

April 9, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As leaders of the nine refugee resettlement agencies in the United States, we are writing to ask that you sign, as soon as possible, the Emergency Fiscal Year 2021 Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions, increasing the refugee admissions goal for this year to 62,500 refugees, as you proposed to Congress in February.

It has been heartening to see you deliver on your promises on many key humanitarian issues—from revoking the Muslim and refugee bans, to addressing the tragedy of family separation. Today, as you seek to assist the increasing number of unaccompanied children seeking safety in the United States at our southern border, we implore on you to fulfill your related and equally important commitment in Executive Order 14010 of February 2, 2021 to “increase opportunities for vulnerable populations to apply for protection closer to home.”

We welcomed the news of your proposal to resettle 62,500 refugees this year and appreciated the consultations your administration held with House and Senate Judiciary Committee leadership. However, we are growing increasingly alarmed at the delay in signing the revised presidential determination. This delay has prompted more than 700 refugees who had booked their travel in anticipation of a final and revised determination to cancel their flights, and there has been an indefinite suspension in bookings placed on refugee arrivals who fall outside the previous administration’s admissions categories. In other words, only refugees from the very narrow categories set by the last administration are currently able to receive resettlement protection. This continuously puts the lives of thousands of vulnerable refugees at peril and leaves out thousands of refugees fleeing the most violent and protracted crises worldwide that were arbitrarily excluded from the current category scheme. For example, despite Syrian refugees representing the population with the highest resettlement needs, estimated by the UN Refugee Agency at over 592,000 individuals in 2021 and accounting for a colossal 41 percent of needs globally, Syrians made up just 4 percent of all admissions in FY20. This is a departure from norm: the U.S. has cut the number of Syrians admitted by 96 percent since FY16. These cancellations have a ripple effect as they also disrupt the planning and operations of the communities that have already secured housing and set up welcome teams.

We are concerned that your delay may signal an intention to set a lower refugee goal for this year than was proposed to Congress earlier this month. As your administration detailed in the

Report to Congress of February 12, 2021, “To respond to all of these unforeseen and urgent situations, a revised target of 62,500 is proposed and is justified by grave humanitarian concerns and is in the national interest.” As we embark on rebuilding and expanding the refugee program and pursuing the goal of resettling 62,500 refugees, this is a crucial act of presidential leadership and a direction-setting declaration tied to U.S. values and interests.

If the revised FY21 Determination is issued, the Administration is not required to bring in the full Determination number of refugees. On the other hand, if the revised Determination is not issued, it precludes the State Department from bringing in any of the refugees currently waiting in the system who do not fit into the very narrow categories designated by the previous administration and also precludes your Administration from bringing in any more than 15,000 refugees. Most importantly, it undermines your declared purpose, expressed as a candidate, as president-elect, and as president of reversing the refugee policies of the former administration and rebuilding the program to admit a target of 125,000 in FY22.

Thus, it is imperative that you sign the Emergency Fiscal Year 2021 Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions, as proposed to Congress, without further delay.

Sincerely,



Erol Kekic, Senior Vice President, Immigration & Refugee Program, Church World Service



Demetrio Alvero, Director of Operations, Episcopal Migration Ministries



Tsehaye Teferra, President and CEO, Ethiopian Community Development Council



Mark Hetfield, President and CEO, HIAS



David Miliband, President and CEO, International Rescue Committee



Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, President and CEO, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service



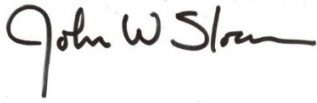
Eskinder Negash, President and CEO, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants



Jennifer Foy, Vice President of U.S. Programs, World Relief



William Canny, Executive Director of Migration and Refugee Services, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John W. Slocum". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

John Slocum, Interim Executive Director, Refugee Council USA

CC:

The Honorable Anthony Blinken, Secretary of State
The Honorable Xavier Becerra, Secretary of Health and Human Services
The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security
Ron Klain, Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff
Ambassador Susan Rice, Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy