugee Programs." USCIS Testimony for House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence. December 4, 2012.

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<http://www.dhs.gov/news/2012/12/04/written-testimony-uscis-house-homeland-security-subcommittee-counterterrorism-and>

<sup>9</sup> Foley, Elise. "Refugee Screenings Are More Intensive Than Some Politicians Would Have You Think." Huffington Post. November 17, 2015. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/refugee-screening-process-syrians\\_564b55ece4b045bf3df0ece7](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/refugee-screening-process-syrians_564b55ece4b045bf3df0ece7)

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Strack. "Terorist Exploitation of Refugee Programs." USCIS Testimony for House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence. December 4, 2012. <http://www.dhs.gov/news/2012/12/04/written-testimony-uscis-house-homeland-security-subcommittee-counterterrorism-and>

<sup>11</sup> Bier, David. "Anti-Immigrant Activists More Prone to Terrorism Than Refugees." The Hill. September 29, 2015. [thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/immigration/255237-anti-immigrant-activists-more-prone-to-terrorism-than-refugees](http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/immigration/255237-anti-immigrant-activists-more-prone-to-terrorism-than-refugees)

<sup>12</sup> Bier, David. "Anti-Immigrant Activists More Prone to Terrorism Than Refugees." The Hill. September 29, 2015. [thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/immigration/255237-anti-immigrant-activists-more-prone-to-terrorism-than-refugees](http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/immigration/255237-anti-immigrant-activists-more-prone-to-terrorism-than-refugees)

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<sup>13</sup> Nowrasteh, Alex. "Syrian Refugees Don't Pose a Serious Security Threat." Cato Institute. November 18, 2015. <http://www.cato.org/blog/syrian-refugees-dont-pose-serious-security-threat>

<sup>14</sup> Foley, Elise. "Refugee Screenings Are More Intensive Than Some Politicians Would Have You Think." Huffington Post. November 17, 2015. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/refugee-screening-process-syrians\\_564b55ece4b045bf3df0ece7](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/refugee-screening-process-syrians_564b55ece4b045bf3df0ece7)

<sup>15</sup> Eddy Ramirez. "Panel Probes LAX Gunman." LA Times. October 10, 2002. <http://articles.latimes.com/2002/oct/10/local/me-lax10>

<sup>16</sup> Zelin, Aaron. "Targeting Europe's Refugees Is Not the Answer." Washington Institute. November 16, 2015. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/targeting-europes-refugees-is-not-the-answer>

<sup>17</sup> Naylor, Sean. "Airstrikes Killing Thousands of Islamic State Fighters, but It Just Recruits More." Foreign Policy. June 9, 2015. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/09/airstrikes-killing-thousands-of-islamic-state-fighters-but-it-just-recruits-more/>

<sup>18</sup> Haspelslagh, Sophie. "Safe Havens in Rwanda: Operation Turquoise." Beyond Intractability. [http://www.beyondintractability.org/cic\\_documents/Safe-Havens-Rwanda.pdf](http://www.beyondintractability.org/cic_documents/Safe-Havens-Rwanda.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Editors. "Srebrenica: A U.N. 'Safe Haven' That Soon Was Not." New York Times. October 29, 1995. <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/29/world/srebrenica-a-un-safe-haven-that-soon-was-not.html>

<sup>20</sup> Buncombe, Andrew. "Massacre in the Sri Lanka 'safe zone'." Independent. October 23, 2011. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/massacre-in-the-sri-lanka-safe-zone-1517850.html>

## HEARING: THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SECURITY OF THE U.S. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM

With appreciation to the Chairman and Members of the United States House of Representatives Judiciary Committee and its Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security, we offer this testimony on the Syrian refugee crisis and its impact on the security of the US Refugee Admissions Program.

We represent Peace and Unity Bridge, one of the 30-plus member organizations of Shoulder to Shoulder, and our purpose is addressing Islamophobia and building bridges of understanding and friendship among non-Muslims and Muslims in order to help alleviate dangerously polarizing tensions, misunderstandings and animosity. As people of faith, we cherish the inherent worth of every human person; as citizens of this nation, we cherish our rights and freedoms. We also uphold the International Bill of Human Rights in its declaration of rights and freedoms for all the world's people, including the right "to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution."

Our hearts reach out to people suffering everywhere, and especially when the innocent oppressed and endangered are unfairly associated with their oppressors, such as is currently the case of the horribly beleaguered Syrian refugees and the terror-spreading ISIL. Muslim organizations large and small denounce ISIL in no uncertain terms. ISIL does not represent Islam as understood and practiced by the vast majority of Muslims here and abroad.

We consider the safekeeping our beloved country to be critical, and we emphatically agree with former Secretary Condoleeza Rice and others that our current system of security checks for refugees is very effective. As it stands, it is quite stringent such that it takes years for even the most traumatized refugees to be accepted onto our soil. Besides which, building friendships adds to our own longterm safety, while turning our back on those who are suffering often achieves the opposite and undesired outcome.

Fear of the stranger—the unknown other—is not a motivator that will build the world of which we all dream. Let us as a nation hold strong to our noble tradition of generously helping the down-trodden, as the beloved Jesus of Nazareth taught in the story of the good Samaritan, who stopped to aid a beaten man not of his own tribe and even paid for his care when everyone else looked away.

Rev. Dr. M'ellen Kennedy, Director  
Rev. "Laelia," Assistant Director  
Peace and Unity Bridge



**RSN's Statement to the Committee on the Judiciary of the U.S. House of Representatives  
pertaining to the hearing on  
*The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program*  
Thursday, November 19, 2015**

**By Zaid Hydari, Executive Director of RSN**

The war in Syria, now in its fifth year, has been described as the worst humanitarian crisis of our time. Nearly 4 million people have fled the country, of which well over 90% reside in neighboring countries Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Turkey alone hosts some 2 million Syrians, in addition to over 200,000 individuals that have fled Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, and Somalia.

The Refugee Solidarity Network (RSN) is a US-based non-profit organization that seeks to protect and advance refugee rights worldwide, with a current focus on Turkey. In addition to building capacity of local legal advocates and supporting legal assistance initiatives on the ground in Turkey, RSN advocates for ways in which the international community can better respond and share in the responsibility of this human tragedy.

One way is through resettlement. The United States has a long and significant history of resettling populations in need. Since 1975, the U.S. has resettled more than 3 million refugees to its shores with annual admissions figures ranging from a high of 207,000 in 1980 to a low of 27,110 in 2002. Since the war in Syria broke out in March 2011, the U.S. has resettled less than 2,000 individuals from Syria.

On September 10, 2015 the White House announced a commitment to increase refugee resettlement to the US over the next two years. RSN welcomed this announcement, acknowledging it as a step in the right direction and advocating along with several partner organizations to further expand those commitments. However, some elected officials responded to these initiatives with derogatory remarks and offensive rhetoric, stoking fear against this program and against individuals in urgent need of assistance.

The recent heinous events in Beirut and Paris have only made matters worse. Governors and Congressional officials have spoken out against resettlement of all Syrians, with varying degrees of inflammatory generalizations and prejudice. Like all challenging moments, this has provided an opportunity to reflect not only on our moral obligation, but on the robustness of the security screening procedures carried out as part of the US Refugee Admissions Program.

Refugees are the most vetted and screened of any immigrants granted entry to the U.S. There is no objective basis to challenge the integrity of the security process, a rigorous and lengthy procedure that on average takes over 2 years from start to finish for each and every refugee selected for resettlement. Comparisons to the European context are simply not relevant, as asylum-seekers in Europe do not undergo advanced intensive screening.

While resettlement is not the only solution to this complex crisis, it is a critical gesture of burden-sharing to first countries of asylum like Turkey, where the government and host population have sacrificed a great deal, both monetarily and otherwise, to receive and protect the displaced. RSN and its partner's efforts to improve standards in Turkey are made difficult when other global leaders do not contribute their fair share.

RSN furthermore unequivocally opposes proposals to prioritize or favor resettlement of certain religious groups before others. RSN and its partner on the ground disseminate information to and advise refugees on their eligibility for humanitarian programs in Turkey and discriminatory distinctions between ethnic and religious groups adversely affect humanitarian aid providers and their programs. In addition to creating confusion, such policies stoke resentment and tarnish the image of the United States among vulnerable populations and on the world stage.

As it has done so many times in the past, the US should lead by example, encouraging other developing nations to increase their participation in humanitarian funding and resettlement, instead of participating in a race to the bottom. Congress should continue to promote funding appropriations for humanitarian assistance overseas, while increasing resettlement and family reunification opportunities to the US. RSN urges members of Congress to abandon harmful and misleading discourse instead of abandoning refugees in need of protection.



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## **House Judiciary Committee Hearing: The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program November 19, 2015**

On behalf of the Religious Action Center, the Washington office of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose nearly 900 congregations across North America encompass 1.5 million Reform Jews, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, whose membership includes more than 2,000 Reform rabbis, we submit this testimony as an urgent plea on behalf of the refugees fleeing the horrific violence in Syria and elsewhere in the region, who so desperately need our support.

Our tradition teaches us that "The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself" (Lev. 19:33). As a community, we find it impossible to close our hearts to the plight of the millions of refugees seeking a haven from violence and persecution. In our congregations nationwide, rabbis and congregants are eager to respond with compassion and efficacy. Many have contacted us ready to sponsor individuals or families of refugees, as many of our Canadian congregations are doing. In the absence of that opportunity in the U.S., these congregations have responded with financial donations to relief organizations and robust advocacy in support of welcoming increased numbers of refugees.

The recent attacks in Paris echo the kind of terrible violence that the Syrian people have lived with for the past several years. Now is the time to ensure the U.S. refugee system remains open to those fleeing this violence, reflecting our values as a country that is a safe haven and beacon of freedom. This can be done while maintaining our national security, assured in the knowledge that individuals allowed into the U.S. as refugees go through a lengthy and rigorous screening program.

