THE CURRENT STATE OF THE U.S. REFUGEE PROGRAM

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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44 - 567

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CONTENTS

February 27, 2020

1	Page
OPENING STATEMENTS	
The Honorable Zoe Lofgren, Chair of the Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship from the State of California The Honorable Sylvia R. Garcia, a Member of the Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship from the State of Texas The Honorable Ken Buck, Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship from the State of Colorado	1 2 3
WITNESSES	
Barbara Strack, Advisory Committee for Church World Service, Immigration and Refugee Program Oral Testimony Prepared Statement Most Reverend Mario Eduardo Dorsonville-Rodriguez, Chair of the Committee on Migration of the United States, Conference of Catholic Bishops, Auxiliary Bishop of Washington Oral Testimony Prepared Statement Biar Atem, Nevada Delegate and Board of Directors Member for Refugee Congress Oral Testimony Prepared Statement Lora Ries, Senior Research Fellow for Homeland Security, Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy at The Heritage Foundation Oral Testimony Prepared Statement	6 8 24 26 35 37 41 43
Articles submitted by the Honorable Veronica Escobar, a Member of the Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship from the State of Texas for the record An article entitled "Abbott tells Trump administration Texas won't participate in refugee resettlement," The Texas Tribune An article entitled "Federal Judge Blocks Policy that Allowed Gov. Greg Abbott to Ban Refugees in Texas," The Texas Tribune An article entitled "Federal Judge Blocks Policy that Allowed Gov. Greg Abbott to Ban Refugees in Texas," Government Executive An article entitled "Will Texas Be Allowed To Refuse New Refugee Resettlement?" Texas Public Radio An article entitled "Response to Texas Governor Abbott's refugee refusal— What's Your Point?" An article entitled "Judge halts Trump refugee order, jeopardizing Abbott move to block settlement in Texas," Statesman An article entitled "Refugees can still resettle in Texas, for now, as judge halts Trump's executive order," Ft. Worth Star-Telegram An article entitled "Federal Judge Halts Policy That Would Allow Gov. Greg Abbott to Ban Refugees From Texas," San Antonio Current	58 61 63 65 67 75 79 83

TV	Page
An article entitled "Judge Halts Trump Order On Refugee Resettlement After Gov. Abbott Was 1st To Sign On," 21CBS DFW	84
to reject refugees," KXAN	87
ica's Voice	90 93
An article entitled "Opinion: We all lose when Texas rejects refugees" Statesman	97
An article entitled "Trump policies stop the flow of refugees to Syracuse, once aresettlement magnet," Syracuse.com, submitted by the Honorable Mary Gay Scanlon, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Judiciary from the State of Pennsylvania for the record	103
Statement from Asian Americans Advancing Justice—AAAJC Statement from Bethany Christian Services Statement from Church World Service (CWS) Statement from Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations Statement from Franciscan Action Network Statement from Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) Statement from Interfaith Immigration Coalition Statement from International Refugee Assistance Project Statement from The International Rescue Committee Statement from Leadership Conference of Women Religious Statement from Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service Statement from National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) Statement from National Immigration Law Center Statement from Refugee Congress Letter from more than 85 U.S. Mayors in support of refugee resettlement	118 125 127 128 129 130 132 136 175 183 184 185 186 190
APPENDIX	
Statement from the Honorable Sheila Jackson Lee, a Member of the Sub- committee on Immigration and Citizenship from the State of Texas for	200
the record Statement from the Honorable Jerrold Nadler, Chair of the Committee on the Judiciary from the State of New York for the record Letter from Bill de Blasio, Mayor, New York, submitted by the Honorable	200 202
Jerrold Nadler, Chair of the Committee on the Judiciary from the State of New York for the record	209
in New York City," Gotham Gazette, submitted by the Honorable Jerrold Nadler, Chair of the Committee on the Judiciary from the State of New York for the record	210
California for the record	212 214

THE CURRENT STATE OF THE U.S. REFUGEE PROGRAM

Thursday, February 27, 2020

House of Representatives

SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY Washington, DC

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 3:08 p.m., in Room 2141, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Zoe Lofgren [chair of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Lofgren, Jayapal, Correa, Garcia, Neguse, Mucarsel-Powell, Escobar, Jackson Lee, Scanlon, Buck,

Biggs, Lesko, Armstrong, and Steube.

Staff Present: Ami Shah, Counsel; Joshua Breisblatt, Counsel; Rachel Calanni, Legislative Aide/Professional Staff Member; John Williams, Parliamentarian; David Greengrass, Senior Counsel; Andrea Loving, Minority Counsel; James Rust, Minority Counsel; and Andrea Woodard, Minority Professional Staff Member.
Ms. LOFGREN. The Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizen-

ship will come to order.
Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Subcommittee at any time.

We welcome everyone to this morning's hearing on the current

State of the U.S. refugee program.

Today's hearing is a timely one for many reasons. A few weeks ago, from now marks the 40th anniversary of the Refugee Act, a bipartisan piece of legislation that established the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and initiated America's commitment to refugee resettlement.

This fiscal year also marks the lowest refugee admissions number since the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980, at a scant 18,000—a fraction of the historic average of 95,000 refugees per

The Trump Administration's drastic decrease in refugee admissions, the cut in referrals from UNHCR, and the provision to allow States and localities to so-called "veto" the resettlement of refugees in their jurisdiction has jeopardized the future of the U.S. refugee program and the United States' longstanding commitment to refugee resettlement.

I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses and their perspectives on the current State of the U.S. refugee program, its impact on the future of the program, and the importance of refugees to our committee.

Now, without objection, I had endeavored to make sure that freshmen Members of this Committee had an opportunity to step forward, help organize a hearing, and preside over that hearing. I am pleased that my colleague, Sylvia Garcia of Texas, will preside over the remainder of this hearing.

Without objection, I now yield to her for her opening statement and ask her to take the chair.

Ms. Garcia. [Presiding.] Thank you, Chair Lofgren. I am honored

to be able to chair this very important hearing today.

Next week, we will be celebrating the 40th anniversary of the bipartisan Refugee Act of 1980, signed into law by President Reagan. Since the passage of the Refugee Act, the United States has welcomed an average of 85,000 refugees each year from around the world—85,000 people who were given a chance at the American Dream.

Refugee resettlement has always been a bipartisan effort, a responsibility that the U.S. accepted with pride as a beacon of hope for all who yearn for a better life. More importantly, the American people have supported refugee resettlement. Pew Research finds that 73 percent of Americans believe refugee resettlement is an important goal for our country.

Yet, all this changed when this Administration politicized refugees, guided by lies, and slashed the number of refugees admitted to the United States each year. The lies spread about the refugee

community are simply not true.

There are roughly 37,000 individuals who, at the very least, have received a DHS interview, in many cases having gone through extreme vetting, and have been cleared to travel to the U.S. Yet, they've been held back by the Administration's policy change.

These individuals should be admitted to the country as refugees this year. Delay in resettlement means that families cannot travel together and must wait a long time before being reunited—yet an-

other form of cruel family separation.

Refugees arrive from all corners of the globe and resettle across the country. I am especially proud that my hometown of Houston resettles more refugees than almost any other city in America. After arriving, 90 percent of refugees reach self-sufficiency in only 6 months—a truly impressive feat given all the barriers that come with living in a new country. Some do this by starting a business and eventually employing others. As we know, refugees start businesses at a very high rate, higher than citizens.

Helping refugees along their journey are nonprofit agencies. Some of these organizations have been doing this work for over 40 years, ever since refugees started coming to the United States from Vietnam and Cambodia. Agencies in Houston, like Catholic Charities, YMCA International Services, and The Alliance, have grown with the number of refugees, developing a solid infrastructure of

support for newly arrived refugees.

Now, because of efforts to drastically limit the refugee program, we risk losing these agencies' systems that cannot simply start up again once a new Administration restores the previous resettlement numbers.

The Administration recently issued an Executive order giving States and localities veto power over refugee resettlement. Governor Abbott of my home State of Texas then made the misguided decision of becoming the only Governor in the country to veto refugee resettlement under the Executive order. Fortunately, that order has been stopped by the courts, and we're hopeful that it will end there.

The world is experiencing the worst refugee crisis in history, with an estimated 25.9 million refugees worldwide, and we cannot abandon our longstanding tradition and leadership in welcoming them. It is good for our economy, for our national security, but, most importantly, it is fundamental to our values as a Nation. For many of us, it's fundamental to our closely held religious beliefs. After all, it's about people and doing what's right.

Today, we are faced with a choice. We can either allow the Administration to undo the will of the American people over the last 40 years, or we can use this hearing to reset our bipartisan refugee efforts and work together to welcome the world's most vulnerable to the land of freedom and opportunity. The choice, to me, is clear, and I hope my colleagues will join me in saying that refugees are welcome in America.

It is now my pleasure to recognize the Ranking Member of this subcommittee, the gentleman from Colorado, Mr. Buck, for his opening statement.

Mr. Buck. I thank the chair.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has helped people from all over the world escape brutal persecution in their home country and find a new life and new beginning in the United States. America's commitment to and participation in this program has been a crucial part of our humanitarian and diplomatic leadership. I believe we must honor this important commitment.

However, as with any government program, this program has problems that we must address. Those most in need of humanitarian assistance have been forced to flee their homes. They may be displaced, living in refugee camps. Their home country is often war-torn or the government has collapsed. The tragic reality is that the circumstances that give rise to a refugee crisis are also the same reason why it can be so difficult to vet refugees.

We heard time and again from the Obama Administration that refugees were the most vetted of all foreign nationals seeking to come to the U.S. That same Administration and national security experts also told us that security checks are only as reliable as the databases used for vetting.

Case in point: Earlier this month, a man named Ali Ahmed was recently arrested in Arizona. He received refugee status in 2008. He has scars on his body from bullet wounds that he used to claim persecution. We now know the truth of how he obtained these wounds: He was a member of an al-Qaida hit squad in Iraq.

A 2018 report detailed how over a 4-year period almost 1,000 people had been killed or injured in 32 separate terrorist attacks in Europe involving asylum seekers or refugees. A majority of the terrorists had direct connections with ISIS, and two-thirds were re-

cent arrivals admitted under a humanitarian program, such as the

refugee program.

I want to be clear: Most refugees present no danger to the United States or our European allies. At the same time, we need to continue to evaluate this program to ensure that we admit only those persons truly deserving of assistance.

Maintaining this delicate balance is not only critical to protecting the national security interests of the United States, but also necessary for maintaining public support for the refugee program to

ensure its continued existence.

This is why the Trump Administration took steps to increase vetting of refugees and other foreign nationals seeking admission to the U.S. These policies do not reflect racial bias or religious animus but show a concern for the security of our country and the safety of its residents.

Another concern is whether States and localities are being consulted prior to resettlement. While Federal law requires this, previous Administrations never took the obligation seriously. Under the leadership of the current Administration, States and localities are finally being consulted.

I also understand that the Administration has lowered the refugee ceiling to 18,000 this fiscal year. I appreciate the fact that asylum claims draw on the same finite resources and personnel as the refugee program. The spike in asylum cases has strained these

resources.

I personally would like to see a greater commitment to helping people truly in need of assistance. The way to do this is for Congress to work with the Administration to curb frivolous asylum claims. Doing so would allow us to target resources to process legitimate refugee and asylum claims, prioritizing help for those most deserving of assistance.

Finally, I would note that, when we consider all the U.S. does in terms of humanitarian programs, there can be no doubt that we

are doing our part.

I thank the chair for holding this hearing and look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

I vield back.

Ms. Garcia. It is now my pleasure to introduce today's witnesses. Barbara Strack is a former Chief of the Refugee and Asylum Division of USCIS and currently serves on the Advisory Committee for Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program.

Barbara Strack retired as Chief of the Refugee and Asylum Division in 2018 after 12 years as its head and spent a total of 27 years in Federal Government service. During her time there, Ms. Strack was responsible for overseas refugee interviews as well as related antifraud, national security, quality insurance, and training initiatives. She also frequently testified before both chambers of Congress on the topic of U.S. refugee admissions.

She is a longstanding advocate for the importance of the U.S. refugee program and continues to do so in her current role with Church World Service. She received her bachelor's degree from Brown University and her J.D. from the University of Michigan.

Next to Ms. Strack is Bishop Mario Eduardo Dorsonville-Rodriguez. The Most Reverend Mario Eduardo Dorsonville-Rodriguez is

an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Washington and is the current chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Com-

mittee on Migration.

Bishop Dorsonville was born in Colombia and was ordained to the priesthood there in 1985. He received his bachelor's degree in philosophy and sacred theology from the Major Seminary of the Archdiocese of Bogota, a licentiate in sacred theology from Pontificia Universidad Javeriana de Bogota, and a doctorate in ministry from the Catholic University of America.

Bishop Dorsonville is a longstanding advocate for immigration reform, refugee resettlement, and critical programs like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and Temporary Protected Status, the latter of which he testified about before this very Committee last year. We welcome him back to the Committee and look forward to

his testimony.

Next is Mr. Biar Atem. He is a Sudanese refugee who came to the United States in 2001 and became a U.S. citizen in 2007. Since arriving to the United States, he has received his bachelor's degree from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and his MBA from Regis University and currently works as a contract audit manager at a Las Vegas casino and resort company.

He is a Nevada delegate to the Refugee Congress, the founder of a local refugee support nonprofit called South Sudan Center for America and is engaged with mentorship programs at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Hotel College in his local school district.

Mr. Atem has been honored by Fortune magazine and the American Red Cross for his contributions to his community. We thank him for sharing his story with us today and his continued advocacy for the importance of refugee resettlement to the United States.

Lastly, Lora Ries. Ms. Ries is a senior research fellow for homeland security at The Heritage Foundation. She has over 23 years of experience in the immigration and homeland security arena.

Ms. Ries twice worked at the Department of Homeland Security on management and immigration policy and operation issues. She has also worked in the private sector as a homeland security industry strategist and in government relations. She previously worked for this very Committee as a counsel for the Immigration Subcommittee.

She started her career at the Justice Department's Board of Immigration Appeals and the former Immigration and Naturalization Service. She received her bachelor's degree and J.D. from Valparaiso University in Indiana.

Welcome to all the witnesses.

If you all would please stand so we can swear you in. We welcome all our distinguished witnesses, and we thank them, and if you would raise your right hand.

Do you swear or affirm under penalty of perjury that the testimony you are about to give is true and correct to the best of your knowledge, information, and belief, so help you God?

Let the record show the witnesses all answered in the affirma-

Thank you, and please be seated.

For the witnesses, please make note that each of you have provided written statements, and some of them were a little lengthy,

so we will ask you to please summarize your testimony to 5 minutes. You will each have 5 minutes.

To help you stay on time, there is a time lighting device on your table. When the light switches from green to yellow, you have 1 minute to conclude your testimony. When the light turns red, guess what that means? We stop. It signals to you that your time has expired.

With that, we'll go ahead and begin with Ms. Strack. You can begin with your testimony.

TESTIMONY OF BARBARA STRACK

Ms. STRACK. Thank you very much, Chair Lofgren, Congresswoman Garcia, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members.

Ms. Lesko. Turn the mike on. Ms. STRACK. Oh, I am sorry.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today.

I am the former Chief of the Refugee Affairs Division at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, where I served as a career civil servant under the Bush, Obama, and Trump Administrations.

To briefly set the stage, a refugee is a person outside of his or her country of origin who is unable or unwilling to return to that country due to persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, Membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Today, there are approximately 26 million refugees in the world.

There are three avenues to end refugee status. These are: Voluntary repatriation to the home country, local integration in a neighboring country, or resettlement in a third country. Resettlement is the scarcest option. Fewer than 1 percent of the world's ref-

ugees are resettled to any third country on an annual basis.

The U.S. traditionally took half, and the rest of the world took the other one-half of 1 percent. The Trump Administration, however, has dramatically departed from these norms and set the lowest refugee resettlement ceiling ever, at only 18,000 for fiscal year

There is no justification for this.

First, the USRAP, U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, is operationally secure. The U.S. decides on both the number of refugees to be admitted and who they are. Refugee applicants are interviewed in person, and they're subject to the most rigorous level of screening of any category of traveler to the United States. This has been an iterative process of adding new checks, both biometric and biographic, since 9/11.

One of the Trump Administration's early initiatives was to institute a 120-day review of the security check regime for refugee applicants, followed by an additional 90-day review for certain nationalities. As a result of these reviews, new screening processes were implemented, and refugee admissions resumed for all nationalities

by September 2018.

The Administration has argued that we should prioritize assistance to refugees overseas in lieu of resettlement, but this misses the point that 99 percent of refugees always remain in host countries close to home. Resettlement is specifically to help those most vulnerable refugees, those who can't return home or aren't safe in that country of first asylum.

Finally, there are no sound foreign policy reasons for such a dramatic cut, and, in fact, reducing refugee admissions hurts U.S. for-

eign policy and national security interests.

While I have been talking about the admissions ceiling in numerical terms, it's critical to remember that each number represents a person and each slot in the U.S. resettlement program is a unique and important humanitarian resource that should not be squandered.

What I particularly want to highlight today is that the situation for refugee admissions is dire. The program is not on track to meet the 18,000 ceiling. At this point in the fiscal year, concerted congressional oversight is crucial if there is any hope to close this gap.

The Administration has adopted several self-imposed roadblocks

and speed bumps that are suppressing refugee arrivals.

The Administration took an unusual approach to subdividing or allocating the refugee admission slots to different groups of refugees. Instead of the usual approach of using broad geographical categories, the Administration set narrower criteria. These are harder to administer, and they don't properly align with the pipeline of cases already in the U.S. system.

These narrow categories actually represent cuts for the groups that are purportedly prioritized. This is true for both the religious persecution category and for Iraqis, those who've worked closely with the U.S. Against the allocated ceiling of 4,000, only 53 Iraqis have been admitted as of mid-February. I would like to repeat that: As of mid-February, 53 Iraqis have been admitted to the United States.

The Administration also decided to make it much harder to reallocate slots between these narrow categories, creating a burdensome four-department approval process, for no apparent reason other than to stall processing and reduce admissions. Based on my years of experience, the flexibility to use resettlement slots within the broad categories and to reallocate them is a crucial factor in being able to meet the refugee ceiling.

This is an area ripe for congressional oversight, and time is of the essence to allow for backup planning. Reallocations need to

happen now and on a continuing basis.

The need for congressional oversight is particularly stark because the Administration is not just temporarily cutting refugee numbers. The changes it has made will have long-lasting ramifications, dismantling a program that Congress has supported and invested in over decades. It will take years to recover.

The current politically charged debate around refugee resettlement is a historical anomaly. For most of the program's existence, it has enjoyed bipartisan support. I'd like to say thank you, in particular, to Ranking Member Buck for spearheading a letter signed by 17 Members of Congress to Secretary Pompeo.

This is the moment to harness this bipartisan support, to provide effective oversight of an Administration that is bent on dismantling this critical, lifesaving program.

[The statement of Ms. Strack follows:]

Statement of Barbara L. Strack, Retired, Former Chief, Refugee Affairs Division, Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Directorate, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security (2005-2018)

Hearing on The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program, House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Immigration & Citizenship, February 27, 2020

Chair Lofgren, Vice Chair Jayapal, Ranking Member Buck, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify at this hearing on the current state of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). As the former Chief of the Refugee Affairs Division within the Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Directorate at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), I served as a career civil servant during the Bush, Obama, and Trump Administrations. I'm happy to discuss the USRAP's mission to offer resettlement opportunities in the United States to eligible refugees while safeguarding the integrity of the program and our national security.

U.S. Refugee Resettlement

As defined by The Refugee Act¹ of 1980, a refugee is a person outside of his or her country of origin who is unable or unwilling to return to that country due to persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. U.S. law also recognizes certain refugees who remain inside their country of origin, under special circumstances. Today, the United Nations refugee agency -- the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) -- estimates that there are approximately 26 million refugees² in the world.

Three durable solutions³ are internationally recognized to end refugee status and allow refugees to live in peace and security. While these three solutions are sometimes presented as a hierarchy, I think that the better view is that they should be considered as complementary, depending on the particular characteristics of each refugee displacement situation. One durable solution is voluntary repatriation, that is, for refugees to return to their home country when they can do so with safety and dignity. It is the durable solution of choice for many refugees, but it also depends on the willingness and ability of their country of origin to help reintegrate its own people. The second durable solution is local integration, which involves allowing refugees to rebuild their lives with legal and social rights in the neighboring country to which they have fled. The third durable solution is resettlement in a third country, which is numerically the scarcest option. Over the course of many years, fewer than one percent of the world's refugees are resettled to a third country on an annual basis.

¹ Refugee Act of 1980, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-94/pdf/STATUTE-94-Pg102.pdf.

² Figures at a Glance, UNHCR, https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html.

³ "The 10 Point Plan in action: Chapter 7, Solutions for refugees," UNHCR, https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/migration/50a4c17f9/10-point-plan-action-chapter-7-solutions-refugees.html.

Traditionally, the United States has been the leading resettlement country in the world. The legal foundation was laid when Congress enacted The Refugee Act of 1980, with strong bipartisan support, almost 40 years ago. At the time of the bill's passage, Congress understood deeply the need to resettle refugees fleeing the Vietnam War and reflected the desire to institutionalize refugee resettlement, which had previously been carried out under varying legal authority for specific populations. As of 2018, UNHCR reported that the United States was one of 27 countries⁴ with a formal refugee resettlement program.

USRAP Operations

I'd like to describe briefly how the USRAP operates, highlighting measures that have been taken to safeguard its security and integrity. My focus is on overseas operations, which were part of my responsibility in my former position with USCIS's Refugee Affairs Division.

Overseas, the USRAP is a shared operational responsibility of the State Department and USCIS. The State Department is responsible for the overarching coordination and management of the USRAP. As contemplated by section 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act⁵, this work is guided each year by a Presidential Determination, which sets the refugee admissions ceiling following the submission of a report and in-person consultations with Congress -- specifically, the Judiciary Committees of each chamber. It is important to remember that the United States is entirely in control of who gets to apply for resettlement to our country -- it is only those refugees who have been identified as being of "special humanitarian concern" to the United States. Traditionally, UNHCR helps to identify refugees in need of resettlement and makes referrals to the USRAP, in keeping with U.S. priorities. After applicants have been pre-screened by Resettlement Support Center staff under contract with the State Department, USCIS is responsible for conducting individual, in-person interviews with applicants to determine their eligibility for refugee status, including whether they meet the refugee definition and are otherwise admissible to the United States under U.S. law. To fulfill this mission, USCIS created the Refugee Corps in 2005, a cadre of specially-trained USCIS officers who are dedicated to adjudicating applications for refugee status overseas.

⁴ Information on UNHCR Resettlement, UNHCR, https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/information-on-unhcr-resettlement.html.

⁵ 8 USC 1157: Annual admission of refugees and admission of emergency situation refugees, Section 207, Immigration and Nationality Act

https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?hl=false&edition=prelim&req=granuleid%3AUSC-prelim-title8-section1157&num=0&saved=%7CZ3JhbnVsZWlkOIVTQy1wcmVsaW0tdGl0bGU4LXNIY3Rpb24xMTU3%7C%7C%7C0%7Cfalse%7Cprelim#.

Security Checks

Security checks have been an integral part of the USRAP process for applicants of all nationalities since the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, and they have been enhanced systematically over the years as interagency capacity has expanded. My former staff and I devoted countless hours to help ensure the integrity of the USRAP, in close collaboration with colleagues across the Executive Branch, including those with expertise in counter-terrorism, intelligence, and law enforcement. During my 12-year tenure with the USRAP, security checks that were first piloted and tested by the refugee program were expanded, institutionalized, and integrated as standard operating procedures for refugee processing and for other categories of travelers to the United States. Refugee admissions were not halted across the board as new capacities were brought online; rather, they were incorporated prospectively and with a risk-based analysis.

All available biographic and biometric information from refugee applicants is vetted against a broad array of law enforcement, intelligence community, and other relevant databases to help confirm a refugee applicant's identity, to check for any criminal or other derogatory information, and to identify information that could inform lines of questioning during the interview. Collaborations with the Department of Defense and UNHCR have reinforced screening procedures. I am attaching a detailed description of the security screening process as an addendum at the end of my testimony.⁶

One of the Trump Administration's early initiatives pursuant to Executive Order 13780 was to institute a 120-day review of the security check regime for refugee applicants. During this period, refugee admissions were generally suspended, although there was no risk-based assessment to justify such a broad moratorium. The results of this review were announced in October 2017 by the Secretary of State, Acting Secretary of Homeland Security, and the Director of the Office of National Intelligence. Based on the work of an interagency working group, additional ways to enhance refugee screening and vetting processes were identified and implemented. Thus, refugee admissions generally resumed with these new procedures in place. However, at the same time, these senior officials announced that additional review would be undertaken for nationals of 11 countries that had previously been identified for the higher level review of Security Advisory Opinions (SAO). Refugee admissions from these 11 countries generally remained suspended -- again, without a risk-based assessment. After the additional 90-day review period for these SAO countries, refugees of these nationalities were also cleared for admission to the United States, subject to enhanced security procedures.7

⁶ Infographic: The Screening Process for Refugee Entry into the United States, Amy Pope, Former Deputy Assistant to the President for Homeland Security, November 20, 2015 https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2015/11/20/infographic-screening-process-refugee-entry-united-states.

^{7 &}quot;DHS Announces Additional, Enhanced Security Procedures for Refugees Seeking Resettlement in the United States," Department of Homeland Security Office of the Press Secretary, January 29, 2018 https://www.dhs.gov/news/2018/01/29/dhs-announces-additional-enhanced-security-procedures-refugees-seeking-resettlement.

Fiscal Year 2020 Refugee Admissions

For Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, the Trump Administration set a historically low refugee admissions ceiling of 18,000, an 80 percent cut from the historic average ceiling of 95,0008. This continues the downward spiral of admissions during this Administration, from the ceiling of 110,000 that it inherited for FY17 (and immediately lowered to 50,000), down to 45,000 for FY18 (with fewer than 23,000 actual admissions), and 30,000 for FY19. None of the official explanations justify this decrease, as I explain below. Moreover, several other changes to standard operational processes further handicap the USRAP and will make it difficult to achieve even the exceedingly low ceiling of 18,000.

The Administration has offered a series of excuses for the low ceiling on refugee admissions, rather than plainly stating that its preferred policy is fewer refugees finding freedom and opportunity in the United States.

- First, the administration has argued that overseas refugee resettlement needs to be low because domestic asylum claims and "credible fear" claims at the southwest border are high. However, legally and operationally, domestic asylum processing and overseas refugee processing are distinct, and the government can handle both. At the time that the Administration set the 18,000 ceiling last September, there were approximately 40,000 refugees overseas who had already been interviewed and conditionally approved by DHS. The vast majority of these 40,000 "pipeline" cases could be finalized and approved for travel to the U.S. this fiscal year. It is both inefficient and cruel to leave these refugees behind: inefficient because the U.S. government has already expended significant resources to conduct rounds of interviews and security checks, and cruel because we have raised these applicants' expectations and then consigned them to limbo. And worse yet: refugees identified for U.S. resettlement are typically not considered by other resettlement countries because they are "spoken for," leaving them in a perpetual stage of uncertainty and instability.
- The Administration also asserted that it was taking foreign policy into account⁹ in setting this year's refugee admissions ceiling, as if past Administrations had not. But every administration has considered refugees' humanitarian needs in the context of U.S. foreign policy and national security interests, as discussed further below
- The Administration has argued that the U.S. should prioritize assistance to refugees overseas in lieu of resettlement, but this is misleading. Even at recent high-water marks for resettlement worldwide, 99 percent of refugees remain in host countries close to home, with monetary support from donors including the

^{8 &}quot;U.S. Annual Refugee Resettlement Ceilings and Number of Refugees Admitted, 1980-Present," Migration Policy Institute, 2019, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-annual-refugee-resettlement-ceilings-and-number-refugees-admitted-united.

⁹ Report to Congress on Proposed Refugee Admissions for FY2020, Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, September 26, 2019 https://www.state.gov/report-to-congress-on-proposed-refugee-admissions-for-fy-2020/.

U.S. Voluntary return by refugees to their homelands is much desired, but it is rarely achieved at a significant scale due to continuing conflict, the aftermaths of conflict, poverty, and other factors. The Administration's current policy simply leaves stranded the most vulnerable one-half of 1 percent of refugees who used to be identified for resettlement to the U.S. — including people with medical needs, survivors of torture, and those who are not safe in their country of first asylum. Moreover, the Trump Administration's budget requests have consistently proposed dramatic *cuts* to the State Department's funding for overseas assistance, demonstrating clearly that this is a hollow argument.

Beyond the Ceiling - Hampering Admissions

In addition to setting this historically low ceiling, the Administration has taken a number of other steps -- some little recognized -- that hamper resettlement operations and will make it difficult to reach 18,000 admissions this fiscal year.

Challenge One: The Administration took an unusual approach to subdividing or "allocating" the admission slots to different groups of refugees. Traditionally the State Department has recommended and the President has determined that refugee slots would be allocated to five broad regional categories, often with an unallocated "reserve." Instead, this year the Administration abandoned this regional approach and set narrower criteria, allocating slots specifically for religious minorities; certain Iragis; Central Americans from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador; and "other refugees" in both enumerated and unenumerated categories. In contrast, note that as recently as 2016, USCIS interviewed refugees from 74 countries¹⁰.

These new, narrowed categories are harder for the State Department and USCIS to administer than the traditional regional approach, and they do not align properly with the "pipeline" cases already in the U.S. system. Thus, for example, thousands of Congolese refugees who have already been interviewed by USCIS and could likely travel to the U.S. this year will be left behind because there are insufficient slots assigned to the catch-all "other" category.

Further, it's important to note that these narrow categories actually represent cuts for the groups that are purportedly prioritized. Religious persecution, for example, has been part of the refugee definition since 1951¹¹, and it has always played a significant role in the U.S. resettlement program. Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Yazidis, Baha'is, and others who have been persecuted on account of their faith have found

¹⁰ Refugee Arrivals, Fiscal Year as of 30-September-2016, Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Office of Admissions - Refugee Processing Center https://ireports.wrapsnet.org/Interactive-

Reporting/EnumType/Report?ItemPath=/rpt WebArrivalsReports/MX%20-

^{%20}Arrivals%20by%20Nationality%20and%20Religion (report run 2/24/2020).

11 "Guidelines on International Protection: Religion-Based Refugee Claims under Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees," UNHCR, April 28, 2004 https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/publications/legal/40d8427a4/guidelines-international-protection-6-religionbased-refugee-claims-under.html.

safety and freedom to worship in this country. The Administration's allocation of 5,000 slots to religious minorities represents a sharp dip from just a few years ago, and data from the refugee pipeline suggest that as many as 15,000 additional refugees who have suffered religious persecution could be resettled this year, if the ceiling were higher.

Similarly, in FY16, the U.S. resettled 9,880 Iraqi refugees, compared to the 4,000 authorized for FY20, and only *53 Iraqis*¹² have actually been admitted as of mid-February. These Iraqi applicants are individuals who have worked closely with the U.S. military, diplomats, journalists, and aid workers, and this contraction of refugee resettlement sends a message to our allies and potential future allies that the U.S. doesn't keep its promises.

Challenge Two: The Administration also decided to make it much harder to reallocate slots between the narrowly-designated categories, substantially increasing the likelihood that unneeded slots in one category will go unused rather than being repurposed to another category with higher potential. New language was included in this year's Presidential Determination that permits reallocations only if the Secretary of State consults with three other Cabinet officials -- the Secretaries of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services and the Attorney General -- and provides notification to the appropriate committees of the Congress, "if such transfer would be in the national interest and there is a need for greater admissions for the allocation to which the admissions will be transferred."13 In contrast, the simpler process in past years allowed for the Secretary of State alone to make the decision to reallocate slots, "following notification of the appropriate committees of the Congress, ... if greater admissions are needed for such region or regions."14 Even if the new language is interpreted to allow the enumerated Cabinet officials to delegate this authority to lower-level officials, it is unquestionably more cumbersome and slower to require input from four Executive Branch departments rather than to empower the Secretary of State to act, upon notice to Congress. And since all of the designated categories have already been agreed upon and endorsed by the President, it is difficult to see what additional benefit could be derived from this added layer of bureaucratic review; rather, it reads as an intentional effort to stall processing and reduce admissions.

<u>Challenge Three</u>: On September 26, 2019, President Trump issued Executive Order 13888 with a new requirement that state and local elected leaders affirmatively provide written consent in order for newly arrived refugees to be resettled in their jurisdictions. While many viewed the order as an invitation for states to say "no" and thereby limit resettlement, the response was overwhelmingly positive, with 43 states saying "yes"

¹² "Arrivals by Admissions Category as of Feb 14, 2020," Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Office of Admissions - Refugee Processing Center https://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/

https://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/.

13 Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2020, Executive Office of the President, November 1, 2019 https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-determination-refugee-admissions-fiscal-year-2020/.

refugee-admissions-fiscal-year-2020/.

14 Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2018, Executive Office of the President, September 29, 2017 https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-memorandum-secretary-state-4/.

(including 19 states with Republican governors) and only Texas declining. (Six states did not respond.) Because a federal court issued a preliminary injunction in *HIAS v. Trump* on January 15, the Executive Order has not gone into effect, but the State Department has delayed renewing its contracts with the domestic resettlement agencies that welcome refugees.

I highlight these challenges because, based on my 12 years of operational experience, the flexibility to use resettlement slots within broad geographic regions of the world and to reallocate them between categories is a critical factor in allowing the USRAP to meet the refugee ceiling. The best-laid plans for meeting resettlement goals at the beginning of a fiscal year are inevitably rocked by unforeseen developments. For example, the USRAP's overseas operations depend on the cooperation of the host governments where refugees reside. It is extremely common that one or more host governments withhold or delay visas at some point during the fiscal year and USCIS can't send in its staff to interview applicants on schedule. Or, in other instances, host governments may delay the issuance of exit permits that are required before refugees are allowed to leave the country. Sometimes there are medical issues that delay processing or refugees' departures -- say, an outbreak or suspected outbreak of measles in a particular refugee camp. Further, there can be security issues that affect the USRAP's ability to operate in certain locations. One example of this is Baghdad, where the U.S. embassy has sometimes hosted large teams of USCIS officers to interview Iraqi "Priority 2" cases and at other times has determined that the security environment called for a pause in their presence.

The professional staff at the State Department and USCIS -- working in close coordination with the vetting agencies, program partners from nongovernmental and international organizations, and domestic resettlement agencies -- have demonstrated that they can achieve refugee admissions that match the refugee ceiling. This happened in fiscal years 2013 through 2016, and again last year with 30,000 admissions against a 30,000 ceiling. Reaching the ceiling requires close monitoring of the pipeline, timely "issue-spotting," and agile adjustments as conditions change. It requires holding the vetting agencies accountable for the timely processing of security checks. It requires attention to and juggling of overlapping expiration dates for certain security checks and medical exams, which can cascade into a domino effect of delays for refugee applicants. I am concerned that this fiscal year, these professionals will find their efforts to reach the 18,000 ceiling stymied by the Administration's self-imposed roadblocks and speed-bumps.

While I have been talking about the admissions ceiling and the USRAP overall in numerical terms, it is critical to remember what those numbers represent. Each number reflects a person, and each slot in the USRAP is a unique and important humanitarian resource. It is an opportunity to relieve suffering in the world and to renew America's promise as a nation of immigrants and a beacon of hope for the persecuted. These scarce opportunities to extend humanitarian protection through resettlement should not be squandered.

I believe that this is an area ripe for congressional oversight, and this is the perfect time -- not quite halfway through the fiscal year -- for Congress, and more particularly this Committee, to communicate to the Administration that you value refugee resettlement. It's timely to inquire about the Administration's plans to reach the 18,000 ceiling; what refugee "circuit rides" are planned for USCIS officers (which have been drastically reduced); what obstacles exist or are anticipated with regard to each allocated category; what the strategies are to address them; and whether the Administration is committed to reallocating numbers across categories (and where) that would otherwise go unused.

Long-Term Consequences of Dismantling Infrastructure

The need for congressional oversight is particularly stark because the Administration is not just temporarily cutting refugee numbers during its tenure in office. The changes made by this Administration will have long-lasting ramifications, dismantling a program that Congress has supported and invested in over decades. These investments have created an infrastructure of public/private partnerships including state and local governments, congregations of faith, nonprofits, volunteers, employers, and community members across the United States.

The Administration has drastically reduced USCIS interview circuit rides, which begins to erode the pipeline of refugee candidates who could be admitted next fiscal year. It has begun closing USCIS's international offices, which have provided key logistical support to USCIS interviewers on circuit rides and which also took primary responsibility for interviewing certain refugee populations. This loss of capacity, local knowledge, and nimbleness in responding to time-sensitive developments will hamper USCIS refugee operations in the future.

In addition to dismantling the U.S. infrastructure for resettlement, the Administration announced in its 2020 Report to Congress that it will no longer accept resettlement referrals from UNHCR, with the very limited exceptions of religious minorities and individuals from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. 15 This is unprecedented, as the United States has a long and positive history of working with UNHCR. As the internationally recognized agency mandated to protect refugees and with staff working in 134 countries around the world, UNHCR is uniquely placed to identify the most vulnerable refugees in need of resettlement and is by far the largest source of resettlement referrals worldwide. This change will negatively impact the efficiency of the USRAP. While the United States makes its own decisions about which refugees to accept, UNHCR's initial screening promotes the integrity of the USRAP by screening out cases that are unlikely to meet U.S. priorities and standards. Other referral mechanisms simply do not exist on any real scale: U.S. embassy referrals are rare, as embassy staff generally lack the capacity and training for such work. By severely limiting UNHCR referrals, the Administration is handicapping the USRAP for years to come, since it will take years to rebuild the "pipeline" of UNHCR referrals.

¹⁵ Report to Congress on Proposed Refugee Admissions for FY 2020, https://www.state.gov/reports/report-to-congress-on-proposed-refugee-admissions-for-fy-2020/

Protection and Beyond: Foreign Policy and National Security Implications

I have heard critics say that refugee resettlement, in the larger scheme of things, just doesn't matter -- that even at "high" levels, only 1 or 2 percent of refugees get resettled, which is a drop in the bucket. This critique misses the larger context, however. First, resettlement **does** matter for the individuals and families involved. I'm sure that many Members of this Subcommittee have met refugees in your states and districts and have seen this first-hand.

Resettlement also opens up other "protection space" for refugees who remain in their countries of first asylum. When the U.S. engages with these front-line countries that are often under enormous pressure, U.S. diplomats have entree to negotiate for additional protections for those left behind: perhaps it's access to public schools for refugee children; or improved labor or mobility rights for refugees; or even a new UNHCR registration initiative that will place identity documents in the hands of refugees who otherwise have nothing to show to local police to prove who they are and their legal immigration status.

That said, resettlement is not solely a humanitarian endeavor - it is also critical to advancing U.S. foreign policy and national security interests. By assisting refugee-hosting states, the U.S. advances stability and U.S. strategic interests abroad. Former DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff has written:

"Strategic allies located near crises host the largest refugee populations in the world. Jordan, Turkey, Pakistan and Kenya are among the top refugee-hosting states. Their willingness to host millions of refugees contributes greatly to regional stability and security, all in regions where U.S. troops are deployed. As our military works to contain terrorist insurgencies in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and the Horn of Africa, forcing refugees to return to unsafe and unstable countries would make countering terrorism more difficult." 16

These sentiments are echoed by military leaders such as Robert J. Natter, a retired U.S. Navy admiral who served as commander of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet and U.S. Fleet Forces from 2000 to 2003, and Mark P. Hertling, a retired lieutenant general who served as commanding general of U.S. Army Europe from 2011 to 2012. They have written:

"We know firsthand that both the humanitarian and strategic consequences of conflicts in Iraq, Syria, the Balkans and East and West Africa would be much worse had neighboring countries closed their borders. We also know that conflicts can restart when refugees are sent home prematurely. Of the 15 largest

¹⁶ "Cutting refugee admissions hurts Americans. Here's how," The Washington Post, September 14, 2017 https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/cutting-refugee-admissions-hurts-americans-heres-how/2017/09/14/c7c8b5e6-9987-11e7-b569-3360011663b4_story.html.

returns of refugees since 1990, a third have resulted 17 in the resumption of conflict and the slaughter of innocents." 18

The State Department regularly leverages refugee resettlement as it works with countries like Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, and Lebanon - which are hosting hundreds of thousands and in some cases millions of refugees. Similarly, resettlement is a critical component in the U.S. relationship with Kenya, which hosts more than 500,000 refugees and has threatened¹9 to close its refugee camps for years. A mere 16 percent of the world's refugee population is hosted in developed countries like the United States. In stark contrast, one-third of the global refugee population is hosted in low-income countries, like Bangladesh and South Sudan, which account for just over 1 percent of global GDP and 13 percent of the world's population. Cooperation with foreign governments in key regions can run the gamut from keeping borders open to intelligence-sharing to military deployments to aviation security. This often happens with little fanfare, behind the scenes.

This is an arena where American leadership matters. How can we ask host governments to keep borders open and extend more rights to refugees within their borders when the U.S. will not step up and lend a hand through resettlement? How can we expect other resettlement countries to increase their commitment to help protect refugees when the U.S. program is in retreat?

Taking a step back, it cannot be ignored that the contraction of the U.S. refugee program has not been equally distributed across all populations. As the Migration Policy Institute's analysis shows, the resettlement of Muslims has plummeted 87 percent since FY 2016. Christian admissions have also fallen by 37 percent over this period, "[b]ut, because Muslim admissions have fallen so much more, the great majority of admitted refugees are now Christian: In FY 2019, 79 percent of refugees were Christian and 16 percent Muslim—as compared to 44 percent Christian and 46 percent Muslim in 2016." This shift also reflects a geographic bias: "More than half of the 65 percent decline in overall resettlement during this period is attributable to falling admissions from the 'Near East/South Asia' region, which includes the Middle East and Southern and Southeast Asian countries. Over this same period, admissions from Europe actually increased by 26 percent. Owhile there are certainly refugees in distress in Europe — and this is a

^{17 &}quot;Forcibly Displaced, Toward a Development Approach Supporting Refugees, the Internally Displaced, and Their Hosts," World Bank Group, 2017
https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/25016/9781464809385.pdf?sequence=11&

isAllowed=y.

18 "Cutting refugee admissions will have severe consequences for the U.S. military," Robert J. Natter and Mark P. Hertling, The Washington Post, September 8, 2019 https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/09/08/cutting-refugee-admissions-will-have-severe-consequences-us-military/.

¹⁹ "Kenyan Government Threatens To Close Dadaab Refugee Camp," NPR Morning Edition, March 28, 2019 https://www.npr.org/2019/03/28/707529616/kenyan-government-threatens-to-close-dadaab-refugee-camp.

<u>refugee-camp</u>.

20 "As the United States Resettles Fewer Refugees, Some Countries and Religions Face Bigger Hits Than Others," Migration Policy Institute, September 2019

longstanding component of the USRAP -- I think that any refugee expert would find it surprising to see the primacy of European arrivals at the expense of those from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

One critique of this geographical shift is that it is antithetical to American values. But even for those who don't subscribe to that view, there are serious, real-world implications. As national security expert Juliette Kayyem has stated with regard to the President's divisive call for a ban on Muslims entering the United States, "This is a narrative ISIS has wanted, that ISIS is promoting.... [It's] on their website and their tweets..."²¹ It is being used as a recruiting message by extremists who wish us harm.

Bipartisan Support

The current politically-charged debate around refugee resettlement is a historical anomaly. For most of the program's existence, it has enjoyed bipartisan support, from Presidents Truman to Reagan to G.W. Bush — even in the wake of 9/11 — to Obama. Personally, when I started my job in 2005, both Senator Kennedy, a liberal Democrat, and Senator Brownback, a conservative Republican, exhorted my office to reach refugee admission targets. In 2008, I attended a reception hosted by First Lady Laura Bush in recognition of World Refugee Day in the Rose Garden at the White House. She welcomed UNHCR officials, service providers, advocates, and government officials to an event that lifted up the voices of refugees, featuring speakers who had fled from Burma, Iraq, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is a sad fact that such an event would never be contemplated today.

That said, I would be remiss if I did not recognize the bipartisan support evident in both chambers of Congress for the USRAP, including multiple letters led by Senators Lankford (R-OK)²³ and Shaheen (D-NH)²⁴, the Bipartisan Congressional Refugee

 $[\]underline{\text{https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/united-states-refugee-resettlement-some-countries-religions-face-bigger-hits}.$

 ^{21 &}quot;Is ISIS Really Using Videos of Donald Trump For Recruitment?," WGBH Boston, December 23, 2015
 https://www.wgbh.org/news/post/isis-really-using-videos-donald-trump-recruitment.
 22 "Four Decades of Presidential Leadership on Refugee Protection, Until Now," International Rescue

[&]quot;Four Decades of Presidential Leadership on Refugee Protection, Until Now," International Rescue Committee, February 17th, 2020

https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/4442/ircpresidentsdayreport2020.pdf.
Highest Annual Admissions Ceilings by Administration:Carter: 231,700; Reagan: 140,000; H.W. Bush: 142,000; Clinton: 121,000; G.W. Bush: 80,000; Obama: 110,000; Trump: 45,000; Current Ceiling: 18,000

²³ "Sens. Coons, Lankford send bipartisan letter to Trump Administration in response to proposed elimination of refugee resettlements," Office of Senator Chris Coons, August 6, 2019 https://www.coons.senate.gov/news/press-releases/sens-coons-lankford-send-bipartisan-letter-to-trump-administration-in-response-to-proposed-elimination-of-refugee-resettlements.
²⁴ Bipartisan Congressional Letter led by Senator Shaheen on status of USRAP, Office of Senator

Jeanne Shaheen, May 4, 2017 https://www.shaheen.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2017-5-4%20Final%20Shaheen-Lankford%20Refugee%20Program%20Letter.pdf.

