Slide 1: (RYAN)

- Hello, this webinar is part of a Refugee Council USA series of webinars on supporting refugees during COVID-19.
- Other webinars in this series, along with related tools and resources, can be found at www.rcusa.org/covid-19.

Slide 2: (RYAN)

- Today, we'll be talking about Refugee Advocacy in the Age of COVID-19

Slide 3: Presenters

- I'm Denise Bell Researcher for Refugee & Migrant Rights at Amnesty International USA
- And I'm Ryan Mace, Senior Policy Advisor on the Government Relations and Advocacy Team at Amnesty International USA

Slide 4: Learning Objectives (Ryan)

By the end of today's webinar, you will be able to identify:

- Challenges unique to refugees and asylum-seekers in this time
- Advocacy opportunities for you to be part of helping displaced populations around the world and here in the U.S.
- And finally, what are things you can "ask" of elected leaders to bolster support for refugees and asylum-seekers

Slide 5: What Does COVID-19 Mean for Refugees and Asylum-Seekers? (Denise)

We'd like to start with an overview of the situation: What Does COVID-19 Mean for Refugees and Asylum-Seekers in the U.S.?

- Right now, there is a temporary suspension of resettlement globally. Since mid-March, no refugees have been resettled to the U.S. or anywhere. While there is a moratorium on refugee arrivals, there are specific and limited exceptions for particularly urgent protection cases. These individuals are being quarantined for 14 days -- with mandatory daily temperature checks and other precautions. As Ryan will discuss, this means refugees are facing even more challenges in the countries where they're seeking shelter.
- People seeking asylum here in the U.S. are facing even more challenges too. The southern border has been closed to people seeking asylum, even children on their own. Immigrants and asylum-seekers are held in overcrowded detention centers across the U.S., with inadequate access to soap and sanitizer and negligent medical care.
- People seeking safety -- refugees and asylums-seekers -- have been subject to discrimination on account of their ethnicity, race, and nationality because they are seen as foreigners and COVID-19 is associated with foreigners.
- While Congress has enacted legislation to respond to growing needs during this time, many refugees are left out of the aid and unable to receive cash payments, unemployment benefits, and other desperately-needed relief. Asylum-seekers were

already not able to access many benefits, and are feeling the economic impacts all the more acutely.

- And many of the world's most urgent humanitarian situations were already underfunded, meaning that refugees and displaced populations often barely have their most fundamental needs of adequate shelter, food, water, basic health care met.

Slide 6: Refugees Are Part of the Solution (Denise)

At the same time, refugees are part of the solution in battling COVID-19 in the U.S.

- During the COVID-19 crisis, as advocates work to keep people safe, refugees are also working on the frontlines and in essential jobs. There are 161,000 working in health care, and 170,000 in the food supply chain.
- They are doctors, nurses, and medical personnel working in hospitals, clinics, and elder care facilities. They work in vital supply chains, keeping grocery store shelves stocked. The work in factories and plants making sure we have what we need to stay healthy and beat the pandemic.
- We need to shift the narrative of refugees being victims, of refugees being threats, of refugees depending on help, and share the stories of our collective humanity. Being a refugee is just one part of a person's identity.
- Refugees are part of the solution and indispensable to our collective well-being and success. We are interconnected. Like any of us, refugees contribute to their new communities, are productive and helpful, and support their families. And together, we will beat this virus.

Slide 7: Refugees & Displaced Populations (Ryan)

It's important to remember some key facts about the displacement crisis we were facing before COVID-19

- There are over 70 million forcibly displaced people worldwide
- 41 million internally displaced Persons
- Nearly 26 million refugees
- And between 3 and 4 million people seeking asylum
- We were also seeing some very concerning humanitarian situations grow worse in the immediate weeks and months before this was declared a pandemic.
- With the spread of COVID-19, refugees find themselves in an even more perilous situation than before.

Slide 8: Basic Safety for Refugees (Ryan)

First, basic safety for refugees.

- Refugees and displaced populations have limited access to water, sanitation systems, and health facilities.
- All of which are critical to fighting the spread of the disease and meeting emergent needs.
- Refugees are cut off from adequate health facilities with little means of protecting themselves.

- The kind of intensive care needed for particularly acute cases of covid-19 – including access to respirators – is limited to scarce in some of the better circumstances, or non-existent in others.
- While some refugees live in overcrowded camps, the majority of refugees and displaced populations live in urban settings.
- They often live in close quarters with multiple generations sharing the same small living space including cooking and bathroom facilities.
- Social distancing in these settings simply isn't possible.

Slide 9: Economic Impact (Ryan)

Second, the economic impact.