A nation built by refugees from political and religious persecution cannot turn its back on refugees seeking escape from the same. We stand ready to do our part, but we know, as you must, that what is required first and foremost is governmental action, which should never discriminate against refugees or others based on their religion.

We must all ask ourselves what more can be done to help those in desperate need. We must all, including and perhaps especially those of us who hold public office and make decisions about our nation's priorities and actions, act with courage and compassion. We pray that we as a nation will rise to meet this challenge, and will all be found to have lived up to our responsibility to care for the poor, the needy and the stranger among us.



*The Religious Action Center pursues social justice and religious liberty by mobilizing the Jewish community and serving as its advocate in Washington, D.C. The Center is led by the Commission on Social Action of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism (and its affiliates) and is supported by the congregations of the Union.*





**Statement to the U.S. House of Representatives' Judiciary Committee, pertaining to its hearing “The Syrian Refugee Crisis and its Impact on the Security of the U.S Refugee Admissions Program”**

**Thursday, November 19, 2015**

The Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) was founded in 1979 to facilitate the relocation of Southeast Asian refugees into American society, and continues at present to advance the interests of these communities through advocacy, leadership development and capacity building.

Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese American communities arose from the largest refugee resettlement in U.S. history. Approximately 1.3 million refugees from war-torn countries in Southeast Asia were resettled into the United States after decades of the U.S. war in Vietnam, the Secret War in Laos, and the bombings of Cambodia, followed by the ruthless Khmer Rouge genocide. In 1975 alone, the United States resettled 4,600 refugees from Cambodia, 800 from Laos, and 125,000 from Vietnam, and continued to welcome hundreds of thousands more in need of safe haven in the years to come.

Syria is currently facing a similar humanitarian crisis, with more than 50 percent of its entire population displaced from their homes due to civil war and the growing threat of ISIS. More than 4 million refugees have fled the country, and an additional 8 million are internally displaced—76 percent of whom are women and children. Although SEARAC applauds Secretary Kerry’s announcement to increase refugee resettlement numbers to 85,000 in 2016, and 100,000 in 2017, these efforts still need to be drastically improved. At present, the United States has resettled less than 2,000 Syrians since the beginning of the conflict. In contrast, there are currently, 1.9 million registered refugees in Turkey, 1.1 million in Lebanon, 630,000 in Jordan, 250,000 in Iraq, and 130,000 in Egypt.

Growing anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment fuel the fire of fear and hate that penalizes millions of these refugees in need of protection. The current process of refugee screening in the United States subscribes to the most stringent of standards, allowing admission into the country only after successfully undergoing a rigorous 11-step process, which includes a number of security clearances. Despite this, xenophobia and islamophobia continue to steer the direction of public policy decisions, and weaken the country’s resolve in pursuing its humanitarian responsibility.

2015 marks the 40th year anniversary since the United States opened its doors to millions of men, women and children from Southeast Asia seeking humanitarian protection. Their courage and resilience has led these communities to grow and contribute to the country. SEARAC, along with more than 2.5 million Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese Americans living in the country, stand with our refugee brothers and sisters from Syria, and call on the Administration and Congress to carry on America’s legacy as a leading humanitarian leader by opening its doors to vulnerable communities.

## **Co-Signers:**

### Organizations:

ACT for Women and Girls  
Asian Law Alliance  
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network  
Chinese for Families  
Community Health for Asian Americans  
Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries(FIRM)  
Guam Communications Network  
Khmer Health Advocates Inc.  
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium  
NQAPIA: National Queer API Alliance  
OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates  
Pacific Islander Cancer Survivors Network  
Services, Immigrant Rights, and Education Network (SIREN)  
Southeast Asians in Medicine (SEAM) at UC Davis School of Medicine  
Stone Soup Fresno  
The Greenlining Institute  
UCDSOM Southeast Asians In Medicine  
United Cambodian Community  
Vietnamese Youth Development Center  
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Amelia Ortega	David Yang	Kayla Lor
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Angie Tran	Dinh Le	Kenny Hoang
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Camille Llanes-Fontanilla	Jeniffer Huong	Linh Chuong
Casey Tran	Jennifer	Lisa Phan
Chariya Sok	Jennifer Ka	Lyia Jalao
Cherry Lim	Johnny Rodriguez	Lynna Vong
Cynthia Brothers	Jonnie Luong	Maggie Doman
D Cahn	Justin Nguyen	Maggie Quan

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Martin Tran  
Mary Rose  
Mary Scully  
Mary xiong  
Mary Yang  
Mayta Lor  
Melissa Koch  
Merri Sullivan  
Michelle Yeung  
Mina Nguyen  
Minh Nguyen  
Mykhou Vue  
Nancy Le  
Natalie Nguyen  
Navy Nhiv  
Nga Bui  
Nhi Tran  
Nit Ounniyom  
Odyssey Xiong  
Pa Thao  
Prenz  
Quynh Nguyen  
Rachel Pomeroy  
Ricky Ly  
Ruth Silver Taube  
Sandy Kuoch  
Sarita Panchang  
Seng  
Sheila Nem  
SONEXAY SANAPHOL  
Steven Doman  
Suzanne Im  
Tagoipah Mathno  
Tam Duong  
Tanira Chau  
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Yi Chia Chen  
Z Vue  
Zer Vang

**Written Testimony of Catherine Orsborn, Director of the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign**

**Submitted to the House Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security on  
“The Syrian Refugee Crisis and its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program”**

**November 19, 2015; 9:00 am**

I would like to thank the members of the House Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security for providing the opportunity to submit this statement on the need to address the Syrian refugee crisis. As I will discuss below, this is an issue that is too often clouded by misinformation and prejudice, and I welcome the opportunity to expand the conversation of this critical topic.

I bring before you today the collective voices of 31 different religious denominations and organizations, the members of the Shoulder to Shoulder campaign to combat anti-Muslim bigotry. We are calling on the United States government to respond generously in the face of the Syrian humanitarian crisis, and urging public officials to refrain from bigoted and discriminatory rhetoric and approaches in this response. The magnitude of the Syrian crisis is daunting, and the U.S. must help to lead a global response that honors the human dignity of each and every person seeking freedom from the violent conditions in Syria today.

As religious leaders, it is deeply concerning to our coalition that we too often hear this crisis discussed in terms of U.S. national security instead of our moral and humanitarian commitment to the least among us. We are of course concerned with safeguarding the national security of our nation, but too much of this rhetoric is a smokescreen for bigotry and prejudice. Elected officials have referred to the refugee resettlement system as a “Trojan horse” for terrorist groups. Such claims are unfounded, as the resettlement program is one of the most difficult ways to enter our country. Syrians from all backgrounds are leaving some of the most horrific conditions imaginable to find security for themselves and their communities; their human security is the security that is most threatened at the moment. We must not talk about Syrian refugees as “security threats,” politicizing their plight, but we should talk about them as human beings who, as such, deserve our respect and compassion.

We do a disservice to our nation’s values if we allow religious prejudice to influence our response to this crisis. Our nation’s mandate in resettling

refugees is to prioritize the most vulnerable. The most vulnerable of those fleeing Syria are from a number of different religious and ethnic backgrounds- this includes religious minorities and Muslims alike. All of whom are fleeing the horrific conditions in Syria today; all of whom are searching for peace and security for themselves and their families. To paint Muslim refugees in particular as security threats on the basis of their religious identity is bigoted and defies the compassion with which we as Americans of different faith traditions should approach those asking for our help.

We thus lift our voices to call upon our elected officials to recognize the human dignity of Syrians reaching out for global support in this time of great need. We call on our elected officials to refrain from politicizing their plight and to instead reach into the wells of our own national values to find the courage and compassion to extend a welcoming hand to those seeking refuge without religious or ethnic discrimination in so doing.

November 17, 2015

Dear Senator/Representative:

As refugee and immigration law experts, humanitarian aid organizations, faith, labor and civil and human rights groups, we write to express our support for the U.S. refugee resettlement program. The world is witnessing the largest refugee crisis since World War II. More than 4 million Syrians have fled from their home country fleeing conflict and violence, and 6.5 million are displaced internally.

At a time when the world needs humanitarian leadership, some are now calling for the suspension of the U.S. refugee resettlement program or the imposition of restrictions on funding for Syrians and other groups of refugees. We oppose these proposals and believe they would jeopardize the United States' moral leadership in the world.

Syrian refugees are fleeing exactly the kind of terror that unfolded on the streets of Paris. They have suffered violence just like this for almost five years. Most have lost loved ones to persecution and violence, in addition to having had their country, their community, and everything they own brutally taken from them.

Refugees are the most thoroughly vetted group of people who come to the United States. Security screenings are rigorous and involve the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the Department of Defense and multiple intelligence agencies. Department of Homeland Security officials interview each refugee to determine whether they meet the refugee definition and whether they are admissible to the United States. Refugees undergo a series of biometric and investigatory background checks, including collection and analysis of personal data, fingerprints, photographs, and other background information, all of which is checked against government databases. The entire process typically takes more than two years and often much more before the refugee would arrive in the U.S. In addition the Administration is already taking steps, with its existing authority, to increase the capacity of its security and screening procedures for refugees. There is no need for Congress to impose additional restrictions or security measures.

The United States decides which refugees to resettle. Because so few refugees in the world are resettled, the U.S. often chooses the most vulnerable, including refugees who cannot remain safely where they are and families with children who cannot receive the medical care they need to survive.

To turn our back on refugees would be to betray our nation's core values. It would send a demoralizing and dangerous message to the world that the United States makes judgments about people based on the country they come from and their religion. This feeds into extremist propaganda and makes us all less safe. We call upon Congress to demonstrate leadership by speaking out against the scapegoating of any group during this time of crisis and to ensure that our nation's humanitarian efforts are robust.

The United States is a welcoming country with a diverse society and our resettlement program must continue to reflect this.

We can welcome refugees while ensuring our own security. Refugees have enriched communities across our country and have been part of the American fabric for generations. Historically our nation has responded to every major war or conflict and has resettled refugees from Africa, South East Asia, Eastern Europe as well as the Middle-East. Closing the door to refugees would be disastrous for not only the refugees themselves, but their family members in the United States who are waiting for them to arrive, and our reputation in the world.