Caucus²⁵, and Ranking Member Buck (R-CO),²⁶ signed by 17 Republican Members of Congress. This demonstrates that the USRAP has had and continues to have strong bipartisan support. That support must now be harnessed to provide effective oversight of an Administration that is clearly bent on dismantling this critical, lifesaving program.

In remarkably prescient comments from 1983, former Senator Hatfield (R-OR) seems to have anticipated today's policy debates and came out firmly on the side of resettlement:

"This consultation process focuses on the appropriate U.S. level in providing asylum to persons fleeing political persecution. There is no magic formula, and there is no way to quantify humanitarianism and balance it with the competing interests inherent in immigration and refugee policy decisionmaking. I do not pretend to have the magic number that will represent the perfect balance. However, without hesitation, I will state that the United States role in providing hope for those fleeing tyranny, in providing assistance to the countries of first asylum who bear the immediate brunt of refugee migration, and in providing shelter for our appropriate share for the refugee population, must not decline. This does not mean that the United States should admit every one fleeing war or the threat of war. It means simply that refugee policy must not be the whipping boy for our country's inability to control illegal immigration. And it means that if we abandon our responsibility to uphold freedom by providing hope to those who are not free, then we have failed history and we have failed ourselves."²⁷

Likewise, Senator Brownback (R-KS)²⁸ made impassioned comments in support of refugee resettlement during the refugee consultations in 2002, expressing grave concern that the resettlement ceiling was set at *only* 70,000:

"The success of the United States refugee program is of great personal interest to me Tragic events of September 11th interrupted our country's ability to process refugees. However, we cannot allow those events which have already caused so much death and sorrow to undermine our commitment to rescuing the persecuted, the widow, and the orphan. I think everyone here agrees it is time that refugee processing got back on track.

²⁵ "Congressman Neguse Leads Bipartisan Letter to Oppose Trump Administration Actions Targeting U.S. Refugee Resettlement," Office of Congressman Joe Neguse, August 7, 2019 https://neguse.house.gov/media/press-releases/congressman-neguse-leads-bipartisan-letter-oppose-trump-administration-actions.

trump-administration-actions.

26 "Ken Buck Calls for the United States to Uphold Our Commitment to Refugees Around the World,"

Office of Congressman Ken Buck, October 18, 2019 https://buck.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/ken-buck-calls-united-states-uphold-our-commitment-refugees-around-world.

27 Hooging Referenting Control (1997)

²⁷ Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Policy of the Committee on the Judiciary the United States Senate, 98th Congress, Annual Refugee Consultation, Former Senator Mark Hatfield, September 26, 1983 https://www.loc.gov/law/find/hearings/pdf/00139298780.pdf.

²⁸ Empty Seats in a Lifeboat: Are There Problems with the U.S. Refugee Program? Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, One Hundred Seventh Congress, Former Senator Sam Brownback, February 12, 2002 https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-107shrg84502/html/CHRG-107shrg84502.htm.

In the fall President Bush determined that our Nation could receive up to 70,000 refugees in this fiscal year.... [T]he reality is that 70,000 is a small number of the world's refugees.... We should strive to admit as many refugees as the President thinks that we can handle. To do less, even by a single person, is to deprive a victim of persecution of the protection that we ought to, and that we can provide....

If we are to lead the world by example we need to determine why our numbers declined so consistently year after year when there is so much need that is there around the world. Given this trend we need to ask ourselves, are we truly doing what is right and what is just and what we are capable of doing to help those that in many cases are the poorest of the poor in the most difficult circumstances around the world?"

Refugees' Contributions

The Administration's hostility to refugee resettlement is hard to understand or reconcile on the merits. Research from many sources demonstrates that refugees contribute positively to the U.S. economy. According to a study by the New American Economy Research Fund, refugees contribute meaningfully to our economy as earners and taxpayers.

While they receive initial assistance upon arriving in the United States, that is followed by particularly sharp increases in income in subsequent years. Entrepreneurship among refugees is nearly 50 percent higher than among U.S.-born populations, creating jobs for Americans. And, over time, more than 57 percent of refugees become homeowners.²⁹ Similar studies from the National Bureau of Economic Research³⁰ and The Fiscal Policy Institute³¹ also demonstrate that refugees contribute positively to the U.S. economy. An unpublished 2017 study by the Department of Health and Human Services found that refugees have contributed \$63 billion more in revenue than they cost over the past decade.³²

Conclusion

This Administration's hostility to refugee resettlement is unjustified, and it is not in keeping with the traditional bipartisan support for the USRAP. In dismantling the refugee resettlement program, the Trump Administration's policy ignores humanitarian needs on

²⁹ "From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America," New American Economy, June 19, 2017 https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/from-struggle-to-resilience-the-economic-impact-of-refugees-in-america/.
³⁰ The Economic and Society Contemporary (Forting and Society Contemporary Cont

³⁰ "The Economic and Social Outcomes of Refugees in the United States: Evidence from the ACS," William N. Evans and Daniel Fitzgerald, The National Bureau of Economic Research, June 2017 https://www.nber.org/papers/w23498.

³¹ "Refugees as Employees: Good Retention, Strong Recruitment," David Dyssegaard Kallick and Cyierra Roldan, Fiscal Policy Institute, May 2018 http://fiscalpolicy.org/refugees-as-employees-good-retention-strong-recruitment.

strong-recruitment.

32 "Rejected Report Shows Revenue Brought In by Refugees," The New York Times, September 19, 2017 https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/09/19/us/politics/document-Refugee-Report.html.

every continent, cements the U.S. retreat from our longstanding leadership as the most generous resettlement country in the world, and diminishes U.S. influence over the violent and destabilizing root causes of displacement. Worse, it confirms to Americans and to the world that the new status quo of fear, division, and racism is the policy of the United States. We are not only leaving behind tens of thousands of refugee families at risk, but our own values and interests. I believe that the U.S. can and must do better.

Addendum: The Screening Process for Refugee Entry Into the United States https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2015/11/20/infographic-screening-process-refugee-entry-united-states

Recurrent vetting: Throughout this process, pending applications continue to be checked against terrorist databases, to ensure new, relevant terrorism information has not come to light. If a match is found, that case is paused for further review. Applicants who continue to have no flags continue the process. If there is doubt about whether an applicant poses a security risk, they will not be admitted.

1. Many refugee applicants identify themselves to the U.N. Refugee Agency, UNHCR. UNHCR. then:

- o Collects identifying documents
- o Performs initial assessment
 - Collects biodata: name, address, birthday, place of birth, etc.
 - Collects biometrics: iris scans (for Syrians, and other refugee populations in the Middle East)
- o Interviews applicants to confirm refugee status and the need for resettlement
 - Initial information checked again
- Only applicants who are strong candidates for resettlement move forward (less than 1% of global refugee population).

2. Applicants are received by a federally-funded Resettlement Support Center (RSC):

- o Collects identifying documents
- o Creates an applicant file
- Compiles information to conduct biographic security checks

3. Biographic security checks start with enhanced interagency security checks Refugees are subject to the highest level of security checks of any category of traveler to the United States

- U.S. security agencies screen the candidate, including:
 - National Counterterrorism Center/Intelligence Community
 - FB
 - Department of Homeland Security
 - State Department
- The screening looks for indicators, like:
 - Information that the individual is a security risk
 - Connections to known bad actors
 - Outstanding warrants/immigration or criminal violations
- DHS conducts an enhanced review of Syrian cases, which may be referred to USCIS
 Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate for review. Research that is used by
 the interviewing officer informs lines of question related to the applicant's eligibility and
 credibility.

4. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)/USCIS interview:

- o Interviews are conducted by USCIS Officers specially trained for interviews
- Fingerprints are collected and submitted (biometric check)
- Re-interviews can be conducted if fingerprint results or new information raises questions.
 If new biographic information is identified by USCIS at an interview, additional security checks on the information are conducted. USCIS may place a case on hold to do additional research or investigation. Otherwise, the process continues.

5. Biometric security checks:

- $\circ\quad$ Applicant's fingerprints are taken by U.S. government employees
 - Fingerprints are screened against the FBI's biometric database.

- Fingerprints are screened against the DHS biometric database, containing watch-list information and previous immigration encounters in the U.S. and overseas.
- Fingerprints are screened against the U.S. Department of Defense biometric database, which includes fingerprint records captured in Iraq and other locations.
- If not already halted, this is the end point for cases with security concerns. Otherwise, the process continues.

6. Medical check:

- The need for medical screening is determined
- This is the end point for cases denied due to medical reasons. Refugees may be provided medical treatment for communicable diseases such as tuberculosis.

7. Cultural orientation and assignment to domestic resettlement locations:

- O Applicants complete cultural orientation classes.
- An assessment is made by a U.S.-based non-governmental organization to determine the best resettlement location for the candidate(s). Considerations include:
 - Family; candidates with family in a certain area may be placed in that area.
 - Health; a candidate with asthma may be matched to certain regions.
- A location is chosen.

8. Travel:

- o International Organization for Migration books travel
- Prior to entry in the United States, applicants are subject to:
 - Screening from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection's National Targeting Center-Passenger
 - The Transportation Security Administration's Secure Flight Program
- This is the end point for some applicants. Applicants who have no flags continue the process

9. U.S. Arrival:

- All refugees are required to apply for a green card within a year of their arrival to the United States, which triggers:
 - Another set of security procedures with the U.S. government.
- $\circ \quad \text{Refugees are woven into the rich fabric of American society!}$

Ms. GARCIA. Thank you. Bishop?

TESTIMONY OF THE MOST REVEREND MARIO EDUARDO DORSONVILLE-RODRIGUEZ

Bishop Dorsonville. Subcommittee Chair Lofgren, Ranking Member Buck, Representative Garcia, and House Judiciary Subcommittee Members, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today about refugees, the lifesaving U.S. refugee resettlement program, and its importance to the Catholic Church as well.

My name is Mario Dorsonville. I am one of the auxiliary bishops of the Archdiocese of Washington and Chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration.

I am here to offer my perspective as a naturalized immigrant to this great country. A bishop of the Catholic Church and community leader, I am personally an example of the possibility of the American Dream.

Originally from Colombia, I have had the opportunity to live here in the United States for close to 30 years, naturalized, and achieve my calling to work as a bishop with the Catholic Church. For this, I am blessed.

I have been a priest for 35 years, and for 10 years I've had the opportunity to work with Catholic Charities' Spanish Catholic Center here in the Archdiocese of Washington. Through this experience, I have encountered many immigrants and refugees who have come to the United States and thrived. I have met many individuals, including refugees, who are building lives here so that they can serve others.

I have also worked with parishes in the archdiocese whose lives have been touched and improved by their work assisting refugees' families.

In 2013, our Holy Father, Pope Francis, chose as his first official trip as Pope to travel to the community of Lampedusa to acknowledge the deaths of migrants and refugees who had lost their lives drowning in the Mediterranean in an attempt to flee persecution and find a better life.

In that visit, the Holy Father stated that the loss of sacred human life felt like a thorn on his heart. Pope Francis asked us at Lampedusa, "Where is your brother? Where is your sister?"

He stated, "This is not a question directed to others; it is a question directed to others."

He stated, "This is not a question directed to others; it is a question directed to me, to you, to each of us. These brothers and sisters of ours were trying to escape difficult situations to find some serenity and peace. They were looking for a better place for themselves and their families, but instead they found death. How often do such people fail to find understanding, fail to find acceptance, fail to find solidarity?"

Today, I am here to echo the Holy Father's message, to recognize that we must, at all times but particularly in these moments of great global turmoil, recognize the most vulnerable and welcome them to the extent we are able.

As a naturalized and proud American citizen, I can say without hesitation that my adopted country is able to welcome and integrate refugees in a safe manner. In this respect, we have been a leading country to the international community. Other countries

are following our example.

Refugees are individuals who are among the most vulnerable. As you can read in my written testimony, the Catholic Church, for more than 50 years, has long supported refugees and refugee resettlements in this country. I am sometimes asked, why is welcoming immigrants and refugees so important to Catholics? A very simple answer: We believe that welcoming refugees reflects our belief to uphold and protect the sacredness of every human life. And beyond this point, let us remember "Catholic" means "universal." Through our Catholic Charities around the country, we are heed-

ing Pope Francis's call to accompany and integrate refugees into

our communities, dioceses, parishes, and lives.

Despite the cuts to the resettlement program and the reduction of refugees being allowed into the United States, I urge you to recognize that we need to welcome refugees now more than ever. It is also important to note-

Ms. GARCIA. Your time has expired. If you could just wrap it up.

Your time has expired.

Bishop DORSONVILLE. Oh. God bless you for listening to me. I will say, in a very small closing point, our community really needs our attention, our compassion, and our solidarity.

Thank you so much for your time. Ms. GARCIA. Thank you, Bishop. Bishop DORSONVILLE. Thank you.

[The statement of Bishop Dorsonville follows:]



Written Testimony of

Most Reverend Mario E. Dorsonville Auxiliary Bishop of Washington

Chair of the Committee on Migration of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

for

House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship

"Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program"

2141 Rayburn House Office Building 2pm Thursday, February 27, 2020 "In a word, it is not only the cause of migrants that is at stake; it is not just about them, but about all of us, and about the present and future of the human family. Migrants, especially those who are most vulnerable, help us to read the "signs of the times". Through them, the Lord is calling us to conversion, to be set free from exclusivity, indifference and the throw-away culture. Through them, the Lord invites us to embrace fully our Christian life and to contribute, each according to his or her proper vocation, to the building up of a world that is more and more in accord with God's plan."

--Pope Francis, Message for the 105th World Day of Migrants and Refugees¹

Thank you to Representative Sylvia Garcia who is leading this hearing on behalf of Subcommittee Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren and to Ranking Member Ken Buck and members of the House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship for the opportunity to testify before you and to submit this written testimony regarding the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).

As chairman of the Committee on Migration for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I wish to address the importance of America's global leadership role in accepting and integrating refugees for the last forty years. Refugees are a blessing to our country. I speak on behalf of the Catholic Church when I say that the Church teaches that every human being is created in God's image and deserves dignity and respect. We view assisting those in need as is a fundamental Christian duty that is derived directly from the words and the life of Christ, who himself was a migrant and part of a refugee family, and that as Christians, we are called to welcome our new neighbors with the same love and compassion that we would want ourselves to be shown. In the spirit of the quote I cited from Pope Francis, the USCCB urges the U.S. government, in collaboration with civil society, including the faith-based community, to assert its traditional and strong moral international leadership -- a reflection of American values and global strategic interests -- in all phases and parts of the refugee protection system.

I am particularly conscious of the legacy of the U.S. refugee program as we approach March 17, 2020, the $40^{\rm th}$ anniversary of the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980. The Refugee Act provides the framework for the United States to meet its domestic and international obligations to refugee protection through the two major U.S. humanitarian protection systems for refugees---asylum and resettlement. While having deep concerns about reduced access in recent years to both asylum and resettlement and urging rejuvenation of both, I will focus my remarks today on resettlement, the subject of today's hearing.

I. Catholic Social Teaching and Concern, Care and Support for Migrants and Refugees

The Catholic Church has a long history of solidarity, pastoral care, community outreach, service, and advocacy related to people migrating to the United States. Migration and Refugee Services of the USCCB (USCCB/MRS) is historically the largest U.S. refugee resettlement agency in the United States. USCCB/MRS has worked to welcome and integrate refugees, regardless of nationality, race, ethnicity, or religion. Working in partnership with the U.S. government, state and local

 $^{^1}$ Pope Francis, "Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the $105^{\rm th}$ World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2019," Vatican, released September 29, 2019, available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20190527_world-migrants-day-2019.html

governments, and local communities, USCCB/MRS has resettled over one million of the three million refugees who have come to our country since 1975.

The Catholic Church's solidarity and service related to migrants and refugees stems from the belief that every human being 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. 10:19). 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 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, 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. Pope Pius XII reaffirmed the Catholic Church's commitment to care for pilgrims, aliens, 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. Meanwhile, we advocate to address the root causes for such poor conditions while also protecting those forced to migrate. 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." In that document, we affirm that "Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection. Those who flee wars and persecution should be protected by the global community." (No. 99). We likewise state that refugees should "have access to appropriate due process protections consistent with international law." (No. 99).

From the beginning of his papacy, including when Pope Francis traveled to Lampedusa, Italy, he has defended the rights of refugees and migrants and called for their protection. He decried the "globalization of indifference" and the "throwaway culture" that disregards those fleeing persecution in order to seek a better life. Pope Francis also created a new Vatican department, the Dicastery to Promote Integral Human Development, to be a catalyst for Catholic collaboration in developing policies and systems to effectively address refugee and migration crises. He is personally overseeing the Migration & Refugee Section of that Dicastery as the Church seeks to improve the welcome, protection, promotion, and integration of refugees and immigrants.

II. Bipartisan and Community-Based History of the US Refugee Admissions Program

At the height of World War II (1943), the U.S. bishops established War Relief Services (WRS) as the mechanism through which the Church would participate in overseas refugee and relief work. Soon after its establishment, the bishops assigned WRS with the responsibility to lead the Church's work with displaced persons abroad and extend "help to war-afflicted people, especially children, on the basis of need alone, without reference to race, creed, or other factors." By 1948, of the 119 dioceses in the U.S. at the time, 105 dioceses had a resettlement director appointed by their respective bishop.³ This effort established the foundation upon which the Church's current resettlement program was built.

² Pope Pius XII, Exsul Familia (On the Spiritual Care of Migrants), September 1952.

³ Todd Scribner, "Pilgrims of the Night': The American Catholic Church Responds to the Post-World War II Displaced Persons, Crisis," American Catholic Studies 124(3): Fall, 2013, 14.

During the next three-decades, the Church remained responsive to migration flows – often forced – that emerged under the cloud of the Cold War. From 1948 to 1952, the Church helped to resettle 190,275 persons who were displaced by the devastation of World War II, another 70,000 persons through the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 and in the aftermath of the Hungarian uprising in 1956.⁴ Striking more closely to home, the periodic influx of Cubans following the rise of Fidel Castro reshaped the demographic and cultural identity of southern Florida. The Catholic Church in Miami, due in large part to the efforts of Catholic Relief Services and the local Catholic Charities (the social services arm of the Church), was indispensable to the reception and placement of Cubans upon their arrival.

The Catholic Church played a critical role in the Orderly Departure Program (ODP), which permitted Vietnamese immigration to the United States and other countries after the Vietnam War. Prior to the ODP, tens of thousands of "boat people" fled Vietnam monthly and to neighboring countries. From 1979 until the end of 1999 the Orderly Departure Program processed more than 523,000 Vietnamese for admission to the U.S. as refugees, immigrants, and parolees.⁵

By the mid-1970s, it had become apparent that the ad-hoc nature of the resettlement process needed significant revision. Different refugee populations received different levels of support; the parole power of the Executive branch raised concerns within Congress that the President was effectively skirting immigration law and admitting migrant populations outside the Congressionally established system of admissions. The differentiated nature of the program was an important contributing factor to the passage of The Refugee Act of 1980, which standardized the system through which refugees were admitted, clarified the objectives of the program, regularized assistance programs for refugees, and delineated the roles and responsibilities of federal and private agencies responsible for resettlement. Since 1980, the U.S. Refugee Admissions program has received broad, bipartisan support, with the annual admissions goal averaging 95,000 each year.6

The current resettlement system in the U.S. is an expansive public-private partnership with longstanding commitments from a broad group of faith-based organizations, including Jewish, Episcopal, Catholic, Lutheran, and Evangelical faiths, as well as secular non-governmental organizations. Each involved entity raises private money, cultivates in-kind donations from local communities, and volunteers matching federal dollars.

USCCB/MRS operates the Parishes Organized to Welcome Immigrants and Refugees (POWIR) program throughout its resettlement network to strengthen parish and community support for newcomer populations. In the first 8 months of 2019, 23 POWIR programs engaged over 131 parishes, identified and trained 1,579 new volunteers, and formed 162 new community partnerships.⁷

III. Contributions of Refugees to the United States

⁴ Scribner, 19.

⁵ The U.S. Department of State, "Fact Sheet: Refugee Admissions Program from East Asia", January 16, 2004, https://2001-2009.state.gov/g/prm/rls/fs/2004/28212.htm.

⁶ See Migration Policy Institute, *U.S. Annual Refugee Resettlement Ceilings and Number of Refugees Admitted since 1980*, available at https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-annual-refugee-resettlement-ceilings-and-number-refugees-admitted-united.

 $^{^7}$ This data is derived from internal USCCB/MRS survey results of participating POWIR Programs. More detail is available upon request.

As explained above, our call to resettle refugees is deeply ingrained in Catholic social teaching and thought which is based off of our Catholic faith and in the teaching of Jesus Christ. We believe that every human life is sacred and entitled to protection and human dignity. It is our responsibility to help refugees not based on their achievements or contributions but because they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Despite this fundamental underpinning of our approach to resettlement, my brother Bishops and I feel that it is important to highlight the amazing accomplishments and contributions of refugees who have been resettled here in the United States.

In addition to the many fine refugee families we have been blessed to assist through our Catholic Charities' network, there are some truly noteworthy refugees whose accomplishments have changed the face of U.S. and global history important to mention. Such U.S. refugees include Albert Einstein, Henry Kissinger, Madeleine Albright, and Sergey Brin (founder of Google), As well as countless other contributors to U.S. society. A recent study⁸ highlighted the profound, positive economic impact of refugees collectively.

Refugees:

- earn \$77.2 billion and pay taxes of \$20.9 billion, annually;
- earn initial median household wages of \$22,000 per year and in 25 years, averages \$67,000;
- earn as entrepreneurs \$4.6 billion annually, as 13% of refugees start their own businesses;
- share collective spending power of over \$1 billion in each of 18 U.S. states for a total of \$57.4 billion, including \$17.2 billion in California and \$4.6 billion in Texas; and
- provide part of the solution for future tax support to address the aging of America as 49.7% of U.S. born people are of working age, while 77.1% of refugees are of working age.

IV. Recommendations

As noted above, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is a long-standing public-private partnership that has provided life-saving protection to millions of individuals fleeing violence, political turmoil and religious persecution. Understanding the pivotal moment that the program finds itself; we respectfully request Congress to consider the following recommendations:

- urge the Administration to ensure that the Fiscal Year 2020 admission goal of 18,000 refugees is met;
- urge the Administration to return the refugee admissions goal in future years to a level
 consistent with global need and traditional U.S. global humanitarian leadership, that is, at
 least 95,000, the historical norm over the past 40 years of the USRAP;
- maintain robust appropriations levels related to accounts that support the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program; and
- recognize the unique and vital role that faith-based organizations and faith communities
 play in welcoming and integrating refugees.

⁸ From Struggle to Resilience, New American Economy, June 2017, p. 2, available at https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/NAE_Refugees_V5.pdf.

A. Congress must strongly encourage the Administration to reach its Fiscal Year 2020 refugee admission goal of $18,\!000$

In recent years, the numbers of the refugee program have dramatically dropped. While these lower numbers were stated to be resulting from increased and improved vetting, we which appreciate and recognize as important, it has been disheartening to see the numbers of refugees arriving continually not meet the Presidential Determination number that has been given. To this point, there was a Presidential Determination in Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 of 110,000 refugees, and only 53, 716 were resettled; in FY 2018 there was a Presidential Determination of 45,000 and only 22,491 were resettled. In FY 2019 there was a Presidential Determination of 30,000 and while we were dismayed at the low number of refugees allowed by the President to be resettled in 2019, we were grateful that the U.S. government resettled all 30,000 in FY 2019. ¹¹We are hopeful that this may be something to build on, in terms of ensuring that the goal number is likely to be met in future years going forward. However, despite the increasingly low number of refugees allowed to be resettled in the United States, (this year another reduction to 18,000), we are currently not on track to reach that resettlement goal. As of February 21, 2020, there have been 5,792 refugees resettled. ¹² If this pace is continued, we will only be resettling 14,682 refugees in Fiscal Year 2020. As a country we can and must do better to help those in need.

To help ensure that we are able to resettle 18,000 refugees this year, we encourage Congress to conduct robust oversight into the resettlement program. We urge Congress to help troubleshoot areas within the Department of State and Department of Homeland Security that are leading to delays for refugees to reunite with families living here in the United States. We remind Congress and the Administration that refugee resettlement is reserved for the most vulnerable who have vital need to leave their precarious and dangerous living situations, such as religious or ethnic or social minorities who are as unsafe in the neighboring host country as they were in their home country. It includes unaccompanied refugee children in child-headed households, women at risk, victims of torture and human trafficking, and the elderly. These most vulnerable populations need our help immediately, and we, along with the other voluntary agencies, stand ready to work with you and with the Administration to ensure that together we reach this year's goal of 18,000 refugee admissions.

B. Given the unprecedented level of global need, and the U.S.'s historic leadership role in the world, we need to return to the historic average for resettling refugees

While urging the Administration to use every one of the 18,000 designated admission slots in FY 2020, we also urge that the Administration build admissions back up to a level commensurate with the global resettlement need, to at least the 95,000 average. ¹³ Given the extremely high levels

¹⁰ Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees FY2021, Administration of Children and Family, Department of Health and Human Services, p 39, available at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/olab/fy_2021_congressional_justification.pdf?nocache=158135

 $^{^{11}}$ President Trump, Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions FY2019, Federal Register, 10/4/2018, available at https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/11/01/2018-24135/presidential-determination-on-refugee-admissions-for-fiscal-year-2019

¹² Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS), , Department of State, available at https://wrapsnet.org (Information publicly available on wrapsnet; also, USCCB can provide upon request).
¹³ 95,000 is the average PD number for the USRAP from 1980 to 2016. With an ever-rising resettlement need, our response should be consistent with need and leadership, and at least "average". Also, 95,000 is the minimum annual goal also called for in H.R. 2146/S.1088, The GRACE Act, which USCCB and RCUSA support. See S.1088, available at https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/1088

of displacement globally and the U.S.'s traditional leadership role in humanitarian assistance through aid and programs such as refugee resettlement, it is vital that the U.S. refugee admission program is restored to the historical levels.

Currently there is unprecedented migration-related displacement throughout the world. As of June 2019, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that there was forced displacement of over 70.8 million people globally, with over 25.9 million individuals considered refugees who have fled to other countries. For the majority of the refugees, the solution is to either voluntarily return home when returning can be done in safety and dignity or integrating into a nearby refugee host country. Resettlement to a third country is a last resort. For 2020, UNHCR identified that over 1.44 million of the 25.9 million refugees need access to resettlement, up from 1.2 million in need of resettlement in 2016.

Yet, despite a documented rising need for resettlement, the current global resettlement capacity is decreasing. For example, in 2018, UNHCR referred only 81,337 refugees for resettlement, a nearly 50% reduction from 162,500 referred in 2016. The U.S., in its dramatic reduction of refugees, has greatly contributed to the reduced capacity, with an over 70% reduction in U.S. arrivals from 85,000 in 2016 to 22,500 in 2018. With maximum arrivals to the United States in 2020 of 18,000, we will soon be experiencing an almost 80% reduction in U.S. resettlement since 2016. It is important to note that in prior Republican and Democratic administrations, the State Department worked with UNHCR to help grow the number of countries globally who would resettle refugees. As these new programs begin to gain strength, the United States is abruptly moving in the opposite direction, drastically cutting back on resettlement. We fear that other nations will follow suit and that even more vulnerable refugees will be left behind.

The U.S.'s retreat from global leadership in this area has great consequences not only to the annual number of refugees that other countries will resettle but also as resettlement is used as a diplomatic tool, there are far reaching effects in global and regional stability. This (hopefully temporary) reduction in U.S. leadership also comes at a time when there are several world crises which have large components of forced migration, including in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in Africa, Syria and Iraq in the Middle East, and Venezuela in Latin America.

- In Africa, for example, the U.S. has previously played a key responsibility-sharing role
 through resettlement for the many refugees from the DRC. The largest African refugee
 resettlement population includes those fleeing from DRC, and many of them are Christians
 fleeing ethnic and religious persecution. From FY 2016 to FY 2019, the total U.S.
 resettlement out of Africa has fallen 49% from 31,624 to 16,366.¹⁷
- In the Middle East, the arrivals from 2016 to 2019 have fallen 92%, from 35,555 to 2801.¹⁸
 On the humanitarian level, many Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities fleeing from Syria and Iraq will lose access to resettlement.

¹⁴ UNHCR, Global Forced Displacement in 2018, June 2019, p 2, available at https://www.unhcr.org/enus/statistics/unhcrstats/5d08d7ee7/unhcr-global-trends-2018.html

¹⁵ UNHCR, Global Resettlement Needs 2020, June 2019, p 12, available at

https://www.unhcr.org/5d1384047.pdf

¹⁶ *Id*.

¹⁷ Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS), Department of State, , available at https://wrapsnet.org. (This report is publicly available on wrapsnet; USCCB will also provide it upon request).

¹⁸ WRAPS, Department of State, available at https://wrapsnet.org (This report is publicly available on wrapsnet; USCCB will also provide it upon request).

Lastly, forced displacement in Venezuela may soon even exceed that of the Syrian crisis.
 UNHCR projects that the number of Venezuelans forced to flee their country will reach 6.5 million by the end of 2020.¹⁹

Reducing our leadership role in these situations potentially leaves a vacuum with not only negative humanitarian consequences but also negative strategic consequences. Given the life-saving nature of the resettlement program, the heightened global need, and the vital strategic leadership role the United States has occupied, we urge a return to the historical average numbers of the resettlement program.

C. Maintain and Increase Funding for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

Robust funding needs to be in place to ensure the continued operation and hopeful return to historical refugee resettlement admission norms. First, we commend the bipartisan efforts of Senate and House appropriators and lawmakers to ensure existing funding for refugee resettlement admissions and domestic implementation. We are grateful to see the maintenance of bipartisan humanitarian focused support for the refugee resettlement program. Second, we urge continued support and funding for the Department of State which deals with the overseas admissions elements of the refugee resettlement program and for the Department of Labor, Health, and Human Services which funds the domestic integration and short term support of refugees once they have arrived to the United States. To fully support the international element of the U.S. refugee admissions program, in FY 2021, we are asking Congress appropriate \$3.604 billion for the Department of State's Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account, \$1 million for the Department's Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) account, and \$4.52 billion for the International Disaster Assistance (IDA). To ensure that the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement can adequately serve these vulnerable populations of concern, we are requesting \$4.692 billion for the Refugee Entrant and Assistance (REA) account. Such funding is to maintain robust levels of funding to meet the ongoing work of local U.S. communities welcoming not only refugees but others suffering from the global displacement crisis—such as asylum seekers, Cubans and Haitians, unaccompanied children, survivors of torture and human trafficking.

D. Recognize the unique and vital role that faith-based organizations and faith communities play in refugee resettlement and integrating newcomers

We urge Congress and the Administration to continue to recognize and understand the overwhelming support that various faith-based groups have exhibited for the United States refugee admissions program. As noted, our Christian faith tradition and Catholic social teaching urges us to welcome the refugee, however, it is noted that many other faith-based groups also resettle refugees. It is important to note that six of the nine voluntary agencies resettling refugees in partnership with the federal government are faith-based. In addition to our programmatic experience and expertise to caring for refugees, faith-based groups are uniquely situated to support refugee resettlement and welcome refugees into American communities through their dioceses, parishes, congregations and synagogues. Resettling refugees and welcoming individuals at the local level in communities of faith is a tradition that we have been engaging in for many years and continue to do. An example of the

 $^{^{19}}$ Danny Bahar, Meagan Dooley, Venezuela refugee crisis to become the largest and most underfunded in modern history, Brookings, 12/9/2020, available at https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2019/12/09/venezuela-refugee-crisis-to-become-the-largest-and-most-underfunded-in-modern-history/

strong support of local communities for refugees can be seen in the recent efforts to comply with the President's Executive Order requiring consent for resettlement from governors and local county executives. Before the current preliminary injunction was put in place, 43 states had consented to resettlement and faith groups played a very prominent role in almost every state to help secure that consent.²⁰ In addition to being active supporters, communities of faith work to help to integrate refugees into their local communities and equip them and their families up for success in our country. In the Archdiocese of Washington, there are several parishes who have sponsored and supported refugee families who have come to the United States via the U.S. resettlement program. It is a profound and powerful experience to be able to personally witness the welcoming of the stranger, one of the core elements of our faith, because it allows us to see the love and compassion that our faith calls us to express and live out in our lives. We urge Congress and this Administration and future Administrations to recognize the unique and vital role that we as faith-based entities play in this important program.

IV. Conclusion.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our insights, our long-standing commitment and historic work with refugees to our country, and our analysis. We respectfully urge the Subcommittee to pursue these recommendations.

 $^{^{20}}$ The Texas governor said he would not consent, and governors from Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina had not yet made decisions. Wyoming has no refugee resettlement program.

Ms. Garcia. Next, Mr. Atem?

TESTIMONY OF BIAR ATEM

Mr. ATEM. Good afternoon, Chair, Ranking Member, and Members of the subcommittee.

I am Biar Atem, a former refugee from South Sudan and member of the board of directors for the Refugee Congress. In 2014, I also started the South Sudan Center of America, a local nonprofit that assists refugees.

I sit here before you on behalf of myself and on behalf of the refugees across this great Nation. It is my great honor to appear before you to not only share my refugee experience but also our gratitude to the American people for welcoming us into the United States. This country has been a lifesaving force for us, and the fact that you are willing to hear from someone like me is a further testament to the decency and goodwill of this country.

Let me tell you a little bit about myself. In the 1980s, when I was 7 years old, my village in South Sudan was violently attacked during the second Sudanese civil war. This was a brutal ethnic-religious conflict and ultimately took over 2 million lives and displaced millions.

My village was firebombed, in part because we refused to give up our Christian faith. When we were attacked, I was in the field with my father's cattle and had to flee for my life with other children. We became part of the so-called "The Lost Boys of Sudan," the 30,000 kids between the ages of 5 and 11.

We walked over a thousand miles to get to a refugee camp in Ethiopia and Kenya. When we reached the refugee camp in Ethiopia, only one in three boys survived the journey. Some died of starvation. Others died of malaria. Still others were eaten by a lion and other animal attacks. Of course, many died from gunfire.

One time, the Ethiopian soldiers chased us out of their country, forcing us to swim across the Gilo River, which was infested with crocodiles. Many kids did not make it out of the river. They were either eaten or shot.

This childhood experience made me and many like me especially grateful to the United States. In 2001, nearly 4,000 Lost Boys of Sudan were resettled across the States as refugees. It was the single greatest blessing of our lives.

Unfortunately, just a few months after we arrived, September the 11th happened. One consequence of that was the al-Qaida attack. The U.S. Department of State—the U.S. State Department reduced the number of Sudanese refugees who were resettled for some years.

So, I was sent from a refugee camp in Kenya, where I spent nearly 10 years staying in the camp, going from five different plane rides, from Nairobi to Belgium, to New York JFK, to St. Louis, and then to Las Vegas at 10:30 p.m. at night.

Coming from a place where the only light I had was the daylight, so when I was going to school, I had to make sure that I got my homework done during the day, but in Las Vegas I could do my homework at 2:00 a.m. in the morning on the street.

Osama bin Laden was actually supporting the Sudanese Government, and that was the reason why we couldn't go to Sudan. This

had impacted us for so many years. So, I often think about, when I became a U.S. citizen in 2007, I couldn't wait for a day when I was going to go back to the refugee camp and bring my mother back to Las Vegas. Especially, I wanted her to meet my future wife and attend our wedding in Minnesota.

That trip instead turned into the one to attend her funeral. My mother died of malaria in the refugee camp after she was denied a visa to come and attend my wedding in the U.S. Her death and life in the camp was ultimately the result of the tragic and the fearful times that we lived in.

Therefore, it's not an exaggeration to say that I sit here today because my family and my community are the victims of the same terrorism that struck the United States on September 11th.

My question that I would like to ask today is, why do the vast majority of Americans want to welcome refugees into this country? I am going to share three perspectives.

Refugees bring the spirit of gratitude to this country. Sometimes

people who are born here—I am just going to wrap it up.

So, the second thing is that refugees are often the most talented of their communities-

Ms. Garcia. Mr. Atem, just in one sentence, because your time also has expired.

Mr. Atem. All right. I thank you so much.

So, refugees are the most talented Members of their communities. Refugees are the great ambassadors for America.

Thank you so much for having me here today.

[The statement of Mr. Atem follows:]

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

OF

BIAR ATEM NEVADA DELEGATE AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEMBER FOR REFUGEE CONGRESS

HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION & CITIZENSHIP

HEARING ON THE CURRENT STATE OF THE U.S. REFUGEE PROGRAM

FEBRUARY 27, 2020

Good afternoon, Chair Lofgren, Ranking Member Buck, and members of the Subcommittee. I am Biar Atem, a refugee from South Sudan, and member of the Board of Directors for Refugee Congress. In 2014, I also founded the *South Sudan Center of America*, a registered non-profit that assists refugees.

I sit here before you on behalf of myself and on behalf of refugees across this great nation. Whether we are helping people meet basic needs, working to reduce poverty, advancing education, improving financial literacy, or organizing cultural celebrations, our values of compassion and charity are the foundation on which we seek to contribute to American civil society. It is my great honor to appear before you to share not only the refugee experience but also our gratitude to the American people for welcoming us into the United States. This country has been a life-saving force for us. And the fact that you are now willing to hear from someone like me is further testament to the decency and goodwill of this country.

In the last three years, we have heard some negative attitudes about refugees in the media. There has also been a significant reduction in the number of refugees allowed into the country. However, those attitudes and policies do not reflect the general will of the American people. From personal experience, I have been warmly received in this country by Americans from nearly all political, religious, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. My experience is not unusual. Last November, Pew Research found that seventy-three percent of Americans say it is important to take in refugees escaping war and violence. Seventy-three percent — that is an overwhelming number of the population. The question that I wish to pose this afternoon is the following: Why do the vast majority of Americans want to welcome refugees into the country?

To begin to explore this question, let me tell you a bit about my life. In the 1980s, when I was seven years old, my village in South Sudan was violently attacked during the Second Sudanese Civil War. This was a brutal ethno-religious conflict that ultimately took two million lives and displaced millions more. My village was firebombed in part because we refused to give up our Christian faith. When we were attacked, I was in the field with my father's cattle and had to flee for my life with other village children. We became part of the roughly 30,000 so-called "Lost Boys of South Sudan" who walked barefoot for 1,000 miles to reach refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya. Only one in three boys survived the journey. Some died of starvation; others, of malaria; still others, by lion and other animal attacks. And, of course, many died from gunfire. At one time, Ethiopian soldiers chased us out of their country, forcing us to swim across the Gilo River, which was infested with crocodiles. Many kids didn't make it out of the water. They were either eaten or shot.

These childhood experiences have made me- and many like me- especially grateful to the U.S. government which, in 2001, brought nearly 4,000 Lost Boys to live in the United States. It was the single greatest blessing of our lives.

Unfortunately, just after we arrived, September 11th happened. One consequence of the Al-Qaida attack was that the U.S. State Department reduced the number of Sudanese who were brought over for some years. There was then, as there is now, fear that terrorists might be hiding among refugee populations. I understand the concern. But for us Lost Boys, this was ironic. Osama Bin Laden spent five years in Sudan and assisted the war against our villages. You might even say that he attacked us before he attacked America. It was men like Bin Laden, and radical groups like Al-Qaida, who made us refugees in the first place. Their fanatical violence caused the march of the Lost Boys across East Africa.

It impacted us for many years. I often think about what it did to my mother. After I became a U.S. citizen, I dreamed of going to Kenya and bringing her back to the United States from the refugee camp where she lived. I especially wanted her to meet my future wife and attend our wedding in Minnesota. But that trip, instead turned into one to attend her funeral. She died of malaria in the camp after she was denied a visa by U.S. immigration to attend my wedding. Her life and death in the camp was, ultimately, a result of the tragic and fearful times we live in. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that I sit here today because my family and the community of lost boys are, in various ways, victims of the same terrorism that struck the United States on September 11th.

And that fact, I think, begins to answer my initial question: Why do the vast majority of Americans want to welcome refugees into our country? Partly, it's because they know

many of us are terrorism's chief victims. Helping us is one way — one *life-affirming* way — in which the American people seek to combat terrorism. And Americans know that we come to the United States with a deep sense of loyalty, gratitude, and willingness to serve this country. When you bring in refugees, you bring in the most loyal of Americans. Some Lost Boys, for example, have joined the U.S. Armed Forces. Their gratitude has translated into wanting to protect their new homeland. As U.S. Air Force Staff Sergeant Deng Pour, a fellow Lost Boy, <u>told</u> a newspaper in Nebraska: "As a refugee, I wanted to give back. The only thing I can give back is to serve the country...." His sentiment is shared by every refugee that I know.

But the majority of Americans welcome refugees not just because we are victims of terrorism and not just because we want to say "thank you" to the country. We are also a *benefit* to America. Let me quickly point out three ways that we enhance our society.

First: we bring a spirit of gratitude to the United States. Sometimes people who are fortunate to have been born here take this incredible country for granted. Refugees do not. When I first came here, I worked nights as a janitor in a casino in Las Vegas. It was a job for which I was profoundly thankful. Some of my American-born colleagues, who had better paying jobs, asked me why I was always smiling while I cleaned. I would then tell them my story as a Lost Boy and they would soon realize how fortunate I was to be in the United States. They saw that even cleaning out a restroom in a Vegas hotel can be done in a spirit of joy and gratitude. It was a perspective which seemed to inspire my American colleagues, contributing to their positive view of refugees. My work ethic helped to remind them that they have a lot of opportunities in this country and they should embrace those opportunities. Refugees are, then, an inspiration for our citizens.

Second: refugees are often the most talented members of other countries.

Most of the time, people who become refugees are the businesspeople and the academics, the writers and the artists of their societies. They just had the misfortune to have gotten swept up in wars that they never wanted to be part of. So, in that sense, when you welcome refugees into America, you are taking in the most productive and most peaceful people from other lands. You are getting the best and brightest – and for a bargain price. Their talents add to America and its power. Economists have found this to be the case. A report by the *New American Economy* found that "refugees have an entrepreneurship rate that outshines even that of other immigrants." They wrote: "The United States was home to more than 180,000 refugee entrepreneurs in 2015. That means that 13 percent of refugees were entrepreneurs in 2015, compared to just 11.5 percent of non-refugee immigrants and 9.0 percent of the U.S.-born population. The businesses of refugees also generated \$4.6 billion in business income that year." Just to give you my own case, I started out as a casino janitor, went to college full time, earned a

BA and an MBA, and now I own and manage my own real estate business, all while working for a Fortune 500 company as a manager. Like other refugees, I've come a long way since the crocodiles of the Gilo River, all thanks to the opportunities available in the United States. Other refugees are eager for those opportunities as well. If you welcome them, they will further empower this amazing country. The data shows it.

Third: refugees become great "ambassadors" for America. By that I mean, they provide a compelling form of public relations for our country. When I speak to family and friends in South Sudan, for example, I tell them about all the great things and opportunities in the United States. I excite them about this country. Conversations like these add up and, ultimately, help our country forge positive ties with other nations. People from other lands are able to identify with our country because they know that people like themselves live here. What refugees therefore provide America is a form of "soft power," the power to persuade, the power to make others love our nation. Refugees are fabulous ambassadors.

To close, then, let me repeat my initial question: Why do the vast majority of Americans want to welcome refugees into the country? Besides the innate compassion of the American people, the answer is that Americans also know that refugees bring gratitude, and add talent to the workforce, and enhance America's diplomatic power. Those are the three broad reasons why I think most Americans welcome refugees into the country.

It has been an honor to share my thoughts with you. Thank you so much again for your time and consideration. May God continue to bless you and the rest of America.

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Ms. GARCIA. Thank you for your testimony. Ms. Ries?

TESTIMONY OF LORA RIES

Ms. RIES. Thank you. Thank you, Chairwoman Lofgren, Congresswoman Garcia, and Ranking Member Buck, for the opportunity to speak to you today about the current State of the U.S. refugee program.

My name is Lora Ries, and I am the senior research fellow for homeland security at The Heritage Foundation. The views expressed here are my own and do not reflect an institutional posi-

tion for The Heritage Foundation or its board of trustees.

I have spent my career involved in the immigration and homeland security arena, including the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, and the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary. As a former counsel on this subcommittee, I am honored that this is where I am testifying at a congressional hearing for the first time.

The United States has a long, proud humanitarian tradition of admitting refugees into this country. The U.S. refugee program supports U.S. interests by rescuing some of the world's most vulnerable people, asserting American leadership and strengthening

U.S. public diplomacy.

I will discuss three areas of improvement needed for the Refugee Admissions Program. The first area has to do with refugee vetting.

There is no way to design a foolproof vetting system, but a successful refugee program should be honest about security risks and make sure to mitigate them. Periodic reassessments are necessary to identify and combat fraud patterns, maximum information-sharing among agencies dispersed across departments, and leverage newer technology.

An effective tool to achieve this is developing a person-centric system. The status quo of the relevant databases involved in this program are characterized by scattered information systems among agencies gathering limited-purpose data that is difficult to coordinate across agencies. The U.S. immigration agencies and intelligence community should be employing a person-centric system which would link encounters based on biometrics and provide a person's complete travel to and from the U.S. and immigration history to allow an adjudicator to determine eligibility for any immigration benefit.

As we think about vetting, we should also consider upstream benefits. Resettlement is not the solution to mass displacement. By assisting countries on the front lines, we can stretch resources fur-

thest to help the largest number of refugees.