- Refugees are disproportionately impacted by loss of income, restricted movement, reduced access to markets, and inflation.
- This is especially true in countries that currently host large numbers of refugees.
- As host communities feel the economic impact of COVID-19, they may limit the access of refugees, migrants, and IDPs to resources that support their basic needs.
- Many refugees may have had economic support through remittances from abroad, but those too have decreased as economies shrink and the ability to work is limited or in some cases, stopped altogether worldwide.
- Further, the ability of humanitarian workers to do their critical work has been affected by this pandemic as critical services and goods have been restricted.

Slide 10: Gender-Based Violence (Ryan)

Third, gender-based violence.

- Women and girls will likely experience distinct challenges and risks as a result of this pandemic.
- Like here in the US: confinement, loss of income, isolation can all lead to increased risks of violence and sexual exploitation.
- Further, women and girls might also face increased household responsibilities such as having to care for sick family members and handle additional childcare demands.
- This will hinder their ability to access critical services, including health care.

Slide 11: Decreased Access to Protection (Ryan)

And, fourth: decreased access to protection.

- The closure of borders, asylum offices and courts, along with the suspension of resettlement globally has decreased access to protection opportunities.
- UNHCR has reported that 167 countries have responded to COVID-19 by partially or fully closing their borders including the U.S.
- At least 57 states are making no exception for people seeking asylum
- Suspending the right to seek asylum, under any circumstances, is a violation of international law.
- We cannot return someone to a place where they could face persecution or torture.

- Even with resettlement on hold globally there are still 1.4 million refugees in need of resettlement this year.
- Their need for protection has not lessened.
- Many are rightly concerned that there is a real risk that current "temporary" measures to respond to the virus – closing off borders, shutting down of resettlement – will become a new normal.

Slide 12: Closing borders to people seeking safety (Denise)

As we've just heard, asylum-seekers to the U.S., like refugees, are facing challenges. The U.S. has weaponized the response to COVID-19 to achieve its longstanding policy objective to close the border.

Slide 13: U.S.-Mexico Border (Denise)

On March 20, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, also known as the "CDC," issued an order closing the U.S. southern border.

- The Department of Homeland Security has used this order to eviscerate asylum and humanitarian protections for unaccompanied children, families, and adults seeking safety at the border. On May 19, the CDC extended this much-criticized order indefinitely.
- Public health experts have concluded that this order "is based on specious justifications and fails to protect public health." The U.S. government is using COVID-19 to fulfill its long-sought goal of closing the border to asylum-seekers.
- In just six weeks, DHS used the CDC order to block and expel at least 21,000 people -- including untold thousands of asylum-seekers and over 1,000 unaccompanied children. These are children traveling alone who were summarily expelled at the border.
- The U.S. is expelling people to places where they face risk of kidnapping, rape, and murder, without the legally required opportunity to seek protection in the United States.

Slide 14: Immigrant Detention (Denise)

The U.S. government is using the pandemic against asylum-seekers already inside the U.S. as well.

- Currently, there are over 26,000 people trapped in tinderbox-like conditions in ICE detention facilities across the United States. This includes families with children as young as 1-years-old.
- Even before COVID-19, ICE detention facilities were already well documented to be overcrowded and with inadequate conditions and negligent medical care.
- Since the onset of the pandemic, conditions in ICE facilities have grown deadlier. Detention facilities are still overcrowded and failing to provide people with sanitizer, face masks, free soap, or even basic information about the virus.

- Conditions are so dangerous that even guards at ICE facilities operated by private prison corporations have been driven to sue their employers for failing to provide even basic safety precautions, including masks, sanitizer, and adequate social distancing.
- Public health experts predict that, unless ICE drastically reduces the numbers of detained immigrants in its custody, anywhere from 72 percent to nearly 100 percent of detained people in many ICE facilities could contract COVID-19, endangering not only their lives, but also local communities. It could overwhelm local hospital capacity and potentially devastating the health of entire communities.
- There is simply no reason for ICE not to release people in detention. ICE has the legal authority to release people -- including families together -- but is choosing not to act during a global pandemic, when our collective public health depends on it.

Slide 15: Refugees Have No Nation Fighting For Them (Denise)

Crises test who we are as a country – and we are stronger when we are united.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed how interconnected and interdependent the world is.
- We are safer when we care for all of our neighbors, listen to public health experts, and resist medical prejudice and scapegoating.
- The crisis has also shown us that we each have a role to play and every one of us counts.
- More than ever, this is a time to use our voice to advocate for policies that bring us together and keep us all safer, to advocate for fairness and against discrimination, and to advocate for a inclusive society that ensures all people's rights are respected and the right to seek asylum is guaranteed and the lifeline of resettlement is available to refugees.

Slide 16: What is Advocacy? (Ryan)

What is advocacy?