Sincerely,

The Advocates for Human Rights  
Alliance for Citizenship  
American Civil Liberties Union  
American Immigration Lawyers Association  
American Jewish Committee (AJC)  
American Refugee Committee  
America's Voice Education Fund  
Anti-Defamation League  
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice-AAJC  
Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence.  
Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies  
CARE USA  
Center for Applied Linguistics  
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies  
Center for New Community  
Center for Victims of Torture  
Centro de los Derechos de Inmigrante, Inc.  
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Refugee & Immigration Ministries  
Church World Service  
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach  
Concern Worldwide (US) Inc.  
Conference of Major Superiors of Men  
Council on American-Islamic Relations  
The Episcopal Church  
Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc.  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
Farmworker Justice  
Franciscan Action Network  
Friends Committee on National Legislation  
Habonim Dror North America  
HIAS  
Human Rights First  
InterAction  
International Catholic Migration Commission  
International Refugee Assistance Project  
International Rescue Committee  
Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, National Advocacy Office  
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA  
Jewish Council for Public Affairs  
Jewish Labor Committee  
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)  
Leadership Conference of Women Religious  
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service  
Mercy-USA for Aid and Development  
Mi Familia Vota  
Muslim Public Affairs Council  
NAFSA: Association of International Educators  
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)

National Council of Jewish Women  
National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC)  
National Immigration Forum  
National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild  
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby  
OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates  
OneAmerica  
ORAM – Organization for Refugee, Asylum & Migration  
Oxfam America  
Peace Action West  
Presbyterian Church USA  
Refugees International  
Save the Children  
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)  
STAND: The Student-Led Movement to End Mass Atrocities  
SustainUS: U.S. Youth for Justice  
Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS)  
Syria Relief Development  
Tahirih Justice Center  
T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights  
Union for Reform Judaism  
Unitarian Universalist Association  
United to End Genocide  
United Farm Workers  
United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
UURISE – Unitarian Universalist Refugee and Immigrant Services and Education, Inc.  
Win Without War  
Women’s Refugee Commission  
Workmen’s Circle  
World Relief

Statement by Gainesville FL Interfaith Alliance for Immigrant Justice

To the Congressional Hearing on **The Syrian Refugee Crisis and its impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program**

November 19, 2015

The Gainesville, Florida, Interfaith Alliance for Immigrant Justice has previously asked Congress to increase the number of Syrian refugees offered a refuge in the United States to at least 100,000 and we now respectfully repeat that request and not limit the number of refugees admitted to this country any further.

The Gainesville City Commission is actively seeking to make Gainesville a Welcoming City for people from around the world and building strong community support for Welcoming Refugees. Our Interfaith Alliance for Immigrant Justice has developed a network of faith leaders from the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities who are committed to providing hospitality for as many Syrian refugees as may be sent here. We have firm offers for housing, jobs, and other support from business and other community leaders. We have a full-time staff person ready to direct this welcoming project.

We ask you not to turn your backs on Gainesville, Florida, whose citizens of many faiths and none are united in welcoming strangers who are victims of war and in rejecting every form of religious bigotry.

***Presbyterian Church (USA)***

*Statement to the U.S. House of Representatives' Judiciary Committee, pertaining to its hearing*

***“The Syrian Refugee Crisis and its Impact on the Security of the U.S Refugee Admissions Program”***

*November 19, 2015*

We are a world grieving. We mourn the many deaths, not only in Paris, but also in Beirut, Baghdad, and Egypt. Any sense of security we have had is badly compromised by these horrific events; moreover, our fear of ISIS grows with every successful execution of its violent agenda.

Much has been taken from us but we still hold the choice as to how we react in our grief and fear. Many politicians have rushed from grief to fearful judgment. More than half of the governors of our states have attempted to protect their citizens by issuing declarations denying entry of Syrian refugees into their states (as if all of the potential terrorists are Syrian). Some have gone so far as to call for denial of entry to all refugees at the present time, as if that will guarantee safety to the citizens of their state.

As U.S. governors pledge to refuse Syrian refugees within their states and some presidential hopefuls promise to abandon the refugee program altogether, we the people have a choice to make. We can choose to follow those who would have us hide in fear or we can choose hope.

Our nation, for decades, has chosen hope and welcome for those fleeing war and persecution. Since 1975, more than three million refugees have found safety and security within our nation's borders. Right now 11 million Syrians cannot go to school, tend to their land, or raise their children in the place they know as home. They cannot do these things because they, themselves, have been terrorized for far too long by numerous factions, including their own government.

Do we choose to abandon our plan to protect these Syrians because the people who have been threatening them are now threatening the West as well? ISIS has taken lives; they have taken our sense of security. Do we now hand over our hope and compassion to them?

Obviously, we need to move forward with a disciplined response, expediting security checks such as those employed by the U.S. refugee admission program. To refuse certain persons who are fleeing terror and persecution because they are “Syrian” or of some other particular ethnic group is unjust and may be illegal under U.S. law. We can be disciplined and, at the same time, led to love beyond our own limited, fearful vision.

After the crucifixion of Jesus, the disciples hid in fear. They locked the doors but God had another plan. Jesus appeared to them and said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has

sent me, so I send you” (Jn. 20:21). We were not meant to hide. We were meant to walk out in hope and compassion. Author, poet, and peace activist Wendell Berry wrote, “Healing is impossible in loneliness; it is the opposite of loneliness. Conviviality is healing. To be healed we must come with all the other creatures to the feast of Creation” (*The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays*, “The Body and the Earth,” p. 99). The way to end terror is to prove that those who demonize us are wrong. We are not a heartless secular culture. We must witness to the Gospel with generous hospitality. To hide in fear is a mistake. Fear is the ammunition of terror. Hope is the best defense.

**General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church**  
**Statement to the U.S. House of Representatives' Judiciary Committee,**  
**pertaining to its hearing**  
***The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee***  
***Admissions Program***  
**Thursday, November 19, 2015**

The General Board of Church and Society grieves for the victims of violence in Paris, Beirut, and other places around the world recently. We continue to pray for the day when no more tears will be shed as war will give way to peace. Christians are reminded of the coming season of Advent and anticipate the coming of our Lord. We recall the Savior of the world began his life as a refugee.

Vulnerable people are increasingly facing crises in our world today. Perhaps the most vulnerable people are refugees. This is evident today as we see approximately four million refugees from Syria, with three quarters of them being women and children. The solutions to this crisis are complex, but one solution is the safe resettlement of refugees. Currently, more than three million Syrian refugees have resettled in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq. U.S. participation in the resettlement of refugees is vital and demonstrates global leadership while providing relief for the countries in the region to which refugees immediately flee.

The United States presently has resettled only 2,000 Syrian refugees. We feel strongly the United States should significantly increase this number and show authentic global leadership. Refugees are the single most scrutinized and vetted individuals to travel to the United States: undergoing more than seven security checks by intelligence agencies including biometric tests, medical screenings, forensic testing of documents, iris scans to confirm the identity of Syrian refugees throughout the process, investigations by the National Counterterrorism Center, and in-person interviews with Department of Homeland Security officials. It takes individuals longer than 1,000 days to be processed before entering.

States and governments have a responsibility to protect their citizens, including protecting the human rights of all people in their boundaries. However, the calls for stopping Syrians from entering the country are reminiscent of shameful times in this country's history when we surrendered to our fears and refused to serve people who truly were experiencing violence and persecution. Protecting and upholding human dignity and freedom for those fleeing terror, persecution, and economic deprivation, is not only the common responsibility of everyone including state and religious bodies, it is our highest calling.

The United Methodist Church has consistently supported humanitarian responses to crises. Christian witness should reflect the special care that Christ offers migrants, refugees and the vulnerable. As United Methodists, we know that fearful responses are not reflective of Christian life and witness. Instead, Christ calls us to a love for humankind and compassion for all of people regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion.

Therefore, we oppose all efforts to curtail the acceptance of Syrian refugees into the United States as well as the efforts of some to impose a religious litmus test that will discriminate against Muslim refugees. To conflate refugees with terrorists is inexcusable when the millions of people leaving Syria are fleeing that same violence and terror.

Rather than submit to fear, we pray that public officials will give pause to thoughtful deliberation and choose wisdom over political rhetoric. Our hope is that Congress shows true leadership in this time of great tragedy. United Methodists serve refugees across the world and will continue to welcome refugees to our communities. Our prayer is that this will include refugees from Syria.

## **T'ruah: the Rabbinic Call for Human Rights**

### **Written testimony submitted for hearing on the Syrian Refugee Crisis and its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program**

November 19, 2015

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of T'ruah: the Rabbinic Call for Human Rights concerning the response of the United States to the refugee crisis and the effect of recent terror attacks in Beirut and Paris on these important decisions. It is worrisome that more than two dozen state governors have been ignoring our country's obligations to refugees under the UN Refugee Convention, which we signed and ratified in 1967. We are grateful for the Subcommittee's timely review of our responsibilities today.

T'ruah: the Rabbinic Call for Human Rights is an organization of 1,800 rabbis from all streams of Judaism that acts on the Jewish imperative to respect and protect the human rights of all people. Grounded in Torah and our Jewish historical experience and guided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we advocate for human rights in Israel and North America. We are one of many organizations working with Shoulder to Shoulder: Standing with American Muslims, Upholding American Values, and our concern for the welfare of Muslims in the United States comes from our commitment to human rights for all and our own Jewish historical experience as a minority often in need of protection.