The second area of improvement is ensuring refugee program integrity. An aspect of the U.S. refugee program that needs attention is continuous vetting of recently resettled refugees to determine whether a refugee returns to the same country from which they asserted they were being persecuted. If a refugee voluntarily returns to his home country, he may lose his refugee status. To maintain the integrity of the program, the U.S. should ensure that those who apply for and those who have received refugee status have a bona fide claim of fear.

Another aspect of program integrity is that U.S. immigration law states that a refugee should apply for adjustment of status, or a green card, 1 year after admission as a refugee. However, there is currently no follow-up by the U.S. Government to ensure a refugee submits the adjustment application. As a refugee's 1-year anniversary approaches, DHS should contact the refugee with a reminder to apply for adjustment of status. This will not only assist the refugee's integration into U.S. society with a more permanent immigration status, it is importantly also provides the U.S. Government another look at the refugee regarding progress towards that permanent status.

This brings me to my third area of improvement, and that is refugee assimilation. Unfortunately, subsequent radicalization of refugees in the same or later generations has occurred in the U.S. and other resettlement countries, and this new phenomena warrants having the U.S. Government assess current assimilation efforts and success.

Assimilation is key to reducing this risk. Learning English, gaining an education—and gaining an education helps immigrants build an American identity and the knowledge, skill sets, and social capital that increase their sense of belonging in American society.

Patriotic assimilation does not require that refugees forget their history. Rather, the goal is that immigrants embrace the principles of the United States and develop loyalty to the U.S. and fellow Americans. We need a comprehensive assimilation plan in which our schools emphasize civics education more, English proficiency occurs more quickly, and greater civil society is more involved in the resettling of refugees. Involvement by individuals, even sponsors from the local community, can facilitate refugees' entry into mainstream society. This helps build civic pride and patriotic attachment to other Americans.

Finally, as we think about our refugee program, we should always view it as a segment of our whole immigration picture and remember that managing borders is central to a nation's sovereignty, which is exercised by every country in this world.

Thank you.

[The statement of Ms. Ries follows:]



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LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program

Testimony before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship Committee on the Judiciary U.S. House of Representatives February 27, 2020

Lora Ries

Senior Research Fellow, Homeland Security
Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy
Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy
The Heritage Foundation

Chairwoman Lofgren, Ranking Member Buck, and distinguished Members of Congress:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the current state of the U.S. Refugee Program. My name is Lora Ries. I am the Senior Research Fellow for Homeland Security in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy at The Heritage Foundation. I have spent my career involved in the immigration and homeland security arena – at the Department of Homeland Security, the private sector, the Department of Justice, and the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on the Judiciary.

The United States has a long, proud humanitarian tradition of admitting refugees into the country. The U.S. Refugee Admission Program (USRAP) is the current mechanism to implement and achieve refugee admissions. The program supports U.S. interests by asserting American leadership, strengthening U.S. public diplomacy, helping partners and allies in a tangible way, and rescuing some of the world's most vulnerable people. The U.S. government has made improvements to the USRAP over the years, but additional improvements are still needed to help ensure the program serves U.S. interests, supports our allies, and helps those in greatest need.

Principles

Before describing needed improvements to the USRAP, it is important to first set out some basic principles related to admitting refugees into the United States.

- Managing who crosses its borders is central to a nation's sovereignty and is exercised by every country in the world.
- 2) Resettlement is not the solution to mass displacement. Only the resolution of conflict will rectify an associated refugee crisis.
- Assisting countries on the front line to conflict that are hosting refugees stretches resources the furthest and helps the largest number of refugees.
- 4) U.S. policymakers have a moral and constitutional duty to care for American interests first. This includes the responsibility to ensure the U.S. only takes in as many refugees as it can safely vet and assimilate.

UNHCR

The USRAP spans several agencies across the international, federal, state, and local arenas. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the primary international organization responsible for assisting refugees and other displaced persons, and is a key component of the USRAP for referring potential resettlement cases to the U.S.

Like other countries, the U.S. benefits from the UNHCR being the primary intake agency as opposed to the U.S. directly receiving self-selected refugee applicants. The UNHCR is better positioned to have a global view and knowledge of sources and locations of persecution. The U.N. is also better situated than a single receiving country to resource staff from those regions who have the most current country condition knowledge. Furthermore, the UNHCR has an enterprise view of the resettlement status and issues of receiving countries to appropriately identify regions or countries for additional integration and resettlement. This allows for distribution of resettlement cases by UNHCR among several receiving countries.

While the U.S. benefits from UNHCR participation in the USRAP, vetting and security improvements are needed in the UNHCR process.

Vetting and Security Checks

Safeguarding the homeland requires periodic vetting and security assessments and prioritizing the best candidates for resettlement. There is no way to design a foolproof vetting system, but a successful refugee program should be honest about security risks and make sure to mitigate them. Review of vetting and security procedures occurred at the beginning of the Trump Administration. A similar assessment occurred after 9/11. These assessments are necessary periodically to identify and combat fraud patterns, maximize information sharing among agencies dispersed across departments, and leverage newer technology.

When new vetting and security procedures are implemented, it takes some time for USRAP staff to acclimate to the changes, causing refugee admissions numbers to initially dip. The post-9/11 enhancements were resource-intensive and staff had to re-vet cases. As a result, the refugee admission numbers dropped from 69,304 in 2001 to 27,110 and 28,422 in 2002 and 2003, respectively. The admission numbers rebounded, however. Predictably, the admission numbers decreased again after the vetting and security changes made in this Administration. As before, USRAP staff have become more efficient at the new vetting and security procedures, and the admission numbers have started to rise. In fiscal year (FY) 2018, the U.S. admitted 22,491 refugees, and in FY 2019, the refugee ceiling number of 30,000 was admitted.

As the U.S. government identifies fraud patterns during and between security assessments, it should consistently update the UNHCR with its fraud findings to terminate fraudulent applications further upstream in the refugee resettlement process.

Information sharing between the U.S., as well as other resettlement countries, and the UNHCR needs to occur in both directions, however. In addition to fraud patterns it finds, the UNHCR should be sharing biometric, biographic, and interview information it collects from resettlement cases with all resettlement countries. This is valuable information for countries in both their refugee and asylum processes. For example, a refugee applicant case may not be accepted by the U.S., but if the applicant subsequently arrives in the U.S. and seeks asylum, the U.S. has a need to know the applicant's immigration history.

The U.S. immigration agencies and intelligence community should be accelerating development progress towards this concept of a complete immigration history, or "person-centric" system. Currently, many immigration, criminal, and intelligence systems are built for narrow purposes and may be encounter-based. The result is it is difficult and time-consuming for staff to do manual searches in multiple systems to connect the dots and derive a complete picture of an individual. Rather, person-centric databases would link encounters, based on biometrics, and provide a person's travel to and from the U.S. and immigration history to allow an adjudicator to determine eligibility for a benefit.

An aspect of the USRAP that needs attention is continuous vetting of recently resettled refugees to determine whether a refugee returns to the country of their claimed persecution fear. If a refugee voluntarily re-avails himself of the protection of his country or travels with the passport of that country,

he may lose his refugee status. To maintain the integrity of the USRAP, the U.S. should ensure that those who apply for, and those who have received, refugee status have a bona fide claim of fear.

While U.S. immigration law states that a refugee should apply for adjustment of status (a green card) one year after admission as a refugee, there is currently no follow-up by the U.S. government to ensure a refugee submits the adjustment application. The intent of the one-year requirement is, in part, to have the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) encounter the refugee again for re-vetting. As a refugee's one-year anniversary approaches, DHS should contact the refugee with a reminder to apply for adjustment of status. It is in the refugee's interest to apply for adjustment because lawful permanent resident status provides the individual with more immigration stability.

Re-designing security vetting on the front end of the refugee admissions process does not eliminate security risks from occurring after the refugee process is complete. Unfortunately, subsequent radicalization of refugees in the same or later generations has occurred in the U.S. and other resettlement countries. To mitigate radicalization risks, the U.S. government should develop a comprehensive plan for assimilating refugees into the United States.

Assimilation

Assimilation into mainstream mores is key to immigrants' success. Embracing the American creed, learning English, and gaining an education help immigrants build an American identity, and the knowledge, skill sets, and social capital that increase their sense of belonging in American society. Assimilation does not require that refugees forget their history. Patriotic assimilation simply asks that immigrants embrace the principles of the United States, and develop loyalty to the U.S. and fellow Americans above other countries and people.

The U.S. government can do a better job assimilating refugees. The government should institute a comprehensive plan for assimilation, including mobilizing private organizations, companies, and individuals. Having individual sponsors assist refugees in their resettlement process, including the timely application for lawful permanent resident status, for example, creates human connections and loyalties to fellow Americans.

To increase assimilation, schools should emphasize civics education. Learning English can also be assisted by greater civil society involvement. Places of worship, community groups, and academic communities can marshal extra time and resources for refugees to facilitate their entry into mainstream society. This helps build social capital, civic pride, and patriotic attachment to other Americans.

The U.S. government should pilot private resettlement programs. Canada has used a private resettlement program model and reports better assimilation outcomes. Refugees in Canada who have gone through a private resettlement model have reported greater satisfaction with their new lives than those resettled by the government alone.

Finally, the USRAP should add an assessment of refugees' skills and educational degrees to align them with employment needs and to fully utilize their skills. The process should include: assessing degrees and credentials earned overseas; recognizing the level of educational attainment and technical qualifications with the appropriate U.S. credential; and assisting refugees in preparing for licensing and certification tests.

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Ms. GARCIA. Thank you.

We will now proceed under the 5-minute Rule with questions for the witnesses, and I will begin by recognizing myself for 5 minutes.

My first question is for Ms. Strack.

Ms. Strack, you described in your oral testimony the situation for refugees as "dire" for this program. You make reference to the 18,000 ceiling as being too low. I think you mentioned that we're not quite even there yet, with half the fiscal year. My understanding is that the fiscal year, it looks like, halfway through, we're only at about 5,000.

Do you think the Trump Administration could handle more refugees and do more on this? What is it you think that we could be doing to make sure that we achieve that 18,000 ceiling, low as it

is?

Ms. STRACK. Thank you.

I am very concerned about the particular subcategories, what we call the allocations of refugees, and that it's going to hamper the Administration's ability to reach the 18,000 ceiling.

If you actually look at the number and estimate monthly arrivals, the situation doesn't look too bad. You would see a path to get to 18,000 if you increased monthly arrivals by a reasonable amount. The problem is, though, suballocation.

So, for example, of the 18,000, 4,000 numbers are reserved for Iraqis. Fifty-three Iraqis have arrived so far, this fiscal year. My concern is that there is not a path forward to go from 53 arrivals to 4,000 arrivals.

I strongly suspect that my former colleagues at the State Department and USCIS have those data. They could share them with you and show you a pipeline report of who is in the pipeline and what's the likelihood they could travel this fiscal year. If they can see already that those cases are not going to travel this fiscal year, what I am suggesting is those numbers should be reallocated to another category where there is a backlog of refugees who could travel this year. That could be the religious minority category. It could be the "other" catchall category.

The statistics are there, and the knowledge and experience is there in the programs to be able to project with a fair degree who is likely to be able to travel this year. The categories where there is going to be a shortfall, those should be flipped to another category where individuals are more likely to be able to travel this year, consistent with the priorities that have already been set by this Administration.

Ms. Garcia. All right.

The Administration claims that it's had to reduce the Administration's goal to focus the resources on the southern border. So, is it a resource issue, or is it a funding issue, or is it this category flipping and wrong targets for the wrong group of people, to put it another way?

Ms. STRACK. The refugee and the asylum program are legally and operationally distinct. I believe that the reference to the southwest border is largely a post-hoc rationalization for an Administration that chooses to have a smaller Refugee Admissions Program.

I think one piece of evidence for that is that, when they set the ceiling at 18,000 for this fiscal year, there were already approxi-

mately 40,000 refugees in the pipeline who had already been interviewed by DHS officers. I think that's the argument there, that there's a scarcity of officers to do the interviews. These were interviews where USCIS officers had already been overseas, interviewed them, and those cases were conditionally approved. So, there's no offset with the asylum program in that situation.

The other thing I want to say is, my experience as a government official and in the last 12 years as really an operational person, policy drives resources, not the other way around. So, when there is a policy will to admit refugees, resources follow. It's not the other

way around.

Ms. GARCIA. Okay. Thank you.

Bishop, thank you again for your support on this issue. I know that we've talked about the Texas Governor, using that veto power, decided not to do the refugee resettlement programs in Texas. What has been the reaction from your colleagues in Texas and the Catholic community about the Governor's decision?

Bishop DORSONVILLE. Well, we have been, first, working with other religion groups and denominations. I guess that we expect that it might be a rectification, if it's possible, advocating and continue to try to find the real ways to support, to welcome, and to integrate into the parish and diocese life, the refugees would be a

very important point.

I guess that advocating, praying with them, trying to work with them, it would be, like, the main point. Surprise and disappointment always come from the ones who have to face, day by day, the drama, the human drama, of many people, but still we move with much faith and hope that we know that perhaps there might be other ways to face this kind of crisis.

Ms. GARCIA. Thank you, Bishop. Bishop DORSONVILLE. Sure.

Ms. GARCIA. My time has expired. I'll now recognize Mr. Biggs of Arizona.

Mr. BIGGS. I thank the gentlelady, the chair.

I thank each of you for being here to testify before us today in

this important hearing.

Ms. Ries, you talked about coordination of data across agencies. I am wondering, in the world of refugees and, basically, sometimes the upheaval that is causing the movement of peoples, how would you suggest that we acquire information? You mentioned biometrics, for instance. How would we transmit that across agencies and coordinate better in the United States?

Ms. RIES. So, there are two parts to that. One is UNHCR, the biometrics that they collect, and having them share information with the resettlement countries.

Also, the other side is within USCIS. For example, having the intel communities who must do security checks, which can take a long time, be able to, along with the immigration agencies, get a complete picture of all the data that does exist on a person to make sure is this person eligible, grant the benefit; if they're not eligible, don't. It would add a lot of efficiency.

Mr. BIGGS. So, Ms. Strack testified in both her written and oral testimony that 40,000 refugees have been interviewed in the pipe-

line, but we've only allocated for 18,000. Is an interview the only vetting process that goes through before we admit a refugee?

Ms. RIES. My understanding with that group is they are awaiting

security checks. As I said, that can take a long time.

Mr. BIGGS. With regard to the vetting system, I think everybody here is going to agree that there is no foolproof vetting system available at this time. Have improvements been made during the Trump Administration to mitigate risks of either fraud or those who pose a national security risk?

Ms. RIES. Yes. So, both refugee and asylum process needs periodic reassessments. This was done after 9/11. Over time, applicants can game the system, and so that is why another assessment is

needed periodically.

Coming into the Trump Administration with very high numbers and radicalization appearing in some of these cases, both in the U.S. and abroad, it was time to do another reassessment. So that is what occurred at the beginning of the Administration. It has involved using newer technology, making sure information-sharing is occurring among all the right agencies, and the like.

Mr. BIGGS. So one of the things that you testified to is that DHS doesn't provide—at the end of a year, a refugee comes in, they are not providing a notice to the refugee that it is time to apply for a

change of status.

So, I am going to ask Mr. Atem, do you recall receiving any kind of notification from DHS when your year status was up to apply for a change of status?

Mr. ATEM. No, I never got a call from the DHS. When I arrived here, I knew that after 1 year I can apply for a green card, which I did, and then applied for U.S. citizenship. So, it was a process.

Because when you come as a refugee, you get a I-94, which is only good for 1 year. After 1 year, that document is not valid, so you have to become a resident and get your green card. Then, you can become a citizen or continue to renew your green card every 10 years.

Mr. BIGGS. So, on the front end, you knew that within a year you were going to be able to apply for the green card, the change of sta-

tus?

Mr. Atem. Right, because the initial document is only good for 1 year.

Mr. Biggs. Right.

So, I guess I would ask anyone on the panel this question, because I think this is an interesting question. We talked about repatriation and the three—well, let's just put it this way. After you received either refugee status or do we know if there is any repatriation? Do people head back to their original Nation after the period of danger has passed? Do we keep statistics on that at all?

By your silence, I would say—Ms. Strack, do you want to—

Ms. STRACK. If I may. I would agree, I don't believe there are any

comprehensive statistics on that.

I would like to note that sometimes there are very legitimate reasons for refugees to return to their homeland. I think my fellow witness mentioned one might be going back to visit a relative, a sick relative, try to dispose of a family business or family property. So those are typically short visits done somewhat stealthily.

My understanding is that, at the airport, very often inspectors, CBP officers at the airport, if they recognize that someone has refugee status and they recognize that they have returned to their homeland, they have the discretion—and I understand that it is used on occasion; I don't know how regularly they will invite that refugee into a secondary conversation to explore those issues.

Mr. BIGGS. Thank you. My time has expired.

Ms. Garcia. The chair now recognizes the Subcommittee chair, Ms. Lofgren of California.

Ms. LOFGREN. Thank you very much.

Thanks to each witness for being here and sharing your information with us.

Mr. Atem, you had a longer statement, and I know that the chair is enforcing, as she is required to do, our 5-minute rule, but I wanted to hear the rest of what you were going to tell us. So, tell us your success story.

Mr. Atem. Thank you so much for that opportunity.

So, when I came to the U.S. here, I knew that I had to get a job right away after spending nearly 14 years in a refugee camp. You pretty much live off the ration that is provided by the United Nations.

So, when I first arrived in Las Vegas, it took me about 6 weeks to be employed. Within the first few weeks when you come to the U.S. as a refugee, you get cash assistance, so it was \$335 a month. There is a one-way airplane ticket that you get to pay back as a loan, so I gladly paid that back after I was employed.

So, getting a job right away, really working hard to better yourself, and then getting an education. That is what I had to do, coming to the U.S. here. That is what refugees are doing in this com-

munity.

Some of the refugees that I know, they have really done well for this country. Some have died in the service in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some have graduated from Ivy League universities, and we

have some who are Foreign Service officers.

So, my story of when I became a U.S. citizen, I really wanted to go back to Sudan and be able to be reunited with my family after 21 years of separation. When my mom was denied a visa, I just felt that, as an American citizen my rights didn't matter. Because I was going to take care of her in Las Vegas. I owned a beautiful home in Nevada, went to college, been successful. My mother was denied the opportunity to be united with my family and my children, so we never had the opportunity to be blessed by her.

A lot of work that I do in the community, I do a lot of speaking engagements, sharing the refugee story with our kids in the school district, whether I am speaking at a community college or just a local middle school. So, the message that I get from the kids is that, "Before hearing your story, I used to doubt myself that I could actually accomplish my academic goals, but after hearing what you

went through, if you can do it, I can do it."

We are really inspiring kids in the community and also helping refugees to integrate into the American community, so providing job training. That is what we are doing in the community, being able to help them so that they become self-sufficient. As a refugee, you are only being assisted for 90 days, within 90 days you can get a job and pretty much be on your own. So, the first thing that you do, make sure that refugees get employed as soon as possible. Then after that, they are going to be happy taxpayers.

Ms. LOFGREN. That is great to hear. What you went through as a child is just shocking to even hear. I am glad that you are now

my fellow citizen.

Mr. Atem. Thank you so much for this opportunity. I couldn't be prouder to be an American, because what really inspired me to be an American, when I was growing up in a refugee camp, when we got the ration, they said it was provided by the United Nations, USA. So, I wanted to be here so I can be the one assisting those kids in the refugee camp. Hopefully they will have an opportunity to be settled so they can achieve all the things that I have done for myself here in the U.S. I am proud to do that any day.

Ms. LOFGREN. Thank you very much.

Ms. Strack, we have our refugee consultation once a year with the Secretary of State, and we did that last fall. One of the issues raised by Senator Graham—and we followed it up with a letter to the Secretary of State—was that there are thousands of refugees who had done everything—they had been screened, the security check, they were waiting with their airplane ticket—and then were not able to come because of the change in the numbers, some of whom were translators who had helped the American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Obviously, the low number is for all of this year. They going to have to go through that entire process from scratch over again if

they wait several years?

Ms. Strack. It is a complicated question.

I guess the first thing I would like to say is, I agree that periodic reviews of the security vetting system for refugees are very important and didn't just happen after September 11 and with the Trump Administration.

Ms. LOFGREN. Sure, I know that.

Ms. Strack. It really is a continuous process.

Ms. LOFGREN. They have happened due to fraud issues and the like.

Ms. STRACK. I certainly think that the moratorium that accompanied the 120-day review at the beginning of the Trump Administration was unnecessarily cruel. They were in transit and who had given up all their possessions, were in a camp, and were ready to head to the airport at midnight. That was not necessary.

The answer, though, is some people, because of those enhancements, do need to go through additional processing. Whether it is every step or only an incremental addition, they do have to go through those. It is likely that some other checks will expire in the meantime, and those may need to be repeated as well.

Ms. Lofgren. Correct.

My time has expired, so I am going to yield back to the gentlelady from Texas.

Ms. GARCIA. She yields back.

The gentleman from North Dakota, Mr. Armstrong, is next.

Mr. Armstrong. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Ries, the President issued an Executive order to ensure that States and localities were adequately consulted before refugees were resettled in their jurisdictions. What kind of just State and local resources do refugees utilize?

Ms. RIES. So, it could involve some that Mr. Atem had mentioned—job services, school programs, medical assistance, and childcare. There are a host of—

Mr. Armstrong. Community buy-in is obviously important to

have proper refugee resettlement?

Ms. RIES. Yes, it is very important. The more that individuals in the community are involved, the more assimilated the refugees can become, the more they develop an affinity for their fellow community Members.

Mr. ARMSTRONG. Just like with anything else, because refugees utilize local resources and require the community to buy in to the resettlement program, it is important to consult with local jurisdictions, isn't it?

Ms. Ries. Yes.

Mr. Armstrong. What do you think it says about the program that 43 States consented to resettle refugees before the order was

enjoined?

Ms. RIES. So, it was already required in the law that the resettlement agencies work with State and locals before resettling. My understanding is that was maybe done inconsistently. Some States or localities were not pleased with the lack of consultation that was occurring, so I believe that was the reason for the Executive order that was issued.

The fact that the vast majority of the States agreed to continue to resettle continues their commitment and the faith in resettling

refugees and the benefits of the program.

Mr. Armstrong. In North Dakota, we have primarily three communities that do this—Fargo, Grand Forks, and Bismarck. We are proud of our refugee communities. We are proud of our new American communities. They are fantastic. In two of those communities, through this whole process, it went by as seamlessly as possible.

In the third community, it actually turned into quite a contentious deal before they actually voted to accept them. As is often the case with issues like this, it turned into a binary fight, which I don't think was really accurate. I think a lot of people weren't frustrated with the refugees and the resettlement so much as the lack of transparency from the agency that was in charge of helping resettle these refugees. The legislature had previously asked for a report on these things in a couple years prior—we weren't asking for phone numbers and addresses and those types of things. Through the course of this, we recognized that they were fairly uncooperative in the type of data they provided.

So, the integrity of the program has to be in place in order to ensure the successful future of the program. It is really more of a statement than a question, but, how do we ensure that the agencies we are working are working with the communities, so they know that the information they are getting is correct?

Ms. RIES. Well, this E.O. was a bit of a forcing function, to make what the law required happen. Hopefully, going forward, there will

be more consistent, consultation with the States and localities be-

fore resettling.

Mr. Armstrong. To that end, I would be the first person to testify in favor of responsible and reasonable refugee resettlement, but I don't entirely know why the appropriate place for that isn't in a State legislature or in a county place, where the resources in the community is the one that is going to accept them and going to welcome them in and continue to work with them.

So, with that, I yield back.

Ms. Garcia. The gentleman yields back.

We will now recognize the gentlelady from Florida, Ms. Mucarsel-Powell, for her 5 minutes.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank

you for holding this hearing today.

I think that it is clear—and we see this every day—that the world, not just the United States but the entire world, is facing the worst refugee crisis in history. There are millions of people that are being displaced not just because they are fleeing political persecution, corrupt governments, violence, but also because of scarcity of resources and the effects of climate change, like what we have seen in Guatemala.

Under this Administration, the number of refugees admitted into the safety of our country has dropped dramatically. These new policies disregard the real human beings that are fleeing these brutal dictatorships like what we are seeing in Venezuela right now. 5t seems to me that the Administration, with these new policies, are completely disregarding the fear, the persecution, and the people that are escaping these countries, like in Nicaragua.

It is incredible for me to see that the country has cut from the fiscal year 2016, the number of refugees that were admitted were 85,000 refugees in 2016. In 2020, we have only admitted 18,000, a 79-percent decrease and the lowest level in the history of the U.S.

Refugee Admissions Program.

This is a complete contradiction of everything that the United States stands for. It ignores our place on the international stage as a beacon of hope. Even at the lowest levels of refugees that this Administration is letting in, it doesn't even allow for the smallest percentage of refugees from around the globe that are trying to obtain freedom, asylum, and protection.

This is not only a blow to our refugee policy, but the President has also issued an Executive order requiring States and localities to consent to receiving refugees before they can be placed there by the government. While this order was put on pause by the courts, my own State of Florida has not yet consented to receiving refugees.

South Florida, I represent an area that is incredibly diverse in my district. It has a very rich history as a place for refugees for tens of thousands of Cubans who have fled dictatorship in search for a better life. Because we have welcomed those in search of freedom, it seems like now they are being punished for it.

I immigrated here when I was a young girl, when I was 14, from Ecuador. I was not a refugee seeking asylum, but during the Reagan years, the immigration policies were completely different, and there was a path for us to request legal status for those of us

that were looking for freedom and opportunity. I know that my life has changed incredibly because of the opportunities that were allotted to me.

My story is not unique. We continue to be a Nation of immigrants. We continue to be the opportunity for those that are fleeing

violence and persecution.

So, my first question, to Mr. Atem: Refugees clearly benefit from coming here to the United States. This is not a one-way street, and we really don't discuss this enough. Can you describe how refugees are vital to the economic health of small communities across the country?

Mr. Aтем. Thank you.

So, the opportunities that refugees bring to the community—refugees are often the ones doing the job that nobody wanted to do. For example, when I arrived in Las Vegas, I was a janitor, and no young man wanted to do that kind of job. You have to be a refugee to be excited about doing that job. So, the way we look at things, whatever first opportunity, the first job—it could be working in a meat factory or working on a farm or food processing in Alaska or working as a server in a casino somewhere in the U.S.

Those are the ways in which refugees do really help those communities. So, they are providing cheap labor and then, in turn,

they are building their communities.

Ms. Mucarsel-Powell. Yeah.

Mr. Atem. They work their way up through the system, getting better jobs and moving on and then creating opportunities, too, for the communities. Like myself, I am a real estate developer in Las Vegas. I own an apartment complex on top of working as an audit manager for a casino, for a corporation.

Ms. Mucarsel-Powell. Uh-huh.

Mr. ATEM. So, those are the benefits that we do bring to these communities.

What we really need as refugees, we just want to be water, we need water, and then we are going to blossom and give you flowers and food.

The temporary assistance for 3 months, that is all we are asking for, because for refugees, it doesn't take long to get an opportunity, and we are really not afraid to start at the bottom. Although, some may come from their home communities with advanced degrees, but to come to America, you start at the bottom, so refugees are really grateful for those opportunities.

So, they can not only make the difference here in the U.S., but

helping peoples in their home countries as well.

Ms. Mucarsel-Powell. Thank you so much, Mr. Atem. I am out of time. I wish I had more time, Madam Chair.

Ms. Garcia. Well—

Ms. Mucarsel-Powell. Maybe next time.

Ms. GARCIA. The gentlelady yields back.

I now recognize my colleague and friend from Texas, Ms. Escobar.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for hosting this very important hearing.

You and I are from the same State, and you mentioned earlier that our Governor has chosen to openly reject refugees.

My esteemed colleague, Mr. Armstrong, just moments ago, talked about the need for local governments and for States to express whether they want to accept refugees or not. I want to first say that I have much respect for Mr. Armstrong, so this is not against Mr. Armstrong; this is against that perspective.

In my State, unfortunately, our Governor has adopted the same tactics that many others in his party have adopted, and that is using migrants and refugees as scapegoats, trying to portray them

as people to be feared, even people to be hated.

In fact, I represent El Paso, Texas, a community that on August 3 suffered through one of the most horrific targeted attacks against Latinos in our Nation's history when a gunman drove over 600 miles to-literally, he confessed to wanting to go slaughter Mexi-

cans and immigrants.

The anti-immigrant sentiment and the pervasive xenophobia that is pushed by leaders at our highest levels of government—I hold them responsible for helping fuel the hatred and ultimately the violence. In fact, the day before the attack, the Governor sent out a fundraising letter denouncing immigrants, using the same hateful rhetoric that the killer used in his own manifesto and trying to raise money off that fear.

So, it is no surprise that, months later, the Governor announced he wanted to close the door, shut the door on refugees. In fact, I would like unanimous consent, please, to enter into the record almost a dozen articles about the Governor's efforts to shut the door on refugees.

Ms. GARCIA. Without objection. [The information follows:]

MS. ESCOBAR FOR THE RECORD

THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Abbott tells Trump administration Texas won't participate in refugee resettlement

The decision comes after more than 40 other governors said they would opt in to the federal program.

BY JULIÁN AGUILAR JAN. 10, 20202 PM

Gov. <u>Greg Abbott</u> informed the U.S. State Department that Texas will not participate in the refugee resettlement program this fiscal year.

The decision comes after more than 40 other governors, including several Republicans, said they would opt in to the federal refugee resettlement program. Resettlement agencies need written consent from states and local governments by Jan. 21. The Trump administration imposed the deadline in a September executive order that requires written consent from states and local entities before they resettle refugees within their boundaries.

The news was first reported by <u>The Daily Wire</u> and later confirmed by the governor's office. The <u>AP reported</u> that Texas is the first state to opt out of the program.

Abbott said the state and nonprofit organizations should concentrate resources on those already here, according to a letter the governor sent to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

"At this time, the state and nonprofit organizations have a responsibility to dedicate available resources to those who are already here, including refugees, migrants, and the homeless—indeed, all Texans," he wrote.

Refugee advocacy groups condemned the move.

"This is a deeply disappointing decision — although not surprising given Texas' previous but unsuccessful opposition to refugee resettlement a few years ago," said Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, the president and CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. "This is precisely why we filed a lawsuit against President

Trump's unlawful executive order, and we are confident that justice will be served."

Abbott wrote that Texas has already been forced to "deal with disproportionate migration issues" due to federal inaction to fix a broken immigration system.

"In May 2019, for example, around 100,000 migrants were apprehended crossing this state's southern border. In June 2019, individuals from 52 different countries were apprehended here," he wrote.

The number of <u>undocumented migrants apprehended in Texas</u> has dipped considerably since that high mark in May, however. That's due, in part, to the Trump administration's policies of requiring asylum seekers to wait in Mexico for their immigration hearings and another policy, known as "metering," that requires migrants to wait in Mexico before they are allowed to apply for protections here in the United States.

Abbott's decision comes less than a day after several Texas House Democrats, led by state Rep. <u>Vikki Goodwin</u>, D-Austin, urged Abbott to opt in, calling the issue a "moral and economic" one.

"People who are forced to flee their home countries come here looking for a better life and work hard to achieve that goal," she said in a letter to the governor. Goodwin also touted the economic boon of resettling, citing a 2015 study that found refugees in Texas spent \$4.6 billion and paid \$1.6 billion in taxes.

Abbott's decision doesn't mean refugees won't be able to come to Texas at all. They could resettle here after first arriving in another state that's opted in to the program, which the governor acknowledged in his letter.

"This decision does not deny any refugee access to the United States. Nor does it preclude a refugee from later coming to Texas after initially settling in another state," he wrote.

The Texas Democratic Party quickly slammed Abbott's decision.

"Refugees are not political pawns and bargaining chips to advance antiimmigrant policies," the party said in a statement. "We cannot let Republican racism overpower our love and compassion for our brothers and sisters fleeing violence across the world. Republican Governor Greg Abbott is in complete opposition to our Texas values by refusing to let refugees into our great state. Governor Abbott's decision will lead to more innocent people dying." Texas has been a leader in resettlement for several years after reaching a high of about 8,212 people in 2009. The levels dropped off in 2011 and 2012 but hovered around 7,500 for the next four years, according to State Department data. But Friday's decision won't necessarily catch advocacy groups off guard, considering Abbott's recent history on the issue.

In 2016, the governor <u>sued</u> the Obama administration in an effort to prevent Syrian refugees from resettling in Texas. The lawsuit was dismissed, and Abbott later withdrew the state from the resettlement program. But the administration continued partnering with local agencies to resettle refugees in Texas, which received more refugees than any other state — about 1,700 — during the federal government's 2018 fiscal year. That total was a dip of nearly two-thirds less than 2017, but the number of resettled refugees increased again during the 2019 fiscal year, to about 2,460.

The issue could be far from settled. The Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and the Church World Service sued the Trump administration in November alleging the executive order violates federal law.

Arguments in that case were heard earlier this week. It's unclear when a decision is expected.

THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Federal judge blocks policy that allowed Gov. Greg Abbott to ban refugees in Texas

The decision comes just days after the Texas governor became the first state leader to opt out of the program. The move drew a harsh rebuke from Texas' Catholic bishops.

BY JULIÁN AGUILAR JAN. 15, 202011 AM

A federal judge temporarily blocked a Trump administration policy that would have allowed governors, like Texas Gov. <u>Greg Abbott</u>, and other local leaders to prevent refugees from resettling in those areas.

The Wednesday decision from Maryland-based Judge Peter J. Messitte comes just days after Abbott became the first and only state leader to opt out of the program. Officials had until Jan. 21 to inform the State Department whether they would participate in the program after the Trump administration imposed the deadline in a September executive order. At least 42 governors, including Republicans, said they would accept refugees.

"By giving States and Local governments the power to veto where refugees maybe settled — in the face of clear statutory text and structure, purpose, Congressional intent, executive practice, judicial holdings, and Constitutional doctrine to the contrary — [the order] does not appear to serve the overall public interest," Messitte said in his ruling.

In November, The Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and the Church World Service sued the Trump administration alleging the executive order violates federal law.

Abbott, who is traveling overseas for an economic development trip, could not immediately be reached for comment.

Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, the president and CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, praised the ruling and said it provides critical relief.

"Those who have been waiting for years to reunite with their families and friends will no longer have to choose between their loved ones and the resettlement

services that are so critical in their first months as new Americans," she said in a statement. "This is an important first step, but this fight is far from over. We do not expect the Administration to back down from using these vulnerable people as political pawns."

Texas has been one of the leading states for resettlement in recent years. Resettlement reached a high of about 8,212 people in 2009. Although levels dropped off in 2011 and 2012, they increased to around 7,500 for the next four years, according to State Department data.

Abbott's move drew the ire of the state's Catholic bishops, who called it "discouraging and disheartening."

"It denies people who are fleeing persecution, including religious persecution, from being able to bring their gifts and talents to our state and contribute to the general common good of all Texans," the group said in a statement last week.

Asked Monday about Abbott's decision, the state's senior senator, Republican John Cornyn, said he may have a "private conversation with the governor on that." While he said he can understand why Abbott made the decision, he also said that "legal immigration is a good thing."



Federal Judge Blocks Policy that Allowed Gov. Greg Abbott to Ban Refugees in Texas

By Julián Aguilar January 16, 2020

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But a spokesman in the governor's office has defended the move and said Abbott's decision would not deny any refugee entry to the United States.

"Equally important, the Texas decision doesn't stop refugees from moving to Texas after initially settling in another state," spokesperson John Wittman previously told The Texas Tribune.

 $\label{this article originally appeared in $$The Texas Tribune$ at $$https://www.texastribune.org/2020/01/15/texas-gov-greg-abbott-may-be-unable-ban-refugees-after-all/.$$

By Julián Aguilar January 16, 2020

https://www.govexec.com/management/2020/01/federal-judge-blocks-policy-allowed-gov-greg-abbott-ban-refugees-texas/162482/



Will Texas Be Allowed To Refuse New Refugee Resettlement?

By KIM JOHNSON & DALLAS WILLIAMS - JAN 28, 2020

The Trump administration issued an executive order in September that required organizations that help resettle refugees in the U.S. to get permission from states and local governments to do so within their boundaries.

Ahead of the Jan. 21 deadline, Governor Greg Abbott informed the U.S. State Department that <u>Texas would opt out</u> of the federal refugee resettlement program for the 2020 fiscal year, making it the first state to do so. Abbott said Texas had already done its fair share for refugees and that resettlement organizations should instead focus their efforts on those already living here.

Soon after, a federal judge <u>temporarily blocked Trump's initial order</u> that had allowed states and local governments the option of refusing refugees, saying the policy had no rationale and was in conflict with the 1980 Refugee Act.

How does the federal refugee resettlement program work and who qualifies? How many refugees have previously been allowed to resettle in Texas since the program was established? How has the Trump administration defended this executive order and how did Gov. Abbott justify his decision for Texas to no longer participate? What happens next?

What is the potential impact of Texas' opting out, if the courts permit it? What implications could these actions have for refugee resettlement rules moving forward?

Guests:

- Ruth Wasem, Ph.D., clinical professor of policy practice in the <u>Lyndon</u>
 <u>B. Johnson School of Public Affairs</u> at the University of Texas at Austin
- Julián Aguilar, immigration and border security reporter for the <u>Texas</u> Tribune

"The Source" is a live call-in program airing Mondays through Thursdays from 12-1 p.m. Leave a message before the program at (210) 615-8982. During the live show, call 210-614-8980, email the source@tpr.org or tweet @TPRSource.

^{*}This interview was recorded on Monday, January 27.



Response to Texas Governor Abbott's refugee refusal -What's Your Point?

By Greg Groogan

Published January 19

What's Your Point?

FOX 26 Houston

Texas Catholic Bishops call Governor Abbott's refugee refusal deeply discouraging and disheartening

The What's Your Point panel discusses the response from Catholic Bishops and other organizations to Texas Governor Greg Abbott's refugee refusal

HOUSTON - SILVER SPRING, Md. (AP) — A federal judge agreed Wednesday to block a Trump administration executive order that Texas Gov. Greg Abbott invoked to refuse refugees from resettling in the state. U.S. District Judge Peter Messitte in Maryland issued a preliminary injunction requested by three national refugee resettlement agencies that sued to challenge the executive order.

In his 31-page ruling, Messitte said the agencies are likely to succeed in showing that the executive order is unlawful because it gives state and local governments veto power over the resettlement of refugees.

President Donald Trump's administration announced in November that resettlement agencies must get written consent from state and local officials in any jurisdiction where they want to help resettle refugees beyond June 2020.

Agency leaders say the order effectively gives governors and county leaders a veto in the resettlement process. The agencies also argue the order illegally conflicts with the 1980 Refugee Act.

Messitte concluded Trump's order doesn't appear to serve the "overall public interest."

"Refugee resettlement activity should go forward as it developed for the almost 40 years before the (executive order) was announced," he wrote.

Church World Service, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and HIAS — a Jewish nonprofit — filed the lawsuit in Greenbelt, Maryland, on Nov. 21. They are three of the nine national organizations agencies that have agreements with the federal government to provide housing and other services for refugees.

Texas, which took in more refugees than any other state during the 2018 fiscal year, became the first state known to reject the resettlement of new refugees. Gov. Greg Abbott said in a letter released Jan. 10 that Texas "has been left by Congress to deal with disproportionate migration issues resulting from a broken federal immigration system."

The head of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, said the ruling for now puts on hold a policy that was causing "irreparable harm to refugee families and resettlement agency's already. "She added that it essentially reopens the door for now to refugees being resettled in Texas.

"It's a significant day in which the rule of law won," O'Mara Vignarajah said.

At least 41 states have publicly agreed to accept refugees, but a governor's decision wouldn't preclude local officials from refusing to give their consent. For instance, the Democratic mayor of Springfield, Massachusetts, has refused to give written consent for refugees to be resettled in the city.

Trump's order says the agencies were not working closely enough with local officials on resettling refugees and his administration acted to respect communities that believe they do not have the jobs or other resources to be able to take in refugees. Refugees have the right to move anywhere in the U.S. after their initial resettlement, but at their own expense.

Before Trump signed the executive order, state and local officials were given a voice but not a veto in deciding where refugees would be resettled, resettlement agency lawyers said.

During a Jan. 8 hearing, the judge said the president's order essentially changed a federal law governing the resettlement of refugees.

Justice Department attorney Bradley Humphreys said the Refugee Act gives the president "ample authority" to make such a change.

"Why change it now?" Messitte asked. "Is it purely a political thing?"

Humphreys said the executive order is designed to enhance the involvement of state and local officials in the process of resettling refugees. But he insisted it doesn't give them a veto over resettlement decisions.

Messitte said it "borders on Orweillian Newspeak" for the administration to claim that the order is meant to merely "enhance the consultation" between the federal governments and the states and localities.

"It grants them veto power. Period," he wrote in his order.

And giving that veto power to the state and local governments "flies in the face of clear Congressional intent," the judge concluded.

The Trump administration has capped the number of refugee admissions at 18,000 for the current fiscal year. About 30,000 refugees were resettled in the U.S. during the past fiscal year; between 150,000 and 200,000 remain in the pipeline for possible U.S. resettlement while they live abroad, according to Linda Evarts, one of the plaintiffs' attorneys.

Texas Catholic Bishops respond to Governor Greg Abbott's decision to turn away refugees

... an essential aspect of our faith is to welcome the stranger and care for the alien.

Governor Greg Abbott's decision to turn away refugees from the great state of Texas is deeply discouraging and disheartening. While the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops respects the governor, this decision is simply misguided. It denies people who are fleeing persecution, including religious persecution, from being able to bring their gifts and talents to our state and contribute to the general common good of all Texans. The refugees who have already resettled in Texas have made our communities even more vibrant. As Catholics, an essential aspect of our faith is to welcome the stranger and care for the alien. We use this occasion to commit ourselves even more ardently to work with all people of goodwill, including our federal, state and local governments, to help refugees integrate and become productive members of our communities.

HOUSTON (AP) — Texas will no longer accept the resettlement of new refugees, becoming the first state known to do so under a recent Trump administration order, Gov. Greg Abbott said Friday.

Abbott's announcement could have major implications for refugees coming to the United States. Texas has large refugee populations in several of its cities and has long been a leader in settling refugees, taking in more than any other state during the 2018 governmental fiscal year, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Since the 2002 fiscal year, Texas has resettled an estimated 88,300 refugees, second only to California, according to the Pew Research Center.

In a letter released Friday, Abbott wrote that Texas "has been left by Congress to deal with disproportionate migration issues resulting from a broken federal immigration system." He added that Texas has done "more than its share."

Abbott argued that the state and its non-profit organizations should instead focus on "those who are already here, including refugees, migrants, and the homeless — indeed, all Texans."

It wasn't clear how Abbott's letter might affect any currently pending refugee cases.

Refugee groups sharply criticized the Republican governor. Ali Al Sudani, chief programs officer of Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston, predicted that some refugees with longstanding plans to come to Texas would have flights rescheduled or delayed. Al Sudani settled in Houston from Iraq in 2009 and now works to resettle other refugees.

"You can imagine the message that this decision will send to them and to their families," Al Sudani said. "It's very disappointing and very sad news, and honestly, this is not the Texas that I know."

Dallas County Judge Clay Jenkins said he had met refugees in Dallas who had previously served as interpreters or aides for U.S. soldiers.

"You have people who are fleeing violence, people who are assisting us in the war on terror, who are having the door slammed in their faces," said Jenkins, a Democrat who is the county's chief administrative official.

President Donald Trump announced in September that resettlement agencies must get written consent from state and local officials in any jurisdiction where they want to help resettle refugees beyond June 2020. Trump has already slashed the number of refugees allowed into the country for the 2020 fiscal year to a historic low of 18,000. About 30,000 refugees were resettled in the U.S. during the previous fiscal year.

Governors in 42 other states have said they will consent to allowing in more refugees, according to the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, which works with local agencies throughout the U.S. to resettle refugees. The governors who haven't chimed in are from Alabama, Georgia, Hawaii, Florida, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Wyoming.

Fierce debates have occurred in several parts of the country, including North Dakota and Tennessee, over whether to opt into refugee resettlement under the executive order. Many Republican governors have been caught between immigration hardliners and some Christian evangelicals who believe helping refugees is a moral obligation.

LIRS is also part of a lawsuit challenging the order. A federal judge on Wednesday heard arguments on a request by resettlement agencies to prevent the Trump administration from enforcing it.

Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, LIRS' CEO, called Abbott's decision "a devastating blow to a longstanding legacy of refugee resettlement in the state." Local officials in Houston, Dallas, and other cities will not be able to take in refugees over the governor's objection, she said.

"There are some refugee families who have waited years in desperation to reunite with their family who will no longer be able to do so in the state of Texas," she said.

Abbott has tried to stop refugees before, declaring in 2015 that Texas would not welcome people from Syria following the deadly Paris attacks that November. At the time, the administration of former President Barack Obama

continued to send refugees to Texas and other states led by Republican governors who were opposed to it.

Al Sudani, of Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston, pointed out that even if refugees are resettled in a different state, they can travel freely within the U.S. and move wherever they choose.

"Literally you can take the bus the next day and come to Texas," he said.

Statesman

Judge halts Trump refugee order, jeopardizing Abbott move to block settlement in Texas

By Chuck Lindell

Posted Jan 15, 2020 at 12:20 PM Updated Jan 15, 2020 at 12:29 PM

Jeopardizing Gov. Greg Abbott's recent decision to halt refugees from resettling in Texas, a federal judge on Wednesday blocked a Trump administration rule that gave state and local officials the power to deny refugee admissions.

