



# Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

## Background

### Talking Points on Refugee Resettlement

*Revised January 28, 2017*

#### **Background**

- On the International Holocaust Remembrance Day—January 27, 2017, President Trump signed an Executive Order titled, “Protecting the Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into the United States.”<sup>1</sup>
- The U.S Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is being suspended for 120 days for all populations with a few exceptions.
- It sets a new refugee resettlement priority—requiring the United States to no longer prioritize the resettlement of the most vulnerable—but those who are fleeing religious persecution and are minorities in the country they are fleeing.
- Syrian refugees have an indefinite bar on being resettled, until such time that the President determines that sufficient changes have been made to the USRAP.
- The order further bans residents of seven countries, including green card holders, from Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Yemen, Iraq and Sudan from visiting or entering the U.S. for 90 days. Other countries may be added to the list.
- It creates new screening procedures for refugees and other visa applicants in the U.S. and *may* require asylum recipients and others—to undergo additional screening.
- Provides for a new procedure to allow states and localities to discriminate against refugees by deciding whether they can be placed in their state or communities.
- **It is essential that we stand firm and fight for the rights of refugees and our shared American values.**

#### **Who is a Refugee?**

- Under U.S. and international law, a refugee is someone outside his or her own country with a well-founded fear of persecution in that country based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.
- Most refugees’ deepest desire is to be able to return to their homeland in peace and safety – and they are willing to wait a long time in refugee camps and dangerous settings for that possibility.
- Resettlement in a new country is available to less than 1% of the world’s refugees as the last resort for those who cannot return to their homes and for whom it is not possible to survive or rebuild their lives in a nearby country.
- The vast majority of the world’s refugees live in places that neighbor the countries they have fled, placing disproportionate responsibility on already strained allies and stretching their ability to provide protection and care, and further risking the stability of the region.
- Refugees are fleeing the same kind of terror which we have seen unfolding around the world.

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<sup>1</sup> The Executive Order may be found here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/27/us/politics/refugee-muslim-executive-order-trump.html>

- We cannot forget who refugees are – they are the families, the children, and the most vulnerable among us who have lost everything. In fact 78% of refugees are women and children. They have lost friends and family. They have lost their community. They have lost their home.
- They have defied and survived all the odds staked against them to leave behind discrimination, threats, and violence.

### **Topline Messaging**

- President Trump’s Executive Order undermines the very foundation of our commitment to freedom and justice for people seeking our democratic way of life.
- Halting vulnerable refugees from coming to America should not be among the first actions of a new administration. **This executive order literally snuffs out the beacon of light held by the Statue of Liberty.** His actions sends an ominous message to the world that America no longer cares about freedom, democracy, and justice.
- Furthermore, stopping refugee resettlement will not make us any safer – instead it will undermine our country’s national security by feeding into the rhetoric of those who wish to wreak havoc and sow fear.
- American values are built on freedom and justice. As a nation of immigrants, we have always prided ourselves as a beacon of hope for people around the world who do not have the fortune of our freedoms here in America.
- America has always been on the front line of freedom and social justice, supporting refugees from around the world fleeing violence, terrorism, and intolerance.
- **In the strongest possible terms, we in the faith community condemn this announcement to pause the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, halt the arrival of Syrian refugees, and reduce the overall number of refugees who will enter the U.S. this year from 110,000 to 50,000.**

### **Value of Resettlement**

- This is a program that saves hundreds of lives every day, and strengthens our communities, our churches and our nation. Stopping refugee resettlement, no matter for how long, will have profound and detrimental consequences for those we seek to help. Lives will be lost because of this shortsighted decision.
- The refugee resettlement program was started by people of faith in the United States, and this announcement flies in the face of the Bible’s call that we welcome the stranger and treat the sojourner as we would our own citizens. **Nations are judged by how they treat the most vulnerable: the widow, the orphan, and the refugee, during trying times.**
- The refugee program that the United States government has built, in partnership with faith communities and other private non-profit partnerships, works - and it works well. To put a stop to these successful partnerships for an undetermined period of time is foolish, and puts at risk the progress and communities of welcome our organizations have supported and built across the country.
- The refugees that are screened and admitted to the U.S., often to join family who are already U.S. citizens, embody American values AND helping refugees is essential to what it means to be an American.
- The United States can – and must – continue to welcome refugees while continuing to ensure our own security. **Our history has proven you don’t need to make a choice, and we should continue to do both.**