Our historical experience as Jews in the United States teaches us the consequences of letting our fears dictate our policies towards those seeking refuge. 75 years ago, as Jewish refugees from the Nazis in Europe desperately sought a safe haven, elected officials in the United States spoke about the threat of Nazi infiltrators arriving on refugee boats, and spoke out against letting in so many Jews. Similar rhetoric about Muslim refugees is being used today, and similar fears are being used as excuses for refusing refuge to Syrians. Today, the processes our country has in place for screening refugees are incredibly thorough, and at least half of the refugees are children, who do not pose a threat. Americans made the mistake less than a century ago of turning away refugee Jewish children and their parents, many of whom went to their deaths. Today, we see in the Syrian refugees the same need that we saw two generations ago among European Jewish refugees, and today we have the strength, the resources, and the understanding to provide them with the shelter and aid they so desperately need.

At the beginning of Genesis, we read: "God created the human in his own image." (Genesis 1:27) Our primary understanding of who we are comes from this phrase, teaching us that every human being – no matter their religion or nationality – is created in God's image, *b'tzelem elohim*. Therefore, to refuse hospitality and aid to millions of human beings in a dire situation is akin to degrading the divine.

If we take our belief in God seriously as people of faith, then we cannot be silent when millions of fellow human beings are being prevented from seeking refuge in other countries, and who are now being treated as undesirable in our country, primarily because of their religion. The Muslim faith of refugees does not make them inherently dangerous, as some voices have said. Acts of terror being committed today by extremists have had devastating impacts on Muslim

communities as well as others. The fear is understandable, but our fears are shared by the majority of refugees from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, who are fleeing precisely the same violence. Refusing to help victims of our shared enemy is immoral and cowardly.

Jewish tradition emphasizes the need for a shared sense of human responsibility. In a collection of Biblical interpretations called Pirke DeRabbi Eliezer, we are told that god gathered the dust - red, black, white, and yellow - to create the first person from the four corners of the world. Why? So that if a person traveled from east to west or from west to east, and the time came for that person to die, the earth would not be able to say that the dust of that person's body did not belong there, or should return to the place from which the person had been created. We learn that the basic elements of creation in each of our bodies are the same everywhere, and that each person's body will return to the dust, as is says in Genesis 3:19, "For you are dust, and you shall return to dust."

We believe that the moral voice of rabbis is critical in ending hateful and false anti-Muslim rhetoric, and we believe that the time to act and help these refugees is now. Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, T'ruah: the Rabbinic Call for Human Rights believes strongly that the United States should do everything it can to be a place of refuge and welcome for those in dire need. We have a moral obligation to uphold the dignity and the safety of those in desperate circumstances. To that end, we strongly support your leadership in sponsoring legislation that would bring Syrian refugees to the United States and ensure their safety once here. We implore you to publicly recommit to our obligations under the Refugee Convention and come to the aid of our allies in Europe and the Middle East today by acting immediately to bring refugees to the United States. Your hearing today is a very important effort in doing that, and we thank you for the opportunity to contribute to it.



**UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE STATEMENT  
to the Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee**

*pertaining to the hearing*

*"The Impact of ISIS on the Homeland and Refugee Resettlement"*

**Thursday, November 19, 2015**

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee was founded 75 years ago to assist refugees escaping the atrocities and violence of Nazism in war-torn Europe. Today, we face a global refugee crisis of similar magnitude, and a U.S. public invited once again to live covered by fear, religious and ethnic bigotry, and xenophobia. We call upon all members of this committee, indeed, all of our elected officials, to take the higher ground in this public debate and defend our highest ideals — to protect the liberty and human rights of all, to be a country that understands its strength and abundance have come as a result of welcoming waves of immigrants from many lands. It is only by taking the higher ground that we can maintain our integrity as a nation and our moral standing as a world power. It is only by taking this higher ground that we can win people's hearts and minds in the midst of ISIS terrorism.

***The United States has traditionally been a leader in refugee protection and resettlement and needs to show bold leadership now.*** The United States can and should resettle at least 100,000 Syrian refugees this coming fiscal year, in addition to increasing our total resettlement commitment from 70,000 to 100,000 refugees from all parts of the world. The administration's initial announcement about resettling 10,000 is far from what is needed.

***Rejecting refugees will make us less safe:*** Ignoring the plight of refugees, who can be potential allies, and denying them safe haven will drive them back to Syria. There they will face the dangerous regime of Bashar al-Assad that they fled in the first place. Some refugees, in a desperate search for any safety, will seek out ISIS as an ally against Assad.

**UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE**

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***There is no need to implement additional security safeguards as the United States already possesses an excellent screening system.*** Refugees are not terrorists. Since 1980, the United States has invited in millions of refugees, including hundreds of thousands from the Middle East, and not one of them has committed an act of terror in this country. All of the 9/11 hijackers, for example, used student or tourist visas.

The simple fact is that those who successfully obtain refugee status are not terrorists. They are often the victims of terrorism in their home countries just as surely as those who lie dead in Paris are.

To become a refugee in the United States, one undergoes a multi-stage vetting process and only after receiving U.N. designation by trained officers in the field. This process takes on average 18 to 24 months. Refugee status is the single most difficult way to come to the United States. It makes no sense for a terrorist to try to use the resettlement process for an attack.

***Instead of tightening our controls, the United States needs to encourage Europe to coordinate the reception and registration of arriving refugees to ensure that security concerns and needs for protection are being met simultaneously.***

Without a comprehensive collaborative response with burden-sharing agreements in place, Europe will not be safe from ISIS threats of infiltration. The United States should increase its humanitarian assistance to UNHCR and bilateral aid to do our part to meet this great challenge. Our best chance for preventing future devastating acts of terror is to act decisively and to work with the international community and within the collective framework of international law to address the critical human rights violations.



**UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST**

**Christian Church  
(Disciples of Christ)**  
In the United States and Canada



## **Not Terrorists; Not Tourists: Refugees are Human Beings**

*I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”—Matthew 25:36-40*

In the past few days, we have shared in the public and global outpouring of sympathy and support for the victims, their families, and the people of France, Lebanon, and Russia. We reiterate that expression of solidarity, and our condemnation of these acts of violence, all of which have been claimed by the “Islamic State.”

We unequivocally deplore and mourn the senselessness that leads people to believe that violence will bring peace and justice, much less honor or blessing. Whether carried out by non- or quasi-state actors in the name of an ideology or religion, or by states in the name of national security, we have seen repeatedly that the largest numbers of victims are innocent of any crime, and undeserving of any such fate. We are not blind to the real threats that exist in our world. We have seen attacks and assaults perpetrated by individuals and groups, states and coalitions take the lives of many, and destroy the hopes and dreams, aspirations and futures of many more. We, too, desire safety and to be free of fear.

An unfortunate consequence of these attacks is the strident rhetoric of many politicians—including United States mayors, governors, and members of Congress—that effectively calls for the closing of the door and borders to innocent victims of the war in Syria. The Syrian war is the worst humanitarian crisis of our generation, and it has no resolution in sight. More than half the Syrian population has been forcibly displaced from their homes, and more than four million Syrians are now refugees in neighboring Middle Eastern countries and Europe. Over half of Syrian refugees are children. The people of Syria did not choose such horrific suffering. The “Islamic State” and the Asad regime are now the main visible protagonists of the war, but they are surely not the only parties.

Our nation is enriched—indeed it is made what it is—by the great diversity that can be celebrated here: cultures, faiths, and heritages. Recognizing the enormity of the Syrian crisis, our churches around the nation have prayed, extended care, and advocated for allowing more refugees from Syria—and in fact more refugees and potential immigrants generally—to be welcomed. In seeking such a welcome, we assert our faith commitments to “love the sojourner” (Deuteronomy 10:19) and to treat “the foreigner residing among you...as your native-born” (Leviticus 19:34). We likewise continue to advocate for negotiated steps to end the root cause of the Syrian and Middle Eastern refugee crisis—the Syrian war. We stand firmly behind those positions.

It is tragic that our country continues to witness the scapegoating and systematic collective punishment that it has known in the past. During World War II, those of Japanese heritage were interned. In former eras it was Catholics, Jews, and repeatedly Asians who were refused entry or inclusion into our immigrant nation. Today we watch still as a new manifestation of Jim Crow leads to the mass incarceration of great numbers of African-Americans. We have experienced how fear and suspicion lead to institutionalized discrimination and systematic dehumanization of whole communities.

We are appalled by the punitive and discriminatory rhetoric and actions by many political leaders to restrict and deny the admission of Syrian refugees because they are Syrian, or because they are Muslim. Such attitudes are contrary to our understanding of our nation's values; and to our reading of our sacred scriptures. Such restrictions and limitations only make the displaced Syrian population doubly victimized: victims of the violence of war, and victims of the violence of hatred and bigotry.

We aspire to something greater than this. We celebrate the human community. We recognize evil in the world, but the answer is not to shut out whole populations collectively; we know that each and every one of us could be excluded based on some aspect of identity. Refugees are already the most heavily scrutinized entrants to our nation, subjected to multiple and repeated security screenings. Such safeguards are essential, should be adequately supported, and should be efficiently managed. The US should continue offering welcome to the world's most vulnerable peoples, including refugees from Syria.

The condemnation of these attacks by American and global Muslim leaders, clergy, and scholars is absolutely consistent with what we know and have experienced from many decades of interreligious engagement in the US, the Middle East and in the Muslim-majority world. Our partnerships in Syria and frequent interaction with Syrians has enabled us to know and share in the humanity of the Syrian people—their joys and sadness, their hopes and dreams, and the wish for a better future.

We are called to be a merciful and caring community; to seek justice and to honor every person; and to stand up and shout out when such a vision is challenged or violated. We urge caution and caring in our discourse and in our actions, so that we all may hold ourselves to a higher standard and ideal.

A joint statement of the leadership of the  
United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer, General Minister  
and President  
Rev. J. Bennett Guess, Executive Minister,  
Local Church Ministries  
Rev. Dr. James Moos, Executive Minister,  
Wider Church Ministries  
Rev. Dr. Bentley DeBardelaben, Manager,  
Justice and Witness Ministries

Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, General Minister  
and President  
Rev. Dr. Ron Degges, President,  
Disciples Home Missions  
Rev. Julia Brown Karimu, President,  
Division of Overseas Ministries

*November 17, 2015*



## **Statement Submitted to the House Judiciary Committee**

Hearing titled “The Syrian Refugee Crisis and its impact on the security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program”

**November 19, 2015**

Chairman, Ranking Member and honorable members, on behalf of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), a national non-profit organization serving refugees and immigrants with a network of over 90 agencies and offices across the nation, I submit our testimony in support of the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program and to provide information on the program.