In response to a lawsuit by resettlement agencies, U.S. District Judge Peter Messitte of Maryland temporarily blocked President Donald Trump's executive order that required governors and local officials to agree in writing to accept refugees.

The refugee agencies adequately demonstrated that Trump's order is unlawful by assuming authority not granted by the Refugee Act of 1980 and by improperly putting state and local officials in charge of admitting or excluding noncitizens, an "exclusively federal" power, Messitte wrote.

"Giving states and local governments the power to consent to the resettlement of refugees — which is to say veto power to determine whether refugees will be received in their midst — flies in the face of clear congressional intent," Messitte wrote.

"Refugee resettlement activity should go forward as it developed for the almost 40 years before Executive Order 13888 was announced," the judge said in granting a preliminary injunction halting enforcement of the order.

White House spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham called the ruling preposterous, saying Trump had the legal authority to let local officials determine whether their communities have the resources to support refugees.

"We are expeditiously reviewing all options to protect our communities and preserve the integrity of the refugee resettlement process," she said.

Abbott became the first governor to block refugee resettlement in his state when he sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last Friday.

Trump's order, however, does not require governors to reject refugees, only to consent to their resettlement, and thus far 42 states have agreed to accept refugees ahead of a decision deadline next Tuesday, according to Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, one of three agencies that sued to block the new policy.

Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, president of the Lutheran agency, said the judge's ruling "provides critical relief."

"Those who have been waiting for years to reunite with their families and friends will no longer have to choose between their loved ones and the resettlement services that are so critical in their first months as new Americans," Vignarajah said. "This is an important first step, but this fight is far from over. We do not expect the administration to back down from using these vulnerable people as political pawns."

Abbott letter

The agencies' lawsuit argued that Trump's order would eviscerate a successful and humane program, hurting not only refugees but the "image of the United States as a beacon of liberty."

In his letter, Abbott said Texas would not participate in the federal refugee resettlement program this year, saying state resources were already strained by a "broken federal immigration system."

"Texas continues to have to deal with the consequences of an immigration system that Congress has failed to fix," Abbott wrote. "At this time, the state and nonprofit organizations have a responsibility to dedicate available resources to those who are already here, including refugees, migrants, and the homeless — indeed, all Texans."

Under Trump's order, after June 1, refugees would have been allowed to settle only where state and local governments had given consent.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton declined to comment on Wednesday's ruling, and Abbott's office did not respond to inquiries.

'Full speed ahead'

Becky Storey with Refugee Services of Texas, which settles refugees in Austin, said her agency will continue "full speed ahead."

"We are hopeful that Gov. Greg Abbott, during the appeal process that is likely to follow this preliminary injunction, will do the right thing and reverse course in his decision that would make Texas the only state to abandon the federal refugee program," Storey said.

In his opinion, Messitte said Trump's order upended the Refugee Act's stated goal of creating a uniform resettlement system by creating a "state-by-state, locality-by-locality approach" that appeared "inherently susceptible to hidden bias."

"One is left to wonder exactly what the rationale is for doing away entirely with a process that has worked so successfully for so long. And why now?" the judge asked.

Messitte suggested the catalyst was three recent court rulings that said state and local governments lack the power to block refugee resettlement — including a 2016 case involving Abbott's vow to keep Syrian refugees out of Texas.

Texas sued the Obama administration in an effort to make good on that vow, but the lawsuit was tossed out by a federal judge who rejected fears that new arrivals could include terrorists or those who sympathize with terrorist groups.

Staff writer Nancy Flores contributed to this report.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

Refugees can still resettle in Texas, for now, as judge halts Trump's executive order

BY TESSA WEINBERG

JANUARY 15, 2020 01:25 PM

AUSTIN

A federal judge temporarily halted the Trump administration's policy Wednesday that allowed Gov. Greg Abbott to bar Texas' participation in the federal refugee resettlement program, meaning that refugees can continue to resettle in Texas for now.

U.S. District Judge Peter J. Messitte, of Maryland, <u>temporarily halted the Trump administration's Sept. 26 executive order</u> that allowed states and local officials to block the resettlement of refugees in their areas starting in June. In his opinion, Messitte <u>wrote that by giving local governments</u> "veto power," the order is likely "unlawful."

In an email Wednesday, a U.S. State Department spokesperson said the agency is currently reviewing the decision and has no further comment.

The lawsuit was brought against the Trump administration in November by refugee resettlement agencies Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Church World Service and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. The groups celebrated the ruling Wednesday as a win for refugees nationwide — and in Texas.

"We strongly believe that one single letter from the governor cannot override a decades-long legacy of welcome and compassion for the most vulnerable," Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service's president and CEO, said in a statement. "We are grateful that the judge's ruling invalidates the executive order as it applies to Texas — the

nationwide leader in helping individuals and families rebuild their lives here in America."

Messitte's ruling comes ahead of the Jan. 21 deadline for officials to submit their consent and just days after Abbott <u>sent a letter Friday to U.S.</u>

<u>Secretary of State Michael Pompeo</u>, detailing his decision to not permit refugee resettlement in Texas for the fiscal year. Texas has long led the nation as one of the states that resettles the largest number of refugees, and Abbott's decision made Texas the first known state to bar their resettlement under the executive order. Forty-two governors <u>had already submitted their consent</u>.

In the letter, Abbott said Texas "has carried more than its share" and cited figures related to apprehensions of migrants at the Texas-Mexico border as examples of the state having "to deal with disproportionate migration issues," and justification for declining to participate in the federal resettlement program.

"It makes that decision moot," said Jen Smyers, Church World Services' director of policy and advocacy.

The governor is currently abroad on an economic development trip to Israel and Switzerland, and a spokesman for Abbott's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment Wednesday. Attorney General Ken Paxton's office declined to comment.

Local groups applauded Wednesday's ruling, calling it "a very positive step in the right direction."

"This is a rallying message for us," said Troy Greisen, the director of World Relief Fort Worth, a refugee resettlement agency which has worked since 1980 to help support refugees locally. "The key opportunity for us is to use this to better educate the public, Texans as a whole."

TARRANT OFFICIALS SUPPORT RESETTLEMENT

In Tarrant County, local officials had affirmed their consent to continue to welcome refugees, with Fort Worth Mayor Betsy Price submitting a letter to the U.S. State Department in December and Tarrant County commissioners voting to allow for the initial resettlement of refugees at the county level Tuesday.

"These are the folks who have come here legally, that come here the right way. And that's what I've supported all along," Tarrant County Judge Glen Whitley said following the judge's ruling. "I feel good that we went ahead and did that and that we did that unanimously."

Katie Sherrod, a spokeswoman for the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth, whose volunteers work to support refugees locally, said she hopes to see the executive order remain blocked.

"I think a lot of people feel let down by our governor and disappointed, because Texans have stepped up. They're working with these people, they're being helpful and they have relationships with them — friendships," Sherrod said. "I think if it's damaged anyone, it's damaged Governor Abbott."

Smyers said local officials' decision to continue to welcome refugees in Fort Worth is a "powerful signal," but that Abbott's decision was not morally or legally right and "a punch in the gut" for refugees who call Texas home.

"They have finally found a place where they're not persecuted for their religious beliefs or their political opinion, and they're rebuilding their lives in Texas. And so to be told from your governor that you're not welcome here, has got to be a sinking feeling," Smyers said.

LEADING THE NATION

In fiscal year 2019, Texas led the nation in resettling 2,458 refugees, or 8.19% of all refugees resettled in the U.S. during that time, according to federal figures. However, it's a sharp decline from just a few years ago.

The Trump administration's September order came amid President Donald Trump's announcement that <u>18,000 refugees would be admitted</u> to the U.S. for fiscal year 2020 — a low since the program began in 1980 and a reduction of 40% from the previous year's cap of 30,000.

"The Trump administration has made so many drastic changes to the refugee program," Smyers said. "I think this shows that they've gone too far, and that they can't change every part of the law just by executive (order)."

Becky Storey, Refugee Services of Texas' senior regional director, said in a statement Wednesday that the organization is hopeful Abbott "will do the right thing" and reverse his decision during the appeal process that is likely to follow.

"While the decision could be appealed, any future litigation, timing, and final outcome are unknown," Melanie Nezer, HIAS senior vice president of public affairs, said in a statement. "For now though, refugee resettlement will continue as before, including in Texas and the small number of states and counties that have not provided consent."

It was something Greisen said he witnessed firsthand when he welcomed two refugee families from Afghanistan at the DFW International Airport on Tuesday night and helped them settle into their new apartment.

"Seeing that face to face in that moment there at the airport was such a powerful reminder of what we can do and being able to receive the stranger," Greisen said.



Federal Judge Halts Policy That Would Allow Gov. Greg Abbott to Ban Refugees From Texas

Posted By Sanford Nowlin on Wed, Jan 15, 2020 at 3:01 pm

A federal judge has temporarily blocked a Trump administration policy that would have let Gov. Greg Abbott stop refugees from settling in the Lone Star State.

Judge Peter J. Messitte handed down the decision Wednesday, days after Abbott become the <u>first and only governor</u> under Trump's executive order to say he wouldn't allow refugees to be placed in his state. Abbott has <u>faced harsh criticism</u> for the decision. At least 42 other governors — including fellow Republicans — have said they would accept refugees.

Messitte, who presides over a U.S. District Court in Maryland, ruled that the administration's rule, which allows governors and local officials to decline to participate in refugee resettlement, is "unlawful." He also warned that it would allow officials to make arbitrary decisions that are "inherently susceptible to hidden bias."

"By giving States and Local governments the power to veto where refugees maybe settled — in the face of clear statutory text and structure, purpose, Congressional intent, executive practice, judicial holdings, and Constitutional doctrine to the contrary — [the order] does not appear to serve the overall public interest," Messitte said in his 31-page decision.

Texas has been one of the top states for resettlement, <u>according to the *Texas Tribune*</u>. The number of refugees coming here hit a high of about 8,212 people in 2009, the *Tribune* reported, citing State Department data.

Wednesday's ruling came in response to a suit filed by three refugee resettlement agencies that work with the State Department to help people who flee their home countries to escape war and persecution.



Judge Halts Trump Order On Refugee Resettlement After Gov. Abbott Was 1st To Sign On

January 15, 2020 at 12:27 pm

SILVER SPRING, Md. (CBSDFW.COM/AP) — It's been less than a week since Governor Greg Abbott declared Texas would no longer accept the resettlement of new refugees. Now a federal judge is blocking the Trump administration from enforcing an executive order allowing state and local government officials to do just that. U.S. District Judge Peter Messitte in Maryland issued a preliminary injunction requested by three national refugee resettlement agencies that sued to challenge the executive order.

In his 31-page ruling, Messitte said the agencies are likely to succeed in showing that the executive order is unlawful because it gives state and local governments veto power over the resettlement of refugees.

President Donald Trump's administration announced in November that resettlement agencies must get written consent from state and local officials in any jurisdiction where they want to help resettle refugees beyond June 2020.

Agency leaders say the order effectively gives governors and county leaders a veto in the resettlement process. The agencies also argue the order illegally conflicts with the 1980 Refugee Act.

Messitte concluded Trump's order doesn't appear to serve the "overall public interest."

"Refugee resettlement activity should go forward as it developed for the almost 40 years before the (executive order) was announced," he wrote.

Church World Service, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and HIAS — a Jewish nonprofit — filed the lawsuit in Greenbelt, Maryland, on Nov. 21. They are three of the nine national organizations agencies that have agreements with the federal government to provide housing and other services for refugees.

Texas, which took in more refugees than any other state during the 2018 fiscal year, became the first state to reject the resettlement of new refugees. Gov. Abbott said in a letter released January 10 that the state "has been left by Congress to deal with disproportionate migration issues resulting from a broken federal immigration system."

The head of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, said the ruling for now puts on hold a policy that was causing "irreparable harm to refugee families and resettlement agency's already. "She added that it essentially reopens the door for now to refugees being resettled in Texas

"It's a significant day in which the rule of law won," O'Mara Vignarajah said.

At least 41 states have publicly agreed to accept refugees, but a governor's decision wouldn't preclude local officials from refusing to give their consent. For instance, the Democratic mayor of Springfield, Massachusetts, has refused to give written consent for refugees to be resettled in the city.

Trump's order says the agencies were not working closely enough with local officials on resettling refugees and his administration acted to respect communities that believe they do not have the jobs or other resources to be able to take in refugees. Refugees have the right to move anywhere in the U.S. after their initial resettlement, but at their own expense.

Before Trump signed the executive order, state and local officials were given a voice but not a veto in deciding where refugees would be resettled, resettlement agency lawyers said.

During a Jan. 8 hearing, the judge said the president's order essentially changed a federal law governing the resettlement of refugees.

Justice Department attorney Bradley Humphreys said the Refugee Act gives the president "ample authority" to make such a change.

"Why change it now?" Messitte asked. "Is it purely a political thing?"

Humphreys said the executive order is designed to enhance the involvement of state and local officials in the process of resettling refugees. But he insisted it doesn't give them a veto over resettlement decisions.

Messitte said it "borders on Orweillian Newspeak" for the administration to claim that the order is meant to merely "enhance the consultation" between the federal governments and the states and localities.

"It grants them veto power. Period," he wrote in his order.

And giving that veto power to the state and local governments "flies in the face of clear Congressional intent," the judge concluded.

The Trump administration has capped the number of refugee admissions at 18,000 for the current fiscal year. About 30,000 refugees were resettled in the U.S. during the past fiscal year; between 150,000 and 200,000 remain in the pipeline for possible U.S. resettlement while they live abroad, according to Linda Evarts, one of the plaintiffs' attorneys.

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Federal judge blocks order Gov. Greg Abbott used to reject refugees

by: Associated Press

Posted: Jan 15, 2020 / 12:35 PM CST / Updated: Jan 15, 2020 / 12:35 PM CST

SILVER SPRING, Md. (AP) — A federal judge agreed Wednesday to block a Trump administration executive order that Texas Gov. Greg Abbott <u>invoked to</u> refuse refugees from resettling in the state.

U.S. District Judge Peter Messitte in Maryland issued a preliminary injunction requested by three national refugee resettlement agencies that sued to challenge the executive order.

In his 31-page ruling, Messitte said the agencies are likely to succeed in showing that the executive order is unlawful because it gives state and local governments veto power over the resettlement of refugees.

President Donald Trump's administration announced in November that resettlement agencies must get written consent from state and local officials in any jurisdiction where they want to help resettle refugees beyond June 2020.

Agency leaders say the order effectively gives governors and county leaders a veto in the resettlement process. The agencies also argue the order illegally conflicts with the 1980 Refugee Act.

Messitte concluded Trump's order doesn't appear to serve the "overall public interest."

"Refugee resettlement activity should go forward as it developed for the almost 40 years before the (executive order) was announced," he wrote.

Church World Service, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and HIAS — a Jewish nonprofit — filed the lawsuit in Greenbelt, Maryland, on Nov. 21. They are three of the nine national organizations agencies that have

agreements with the federal government to provide housing and other services for refugees.

Texas, which took in more refugees than any other state during the 2018 fiscal year, became the first state known to reject the resettlement of new refugees. Gov. Greg Abbott said in a letter released Jan. 10 that Texas "has been left by Congress to deal with disproportionate migration issues resulting from a broken federal immigration system."

The head of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, said the ruling for now puts on hold a policy that was causing "irreparable harm to refugee families and resettlement agency's already. "She added that it essentially reopens the door for now to refugees being resettled in Texas.

"It's a significant day in which the rule of law won," O'Mara Vignarajah said.

At least 41 states have publicly agreed to accept refugees, but a governor's decision wouldn't preclude local officials from refusing to give their consent. For instance, the Democratic mayor of Springfield, Massachusetts, has refused to give written consent for refugees to be resettled in the city.

Trump's order says the agencies were not working closely enough with local officials on resettling refugees and his administration acted to respect communities that believe they do not have the jobs or other resources to be able to take in refugees. Refugees have the right to move anywhere in the U.S. after their initial resettlement, but at their own expense.

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And giving that veto power to the state and local governments "flies in the face of clear Congressional intent," the judge concluded.

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Associated Press reporter Julie Watson in contributed to this report from San Diego.



Leading Observers Praise Federal Judge's Injunction Blocking Refugee Executive Order and Blast Texas Gov. Abbott

by AV Press Releases on January 16, 2020

The <u>news</u> that U.S. District Judge Peter Messitte has issued a preliminary injunction blocking President Trump's executive order that allowed states and localities to reject refugee resettlement is a welcome development – a view shared by a host of leading refugee resettlement organizations and allies.

In a joint statement, HIAS, International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP), Church World Service (CWS), and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) — the plaintiffs in the case — praised Judge Messitte's ruling:

Mark J. Hetfield, President and CEO, HIAS: "This ruling shows the country how this administration was wrong to attempt a state-by-state refugee ban. Judge Messitte found it likely that the executive order is unlawful, and we are grateful for the clarity of this injunction. An overwhelming majority of governors and municipalities have already expressed their desire to continue welcoming refugees. To those few who have not, we say not only is it unkind and un-American to ban refugees from your states and towns, but it is unlawful. HIAS will

continue our work resettling refugees who have come to our shores looking to restart their lives in safety."

Melissa Keaney, Senior Litigation Staff Attorney, IRAP: "We are thrilled that today's ruling not only protects the important work the resettlement agencies have been doing with communities for decades, but also reflects our values as a nation. Communities all across the country have been voicing their support for refugees, and today's ruling ensures that they can continue to welcome those in need of a safe home."

Rev. John L. McCullough, President and CEO, CWS: "Today the sun is shining on refugee families and the communities who for decades have devoted their time and resources to welcome them. This ruling means that newly arriving refugees won't have to choose between being together and accessing critical services as they rebuild their lives. It means that people of faith can continue to live out their calling to welcome the stranger. It means that we can continue to ensure that all refugees get a bright start in the United States, regardless of who is in office in the states and cities where they live."

Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, President and CEO, LIRS: "Judge Messitte's ruling is a win for the rule of law and for all refugees and the communities that welcome them. We know the fight isn't over, but we're confident that the Constitution—and, as the last few months have proved, the country—are on our side. LIRS and our colleagues have been collaborating with local, state, and national government to successfully resettle refugees for decades, and we plan to continue doing just that."

Meanwhile, Texas Governor Greg Abbott continues to be roundly condemned for his decision to become the first state to opt-out of refugee resettlement. In addition to the Texas editorials and other key voices we highlighted earlier in the week condemning Abbott's decision, a blistering Washington Post editorial from before Judge Messitte's ruling, "Greg Abbott turns his back on refugees — and American values," is worth reading (excerpted below):

With the stroke of a pen, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has embraced moral myopia — specifically, contempt for the planet's most vulnerable people. He

did so by becoming the first governor to announce that his state would refuse to welcome even the scant number of legal, fully vetted refugees who would otherwise have settled there in the coming year.

Whatever gain Mr. Abbott, a Republican, may have hoped for, either in currying favor with President Trump, who has practically invited states and localities to shut their doors to refugees, or in pandering to the GOP's most xenophobic voters, is outweighed by the dishonor he has called down upon his state.

Texas would be a culturally, financially and politically diminished place if it somehow subtracted the decades of contributions by Mexican, German, Vietnamese and other immigrants, including refugees. By his action, Mr. Abbott has turned his back not just on a few hundred refugees, whose likely long-term success and assimilation in the United States are strongly supported by experience, but on a few hundred years of Texas's own history...



Judge blocks Trump policy allowing states to refuse refugees

Lomi Kriel Jan. 15, 2020 Updated: Jan. 15, 2020 6:56 p.m.

A federal judge on Wednesday temporarily blocked an executive order allowing state and local authorities to refuse to resettle refugees, just days after Republican Gov. Greg Abbott made Texas the only state to withdraw from the program.

In a strongly-worded 31-page decision, U.S. District Judge Peter J. Messitte said that the new consent requirement is likely "unlawful" for violating the 1980 Refugee Act, which sets conditions for refugee resettlement and grants the federal government authority over where to send them.

"Giving states and local governments the power to consent to the resettlement of refugees — which is to say veto power to determine whether refugees will be received in their midst — flies in the face of clear Congressional intent," Messitte wrote. "One is left to wonder exactly what the rationale is for doing away entirely with a process that has worked so successfully for so long."

A spokesman for Abbott did not respond to an email seeking comment.

Abbott is the only governor to opt out of the federally funded program while seven other states —including Georgia, Florida, and Alabama —had not yet notified the State Department of its decision before the injunction.

The Justice Department declined to comment on whether it would appeal the ruling. A State Department spokesman said the agency is reviewing the judge's decision.

The new veto power for states and cities, required by an executive order President Donald Trump issued in September, is unprecedented in decades of U.S. resettlement. It comes as the White House has slashed the number of refugees allowed into the country to a record low of 18,000 for 2020 — down from 30,000

in 2019 and an average of 102,000 annually during the program's peak under President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s.

This year, about 2,000 refugees were expected to be resettled in Texas, compared to 7,800 admitted during the last year of President Barack Obama's administration in 2016.

"Today's ruling not only protects the important work the resettlement agencies have been doing with communities for decades, but also reflects our values as a nation," said Melissa Keaney, an attorney for the International Refugee Assistance Project who argued the case on behalf of three national resettlement agencies.

Mark Hetfield, chief executive of HIAS, a Jewish refugee organization which was a plaintiff to the lawsuit, said the judge's decision reflected the fact that 42 states —including 17 led by Republican governors — agreed to continue taking in refugees.

"An overwhelming majority of governors and municipalities have already expressed their desire to continue welcoming refugees," Hetfield said in a statement. "To those few who have not, we say not only is it unkind and un-American to ban refugees from your states and towns, but it is unlawful."

In a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo Friday, Abbott wrote that since 2010, more refugees have been sent to Texas than any other state and about 1 in 10 are resettled here. At the same time, the governor wrote, the state has been the focus of immigrants crossing the southern border.

"The state and non-profit organizations have a responsibility to dedicate available resources to those who are already here, including refugees, migrants, and the homeless — indeed, all Texans," Abbott wrote.

His spokesman, John Wittman, defended the decision in a statement earlier this week, saying it "will not prevent any refugee from coming to America."

Withdrawing from the program would have meant federal funding could not be distributed to resettle any refugees in Texas, <u>said Kimberly Haynes</u>, a <u>regional refugee coordinator with the South Texas Office of Refugees</u>. But it would not have prevented refugees from coming here on their own without such assistance.

Most refugees coming to Houston are joining relatives and would likely have continued to resettle here no matter where they initially were placed, Haynes said. But under Abbott's withdrawal they would not have qualified for federal services to help them integrate, including assistance with housing, finding work, and learning English.

"We're breathing a big sigh of relief knowing that communities across the country can continue to welcome refugees and won't have to make decisions if they want to be with their family members or access important services, especially when it comes to Texas," said Jen Smyers, director of policy for Church World Service, a national resettlement agency that joined the lawsuit against the government.

She said the issue of refugee resettlement had <u>wrongly been conflated with illegal immigration and asylum seekers at the southern border.</u> Refugees must prove they suffered persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. They apply for the protection through the United Nations from another country and can be resettled all over the world.

The U.N. estimates there are an unprecedented 25.9 million refugees globally—over half of whom are under the age of 18—and most go to Turkey, Jordan and Pakistan. Of the 30,000 refugees admitted into the United States in the 2019 fiscal year ending in September, 60 percent were from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Myanmar. They undergo stringent U.S. State Department security screenings and multiple interviews in a process that can last three years and are widely regarded as the most-closely vetted entrants to the country.

Other than Texas, two counties and one city opted to block refugees from coming there. No refugees had been resettled in the counties — Appomattox in Virginia and Beltrami in Minnesota — for years, Smyers said. Mayor Domenic J. Sarno of Springfield, Mass., which has been a resettlement destination for refugees, also said he would not consent to their admission, though city council members were considering measures to overrule him.

On Tuesday, state Attorney General Ken Paxton <u>appeared on Fox & Friends to</u> <u>defend Abbott's decision</u>, saying Texas had resettled the greatest share of refugees in the nation and that it was "expensive."

"I think people understand in Texas that we have done our share for a long time and we're going to continue doing our share given the fact that Congress is not reacting to the border crisis," Paxton said.

No direct state funding goes to refugee resettlement, although refugees can qualify for Medicaid and food assistance.

A spokesman for Paxton did not immediately return an email seeking comment.

U.S. Sen. John Cornyn, a Texas Republican, said he'd "like to have a private conversation" with Abbott to "get more detail about his thought process" in declining to accept refugees, even as the senator said he understood that the state had long borne the brunt of illegal immigration at the border.

"I think legal immigration is a good thing, and these refugees - once they come to the United States, they're not required to live where they're settled. They could move tomorrow," Cornyn said.

Still, he said, Abbott's decision was "certainly within the governor's purview and not my decision to make."

Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, a Washington D.C. group that supports reducing immigration, cast the ruling as "another lawless attempt by judges who don't like Trump to prevent his policies from going into effect."

Ali Al Sudani, who came here as a refugee from Iraq a decade ago and is now chief programs officer at Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston, said he was grateful the decision would continue allowing refugees to resettle in Texas, popular for its plentiful job opportunities, cost of living and rich faith community.

He said he hoped the legal challenge would not continue to politicize what for decades has been a program with bipartisan support.

"I hope this will be a situation where the federal government, state government, local, faith, nonprofit and business groups come to realize once again that this is the right thing to do, the American thing to do," Al Sudani said.

Opinion: We all lose when Texas rejects refugees - Opinion - Austin American-Statesman - Austin, TX

Statesman

Opinion

Opinion: We all lose when Texas rejects refugees

By Ashley Faye

Posted Feb 24, 2020 at 11:54 AM

In 2010, the Iraqi couple Ayman Attar Bashi and Raya Thanoon came to Austin fleeing bombings outside their home and threats from government militia members. Within five years, they'd started a small catering business called Baiti Food in North Austin with just \$100. Today, they have three employees, cater to companies like Apple, Stitch Fix, and Dropbox, and make classic Iraqi dishes at their popular restaurant, Pita Shack.

Their success isn't surprising. There are more than 180,000 refugee entrepreneurs in the United States and they start businesses at higher rates than other immigrants and native-born Americans. It's something I see across Austin—and the state—every day through my work with Refugee Services of Texas.

This is one reason it was so shocking for us in the refugee resettlement community when President Trump signed an executive order in September allowing states and cities to refuse refugees, and heartbreaking to see Gov. Abbott's attempt last month to prevent refugees from resettling in Texas.

Gov. Abbott's stance on refugees could not only risk lives, but hurt economic growth, as refugees are a net positive to our economy, paying an average of \$21,000 more in taxes than they receive in public assistance after 20 years in the United States, according to a 2017 study by the National Bureau of Economic Research. They find jobs quickly, typically working after 60 days, and becoming financially self-sufficient within 90 days. Of the nearly 2.5 million refugees that call the U.S. home, about 96 percent were employed in 2017, earning \$91.8 billion, according to New American Economy. They are even required to repay the cost of their airfare to the U.S.

Luckily, a federal judge has blocked President Trump's executive order and Gov. Abbott's decision for now – although the Trump administration is expected to appeal. Refugee resettlement agencies have already suffered greatly from the

declining number of refugees since Trump took office. Historically, our state has resettled the highest number of refugees in the country. Refugee Services of Texas has assisted nearly 30,000 individuals from more than 30 countries since it was founded in the late 1970s. In 2016, we welcomed almost 2,500 of these newcomers. But in 2018, that number plummeted to 800. If Texas were to opt out of the resettlement program for just one year, the state could lose \$17.1 million in income and economic stimulus, according to a New American Economy report.

The actions of the current president and governor will also make our work that much harder when future administrations restore resettlement rates. And they undoubtedly will; the vast majority of states recognize the economic importance and moral imperative of welcoming refugees and immediately told President Trump that they would continue welcoming refugees. This includes 41 governors, of which 19 are Republican.

In the 15 years I've worked in the nonprofit field, resettling refugees has never been a divisive issue, which makes sense. Refugees bring enormous benefits to our city and state, from increased diversity, to cultural vibrancy to economic growth. They're built into our fabric of life, and they even make our communities safer. A 2017 report found that in communities with large refugee populations, nine out of 10 saw a reduction in violent and property crime rates between 2006 and 2015.

It's not just the refugees who will suffer if the judge's decision is overturned – it's all of us.

Faye is the director of development at Refugee Services of Texas.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you, Madam Chair.

My point in raising this issue about allowing local governments to have this kind of control is that we sometimes empower people who work against our Nation's values in that way. As a Nation, we are a Nation of immigrants, and we should continue to pursue the

noble goal of protecting the most vulnerable.

Ms. Strack, I want to make sure that folks watching at home understand just how vetted refugees are before they come into our country. Can you very briefly—because I have a couple follow-up questions—tell the American public what a refugee has to go through in order to enter into this country?

Ms. Strack. Yes.

I can say, in my former life, if the system that Ms. Ries described, that there was a single touchpoint for a person's record existed, that would have simplified the task. Since that doesn't exist, we went to multiple places in the government.

So, refugees are vetted with biographic and biometric information. That is usually fingerprints. The State Department is involved, Department of Homeland Security, FBI, National Counterterrorism Center, and other elements of the intelligence commu-

nity, also the Department of Defense.

We are looking not only for criminal records or national security information, but there is information regarding identity to make sure that people are who they say they are and that their family is who they say they are.

Also, we had, towards the end of my tenure, some very good initiatives with the U.N. refugee agency, UNHCR. In some cases, they have fingerprints and iris scans, and they were able to share them with us.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you. That describes a very thorough vetting

process that refugees must go through, so I appreciate that.

Ms. Strack, earlier, Ms. Ries mentioned, when the question was asked, about the backlog for the refugees. Of the 42,000 who have been interviewed and conditionally approved, are they all just waiting on their security checks? How many who are conditionally approved would be denied?

Ms. STRACK. I cannot give you precise numbers on that.

It is certainly true, as Mr. Biggs suggested, that there would be a discount in those numbers, of the 40,000. Some people aren't going to pass their security checks. Some people may not pass their medical checks. Those are probably the two biggest things that would be outstanding for that cohort of 40,000 that I mentioned.

It depends a lot on nationality. Some nationalities pass security checks at very high rates and don't have a lot of stumbles on their medical checks, and they travel quickly.

The agencies know those numbers, those statistics, those average security-check-passage rates and travel times, and that is how they can construct a pipeline that meets the ceiling. So, last year, when the program succeeded in meeting the modest ceiling of 30,000, they were managing against those kinds of challenges.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you.

I vield back.

Ms. Garcia. The gentlewoman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from Washington, Ms. Jayapal.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you all so much for being here and for your work.

I wanted to start with you, Mr. Atem. I want to thank you for being here. I just had the pleasure of coming from Sudan on a congressional delegation and seeing the people's revolution in Sudan achieve some incredible results in overthrowing a dictatorship.

I know this is a very difficult time. As we were there, the Administration announced a further ban that included Sudan in part, and I know what a terrible impact that had on the Sudanese people

seeking to build a better future.

This refugee program has been described by the National Association of Evangelicals as the crown jewel of American humanitarianism. I think that, for a long time, it has been a bipartisan program. I am deeply concerned that we are abandoning support for refugees when the world is in the midst of the worst refugee crisis in history.

I wanted to ask you if you could say a little bit about the process that you went through. I have a number of questions. So, if you can just talk about what you had to go through administratively to get approved as a refugee to come to the United States. What did that involve for you?

Mr. Atem. Thank you.

So, for me, it took having to walk a thousand miles to get to a refugee camp in Ethiopia and Kenya. So, when we arrived in that camp in Ethiopia, it took the U.N. about 3 years to make that an

official refugee camp.

Some of the screening that was put in place was that you had to be identified that you were coming from, let's say, some tribe in southern Sudan. So, you would be identified by the United Nations, the UNHCR. Then that was the point where you were issued your identification.

When we were attacked in Ethiopia and had to walk to come through South Sudan and then to Kenya, we already had our refugee's identification. To go through that process of becoming a refugee, you will be interviewed by the U.N. agencies there, along

with the local authorities, to be identified as a refugee.

For me, I was already a refugee since I was 7 years old, and then spending nearly 14 years in that refugee camp. So, the process of coming to the U.S. began in 1998, which I am going to talk a little bit more later when I get an opportunity, but the initial process took about 3 years. It took 14 years in a refugee camp to be identified as a refugee. I was there getting rations from the U.N. with the rest of the lost boys from Sudan.

Ms. JAYAPAL. After walking a thousand miles to get there.

Ms. Strack, based on your knowledge of the current State of the U.S. refugee program, what would be the likelihood of Mr. Atem successfully arriving as a refugee under current policy?

Ms. STRACK. I have to say it would be exceedingly small, for a

few reasons.

One is that the Administration has announced that it is no longer accepting referrals from the U.N. refugee agency, UNHCR. So, he would have to have been lucky enough to get in before the deadline was cut off for UNHCR referrals but for a few exceptions in Central America.

Then, in addition to that, the way the categories have been drawn this year, Sudanese nationals would fall in the "other" category, which is small. So, if he were lucky enough to be in the pipeline, he would be competing with many other qualified refugees for very, very few slots.

Ms. JAYAPAL. So, a person who has walked a thousand miles, spent 3 years and then another 14 or 17 years—I forget which number you said—

Mr. Atem. It was a total of 14.

Ms. JAYAPAL. —14 years to get here and is now an incredibly successful contributor to our community and our country would have close to an impossible chance of getting in under current regulations.

Ms. Strack. I think it is exceedingly likely that he would remain in the camp.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Those are changes that have occurred in the current Administration, correct?

Ms. Strack. Yes.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Congress gave the President the power to determine refugee numbers under the assumption that the program would always be a priority regardless of political affiliation.

Ms. Strack, I understand you worked in both the Bush and the Obama Administrations. Did you see a significant difference between a Republican Administration's approach to refugee resettlement and a Democratic Administration's prioritization of refugees?

Ms. Strack. I did not before this Administration. I would say my prior experience working in the Bush and Obama Administrations on the one hand versus the Trump Administration is night and day.

The Bush Administration was very supportive of refugees, also Secretary Chertoff and the leadership at USCIS. I note in my testimony, Secretary Chertoff has continued to support refugee resettlement because of its implications for foreign policy and national security.

Ms. JAYAPAL. I see that my time has expired.

I just wanted to make it very clear that this has always been a bipartisan program. In fact, my Governor, Dan Evans, in the State of Washington was a Republican Governor who really helped bring in Vietnamese refugees after the war. So, I am deeply distressed that this is where we are today.

I thank you, Mr. Atem, and I thank all of you for your testimony. I vield back.

Ms. GARCIA. We thank you.

The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Pennsylvania, Ms. Scanlon, and also vice chair of the Judiciary Committee.

Ms. Scanlon. Thank you very much.

As the conversation has been going on here, I have been struck by some of the commentary about refugee resettlement programs and why people have these programs. I know many, many of the faith-based communities in southeastern Pennsylvania, which I represent, are eager to have refugees to resettle. There has been

a very broad network there of resettlement activities because of the

I hail from northern New York, the Syracuse area. A couple years ago, when I was visiting, there was an article that I would ask unanimous consent to introduce in the record, "Trump Policies Stop the Flow of Refugees to Syracuse, Once a Resettlement Magnet."

Mr. Conservicion

Ms. Garcia. Without objection. [The information follows:]

MS. SCANLON FOR THE RECORD

Trump policies stop the flow of refugees to Syracuse, once a resettlement magnet



syracuse.com/news/2018/08/trump_policies_stop_the_flow_of_refugees_to_syracuse_once_a_resettlement_magnet

By Marnie Eisenstadt | meisenstadt@syracuse.com

August 1,

Syracuse, N.Y. -- A slight man wearing a sagging backpack puzzles his way through the automatic bubble doors in the arrival gate at the Syracuse airport. It is nearly midnight.

He has traveled across three days and through five time zones. It is the end of his journey and the end of a 20-year-wait.

It is also a rare moment in Syracuse these days. Muhire Serge Eric was one of seven refugees resettled in Syracuse in July. There were two individuals and one family of five.

Two years before, this moment in the airport was on a constant loop: There were 1,400 refugees settled in Syracuse in 2016. And there were about 200 in July, alone, that year.

But now, refugee resettlement is grinding to a halt in Syracuse, across Upstate New York and across the nation.

"It's nearly stopped," said Beth Broadway, president and CEO of <u>InterFaith Works</u>. The agency is one of two in Syracuse that resettles refugees.

It is the end result of a vastly different legal immigration policy under President Donald Trump. One of his first acts as was an executive order that became known as the Muslim travel ban. Trump cut legal immigration from several predominantly Muslim countries.

He also dropped the cap on the number of refugees the U.S. will allow in to 45,000, the lowest it's been since at least the 1980s. And with that came a cut to the staff at the U.S. Department of State that work with refugees. Experts project the number of refugees for 2018 will be about 20,000. (Refugees are counted on the fiscal year, which ends Oct. 1).

<u>In 2017</u>. New York welcomed 70 percent fewer refugees than the year before. That trend has continued downward. For the first two months of 2018, there were just 185 refugees resettled across the state. Spring and summer have been leaner still, resettlement agencies said.

"New York State has a robust refugee resettlement program but, unfortunately, thanks to the federal government's hostility to refugees, fewer individuals have been resettled in New York State than we would like," said Anthony Farmer, a spokesman for the state Office of

Temporary and Disability Assistance, which oversees refugee resettlement operations.



Watch Video At: https://youtu.be/oNFBzkLKc Y

A refugee resettlement capital

<u>In 2014</u>, Onondaga County settled more refugees, per capita, than any other county in New York state. And it settled refugees at the third-highest rate in the nation.

Now the board where they put incoming refugees' names at Catholic Charities in Syracuse is nearly bare.

"It's amazing how white that board is when there are no names on it," said Mike Melara, CEO of Catholic Charities of Onondaga County. There are three individuals and one family on the board, waiting to be resettled in August. In July, the agency resettled just one family. Two years ago, July was a banner month: 155 people were resettled in Syracuse by Catholic Charities.

Then, there were six full-time refugee resettlement caseworkers and one part-time caseworker. The program was budgeted for about \$1.5 million. Now, there is one full-time caseworker and one part-time caseworker. The program is expected to lose \$600,000.

<u>Catholic Charities</u> received money from the New York state Legislature to prop it up as federal money that funds refugee resettlement dries up. In 2017, the Legislature set aside \$2 million for refugee resettlement agencies in the state. What agencies received depended

on how many people they had resettled. Catholic Charities received \$230,000. They're expecting a similar amount from the state Legislature this year. That helps fill in the \$600,000 hole.

But the hole looms larger in years to come. Melara does not expect the picture to improve any time soon.

"It's hard to imagine a scenario when the numbers improve over the next couple of years," he said. And he expects it could take as much as two years after the ban is lifted and cap raised for the flow of refugees to return.

Melara, though, has every expectation that when there is a change in administration, the refugees will return to Syracuse. "So, locally, we don't want to get depleted to the point where we can't resettle refugees," he said. He expects the agency will close out its fiscal year in October having settled 125 people.

For now, Catholic Charities continues to keep a skeleton resettlement crew while the \$22 million nonprofit, which operates many other programs, absorbs the loss for now.

"The numbers are easy to share," Melara said. "The hard part I keep coming back to is this knowledge that there are millions of people who are refugees, who are suffering."

The situation at InterFaith Works, the other resettlement agency in Syracuse, is the same. They settled just two people in July and August looks equally slow.

Broadway, the CEO, said the state money is helping and they have shifted resettlement staff to help refugees who are already here. But she, too, expects the situation to stay like this for years.

"We've got to white-knuckle this," she said.

'Where are my refugees?'

While agencies in Syracuse have been able to shift staff around, other operations in New York have had to make more drastic changes to deal with the loss of new refugees.

Buffalo took in so many refugees - 6,000 -- in the past five years that its healthcare system couldn't handle the influx. So in 2016 Catholic Charities of Western New York opened a primary care clinic and a dental clinic to serve new refugees.

The next year, the refugees were nearly gone.

The primary care clinic closed in September. The dental clinic shut down last month. William Sukaly, the program director for the Immigration and Refugee Assistance Program there, said there just weren't enough patients. The agency also had to make some staff cuts.

Sukaly said landlords had been doing redevelopment projects in the city, aimed at housing the new refugees. Those projects have stopped. Like the Syracuse agencies, he hopes to keep enough staff so the agency can be ready when refugees return.

"How will it play out? We don't know," he said.

It is also hard to guess the economic impact from the loss of Rustbelt cities' biggest new population source.

<u>A study</u> released last year found that immigrants, including refugees, contributed \$2 billion in spending power in the Syracuse and Buffalo metropolitan areas.

They fill labor gaps, buy vacant homes and open their own businesses, the study found. It was conducted by New American Economy for CenterState CEO in Syracuse and the International Institute in Buffalo.

"Syracuse, like most rust belt cities, should be looking for ways to regrow its population, because that's good for our economy," said Dominic Robinson, who was part of the team that commissioned the study. He's the vice president of Economic Inclusion for the CenterState Corporation for Economic Opportunity.

"Refugee resettlement has been one of the only reliable, consistent sources of new population in our city. It's unfortunate to see that source of new members of our community and contributors to our economy cut off," he said.

In Syracuse, Broadway said people are starting to feel the ripples created by so few refugees entering the pipeline.

"There's huge infrastructure that gets set up in cities," she said. She's heard from the schools, the hospitals and landlords. "We've had landlords coming in and saying, 'Where are my refugees?"

Frank Fan manages 120 apartments on Syracuse's North Side, the neighborhood where most of the refugees are resettled.

In years past, his entire rental base has been new refugees. They're good tenants and the rent is guaranteed for a year.

"Basically last year, it completely stopped," said Fan, who came to the U.S. as a refugee from China 30 years ago. He said he's been filling his apartments with other tenants for now, but he hopes the refugees return.

Journey's end

Felicien Seruhungu, the one full-time resettlement caseworker for <u>InterFaith Works</u> in Syracuse, checks the arrivals board at the airport. He knows well the wait of refugees. He was a refugee, himself. He came to Syracuse about six years ago. His family spent years in a camp in Burundi. His mother was killed during a clash at the camp along with more than 100 others.

"You can be killed at any time," he said. He began as a translator at InterFaith; Seruhungu speaks seven African languages along with English and French. He switched to resettlement two years ago.

Muhire Serge Eric, the refugee from the Congo, steps into the arrivals gate in Syracuse looking lost. Seruhungu waves to him, then embraces him. A moment later, Eric's family rushes in.

"Serge!" yelled Bienvenu Mbuguje as he ran up to Eric. Eric's whole face smiled as his nephew threw his arms around him, hugging Eric and picking him up at the same time. Another nephew ran in. They danced back and forth together as more family gathered around.

His older sister rose out of her wheelchair and walked toward him, holding herself up with a crutch. She gathered him to her and held him, kissing his face and smoothing it as she spoke to him in Congolese.

"I am so happy," Eric said, in English.

Marnie Eisenstadt is an enterprise reporter who writes about people, life and culture in Central New York. Have an idea or question? Contact her anytime: email | twitter | Facebook | 315-470-2246

Ms. Scanlon. There were just some really interesting points in there. Syracuse and Buffalo are Rust Belt communities, where the population has been leaving. I think it speaks to Mr. Atem's statement that, often, refugees are ready to take the first job that comes along. But these are communities that had actively sought refugee resettlement because, they had a labor shortage and they were

seeking ways to revitalize their communities.

So, in this region, they went from having several thousand refugees resettled per year to a handful and now hardly any. So, as you might expect, there was an immediate drop in resources to the resettlement agency, so they had to lay off people. But it has been broader-based than that. We have clinics and dental clinics and healthcare clinics that have had to lay off people or close because they don't have the same population coming to them before. They have had landlords and real estate developers who have had to shutter projects and cease them because they don't have the same folks coming into the community.

So, they have seen that refugees were filling labor gaps, they were buying vacant homes, and starting businesses. They did a study that showed that refugees and immigrants were adding \$2

billion in spending power to this Rust Belt economy.

So, we have the humanitarian reasons, which I think are undeniable, but we also have these economic reasons that this policy has

really, really harmed.

I wanted to also turn back to something—we were talking, Ms. Strack, about the claim that we had to reduce the refugee admissions goal to refocus on the southern border. You mentioned that these are two very distinct systems. Is that right?

Ms. Strack. Yes, that is correct.

Ms. SCANLON. Some of the big cuts to the refugee program came from people who were actually stationed overseas. Is that right? Or on this circuit?

Ms. STRACK. Yes. In general, refugee officers are based in Washington, but conduct trips overseas to interview refugee applicants

that we traditionally call "circuit rides."

In addition, USCIS had some overseas officers who were assigned permanently overseas for 3 years or so who were very helpful in the administrative support and also did some refugee interviews themselves, particularly small, far-flung caseloads.

This Administration did decide to close those USCIS overseas offices. It was called "International Operations." I understand there has been a bit of a reprieve and a few staff will stay overseas, but I do not think they will be working on refugee matters.

Ms. Scanlon. Okay.

Can you just speak to one element that I am not sure has been brought out? When people are resettled through the U.N. refugee program, they don't get to pick the country they are going to, do they?

Ms. STRACK. No, they do not.

Ms. Scanlon. So, when people were being resettled in the U.S. through the U.N. program, after going through all those layers of verification that you stated, they weren't getting to choose the U.S., so there wasn't any kind of immediate terrorist threat or anything there, was there?

Ms. STRACK. No. The United States always is in control on the refugee program. That is a distinction from the asylum program. It is also a distinction from what many of us saw in Europe in 2015

that involved spontaneous arrivals.