- Refugees are the most vetted of any immigrant group that enters the United States. To say we do not have robust vetting is, quite simply, ignoring the facts. If there is any doubt on a refugee's background, they are denied access to the United States, by the U.S. Government.<sup>2</sup>
- We must not forget: refugees are those standing up to dictators and violent movements like ISIS. They are the survivors of religious discrimination, persecution, violence, tyranny, and injustice. They share our American values and should be welcomed as our neighbors.
- And, the United States government **chooses the most vulnerable and most vetted** for admission to our country.
- Putting a stop to our refugee resettlement program – for any period of time and for any group of people – puts at risk the lives of those most in need at the worst possible moment. **Our world is facing the worst humanitarian crisis in history with over 65 million forcibly displaced people worldwide.**<sup>3</sup>
- The 30 countries that together resettle less than 200,000 refugees a year to a safe third country play an important role in demonstrating the protection of human rights and helping to provide stability to our allies like Jordan that are providing temporary protection to more than 650,000 refugees.<sup>4</sup>
- By drastically reducing the number of refugees the U.S. has committed to resettle this year – in the middle of the process – sends a message to the world that the United States commitments aren't reliable. And it puts at risk the lives of those we seek to help through resettlement.
- The United States is also the only country in the world that has championed the resettlement of **unaccompanied refugee children**—children who no longer have a parent or guardian due to the persecution they experienced. President Trump is allowing us to turn our backs on the most vulnerable of all—refugee children without families.
- We [*name of organization and/or LIRS*] strongly encourage President Trump to **immediately restart** refugee resettlement from all countries that the United States has been resettling from.<sup>5</sup>
- Lives are at stake, and so too are American values. This announcement is irresponsible and flies in the face of what it means to be American.

## Country Specific Pause to Refugee Resettlement

### ***Why This is Unconscionable***

- We stand with the American people in strong opposition to this announcement, which turns our backs on refugees—in particular Syrian and other Muslim refugees—at the very time when they are most in need of safety and assistance.
- By restricting access to resettlement for Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Yemen, Iraq and Sudan specifically, this order is **tantamount to the Muslim ban** that President Trump threatened during his campaign. This is a clear case discrimination based on religion and nationality and must be decried as such.
- We call on members of this new administration and Congress to do everything in their power to reverse this announcement.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/refugeescreening>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Jordan%20Operational%20Update%20-%20December%202016.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/docsforcongress/261956.htm>

- **The refugees who ultimately obtain approval for entry to the United States are the very ones opposing terrible acts of violence and terrorism.**
- Closing our borders to refugees based on their national origin runs contrary to our constitutional values and is not only insidious, but dangerous.

### ***Why We Care about Syrians, Afghanis, and Iraqis...***

#### ***Syrian Refugees***

- Nearly **five million Syrians** were registered as refugees as of early January. The vast majority are in countries of first-asylum such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq and only a fraction are likely to ever be permanently resettled in another country.<sup>6</sup>
- Syrian refugees are fleeing the same kind of terror which we have seen unfolding in incidents around the world.
- The Syrian war, quickly approaching its sixth year, has caused unspeakable horrors with the government of Syria bombing and killing their own citizens, including persecuted Christians, who are also threatened by ISIS.
- Syrians account for 40 percent of the refugees in need of resettlement, the highest figure since the start of the conflict in early 2011.
- The war in Syria has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, caused millions to be internally displaced within Syria, and forced millions more to flee Syria for their lives.
- The war has had a disproportionate effect on women and children - **51% of all Syrian refugees are children.**
- These large numbers put significant pressures on the countries of initial refuge. By resettling a very small fraction of the total displaced, the United States can leverage our leadership to influence other countries around the world to do more.

