

November 30, 2015

Dear Senator/Representative:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,