So, whether it is UNHCR or is a U.S.-designated program, the United States, traditionally through the State Department, determines which categories of refugees are candidates for resettlement to the United States. There is quite a bit of conversation between the U.S. and UNHCR.

We largely, overwhelmingly, see eye-to-eye on who are good candidates, but there certainly are some particular characteristics that the U.S. is interested in and asks for, and there are other characteristics that we do not think are suitable for U.S. resettlement.

So UNHCR is extremely helpful as a source and a filter on the front end, but the decision-making always lies with U.S. Government officials.

Ms. Scanlon. Okay.

I see my time has expired, so I yield back. Ms. GARCIA. The gentlelady yields back.

Now, the chair recognizes my colleague and fellow Texan, Ms. Jackson Lee.

Ms. Jackson Lee. Let me thank the chair for the leadership and for the importance of this committee.

I almost don't know where to start, but let me move quickly, be-

cause time goes.

I want to just put this statement on the record, and that is this statement of numbers. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported, at the end of 2018, there were 70.8 million displaced people worldwide, a record high, including 41.3 million internally displaced people, 25.9 million refugees, and 3.5 million asylum seekers.

I am going to go to you. I am very familiar with the lost boys of Sudan. Can you just give us the pain, the disorientation, the violence of being a refugee? When I say that, not necessarily the violence against your person but the violence on your life, your whole being, about being a refugee or an internally displaced person.

Mr. ATEM. Thank you.

Being an internally displaced person—there are over a million South Sudanese being displaced in South Sudan now and maybe about 2 million in Uganda, and then another maybe 500,000 or a million in Kenya.

Growing up in refugee camp, the pain of going through that, you feel like you don't belong. I was a kid. You don't know that when you become the "other" as a refugee, you are what is known as the "other." So, the pain of going through that, not having a home to

go to and spending your entire life in a refugee camp.

So, when we arrived in Kenya in 1992, in Kakuma, that is when we opened that refugee camp. 20 years later, that camp is still open. There are more people there now going to that refugee camp. Kids that are growing up in that camp, and they are going to have kids in that camp. You are talking about a camp of nearly 500,000 people with really no opportunities, so they just kind of live off the U.N. aid. Because of the conditions in Sudan or South Sudan, they couldn't go back home.

Ms. Jackson Lee. Thank you.

Bishop, would you follow up with the pain of having a country that has policies that have been presently put in place by this Ad-

ministration, that then goes to States?

I know my colleague—I chaired a group called the Interfaith Ministries. The Houston-Galveston diocese was very involved. We were very active in taking refugees, proudly so, placing them, having apartment buildings, as they adjusted to a new life.

Of course, our State has joined in the pattern of rejection. What is it like for a refugee—70.8 million people—that can't find any

place to go?

Bishop Dorsonville. There is something very important for all of us men and women of faith to read the signs of the times and to see that the worst thinking have been to humanities to move to indifference. Because we have a wonderful leader around the world, who is Francis, who is inviting us every day to move from indifference to the solidarity and compassion.

I have been very disappointed for bishops in Texas for this position, because it is just closing the minds of those who have the power, if not to change things in this world, to make the difference. I really think that is powerful for a human person, to be able to create sense of hope and future, if not for everyone, for others.

Bishop Dorsonville. In my testimony, if you allow me, and I will finish. I said, we have a strong responsibility to be leaders in the international community. Those who are watching us will follow our example. If we close the doors, we are isolating in a globalized world. Doesn't make any sense.

Therefore, basically, that would be my reflection. Ms. Jackson Lee. A beautiful statement.

Ms. Strack, what does capping—this ridiculous policy of capping refugees, in the experience that you have had, where refugees have been able to adjust, what does it do to the world order? As the bishop has said, others watching this country, with 70.8 million people, including people internally displaced, as refugees, what does it do?

Ms. STRACK. During my tenure with the program and for many years before that, the United States was widely recognized as the leader on refugee resettlement. We had the largest program in the world. We had the most diverse program in the world in terms of nationalities, in terms of case profiles. Some countries said, "no big families" or "we only will take medical cases, but we don't want older people." The United States was renowned for taking those large numbers.

It made a difference because we sometimes—at best, we could bring other countries to the table. So, we helped bring other resettlement countries to the table, beyond the traditional ones, by showing the example of doing that. It led, then, to the strengthening of American communities that people have been talking

about here today.

Ms. Jackson Lee. Thank you.

I vield back.

Ms. Garcia. The gentlewoman's time has expired, and she yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Correa.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, let me welcome our witnesses here today, and thank you

very much for shedding important light on this issue.

Ms. Strack, I have some questions for you, if I may. You were the head of the Refugee Affairs Division at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services under a number of Presidents, including President Trump, correct?

Ms. STRACK. Yes, sir. I served for the first year of the Trump Ad-

ministration before I retired.

Mr. CORREA. Would you say that, even before President Trump came to office, that refugees were the most vetted individuals who were coming to our country from overseas?

Ms. Strack. Yes, they were. We was a pioneer in a number of security checks. We were able to form alliances with National Counterterrorism and other colleagues. A number of checks that

Mr. CORREA. Counterterrorism—with other groups around the country?

Ms. Strack. I am sorry. Yes, here with our Federal Government colleagues, in particular, for example, the National Counterterrorism Center.

As the intelligence community and national security colleagues got better and more proficient and were able to do additional types of vetting, often the refugee program was the prototype.

Mr. CORREA. Say that again. Your program, the refugee program,

was a prototype for what?

Ms. STRACK. To pilot new security checks that were not previously in place for any category of traveler to the United States.

Mr. CORREA. So, would you say, then, you were pretty much here doing your job. Did you check with other international databases, or was it just U.S.?

Ms. STRACK. Our immediate counterparts were U.S. Government agencies, but some of those agencies were attached to international systems. So, for example, we had access to INTERPOL data through those other U.S. Government partners, yes.

Mr. Correa. How long would it take to go through some of these

background checks?

Ms. Strack. It is very hard to answer. At certain points, there were backlogs, so it wasn't that the check itself was taking a long time; it was that getting to the front of the queue to be checked

would take a long time.

It really depends on what is found. There are times when all the agencies scour all the available data and there are no matches. Or there is a positive match, for example, someone who—an Iraqi who testified, "I worked with the U.S. military in Iraq in such and such a place." We had access to fingerprint records, and we would find a DOD record that indicated, yes, that individual worked for us at DOD at the time and place that they said. So, that might happen very quickly.

In other cases, if there was potentially derogatory information identified, then an analyst would sort through that. That took

whatever amount of time was necessary to resolve.

Mr. Correa. Let me focus on that point. Individuals as Iraqis and Afghanis, from other countries around the world which worked alongside our soldiers, covering their backs, so to speak, in war zones, are those individuals now subject to higher scrutiny?

Ms. Strack. They are subject—I would say Iraqis, in particular, as far as I know, I have been out of government for 2 years. The status quo that I know was they were subject to the same set of

rigorous checks as other refugee applicants.

Mr. CORREA. So, at this point, what is going on today within the Administration, you wouldn't know whether that has changed at

I am trying to figure out whether these individuals are less welcome or as welcome as they would normally be since they were part

of our fighting forces.

Ms. STRACK. My sense is that they are equally unwelcome. With the ceiling set at 18,000, that is a very restrictive ceiling. Although 4,000 of those numbers are purportedly set aside for Iraqis, only 53 Iraqis have actually been admitted through the refugee program this year. So, there is a problem with the Iraqi program.

Mr. Correa. There is a problem with these individuals that have fought alongside our soldiers, covering their backs, saving Amer-

ican lives, qualifying as refugees to the United States?

Ms. STRACK. Yes. As the Congress actually defined the Iraqi program, it is people who worked with the U.S. military, people who worked with U.S. civilians, say at the U.S. embassy, people who worked with American journalists and American aid organizations. There clearly is some sort of bottleneck in that program, with 53 arrivals so far this fiscal year.

Mr. CORREA. So, what are we sending these warriors, what is the message we are sending these warriors around the country about

being allied with American soldiers in a battlefield?

Ms. STRACK. In preparing for this hearing, I found primary sources, former military individuals that I have quoted in my testimony. They indicate that we are abandoning our allies and we are sending a message for the future that we are not reliable.

Mr. CORREA. Madam Chair, I am out of time. Thank you very

Ms. Garcia. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the Ranking Member, the gentleman

from Colorado, Mr. Buck. Mr. Buck. I thank the chair. I will try to be brief, in less than 5 minutes, but thank you for your recognition. I am in favor of admitting more refugees to the United States. I think refugees follow the rules, and we should reward those who follow the rules.

I have a big problem with what is happening on our southern border, and we need to find a way to address that, both through foreign aid to countries that are south of our border as well as with a better program. I see the two as linked. I understand they are in different offices. I see the linkage.

I want to thank all the witnesses today for your testimony. It has been enlightening and has been very helpful to us as we try to

make policy.

Ms. Strack, I wanted to mention one thing. I will talk more offline to you, perhaps, after the hearing. You mentioned in your testimony that the Administration was stalling or stalled. You used the word "stalled," I think. You also said that they were unneces-

sarily cruel, in an answer to a question.

We have also heard some of the Members talk about how refugees are used as scapegoats or people to be hated or that the Administration is xenophobic or that a particular Governor may have fueled hatred.

I think we lose our ability, especially after an impeachment hearing, especially after some of the other things that have happened in Congress, when we go to our separate spaces and use that kind

of language.

So, as a leader in this area and as somebody who has spent her life in this area and has a passion for it, I would just ask that you recognize that—when I heard you use the term "unnecessarily cruel," what came to my mind was "cautious." I can see the word "cautious" being used, and perhaps "unnecessarily cautious." When we attribute motive, we go down a path that is unfortunate.

There are many of us, many Republicans, who feel very strongly. Many Somalis settled in my district. Great workers and great Members of the community, contributing, and friends of mine and people who—I wish everybody could see the dynamic that occurs between the refugees that are settled in the eastern part of Colo-

rado and the rest of the community.

Frankly, a lot of times, the community begins with a certain level of apprehension but, over time, accepts people. The dynamic that exists between the refugee community and the more established community is a wonderful thing to see. It is really a growth on behalf of both sides.

So, I hope that we can deal with this issue in a more productive way. I will continue to work with the Administration in finding ways to admit more refugees and make sure that they have accom-

plished the safety and security concerns they have validly.

When we talk about vetting, I recognize the Somalis, for example, that I have talked to were in refugee camps for 6, 8, 10 years. I think that is pretty vetted. When I talk to those folks, they strongly disliked Islamic fundamentalism and the kind of attitude that might breed a terrorist action in this country, because that is who put them into this refugee camp. So, they were very pro-American and very concerned about—while they maintained a strong faith, they were very concerned about how that faith was perceived by Americans.

I learned that by interacting with the Somalis in my community, and I really appreciated that. It is something that I hope everybody

can see in one way or another.

When we assume motive, we go to a place that isn't productive. I hope that we are accomplishing something more productive in the future in this area. Because Americans, no matter what our faith or lack of faith, we have a heart for those who are less fortunate around the world.

I hope that we continue to open the door and allow many people in that are following the right process, and make sure that we close the door and require people to follow the right process if they want to come to this country.

So, thank you all for your testimony.

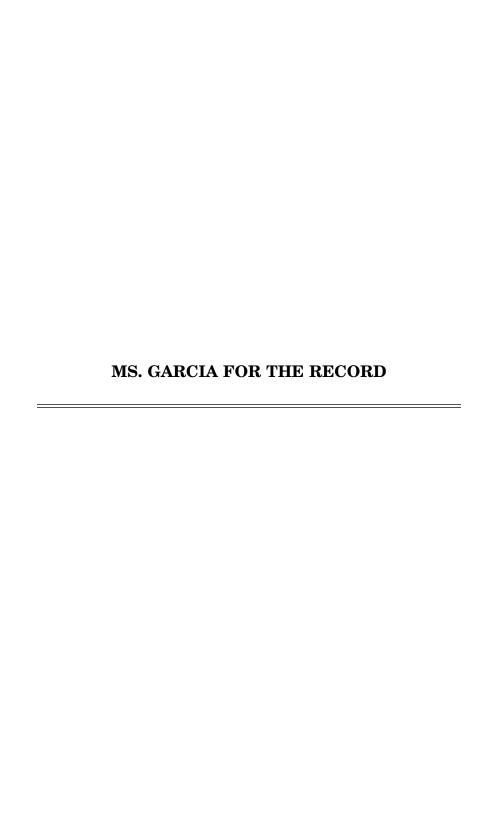
I thank the chair for holding this important hearing, and I yield back.

Ms. GARCIA. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now asks for unanimous consent to insert the following statements into the record. We have statements from the Asian Americans Advancing Justice, Bethany Christian Services, Church Americans Advancing Justice, Bethany Christian Services, Church World Service, the Episcopal Church, Franciscan Action Coalition, HIAS, Interfaith Immigration Coalition, the International Refugee Assistance Project, International Rescue Committee, Leadership Conference of Women Religious, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, National Council of Jewish Women, National Immigration Law Center, the Refugee Congress, and also a letter from more than 85 U.S. mayors in support of refugee resettlement.

So, without objection, those will be entered into the record.

[The information follows:]



Written Statement of Advancing Justice | AAJC

The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program

February 26, 2020

Contact Information:

Megan Essaheb, Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC messaheb@advancingjustice-aajc.org

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC (Advancing Justice) writes to express our strong support for the U.S. Refugee Program and to highlight the harm caused by the decimation of the program in recent years. We appreciate this opportunity to submit a written statement for today's hearing on the state of the U.S. Refugee Program. Advancing Justice | AAJC is the voice for the Asian American community – the fastest-growing population in the U.S. – fighting for our civil rights through education, litigation, and public policy advocacy. We serve to empower our communities by bringing local and national constituencies together and ensuring Asian Americans can participate fully in our democracy.

The U.S. has long been a leader in welcoming refugees and asylum seekers fleeing persecution and conflict. However, in recent years the program has been decimated. The ceiling on refugee admissions was slashed by more than half from 2017 to 2018, and only about half of the 45,000 refugees allowed were admitted in 2018. The Presidential Determination for FY 2019 was 30,000² and in November, President Trump set the refugee admission ceiling for FY 2020 to 18,000³ refugees, the lowest in the history of the program. We urge the Administration to increase the Presidential Determination on the number of refugees welcomed to the U.S. We further urge Congress to step in and pass legislation to create a minimum annual floor on the number of refugees resettled through the U.S. Refugee Program. We strongly support the GRACE Act, which would establish that the maximum number of refugees admitted each fiscal year shall be no less than 95,000 and that the maximum number shall be treated as the numerical goal for refugee admissions for the applicable fiscal year.

¹ "Inside the Numbers: How Immigration Shapes Asian American and Pacific Islander Communities," Asian Americans Advancing Justice, June 12, 2019, https://www.advancingjustice-aajc.org/publication/inside-numbers-how-immigration-shapes-asian-american-and-pacific-islander-communities)

² "Presidential Memorandum for the Secretary of State," The White House (The United States Government, October

^{4, 2018),} https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-memorandum-secretary-state-13/) ³ "Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2020," The White House (The United States Government, November 1, 2019), https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-determination-refugee-admissions-fiscal-year-2020/)

⁴ Lofgren and Zoe, "H.R.2146 - 116th Congress (2019-2020): GRACE Act," Congress.gov, May 15, 2019, https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2146)

I. The Refugee Crisis

The world is facing a global refugee crisis. As of June 2019, there were 70.8 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. This number is comprised of 41.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 25.9 million refugees, and 3.5 million asylum-seekers. 57% of the United Nations Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) refugees come from Syria, Afghanistan and South Sudan due to civil war and ongoing conflict in their home countries. In 2018, half of the refugee population constituted children below the age of 18 which increased from 41% in 2009. Understanding the faces behind these statistics helps humanize those who are suffering and who we are languishing in refugee camps through cuts to the program.

According to the UNHCR, the Asia and Pacific region is currently home to 3.5 million refugees, 1.0 million IDPs and 1.4 million stateless people. Out of the top 10 origin countries for refugees admitted to the U.S. in FY 2018, four of them, Burma (Myanmar), Bhutan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan are from Asia. In Burma specifically, there are an estimated 500,000 refugees who have been experiencing ethnic, religious and political-based violence and persecution by the government and government supported actors. Burmese and Rohingya refugees, members of a stateless Muslim minority in Myanmar, began arriving in the U.S. around the turn of the century due to political, religious, and economic persecution. As of June 2017, Burmese refugees represented 23% of the 708,354 total refugees admitted since 2007—the largest ethnic group resettled to the U.S. over that decade. During the same time frame, Bhutanese refugees, most of whom were ethnic Nepalis fleeing discriminatory treatment by their government, were the third-largest resettled group at 13%. Other countries that have experienced mass refugee exoduses include Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Syria. Since 2011, over 5.6 million Syrians have fled the devastating conditions of an ongoing civil war to nearby countries including Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan.

Refugees from Burma represented the fourth largest population group by country of origin and the population of displaced people worldwide stood at 1.1 million by the end of 2018. ¹⁰ The vast majority of the refugees are women and children, including newborn babies as well as elderly people. ¹¹ Most of the refugees have been hosted by Bangladesh, home to the 9th most populated

⁵ "Refugee Crisis," International Rescue Committee (IRC), accessed February 26, 2020, https://www.rescue.org/topic/refugee-crisis)

February 26, 2020, https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018/)

⁷ "Fact Sheet: U.S. Refugee Resettlement," National Immigration Forum, January 25, 2019,

https://immigrationforum.org/article/fact-sheet-u-s-refugee-resettlement/)

⁸ United Nations, "Rohingya Emergency," UNHCR, accessed February 26, 2020, https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/rohingya-emergency.html)

⁹ United Nations, "Syria Emergency," UNHCR, accessed February 26, 2020, https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/syria-emergency.html)

¹⁰ Angelica et al., "Global Trends - Forced Displacement in 2018 - UNHCR," UNHCR Global Trends 2018, accessed February 26, 2020, https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018/)

^{11 &}quot;Refugee Statistics," USA for UNHCR, accessed February 26, 2020, https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/)

city in the world¹², and nearly all refugees from Burma are hosted by countries in the region such as Malaysia, Thailand, and India.

Developing and middle-income countries are bearing the lion-share of the burden of the world's refugee crisis. Nations including Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Jordan have hosted more than 84% of the world's refugees whereas the six wealthiest nations hosted fewer than 9%. ¹³ In Jordan, 1 in 11 residents is a refugee and roughly 25% of the annual state budget has gone towards hosting them. Similarly, Kenya is hosting Somalis in the world's largest refugee camp. These nations who are undertaking most of the burden will not be able to sustain themselves without support from wealthier nations, such as the U.S., who have the capacity to help.

If the U.S. continues to close our borders to refugees and asylum seekers, we risk causing instability in other parts of the world and it would also impact "the security of U.S. missions in those regions." We must maintain an immigration system that is true to our American values, that protects immigrants from discrimination based on religious animus, and that extends humanitarian relief to individuals fleeing persecution, regardless of religion or country of origin.

II. The U.S. Refugee Program

The U.S. refugee and asylum programs aim to protect individuals fleeing violence and persecution in their countries of origin. For decades, the U.S. has led the global initiative to accept refugees and asylees by raising refugee quotas during periods of international conflict. Recognizing the Vietnam War's devastating human impact, Congress passed the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act in 1975, which allocated funds for Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees to be transported to the U.S. and for social and rehabilitation services for resettled individuals. The Act was amended a year later to include the resettlement of Laotian refugees. The impact was immediate: between 1975 and 1980, approximately 300,000 Southeast Asian refugees entered the U.S. through the attorney general's parole authority. ¹⁵

Passed during this influx of refugees, the Refugee Act of 1980 created a "uniform and comprehensive policy to proactively address refugee admissions." In addition to removing the geographic and ideological limits on the definition of refugee established by the INA of 1965, the Act raised the annual refugee admissions ceiling, provided the first statutory basis for asylum, and founded the Office of Refugee Resettlement. ¹⁶ The 21st century has witnessed no shortage of refugee admissions to the U.S from Asia and the Middle East. Some flows stemmed from old

^{12 &}quot;The World's Cities in 2018," Statistical Papers - United Nations (Ser. A), Population and Vital Statistics Report, March 2018, https://doi.org/10.18356/c93f4dc6-en)

^{13 &}quot;Why Should America Take in More Refugees? Get the Facts on the Refugee Cap.," International Rescue Committee (IRC), January 24, 2020, https://www.rescue.org/article/why-should-america-take-more-refugees-get-facts-refugee-cap)
14 Ibid.

¹⁵ Ruth Igielnik and Jens Manuel Krogstad, "Where Refugees to the U.S. Come From," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, February 3, 2017), https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/03/where-refugees-to-the-u-s-come-from/)

^{16 &}quot;Refugee Timeline," USCIS, June 21, 2017, https://www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/featured-stories-uscis-history-office-and-library/refugee-timeline)

conflicts such as the Vietnam War. In 2004, nearly three decades after the Communist takeover of Laos, the U.S. government allowed 15,282 Laotian Hmong refugees, then living in a Thai refugee camp, to resettle in the country. ¹⁷

III. The Decimation of the Refugee Program

One of the first acts of the Trump administration was to issue the President's promised "Muslim Ban" through an executive order banning the entry of nationals from several majority-Muslim countries and suspending refugee admissions. The refugee program was halted in 2017 with the first iteration of the Muslim Ban significantly lowering the number of refugees resettled to the U.S. and increasing family separation. The impact of the executive orders affecting Muslim and refugee communities has been profound: between 2016 and 2018, visas issued to people from most of the affected countries decreased dramatically, falling by as much as 90.8%. The ceiling on refugee admissions was slashed by more than half from 2017 to 2018, and only about half of the 45,000 refugees allowed were admitted in 2018. The Presidential Determination for FY 2019 was 30,000¹⁹ and in November, President Trump set the refugee admission ceiling for FY 2020 to 18,000²⁰ refugees, the lowest in the history of the program.

The Rohingya and Burmese refugee communities have been particularly harmed by the decimation of the Refugee Program. The impact of this decimation on the Rohingya has meant that between 2015-2016, approximately 7,000²¹ Rohingya refugees were admitted to the U.S., whereas under the Trump's administration the number decreased to less than 600²² in 2017. The Burmese American community has been growing in recent years due to years of refugee resettlement "protracted armed conflict, human-rights abuses, political repression, and national disasters". Since Fiscal Year 2012, the largest nationality of refugees has come from Burma. 4, and in the past 10 years, 1 in 4 U.S.-bound refugees have come from Burma. 5 These statistics also include

¹⁷ Monica Davey, "Decades After First Refugees, Readying for More Hmong," The New York Times (The New York Times, April 4, 2004), https://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/04/us/decades-after-first-refugees-readying-formore-hmong.html)

^{18 &}quot;Inside the Numbers: How Immigration Shapes Asian American and Pacific Islander Communities," Asian Americans Advancing Justice, June 12, 2019, https://www.advancingjustice-aajc.org/publication/inside-numbers-how-immigration-shapes-asian-american-and-pacific-islander-communities)

^{19 &}quot;Presidential Memorandum for the Secretary of State," The White House (The United States Government), accessed February 26, 2020, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-memorandum-secretary-state-13/)

²⁰ "Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2020," The White House (The United States Government), accessed February 26, 2020, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-determination-refugee-admissions-fiscal-year-2020/)

²¹ Miriam Jordan, "Refugee Cutbacks Could Isolate Rohingya Children in the U.S.," The New York Times (The New York Times, September 22, 2019), https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/22/us/rohingya-refugees-us.html)

 ²³ Joyce Chia, "Key Issues for Refugees from Myanmar (Burma) - Refugee Council," Refugee Council of Australia (Refugee Council for Australia, January 25, 2019), https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/myanmar-burma/)
 ²⁴ Jens Manuel Krogstad, "Key Facts about Refugees to the U.S.," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, October 7, 2019), https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/07/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/)
 ²⁵ U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State), accessed February 26, 2020, https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/prm/releases/statistics/index.htm)

730,000 Rohingya who fled Burma²⁶ due to violence that the United Nations human rights chief, Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, has called "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing." Refugees fleeing ethnic strife such as Pa Hu and Tin Lia, father and son, first escaped to Malaysia prior to gaining refugee status and coming to the U.S. and resettling in Iowa. 28 They still have family in Myanmar and relatives who escaped to Malaysia who they are seeking to have resettled in the U.S. but are facing multiple barriers to doing so. In addition to the decimation of the Refugee Program, the President recently expanded the Muslim Ban to include 6 additional countries including Burma. The Expanded Muslim Ban bars Rohingya and Burmese Americans who are lawful permanent residents or U.S. Citizens from sponsoring family members, closing another door on family unity. This community of resettled Rohingya in the U.S. includes young children in foster care who arrived alone and hope to reunite with family members through the refugee program or family sponsorship. The New York Times recently profiled Hefzur, a refugee in Michigan, who arrived in the U.S. around the age of 14 and had a difficult time adjusting into his foster family and being separated from his parents.²⁹ He felt guilty about his time in the U.S. away from his loved ones still facing violence at home and feared that his parents would be killed in Burma. Hefzur said, "My dream is to bring my family here. I'm afraid my mom and dad will die before I can touch them again."30 Once these youth become U.S. citizens and become 21 years old, they would typically be eligible to sponsor their parents to come immediately through the family-based visa system. However, the Muslim Ban will prevent anyone from sponsoring any family members who are Burmese nationals.

IV. Demystifying Security Concerns

The various iterations of the Muslim Ban, the Refugee Ban and decimation of the refugee program have been made under the false pretext of national security concerns. We know this because the national security justifications for the Muslim Ban were created after the original version of the Muslim Ban was drafted and in response to litigation. Additionally, the President and his advisors made many statements indicating that these policies were indeed the expression of the President's campaign promise to create a "Muslim Ban" and his vision for a "total and complete shutdown of

²⁶ Hannah Beech, "Massacred at Home, in Misery Abroad, 730,000 Rohingya Are Mired in Hopelessness," The New York Times (The New York Times, August 22, 2019),

https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/22/world/asia/rohingya-myanmar-repatriation.html?auth=login-google) ²⁷ Nick Cumming-bruce, "Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar Is 'Ethnic Cleansing,' U.N. Rights Chief Says," The New York Times (The New York Times, September 11, 2017),

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/11/world/asia/myanmar-rohingya-ethnic-

cleansing.html?rref=collection/sectioncollection/asia&action=click&contentCollection=asia®ion&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=5&pgtype=sectionfront)

^{28 &}quot;Inside the Numbers: How Immigration Shapes Asian American and Pacific Islander Communities," Asian Americans Advancing Justice, June 12, 2019, https://www.advancingjustice-aajc.org/publication/inside-numbers-how-immigration-shapes-asian-american-and-pacific-islander-communities)

²⁹ Miriam Jordan, "Refugee Cutbacks Could Isolate Rohingya Children in the U.S.," The New York Times (The New York Times, September 22, 2019), https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/22/us/rohingya-refugees-us.html)
³⁰ Ibid.

Muslims entering the U.S."31 Finally, the President has made many other "dog whistle" statements about immigrants, refugees and people of color.

The U.S. government has a long history of using national security justifications to discriminate against and target Asian Americans, including Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian (AMEMSA) communities. Often, these xenophobic policies have made their way into our immigration laws, just like the current Muslim Ban. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prevented Chinese immigrants from coming to the United States for over 60 years and prevented existing Chinese immigrants from naturalizing,³² was the first major immigration law that prevented immigrants from entering the country or gaining citizenship based on ethnic and national origin.³³ In 1914, the federal government once again targeted Asian Americans when under the guise of national security it barred anyone born in a geographically defined "Asiatic Barred Zone" from entering the country.³⁴ The Act extended the exclusion formerly limited to the Chinese to all Asians and Pacific Islanders from Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the west to the Polynesian Islands in the east.³⁵ Finally, in 1924, with the passage of the Asian Exclusion Act, the government effectively ended all immigration from Asian countries.³⁶

These anti-Asian sentiments culminated in one of the darkest chapters of American history: the incarceration of 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry during World War II.³⁷ Whole families, including children, were rounded up, removed from their homes, and forced to live in detention centers under the pretext of national security based simply on their ancestry.³⁸ Americans of Japanese ancestry were targeted and incarcerated in federal detention centers without due process, while members of white ethnic groups with ancestry of countries that the United States was at war with were not detained.³⁹

The current vetting process for refugees is exhaustive and secure and it entails screenings from eight different federal agencies, six security database checks, a medical screening, and three inperson interviews over the course of approximately two years. 40 Additionally, refugees do not choose the country where they are resettled. The UN Refugee Agency recommends select countries for resettlement. Thus, the argument that decreasing the number of refugees is important

³¹Jessica Taylor, "Trump Calls For Total And Complete Shutdown Of Muslims Entering U.S.," NPR (NPR, December 7, 2015), https://www.npr.org/2015/12/07/458836388/trump-calls-for-total-and-complete-shutdown-of-muslims-entering-u-s)

³² Ibid.

³³ "THE WEST - Documents on Anti-Chinese Immigration Policy," PBS (Public Broadcasting Service), accessed February 26, 2020, https://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/seven/chinxact.htm)

³⁴ U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State), accessed February 26, 2020,

https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act)

^{35 &}quot;Asiatic Barred Zone," Immigration to the United States, accessed February 26, 2020, https://immigrationtounitedstates.org/362-asiatic-barred-zone.html)

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "Removal of Japanese Aliens and Citizens From Hawaii to the ...," The United States Department of Justice, accessed February 26, 2020, https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/olc/opinions/1942/05/31/op-olc-supp-v001-p0084.pdf) ³⁸ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid. 39 Ibid.

^{40 &}quot;Refugees in America," USA for UNHCR, accessed February 26, 2020, https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/usa/)

to our national security is without merit. A study by the New American Economy Research Fund has shown that refugee arrival is not correlated with increased crime or violence. 41 The study used refugee resettlement data "to calculate the 10 cities in the US that received the most refugees relative to the size of their population between 2006 and 2015" and looked at the overall crime rates in those areas. The results showed that nine out of ten of the communities became considerably safer, "both in terms of their levels of violent and property crime" including places such as Southfield, Michigan, where violent crime dropped by 77.1%. 42 The one city, West Springfield, Massachusetts, that saw an increase in crime was impacted by the opioid crisis and news articles found drug-related crime connected to the rise in violence. This was also "well underway before the most recent wave of refugees began arriving" and therefore was not correlated with the refugee population. 43

The U.S. refugee resettlement program is designed to help refugees achieve self-sufficiency quickly. In 2016, over 80 percent of refugees in the International Rescue Committee's early employment program were economically self-sufficient within six months and data shows that entrepreneurship among refugees is nearly 50 percent higher than among people born in the U.S. Salam Bunyan and his family are a prime example of how refugees are contributing to the economy and creating jobs for Americans. Salam is a refugee from Iraq who was resettled by the International Rescue Committee in Boise, Idaho and through the support of the community, he opened a restaurant in the international market where he employed members of the community. Anne-Marie Grey, the Executive Director and CEO of the USA for UNHCR says that, "Refugees are vulnerable people, but due to the generosity of the American people we are able to provide refugees with help and hope as they flee devastating circumstances and prepare them for independence in a new and permanent home."

V. Conclusion

The U.S. has a responsibility to stay true to its values and stay true to the purpose of the Refugee Program which is to protect people fleeing violence and persecution in their countries of origin. The U.S. should resume a robust refugee resettlement program and continue to serve as a haven for people seeking refuge. Advancing Justice | AAJC urges the Committee Members to support the GRACE Act, which includes an annual floor on the number of refugees welcomed into the U.S..

⁴¹ "Is There a Link Between Refugees and U.S. Crime Rates?," New American Economy Research Fund, accessed February 26, 2020, https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/is-there-a-link-between-refugees-and-u-s-crime-rates/)

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid.

 ^{44 &}quot;An Iraqi Refugee Resettled in Idaho Creates Jobs for Americans," International Rescue Committee (IRC),
 January 21, 2017, https://www.rescue.org/article/iraqi-refugee-resettled-idaho-creates-jobs-americans)
 45 "Refugees in America," USA for UNHCR, accessed February 26, 2020, https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/usa/)



House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship

Hearing: The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program

Statement for the Record Bethany Christian Services

February 27, 2020

Chair Lofgren, Vice Chair Jayapal, Ranking Member Buck, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this hearing on a very urgent and pressing issue and allowing the submission of this statement to further explain and detail Bethany's resettlement of and support for refugees. Through public-private partnerships with nonprofit organizations like Bethany, the United States has long been a place of refuge for people who are unable to return to their homes, fearing persecution because of what they look like or what they believe.

I. Introduction

Bethany Christian Services is an international nonprofit headquartered in Grand Rapids, Michigan that provides services to children and families and has supported refugees for over 40 years. Bethany's programs support resettled refugee adults and families as well as unaccompanied refugee minors (URM). Through a network of churches, individuals, and businesses that employ refugees in several states across the nation, Bethany helps resettled individuals and families become vibrant, integral parts of our communities.

II. Refugees' Contributions to Communities

Refugees are vital to the continuing prosperity of our communities – they pay taxes, help grow our economy, and bring unique skillsets, experiences, and insights. Collectively, over 5,000 refugees have been hired in Michigan since 2009 through Bethany's Refugee Employment Program. In 2019, Bethany's Refugee Employment Program placed 301 refugees with over 100 employers, a sharp decline from past years because fewer refugees were resettled. In 2019, these refugees collectively earned approximately \$8 million, barely half of what refugees earned and contributed to the West Michigan economy in 2017. Refugees strengthen our communities and help shape opportunities for continued growth by joining the workforce in critical positions, starting businesses, buying homes, and contributing tax revenue.

III. Unaccompanied Refugee Minors

Since 1975, Bethany has supported unaccompanied refugee minors in the U.S. with family and community-based care and services designed to help them thrive. On any given day, more than 300 unaccompanied refugee minors are cared for in the U.S. through Bethany. In fact, Bethany finds homes for more unaccompanied refugee minors than any other organization in the United States, with the state of Michigan welcoming more refugee minors than any other state.



Of the 70 million displaced people and over 26 million refugees in the world, unaccompanied refugee minors (URM) are among the most vulnerable. URMs often live indefinitely in refugee camps or childled households in heavily impoverished areas and are susceptible to human trafficking - both sex and labor trafficking - and exploitation. Since the inception of the URM program in 1980, approximately 13,000 URM children have resettled in the United States. These children have come from countries such as Sudan, Myanmar, and Cuba-where many were persecuted for their faith or witnessed the genocide of their families and communities.

Increasing conflict and rising inequality are contributing to the mass displacement of children, including URM, from their homes, endangering their survival, disrupting their education, and exposing them to severe protection risks, including trafficking, violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. At the same time, U.S. support for URM has fallen precipitously. In FY 2015 the U.S. resettled 294 refugee children, compared to only 116 in FY 2018 and 156 in FY 2019 - a significant decline in just five years

While the total number of children resettled through the URM program is relatively small, the program has a tremendous impact on the children it serves. Children in the URM program receive the same care and benefits provided to U.S. born children placed in foster care. The URM program provides culturally and linguistically appropriate foster care to unaccompanied refugee children and youth. Through the program, unaccompanied refugees receive care, educational support, and case management to help the children thrive and achieve self-sufficiency.

The U.S. should commit to increasing the life-saving refugee resettlement practices in a way that reflects the gravity of the global refugee crisis. This includes a continued strong commitment to unaccompanied refugee minors.

Conclusion

We care for refugees not based on their faith beliefs or the color of their skin, but because they too are made in the image of God and have dignity and worth. Supporting the refugee resettlement program upholds our country's history of being a beacon of safety and hope for those in need. With over 70 million forcibly displaced people across the globe, we must continue to seek proactive solutions that alleviate the suffering of refugees worldwide. Developing countries host 85% of the world's refugees, while the six wealthiest nations host fewer than 9%. In Jordan alone, 80% of refugees live below the poverty line, struggling to survive on less than \$3USD per day. There are over 26,000 asylum-seekers and refugees currently residing on the Aegean islands, a number just short of the total number of refugees admitted to the U.S. in FY19. The United States can do better. The lives of millions of displaced children and families depend on it.

Sincerely,

Chris Palusky President and CEO Bethany Christian Services

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Senior Vice President of Global and Refugee Services

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Bethany Christian Services



CWS Statement to the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration & Citizenship, pertaining to its hearing entitled "The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program" on Thursday, February 27, 2020

As a 74-year old humanitarian organization representing 37 Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox communions and 24 refugee resettlement offices across 17 states, Church World Service (CWS) urges the subcommittee to affirm our nation's commitment to refugee protection and resettlement. Amidst the worst refugee crisis in world history and the Trump administration's <u>80% cut</u> to the <u>bipartisan resettlement program</u>, it is imperative to restore U.S. leadership in refugee protection and resettlement.

The U.S. resettlement program represents a standard of excellence that other countries around the world look to as a touchstone for their own policies. Nearly 40 years ago, the U.S. Congress enacted the Refugee Act of 1980, landmark legislation that created the refugee resettlement program and instituted how the United States provides protection and a new life to some of the most vulnerable people in the world. As a pillar of our national foreign policy, the United States has been an international model providing refugees protection through public-private partnerships made up of federal, state, and local governments, national and local resettlement agencies, faith communities, civic groups, businesses, former refugees, and volunteers.

Our capacity to welcome refugees - a core tenet of American values - is being destroyed. The administration set a record-low refugee admissions cap of 18,000 in FY 2020. Last year, the administration set a then-historically low cap of 30,000. For nearly four decades, the annual cap has averaged 95,000 refugees. The administration's systemic decimation of the program - by the slashing of admissions caps, Muslim and refugee bans, and the most recent executive order, currently blocked by a preliminary injunction, allowing states and localities to veto resettlement - is shaping the United States as a nation rapidly closing its doors to the very people we have an obligation to protect.

CWS urges Congress to hold the administration accountable to restoring the U.S. resettlement program to historic norms. Refugee resettlement is a longstanding, life-saving American tradition that welcomes refugees who bring their innovative skills, diverse cultures, and dedicated work ethic to their new communities, improving quality of life for all. Resettlement is an option only for those who cannot return to their home country due to ongoing violence or for reasons of personal safety, and who cannot stay in the country to which they have fled. Communities across the United States have also long recognized that refugees are vital to the continuing prosperity of our communities — they pay taxes, help grow our economy, and bring unique skill sets, experiences, and insights. Refugees have high rates of entrepreneurship, creating jobs and boosting local economies.

Refugees are families torn apart, children who have witnessed profound violence, and people seeking a chance to rebuild their lives and raise their families in safety. For example, in 2016, new parents Deman and Mohammed made a heart-wrenching choice to accept resettlement to the U.S. without their three-month-old daughter, Nimco, in order to seek life-saving medical treatment for Mohammed. To add their newborn to the case would have meant an indefinite delay in their departure and Mohammed most likely would not have survived. Immediately upon their arrival in Columbus, OH, Columbus Refugee and Immigration Services helped them complete the application to have Nimco join them in the U.S. Nimco is now three years old and being cared for in Ethiopia by her grandmother. Deman and Mohammed continue to miss their daughter's earliest milestones because their daughter's departure has been delayed by this administration's drastic cuts to refugee resettlement.

At a time when there are more than 25 million refugees worldwide - more than half of whom are children - now is a critical time to build and restore the U.S. resettlement program to historic norms. Let us reflect the best of our nation by extending hospitality so that the United States can once again be a beacon of hope for refugees.



Statement for the Record Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship "The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program" February 27, 2020

For the first time since World War II, there are more than 70.8 million displaced people worldwide, including nearly 26 million refugees. As Christians, we are called to respect the dignity and worth of every human being, and to do our part to alleviate the suffering of our displaced brothers and sisters.

The Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations works to protect the human rights and safety of refugees by supporting the refugee resettlement work of Episcopal Migration Ministries and advocating for robust refugee resettlement policies. In the last thirty years of our partnership with the federal government, Episcopal Migration Ministries has welcomed more than 95,000 refugees - children, women, and men - to safety and hope in the United States.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is a model humanitarian initiative and a critical tool of U.S. foreign policy. Resettlement is the last resort for refugees who cannot safely return home or remain in the country from which they first fled. Refugees resettled in the United States rebuild their lives in a haven of peace and security. However, resettlement does not just benefit refugees themselves. Through their entrepreneurship, cultural resources, employment, and consumer habits, refugees contribute untold gifts to their local communities and to our nation.

As a church and as strong proponents of religious freedom, we are especially aware that refugee resettlement assists those who are fleeing religious persecution. As statistics show the contraction of conscience rights and religious freedom around the world for a wide variety of groups, the church views resettlement as an essential tool to provide protection to those who have suffered because of their beliefs.

As a faith community rooted in the Gospel of Welcome, The Episcopal Church strongly disapproves of the Trump administration's decision to substantially reduce the number of refugees admitted to the United States. The church also opposes the administration's decision to give states and localities the ability to refuse resettlement. Both actions contradict the will of Congress as expressed through the Refugee Act of 1980. As we prepare to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Refugee Act, we urge members of this subcommittee, and all members of Congress, to stand firm in support of a robust refugee resettlement program.

Sincerely,

Rushad L. Thomas Migration Policy Advisor Office of Government Relations The Episcopal Church

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Franciscan Action Network Statement to House Judiciary Sub-Committee on Immigration and Citizenship Hearing on February 27, 2020, "The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program"

Franciscan Action Network (FAN) strongly supports the Refugee Protection Act of 2019, and welcomes the opportunity to submit a statement to the House Judiciary Sub-Committee on Immigration and Citizenship for their hearing on February 27, 2020. Welcoming refugees to the United States has long been a tradition which not only protects refugees fleeing violence and persecution but also benefits the communities who welcome them. Our country is stronger because families fleeing for their lives or from intolerable oppression in their home countries have demonstrated their gratitude by contributing to the economic and social well-being of their new home, the United States of America.

As a Christian organization, FAN responds to the teachings of Jesus to welcome the stranger. As Catholics we heed the challenge of Pope Francis who urges us to speak up in defense of refugees and use our resources to help people escaping war, violence and persecution. As Franciscans, we are rooted in relationship, because St. Francis of Assisi embraced all people as brother and sister.

FAN is deeply disturbed by the administration's continued efforts to diminish the number of refugees resettled in this country, capping the number at a historic low of 18,000 for 2020. Refugees are families torn apart by this decision. As we see in the media, many thousands who wait in crowded, unhealthy refugee camps in several countries are children. It is appalling that this country, with its tradition of hospitality and resources to assist refugees, continues to post the sign, Not Welcome Here. FAN joins many other refugee advocates in urging support for the Refugee Protection Act of 2019.



Statement submitted to the Committee on the Judiciary of the U.S. House of Representatives

Hearing: "The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program"

February 27, 2020

The story of refugees in America is not a new one. It did not begin with the arrival of thousands of American allies from Southeast Asia in the 1980s, or the arrival of Cubans or Bosnians, or more American allies from Iraq and Afghanistan. It did not begin in the aftermath of WWII when the world witnessed the horror and devastation that results from closing borders to those in need, and in turn responded by ratifying the 1951 Refugee Convention. The story of refugees in America starts with the earliest arrivals from other countries. Beginning with the pilgrims, English Protestants that sought freedom to practice their religion, America has represented a place of refuge and been a country where refugees have made extraordinary contributions to the United States.

HIAS, the American Jewish community's refugee organization, is proud of the role we have played in this story. Since our founding 139 years ago on New York's Lower East Side, providing assistance to newly arrived Jewish immigrants, HIAS has stood for welcome. We have helped more than 4.5 million people start their lives as new Americans, many of them having fled their countries because of religious persecution. Today, guided by our history and values, HIAS—along with eight other national agencies—resettles refugees regardless of religion, race, or nationality. Refugees resettled in the U.S. have a chance to rebuild their lives in freedom, dignity, and safety. In return, our communities are enriched, and oftentimes revitalized.

The necessity of a robust U.S. refugee resettlement program is perhaps now more important than ever. The world is experiencing the worst forced displacement crisis in recorded history. Over 70 million people, 25.9 million of whom are refugees, are displaced from their homes. Whenever we, as a global community, are faced with human suffering, Americans must decide how we will respond as a nation. For example, in 1981, President Ronald Reagan remarked, "More than any other country, our strength comes from our own immigration heritage and our capacity to welcome those from other lands....We shall continue America's tradition as a land that welcomes peoples from other countries. We shall also, with other countries, continue to share in the responsibility of welcoming and resettling those who flee oppression.\(^1\)" The sentiment of President Reagan's words still holds true today, in spite of the fact that the United States refugee resettlement program is currently shrinking, despite historical bipartisan support. There is no greater evidence of this support than the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act, which formally established the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) 40 years ago.

¹ https://www.nytimes.com/1981/07/31/us/reagan-s-statement-on-immigration.html

Since then, the U.S. has proudly resettled over three million refugees. Welcoming refugees has enhanced our local economies and communities, strengthened our foreign policy, and bolstered our standing in the world as a leader for freedom. For nearly 40 years, the refugee admissions goal (also known as the Presidential Determination, or PD) averaged 95,000 per year, with actual admissions averaging 85,000 refugees per year. Yet, in FY2018, the PD was lowered to 45,000, and we only admitted 22,491 refugees. In FY2019, the PD was set at 30,000, a goal that was reached. In spite of that, this fiscal year, the Trump administration set the admissions ceiling to an all-time historic low of 18,000. Furthermore, unless the pace of arrival numbers picks up, we will not be able to meet this year's PD, with only 5,821 refugees having arrived as we near the midpoint of the fiscal year.