First, our condolences to the families of the victims in the Paris and Beirut attacks. Our thoughts are with them in this difficult time. On behalf of the refugees USCRI has helped across the U.S. we submit their condolences as well. Refugees seeking safety in Europe and the Middle East, understand the suffering of Parisians well because they have lived it every day. They too are the victims of the brutal actions of ISIS.

For over 100 years the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) has helped the uprooted by facilitating and providing direct professional services, and promoting the full participation of migrants in community life. We understand the impacts of terrorist acts, because we have seen them firsthand in our work with refugees fleeing terrorist persecution.

We are proud to do this work in the United States because our country is a world leader in providing protection to people who need it. Our heritage is to show compassion for victims of persecution and this is what we will continue to do. The global refugee crisis requires strong leadership and the U.S. will inherently make a statement by our presence or absence. For refugees who are the most vulnerable even after fleeing their countries: torture survivors; women at-risk; those with complex medical situations, for these individuals resettlement might be the only option. For refugees who have languished in camps without the right to work, with children denied education, with the daily betrayal of basic human rights, these are the individuals for whom we must stand. We must not let these heinous acts in Paris make us turn our backs on children and families when our opportunity is to welcome refugees in the U.S. We must not forget our own country was founded by refugees fleeing religious persecution.

### **A Solutions-Based Approach**

Based on our experience we have the following recommendations:

1. Support the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program as a safe, humanitarian and foreign policy operation.
2. Increase funding for the Department of Homeland Security to maintain the integrity of security checks.

3. Increase support for the Office of Refugee Resettlement to enhance the integration of newly arrived refugees.

### **Continue the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program because it is safe**

As the former Director of the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement I am familiar with the security checks that refugees must undergo prior to their arrival to the U.S. and am confident that our vetting system works. Unlike the current situation in Europe, the U.S. gets to choose which refugees we admit. Refugees coming in through the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program must pass through a many-layered review which includes an in-depth, in-person interview by well-trained Homeland Security officers; and multiple highly rigorous background checks, including biographic and biometric investigations, using multiple databases. The FBI, DHS, and National Intelligence Agencies each run their own investigation. The security screenings occur at multiple points in the process and there is ongoing, recurring vetting. Syrians also go through an enhanced review with U.S. Customs and Immigration Services. Refugees also pass a health screening to ensure they don't have a contagious medical condition.

Less than 1% of refugees are resettled worldwide. There are more than 4 million Syrian refugees, and the US has resettled a little over 2,000 since the civil war began in 2011. While our resettlement impact has been small, it has demonstrated to other countries the importance of making opportunity for those who cannot return home.

Governors stating they will not allow refugees in their states is un-American and against the law. Profiling and screening solely on the basis of religious or racial characteristics would, in our view, be discriminatory and inappropriate. Freedom of movement is a constitutionally protected right of all persons and it has consistently been upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. The federal government has the exclusive power to regulate immigration and any state law that conflicts with federal law is illegal according the Supremacy Clause of the Constitution which made federal law "the supreme law of the land." States cannot determine the federal government's refugee policy or prevent people from moving to their states, but governors can make Syrians feel unwelcome -- which would break down a system that relies on community support. From its inception, the U.S. Refugee Resettlement program has been a public/private partnership relying on the welcoming intentions of communities, individuals and states.

USCRI also thanks President Obama for his leadership in continuing to support the resettlement of refugees. USCRI stands with the President's statement that, "The people who are fleeing Syria are the most harmed by terrorism. They are the most vulnerable as a consequence to civil war and strife. We do not close our hearts to these victims of such violence and somehow start equating the issue of refugees with the issue of terrorism."

### **Increase funding for the Department of Homeland Security to maintain the integrity of security checks**

Beginning in 2011, additional security checks were implemented for refugees seeking admission to the United States, resulting in severe disruptions in refugee travel, unclear and erroneous results, and a 'looping' effect where some checks expire while refugees wait in line for the next

step in the process. This has made it nearly impossible for many to travel, which can result in further harm as they wait. There are at least three to five different biometric and biographic security checks performed depending on the applicant's age, gender, and country of nationality. The administration should consolidate security checks to replace the current system of overlapping checks that expire while others are conducted. A comprehensive biographic and biometric check acceptable to all agencies would improve efficiency, processing, and the protection of refugees. Also, cases in which one persons' checks are holding up their family or cross-referenced case should be told their options so they can make well-informed decisions about their family's future. Additional interview officers will enable the system to maintain its rigorous nature without redundancy and waste. USCRI shares the interest in keeping the refugee program safe as our network of agencies and staff work with refugees every day.

### **Increase support for the Office of Refugee Resettlement to enhance integration**

Resettled refugees make significant economic and cultural contributions to their new communities. An increase in funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement to ensure adequate, stable and sustainable resources and programing for newly arrived refugees will only improve these outcomes. Ensure that efforts are pursued to encourage and equip refugees for naturalization by increasing the number of civic engagement programs and access to English language training. Congress should strongly consider funding the Matching Grant Program at higher levels. The Match Grant program enables refugees and other eligible individuals to become self-sufficient without resorting to federal or state assistance programs. A variety of programs support newcomers but are without sufficient or secure funding. This includes Ethnic & Community Based Organizations, Preferred Communities, Elderly Programs, Home Childcare, Refugee Agricultural Partnership, Microenterprise, Individual Development Account, Cuban-Haitian, Technical & Training Assistance, and School Impact grants.

### **The Need to Act**

As a nation of immigrants, we know better than most the importance of providing hope and opportunity to those fleeing persecution and expect our government to continue to demonstrate leadership on this issue. We cannot continue to stand by while refugees are in need of life-saving protection. I welcome any questions or opportunity to meet to discuss the program and our recommendations further. Thank you for your time and consideration.

For question please contact Esmeralda Lopez at [elopez@uscrdc.org](mailto:elopez@uscrdc.org) 703-310-1130 ext 3056

Attachments:

USCRI Refugee Security Screening Backgrounder

USCRI Refugee Flow Chart



**Written Testimony of**

**Most Reverend Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp.  
Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Seattle, WA  
Chairman, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Migration**

**For a Hearing of the House Judiciary Committee**

**“On Safe and Secure Resettlement of Refugees Fleeing from the Syrian Crisis”**

**9:00 a.m., Thursday, November 19, 2015  
Room 2141 Rayburn House Office Building**

I am the Right Reverend Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp., Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle, Washington, and Chair of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration (USCCB/COM).

I would like to thank Chair Bob Goodlatte (R-VA-6th), Ranking Member John Conyers(D-MI-13th), and committee members for the opportunity to comment on the important issue of safe and secure refugee resettlement.

All of us are mindful of the senseless violence perpetrated by ISIS in Paris last week. As we mourn with our French brothers and sisters and offer our deepest condolences, we rededicate ourselves to seeking peace for Syria and her people and safe and dignified options for refugees fleeing from ISIS and other persecutors in Syria.

I am disturbed by calls from both federal and state officials for an end to the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the United States. These refugees are fleeing terror themselves—violence like we have witnessed in Paris. They are extremely vulnerable families, women, and children who are fleeing for their lives. We cannot and should not blame these vulnerable refugees for the actions of a terrorist organization.

Moreover, refugees to this country must pass security checks and multiple interviews before entering the United States—more than any arrival to the United States. It can take up to two years for a refugee to pass through the whole vetting process. We can look at strengthening the already stringent screening program, but we should continue to welcome those in desperate need.

Instead of using this tragedy to scapegoat all refugees, I call upon our public officials to work together to end the Syrian conflict peacefully so the close to 4 million Syrian refugees can return to their country and rebuild their homes. Until that goal is achieved, we must work with the world community to provide safe haven to vulnerable and deserving refugees who are simply attempting to survive. As a great nation, the United States must show leadership during this crisis and bring nations together to protect those in danger and bring an end to the conflicts in the Middle East.

Our analysis and recommendations in today's testimony will focus on how we believe safe and secure resettlement fits in as a small, but important, part of the overall solution to the Syrian refugee crisis. Before, and especially since, September 11, 2001, Congress has been vigilant about maintaining the safety and security of the U.S. resettlement program. This testimony will detail the bars to U.S. asylum and refugee protection, particularly those involved in crime or terrorism. It will also detail how compliance with these bars are maintained through numerous and arduous interviews, administrative reviews, security checks, and background checks built into the refugee resettlement screening process by the Departments of State, Justice, and Homeland Security. In the testimony, we will also show how safe and secure resettlement fits in to the overall comprehensive humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis.

A USCCB/COM delegation travelled to the region in October 2012 and completed a report titled, "Mission to the Middle East: Report of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on Syrian Refugees." We also traveled to the region more recently and released a report in January 2015 entitled, "Refuge and Hope in the Time of ISIS: The Urgent Need for Protection, Humanitarian Support, and Durable Solutions in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece." Between 2012 and 2015, we have seen more than a sevenfold increase in the number of Syrian refugees fleeing to neighboring host countries. There were 550,000 Syrian refugees in the region when we first visited. By the end of 2015, the number is expected to reach 4.3 million, with over half of them being children under the age of 17, 38% children under the age of 12, and three quarters of them being women and children.

With the coming of ISIS we have also witnessed an enormous increase in the number of ethnic and

religious minorities fleeing persecution. The conflict has also spread into Iraq, displacing many in that country, as well.

Mr. Chairman, I ask that the above reports be included in the hearing record. In this current written testimony, I will integrate and update our observations and recommendations from those reports.

