



CWS Statement to the U.S. House Judiciary Committee pertaining to its hearing “Policy Changes and Processing Delays at USCIS” on Tuesday, July 16, 2019

As a 73-year old humanitarian organization representing 37 Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox communions and 25 refugee resettlement offices across 17 states, **Church World Service (CWS) urges Congress to hold the administration accountable to administering the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) in good faith and returning refugee resettlement numbers to historic norms**, at least meeting this year’s record-low refugee admissions goal of 30,000, and committing to resettling 95,000 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020. **CWS also calls on Congress to process family-based immigration visas and asylum applications in a timely, efficient, and equitable manner that promotes family unity and safety for those seeking protection.**

Refugee resettlement is an important tool in advancing U.S. foreign policy interests, leveraging durable solutions, and encouraging other countries to support displaced persons. Resettlement is the last resort for refugees who cannot return to their home country for reasons of personal safety, and who cannot stay in the country into which they have fled. Since its inception in 1980, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) has been an international model of public-private partnership, with broad bipartisan support. The USRAP has successfully resettled more than three million refugees, who have enriched our communities, driven economic growth, and revitalized neighborhoods. Refugees are the most scrutinized travelers to the United States and face the most rigorous screening possible, spending more than two years in exhaustive vetting processes by our nation’s top security and counter-terror experts. Yet over the past two years, the administration has made drastic changes designed to grind the refugee program to a halt, resulting in human tragedy and long-term damage to our nation’s capacity to respond to humanitarian crises.

CWS urges Congress to do everything in its power to see the administration meet its own refugee admissions goal of 30,000 this year and commit to resettling 95,000 refugees in FY2020. The Trump administration has reduced refugee resettlement by 75%, setting this year’s admissions goal at 30,000 – the lowest level in U.S. history. Given that there are more than 25 million refugees worldwide — more than half of whom are children — these numbers are shockingly low. To arbitrarily restrict tens of thousands of people from seeking safety forsakes our nation’s values of compassion and welcome. In addition, the United States can resettle refugees and evaluate asylum seekers’ claims at the same time. We can - and have - consistently admitted both refugees and asylum seekers. The protection offered by the United States is not a zero-sum game; one program need not come at the expense of the other. Given the many ongoing and emerging displacement crises around the world, Congress cannot stand by idly as the administration turns its back on refugees.

CWS urges Congress to uphold family unity by addressing the growing backlogs and slowdown in processing times at USCIS - such as for family-based visas. The family unit is the cornerstone of every community and is the basis of a values-driven immigration system. Unified families bring stability to individual households and strengthen neighborhoods and communities. Together, family members help one another navigate a new culture, pursue job opportunities, start businesses, and contribute economically, socially, and spiritually to society. However, due to tight numerical restrictions each year, there are massive backlogs for family-based visas lasting years and even decades. In 2017, [4.7 million](#) family-based applicants were stuck in the backlog waiting to be reunited with their loved ones. When it is impossible to access the legal immigration system in a timely way, people resort to entering the United States however they can, including crossing borders in between ports of entry or overstaying visas. As faith communities, we know that every family deserves stability and security. Being able to see your family members, hold your children, and live with your family are the most basic of family values.

CWS urges Congress to protect those seeking safety by addressing USCIS’s substantial asylum backlog. USCIS has a self-proclaimed [crisis-level](#) asylum backlog. As of January 2019, more than [325,000 asylum seekers](#) had pending asylum cases. The United States can humanely process all of the families and individuals who arrive in the United States seeking [asylum](#) - without undermining [refugee protection or resettlement](#). The search for protection is a legal right; the United States has moral and [legal obligations](#) under [international](#) and [U.S.](#) law to ensure that individuals seeking protection are not returned to those who seek to exploit them. The administration’s [asylum ban](#), [detention](#) of asylum seekers, [forcible returning](#) of asylum seekers to Mexico and possible harm, and efforts to [dismantle](#) the asylum system increase individuals’ vulnerabilities to being trafficked or returned to persecution.

As a faith-based organization, we urge Congress to hold the administration accountable to respecting the humanity and dignity of all refugees, immigrant families, asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, and others seeking protection.