The challenges confronting the USRAP are not just about the ever lowering PD. This administration has set up multiple obstacles to reduce the number of refugee arrivals to the United States, including through the issuance of a series of executive orders. For example, in January 2017, the administration issued an executive order halting refugee admissions for 120 days, reducing the number of refugees allowed to resettle to the U.S. that fiscal year from 110,000 to 50,000, and prohibiting the entry of foreign nationals from seven (later changed to six) Muslim-majority countries. In October 2017, the administration issued another refugee ban, prohibiting refugee arrivals for 90 days from some of the world's largest refugee producing countries, including Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen. That particular executive order also suspended an important family reunification mechanism for refugee families, leaving families torn apart indefinitely.

In addition, at the end of last year, the administration issued the latest executive order targeting the USRAP. *Executive Order 13888* allowed governors and local elected officials to essentially veto resettlement in their states and communities. Before the implementation of the EO was put on pause due to a preliminary injunction in the case of *HIAS v. Trump*, 43 governors, including 19 Republicans, stated that they want resettlement to continue in their states.

The challenges we face today are not small, but as evidenced by the recent response to the administration's most recent executive order, all across this country, support remains strong for refugee resettlement. This support is not just rooted in the humanitarian foundation of the USRAP. Americans recognize that refugees start businesses, pay taxes, and purchase goods and services. They help to revitalize cities and create new jobs. While there is an investment to be made in resettling refugees, there is also a tremendous gain.

As a Jewish organization, HIAS is all too familiar with what can happen when the United States turns its back on 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. We must learn from our mistakes and make sure that we do not allow history to repeat itself. Our community, which owes its very existence to the American tradition of welcoming refugees, will continue to stand in support of the USRAP and will continue to honor the Torah's mandate to "welcome the stranger."



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 27, 2020

Contact: Lynn Tramonte | media@interfaithimmigration.org | 202-255-0551

Interfaith Leaders Look Forward to Congressional Hearing on Refugee Resettlement

WASHINGTON, DC - The Interfaith Immigration Coalition welcomes Thursday's hearing in the House Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship about "The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program."

"God calls us to welcome the stranger through concrete actions that provide safety and security to the world's persecuted. The Trump administration's asylum and refugee policies are denying and dismantling basic protections for uprooted and vulnerable people," said Reverend Amy Reumann, Director for Advocacy, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). "We must restore U.S. leadership in refugee protection and resettlement, and strengthen opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to find safety, by passing the Refugee Protection Act."

"Without our consent, this administration turned our nation's back on the world's most vulnerable. Americans of all ideologies, faiths, and creeds believe we need to increase the number of refugees we welcome," said Katie Adams, Domestic Policy Advocate for the United Church of Christ and Co-Chair of the Interfaith Immigration Coalition.

"We strongly support the Refugee Protection Act's clarification of the 'firm resettlement' concept in U.S. law, among its many other provisions," said Rachel Gore Freed, Vice President and Chief Program Officer, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. "This change could not be more timely or urgent, as the Trump administration begins implementing its so-called 'safe third country' agreement with Guatemala, deporting people to a country they barely know and that has no capacity to safely resettle them. No government should have the power to send people to places that are not their home and where their lives will be at risk."

"We are called by our faith to welcome the stranger and care for the most vulnerable, and we are challenged by our national values to offer protection to those fleeing violence and persecution. The Trump administration's asylum and refugee policies violate that faith and threaten those values," said Carol Zinn, SSJ, Executive Director of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. "Congress has a duty to stop the administration's attacks on those forced to flee their homes and to provide protection for refugees and asylum seekers. The passage of the

Refugee Protection Act would reverse the dangerous, cruel, and immoral asylum and refugee policy changes made by the Trump administration."

"America is not accepting this," said Faith Williams, Associate Director of Government Relations & Advocacy with National Council of Jewish Women and Co-Chair of the Interfaith Immigration Coalition. "Trump, Miller, and their co-conspirators at the Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security use ugly rhetoric and policies to dehumanize migrants, thinking that the public will be less likely to object to their inhumane treatment. This tactic has failed. A groundswell of Americans of all walks of life are donating time and money to assist refugees and asylum seekers—in ways that our government refuses to do. Congress must hold this administration accountable for the treatment and resettlement of refugees and return the number of refugees the United States commits to resettling to at least its historic average of 95,000."

Margaret Conley, Director of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team said, "The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, committed to stand in solidarity with migrants and refugees seeking fullness of life, call on Congress to pass the Refugee Protection Act without delay. Like millions across the country and around the world, we are shocked and saddened by the cruel and inhumane treatment migrants have received at the hands of the Trump administration. These vulnerable women, men and especially children have experienced severe trauma as they flee violence and repression in their home countries. Migrants are our sisters and brothers who must be welcomed with love and respect. Passing the Refugee Protection Act will go a long way in reversing the egregious abuses of the Trump administration. Congress must act now."

Stephen Schneck, Executive Director of Franciscan Action Network said: "Our diverse faith traditions have always called on us to welcome the stranger and do what we can to offer a safe haven for the world's most vulnerable people. By decimating the U.S. resettlement program and breaking the asylum system, the United States has turned away thousands of persecuted people and refused to provide a safe, fresh start for so many refugees. The Trump administration is not only violating man's law--U.S. and international laws and commitments—but God's law as well. This legislation would fix that."

"As a Jewish organization, HIAS is all too familiar with what can happen when the United States turns its back on refugees," said Naomi Steinberg, Vice President, Policy and Advocacy, HIAS. "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. We must learn from our mistakes and make sure that we do not allow history to repeat itself. Our community, which owes its very existence to the American tradition of welcoming refugees, will continue to stand in support of the U.S. refugee resettlement program and will continue to honor the Torah's mandate to "welcome the stranger."

"A 'wall' has been erected in the sense that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are facing barriers impossible to cross. Trump administration policies, such as cutting refugee admissions numbers to the lowest level in history; using detention as a strategy to demoralize asylum seekers; and forcing asylum seekers to live in dangerous conditions, put lives in danger. These inhumane and harmful changes to our asylum system were made to circumvent U.S. humanitarian protections and our moral and legal obligations. The Refugee Protection Act reflects the values we hold as faithful Americans, and passing this bill would begin the process of righting these wrongs," said Trinidad Ariztia, Program Director for Development and Migration Policy, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

"Welcoming refugees is profoundly American. We are a nation that is made stronger and more secure through a robust refugee resettlement program and asylum system. The world's vulnerable seek refuge to rebuild lives free from fear. Resettling refugees and welcoming asylum seekers is the right thing to do, not only for the sake of these families but also for the American communities that will be revitalized and strengthened by their new neighbors," said the Reverend John L. McCullough, President and CEO of Church World Service. "As the administration sadly abdicates its responsibility on refugee protection and resettlement, Congress must hold the administration accountable to at least meet this year's record-low admissions goal of 18,000 and restore the resettlement program to historic norms."

Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea, Director of Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries, said: "Refugee Resettlement has provided perhaps the most successful model of public-private partnership and bi-partisan cooperation since World War II; allowing communities in both cities and small towns, and in congregations small and large, to touch and know and offer shalom to the world by welcoming the most vulnerable who have been forced to flee their homelands. The Refugee Protection Act is a visionary blueprint which will help reverse dangerous, cruel, and family-separating changes made in recent years to U.S. refugee and asylum policies; and instead will allow us to live into God's calling to offer leaves of hope for the healing of the nations. As our history has taught us, showing such hospitality has likewise strengthened our economy, grown our congregations, and inspired our families through powerful relationships."

"Tragically, there are nearly 26 million refugees worldwide and fewer than 1% of them will ever be resettled to a third country. Let us not forget, refugees are more than just a global figure; they are families torn apart, children who have witnessed profound violence, and people seeking a chance to rebuild their lives and raise a family in safety. We can and should protect refugees and others fleeing violence or persecution. And for this reason, we are happy to support the Refugee Protection Act to reverse the current refugee policy by restoring the resettlement program to historic norms, making it easier for families to reunify and helping refugees integrate into their new communities," said Lawrence E. Couch, Director of the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

"As Quakers, we believe that our government and the people of the United States have a responsibility and an opportunity to welcome those most in need, offer refuge, and uplift our shared humanity in policies and actions," stated **Diane Randall, General Secretary of the Friends Committee on National Legislation.** "In these times, with a record number of refugees around the world, welcoming the stranger is no longer just an ideal -- it must be the reality we practice. Congress can act by passing the Refugee Protection Act."

"More than 25 million refugees worldwide are in need of safety, and 1.4 million are in need of immediate resettlement. It would be morally wrong to turn our backs on these vulnerable people. Yet, that is what the Trump administration has done," said Sr. Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director of NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice. "By consistently attacking refugees, the President undermines our own national security interests. Our nation's longstanding commitment to refugee and asylum seekers suffers under the President's divisive and dehumanizing rhetoric. Our policy should not be based on this Administration's prejudice and bias. The time to tell the President NO is now."

The Rev. Dr. Laurie Ann Kraus, Director, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, the Presbyterian Church (USA) said: "The welcome of refugees, and the humanitarian protection of asylum seekers, is an essential commitment of the global community and a core mandate of faith leaders and the communities we serve. In the face of this administration's deepening dismissal of the humanity of migrants and the systemization of human rights abuse against migrants and their children, countless communities of faith are stepping into the breach to enact our deep faith commitment to treat each person as a beloved child of God, deserving of protection and welcome. Throughout the United States, our years of support of migration have created strong, diverse communities, with churches, synagogues and mosques including fully in their community immigrants who once sought safety and welcome in our country. In solidarity with those immigrant neighbors who are part of us, we feel the pain of exclusion and the hope of a more humane nation. Congress must pass the Refugee Protection Act and end the dehumanization of our American identity."

Fast Facts on Refugees

- According to the <u>UNHCR</u>, in 2018 there were 70.8 million displaced people in the world, including 25.9 million refugees. Fewer than 1% of refugees will ever be resettled to a third country.
- Since the program's inception, the United States has set an average refugee admissions goal
 of 95,000 refugees and has resettled up to 200,000 refugees in certain years. In fiscal year
 2019, the United States welcomed only 30,000 refugees; this year the U.S. committed to
 resettling only 18,000.
- Refugees give back to their new communities. They start working as soon as possible, pay
 taxes, start businesses, and become active members of society. They are even running for
 elected office---and winning.
- <u>Communities</u> across the country support refugees. Faith leaders, educators, business leaders, and local, state, and national elected officials, as well as thousands of community members have <u>demonstrated</u> welcome for refugees in <u>every state</u>.

The Interfaith Immigration Coalition is made up of 55 national, faith-based organizations brought together across many theological traditions with a common call to seek just policies that lift up the God-given dignity of every individual. In partnership, we work to protect the rights, dignity, and safety of all refugees and migrants.

Follow us on Twitter @interfaithimm



International Refugee Assistance Project Statement for the Record: Indefinite Delays in Refugee Security Vetting

House Judiciary Committee Hearing on the Current Status of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)

February 26, 2020

Introduction

Refugees and Special Immigrant Visa applicants undergo <u>extensive security vetting</u>, including checks conducted by the Department of State, FBI, National Counter Terrorism Center, Customs and Border Protection, Department of Defense, and USCIS.

In October 2017, President Trump ordered already-lengthy security checks to be expanded for refugees of 11 nationalities and refugees seeking to "follow-to-join" their spouses and parents resettled in the United States. These changes suspended the cases of hundreds of refugees who were already cleared for travel. Many have still not been allowed to resettle. Since October 2017, timelines for security checks have stretched indefinitely and refugee arrivals have plummeted. This means that individuals are left waiting for years with no known timeline to reach safety and join their families in the United States.

Additional Checks for Eleven Nationalities

In October 2017, the Administration expanded checks for eleven nationalities subject to the Security Advisory Opinion (SAO) check requirement: Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Mali, North Korea, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, as well as some Palestinians. Previously, SAO checks were required for boys and men of those nationalities within an age range. In October 2017, the SAO checks were expanded to girls and women within that age range and from those nationalities. Combined with extensive backlogs in the SAO process, this change made an already years-long resettlement process into an indefinite one for refugees from those countries.

According to the State Department, refugee admissions from those countries have fallen by more than 94% since FY 2016—from 36,952 in FY 2016 to 1,893 in FY 2019.\(^1\) Among the groups who are now effectively shut off from U.S. resettlement are religious minorities from Iran, people fleeing persecution in Syria and Yemen, and Iraqis who worked for the U.S. Government.

1

¹ The State Department's data is attached below.



For example, more than 100,000 Iraqis with U.S. affiliations are waiting to be considered for resettlement, but in FY 2019 only fifty-one Iraqis with U.S. affiliations were admitted to the United States. FY 2020's refugee quota allots only <u>4.000 admissions</u> to Iraqis with U.S. affiliations, but through the first four months of FY 2020, though only 52 U.S.-affiliated Iraqi refugees were admitted, setting a pace at which the U.S. would admit fewer than 160 U.S.-affiliated Iraqi refugees this fiscal year.

Among those waiting for a decision to about their resettlement is the family of Yousif.² Yousif is an Iraqi translator who supported the U.S. military and U.S.-based NGOs; his family members applied to the Direct Access Program years ago, and they are still waiting.

Also among those waiting is Sam, an Iraqi who served as a combat translator alongside U.S. military personnel who continue to advocate for Sam's ability to live in safety. Facing immediate threats to his life, Sam fled to Egypt, where he lives without legal residency or the right to work and separated from his family.³

Additional Checks for Refugees Reuniting with Spouses and Parents in the United States

The October 2017 changes also expanded security checks in the refugee follow-to-join program, which allows refugees who were resettled in the United States to reunite in safety with their spouses and minor children. As with the changes applied to certain nationalities, this has turned a long process into an indefinite one.⁴ Follow-to-join refugee arrivals plummeted from 2,035 in FY 2015 to just 717 in FY 2018. In FY 2019, the backlog of pending follow-to-join refugee and asylum petitions increased by 59%, from 13,119 to 20,913.

Afkab Hussein is a Somali refugee who was resettled to the United States. By the time he was approved for travel, he had married and his wife was pregnant with their firstborn. Afkab traveled to the United States and applied for his wife and son to join him. They were approved to travel when the first Muslim Ban was implemented. Years later, he is still waiting to reunite with his wife and son in safety. He has met his son only once, on a brief trip to Kenya.⁵

Aminata Konate applied to reunite with her son in 2015, when he was a toddler. They were reunited in Idaho in 2019—the only refugee family of more than 40 assisted by a resettlement agency to be reunited since President Trump's inauguration.⁶

² Yousif's story is attached below.

³ Sam's story is attached below.

⁴ More on changes to security vetting on the refugee follow-to-join program is attached below.

⁵ Afkab's story is attached below.

⁶ Aminata's story is attached below.



Conclusion

Additional layers of security checks, without sustained efforts to eliminate delays and backlogs, undermine the humanitarian goals of the refugee program. Refugee families are separated, individuals living under threat remain in limbo, and U.S. wartime partners remain in danger, because of new layers of security vetting. All vetting partners in USRAP must coordinate efforts to improve efficiency in refugee security vetting.

About IRAP

The International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) provides comprehensive legal services to refugees and displaced persons. Since our establishment, we have provided legal assistance to thousands of displaced persons seeking legal pathways from conflict zones to safe countries. IRAP provides pro bono legal representation, legal advice, and expert referrals to refugees all over the world.

IRAP's goal is to ensure that available services and legal protections go to those who are most in need. Our clients include LGBTI individuals, religious minorities subject to targeted violence, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, children with medical emergencies for which local treatment is not available, and interpreters being hunted down by the Islamic State, militias, and the Taliban in retaliation for their work with the United States and NATO.

Exhibit 1

Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration Office of Admissions - Refugee Processing Center

Refugee Arrivals Fiscal Year

as of 30-September-2019
Nationality(s): Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Korea, North, Libya, Mali, Republic of South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Yemen (Sanaa)

Religion(s): All Religions

From: 01 Oct 2015

To: 30 Sep 2019

Nationality					Cumulative
Religion	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	Total
Egypt	21	6	1	4	35
Atheist	0	-	0	0	-
Christian	7	0	0	0	7
Coptic	4	0	0	0	4
Evangelical Christian	0	2	0	0	21
Moslem	4	Ø	-	ю	10
Moslem Suni	-	Ø	0	-	4
Orthodox	S	-	0	0	9
Protestant	0	-	0	0	-
Iran	3,750	2,577	41	199	6,567
Atheist	36	28	0	9	70
Bahai	501	376	5	13	895
to take	•	c		•	c

Data extracted from the Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS).
Data prior to 2002 was migrated into WRAPS from a legacy system therefore we are providing post-2002 data.
MX. -Atrinets by Nationality and Religion
Report Nun Date: 14-February-2020.

Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration Office of Admissions - Refugee Processing Center Refugee Arrivals Department of State

Fiscal Year as of 30-September-2019

From: 01 Oct 2015 To: 30 Sep 2019

Nationality					Cumulative
Religion	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	Total
Catholic	CI	10	0	2	14
Christian	1,710	666	17	56	2,782
Evangelical Christian	0	-	0	0	
Jehovah Witness	0	2	0	0	21
Jewish	72	43	-	2	118
Kaaka'i	32	27	0	21	61
Methodist	-	0	0	0	-
Moslem	25	19	-	19	64
Moslem Shiite	320	122	7	o	458
Moslem Suni	09	32	0	е	95
No Religion	117	127	-	37	282
Orthodox	8	Ø	0	0	S
Other Religion	12	18	0	е	33
Pentecostalist	2	18	0	0	23
Protestant	360	506	9	38	910
Sabeans-Mandean	263	141	6	80	415

Data extracted from the Worldwide Refuges Admissions Processing System (WRAPS).
Data prior to 2002 was migrated into WRAPS from a legacy system therefore we are providing post-2002 data.
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Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration Office of Admissions - Refugee Processing Center Department of State Refugee Arrivals

Fiscal Year

as of 30-September-2019

From: 01 Oct 2015 To: 30 Sep 2019

Nationality					Cumulative
Religion	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	Total
Seventh Day Adventist	2	0	0	0	•
Zoroastrian	226	104	0	-	33.
Iraq	9,880	6,886	140	465	17,37
Atheist	9	o	0	0	#
Baptist	-	0	0	0	
Catholic	929	603	12	15	1,306
Chaldean	107	40	0	ю	150
Christian	406	519	ю	51	976
Evangelical Christian	2	-	0	0	.,
Greek Orthodox	0	ю	0	0	.,
Jewish	-	0	0	0	•
Kaaka'i	4	80	-	0	₩
Moslem	276	159	18	123	576
Moslem Shiite	3,104	1,817	39	86	5,058
Moslem Suni	4,473	3,043	49	134	7,699
No Religion	7	-	0	0	

Data extracted from the Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS).
Data prior to 2002 was ingrated into WRAPS from a legacy system therefore we are providing post-2002 data.
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Report Run Date: 14-February-2020

Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration Office of Admissions - Refugee Processing Center Refugee Arrivals Fiscal Year as of 30-September-2019 Department of State

From: 01 Oct 2015 To: 30 Sep 2019

Nationality					Cumulative
Religion	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	Total
Orthodox	325	206	11	20	562
Other Religion	-	-	0	0	23
Protestant	7	-	0	0	80
Sabeans-Mandean	91	14	2	-	135
Yezidi	393	434	S	20	852
Korea, North	14	12	5	-	32
Atheist	0	-	0	0	-
Buddhist	0	0	-	0	-
Christian	9	80	4	0	18
No Religion	80	е	0	-	12
Libya	-	3	-	0	5
Moslem	0	0	-	0	-
Moslem Suni	-	е	0	0	4
Mali	9	9	0	ဧ	15
Atheist	0	-	0	0	-
Catholic	-	0	0	0	-

Data extracted from the Worldwide Refuges Admissions Processing System (WRAPS). Data prior to 2002 was migrated into WRAPS from a legacy system therefore we are providing post-2002 data. MX - Arrises by Nationality and Religion Residue. A refuge than the refuser of the Religion Report Run Date. 14-February-2020

Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration Office of Admissions - Refugee Processing Center Refugee Arrivals Department of State

Fiscal Year as of 30-September-2019

From: 01 Oct 2015 To: 30 Sep 2019

Nationality					Cumulative
Religion	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	Total
Christian	0	-	0	0	-
Moslem	2	4	0	23	#
Moslem Suni	0	0	0	-	-
Republic of South Sudan	189	176	13	42	420
Catholic	16	40	4	-	61
Christian	138	118	6	38	303
Evangelical Christian	0	-	0	0	-
Moslem	9	7	0	0	13
Orthodox	ß	0	0	0	5
Protestant	23	7	0	е	33
Seventh Day Adventist	-	е	0	0	4
Somalia	9,020	6,130	257	231	15,638
Christian	S	10	0	0	15
Moslem	8,532	5,786	236	188	14,742
Moslem Suni	480	332	21	43	876
No Religion	0	-	0	0	-

Data extracted from the Worldwide Refuges Admissions Processing System (WRAPS). Data prior to 2002 was migrated into WRAPS from a legacy system therefore we are providing post-2002 data. MX - Arrises by Nationality and Religion Residue. A refuge than the refuser of the Religion Report Run Date. 14-February-2020

Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration Office of Admissions - Refugee Processing Center Department of State Refugee Arrivals

as of 30-September-2019

Fiscal Year

From: 01 Oct 2015 To: 30 Sep 2019

Nationality					Cumulative
Religion	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	Total
Pentecostalist	2	0	0	0	Q
Seventh Day Adventist	-	0	0	0	
Unknown	0	F	0	0	
Sudan	1,458	086	76	382	2,896
Catholic	47	51	0	41	136
Christian	177	123	52	87	412
Evangelical Christian	O	60	0	2	15
Moslem	971	614	33	167	1,785
Moslem Suni	175	134	14	53	376
No Religion	9	0	0	0	9
Orthodox	14	21	-	0	17
Protestant	59	48	8	32	142
Syria	12,587	6,557	62	563	19,769
Catholic	16	20	21	1	36
Chaldean	0	-	0	0	
Christian	34	53	S.	25	117

Data extracted from the Worldwide Refuges Admissions Processing System (WRAPS).
Data prior to 2002 was ingraded into WRAPS from a legacy system therefore we are providing post-2002 data.
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Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration Office of Admissions - Refugee Processing Center Department of State Refugee Arrivals

as of 30-September-2019

Fiscal Year

From: 01 Oct 2015 To: 30 Sep 2019

Nationality					Cumulative
Religion	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	Total
Drew	0	3	0	0	
Greek Orthodox	-	-	23	-	
Jehovah Witness	4	0	0	61	
Moslem	103	144	0	31	27.
Moslem Shiite	20	12	0	0	ю
Moslem Suni	12,363	6,257	42	478	19,14
No Religion	-	61	0	0	
Orthodox	80	38	1	22	7.
Other Religion	80	0	0	е	-
Protestant	S	0	0	0	
Yezidi	24	26	0	0	ū
Yemen	26	21	2	8	ŝ
Christian	S	0	0	0	
Jewish	7	0	0	0	
Moslem	E	18	2	-	ñ
Moslem Suni	0	S	0	S	

Data extracted from the Worldwide Feltigee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS).
Data prior to 2002 was migrated into WRAPS from a legacy system therefore we are providing post-2002 data.
MX. Arrivals by Nationality and Feligion
Fepori fun Date. 14 February-2020

Department of State

Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration

Office of Admissions - Refugee Processing Center

Refugee Arrivals Fiscal Year

as of 30-September-2019

From: 01 Oct 2015

To: 30 Sep 2019

Nationality					Cumulative
Religion	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	Total
No Religion	0	1	0	0	1
Total	36,952	23,357	298	1.893	62.800

Data prior to 2002 was migrated into WRAPS from a legacy system therefore we are providing post-2002 data.

Based on the terms of a settlement in Doe et a. v. Trump et al., No. 17-0178 (W.D. Wash), certain refugee applicants that arrive in FY 2020 and any future fiscal years are counted toward the FY 2018 refugee admissions celling.

Data extracted from the Worldwide Petugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS).
Data port to 2002 was migrated into WRAPS from a legacy system therefore we are providing post-2002 data.
MX. Armats by Nationally and Religion
Report Run Date: 14-February-2020

Exhibit 2

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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https://www.wsi.com/articles/america-took-me-in-is-there-no-room-for-my-family-1507847224

OPINION | COMMENTARY

America Took Me In. Is There No Room for My Family?

As an Iraqi who helped U.S. troops, I wasn't safe. My mother, sister and brothers still aren't.

By Yousif al-Jabouri Oct. 12, 2017 6:27 pm ET

I was born 40 years ago in Baghdad. I am married with two children, an 11-year-old boy and an 8-year-old girl. We have been living in the U.S. since 2014.

I worked with the U.S. Army as an interpreter between 2004 and 2009 on Forward Operating Base Warrior in Kirkuk province. I began working for the U.S. because I believed in the honest efforts of the American soldiers to create a better Iraq, with freedom and democracy, and I believed that Iraqis must have a role in this operation.

As an interpreter, I often had to act like a soldier, only without a weapon. I was exposed to the same danger as the American soldiers, except that I was unarmed and vulnerable to attacks on my days off, when I was not under the unit's protection. I therefore had to live a double life, pretending to work for an oil company in northern Iraq to justify my absence to friends and relatives, whom I kept in the dark for security reasons.

During my employment with the U.S. Army, I received many threats from hostile militias, which continued even after I resigned in 2009, when I heard that the Iraqi government wanted access to the database of local interpreters. That was a scary thing, because the Iraqi government in late-2008 had been infiltrated by hostile entities.

I had seen what extremists do to people like me, accused of treason for working with the U.S. I knew these killers wouldn't spare my family if they managed to find me. Seeking a better life elsewhere for the sake of my children, I applied for and was granted a Special Immigrant Visa for those who had worked with U.S. forces.



PHOTO: ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

While we are grateful to live in safety now, I wish I could say the same for the family I had to leave behind. My mother, brothers and sister, still in Iraq, remain in danger. They are considered the close family of a traitor and militias will often go after the relatives to get to their main target. Because my family members share my last name, I am unable to use my real name in this public forum. It's too dangerous for them.

I thought I could bring my family to safety by applying on their behalf to the Direct Access Program for Iraqis with U.S. ties. This program allows eligible Iraqis to be resettled as refugees, but there is a backlog of around 60,000 individuals,

so I knew the process would take a long time. I did not realize that things could get even harder.

Last month President Trump decided to lower the refugee admissions ceiling to 45,000, the lowest number since the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980. Iraqis who are in danger due to their American connections have to go through the U.S. refugee resettlement process to reach safety, so the effects of this policy will slow down the process for all refugees in it, including my family. There are no other options for them from inside Iraq.

Only the most persecuted and vulnerable refugees will ever be considered for $% \left\{ 1\right\} =\left\{ 1\right$

https://www.wsj.com/articles/america-took-me-in-is-there-no-room-for-...

resettlement. Doesn't my family fall into that category? I understand the president wishes to protect Americans from terrorism, but my family members are the ones fleeing the terrorists. They are at great risk of being targeted, as they live in a country where Shiite militias and Islamic State are still influential and looking to make an example out of those who worked with the Americans. Reducing the number of resettlement spots directly puts more lives at risk.

I reached safety in a country that accepted me, my wife and our children. We were treated not as refugees but as citizens. I hope this country will do the same for the rest of my family and others who are in similar situations. Congress can take legislative action to remedy the situation, but the president has the authority to change his mind and increase refugee admissions to respond to an urgent need. He has shifted on policy before, and this would be an appropriate instance for him to change his mind again.

Protecting the persecuted is the right thing to do, and it's what America has always done. That is why I offered my help to Americans in Iraq. I hope the U.S. will continue to do the right thing and resettle refugees, like my family, who live in fear.

Yousif al-Jabouri is a pseudonym for a case worker at the International Refugee Assistance Project.

Appeared in the October 13, 2017, print edition.

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Exhibit 3

U.S. Soldiers Trusted Me With Their Lives. Why Won't the U.S. Government Trust Me?

refugeerights.org/us-soldiers-trusted-me-with-their-lives-why-wont-the-us-government-trust-me/



Sam* is an Iraqi refugee who worked as an interpreter for the U.S. military in Iraq. He has been living in hiding in Egypt since 2014. Sam is a pseudonym to protect his identity, as he is at constant risk of being deported back to Iraq, where his life is in danger.

My name is Sam and I am an Iraqi refugee in Egypt. I have lived here for almost four years, separated from my family and without the ability to work or become a legal resident. But I live here to protect myself and my family. I have no other choice. Back home in Iraq, I am in danger. I am targeted because I worked with U.S. forces as an interpreter.

During my work with the United States in 2003 and 2004, I fought alongside U.S. soldiers. They became my brothers: they relied on me and I relied on them. I am proud to say that I helped save the lives of many of my American brothers, as they would have done for me. They trusted me, and I trusted them and that the American government would keep its word when they promised to protect me against those who want to hurt me for my work with American forces.

To my great sadness, that trust has been betrayed. While the veterans I worked with continue to fight for my safety, the government's anti-refugee policies have left me stranded and in danger for my life.

I stopped my work with the U.S. after surviving my first assassination attempt. While walking home from the base after dark, a man shot at me, hitting me in the leg and permanently damaging my hearing. Unfortunately, attacks of this kind aren't unusual and many interpreters who couldn't get out of the country in time have been executed.

Then a grenade was thrown at my home and I decided it was time to move with my family to Baghdad. But still, I wasn't safe. I tried to work with the U.S. again but three weeks into the job I noticed I was being followed. Then, in 2014, members of a local militia attacked me in my own home and demanded that I join them. I was worried they would hurt my family, so I agreed to give them information, just to make them leave. They took my ID and took photos of me and said they would be back. As soon as I could, I left and fled to Egypt.

I can't go back to Iraq, because I am targeted by both Sunnis and Shiites. The Sunnis hate me because I worked with the U.S. government and the Shiites hunt me because I will not become an informant.

Here in Egypt, my situation is terrible. I could be deported back to Iraq any day and I cannot trust the government. Just the other day, I was stopped in the street by men who said they were police. They interrogated me, made me take them to my apartment, and took my phone and wallet. I knew they were gangsters, which is why I handed them everything. But now they know where I live and I am scared.

I applied for resettlement to the United States via a special program for Iraqis who helped the U.S. in Iraq. But three years and eight months later I am still here. The vetting process was long and complicated. I underwent several background checks by many agencies, and had commanding officers write me letters of recommendation.

One officer is prepared to provide me a home with his family in Dallas. Another is going to offer me a job in California. I know my brothers will take care of me, as I did for them. Of course, those officers care about the safety of Americans and I care about the safety of Americans, too. But even after all I have done, does America care about my safety and that of my family?

I had passed all the security checks and I had communities ready to welcome me, and last October I was finally told to get ready to travel. But my travel was canceled when the U.S. government decided to ban refugees from Iraq for at least ninety days and subject us to new restrictions whenever the ban was finally lifted. Now I am back in security checks.

When I heard I couldn't come to the United States after all, I was devastated and humiliated. I feel like I am being treated like a child, or worse, a criminal. I was told that maybe after three months the ban would be over and my application would be ready for resettlement again. Then in January they called and asked me to provide my addresses going back 10 years and additional contact information for extended family members. I am disappointed that I am being treated as though I am dishonest. I feel like I have

sacrificed a lot for the United States, but this process has me wondering whether my sacrifice was worth it. And I am not the only one who feels like America has broken its promise.

I urge the U.S. government to place the same trust in us that the soldiers had when their lives were on the line. Please don't forget us. Our own lives depend on it.

Exhibit 4

For Refugees in the Trump Era, a Tougher Path to the U.S.

🕥 pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/for-refugees-in-the-trump-era-a-tougher-path-to-the-u-s/



Somali refugees are pictured inside the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, one of the largest refugee camps in the world. (ONY KARUMBA/AFP/Getty Images)

January 23, 2018

by

<u>Leila Miller</u> Tow Journalism Fellow, FRONTLINE/Columbia Journalism School Fellowships Afkab Hussein takes advantage of his commutes as a truck driver in Columbus, Ohio to speak to his wife and son, both of whom live in Nairobi, Kenya. They talk every day, sometimes for more than three hours, and his wife tells him about the words their two-year-old, Abdullahi, has learned in their native Somali.

Hussein, 30, has never met his son in person. He has gotten to know him through video chats and the dozens of pictures his wife sends. He loves to make Abdullahi – who is fascinated by cars – laugh by showing him the inside of his truck. For his birthday in November, Hussein bought him a toddler's bicycle.

"When I see my son ... I feel good," he said. "I love him so much, my son and my wife."

Hussein came to the United States from Kenya, where he grew up in the Dadaab refugee camp alongside hundreds of thousands fleeing famine, drought and civil war in neighboring Somalia.

The resettlement process took him five years, but from Columbus, he is able to send money to his wife, Rhodo Abdirahman, that has helped her and Abdullahi live outside the camp.

"That was my dream," he said about coming to America in 2015. "It was a beautiful country, and it was safe and you could work."

Since arriving, Hussein has sought to bring Abdullahi and his wife to the U.S. through "follow to join," a family reunification program for refugees that brought about 2,000 family members into the country in 2015, according to Department of Homeland Security data. But in <u>October</u>, he hit a snag: The Trump administration suspended the program, putting Hussein's petition, and thousands like it, on hold.

Meanwhile, the clock never stopped ticking on key processing deadlines attached to these applications. While a federal court would block the administration's order in December, families like Hussein's could be forced to start over again if the security and medical checks required for them to travel to the U.S. expire before their applications are fully processed.

These processing times have already grown longer under tough new vetting requirements introduced by the Trump administration in October, according to resettlement agency officials. At the current pace, they say, the U.S. will fail to meet the ceiling of 45,000 refugees that President Donald Trump set in September. That limit is a nearly 60 percent cut from the 110,000 cap that President Barack Obama announced before leaving office, and the lowest since the modern refugee program was created in 1980.

The new cap reflects a dramatic shift in U.S. refugee policy that began a year ago this week with President Trump's <u>executive order</u> suspending the entry of all refugees into the country for 120 days, temporarily banning travelers from seven predominantly Muslim nations, and indefinitely halting the admission of Syrian refugees. While President Trump has said his policies are aimed at preventing terrorism, critics worry the new vetting standards risk costing many refugees their opportunity for safety from war, persecution and economic insecurity. During a global refugee crisis, they say, the administration is shutting the door on people seeking resettlement as a last resort.

"Are they saying, we really want to reach this goal of 45,000 and we're going to put these procedures into place and our resources into making sure this happens, or is this just another way to derail the whole process?" said Melanie Nezer, senior vice president of public affairs at HIAS, a Maryland-based resettlement agency. "It just seems like from everything that we're seeing, it's not being done with the intent of a secure program. It's being done with the intent of no program, or a very tiny program."

Legal challenges blocked the implementation of the president's original travel ban, but in June the Supreme Court <u>allowed</u> a modified ban to take partial effect, saying it should not be applied to foreign nationals with a "bona fide relationship with a person or entity in the United States," such as a family member.

When the modified refugee ban expired in October, the administration <u>ordered</u> that 11 countries — Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Mali, North Korea, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen — undergo a 90-day review to screen for possible security threats. This practically halted refugee admissions from those countries, which for each of the past three years have made up <u>more than 40 percent</u> of U.S. refugee admissions, according to a Reuters analysis. (A federal court injunction partially lifted this order in December. The government is currently appealing.)

Refugees already faced a stringent U.S. <u>vetting system</u> that included numerous layers of security checks across multiple federal agencies, higher level clearances for certain nationalities, and interviews with United Nations and State Department officials. As he restarted the refugee program in October, Trump instituted <u>"enhanced vetting capabilities"</u> including improving the mining of <u>social media data</u> and the collection of <u>10 years</u> of biographical information, rather than five.

The new procedures, combined with the 11-country review, helped lower refugee admissions by 77 percent between October and December 2017. During that time, the U.S. admitted about 5,000 refugees, down from more than 25,000 one year earlier, according to data from the State Department's <u>Refugee Processing Center</u>. Refugees who identify as Muslim typically make up more than 40 percent of arrivals, but during those three months only 14 percent of refugees were Muslim, a recent *Wall Street Journal analysis* found, noting that the number of Christian refugees had increased.

A spokesman for United States Citizenship and Immigration Services declined to comment on processing times or vetting procedures for refugees, but as a candidate and now as president, Trump has repeatedly argued for tougher screening. As a candidate, he famously promised to restrict Muslims from entering the U.S. Last summer, he tweeted that the U.S. "must suspend immigration from regions linked with terrorism until a proven vetting method is in place."

David Inserra, a policy analyst specializing in homeland security issues at the conservative Heritage Foundation, said he supported "any way in which we can improve the vetting procedure."

"In asking for certain documents or looking for people who can vet better, that's not necessarily a bad thing as long as we're still taking those folks," he said.

But leaders of refugee resettlement agencies, which work with hundreds of local offices to help new refugees integrate, question the value of tougher vetting. They argue that the admission process was already tightly controlled and that refugees who have had to flee their homes could struggle to provide the documentation needed to meet the new requirements.

Administration policies, these leaders say, have also made it harder to do the day-to-day work of resettlement. The lower refugee ceiling, they note, has forced resettlement agencies to downsize, closing offices and laying off staff.

Erol Kekic, the head of Church World Service's immigration and refugee program, said that the amount of money wasted by resettlement offices preparing for refugees that never come is in the "tens of thousands of dollars if not in hundreds of thousands of dollars." Planning for refugees, he said, has turned into a game of trying to predict the arrival of nationalities that are not subject to extra security review or that travel through windows created by court injunctions.

"It has been a process of navigating a very difficult set of circumstances and looking at a crystal ball that is quite murky," said Kekic, whose organization announced plans last March to lay off over 500 employees.

Refugee processing has also been slowed by reductions in infrastructure abroad, according to resettlement officials who say that Homeland Security officials are conducting fewer interviews of refugees overseas. An October <u>report</u> submitted to Congress on refugee admissions for fiscal year 2018 said that the Department of Homeland Security would prioritize asylum applications from those already in the U.S. over overseas refugee processing in order to address the asylum backlog.

"We're entering into a new period where we don't know how long it will take people to go through the entire vetting process," said Lee Williams, the Vice President of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, a resettlement agency. "It is a real balancing act to get all these various security checks and their health checks and everything else to align."

Chris Opila, a former caseworker at Resettlement Support Center Africa, a center based in Nairobi that works with the State Department to process refugees for resettlement, explained that the longer wait times drag out, the more applications can become complicated. For example, during longer wait times, refugees may get married and have children, adding people to their cases.

"You get a collection of messy cases that increasingly require more institutional resources to clean them up," said Opila.

This had been one of Hussein's concerns when applying for resettlement. He was well into the process before he got married in 2014, and had feared that adding his wife to his case could extend their wait by years.

"That was a good decision for both of us because I would still be in a refugee camp if we put a case together," he said.

Hussein's wife and son, initially approved for resettlement by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services in June 2016, are currently waiting for a security clearance. Their medical examinations, which have already expired once, are due to expire again this week.

Exhibit 5

Why Refugee Families Cannot Reunite

refugeerights.org/why-refugee-families-cannot-reunite/



<u>Afkab</u>, a Somali refugee who was resettled in the United States in 2015, has waited for more than four years to live with his family in safety. Afkab's wife was pregnant with their first-born when Afkab was resettled, and Afkab has met his son only once on a short visit to Kenya.

Congress created a special process so that refugees like Afkab, who are already in the United States, could be reunited with their spouses and young children (who often have been separated from them when the family had to flee a dangerous situation). This process is called "follow-to-join" or the I-730 process-based on the form a family files to participate. Yet, like other humanitarian programs, the follow-to-join refugee process has seen indefinite delays and plummeting arrivals since January 2017, in no small part because of secretive changes that the Trump Administration has made to the process. Through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, IRAP obtained hundreds of email records outlining changes to the follow-to-join refugee process, which provide detailed insight into the reasons why refugee families continue to be separated—even though U.S. immigration law provides a pathway to reunite them.

At the root of follow-to-join refugee delays is the second Muslim Ban Executive Order 13,780, signed on March 16, 2017, which suspended all refugee processing while the Administration conducted a review of the refugee program. Although IRAP and other

advocates successfully obtained a court order that prevented the Administration from implementing some parts of the March 2017 Executive Order, the Administration continued its review. It concluded in October 2017 that two additional security checks should be required in the follow-to-join refugee application process: the Interagency Check and the Enhanced Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate Review (EFR). EFR includes a social media check that can take a long time and which <u>USCIS is woefully under-equipped to perform</u>.

Then, at the conclusion of the March 2017 Executive Order's review period in October 2017, a joint <u>agency memorandum</u> stated that a further suspension and review of certain refugee applications was necessary. Importantly, this memorandum suspended the follow-to-join refugee process altogether. IRAP again went to court and <u>obtained an injunction</u> against this suspension. But even after the court agreed that the agency's suspension of the follow-to-join refugee process was unlawful, there was very little movement in the cases of follow-to-join refugees. Follow-to-join refugee arrivals plummeted from 2,035 in fiscal year 2015 to just 717 in fiscal year 2018. In fiscal year 2019, the backlog of pending follow-to-join refugee and asylum petitions <u>increased by 59%</u>, from 13,119 to 20,913.

USCIS made several changes that caused the follow-to-join refugee application process to grind to a near-halt. The <u>documents obtained through the FOIA request</u> showed that:

- 1. USCIS transferred processing of follow-to-join refugee applications from one unit (its Service Center Operations Directorate) to another (its International Adjudications Support Branch, or IASB). This was done because IASB already had the ability to initiate the required security checks. Both units had to make adjustments to their databases to facilitate the transfer. The physical files then had to be mailed to IASB, which had to complete manual data entry for each individual file.
- 2. Before USCIS restarted processing, USCIS required additional biographic data from applicants to run the newly-required security checks. USCIS required follow-to-join refugee applicants to complete an additional form, Form I-590, alongside the initial I-730 petition. Because applicants who had already applied had not submitted an I-590, USCIS issued a Request for Evidence to each follow-to-join refugee applicant who was already pending in the process. USCIS only initiates security checks after mailing the request with the I-590 and after applicants returned the I-590.
- 3. USCIS began requesting the Interagency Check and the Enhanced FDNS Review checks only after all physical files had been manually entered into the IASB database, issuing a Request for Evidence, and receiving the I-590 from each applicant. USCIS further decided not to allow follow-to-join refugee beneficiaries to complete their interviews until those security checks were completed. USCIS did not have an anticipated timeframe to complete the security checks. USCIS often takes years to schedule refugee interviews.

The cumulative effect of these changes has been to prolong delays in the follow-to-join

refugee process, preventing refugee families from reuniting in safety. Although IRAP has recently <u>entered into a settlement</u> with the government to reunite people like Afkab with their families by ensuring that USCIS processes their applications in a reasonable amount of time, this solution helps only some individuals with pending follow-to-join refugee applications. Many others have provided all evidence that the government has requested and have waited patiently for years while yearning to see their loved ones. USCIS must take steps to reduce unnecessary and duplicative security checks and to provide sufficient staff to process applications efficiently. Congress must demand that USCIS reduce the follow-to-join backlog and monitor the agency's progress in doing so.

Exhibit 6

 $https://www.idahopress.com/news/local/the-other-family-separation-problem-you-haven-t-heard-about/article_49dadf5f-2b73-5422-b5ce-926fc1b6a47f.html\\$

The other family separation problem you haven't heard about

By NICOLE FOY nfoy@idahopress.com Mar 10, 2019



Aminata Konate is the first Boise refugee that has been reunited with her family since 2016. Aminata hugs her son, Patient, 9, after being separated since he was a toddler, in the Boise Airport on March 6.

RILEY BUNCH/IDAHO PRESS



Refugee video

 ${\it BOISE-Late}~We dnesday~night,~Aminata~Konate~sprinted~through~a~crowd~of~travelers~at~the~Boise~Airport,~searching~for~a~little~boy~she~hadn't~seen~in~many~years.$

When she found him, she burst into tears.

ASHLEY MILLER/IDAHO PRESS Mar 9, 2019

Administrative processing and "extreme vetting"

The U.S. State
Department's website is vague about what it means for a case to be in administrative processing.

"Some visa applications require further administrative processing, which takes additional time after the visa applicant's interview by a consular officer," the website says. "When administrative processing is required, the timing will vary based on individual circumstances of each case."

In November 2017, White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders explained "extreme vetting" included enhanced collection and review of biometric and biographic data, stricter scrutiny and review from agencies like Customs and Border Patrol,

"I'm lucky," said Aminata, a refugee from Mali. "That's why my son

Aminata is the first Boise refugee the International Rescue
Committee has helped reunite with her family through the I-730
Refugee/Asylee relative petition since President Trump took office.
She was separated from her son Patient, now 9, when he was just a toddler. He's been living in Cameroon while Aminata, who arrived in Idaho in 2015, tried everything to get him to the United States.

Julianne Tzul, the executive director of the International Rescue Committee in Boise, said her office is thrilled about Patient's arrival

"We've kind of been walking alongside these families who have been aching for their loved ones for so long," Tzul said.

But other Boise refugee families aren't so lucky.

"(T)here are still a lot of people whose kitchen tables have empty chairs around them, who are trying to parent from overseas, who are trying to get by without their spouses," Tzul said. "I hope this is the beginning of many more coming. But I'm still very cautious that we'll see that."

In the last few months, the Idaho Press has reviewed the cases of several refugee families who are still waiting for their family members to join them in the Treasure Valley. Caseworkers at the IRC's Boise office said since 2016, only Aminata's family reunification case has progressed to an approved flight.

The IRC has more than 40 pending cases like this in Idaho.