When considering refugee situations, Catholics and all Christians are reminded that one of Jesus' first experiences as an infant was to flee for his life from King Herod with his family to Egypt. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were refugees in the Middle East and faced some of the same fear, uncertainty, and dislocation that the millions of Syrians and Iraqis imperiled by this crisis face today. The situation is especially urgent given the unprecedented size, complexity, and rate of growth of the displaced population.

Mr. Chairman, in my testimony today regarding the U.S. resettlement program USCCB/COM recommends that the United States:

- Assure that U.S. resettlement is done in a safe, secure, and timely manner.
- Fully fund the U.S. Departments of State, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services to securely vet and humanely resettle 85,000 refugees admitted under the Presidential Determination (PD) for Fiscal Year 2016, 100,000 refugees admitted under the PD for the Fiscal Year 2017, and additionally, the US should carry out its usual role as international human rights and refugee protection leader and assure that we do our fair share of safe, humane resettlement of Syrians.
- Encourage the Department of State (DOS) to focus especially on the most vulnerable refugees, including unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs), other children at risk, women at risk, refugees with serious health concerns, the elderly, victims of torture and/or trauma, those with affiliations with the U.S. government or U.S. based NGOs, media, and companies; members of persecuted minority ethnic and religious groups; and refugees in immediate danger.
- Increase U.S. resettlement of vulnerable non-Syrian refugees in the region, such as Iraqis, and urge other nations to do likewise and thereby share the refugee protection responsibility with the host countries.

Further, Mr. Chairman, we recommend that resettlement be integrated into a comprehensive approach to this crisis and urge that the United States:

- Work with other governments to obtain a ceasefire, initiate serious peace negotiations, provide increased impartial humanitarian assistance and allow safe passage for this assistance within Syria, especially for internally displaced people (IDPs), and establish a peace that builds an inclusive society in Syria and Iraq that protects the rights of all its citizens, including Christians and other minorities, enabling them to return to their homeland in the future with safety and dignity.
- Encourage refugee host countries to maintain secure border and migration enforcement policies and practices but at the same time maintain policies and practices that enable Syrians and other refugee groups (such as Iraqis) to safely flee from Syria and Iraq to find protection and humanitarian care without improper rejection at the border, deportation, or arbitrary detention in poor conditions.

- Provide more U.S. support and encourage more international humanitarian and development support for refugees in the region, especially children, for their basic necessities of life, immediate protection, primary and secondary education, and systems that lay the groundwork for durable solutions, including employment for adults; and provide host countries additional housing, food, water, sanitation, health, education, and transportation infrastructure to allow them to host these large numbers of refugees.
- Urge the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in consultation with DOS and the Department of Justice (DOJ), to expeditiously remove unjust impediments to U.S. resettlement by implementing discretionary authority to grant exemptions from overly broad terrorism related inadmissibility grounds (TRIG) of U.S. immigration law.

### **I. Catholic Social Teaching**

The Catholic Church is a migrant and refugee church. The Catholic Church in the United States, for example, is made up of more than 58 ethnic groups from throughout the world, including Europe, the Middle East, the Near East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

We have a long history of involvement in refugee and child protection both in the advocacy arena and in welcoming and integrating waves of immigrants and refugees who have helped build our nation as one that embraces ethnic diversity while sharing common values. The work of the USCCB's Committee on Migration is carried out by the Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS), which is the largest U.S. refugee resettlement agency, resettling one million of the three million refugees who have come to our country since 1975. It is a national leader in caring for unaccompanied refugee and migrant children and works with over 100 Catholic Charities across the United States to welcome and serve refugees and unaccompanied refugee and migrant children.

The U.S. Catholic Church also relates closely with the Catholic Church in countries throughout the world, where our worldwide Catholic communion serves the needs of the most marginalized regardless of nationality or religious affiliation. We serve many refugees, internally displaced persons, and host nations straining under the large influx of people fleeing persecution and war. The Church's deep experience in combating poverty and forced migration and their root causes in the Middle East also includes the work of, among others, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the official overseas relief and development agency of the U.S. Catholic bishops, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), of which USCCB is the largest member, Caritas International, Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), and the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA).

The Catholic Church's work of assisting all migrants everywhere stems from the belief that every person is created in God's image. In the Old Testament, God calls upon his people to care for the alien because of their own experience as aliens: "So, you, too, must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:17-19). In the New Testament, the image of the migrant is seen in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. In his own life and work, Jesus identified himself with newcomers and with other marginalized persons in a special way: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt. 25:35). Jesus himself was an itinerant preacher without a home of his own, and as noted above, a refugee fleeing to Egypt to avoid persecution and death (Mt. 2:15).

In modern times, popes over the last 100 years have developed the Church's teaching on migration, teaching that has been frequently applied by church leaders. Pope Pius XII reaffirmed the Catholic Church's commitment to caring for pilgrims, aliens, exiles, refugees, and migrants of every kind,

affirming that all peoples have the right to conditions worthy of human life and, if these conditions are not present, the right to migrate.<sup>1</sup>

In our joint pastoral letter, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope, A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration*, January 23, 2003, the U.S. and Mexican Catholic bishops call for nations to work toward a “globalization of solidarity.” “Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection. Those who flee wars and persecution should be protected by the global community. No. 99. Also, “[b]ecause of their heightened vulnerability, unaccompanied minors require special consideration and care” No. 82.

Recently, Pope Francis defended the rights of refugees and migrants, traveling to Lampedusa, Italy, to call for their protection. He decried the “globalization of indifference” and the “throwaway culture” that leads to the disregard of those fleeing persecution in order to seek refuge or a better life. Regarding Syrian refugees drowning at sea as they flee the crisis, he later exhorted the international community, “We cannot allow the Mediterranean to become a vast cemetery!” He urged solidarity with refugees and cooperation among the nations to address this challenge. During his recent trip to the United States, he spoke about the need to welcome refugees and migrants, urging Congress and the American people, “to respond in a way which is always just, humane, and fraternal”, remembering the Golden Rule and helping refugees, not viewing them as a problem.

## **II. Overview of the Ongoing Syrian Refugee Crisis**

*“War is like fire. A fire eats everything before it. So does war. There is no peace anywhere,” says a Syrian Christian refugee woman in Lebanon served by a Catholic aid group.*

The Syrian refugee crisis deserves the full attention and mobilization of the international community. The armed conflict has continued to escalate across Syria and has spread into Iraq. It has brought ongoing large-scale destruction, human suffering, and death inside the country and threatens destabilization of the whole region. The size, scope, rapid growth and complexity of Syria’s forced migration are reasons for deep concern. With the brutal conflict and ever-growing forced migration, there is a serious lack of livelihood, shelter, food, water, sanitation, education, health care, and protection inside Syria and in neighboring countries that host Syrian refugees.

Protection, humanitarian support, and pursuit of durable solutions for refugees are important for humanitarian reasons but also as part of a strategy for maintaining the stability of the host countries and the region. This requires responsibility sharing by the international community both through generous assistance to support refugees in the host countries and also by providing refuge for some of those fleeing the crisis. Safe and secure refugee resettlement plays a relatively small, but important, role in the overall strategy to address the crisis. Before detailing the role of safe and secure resettlement, we want to describe the overall challenge facing the international community.

The conflict has led to the forced displacement of some 50% of the Syrian population, including some 8 million internally displaced people (IDP).

The Syrian Christian woman quoted above is among the some 4.3 million Syrian refugees forced to flee their country, with 1.1 million seeking refuge in Lebanon, 634,000 in Jordan, 2.2 million in Turkey, 244,000 in Iraq, 127,000 in Egypt, and the several hundred thousand who have fled to Europe seeking

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Exsul Familia* (On the Spiritual Care of Migrants), September, 1952.

asylum.<sup>2</sup> Besides the increase of Syrian refugees to neighboring countries, those countries also host large refugee populations of non-Syrians, including many Iraqis, Afghans, and others.

One UNHCR official in Turkey explained to the USCCB/COM delegation the impact of the refugee arrivals there over the last four years, “It began as a migration emergency, became a protracted refugee situation, and is now a social crisis for our country.” Some 20% of the Lebanese population is refugees and some 8% of Jordan’s. Although very high, those numbers alone do not capture the challenge for host nations and communities. During the first two-days of the most recent trip to Turkey, some 130,000 Syrian Kurds fled from ISIS in Kobane, Syria, into southern Turkey, where Turkey generously provided them protection and humanitarian care. To use a local community example, in Arsal, Lebanon, the city of 35,000 has already welcomed 39,000 Syrian refugees, including 20,000 in November 2013 alone.<sup>3</sup>

An enormous additional humanitarian and refugee protection challenge arises because over 85% of Syrian refugees in the region are so-called urban refugees who reside outside of camps, seeking refuge in widely dispersed local communities.

Some 75% of the Syrian refugees are women and children. Many, especially women and girls, face serious problems with gender-based and sexual violence in Syria and also often in the host countries. UNHCR reports that around half of the refugees are children, with 75% of them less than 12 years old.<sup>4</sup> Some 60% do not attend school, including 80% in Lebanon and more than 50% in Jordan.<sup>5</sup> Only 70% of Syrian, urban refugee children attend school in Turkey. This is due both to lack of education infrastructure and also because of widespread child labor—a strategy Syrian families have had to resort to for family survival. USCCB/COM also heard disturbing accounts of young girls being subjected to early marriage and bride selling.

The most vulnerable refugees are unaccompanied children. UNHCR has so far identified 3760 unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) among the refugees in Lebanon and Jordan.<sup>6</sup> The USCCB/COM delegation saw indications of many more than that during their recent trips. These are children alone in the world whose parents have died or who have been separated from their parents.

We turn last to the vulnerability of some Syrian minorities. While 75% of people in Syria<sup>7</sup> and 90% of registered refugees fleeing from Syria are Sunni Muslims,<sup>8</sup> there are also several ethnic and religious minority groups, including Christians, who are at risk. Christians make up some 10% of the Syrian population, totaling about 2.2 million.<sup>9</sup> These are among the most ancient and venerable Christian communities in the world that have a history of peaceful coexistence with their Muslim neighbors. They long to remain in Syria.