#### ***Afghani and Iraqi (SIV) Refugees***

- The Iraqi and Afghani Special Immigrant Visa program<sup>7</sup> was originally designed to provide 7,500 visas over five years for those who served with our U.S. military. Extensions were passed in 2014 and 2015 that made 7,000 more visas available. Most recently, Congress passed a one year extension providing for an additional 1,500 visas for Afghanis.
- This announcement from President Trump puts at risk the more than 13,000 Afghans, who worked alongside our military men and women, and their families who are waiting for a special immigrant visa, according to the State Department.<sup>8</sup>
- Iraqis and Afghanis face persecution because of their service alongside American troops and they deserve our protection. It not only puts their lives at risk – but could further risk the lives of our military men and women still serving.<sup>9</sup>
- And the thousands that that we have resettled have contributed in countless ways to our American economy and culture. They open businesses and fill important jobs. They represent the American dream at its most fundamental. This announcement stops that American dream from coming to fruition for the thousands who have already sacrificed for our country through their service.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/syrian-refugees-united-states>

<sup>7</sup> <https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/immigrate/iraqi-afghan-translator.html>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/12/02/afghan-visa-program-extended-despite-pushback-from-immigration-foes/?utm\\_term=.d5c0ed806809](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/12/02/afghan-visa-program-extended-despite-pushback-from-immigration-foes/?utm_term=.d5c0ed806809)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/afghan-special-immigrant-visa-program>

- Many individuals from Afghanistan and Iraq who come through the resettlement program have served alongside our military and other federal government officials. This is why veterans strongly support refugee resettlement from all over the world including from Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Refugees have faced acts of terror, have lost loved ones and been forced from their homes, and then make the difficult decision to leave their homeland, their belongings, and their previous lives to flee to wherever they can find refuge for themselves and their families.

### ***Excluding People Based on Faith or Country of Origin***

- Our faith and American values call us to oppose efforts that exclude vulnerable people from protection simply because of *their* faith or country of origin
- We urge public officials to avoid knee-jerk reactions that needlessly politicize protection of extremely vulnerable people, to reject misplaced blame that creates an atmosphere of fear, and to stand in solidarity with all refugees, who are themselves victims of terrorism and violence in their home country.
- Refugees of all faiths and ethnicities add an immeasurable amount to the richness of American culture, contribute to our economic strength and honor our core values as a nation.
- We must not give into the politics of fear, and turn our backs on those most in need when they need us most.

### ***Giving States and Localities Additional Authority to Discriminate***

- LIRS and all of our affiliates have always been committed to ensuring that state and local communities have a role in the process of refugee resettlement.
- In fact, it's already built into the law and regulations that make up the United States refugee admissions and placement programs.
- We have quarterly consultations in every community that we resettle and regularly meet with stakeholders to ensure we are hearing and addressing their needs.
- We are very concerned that this late addition to this executive order will result in states feeling more emboldened to pursue anti-refugee provisions in their state law.
- Refugee resettlement makes our cities, states, and our country stronger.
- We hope that every state we resettle in will recognize this and continue to partner with us as we continue this life saving work which is mutually beneficial to refugees and the states that accept them.

### **Our strong history of welcome**

*"You, too, must show love to foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt." (Deuteronomy 10:19, NLT)*

*"I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (Matthew 25:35)*

We are a nation of immigrants and refugees. As people of faith, we are called to bear prophetic witness to God's love for all people and to welcome, love and care for the stranger. As Lutherans, our special roots as an immigrant church also encourage us to stand in solidarity with migrants and refugees.

Helping refugees is the moral and humane thing to do—they are parents, children, and other vulnerable individuals who have fled their homes and are displaced in refugee camps.

They have little or no food, insufficient access to education or health care services, and inadequate shelter or protection.

- The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program embodies the United States' values of compassion, generosity, and leadership in serving vulnerable people.
- What unites us as Americans is our love of family, deep respect for hard work, and a shared commitment to the country we call home. Refugees are seeking a new place to call home and that is what the refugee resettlement program offers – a new home, an opportunity to be reunited with family, and chance to build a safe and prosperous life.
- By stopping the refugee admissions program, for any period of time, America sends a signal to the rest of the world that we aren't committed to the goal of providing safe refuge to those most in need.
- It also shows the world that we are failing to uphold the international commitments we've made.