The families' cases differ by continents and circumstances, but all fled conflicts that forced them to leave family behind. Refugees who were approved to resettle in places like Boise were told they could help their relatives apply for a special refugee visa meant to reunify separated families.

But instead of approved visas and arrival dates, they have received a version of the same letter, telling them their case is still processing. For several local refugee families, their application for refugee status was approved three to four years ago. Yet, for reasons that aren't clear to them or their caseworkers, they haven't

collecting more information from partner intelligence agencies in foreign countries, more documentation and verification requirements, and "improved intelligence streams," according to CBS News.

been approved for visas.

"We are still (processing cases)," said Rabiou Manzo, immigration services supervisor at the IRC. "But we are just warning people that there is going to be a lot of waiting."

DIP IN ARRIVALS

Under the I-730 Refugee/Asylee Relative petition, recent refugees or asylees can apply to have their spouses or unmarried children join them in the United States, according to the U.S. State Department.

The number of refugees admitted to the country each year has decreased since the Trump administration added a 45,000 cap to refugee admissions for fiscal year 2018. Just 22,491 refugees were resettled in the U.S. that year, compared to 84,994 two years prior, the last year of the Obama administration. Trump recently announced a 30,000 cap for this fiscal year.

The drop in refugee arrivals hit Boise hard in recent years. World Relief closed its Boise office and laid off more than 140 staff nationally in February 2017, citing the Trump Administration's refugee caps as the direct cause.

Despite refugees from several countries trickling into Boise, caseworkers say family reunification cases have almost stalled. Staff at the International Rescue Committee, in particular, cite the "extreme vetting" added to the already lengthy application process for refugees.

"We have several approved I-730 cases that are undergoing mandatory administrative review," Manzo said. "These cases were approved between 2015 and 2016. I suspect there is a connection to the enhanced protocols for refugees that were implemented several months ago."

Refugees go through intense security screenings led by several U.S. departments, including Homeland Security, Defense, State, Health and Human Services, the FBI and the intelligence community. An enhanced vetting process was added after Trump's January 2017 executive order briefly suspending refugee resettlement.

Two years later, what that means for individual cases is still unclear — even for caseworkers.

"I don't think it's every refugee," Manzo said. "I really don't know if it's some countries or every country."

Yasmin Aguilar, the immigration specialist at the Agency for New Americans, also is unsure. Their agency — the only other refugee resettlement agency in Boise — have only two pending I-730 cases right now. It causes so much anxiety and uncertainty for the families, Aguilar said, it would almost be better if their applications were denied outright.

"Their cases are on hold, stuck in a black box where nobody sees it," Aguilar said. "And they're stuck in those refugee camps."

SEPARATED FAMILIES IN BOISE

The stories of two Boise refugee families, in particular, highlight the toll the stalled applications can take on people who have already escaped traumatic situations.

Hagath Mwamba fled violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2003. Bands of Congolese soldiers and civilians were murdering Rwandans, mostly refugees who fled to DRC during the genocide and its violent aftermath.

Hagath, who is from DRC, had married a Rwandan refugee woman over the objections of family and friends. Their daughter, Ornelie, was almost 2 years old when men arrived at his door.

"I was trying to hide my wife so they could not kill her," Hagath said. "But they found her one day in my house."

The men murdered his wife in front of him, Hagath said, and searched the house for his daughter, whom Hagath had hidden with friends that day. Angry and determined to kill his daughter, too, the men gave Hagath an ultimatum.

"We'll give you two hours," they told Hagath. "But if you don't show up with your baby, we're going to kill you."

Hagath ran to pick up his daughter, planning to cross the border and flee the country that night. But his friends stopped him,

warning that any checkpoint guard would be able to tell his daughter was Rwandan. Then, they both would be killed.

Instead, Hagath returned to his house, grabbing a picture of his daughter off the wall, and fled to Zambia, then Zimbabwe alone.

Hagath gazed at the faded photo during a February interview with the Idaho Press and described the little girl he left. For years, the photo was the only thing he had of his daughter. He lost contact with the friend and had no idea if the daughter he tried to save

Hagath remarried, had children and came to the United States as a refugee in 2011. But he never forgot about Ornelie. After he arrived in Boise, he approached the Red Cross with his story, asking if they could help him find his friend, and news of his daughter. Eventually, the Red Cross found his friends, who had good news: Ornelie was alive and safe.

Hagath friends had hidden Ornelie well. So well, in fact, that she was a teenager before she learned they weren't her parents and Hagath was her father.

When Hagath's friends decided to move from DRC to South Africa, they left her in the Tongogara Refugee Camp near Chipinge, Zimbabwe, assuming she would be reunited with her father in America soon. Hagath, who filed a I-730 Refugee/Asylee Relative petition for Ornelie in 2016, was told he would be reunited with his daughter in less than a year.

That was three years ago. Ornelie, who just turned 18, is still in Zimbabwe

"She's a girl, she's alone," Hagath said. "It's very bad."

THE KHUDHAIR FAMILY

In a small apartment across Boise, another family spends the days waiting.

Wejdan Khudhair is tired of hearing her husband's voice over the phone. Every day as she shops, cleans the house and parents with him on the other line, her hope of hearing him say her name in person wanes. Wejdan's husband, Natted, who still lives in

Baghdad, Iraq, hasn't seen his family for almost three years.

Wejdan spends hours talking to Natteq via video chat on her phone. He goes to the grocery store with her, talks with her as she cooks and watches their children Mustafa, 3, and Om Albanin, 8, play in the living room together.

The constant video-chatting is a coping mechanism and an attempt to keep Natteq involved in family life. It's an attempt that's painful, three years after Wejdan and the kids left him in the airport in Baghdad. Om Albanin misses her father, pestering both her parents about when he is coming to the U.S.

Wejdan said her decision to come to the United States without her husband was one of the most difficult she ever made. She applied for refugee status with her mother in 2006, before she was married. She met and married Natteq in 2009, and Om Albanin was born a year later. When her application was approved, she got permission for her two children to come with her, but not her husband. Distraught over the decision, she missed several travel dates before the International Office of Migration warned her she would lose her chance entirely.

In the end, she left to give her children a safer, better future. She left Iraq in August 2016. Despite the pain of separation, she wouldn't choose differently.

"America gives me safety and a future," Wejdan said. "I can't get that in my country."

TOLL OF LONG SEPARATIONS

Many refugees struggle to set up a new life in the United States, which can be far more expensive and complicated than life in their home countries. That's why they seek help at places like the International Rescue Committee, whether for job placement, home furnishings, or English classes. But for women like Wejdan, who came without their husbands, the financial stress is palpable. Wejdan studied business in Iraq but now works in housekeeping at the Wyndham Garden Boise Airport hotel at a salary that barely keeps her family afloat.

"To live with a single income here, it's almost impossible," Manzo,

with the IRC, said. "The person is always financially stressed and that leads to a lot of things."

For others, the lengthening separation prolongs the sharing of difficult truths. It was hard enough for Hagath's daughter to learn he was her father over the phone, before being left alone in a refugee camp. He hasn't been able to bring himself to tell her the truth about her mother's death. She thinks she died from an unspecified illness — although Hagath suspects she knows that's not the whole story.

"Just to have her presence in this house," Hagath said. "Everything will be OK."

Cases like Wejdan's and Hagath's have stalled for so long that IRC caseworkers are running out of options. Hagath's daughter finally had an interview at the embassy in Zimbabwe this month, which they think went very well. Hagath thinks Ornelie could have a clear background check and flight date within weeks.

But the Khudhairs only have form emails from the U.S. embassy in Baghdad as updates.

"At this time, your case is still in administrative processing, which we must conclude before we can decide to issue your visa," reads the most recent automated letter the Khudhairs received on Jan. 30 from the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. "Unfortunately, because of the different circumstances involved in each case, we cannot estimate how long this processing stage will take."

Manzo said he finally told Wejdan to ask U.S. Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, for answers or help.

Wejdan hasn't reached out to anyone from Idaho's congressional delegation or their staff yet. Her days are consumed by long hours cleaning, taking care of her children, then hours on the phone with her husband

But if she does get an appointment, she knows what she'll say.

"Why is it this long time? If there is anything you can do for me, please," Wejdan said. "It's not fair that a family lives separately, with one in another country."

Nicole Foy covers Canyon County and Hispanic affairs. You can reach her at 208-465-8107 and follow her on Twitter @nicoleMfoy

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8 of 8



Written statement for the record The International Rescue Committee

Submitted to the U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship

Hearing on the Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program

February 27, 2020

Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren, Vice Chairwoman Pramila Jayapal, Ranking Member Ken Buck, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement for the record regarding the state of the U.S. refugee resettlement program.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) helps people whose lives and livelihoods have been shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover, and regain control of their future. Working in over 40 countries overseas and in 25 cities across the United States, the IRC knows well the reasons people flee, what they experience in countries of first refuge, and the safety and security they find when they have the opportunity to rebuild their lives in new communities. In the United States, the IRC resettles refugees and provides services to promote self-reliance and the social and economic integration of refugees, asylees, victims of human trafficking and other vulnerable immigrants.

Today, we find ourselves amidst a global refugee crisis, driven by unresolved, increasingly violent conflict. The average length of conflict now stretches to 37 years, a function of change from interstate wars between states to intrastate conflicts between a proliferation of non-state and proxy actors. Conflicts are also increasingly violent, forcing civilians to flee for safety. In 2019, there were 41 active, highly violent conflicts globally—up from 36 at the beginning of 2018. Accordingly, as of 2018, a record 70.8 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations. 41.3 million of these are people internally displaced in their home country, and 25.9 million are refugees—people who have crossed borders to seek safety in another country.

Given the length of conflicts, refugees are displaced for increasing periods of time: as of 2018, 78 percent of refugees were displaced for five or more consecutive years in a row in a neighboring country, and of this group, more than one third were in a situation lasting 20 years or more.⁴ And although the headlines

¹ Bennett, Christina. Time to let go: remaking humanitarian action for the modern era. Humanitarian Policy Group. April 2016. https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10422.pdf (Accessed on February 20, 2020).

Global Humanitarian Overview 2020. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. December 2019. https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHO-2020-v8.7%2006122019%202pm.pdf (Accessed February 25, 2020).

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Figures at a diame. The Grindages general rebruary 25, 2020).

Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018. The UN Refugee Agency. June 20, 2019. Page 22. https://www.unhcr.org/5d08d7ee7.pdf (Accessed on February 20, 2020)

are dominated by people seeking safety in Europe or the United States, the vast majority of refugees—84 percent—are hosted in low- and middle-income countries neighboring conflict.⁵ In fact, as of 2016, 10 countries, with just 2.5 percent of global GDP, hosted over half of all refugees.

Yet, in this time of overwhelming global need, pathways to safety are limited and often dangerous. Given unmitigated conflict, the options for refugees to make a safe, voluntary, and dignified return home are few, with less than three percent of refugees returning home in 2018.⁷ Enduring barriers to integration in major refugee-hosting countries mean that few refugees can rebuild their lives and achieve selfsufficiency in host countries, and millions are left in uncertain limbo. Refugee children are five times less likely to attend school than other children in the countries in which they are displaced, risking a lost generation.8 Nearly half of refugee-hosting countries have a complete bar to employment of refugees, and many of those that allow refugees to work impose significant de facto barriers to employment, such as strict encampment policies limiting freedom of movement or exorbitant permit fees. 9 With limited permanent solutions, resettlement is the solution of last resort available to less than one percent of the world's refugees who are both at risk in their hot country and unable to safely return home.

But even this limited option is becoming increasingly scarce. Led by the United States' retreat from resettlement, global resettlement slots are down 50 percent, from 189,300 in 2016 to 102,800 in 2017 and just 92,400 refugees in 2018, according to government statistics reported to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). In 2019, UNHCR-facilitated resettlement met just 5 percent of global resettlement needs. 10 Without renewed U.S. leadership, the gap between resettlement needs and spaces will only continue to

While the U.S. has a long tradition of being the global leader in refugee protection and offering refuge to those fleeing persecution and war, this legacy is under threat. Since the establishment of the modern-day refugee resettlement program in 1980, presidents have set an average annual refugee admissions ceiling of 95,000 and resettled an average of 80,000 refugees per year. And, during times of great global need, previous administrations were responsive: President Ronald Reagan set an admissions ceiling of 140,000 for FY82 and allocated 96,000 resettlement slots¹¹ within that ceiling for Indochinese refugees fleeing violence in Southeast Asia, and President George H. W. Bush set a ceiling of 142,000 for FY93 in response to emerging needs from the Bosnian War. 12

In stark contrast, President Trump has cut annual refugee admissions ceilings by more than 80 percent despite growing global needs: from 110,000 to 50,000 in FY17, 45,000 in FY18, 30,000 in FY19 and now 18,000 in FY20. These plummeting figures are not just numbers. They represent individuals in need of refuge for whom safe haven in the U.S. is no longer an option or an increasingly distant possibility

For some, the Trump administration's policies to shut the door on refugees have been the equivalent of a death sentence. Take, for example, Mr. Seid Moradi—a 54-year old refugee fleeing religious persecution

Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018. The UN Refugee Agency. June 20, 2019. Page 2. https://www.unhcr.org/5d08d7ee7.pdf (Accessed on February 20, 2020)
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https://asylumaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/FINAL_Global-Refugee-Work-Rights-Report-2014

February 26, 2020).

10 Less than 5 percent of global refugee resettlement needs met last year. The UN Refugee Agency. February 19, 2019.

11 Less than 5 percent of global refugee resettlement needs met last year. The UN Refugee Agency. February 19, 2019.

12 Less than 5 percent of global refugee resettlement needs met last year. The UN Refugee Agency. February 19, 2019.

13 Less than 5 percent of global refugee resettlement needs met last year. The UN Refugee Agency. February 19, 2019.

14 Less than 5 percent of global refugee resettlement needs met last year. The UN Refugee Agency. February 19, 2019.

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¹² Dyssegaard Kallick, David and Silva Mathema. Refugee Integration in the United States. Center for American Progress. June 2016. Page 6. https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/15112912/refugeeintegration.pdf (Accessed on February 20, 2020)

in Iran who was approved for resettlement to the U.S. but whose travel was prevented by the Trump administration's refugee ban. As a result, Mr. Moradi was kept from reunifying with his family and receiving life-saving surgery. He passed away after waiting an additional 15 months to be resettled to the United States. 13 Unfortunately, Mr. Moradi's story is not unique. As a result of the Trump administration's policies, countless families languish in limbo, waiting for safety and reunification with loved ones.

The drastic reduction in refugee resettlement is also threatening the sustainability of critical services refugees and other vulnerable groups receive once in the United States. Since 2016, over 100 refugee resettlement offices have had no choice but to close their doors or suspend resettlement services. The steady weakening of resettlement program infrastructure is harmful to those already in the United States seeking to rebuild their lives and give back to their community. This infrastructure, built from the strong support of local communities across the U.S., could take years to rebuild.

Moreover, for cities and communities in demographic decline, the reduction in welcoming refugees means jobs in critical industries are going unfilled. 14 While resettling refugees is first and foremost a humanitarian imperative, the reality is that refugee resettlement is good for America. The rate of entrepreneurship among refugees is nearly 50 percent higher than among U.S.-born populations: in 2015, 181,000 refugee entrepreneurs brought in \$4.6 billion in business income. ¹⁵ An unpublished 2017 study by the Department of Health and Human Services found that refugees contributed \$63 billion in revenue over the past decade.16

This year, in addition to decreasing the *number* of refugees admitted to the U.S. annually, the Trump administration has made deep changes to the composition of those admitted. The administration removed regional allocations for refugee admissions, moving the USRAP yet another step away from the program established by Congress four decades ago. Regional allocations within the refugee admissions ceiling have historically aligned with populations in greatest need of resettlement and of humanitarian concern or national interest to the United States. The administration replaced regional allocations with four new allocations based entirely on groups of "special interest" to the U.S. In doing so, the administration eliminated the needs-based component of the refugee program.

These allocation categories, combined with the historically low refugee admissions ceiling, all but lock out some of the largest populations in need—notably refugees from the Middle East and from Africa. These two regions alone account for over 90 percent of the 1.4 million refugees globally in need of resettlement, with Syria alone accounting for 40 percent of all needs. Comparing admissions during the same fourmonth period of FY16 and FY20 shows that admissions of refugees from Africa and the Middle East have fallen 89 percent and 74 percent respectively.

To make matters worse, the new allocation categories all but guarantee that the administration will be unable to resettle all 18,000 refugees in FY20. The resettlement of refugees fleeing religious persecution and refugees in the "other" allocation 17 is on pace to cap out at 5,000 and 7,500 respectively. But, admissions in the other two allocations are lagging far behind. Nearly 40 percent through the fiscal year, admissions of Iraqis who supported U.S. missions abroad (Iraqi P-2s) are just 1 percent towards their allocation of 4,000, despite over 100,000 in need of resettlement. Admissions of Central Americans are just 10 percent towards their allocation of 1,500.

¹³ A family broken after the promise of refuge. The International Rescue Committee. April 11, 2019.

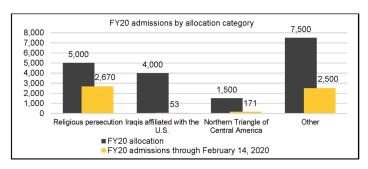
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https://iresearch.newamericaneconomy.org/report/from-struggle-to-resilience-the-economic-impact-of-refugees-in-america/ (Accessed on February 20, 2020).

Rejected Report Shows Revenue Brought In by Refugees. The New York Times. September 19, 2017.

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/09/19/us/politics/document-Refugue-Report.html (Accessed on February 20, 2020).

17 The "other" allocation consists of 7,500 slots for refugees who are referred by a U.S. embassy; refugees who qualify for family reunification, refugees in Australia, Nauru, or Papua New Guinea who benefit from an arrangement between the U.S. and Australia; and refugees who were approved for resettlement and ready to travel to the U.S. as of September 30, 2019.



If admissions continue at this pace, the U.S. will resettle just 13,200 refugees, less than three-fourths of the 18,000 ceiling. The administration must significantly increase processing of Central American and Iraqi refugees or proactively take steps to ensure flexibility across the allocation categories in order to meet the ceiling. This is a goal well within reach—last year, the U.S. resettled 30,000 refugees and historic average admissions are 80,000 annually. With so few resettlement spaces available and over 1.4 million refugees in need of resettlement, no slot should go unfilled.

The U.S. retreat from resettlement has profound implications for America's foreign policy, national security interests, and global stability. The U.S. has often leveraged its refugee resettlement program, combined with humanitarian assistance, to encourage host countries to continue providing safe haven, as well as access to certain rights, to significantly larger populations of displaced people. When the U.S. provides concrete support to its allies, it helps to ensure regional stability in areas and stabilize key strategic allies in countries disproportionately affected by forced displacement, like Jordan, Turkey and Uganda. In the absence of U.S. leadership, the risk is forced returns that not only send refugees back to dangerous conditions, but also have the potential to further destabilize countries struggling with ongoing violence and insecurity. Of the 15 largest refugee returns since 1991, approximately one-third were followed by renewed fighting within a couple of years. ¹⁸

Today, the U.S. has lost leverage and credibility to hold other countries accountable to upholding their humanitarian obligations. Take, for example, the ongoing crisis in Syria, which remains the largest displacement crisis in the world with over half of Syrians displaced. In 2020, this humanitarian crisis has only deteriorated further: violence has displaced 948,000 from Idlib province since December, over 500,000 of them children. The humanitarian response is complicated by the violence and constraints on reaching populations in need.

Syria's neighbors in the region, namely Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq, have responded with generosity by hosting 5.6 million Syrian refugees. These major refugee-hosting countries require greater support from the international community given the scale and protracted nature of the Syrian crisis. Conditions in many areas of Syria are not yet suitable for these populations to safely and sustainably return home, particularly given active conflict and reduced humanitarian access. ¹⁹ U.S. humanitarian leadership is therefore more critical than ever to promote pathways to protection for Syrians, advocate for refugee-friendly policies in host countries and prevent involuntary or uninformed returns to Syria that are not in line with international humanitarian law. Otherwise, the consequences will be devastating for Syrians and for regional stability.

¹⁸ Forcibly Displaced: Toward a Development Approach Supporting Refugees, the Internally Displaced, and Their Hosts. World Bank Group. 2017. Page 108. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/25016/9781464809385.pdf (Accessed February. 2020.)

February 20, 2020.)

19 Emergency Watchlist 2020. The International Rescue Committee. January 2020. https://www.rescue.org/resource/irc-emergency-watchlist-2020 (Accessed February 20, 2020).

The implications of the U.S. retreat from resettlement are similarly dire for U.S. national security. For tens of thousands of Iraqis and Afghans who have served alongside the U.S. military as interpreters, security details, and intelligence experts, resettlement fulfills America's commitment to leave no one behind. Many of these individuals face threats to their life as a result of their critical support to the United States. No more than 500 Iraqi P-2s were admitted in FY19, in contrast to over 5,100 in FY16. Admission of Afghan Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) recipients dropped 53 percent over the same period. In response to these declines, in 2019, 27 of the nation's most distinguished retired military officers called the U.S. resettlement program a "critical lifeline" for those who served alongside U.S. troops and implored the administration to "protect this vital program and ensure that the next refugee admissions goal is commensurate with global resettlement needs" (see Appendix I). ²⁰ The abdication of responsibility on the part of the Trump administration threatens the national security interests of the U.S., the success of ongoing missions, and the safety of U.S. troops.

These harmful policy changes, amounting to the dismantling of the refugee resettlement program, come at a time when support for welcoming refugees is at an all-time high. Public opinion polling by Pew confirms the commitment to welcoming refugees that the IRC sees in communities across the country: 73 percent of Americans believe taking in refugees escaping war and violence is an important goal, an increase from 61 percent in 2016.²¹ This shift is driven in large part by a surge in support among Republicans, the majority of whom—58 percent—support U.S. refugee resettlement, up 18 percent from 2016. While the administration is turning a blind eye to this resounding support, state and local officials are stepping up. In response to President Trump's executive order requiring states and localities to affirmatively consent to refugee resettlement (Executive Order 13888), 43 governors, including 19 Republicans, and over 100 counties across the nation issued consent. This overwhelmingly supportive response marks a sea change from 2015, when 31 governors across the nation sought to halt admission of Syrian refugees.

As the 40th anniversary of the creation of the modern-day refugee admissions program approaches, it has never been more critical for Congress to ensure the U.S. resumes its leadership in refugee protection. Congress passed the 1980 Refugee Act with near unanimous bipartisan support to create a regularized and systematic process for refugee admissions based on humanitarian need and U.S. interests. Today, the drastic and sudden drop in resettlement —combined with the elimination of the needs-based component of the program—runs counter to congressional intent and the law.

At a time of great global need, it is incumbent upon Congress to step in and restore America's legacy of refugee protection through oversight and legislation. In order to meet the FY20 refugee admissions ceiling, the IRC urges Congress to conduct oversight into the pace of admissions across allocation categories and the administration's plans to meet the 18,000 ceiling. Congress should also ask the administration to invest the necessary resources to meet all allocations or proactively take steps to ensure flexibility across these allocations.

In order to restore and strengthen the refugee admissions program, Congress should once again step in, just as it did in 1980 to reestablish regular and predictable refugee admissions. In the face of the dismantling of the refugee admissions program, the IRC urges Congress to pass legislation that sets a minimum refugee admissions level in accordance with global need and U.S. interests. The IRC strongly supports the four pieces of legislation in Congress that establish such a minimum ceiling: the Guaranteed Refugee Admissions Ceiling Enhancement (GRACE) Act, the Refugee Protection Act (RPA), the Lady Liberty Act, and the New Deal for New Americans. Just as the 1980 Refugee Act was passed with resounding bipartisan support, we urge Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle to support these critical pieces of legislation.

²⁰ Letter to President Donald Trump from 27 retired military leaders. September 3, 2019. Published online by the New York Times. https://int.nyt.com/data/documenthelper/1694-generals-letter-refugee/46/652adbbef5a13c2c0/optimized/full.pdf#page=1 (Accessed February 20, 2020)

February 20, 2020).

²¹ Daniller, Andrew. Americans' immigration policy priorities: Divisions between – and within – the two parties. Pew Research Center. November 12, 2019. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/11/12/americans-immigration-policy-priorities-divisions-between-and-within-the-two-parties/ (Accessed on February 20, 2020).

Appendix I: Letter from 27 distinguished retired military officers calling for robust U.S. refugee admissions

September 3, 2019

President Donald J. Trump The White House 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We, retired General and Flag Officers of the U.S. military who served alongside our men and women in combat, write to express our grave concerns about recent reports that the administration may further reduce refugee admissions for FY2020. For decades, the refugee resettlement program has provided life-saving assistance, demonstrated our humanitarian leadership and values, supported allies hosting the vast majority of refugees, and served critical national security interests. While refugee resettlement has long received bi-partisan support, with a historic average admissions goal of 95,000 refugees annually, America's legacy of welcoming refugees is now on the line. Refugee admissions have been reduced to historic lows, with the FY19 refugee admissions goal at just 30,000, leaving thousands in harm's way. Further cuts would undermine commitments made to allies and partners on the ground, our national security missions overseas, and the domestic infrastructure here in the United States that supports the successful integration of refugees, including those who served alongside U.S. troops. We urge you to protect this vital program and ensure that the next refugee admissions goal is commensurate with global resettlement needs.

U.S. military, diplomatic, and intelligence operations abroad rely on the support of thousands of interpreters, translators, advisors, engineers, and others to fulfill their objectives. When their lives and those of their families are threatened because of this support, the U.S. refugee resettlement program provides a critical lifeline. Over nearly two decades, thousands of Iraqis and Afghans have put their lives on the line to support U.S. efforts overseas. The Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) and Iraqi direct access (P-2) programs were created to uphold our nation's commitment to leave no one behind, providing safety to those partners and their families who risk retribution for their support. We have personally borne witness to how these programs ensure the safety of our servicemembers and success of U.S. missions.

In conjunction with U.S. foreign aid, refugee resettlement offers concrete support to our allies and frontline nations hosting more than their fair share of refugees. Providing safe haven to the most vulnerable refugees—those that cannot be safe in their countries of first refuge—demonstrates America's humanitarian leadership and supports regional stability by preventing premature returns back to war-torn or unstable countries. When America turns its back on refugees, we are challenged to call on our allies to accept them, ultimately risking premature returns, like those of Syrians back to an unstable Syria, Somalis back to an unstable Somalia and Afghans back to an unstable Afghanistan. Such premature returns not only put refugees in harm's way, they also further cycles of instability and insecurity in critical regions, increasing pressure on military action.

For these reasons, we urge you to protect this vital program and ensure that the refugee admissions goal is robust, in line with decades-long precedent, and commensurate with today's urgent global needs.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

General Keith B. Alexander, USA (Ret.) Director, National Security Agency ('05-'14); Commander, US Cyber Command ('10-'14) General John R. Allen, USMC (Ret.)

Commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force and Commander, US Forces Afghanistan

Admiral Thad W. Allen, USCG (Ret.) Commandant, US Coast Guard ('06-'10)

Lieutenant General John M. Bednarek, USA (Ret.) Chief, Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq ('13-'15)

General John F. Campbell, USA (Ret.)

Commander, International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan and NATO's Resolute Support Mission ('14-'16)

General Peter W. Chiarelli, USA (Ret.) Vice Chief of Staff, US Army ('08-'12)

General Wesley K. Clark, Sr., USA (Ret.)

US Commander-in-Chief, US Southern Command ('96-'97); US Commander-in-Chief, US European Command ('97-'00); Supreme Allied Commander Europe ('97-'00)

General Martin E. Dempsey, USA (Ret.) Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff ('11-'15)

Major General Paul D. Eaton, USA (Ret.)

Commander, Iraqi Army Training Program ('03-'04); Senior Advisor, VoteVets Foundation ('14-present)

Admiral Thomas B. Fargo, USN (Ret.) Commander, U.S. Pacific Command ('02-'05)

Admiral Edmund P. Giambastiani, Jr., USN (Ret.) Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff ('05-'07); Commander, US Joint Forces Command ('02-'05); NATO Supreme Allied Commander Transformation ('03-'05)

Admiral Jonathan W. Greenert, USN (Ret.) Chief of Naval Operations, US Navy (11-15)

Lt. General Frank G. Helmick, USA (Ret.)

Commanding General, XVIII Airborne Corps ('09-'12)

Lt. General Mark P. Hertling, USA (Ret.) Commanding General, US Army Europe ('11-'12)

Lt. General Claudia J. Kennedy, USA (Ret.)

Deputy Chief of Staff for Army Intelligence, US Army ('97-'00)

Admiral Samuel J. Locklear III, USN (Ret.) Commander, US Pacific Command ('12-'15)

Lt. General Douglas E. Lute, USA (Ret.)

Special Assistant to the President and Senior Coordinator for Afghanistan and Pakistan, National Security Council, The White House ('09-'13)

General Stanley A. McChrystal, USA (Ret.)

Commander, International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan ('09-'10)

Admiral William H. McRaven, USN (Ret.) Commander, US Special Operations Command ('11-'14)

Admiral Michael G. Mullen, USN, (Ret.) Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff ('07-'11)

Admiral Robert J. Natter, USN (Ret.)

Commander, Fleet Forces Command and Commander, US Atlantic Fleet ('00-'03)

General John W. Nicholson Jr., USA (Ret.) Commander, NATO's Resolute Support Mission and Commander, US Forces Afghanistan ('16-'18)

General Raymond T. Odierno, USA (Ret.)

Chief of Staff, US Army ('11-'15), Commanding General, US Forces in Iraq ('08-'10)

General David H. Petraeus, USA (Ret.)

Director, Central Intelligence Agency ('11-'12); Commander, Coalition Forces in Afghanistan ('10-'11) and Iraq ('07-'08)

Admiral James G. Stavridis, USN (Ret.)

Commander, US European Command and NATO Supreme Allied Commander, Europe ('09-'13);

Commander, US Southern Command ('06-'09)

General Joseph Votel, USA (Ret.)

Commander, US Central Command ('16-'19)

General Anthony C. Zinni, USMC (Ret.)

Commander in Chief, US Central Command ('97-'00)

The Honorable John R. Bolton, U.S. National Security Advisor

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State

The Honorable Mark T. Esper, Secretary of Defense

The Honorable Alex M. Azar, Secretary of Health and Human Services The Honorable Kevin H. McAleenan, Acting Secretary of Homeland Security



Hearing: The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship of the House Committee on the Judiciary

Today, an unprecedented 70.8 million people around the world have been displaced by war, humanitarian crisis, extreme poverty, natural disasters, political repression, and religious persecution. Some 25.9 million are refugees; most are children. On average, one person is forcibly displaced every two seconds; forced from their homes and quite literally fleeing for their lives.

The United States has a long and proud history of welcoming immigrants and sheltering refugees. Women religious have been blessed to be able to accompany immigrant and refugee communities across this country for almost 300 years and they continue to welcome those who come to this country seeking safety after passing through the U.S. government's rigorous screening processes.

As Americans we firmly oppose the continued attempts by this administration and some members of Congress to dismantle the U.S. refugee resettlement program. As Catholic sisters we strongly object to President Trump's efforts to limit our ability to heed the scriptural command to welcome the stranger and care for those in need.

U.S. refugee resettlement is at an all-time low. President Trump set the FY2020 Presidential Determination (PD) at an unconscionably 18,000, far below the 95,000 average admissions between 1980 and 2017. The administration's disregard for our nation's moral responsibility places vulnerable refugees, including women and children, in extreme danger and violates our national values and religious beliefs.

We call on Congress to recommit our nation to providing leadership in response to the global refugee crisis; to funding refugee resettlement in the U.S. and refugee protection overseas; and to working with the international community to address the root causes of forced migration.

We urge you to support H.R. 2146 the *GRACE Act* which would set a minimum refugee admissions goal of 95,000 each year and increase accountability by mandating quarterly reports on admissions and H.R. 2214 the *NO BAN Act* which would repeal the bans on Muslims, refugees, and asylees.

We promise you our continued prayers as together we seek to fulfill our moral obligations.

LCWR is an association of leaders of congregations of Catholic women religious in the United States. The conference has nearly 1300 members, who represent more than 38,800 women religious in the United States. Founded in 1956, LCWR assists its members to collaboratively carry out their service of leadership to further the mission of the Gospel in today's world.



Statement Submitted to the House Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship, for the Hearing Entitled, "The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program" February 27, 2020

For 80 years, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service has assisted forcibly uprooted people from around the globe. As one of the oldest and largest resettlement agencies, we seek to provide assistance and protection to vulnerable populations when they can no longer safely remain in their home countries. Informed by a Lutheran legacy of welcoming the stranger and decades of experience with migrants and refugees, we have empowered more than 500,000 families and individuals fleeing conflict, persecution, and war.

While our legacy of compassionate service has made a difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands of people who have found safety and hope in America's communities, the continual reduction of refugee admissions since 2016 is a devasting loss for our communities, inconsistent with our values as a country and puts lives at risk as we face the worst refugee crisis in recorded history. This fiscal year the refugee admissions cap was set at 18,000, the lowest since the start of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program in 1980. It is profoundly disappointing that at a time of unprecedented need, the United States would reduce the number of refugees it welcomes and abandon our commitment of resettling refugees.

Over the years, we embraced and celebrated the diversity that refugees have brought to the United States. Refugees' strong sense of faith and rich cultural traditions bring new life to our congregations and communities. They work in important industries - construction, food, service, transportation, and medical care, and quickly become self-sufficient and contribute to the local and state economies. Research and government studies have shown that refugees quickly become part of the workforce, contribute billions of dollars in taxes and generate U.S economic growth.

Past administrations have recognized these contributions and supported refugee resettlement which is reflected in the strong bipartisan support. Presidents of both parties have led and raised refugee admissions in times of crisis. President Reagan signed the Refugee Protection Act of 1980 into law with strong bipartisan support. Recently, when states were asked through an executive order to consent or block refugee resettlement to their state, only one state government chose to block it.

Refugees are powerful ambassadors of our founding principles of equal opportunity, religious freedom, and liberty and justice for all. Rather than closing the door to refugees, we should be welcoming them, their families, their talents and contributions. The U.S. was once the global leader in refugee resettlement. We must work to return to our leadership position and uphold the legacy of welcome towards refugees.

LIRS and its network of local service providers and Lutheran congregations across the country have historically played key roles in assisting refugees with housing, language, employment, and social supports necessary for their integration into our communities. This commitment to assist refugees as they start their new lives in the United States is a testament of our principles to love our neighbor, accompany the vulnerable, and welcome the stranger. Communities of faith continue to stand in partnership to help refugees of all faiths find safety and hope as they start their lives as new Americans.

LRS is grateful to the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Citizenship and Immigration for its leadership in supporting refugees, and we urge all members to support the increase of U.S. refugee admissions.



February 26, 2020

Beatrice Kahn President Sheila Katz

2055 L Street NW Suite 650 Washington, DC 20036 Tel: 202 296 2588 action@ncjw.org

www.ncjw.org

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler Chairman

Chairman
Judiciary Committee
2138 Rayburn House Office
Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Doug Collins Ranking Member Judiciary Committee 2138 Rayburn House Office Building Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Nadler and Ranking Member Collins,

I am writing on behalf of the over 100,000 members, advocates, and supporters of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) in support of refugees and refugee resettlement efforts in the United States. We believe that welcoming refugees is a moral imperative informed by our Jewish history of seeking safety in the United States and our tradition of caring for vulnerable people who find themselves in alien lands.

NCJW is a grassroots organization of volunteers and advocates who turn progressive ideals into action. Welcoming immigrants and refugees is part of our organization's history. More than a century ago, NCJW established an agency at Ellis Island to support and aid immigrant families, with partner offices in 250 cities providing job training and legal aid for immigrant women. Today, NCJW continues to advocate for the rights of immigrants and refugees. We remain committed to caring for the most vulnerable — in particular members of the LGBTQ community, and women and children. Our experiences and traditions urge us to fight back against xenophobia and exclusion. Many Jews remember our own families' experiences as refugees from war, displacement, and religious persecution.

The current administration has cut the number of people who qualify for the resettlement program by an alarming 75% in the face of the world's worst refugee crisis. The admissions goal for the 2020 Fiscal Year was set to 18,000 – the lowest in 40 years. Similarly, in 1938 the U.S. let in just under 18,000 Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. The cutback on such programs and the mistreatment of refugees and asylum seekers as they enter this country are dangerous assaults on the many who are fleeing violence and persecution. We urge you to hold this administration accountable for the treatment and resettlement of refugees and to return the number of refugees the United States commits to resettling to its historic average of 95,000.

If you have any questions, please contact Faith Williams, Associate Director of Government Relations and Advocacy at fwilliams@nciw.org.

Sincerely,

Jody Rabhan Chief Policy Officer National Council of Jewish Women



Statement of the National Immigration Law Center

Committee on the Judiciary's Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship

Hearing on The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program Thursday, February 27, 2020 - 02:00pm

Dear Members of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship,

The National Immigration Law Center (NILC) is pleased to submit this statement to the U.S. House Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship of the Committee on the Judiciary for the February 27, 2020 hearing titled "The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program."

Established in 1979, NILC is an organization long dedicated to protecting and advancing the rights and opportunities of low-income immigrants and their families. We believe that all people should have the opportunity to achieve their full human potential – regardless of their race, gender, immigration, and/or economic status. Over the past 40 years, NILC has won landmark legal decisions protecting fundamental human and civil rights and advocated for policies that reinforce our nation's values of equality and justice for all. This includes our legal challenges to numerous iterations of the Muslim Ban and refugee ban. Three examples of that are International Refugee Assistance Project v. Trump, challenging the indefinite ban on most or all nationals from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen, as well North Koreans and certain Venezuelan government officials; Pars Equality Center, et al. v Pompeo, et al., challenging the unlawful implementation of the Muslim Ban's waiver provision that has served as window dressing to an otherwise unlawful ban; and Jewish Family Service v. Trump. In the Jewish Family Service v. Trump case, NILC recently secured a settlement whereby the U.S. government must expedite the resettlement applications of over 300 refugees who were impacted by the refugee ban.

Furthermore, we engage in policy analysis and advocacy, strategic communications, and provide technical assistance to partner organizations across the country. We most recently worked with members of this Committee to mark up and pass out of committee the National Origin-Based Antidiscrimination for Nonimmigrants Act or the NO BAN Act (H.R. 2214), which would, among other things, immediately repeal all versions of the Muslim Ban, including one that specifically targets refugees for "extreme vetting", and the asylum ban that targets asylum seekers arriving at the border. We have also supported the GRACE Act (H.R. 2146), which would, among other things, raise the annual refugee admissions to a minimum of 95,000.

LOS ANGELES (Headquarters) 3450 Wilshire Blvd. Bax #108 – 62 Los Angeles, CA 90010 213 639-3900 WASHINGTON, DC PO Box No. 34573 Washington, DC 20043 202 216-0261 We thank the Committee for conducting this hearing to assess the current state of the U.S. Refugee Program, and we encourage the committee, in its capacity to conduct oversight, to act swiftly to improve the U.S. Refugee Program, which has been decimated under this administration, and to better serve those it seeks to protect.

The U.S. Refugee Program Is Currently at Its Most Vulnerable

Muslim and Refugee Bans

Since the first version of the Muslim Ban and refugee ban was issued on January 27, 2017, via Executive Order 13769, the Trump Administration has issued numerous iterations of this discriminatory ban, targeting individuals from Muslim-majority countries in order to prevent their ability to enter or return to the U.S. and access the U.S. immigration process in a fair way. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) was also suspended for 120 days under this executive order, and refugees from Syria were banned from the U.S. indefinitely. This ban was replaced with subsequent iterations of a ban, including Executive Order 13780, Presidential Proclamation 9645, Executive Order 13815, and just last month, Presidential Proclamation 9983. Upon the expiration of the suspension of refugee resettlement, the Trump administration issued guidelines limiting refugee resettlement for 90 days from 11 countries that are primarily Muslimmajority, and indefinitely halted the follow-to-join program, whereby refugee families would otherwise be reunited. The assault against refugees and USRAP did not stop there, however, as another executive order was issued, Executive Order 13815, which subjected refugees to "extreme vetting" as a backdoor channel for effectuating a refugee ban.

The driving force behind the first version of the Muslim and refugee ban, as well as subsequent iterations, Executive Order 13780, Presidential Proclamation 9645, Executive Order 13815, and, Presidential Proclamation 9983, has been to fulfill fear-mongering political campaign promises to effectuate a ban on Muslims—including refugees—from entering the U.S.

While there have been cosmetic changes to subsequent versions of the bans – such as adding non-Muslim-majority countries in a superficial attempt to conceal the ban's primary motivation — each iteration is clearly driven by anti-Muslim animus. This includes the targeting of refugees, given the increasingly high number of refugees from Muslim-majority countries in the years preceding the Trump administration, as well as African immigrants. While the number of refugees from around the world and of all faiths has plummeted under this administration, Muslim refugees have been disproportionately affected, with the admission of Muslim refugees dwindling by 90% between FY 2016 to FY 2019. As a result, targeting refugees has been used as a clear proxy for banning Muslims.

Since the Supreme Court's decision on June 26, 2018, allowing a permanent version of a Muslim ban <u>Presidential Proclamation 9645</u> (Muslim Ban 3.0) – to remain in effect, most nationals from the impacted countries remain indefinitely banned from entering the United States. As a result of the Supreme Court's ruling, American families have been kept apart and denied the

opportunity to celebrate family milestones, mourn together at funerals, receive life-saving medical treatment, or pursue educational or professional opportunities. The administration has since used the Supreme Court ruling to justify additional bans, relying on what it believes to be its limitless authority under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) to abuse its executive powers in order to effectively rewrite our nation's immigration laws.

Refugee Ceilings and Resettlement Numbers Have Been Decimated:

Refugees have been intensely targeted by the anti-immigrant agenda of the current administration. The annual refugee ceilings determined by the President each year deciding the maximum number of refugees that may be granted admission to the U.S. have plummeted year after year under the Trump administration. In FY2018, it was slashed from 110,000 in the prior year to 45,000, the lowest cap since 1980. Barely half that number of refugees were resettled in FY2018, and in FY2019, the annual ceiling was lowered even further to 30,000. The FY2020 refugee ceiling was set at 18,000—the lowest in history since the beginning of the U.S. refugee admissions program.

The justification provided for the decrease in numbers was, according to FY2020's Proposed Refugee Admissions report, "the urgent need to address the border security and humanitarian crisis caused by the massive surge of aliens seeking protection at the U.S. southern border." To address the increased need for more asylum officers within U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the administration's solution is to further harm the refugee resettlement program by taking refugee officers away from processing refugee applications and have them adjudicate asylum applications instead.

Considering the fact that the historically low number of refugees settled in 2018—where the admission goal was 45,000—resulted in only 22,491 refugees being resettled, we anticipate that resettlement numbers in 2020 will be even more dismal.

Legislation Such as the NO BAN Act, the GRACE Act and Other Options Provide Effective Vehicles to Restore the Refugee Program

The NO BAN Act would be a useful vehicle to restore and improve the U.S. refugee program. Among other things, it would change the INA standard for all presidents, limiting executive authority to prevent any president from issuing future overly broad bans like the Muslim and refugee bans. Instead of relying on the current vague standard, any future ban would have to be, among other things, temporary, based on specific and credible facts, and connected to specific acts. It would have to meet a compelling government interest and use the least restrictive means possible to do so. It would also impose stricter requirements before any future ban could be issued, as well as reporting requirements to Congress to create an oversight mechanism once any future ban is in place. The NO BAN Act would also ensure that, if any future ban is imposed, Congress can hold the executive branch accountable by receiving regular briefings on the status, harm, and other impacts of a ban.

The NO BAN Act would also broaden the INA's nondiscrimination clause to specifically prohibit religion-based discrimination against any immigrant or nonimmigrant visa applicant. This would help ensure that future presidents would not be allowed to issue orders based so clearly on anti-Muslim bias or any other religion-based animus and that every visa applicant would receive individual consideration. Finally, the bill would also immediately repeal prior versions of the Muslim and refugee bans, including one that specifically targets refugees for "extreme vetting", and the asylum ban that targets asylum seekers arriving at the border. The NO BAN Act is a much-needed step forward for redressing the devastating harms this administration has inflicted on Muslims, Africans, refugees, asylum seekers and other communities.

Other legislative vehicles for combatting attacks on Muslims and refugees include supporting the GRACE Act (H.R. 2146), which would, among other things, raise the annual refugee admissions to a minimum of 95,000 and begin the arduous process of restoring the vital U.S. Refugee Program.

Conclusion

NILC thanks this committee for continuing to shine a light on the degradation of the U.S. Refugee Program, by holding an oversight hearing on the Muslim Bans, bringing the NO BAN Act up for mark-up and a committee vote, now ripe for a floor vote, and by holding hearings such as today's, in conducting oversight over the U.S. Refugee Program.

We look to you as our members of Congress to redress the harms these bans have imposed on countless families and individuals around the world as well as their family members here in the U.S., many of whom are U.S. citizens, by passing legislation such as the NO BAN Act and GRACE At.

NILC further encourages you to speak up against programs or policies that stigmatize, stereotype or smear refugees and to support programs—such as the U.S. Refugee Program—which can provide a safe haven to those most in need of it. Additionally, we urge you to exercise the power of the purse, defunding any programs administered by the executive branch that degrade the refugee program, and to reinvest instead in refugee resettlement to facilitate the transitions of those granted refugee status in the U.S. and their ability to achieve their maximum potential.

Lastly, preserving congressional intent by way of conducting oversight and passing legislation to ensure fairness, dignity, and respect in the administration of our immigration and refugee laws and conventions is essential for striving for the United States to restore and maintain a globally-respected role as place of hope, safety and freedom. America is at its best when we treat all people, no matter where they come from, with dignity and respect. It is critical that we continue to fight against discriminatory policies like the Muslim and refugee bans.