A growing number of ethnic and religious minorities from both Syria and Iraq are now fleeing as a result of ISIS violence. Besides the ethnic Kurds from Syria described above, the USCCB/COM delegation met many refugees during their trip who were fleeing religious persecution. Iraqi Christians had fled to Turkey from villages near Mosul, Iraq. They reported that they, as Christians, were given an ultimatum by

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<sup>2</sup> Syrian Refugee Response Regional overview, accessed Nov.17, 2105, at <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Secretary of State Anne Richard, Testimony, December 10, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR, *The Future of Syria: Children in Crisis*, December 2013, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Assistant Secretary Anne Richard, Testimony, December 10, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR, *The Future of Syria: Children in Crisis*, December 2013, p. 9 (2440 URMs in Lebanon, 1320 in Jordan).

<sup>7</sup> USCIRF, *Special Report Protecting and Promoting Religious Freedom in Syria*, April 2013, p. 1 (available at [www.uscirtf.gov](http://www.uscirtf.gov)).

<sup>8</sup> USCIRF, Fact Sheet Syria; Syria’s Refugee Crisis and its Implications, July 2013, p. 1 (available at [www.uscirtf.gov](http://www.uscirtf.gov)).

<sup>9</sup> USCIRF, *Special Report: Protecting and Promoting Religious Freedom in Syria*, April 2013, p. 1 (available at [www.uscirtf.gov](http://www.uscirtf.gov)).

ISIS to convert, pay a penalty for being Christian, or die. They understood the seriousness of the threat when the severed head of one of their noncompliant Christian neighbors was left on his doorstep. “I fled my country for Jesus Christ,” explained one middle-aged man. “I left so I could freely follow Jesus.” The delegation also met a young Syrian Christian convert seeking refuge in Bulgaria whose whole family had been killed after he explained to ISIS fighters why he had converted to Christianity. My fellow Bishop Oscar Cantú, Chairman of USCCB’s Committee on International Justice and Peace, rightly called religious persecution the “crisis within a crisis” in recent Senate testimony.<sup>10</sup>

### **III. Recommendations**

We commend the peoples and governments of the refugee host countries for their generous welcome of their Syrian brothers and sisters. We commend the donor countries of humanitarian assistance led by the United States, UN agencies led by UNHCR, nongovernmental organizations, and other humanitarian actors. Yet with the escalating brutality of the conflict in Syria, the continued reports of crimes against humanity by the Syrian government and ISIS, and the thousands of Syrians fleeing for their lives every week, an even greater effort is needed. We urge a comprehensive approach to addressing the crisis that recognizes the important role that humanitarian interventions play in addressing the safety and security of the region. As you will note, we urge a still modest, but much more significant, role for U.S. resettlement as part of the solution. Up to now, the United States has resettled only some 2,000 Syrians.

Mr. Chairman, we will provide details now of our three sets of recommendations for Congress—the first regarding safe and secure resettlement, the second regarding the need for an inclusive peace in Syria, and the third regarding the need for taking a comprehensive approach by including sufficient humanitarian and development support for the refugees and host countries.

#### ***A. Increase U.S. refugee resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees and encourage other resettlement nations to do so as well.***

International refugee protection has three durable solutions to refugee situations: voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity back to one’s home when peace comes, local integration into the host country, and safe and secure resettlement to a third country. In most refugee situations and in the case of Syria, voluntary repatriation is the most viable solution for the vast majority of refugees. To make this possible, the international community needs to support neighboring host countries to be able to safely and humanely host refugees until peace arrives. An inclusive peace in Syria and Iraq would enable all the refugees in neighboring countries, including ethnic and religious minorities, to be able to pursue voluntary return to their home countries. Such return is very important to most of the refugees. For many Catholic and Christian leaders and Catholic and Christian communities forced to flee from Syria and Iraq, it would be a cherished opportunity to return and rebuild their ancient communities and maintain the vital and important role of Christianity in the region that is traditionally diverse both in ethnicity and religion. For some refugees, with the permission of the host countries, they will be able to pursue the second durable solution and make a new life permanently in the neighboring host countries. For a very small percentage of the refugees, especially the most vulnerable and those most victimized and traumatized, the most viable and humane durable solution is resettlement. The most vulnerable Syrian refugees includes people from the majority and also from the minority ethnic and religious groups.

In addition to providing robust humanitarian support for refugees in host countries, the United States, a nation of immigrants and refugees, often demonstrates solidarity with refugees and host countries in far-away crises like Syria’s by providing strategic refugee resettlement for the most vulnerable refugees. It is

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<sup>10</sup> Testimony by Bishop Oscar Cantú, Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace on behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops before the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs of the Committee on Appropriations of the United States Senate, March 11, 2015.

strategic for the most vulnerable refugees because removing them from danger keeps their vulnerable situation from becoming catastrophic. It is strategic for host nations because it often removes vulnerable people who otherwise cause a disproportionate drain on the host's already strained resources. It is strategic for the overall crisis because it shares the responsibilities and spurs other nations to do likewise—either to provide aid or to agree to do resettlement or another durable solution. The U.S. generally resettles as many refugees as all other resettlement countries in the world combined.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops urges the United States to make strategic use of resettlement for the most vulnerable Syrian and Iraqi refugees. UNHCR says that because of their extreme vulnerabilities about 10% of the Syrians need to be resettled. Among the most vulnerable are unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) whose parents have died or who are separated from their parents. There is a great risk that many other URMs, as urban refugees, will not be identified at all and their needs will go unnoticed by the overwhelmed host government and international staff. There is a strong need for community-based systems to identify vulnerable, at-risk refugees, especially unaccompanied children, to screen them, to provide protection and care, and to prepare for resettlement or whatever durable solutions is in each child's best interest. URMs should receive "best interest determinations" (BIDs) and ongoing support from social workers.

I must also call attention to religious minorities from Syria and Iraq as being among the most vulnerable refugees. As described earlier, it continues to be the hope and plan for many Catholic and Christian refugees to return home in the future. But for others, their vulnerability, trauma, and loss is such that the most viable and humane durable solution for them is resettlement. Other at-risk groups for whom resettlement is most viable include women and children at risk, refugees with serious health concerns, the elderly, victims of torture and/or trauma, those with affiliations with the U.S. government or U.S. based NGOs/media/companies; members of other minority persecuted groups, and refugees in immediate physical danger.

Mr. Chairman, before turning to recommendations regarding resettlement, we want to focus on maintaining the security and integrity of the refugee program, a goal that we share with this subcommittee. Before, and especially since, September 11, 2001, Congress has been vigilant about barring bad actors from U.S. asylum and refugee protection, particularly those involved in crime or terrorism. Among other bars, asylum or refugee protection in the United States cannot be granted to anyone who has persecuted others, been convicted of a particularly serious crime in the United States or a serious, nonpolitical crime in another country, engaged in terrorist activity, been a member of a terrorist organization, or otherwise posed a security threat to the United States.

Compliance with these bars are maintained through numerous and arduous interviews, administrative reviews, security checks, and background checks built into the refugee resettlement screening process.<sup>11</sup> Initially, most resettlement cases first involve a UNHCR refugee determination interview process that screens out individuals who have no grounds for refugee protection or who have committed heinous actions that fall under the exclusion clauses of the 1951 Refugee Convention. UNHCR (or sometimes the U.S. Embassy or a trained staff from a nongovernment organization) refers the refugee applicant to a Resettlement Support Center (RSC) overseen by the U.S. Department of State (DOS), where detailed biographical and personal information is gathered that will be used for in-person interviews by the

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<sup>11</sup>"Security Screening of Refugees Admitted to the United States: A Detailed, Rigorous Process," U.S. Committee for Immigrants and Refugees, accessed May 19, 2015, at <http://www.rcusa.org/uploads/pdfs/Refugee%20resettlement%20-%20step%20by%20step%20USCRI.pdf>; "Bars & Security Screening in the Asylum & Refugee Process," Human Rights First, accessed May 19, 2015, <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/HRF-Security-Safeguards.pdf>

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and for security and background checks. DOS submits the names of all refugees through the Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS). Further security checks are done through U.S. interagency checks that have been conducted since 2010. If needed, a Security Advisory Opinion (SAO) is submitted to U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies. When DHS arrives for in-person interviews, they take fingerprints and photos that are run through certain U.S. government data bases. If the person demonstrates grounds for asylum and no security problems, DHS grants a conditional approval, pending final security and medical screening. Prior to departure, another U.S. interagency security check is conducted. If the person passes, he/she travels to the United States where another check is done by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at the Port of Entry. If any of these checks reveal information that disqualify the person that ends the person's ability to be admitted to the United States as a refugee.

At the point of applying for legal permanent residency another round of security and background checks is conducted for refugees. At the point of applying for U.S. citizenship another round is conducted. If above described security problems are revealed, they will bar the person from gaining the status they seek and subject the person to removal. As is clear from the arduous process, DOS and DHS have put in many layers of security to help assure the security and integrity of the program that both provides a new life to deserving refugees and assures the safety of the U.S. communities that welcome them.

Despite Congress' best intentions, Republicans and Democrats alike have noted that certain U.S. security provisions create the unintended consequence of keeping certain deserving refugees from securing resettlement in the United States. For U.S. resettlement of Syrians and Iraqis and for virtually any other refugee population that is fleeing an armed conflict, the set of overly broad U.S. immigration law provisions that bar entry to the United States, so-called TRIG (terrorism-related inadmissibility grounds). While having a laudable goal, TRIG provisions have been written and applied in such an overly broad way that they have delayed or barred admission of many deserving refugees who have no connection to terrorism.

Under the provisions, if a country has an armed, nongovernmental opposition group fighting against the government, that group is deemed to be involved in "terrorist activities." It does not matter if the opposition includes noble freedom fighters supported by the U.S. government to fight against a brutal regime that the U.S. condemns. If someone is a member, solicits funds or provides material support for the armed opposition group, or has a parent or spouse so involved, that person is barred from entering the United States. It does not matter if the person never violated any rules of war or criminal laws or has a neutral, nonmilitary role in the community such as providing humanitarian assistance or healthcare or retail sales. It does not matter that the person poses no danger or threat to our country.