- At its heart, advocacy is people power: Using your voice – and centering the voices of refugees and allies – to change hearts and minds, including those of policymakers and people in power. Advocacy transforms policies and services that affect refugees and asylum-seekers.
- Advocacy includes activities like public education, lobbying and relationship-building with policy makers, civic engagement, voter registration, and media outreach.
- Advocacy can lead to systemic, lasting, positive changes that help all people thrive in their communities.
- It is critical that we build bipartisan support for refugees by working with elected leaders from both parties.

Slide 17: Advocacy Tactics (Ryan)

At its core, what advocacy really means is educating people around the change we seek in the world.

- It is our way of communicating what we want to see and how we want to get there.

- Most often, advocacy happens with elected leaders, because they shape policies, conduct oversight, appropriate funding, and are responsible for writing the laws of our states and country.
- There are a number of tactics we can use to work for the change we wish to see.
- Whether it is public events, like tabling at a farmers market, or educating people about the issue at church, school, or work, it is about relationship building with our community, and elected leaders and their staff.
- It's about planning or participating in marches. Writing letters to our local paper. Calling and writing our local officials. It's about bringing together a coalition of people from different walks of life with one common message.

Slide 18: Advocacy Fundamentals (Denise)

The most important principle to remember about advocacy is: YOU.

- Who You Are. Why You Care. What You Want.
- Your story as a refugee or supporter of refugee resettlement is your most important qualification as an advocate.
- Your story gives you power and authenticity, and reminds elected leaders who their voters are.

Slide 19: Advocacy Fundamentals (Denise)

The other important principle to remember about advocacy is: Developing relationships with and educating elected leaders. These are necessary to see welcoming policies and attitudes towards refugees change.

- It is more important than ever to meet with your local, state, and national policy makers to educate them about the vital role that refugees and all newcomers play in your community.
- Because change takes time, engaging with policy makers should be viewed as part of a continuing process of sharing information, building relationships, and having refugees' perspectives genuinely considered when decisions are made that impact their lives.
- It is important that elected leaders understand that their constituents – YOU – care about refugees, and that refugees are their constituents.
- Talk with policy makers about the way your community welcomes refugees and the positive contributions refugees make to your community, and urge them to support refugee resettlement.
- It is important that elected leaders understand that their constituents live, work, and contribute in their communities, obtain U.S. citizenship, and vote.

Slide 20: Our Asks (Ryan)

So, what are we asking for?

- We want the U.S. to resume refugee admissions as soon as safely possible.
- AND, once resettlement has resumed, ensure that refugees who are waiting for travel can do so.
- Restore both the resettlement program and asylum protections to historic norms

- Lead with policies that welcome refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless individuals

Slide 21: Our Asks (Ryan)

For U.S. House of Representatives Only:

- Join the bipartisan Congressional refugee caucus by emailing rachel.calanni@mail.house.gov
- The refugee caucus is led by Reps. Lofgren (D-CA-19), Diaz-Balart (R-FL-25), Neguse (D-CO-2), and Chris Smith (R-NJ-4)

Slide 22: Our Asks (Denise)

We also want our Members of COngress to use their authority to call for the

- Release of people in immigration detention
- Release of all families in immigration detention together
- And to tell the government not to ban asylum-seekers and to re-open the southern border to people seeking asylum

Slide 23: Next Steps (Denise)

We're urging you to

- Call your Senator and Representative: 1-833-829-5873
- Write a letter to your elected leaders at the local, state, and federal level
- Virtually meet with elected leaders

Slide 24: Next Steps (Ryan)

- Write a letter to the editor
- Host a virtual event
- Virtually sponsor a refugee. Visit Amnesty USA's website to find out how to virtually sponsor a refugee or the website of a resettlement agency.

Slide 25: Contact (Denise)

Please feel free to reach out to either me, Denise, or Ryan. My email is dbell@aiusa.org and Ryan's is rmace@aiusa.org. We would be very happy to answer your questions and direct you to resources.

The RCUSA web site, at www.rcusa.org, has resources and toolkits to help you do advocacy, set up meetings with elected officials, do media outreach, and will walk you through everything. Be sure to visit RCUSA's web site for the toolkits and other resources.

For more information about how to support refugees during COVID-19, please visit:

- www.rcusa.org/COVID-19
- www.rightsnow.amnestyusa.org

Slide 26: Thank you!

Your feedback is important to us!

We'd appreciate you completing this brief survey. It will help RCUSA provide better resources. https://bit.ly/RCUSAFeedback.

Thank you!

Call 27: Closing Slide

And text RIGHTSNOW to 21333 to join Amnesty's campaign to protect the rights of refugees, asylum-seekers, and all people. Thank you!