Sincerely, Avideh Moussavian, Legislative Director National Immigration Law Center



Refugee Congress Statement to the U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary, as it Pertains to the Hearing on The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program on February 27, 2020

As a national nonpartisan organization built and led by refugees, asylum-seekers, and other vulnerable migrants, Refugee Congress knows firsthand the importance of the refugee resettlement program.

The refugee resettlement program provides a safe home to refugees like us, who have fled violence and persecution in our home countries. We have faced danger and persecution due to religion, race/ethnicity, nationality, membership in a social group, or political opinion.

Refugees go through a lengthy and rigorous security vetting process that takes approximately two years and involves numerous U.S. governmental agencies. This process includes screening by eight federal agencies, including the Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, and the FBI; six security database checks and biometric security checks screened against U.S. federal databases; medical screening; and three in-person interviews with Department of Homeland Security Officers.1

Once here, refugees develop connections in our new homes, and we quickly become thriving, contributing members of our communities. We get jobs, start new businesses, make friends, join local places of worship, and volunteer to help others.

The average workforce participation rate for refugees is nearly 82 percent, well above the national rate of 62 percent.² Refugees earn more than \$77 billion in household income and paid almost \$21 billion in taxes in 2015.3 A study by the University of Michigan and Global Detroit found that refugees contribute up to \$295 million to that region's economy alone each year.4

Refugee Congress Delegates across the country provide an illustration of the types of economic contributions we make. Our Delegates work as teachers from elementary school to college. We are award-winning employees at Fortune 500 companies, directors of service agencies, entrepreneurs and small-business owners, civil servants, journalists, religious leaders, tour guides, and more.

As Biar Atem, Refugee Congress Board Member and Delegate for Nevada, recently said, "Refugees bring a spirit of gratitude to this country." We approach our new home with a determination to succeed and a desire to give back. We pursue education and job certifications, and we put in the time and energy to work our way up, sometimes from entry-level and unskilled labor positions to award-winning managerial positions. We also volunteer with local

¹ "Refugees in America," USA for UNHCR, https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/usa,

² "Refugee Integration & Economic Contributions to the United States," Refugee Council USA, https://rcusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Refugee-Integration-Economic-Contributions.pdf.

3 "From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America," New American Economy,

https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/from-struggle-to-resilience-the-economic-impact-of-refugees-in-america/.

4 "Global Detroit, U-M release study: Refugees infuse up to \$295M/year in SE Michigan," Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University

nonprofits, serve on committees at our children's schools, and start new service organizations to assist others -- both immigrants and native-born Americans.

The refugee resettlement program also plays an important role in U.S. foreign policy and national security interests. Through resettling refugees here, the U.S. can influence other countries to provide safe haven to large populations of displaced people coming from nearby, helping prevent unrest and danger. ⁵

In recent years, the number of refugees worldwide has been growing, reaching nearly 26 million last year.⁶ The gap between refugees who need resettlement and those who are resettled has widened. According to the UNHCR, less than one percent of the refugees in need are resettled each year.⁷

Here in the U.S., our tradition of welcome for refugees and our commitment to the popular refugee resettlement program is threatened. The current Administration has taken steps to dismantle and undermine the program, placing refugees at risk and preventing the many economic, foreign policy, cultural, and civic advantages of refugee resettlement.

Since 1980, U.S. presidents have set an average annual refugee admissions goal of 95,000 and have resettled an average of 80,000 per year. In contrast, the current Administration set an admissions cap of just 18,000 for 2020 and allowed local jurisdiction to block refugee resettlement.

These and other actions threaten the refugee resettlement program and wellbeing of refugees in the U.S. and around the world. They threaten the opportunities for refugees like us to find a home after fleeing persecution and to contribute to our new communities and country in the many ways we do every day.

We urge all Members of Congress to reverse the recent trends that threaten refugee resettlement and commit to upholding America's long tradition as a country of safe haven, where refugees fleeing violence and persecution can build new lives and contribute to their new communities.

Below are biographies from several of our Refugee Congress Delegates, which we hope will provide a sense of the diversity and contributions refugees bring to this country.

⁵ "How Robust Refugee Protection Policies Can Strengthen Human and National Security," Center for Migration Studies, https://cmsnv.org/publications/jmhs-refugee-protection-security/.

⁶ "Figures at a Glance," UNHCR, https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html.

⁷ "Resettlement," UNHCR, https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/resettlement.html.





Dauda Sesay Louisiana Resettled refugee from Sierra Leone

Dauda Sesay was born in a small town in the northern part of Sierra Leone. At 16, he fled his homeland due to a terrible war that led to the massacre of his father and seven-year-old sister, who was burned to death.

Sesay was shot and seriously injured by the rebels. He was admitted and stayed in a refugee camp in the Gambia for nearly nine years.

During his time there, he advocated for better living conditions for refugees at the camp and for education for the children.

When his injury required further surgery, he moved to the capital, Banjul, where he met his wife, who is also a refugee. Due to the continued deterioration of his medical condition, he and his family (including his 6-month-old daughter) were resettled to the U.S. by Catholic Charities in May of 2009.

In the United States, Sesay is a community advocate, husband, and caring father to five beautiful children. Upon arrival, he made learning English and acquiring education a top priority for himself and his family. He earned a degree in Applied Science in Process Technology from Baton Rouge Community College, and currently works at Dow Chemical.

Sesay is a founding member and president of Louisiana Organization for Refugees and Immigrants (LORI,) a community-based nonprofit comprised of refugees, asylees, and other vulnerable immigrants, assisting other refugees and immigrants with integration into the United States. He is also a member of the Mayor Sharon Weston Broome International Relations Commission and Chairperson of the Commission Culture and Art Engagement, which was established to make the City of Baton Rouge a more inclusive and welcoming place.



Julia Ostropolsky Missouri Resettled refugee from the USSR

Julia Ostropolsky, MSW, LCSW, arrived in the U.S. with her parents as a stateless refugee near the end of the Soviet era.

She graduated from the University of Toledo and received her Masters in Social Work from Washington University, and then began working with the Russian-Jewish community in St. Louis County. Julia identified a significant gap in

Refugee Congress, Page 3/4

services for limited-English-speaking communities, especially for the older members of these communities.

Shortly thereafter, Julia – together with fellow refugee Svetlana Miretsky – founded Bilingual International Assistant Services to establish a system of holistic care that would meet the needs of all seniors, regardless of language and origin. Since 2002, Bilingual International has grown steadily and branched out into many different communities and areas of service provision.

As she watches the organization she founded grow with pride, Julia continues to advocate for the foreign-born on numerous professional boards and committees.



Biar Atem Nevada Resettled refugee from South Sudan

Biar Atem was born in South Sudan and was forced to abandon his family and village when civil war threatened his life. At age seven, Atem became a child refugee and walked more than 1,000 miles before reaching a refugee camp in Kenya, spending the next 13 years in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya before Catholic Charities resettled him to Las Vegas in April 2001 as a refugee.

Atem started out as a janitor with the Venetian Casino Resort in May 2001. He became a U.S. citizen in 2007 and was reunited with his family in 2008 after more

than 20 years away. He worked his way up from a janitor at the Venetian to a contract audit manager with shared services at Las Vegas Sands Corp. He is now a Certified Fraud Examiner. He has been named to Fortune magazine's "Heroes of the 500," was a finalist for the Adelson Citizenship Award and Sands Cares Hero of the Year, and was named Community Impact Award Winner by the American Red Cross. He is also founder of the nonprofit South Sudan Center of America.

Atem is also a proud husband and a father of two sons and a daughter, and he serves on the school board at his son's elementary school. He earned a bachelor's degree in Accounting from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and an MBA from Regis University.



Kamal Dhimal North Carolina Resettled refugee from Bhutan

Kamal Dhimal is a Bhutanese refugee who was forced to flee persecution in Bhutan at the age of six after his father was imprisoned and killed. He and his family lived in a refugee camp in Nepal for twenty years before being resettled in the United States in 2010.

Dhimal now resides in Charlotte, North Carolina, where he works as a business owner. He has established the Bhutanese Community Association of Charlotte,

volunteers for the city's Immigrant Task Force, and received the Asian Community Leader Award from Asian Chamber of Commerce.



Norah Bagirinka Ohio Resettled refugee from Rwanda

Norah Bagirinka is a survivor of the Rwandan genocide and was resettled to the United States in 2005.

In Rwanda, she directed a program with the International Rescue Committee that aided female victims of violence. Now in the United States, Bagirinka has continued

her humanitarian work by advocating for refugees and immigrants in Ohio, collaborating with organizations such as CRIS Ohio, US Together, World Relief, and the Women's Federation for World Peace Ohio Women's Fund.

In 2007, she founded Refugee Women In Action, a nonprofit organization based in Columbus, Ohio, that assists refugee women and their families to establish social and economic independence. She received a Bachelor's Degree in Healthcare Management from Ohio Christina University and currently works as the Community Outreach Specialist and Program Director for Refugee Women In Action. She also serves as a board member for the National Justice for Our Neighbors.



Joseph Sackor Pennsylvania Resettled refugee from Liberia

Joseph Sackor was two months away from graduating college when war broke out in Liberia and he and his family were forced to flee to neighboring Guinea. Before being resettled, Sackor served as the president of Liberia Refugee Students organization in Guinea, which provided support to UNHCR refugee schools in the early 1990s.

He was resettled to the United States in 1999, and earned his GED shortly after. Sackor went on to earn a dual Bachelor's Degree in Management Information Systems and International Business from Temple University, and a Dual Master's Degree in Management Information Systems and Public Administration from Devry University.

He currently lives in Levittown, Pennsylvania where he has worked as a senior systems analyst. Sackor is most proud of contributing to his community by organizing two medical mission trips to Liberia that brought in nearly \$6 million worth of medication and medical supplies to the country combined.



THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

1620 EYE STREET, NORTHWEST WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006 TELEPHONE (202) 293-7330 FAX (202) 293-2352 TDD (202) 293-9445

November 25, 2019

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo Secretary of State U.S. Department of State 2201 C Street, NW Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

Mayors across the nation recognize the many contributions refugees make to their cities and to our nation as a whole. They strengthen our economy and enhance our culture. We write to urge the Administration to rescind the September 26 executive order and return this year's refugee admissions to previous annual levels.

For years, the United States has been a world leader in welcoming people who have fled violence and persecution and are seeking a safe place to call home. Since our refugee admissions program was established nearly 40 years ago, most administrations have recognized the global need for resettlement and determined the yearly admissions ceiling in consultation with Congress to fulfill the U.S. commitment. U.S. cities have long benefited from the annual arrival of refugees. Once they are resettled, refugees learn the new language, adjust to the different culture, and strive to establish a new life. In the process, they also enrich and bring cultural vibrancy and diversity to their local communities.

Refugees contribute meaningfully to our economy as earners and taxpayers. While they receive initial assistance upon arriving in the United States, they see significant income increases in subsequent years. Their entrepreneurship rate is greater than that of other immigrants, as are their long-term investments in the country, including founding companies, earning citizenship, and buying homes. Indeed, they have positively reshaped cities across the country in recent decades by opening restaurants, buying vacant homes, contributing to the cultural landscape, and adding to the local workforce.

Contributing to our country most visibly are refugees whose work has garnered national and international attention, including former Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and Madeline Albright, singer Gloria Estefan, scientist Albert Einstein, authors Vladimir Nabokov and Isabel Allende, film directors Billy Wilder and Milos Forman, composer Béla Bartok, painter Piet Mondrian, and actor Andy Garcia.

The Executive Order would fundamentally change the structure of the U.S. resettlement program by devolving key decisions primarily to the states and ultimately lead to a patchwork of conflicting policies running contrary to the purpose of a national resettlement program.

It will also leave thousands of refugees, former refugees, and U.S. citizens without consistent and routine access to integration services and other supports. This is an unprecedented and harmful procedure, particularly given that resettlement agencies already consult regularly with state and local stakeholders regarding community needs.

Page 2

The plan to reduce the number of refugees who may enter the country this fiscal year to 18,000 represents a reduction of approximately 80 percent from the levels of just a few years ago. This harms both the tens of thousands of refugees who have been patiently waiting overseas to work their way through the system and it harms our cities because they won't be able to come to our communities and continue to make the important contributions that those who came before them were able to do.

We hope that you will heed our call. America's cities and our nation will be stronger for it.

Sincerely,

Mayor Bryan K. Barnett	Mayor Greg Fischer	Mayor Nan Whaley
Rochester Hills, MI	Louisville, KY	Dayton, OH
President	Vice President	Second Vice President
Mayor Steve Benjamin Columbia, SC Past President	Mayor Elizabeth B. Kautz Burnsville, MN Past President	Tom Cochran CEO and Executive Director
Mayor John Giles	Mayor Jorge O. Elorza	Mayor Eric Garcetti
Mesa, AZ	Providence, RI	Los Angeles, CA
Co-Chair, Immigration	Co-Chair, Immigration	Chair, USCM Latino
Reform Task Force	Reform Task Force	Alliance
Mayor Kate Gallego	Mayor Pauline Russo Cutter	Mayor Buddy Dyer
Phoenix, AZ	San Leandro, CA	Orlando, FL
Mayor Mark W. Mitchell	Mayor Michael D. Tubbs	Mayor Frank C. Ortis
Tempe, AZ	Stockton, CA	Pembroke Pines, FL
Mayor Jonathan Rothschild	Mayor Patrick J. Furey	Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms
Tucson, AZ	Torrance, CA	Atlanta, GA
Mayor Lioneld Jordan	Mayor Christopher L. Cabaldon	Mayor Hardie Davis Jr.
Fayetteville, AR	West Sacramento, CA	Augusta, GA
Mayor Mary Casillas Salas	Mayor Michael B. Hancock	Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot
Chula Vista, CA	Denver, CO	Chicago, IL
Mayor Sam Hindi	Mayor Luke Bronin	Mayor Nancy Rodkin Rotering
Foster City, CA	Hartford, CT	Highland Park, IL
Mayor Lily Mei	Mayor Toni N. Harp	Mayor Thomas P. McNamara
Fremont, CA	New Haven, CT	Rockford, IL
Mayor Alan L. Nagy	Mayor David Martin	Mayor Thomas 'Tom' C. Henry
Newark, CA	Stamford, CT	Fort Wayne, IN
Mayor Thomas K. Butt	Mayor Shari Cantor	Mayor LaToya Cantrell
Richmond, CA	West Hartford, CT	New Orleans, LA
Mayor Sam Liccardo San Jose, CA	Mayor Muriel Bowser Washington, DC	Mayor Bernard 'Jack' C. Young Baltimore, MD

Page 3

Mayor Jeffrey Z. Slavin	Mayor Byron W. Brown	Mayor James A. Diossa
Somerset, MD	Buffalo, NY	Central Falls, RI
Mayor Martin J. Walsh	Mayor Bill de Blasio	Mayor John J. Tecklenburg
Boston, MA	New York, NY	Charleston, SC
Mayor Alex B. Morse III	Mayor Paul A. Dyster	Mayor Madeline Anne Rogero
Holyoke, MA	Niagara Falls, NY	Knoxville, TN
Mayor Jon Mitchell	Mayor Lovely A. Warren	Mayor Steve Adler
New Bedford, MA	Rochester, NY	Austin, TX
Mayor Mike Duggan	Mayor Lydia Lavelle	Mayor Trey Mendez
Detroit, MI	Carrboro, NC	Brownsville, TX
Mayor Rosalynn Bliss	Mayor Pam Hemminger	Mayor Eric Johnson
Grand Rapids, MI	Chapel Hill, NC	Dallas, TX
Mayor James B. Hovland	Mayor Steve Schewel	Mayor Dee Margo
Edina, MN	Durham, NC	El Paso, TX
Mayor Jacob Frey	Mayor Nancy Vaughan	Mayor Sylvester Turner
Minneapolis, MN	Greensboro, NC	Houston, TX
Mayor Lyda Krewson	Mayor Dontario 'Don' Hardy	Mayor Ron Nirenberg
St. Louis, MO	Kinston, NC	San Antonio, TX
Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird	Mayor Tim Mahoney	Mayor Jackie Biskupski
Lincoln, NE	Fargo, ND	Salt Lake City, UT
Mayor Debra March	Mayor Michael P. Summers	Mayor Justin Wilson
Henderson, NV	Lakewood, OH	Alexandria, VA
Mayor Brad J. Cohen	Mayor David J. Berger	Mayor Levar Stoney
East Brunswick Township, NJ	Lima, OH	Richmond, VA
Mayor Adrian O. Mapp	Mayor Wade Kapszukiewicz	Mayor Cassie Franklin
Plainfield, NJ	Toledo, OH	Everett, WA
Mayor Tim Keller	Mayor Breea Clark	Mayor Jenny A. Durkan
Albuquerque, NM	Norman, OK	Seattle, WA
Mayor Kenneth D. Miyagishima Las Cruces, NM	Mayor Denny Doyle Beaverton, OR	Mayor Victoria Woodards Tacoma, WA
Mayor Alan Webber	Mayor Jim Kenney	Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway
Santa Fe, NM	Philadelphia, PA	Madison, WI
Santa 1 C, INIVI	Mayor William Peduto Pittsburgh, PA	Mayor Michael Vandersteen Sheboygan, WI
cc. The White House		

Ms. Garcia. This now concludes today's hearing. So, once again, we would join the Ranking Member and all the Committee Members in thanking all the witnesses for being here. I know you took the time to prepare and come here and travel here, and we cer-

tainly do appreciate it.

Without objections, all Members will now have 5 legislative days to submit additional written questions for the witnesses or additional materials for the record.

Ms. Garcia. So, without objection, the hearing is adjourned. [Whereupon, at 4:48 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

SHEILA JACKSON LEE
1811 DISTRICT, TEXAS
WASHINGTON OFFICE:
2435 Rayburn House Office Building

DISTRICT OFFICE:
1919 SAITH STREET, SUITE 1180
GEORGE "MICKEY" LELAND FEDERAL BUILDING
HOUSTON, TX 77002
(713) 655-0050

HOUSTON, TX 77019 (713) 691-4882 HEIGHTS OFFICE Congress of the United States House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515 JUDICIARY
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CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE OF TEXAS

HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND
CITIZENSHIP

CURRENT STATE OF THE U.S. REFUGEE PROGRAM FEBRUARY 27, 2020 – 2:00 PM

Thank you, Madam Chairman, for convening this important hearing on the current state of the United States Refugee Program.

The issues which have emerged during the last three years strike the heart of American democracy. I rise to express my grave concern about what is occurring within our complex immigration system and acknowledge the conditions in which the system is greatly suffering.

A study conducted by Houston Public Media showed that in 2017, the first year of Mr. Trump's presidency, the average asylum denial rate in Houston was 87 percent although the state of Texas, especially the city of Houston, has been known to welcome immigrants. The Trump administration's oppressive policies have limited resettlement. The Texas Tribune reported a 79% decrease in refugee resettlement between October 2016 and March 2017 when 3,518 people were resettled, compared to 736 people between October 2017 and March 2018.

According to the New American Economy, immigrant households within Houston hold significant economic power, earning \$50.9 billion dollars in 2016 – with \$9.2 billion going to federal taxes and \$3.5 billion going to state and local taxes.

The Migration Policy Institute found that the Nigerian population in Houston more than doubled between 2010 and 2017 – a statistic that will now dwindle, due to Nigeria's placement on the Trump administration's travel ban.

The Associated Press discovered that since 2016, U.S. authorities have adopted a practice called "metering", under which they accept only a limited number of asylum-seekers per day at official crossings. This has resulted in a huge waiting list at border towns in Mexico – about 19,000 people were on waiting lists in 4 cities last July.

The President's failure to properly govern and address immigration policy has clearly caused the degradation and destruction of the system. I worry for the lives that are lost every day at the border, in Immigrations and Customs Enforcement custody and for those attempting to come to the United States to have a chance at a new life.

Refugees and asylum seekers coming to the United States have become a group that are politically powerless and have reached the highest levels of vulnerability within our legal system. The brutality with which Mr. Trump undermines the fundamental rights of immigrants because they are not United States citizens is truly heartbreaking and must immediately be corrected.

Mr. Atem – as a refugee, your presence is truly appreciated and I look forward to hearing your testimony today.

Thank you for convening this hearing, Madam Chairman.

I yield back.

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

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

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

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

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

Worse still, according to the latest State Department data, the Administration is not even on track to meet this historically low goal.

Last year, Canada, a country with fewer people than California, admitted more refugees than the United States.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



THE CITY OF NEW YORK OFFICE OF THE MAYOR NEW YORK, N.Y. 10007

January 9, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo Secretary of State 2201 C Street NW Washington, D.C. 20520-0099

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

This letter is in reference to Executive Order 13888, "On Enhancing State and Local Involvement in Resettlement."

Refugees contribute to our city in innumerable ways, enriching our economy, culture and society.

As Mayor and Chief Executive Officer of New York City, I consent to initial refugee resettlement in New York City, as per the terms of the Executive Order. New York City comprises the five boroughs and counties of Manhattan (New York County), Brooklyn (Kings County), the Bronx (Bronx County), Staten Island (Richmond County), and Queens (Queens County).

This consent is valid unless and until withdrawn, and is provided without making any endorsement regarding the legality of the Executive Order.

Sincerely,

Bill de Blasio Mayor

cc: Carol T. O'Connell, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, U.S. Department of State



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No Matter Trump's Agenda, Refugees Remain Welcome in New York City (/columnists/other/130-opinion/9097-no-matter-trump-s-agenda-refugees-remain-welcome-in-new-york-city)

January 31, 2020 | by Bitta Mostofi (/component/contact/contact/1842-bitta-mostofi?ltemid=327)



(photo: Ed Reed/Mayoral Photography Office)

Our nation has long been a beacon of hope for those fleeing their home country due to violence and persecution based on their race, nationality, religion, political beliefs, or membership in a social group. With resettlement as a refugee's last option for safety, we have welcomed them and supported their successful integration in the United States for nearly 40 years with the establishment of the Refugee Resettlement Program.

Under the Trump administration, however, this country's proud tradition of welcoming refugees and recognizing the contributions and impact of hardworking immigrants is under threat.

On September 26, 2019, President Trump signed Executive Order 13888—an unprecedented move to allow states and localities to block refugees from being resettled in their communities. His administration also capped total refugee admissions to a historic low of 18,000 at a time when the number of refugees and displaced people worldwide is at the highest point since World War II.

And as we've just honored Holocaust Remembrance Day this week, we must not forget the dark times out of which these policies and programs were created. Our nation turned a blind eye as millions of Jews were murdered during the Holocaust, including the hundreds of thousands that applied to immigrate to our country but were turned away due to the strict immigration laws and quotas that were in place at that time.

It was out of this humanitarian crisis that our country vowed not only to never forget, but never go back. Congress passed the first piece of refugee legislation in 1948, which would eventually become the Refugee Resettlement Program as we know it today. A profound moment of moral leadership and recognition that to sit idly by while the "victims of war and oppression" look to us for refuge is to hold "their fate in...our hands."

Despite the best efforts of the Trump administration to dismantle the refugee program and take us back to those dark times, states and localities – many who share the deeply personal, profound, and real stories of refugees in their communities – have responded with an outpouring of support.

From Phoenix, Arizona, to Burleigh County, North Dakota, to Worthington, Minnesota, jurisdictions from across the nation have affirmed their commitment to resettle refugees in their communities and have recognized that true leadership considers the moral responsibility we hold to care for our fellow human beings who seek refuge from persecution.

New York City not only proudly issued consent to resettle refugees, but the city went a step further and joined a multi-city amicus brief in support of the litigation challenging the president's order. Mayor de Blasio also joined with leaders across the nation <u>urging the Trump</u> administration to rescind the executive order (http://usmayors.org/wp-

content/uploads/Mayors%20Letter%20in%20Support%20of%20Refugees%20112519.pdf) and return this year's refugee admissions cap to previous levels. And on January 15 a federal judge blocked the executive order from going into effect for the time being.

The message is loud and clear: refugees are not only welcome, but they are invaluable assets to every community they make home. With refugee workforce participation at 81.8 percent, far more than the 63 percent national average, and with refugees quickly surpassing United States median household income and owning more businesses than any other group—immigrant or otherwise—refugees contribute meaningfully to our economy as earners, taxpayers, and job creators. They enrich our neighborhoods and communities through their cultural contributions, civic participation, and engagement.

It is shameful that the Trump administration continues to turn its back on refugee and immigrant communities. Just this week, the Supreme Court made the deeply troubling decision to allow the Trump administration's xenophobic Public Charge Rule to go into effect—targeting working immigrant families. While the merits of the case are still being fought in court, millions of families, children, and the elderly are at risk.

May our history guide us in the recognition that from a place of darkness and depravity our country grew small and stained and from there we had no choice but to embrace the light and commit to a better and more just way.

At a time when there are so many efforts to divide us, communities in New York and across the country continue to say, we will never go back to closing doors on those in need, and we will not allow the Trump administration to scare us into silence.

Bitta Mostofi is Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. On Twitter <u>@bittamostofi (https://twitter.com/bittamostofi)</u> of <u>@NYCImmigrants (https://twitter.com/NYCImmigrants)</u>.

...

Have an op-ed idea or submission for Gotham Gazette? Email opinion@gothamgazette.com (mailto:opinion@gothamgazette.com)

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((COMPONENT/TAGS/TAG/MAYOR-S-OFFICE-OF-IMMIGRANT-AFFAIRS) • BITTA MOSTOFI
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Statement for the Record of

Community Change Action and the Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM) Action Submitted to House Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship

For the Hearing: "The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program" on Thursday, February 27, 2020, 2 p.m.

Community Change and the Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM) write in unqualified support of refugees and a robust refugee system in the United States. We applaud this committee's prioritization of our nation's valuable—and increasingly under attack—refugee program. We look forward to continued legislative advocacy for a fair and generous refugee system through a substantial increase in the refugee cap and increased oversight over this administration's deconstruction of our refugee system.

Community Change is a national organization whose mission is to build the power and capacity of low-income people, especially low-income people of color, to change their communities and public policies for the better. FIRM, a project of Community Change, is the largest national immigrant grassroots coalition, led by 47 member organizations across 35 states.

Since 1975, over three million displaced people have found a new home in the United States.1 According to the UN High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), 70.8 million people are currently displaced worldwide, with 25.9 million people designated as refugees. Even with the participation of the United States with 134 other countries in refugee resettlement, only 3.6 percent of refugees are able to resettle safely in another country.2

Despite this significant need and our nation's historic commitment to refugee resettlement, the Trump administration has crippled the U.S. refugee system to an unprecedented degree. In 2017, President Trump announced a full suspension of the refugee program for 120 days and indefinitely suspended entry for Syrian refugees.³ When the program resumed, Syria and ten other countries were subject to an additional ban, renewed and expanded as recently as earlier this year, hampering our refugee resettlement program for Muslim and African majority countries in particular.4

The administration also instituted "extreme vetting" measures for refugees, a vague policy decision rooted in baseless assumptions connecting the refugee program to fraud and terrorism.⁵ Even before these so-called security measures, wait times for resettlement in the

¹Jens Manuel Krogstad, Key facts about refugees to the U.S., Pew Research Center, Oct. 7, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/07/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/.

Figures at a Glance, UNHCR, June 19, 2019, https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html.

³ Improved Security Procedures for Refugees Entering the United States, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Press Release, Oct. 24, 2017,

https://www.dhs.gov/news/2017/10/24/improved-security-procedures-refugees-entering-united-states#. Timeline of the Muslim Ban, American Civil Liberties Union, accessed Feb. 25, 2020,

https://www.aclu-wa.org/pages/timeline-muslim-ban.

5 Dan De Luce and Julia Ainsley, *Trump admin rejected report showing refugees did not pose major* security threat, NBC News, Sept. 5, 2018

United States historically took anywhere from 18 to 24 months, as the refugee application already involves one of the most intensive vetting processes of our immigration system.⁶

In addition to pursuing new and damaging policies that undermine the U.S refugee system, the Trump administration has dramatically cut down the ceiling for refugee admissions to their lowest levels in the history of the refugee system. The President set the cap for 2020 to an all-time low of 18,000 admissions, which follows two previous all-time lows in 2019 (30,000) and 2018 (45,000).

These dramatic reductions operate in tandem with the elimination or reduction of other forms of humanitarian relief, from the end to the Central American Minors (CAM) program to the start of the Remain in Mexico program to only name a few. The cumulative effect of all of these changes is profound and has caused serious damage to the system as a whole.

The welcoming spirit of this nation is deeply rooted in the values of family, equality and opportunity, all of which are undermined when we close our shores to those who need a new start in a safe place. Refugees have always and continue to contribute to our communities, from enriching what it means to be American to bolstering the economy. Refugees have higher rates of both employment and entrepreneurship than the U.S.-born population, and they continue to alleviate population decline and establish vibrant new communities in struggling cities across the country.8 Many of the FIRM Network member organizations were founded to assist refugees, and they continue to support refugees to this day. We at Community Change and FIRM find the current state of the U.S. refugee program to be wholly unacceptable.

We call on Congress to restore the refugee cap to its previous levels and immediately end the practice of "extreme vetting," as the vetting process for refugees is already one of the most rigorous in our immigration system. Congress must also exercise increased oversight over the administration's continued erosion of the refugee program, as is its prerogative as a legislative check to executive power.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record.

https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/trump-admin-rejected-report-showing-refugees-did-not-pose-major-n906681; Security screening of refugees admitted to the U.S, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, accessed Feb. 25, 2020, https://refugees.org/explore-the-issues/our-work-with-refugees/security-screening/.

⁶ U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) Syrian Processing-Frequently Asked Questions, Department of State, BPRM Refugee Processing Center, March 11, 2016,

https://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2016/254651.htm

⁸ Immigrants as Economic Contributors: Refugees Are a Fiscal Success Story for America, National Immigration Forum, June 14, 2018,

https://immigrationforum.org/article/immigrants-as-economic-contributors-refugees-are-a-fiscal-success-story-for-america/# ednrefi; Matthew La Corte, Refugees Are Revitalizing Some Great American Cities Facing Decline, Niskanen Center, June 21, 2016,

https://niskanencenter.org/blog/refugees-revitalizing-great-american-cities-facing-decline/



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March 4, 2020

The Honorable Representative Zoe Lofgren Chair, House Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship Committee on the Judiciary U.S. House of Representatives 2138 Rayburn House Office Building Washington, D.C. 20515

Subject: Union Statement on the Current State of the US Refugee Program

Dear Chairwoman Lofgren:

Thank you for affording us the opportunity to submit this statement for the record of the Subcommittee's recent hearing on February 27, 2020, regarding the Current State of the US Refugee Program. We offer this statement in our capacity as the labor organization representing over fourteen thousand (14,000) employees of US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) within the Department of Homeland Security. Our statement represents the views of our members, and should not be construed as the position of USCIS or the personal view of any employee speaking in their official capacity.

This month marks the fortieth anniversary of the Refugee Act of 1980 — the landmark legislation that codified our Country's international treaty obligations under the 1951 International Refugee Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees — which laid the foundation for almost four decades of American leadership in the global refugee protection system. On this important occasion, we take the opportunity reflect upon the current state of the US Refugee Program from the unique perspective of the employees of the USCIS International and Refugee Affairs Division (IRAD) — formerly the Refugee Affairs Division, Our operational component — Refugee and International Operations (RIO) — houses the Refugee Officer Corps, which is made up of an elite cadre of highly trained Refugee Officers whose mission is to travel the globe to interview and vet refugee applicants to determine

whether they are eligible for admission to the United States. Refugee Officers have dedicated their careers and their lives to work towards protecting the world's most vulnerable populations of refugees worldwide and to safeguarding our homeland and its promise of safe haven from persecution. Today, with an historically-low Refugee Admissions Ceiling, and the subsequent diversion of resources from our primary mission, the very identity and purpose of the US Refugee Program is being called into question.

From Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 to FY 2016, the annual Refugee Admissions ceiling remained fairly steady, ranging from 70,000 to 85,000 refugees. The Refugee Corps was fully engaged in processing refugees, focusing its efforts on meeting the ceiling while upholding high standards of security and integrity. Under the previous administration, the refugee admissions ceiling for FY 2017 was set at 110,000 to address the urgent global crises occurring in locations like Syria and Latin America. To meet this ceiling, USCIS detailed qualified personnel from other operational units to augment the Refugee Corps. Officers were expected to travel overseas to conduct refugee interviews three quarters per fiscal year, while rotating back to Washington DC one quarter to work on domestic projects and workloads.

With the change of administration in January 2017, overseas refugee processing was virtually paused for an entire quarter and the ceiling reduced to 50,000, pursuant to Executive Order 13780. Without any rational justification, a travel ban was instituted on a number of major refugee-producing countries, including Iraq and Syria. Further, the Administration ordered a 120-day review of the entire US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), suspending travel of refugees and decisions on applications for refugee status¹. This situation called for another dramatic shift in Agency resources, marking the first time Refugee Officers were deployed in large numbers to the Asylum Division to adjudicate Asylum cases. Every fiscal year since then, the ceiling has been lowered even further. Finally, in FY 2020, the ceiling was set at an all-time low of just 18,000 refugees allowed to be admitted to the US.² No longer can we consider our nation the world's beacon of hope for refugee protection. For the first time since the adoption of the refugee act of 1980, the US no longer leads the world in refugee resettlement. Although Canada has just over 11% of the U.S. population, it has overtaken the United States as the number one resettlement country in the world.

In response to these dramatic changes, our Union filed an *Amicus Curiea* ("Friend of the Court") brief in support of respondents challenging EO 13780, arguing that the Administration's actions undermined the critical mission of the US Refugee Program and the refugee officers who are our members. We argued that these actions were wholly unwarranted given the already robust nature of the program's adjudications and vetting process. ³

 $^{^{1}\,}https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/03/09/2017-04837/protecting-the-nation-from-foreign-terrorist-entry-into-the-united-states$

² https://www.wrapsnet.org/documents/Graph%20Refugee%20Admissions%20FY2020 01 31 .pdf; https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/trump-administration-sets-lowest-cap-u-s-refugee-admissions-four-n1059366

 $^{^3}$ Ref. Nos. 16-1436 and 16-1540 in the Supreme Court of the United States: Donald J. Trump v. International Refugee Assistance Project and Donald J. Trump v. State of Hawaii; Brief of Amicus Curiea National CIS Council 119 in Support of Respondents. September 7, 2017

Today, the job our members were hired to do — conducting overseas refugee adjudications — has become one of the lowest priorities of USCIS. Since the beginning of this administration, we have watched this program's demise: from the dramatic decrease in the number of refugee admissions, to the Division's failure to retain quality officers, to the altering of the mission itself. At first this appeared to be the "normal" ebb and flow of workload and operational priorities with changing political leadership — as is the nature of the federal government. As career civil servants, many of us are familiar with the shift in priorities and resources that comes with a new administration. However, as increasingly restrictive policies were put into place, it became clear that the Agency's objective was no longer to protect refugee and asylum seekers at home and abroad, but to deter them from coming to the United States in the first place.

With a constantly fluctuating workforce, the Refugee Corps currently includes about 140 refugee officers (not including supervisory, administrative and support staff) — down from a high of over 200 at the beginning of FY 2017. In the first quarter of FY2020 no refugee officers traveled overseas to conduct refugee adjudications. In the second quarter, about a third of the officers have been deployed on overseas refugee processing circuit rides, while almost half have been assigned to assist the USCIS Asylum Officer Corps with the screening of asylum seekers at the Southern border of the United States and the remainder either in training or handling tasks in the program's home office in Washington DC. With the dramatically reduced overseas operations, and the assignment of many employees to domestic Asylum caseloads, only a small number of officers are available to work on resolving the tens of thousands of cases in the backlog of refugee applications that have already been interviewed but are awaiting security clearances and the issuance of final decisions.

Since 2017, the Refugee Corps has been tasked with assisting our counterparts in the Asylum Division to a much greater extent than ever before. The United States has an obligation to fairly and efficiently process the applications of asylum seekers whether they are seeking admission from a refugee camp abroad or at borders or ports of entry. However, the effective management of one humanitarian crisis should not come at the expense of the other. Arguably, our government should have the ability to respond to the domestic asylum crisis without diminishing our capacity to fulfill our international burden-sharing obligations with respect to the resettlement of refugees from abroad.

We are deeply concerned that institutional capacity of the Refugee Corps has been adversely affected — with our many of our members diverted from international refugee adjudications to support the Asylum Division in a mission that appears to have tragically shifted from one of refugee protection to deterrence.

Since July 2019, the Washington DC office of Refugee and International Operations (RIO) has, for all intents and purposes, become a call center where Refugee Officers conduct Asylum Pre-Screening (Credible Fear and Reasonable Fear) interviews. During this period, the Administration has implemented harmful and unlawful new programs aimed at deterring asylum seekers arriving at the Southern Border — such as the Interim Final Rule (IFR) that bars asylum to applicants who transited third countries en route to the United States. In September 2019, our Union filed an *Amicus Curiae* ("Friend of the Court") brief in US District Court in Washington DC, in support of plaintiffs opposing the IFR Third Country Transit Bar on the grounds that the

policy violates US and international laws that afford the right of due process and humane treatment to asylum seekers. 4

In recent weeks, Refugee Corps officers have been assigned to conduct interviews under the Administration's Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP) policy (also known as the "Remain in Mexico" policy). Under the MPP program, asylum seekers are made to remain in dangerous conditions across the border, with little or no means of support, while awaiting their hearings in US Immigration Courts. Only a small number of asylum seekers placed in MPP are permitted to await their hearings in the United States after meeting an exceptionally high standard of proof that they would be persecuted or tortured if returned to Mexico.

In June 2019, our Union filed an *Amicus Curiae* brief in the US Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit, in support of plaintiffs opposing MPP on the grounds that the policy denies due process to asylum seekers and violates the "non-refoulement" provisions of US and international law that prohibit the return of refugees to territories where the they might be persecuted or tortured. ⁵

Refugee Corps officers may also be assigned to conduct interviews under the Administration's new Asylum Cooperative Agreement (ACA) with Guatemala whereby the United States may deport asylum seekers to Guatemala for the purpose of either applying for asylum in that country or requesting repatriation to the countries from which they fled. Individuals placed in the ACA proceedings are not afforded any opportunity to have their asylum claims heard by an asylum officer or an immigration judge. They are only screened to determine whether they might meet an exceptionally high standard of proof that they will be persecuted or harmed in Guatemala. It is anticipated that similar ACA programs will be implemented in the near future, for the deportation of asylum seekers to Honduras and El Salvador.

Our Union has publicly opposed the Administration's Asylum Cooperative Agreement with Guatemala policy as an unlawful and inhumane policy that flies in the face of US and international laws and humanitarian standards. ⁶

Our members in the USCIS Refugee Officer Corps feel ethically and morally compromised by their assignment to administer the Administration's harmful and unlawful policies that are clearly intended to deter, not protect, asylum seekers. Moreover, they fear that as they take on these additional Asylum Program workloads on a long-term basis the capacity of the Refugee

See also: BuzzFeed News: "Asylum Officers Are Urging A Court to Strike Down Trump's Asylum Ban and Saying it 'Rips at the Moral Fabric of our Country,'" by Hamed Aleaziz, October 15, 2019.

See also: Washington Post: "USCIS Asylum Officers: Trump's 'Remain in Mexico Policy' Threatens Lives," by Maria Sacchetti, June 27, 2019.

⁴ Ref: Case; 19-16487, 10/15/2019 in the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. East Bay Sanctuary Covenant v. William P. Barr. Brief for Amicus Curiae National CIS Council 119 in Support of Appelles.

⁵ Ref. Case: 19-15716, 06/26/2019 in the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Innovation Law Lab v. Kevin McAleenan. Brief of Amicus Curiae Local 1924 in Support of Plaintiffs-Appellees.

⁶ Ref. BuzzFeed News: "The Trump Administration Will Deport People Seeking Asylum in the US to Guatemala Without Them Seeing a Lawyer First," by Hamed Aleaziz, November 20, 2020

Corps to support the mission of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program will be greatly diminished.

Having been sworn to uphold the Constitution and laws of the United States (including the Refugee Act of 1980, which we celebrate this month) our members strongly believe that harmful policies such as the MPP, the IFR on the Third Country Transit Bar and the ACA programs are incompatible with the legal and humanitarian traditions of our Country. While Refugee Officers entered on duty in this position with the intention of providing life-saving protections to those in need, we find ourselves implementing a policy in which refugees and asylum seekers are being placed in harms' way.

We are alarmed that the political leadership of USCIS leadership has been unable to answer honest questions raised by the Union and its members about the legal and moral basis for these policies and programs — perhaps because there is none. We are also alarmed by the lack of transparency and consistency as to how U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) chooses to implement these programs in the first place.

Quite concerning is the fact that our members are now interviewing applicants who were initially returned to Mexico under MPP but are now referred to us after expressing fear of returning to Mexico during their court hearing. After individuals have spent several months in Mexico, they often qualify for protection from being returned to Mexico due to the severity of the harm they have either experienced or fear. Refugee and Asylum officers regularly see cases in which the harm applicants experienced at the hands of cartels and Mexican officials is so serious they merit protection under the Convention Against Torture — one of the forms of protection with the highest legal standard and burden of proof. These cases illustrate why the MPP program is unlawful and harmful and should never have been implemented in the first place.

While the media has given this topic extensive coverage, making the American public aware of the atrocities committed at the U.S.-Mexican border, refugee and asylum officers hear these stories on a daily basis. Yet, their hands are tied because they are not permitted to properly adjudicate asylum claims as intended by Congress in the laws it made. The crisis at the border is real, but it is largely a tragic consequence of the Administration's precipitous actions. Conducting asylum screenings under these conditions was not the job our members signed up for — but it is now their reality, and they feel compelled to speak out about it, through their Union.

Our members are conducting these interviews in an office building less than a mile from Capitol Hill. All day long, they must listen to stories of fear and desperation over the telephone, while telling asylum seekers that they no longer qualify under the new rules and must return to dangerous situations in neighboring countries. All the while, these dedicated civil servants ask why they aren't out in the world doing the work the government recruited them to do: offering protection, new life and hope to refugees for whom our country has been a beacon of hope since the Second World War. Tragically, tens of thousands of refugees who have already been interviewed, vetted and awaiting final approval for admission to the United States have been caught in a cruel legal limbo with no clear end in sight.

Last Friday, February 28, 2020, the US Court of Appeals for the 9th circuit court ruled that the MPP program "'was invalid in its entirety' due to inconsistencies in the law and should be

'enjoined in its entirety.' 7" Significantly, the Court cited to and quoted from our Union's *Amicus Curiae* brief in the decision, at pages 47-8:

"Local 1924 of the American Federation of Government Employees, a labor organization representing "men and women who operate USCIS Asylum Pre-Screening Operation, which has been responsible for a large part of USCIS's 'credible fear' and 'reasonable fear' screenings, and for implementing [the MPP]," also submitted an amicus brief. Local 1924 Amicus Brief at 1. Local 1924 writes in its brief:

Asylum officers are duty bound to protect vulnerable asylum seekers from persecution. However, under the MPP, they face a conflict between the directives of their departmental leaders to follow the MPP and adherence to our Nation's legal commitment to not returning the persecuted to a territory where they will face persecution. They should not be forced to honor departmental directives that are fundamentally contrary to the moral fabric of our Nation and domestic legal obligations.

In its ruling the Court ordered the government to halt the program immediately. Later that evening, however, the Court granted the government a stay of the injunction, allowing the parties to submit further documentary evidence. The court's decision highlights and validates the concerns that many of our members have regarding MPP.

Many refugee officers have left the Corps as a result of these dramatic changes and the resulting upheaval that has been visited upon the US Refugee Program — concluding that they could no longer be a part of what was once a world class refugee protection operation. Those who remained had hoped that the program would be renewed and adequately resourced after it was reviewed by the Administration and Congress — but those hopes appear to have been frustrated with the lowering of the refugee admissions ceiling for FY 2020 and the assignment of many refugee officers to support the domestic Asylum program.

With all of the changes made by the Administration to severely limit refugee admissions and restrict and deter asylum seekers from availing themselves of our country's protection, our government's capabilities to resume a generous refugee program may very well have been crippled. The Refugee Corps is losing important institutional knowledge and expertise that was built up over decades, and the Refugee Asylum and International Operations directorate (RAIO) is now recruiting less qualified individuals (see job announcements hiring asylum officers with much less experience and education at lower pay grades). Our program's once extensive legal and technical trainings have been truncated and are far less comprehensive — with increasing emphasis on deterrence rather than protection. Our country's historical refugee protection mission is no longer a priority — even though there are now more than 70 million refugees and forcibly displaced persons worldwide. These changes should be of concern for anyone who cares about the future of refugee resettlement and the ability of the US to play a role in this work of international collaboration and burden-sharing going forward.

 $^{^7 \} nbcnews.com/news/us-news/federal-appeals-court-rules-against-trump-two-major-immigration-cases-n1145141; https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/court-reverses-own-decision-trump-s-policy-require-migrants-wait-n1145771$

On behalf of our dedicated members who serve in the USCIS Refugee and Asylum Officer Corps, our Union implores this committee and all members of the Congress of the United States to put an end to this Administration's harmful and unlawful asylum policies and enact measures to restore the integrity of the US Refugee Program and ensure the government's strict compliance with its domestic laws and international treaty obligations with respect to the protection of refugees and asylum seekers.

respectfully submitted,

[signed - Michael A. Knowles]

Michael A. Knowles Special Representative National Citizenship and Immigration Services Council 119

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