In Syria's refugee crisis, there are armed opposition groups fighting against the Syrian government, a government that the UN has condemned for committing crimes against humanity. The opposition groups include some who have received nonmilitary aid from the U.S. government. Because of these and other aspects of the Syrian crisis, the overly broad and unfair application of the TRIG provisions pose a serious impediment for the resettlement of Syrians unless the Administration uses its exemption powers. These are measures painstakingly drawn up by a multi-agency, high level team from the Departments of Homeland Security, State, and Justice. They are also meant to be carefully, judiciously applied during the resettlement screening process. DHS officials have told us that exemptions tailored to the Syrian crisis have been completed and are awaiting the final authorization.

Mr. Chairman, to facilitate the small, but important, role of resettlement in addressing the massive humanitarian refugee crisis caused by the Syrian conflict, we urge the United States to:

- Assure that the increased resettlement is done in a safe, secure, and timely manner by:
  - Maintaining the rigorous security and background checks in the resettlement process while assuring that Congress appropriates and the Administration, through DHS and other security screening agencies, allocates sufficient resources and staff to increase the number people for whom security checks can be expeditiously conducted, thereby speeding up the process for refugees facing significant risks.
  - Increasing the nongovernmental and community capacity to identify and screen the most vulnerable urban refugees in host countries, including URM, to meet their immediate protection and humanitarian needs, and to prepare for their durable solutions;
  - Increasing UNHCR's capacity for refugee status determination, resettlement, and BIDs; and for U.S. Resettlement Support Centers' refugee and URM processing capacity;
  - Facilitating Best Interest Determinations (BIDs) for the 3760 unaccompanied refugee minors identified in Jordan and Lebanon and for all URM identified in the region, and use BIDs to pursue their short-term protection and durable solutions;
  - Increasing DHS' capacity to do circuit rides to the region to interview Syrian and other refugees for potential resettlement; and
  - Allowing Syrians with noncurrent visa petitions to receive refugee interviews while maintaining the same strict security processing measures (this was one of the successful strategies to facilitate Iraqi resettlement).
- Fully fund the U.S. Departments of State, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services to securely vet and humanely resettle 85,000 refugees admitted under the Presidential Determination (PD) for Fiscal Year 2016, 100,000 refugees admitted under the PD for the Fiscal Year 2017, and additionally, the US should carry out its usual role as international human rights and refugee protection leader and assure that we do our fair share of safe, humane resettlement of Syrians.
- Encourage the Department of State (DOS) to focus especially on the most vulnerable refugees, including unaccompanied refugee minors (URM), other children at risk, women at risk, refugees with serious health concerns, the elderly, victims of torture and/or trauma, those with affiliations with the U.S. government or U.S. based NGOs, media, and companies; members of persecuted minority ethnic and religious groups; and refugees in immediate danger.
- Increase U.S. resettlement of vulnerable non-Syrian refugees in the region, such as Iraqis, and urge other nations to do likewise and thereby share the refugee protection responsibility with the host countries.
- Increase U.S. resettlement of vulnerable, non-Syrian refugees in the region, such as Iraqis, and urge other resettlement nations to do the same, and thereby further share the burden with host countries.
- Urge DHS, in consultation with DOS and DOJ, to proactively and expeditiously remove unjust impediments to U.S. resettlement by fully authorizing the discretionary authority to grant exemptions from TRIG provisions of U.S. immigration law currently awaiting approval at DHS and by judiciously interpreting the meaning of the "material support" bar.

***B. Pursue an inclusive peace in Syria.***

While resettlement is the main focus of this hearing, it is very important to also recognize the other elements that contribute to a holistic response to the crisis. During a public appearance on August 25, 2013, Pope Francis denounced and called for an end to the “multiplication of massacres and atrocious acts” in Syria. Later, Pope Francis urged “the international community to make every effort to promote clear proposals for peace without further delay, a peace based on dialogue and negotiation, for the good of the entire Syrian people. May no effort be spared in guaranteeing humanitarian assistance to those wounded by this terrible conflict, in particular those forced to flee and the many refugees in nearby countries.”

Mr. Chairman, we urge Congress to

- Work with other governments to obtain a ceasefire, initiate serious peace negotiations, provide increased impartial humanitarian assistance and allow safe passage for this assistance within Syria and Iraq, especially for internally displaced people (IDPs), and establish a peace that builds an inclusive society in Syria and Iraq that protects the rights of all its citizens, including Christians and other minorities, enabling them to return in the future with safety and dignity to their homeland.

***C. Support host countries to maintain generous protection and humanitarian care for refugees, especially children.***

Given the huge influx of refugees, international support and special vigilance are needed to maintain border and migration enforcement and asylum policies that safeguard refugee protection and related humanitarian care for Syrians and also for Iraqis, and other refugees, while also maintaining the safety and security of the refugee host countries.

Beyond maintaining protection at the border, there are enormous political and logistical challenges involved in protecting and serving the 85% of Syrians who are urban refugees. When refugees reside in camps, the international community generally partners with host nations to create the camps’ infrastructure and service delivery system parallel to that of local communities, with refugees and communities remaining insulated from one another. With urban refugees, the international community partners with the host country and local communities to expand local infrastructure and services and facilitates face-to-face interactions, problem solving, conflict resolution, and collaboration between the local communities and refugees.

Lack of housing continues to be a chronic issue for Syrian urban refugees, many of whom were hard-working, middle-class people when they fled the conflict. Some fortunately still live with host families or friends. Others who lived in apartments—often 4-5 families per apartment-- have already spent down what savings they had, and with few jobs, have insufficient money for rent. They, as well as new arrivals, are forced to find shelter in abandoned or unfinished buildings, or to create settlements of makeshift tents provided by NGOs. Especially over the last year, many are also fleeing onward on dangerous maritime routes to seek refuge in Europe and beyond, with thousands losing their lives at sea.

Mr. Chairman, regarding the neighboring countries who host Syrian refugees, we urge Congress to

- Encourage host countries in the region to maintain secure border and migration enforcement policies and practices but at the same time refugee protection policies and practices that enable Syrians and other refugee groups (such as Iraqis) to safely flee from Syria and Iraq to find

humane protection and care without improper rejection at the border, deportation, or arbitrary detention in poor conditions.

- Provide more U.S. support and encourage more international humanitarian and development support for refugees in the region, especially children, for their basic necessities of life, immediate protection, primary and secondary education, and systems that lay the groundwork for durable solutions, including employment for adults; and provide host countries additional housing, food, water, sanitation, health, education, and transportation infrastructure to allow them to host these large numbers of refugees.

## **Conclusion**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to share our observations and recommendations.



**Statement of Andrea Cristina Mercado and Miriam Yeung, co-chairs of We Belong Together**

**Submitted to the United States House of Representatives Judiciary Committee  
Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security**

**Hearing on “The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Security of the US Refugee  
Admission Program”**

**November 19, 2015**

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Lofgren and members of the Subcommittee, we are Andrea Cristina Mercado and Miriam Yeung, co-chairs of We Belong Together. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for inclusion in the record for today’s hearing.

We Belong Together is a campaign co-anchored by the National Domestic Workers Alliance and the National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum to mobilize women in support of common-sense immigration policies that will keep families together and empower women. We Belong Together was launched on Mother’s Day in 2010 and has exposed the dangerous impact of immigration enforcement on women and families, advocated for comprehensive immigration reform legislation and campaigned President Obama to take executive action to improve the broken immigration system.

We stand in solidarity with the people of Beirut, Paris and all around the world who have experienced the pain and tragedy of senseless violence. We also stand in solidarity with all refugees around our world who, in order to escape violent conflicts and danger, escape to uncertain futures seeking safety and protection. Currently, Syria is experiencing a humanitarian crisis with 4 million refugees fleeing the country and 8 million internally displaced persons. Over 75% of these refugees are women and children and more than half are under the age of 18.

We urge the United States to act as a true global leader and offer protection to refugees from Syria and from around the world. This Subcommittee should ensure that growing anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment do not guide policy decisions – this would be un-American, inhumane and dishonorable to the dignity of migrants seeking safety and protection in the U.S.

**Welcoming America's Statement to the U.S. House of Representatives' Judiciary Committee,  
pertaining to its hearing Lessons from the Paris Terrorists Attacks: Ramifications for the Homeland  
and Refugee Resettlement**

**Thursday, November 19, 2015**

We are deeply saddened by the tragic events in Paris, Beirut and other parts of the world in the past week. Lives were lost to senseless acts of violence, but now more than ever, we must lead with compassion and open our doors and hearts to families fleeing from war-torn countries whose daily lives are plagued by strife. By definition, refugees are people who are here because they face a threat to their safety in their former homes. How we respond as a community, how we treat and welcome the most vulnerable, demonstrates how we live up to our values and who we are as Americans. And we are very heartened that leaders from across the country are speaking positively about being welcoming to Syrian refugees.

Families from Syria who are seeking a better life embody American values that have guided our country since its founding -- packing up everything and moving to a new place takes courage and resilience. They've defied all odds to arrive in a safe place, and we have the opportunity to reaffirm our values by responding with compassion. Moreover, communities are stronger when they become welcoming. For instance, a recent study in Columbus, Ohio, found that the central Ohio community reaps an annual economic impact of \$1.6 billion from refugee resettlement. Additionally, a report in Tennessee found that refugees contributed almost twice as much in tax revenues as they consumed in state-funded services in the past two decades.

By working together, we can make sure that our nation stands on the better side of history. Throughout our country's history, we have welcomed those seeking refuge regardless of where they were born or what religion they practice, and we have thrived because of it. We must continue to create inclusive communities where everyone has the opportunity to prosper and is treated with dignity and respect. When we look back 10 or 20 years from now, we will remember that we weren't hindered by our fears. Instead, we invited diverse new neighbors to join us in building a stronger community, and we all became better for it.