Dear Honorable Members of the United States Senate,

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

This nation has an urgent moral responsibility to receive refugees and asylum seekers who are in dire need of safety. Today, with more than four million Syrian refugees fleeing violence and persecution and over 250,000 Syrian deaths, the United States has an ethical obligation as a world leader to reduce this suffering and generously welcome Syrian refugees into our country. We call on the Obama Administration, the U.S. Congress and Governors of all states to demonstrate moral leadership and affirm their support for the resettlement of Syrian refugees to the United States. This nation has a rich history as a leader in refugee resettlement, with significant precedent, including after World War II and after the fall of Saigon, when we resettled hundreds of thousands of refugees.

In the wake of recent terrorist attacks in Paris, Beirut and Baghdad, many U.S. Governors and Members of Congress are calling to stop any Syrian refugees from resettling to the United States. It is important to recognize that the United States has the most rigorous refugee screening process in the world, including biometric checks, medical screenings, forensic testing of documents, DNA testing for family reunification cases, and in-person interviews with Department of Homeland Security officials. In the face of violence, we can and must show moral courage and increase welcome for individuals fleeing persecution.

The U.S. Refugee Resettlement program has been and should remain open to those of any religious tradition who face persecution on account of the reasons enumerated under U.S. law. We oppose any legislation or proposal that would prevent Syrian refugees or individuals who practice Islam and other faiths from accessing the U.S. refugee resettlement program. Proposals that would have the U.S. State Department disqualify refugees from protection based on their nationality or religion fly in the face of the very principles this nation was built upon, contradict the legacy of leadership our country has historically demonstrated, and dishonor our shared humanity.

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

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

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

Sincerely.

National and International Leaders

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Rev. Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
The Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ

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Bishop Forrest C. Stith, Retired

Clay F. Lee, Bishop retired, The United Methodist Church

Bishop William W. Hutchinson, The United Methodist Church, Retired

Bishop Charlene Kammerer, Bishop, The United Methodist Church, Retired

Ray W. Chamberlain, Jr. Ret. Bishop, United Methodist Church

Bishop Peter D.Weaver. The United Methodist Church

Bishop Ernest S. Lyght, Retired, The United Methodist Church

Bishop Sharon Zimmerman Rader, retired, The United Methodist Church

Bishop Joseph H. Yeakel, retired The United Methodist Church

Bishop Al Gwinn, The United Methodist Church, Retired

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Bishop Alfred Johnson, retired Bishop, The United Methodist Church

Bishop Susan W. Hassinger, The United Methodist Church, Retired

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Rev. Angie Wright, Greater Birmingham Ministries

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Reverend Jack M. Dickson, Shepard's Grace Church

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Rev. D. Anthony Everett, Wesley United Methodist Church, Lexington, KY

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