

Council for Christian Colleges
and Universities

Ethics and Religious Liberty
Commission of the Southern
Baptist Convention

National Association of
Evangelicals

National Hispanic Christian
Leadership Conference

World Relief

December 2, 2015

Dear Members of Congress,

With more than 50 million refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people in the world, we are facing the world's worst displacement crisis since World War II. The conflict in Syria alone has forced approximately 4 million individuals to flee the country, with millions more displaced internally. The deliberate, brutal targeting of Christians solely because of their faith is especially alarming.

Since the inception of the modern U.S. refugee resettlement program in 1975, 3 million individuals fleeing violence, conflict and persecution have started their lives anew in the United States. Many of these refugees have been welcomed by local church communities that have helped them get back on their feet. Just last year alone, the United States resettled close to 70,000 refugees. In 1980, the United States received more than 200,000 refugees in one year. Resettlement to the United States is not the sole or primary solution to the displacement crisis, but this important tool in humanitarian protection rescues the most vulnerable refugees and embodies the best of our country's values. It also promotes a positive image of our country abroad and encourages other nations to follow our example.

As Congress considers legislation to reform the program, we ask you to consider the following:

- **Reject damaging changes to the U.S. refugee resettlement system that would cause this life-saving program to grind to a halt.** Adding additional layers of bureaucracy to a proven system will not make us any safer, but it will keep us from providing refuge to people whose lives have already been threatened. The U.S. resettlement program is a life-saving tool that rescues some of the most vulnerable refugees around the world. It is also one of the most secure programs the United States has for allowing anyone to enter the country. While tourists, students and business travelers may undergo minimal security screening, it takes on average 18-24 months for a refugee to be vetted through the security process. Biographic and biometric data is collected and checked against multiple U.S. security and intelligence databases. In addition, each refugee has a face-to-face interview with a trained Department of Homeland Security official as well as a thorough medical screening before they are admitted. This process has worked to exclude individuals who could be a potential threat to our national security.
- **Do not exclude any religion or nationality from the U.S. refugee resettlement program.** The hallmark of our refugee resettlement program is that it accepts refugees based on vulnerability and ties to the United States. Religion and nationality are factors to consider in evaluating the refugee claim, but the program should not exclude a refugee on one of those grounds alone. Each refugee story is unique and as such should be treated on its own merit.
- **Increase the resettlement of Christian refugees.** The persecution of Christians is uniquely severe given their extreme minority status. Christian communities in the Middle East are facing attacks that can only be considered genocidal in intent. The United States must do more to protect them.
- **Do not neglect other vulnerable refugee groups.** We are concerned about the plight of religious minorities in the Middle East, including Christians.

Evangelical Immigration Table

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Resettlement is one tool of protection which can and should be used in cases where refugees cannot return home or locally integrate. The United States should identify and receive a larger number of religious minorities from the Middle East including, but not limited to, Christians. The United States can increase the resettlement of persecuted Christians in addition to other vulnerable religious groups, including Yazidis, Muslims, and others.

- **Address root causes of the conflict so more refugees do not have to flee.** Resettlement is a durable solution of last resort in extreme situations and is not an option for most refugees. Refugees often prefer to return home once conditions in their home countries improve or locally integrate in the countries of asylum. Thus, we urge you to dramatically increase assistance to refugees in places where they seek refuge, while also acknowledging that resettlement is a key durable solution for many refugees who are unable to return home or locally integrate in a country of asylum.
- **Work with governors and local communities to welcome refugees.** The U.S. refugee resettlement program is a federal responsibility that depends on the cooperation of local and state governments, as well as churches and volunteers. We urge you to work with state and local elected officials to ensure that states continue to fulfill their responsibilities. Many businesses and faith communities welcome refugees and work in close partnership with state and local governments to help refugees become self-sufficient, quickly integrated, contributing members of their communities.

The United States resettles less than half of 1% of the world's refugees. At a time when turmoil and war are forcing millions of people to flee their homes, the United States should ensure the refugee resettlement program, a vital lifeline, continues to protect the world's persecuted. As our country does so, many evangelical Christians within local churches and college campuses are eager and willing to volunteer their time and resources to assist in the resettlement and successful integration of refugees.

Our faith inspires us to respond with compassion and hospitality to those fleeing violence and persecution. Jesus himself was a refugee, and he teaches us to do unto others as we would have them do to us. Compassion is not in conflict with national security. The U.S. refugee resettlement program has embodied both values and continues to be a valuable humanitarian tool that should be supported. Our nation has rich history as a beacon of freedom and hope. Please help us as we write the next chapter in this history.

Sincerely,

The Evangelical Immigration Table