### **Our National Security Interests are Protected**

**Refugees to the United States are among the most EXTREMELY VETTED immigrants in the world.** The United States handpicks the refugees who are admitted. They go through multiple and extensive layers of security checks (for more information on the vetting and resettlement process, visit Refugee Council USA<sup>10</sup>). Only after all checks are completed and cleared is a refugee eligible to travel, at their cost, to the United States.<sup>11</sup>

- Simply put, the United States only resettles individuals who have been thoroughly vetted over the course of years.
- Intensive security screening by the U.S. government occurs on all refugees prior to admission. It is a detailed and rigorous process – and the U.S. hand picks every refugee who is resettled here.
- Refugees must pass through a series of security screenings, including biographic and biometric checks, medical screenings, forensic document testing, and in-person interviews. A refugee's identity is checked against law enforcement and intelligence databases, including those of the:
  - ✓ National Counterterrorism Center,
  - ✓ Department of Defense,
  - ✓ Federal Bureau of Investigation,
  - ✓ Department of State,
  - ✓ Department of Homeland Security
- This all happens before a refugee ever steps foot on American soil where they will still undergo additional checks at the port of entry.
- This already extreme vetting process takes, on average, **18 -24 months**. And if there is ever a doubt if someone is a risk to our country, they are not resettled in the United States.
- **Resettling refugees is in our national interest.** In December 2015, 20 former national security officials signed a letter to Congress in support of the U.S. refugee program – stating "resettlement initiatives help advance U.S. national security interests

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.rcusa.org/resettlement-process/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/refugeescreening#Enhanced%20Review>

by supporting the stability of our allies and partners that are struggling to host large numbers of refugees.”<sup>12</sup>

## **Refugees Make America Great**

While there is an immediate and modest short-term cost to resettling refugees in the U.S., there is a **long-term and life-long economic gain** that refugees and their decedents bring.<sup>13</sup> America is better because of the hardworking and contributing refugees we resettle here. They are customers in our stores and businesses, small business owners who pay payroll taxes, and our neighbors who give to local churches and charities.

- The majority of refugees open businesses, fill important jobs, become teachers, CEOs, and public officials.
- Refugees and asylum seekers in the U.S. today are law-abiding, hard-working individuals and families who make valuable contributions to their communities by starting businesses, paying taxes, and by sharing their unique cultural gifts with America.
- Employment counselors help refugees find work so that they can support themselves. Many refugees often find work in manufacturing or other industries very quickly with support from dedicated professional at our Lutheran partners throughout the country.
- Much of our continued success as a nation will rest on our ability to embrace those who come here seeking protection and better opportunities for themselves and their families.

## **Additional Resources**

We encourage you to visit the following links to learn more about refugee resettlement, security screening, and further information on how to advocate for refugees. If you haven't already, [sign up](#) to receive our Stand for Welcome action alerts, which keeps you updated on current legislation and issues affecting migrants and refugees. And regularly visit our [LIRS Action Center](#) for information on how you can act now to stand up for refugees and migrants.

- [Refugee 101 From Refugee Council USA](#)
- [Refugee Council USA Security Screening Backgrounder](#)
- [Refugee Resettlement State Profiles](#)
- [Refugee Council USA 2017 Advocacy Toolkit](#)
- [Letters and articles, national and state-by-state, demonstrating welcome for refugees](#)
- [Letter from former Secretaries of the Department of Homeland Security](#)
- [Letter to Congress from 20 Former National Security Officials](#)
- [White House Infographic: The Screening Process for Refugee Entry into the United States](#)

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.rcusa.org/blog/20-former-national-security-officials-sign-letter-to-congress-on-the-security-of-the-refugee-program>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2016/12/13/294851/syrian-immigrants-in-the-united-states-a-receiving-community-for-todays-refugees/>