

REFUGEE COUNCIL USA

Refugee Council USA responds to the administration's proposal to resettle the lowest number of refugees in US history

October 1, 2020

Washington, DC — RCUSA is outraged at the administration's indication that it will further abdicate leadership and reduce its commitment to resettling refugees. Intending to set a goal of just [15,000](#) refugees for FY 2021 represents a deepened cut from the already historic low target last year, and well below the average of 95,000 since inception of the program 40 years ago. The administration further violated the law by not meaningfully consulting with Congress before the start of the fiscal year, and its delay allows resettlement to grind to a halt beginning today until a formal directive is in place. Slamming the door on persecuted people while the number of refugees displaced globally continues to rise upends decades of bipartisan tradition. It also abandons thousands of refugees in need of resettlement, leaving them in precarious, often life-threatening situations.

For the last three years, the Trump administration has neglected its legal responsibility to consult with Congress, delayed and consecutively reduced refugee admissions goals. Last year, the administration did not set a refugee admissions goal until November, forcing a several week halt that cruelly resulted in [500 canceled flights](#) for refugees who had been approved for US resettlement. Until an admissions goal is in place this year, countless more refugees will lose their opportunity for resettlement in the United States and face prolonged family separation.

Refugee resettlement is about saving lives, not partisan politics. At every turn, US [communities have affirmed](#) that they are ready and able to welcome refugees. This year alone, [540 state and local elected officials](#), over [600 faith leaders and faith-based groups](#), and [183 organizations](#) affirmed their support for refugees, and asked for a resettlement goal of 95,000. Even with ongoing challenges due to COVID-19, the United States can - and should - rebuild the resettlement program. Our country's systems of welcome have responded to uphold public health standards and ensure that resettled refugees will receive the same quality of support. Already resettled refugees have actively helped to keep our communities safe by [working on the frontlines of COVID-19 response](#), with 176,000 refugees serving in the healthcare field, and another 175,000 working along the food supply chain.

"In just a few short years, the United States has gone from leading the world on resettlement to historic lows," said **Adam Hunter, Executive Director of Refugee Council USA**. "Despite its stated concern for people fleeing religious or political persecution, the administration provides so far neither the authority to act nor a numerical goal commensurate with our nation's ability to lead and capacity to welcome. With impact mounting with the delay, I hope the administration reconsiders its proposal, engages Congress, and issues a robust admissions goal of 95,000 that speaks to the bipartisan legacy of refugee resettlement."

REFUGEE COUNCIL USA

Scott Roehm, the Washington Director for the Center for Victims of Torture, and the board chair for RCUSA stated: “The president and members of his administration have acted so egregiously – and often in unprecedented ways – across so many issues and with such frequency that it can be hard to appreciate the gravity of something like this. But make no mistake, by failing to appropriately consult with Congress before the end of the fiscal year, the administration broke the law. And by dramatically slashing refugee admissions to date, the administration has cost persecuted people their lives. It may not matter much to some in the administration that checks and balances is the foundation of American democracy, or that more than 350,000 refugees have been working on the front lines of the pandemic in the US healthcare and food supply industries, but it should, and to most Americans, it does.”

“Providing refuge to the persecuted has long been a core American value. The Trump administration’s choice to set such a pathetically low refugee goal for this new fiscal year is a shameful decision that reflects a total lack of moral and humanitarian leadership,” said **Eleanor Acer, Senior Director of Refugee Protection at Human Rights First**. “Refugees make America stronger, but this administration continues to take every step it can to block them from US resettlement and US asylum.”

Sasha Chanoff, Founder and Executive Director, RefugePoint remarked: “RefugePoint is on the frontlines helping refugees in peril to resettle to safety. From Libya, to Iraq, to South Africa, and globally, there are those who might not survive without resettlement. President Trump has announced a proposed ceiling of 15,000 resettlement slots for 2021. This is a dramatic reduction from prior annual targets, and a gross and unacceptable abdication of responsibility and commitment. President Trump himself has signaled the importance of the program with his executive order calling for the resettlement of persecuted residents of Hong Kong. By limiting resettlement so dramatically, Trump is shooting his own priority in the foot, slamming the door on many in their hour of greatest need, and further crippling American leadership and influence in the world.”

President and CEO of HIAS Mark Hetfield stated “This administration claims to stand up for the religiously persecuted and for law and order. But by failing, for the second year in a row, to consult with Congress and set a presidential determination before October 1, it has violated a statutory deadline, with very real consequences. Until the administration consults with Congress and sets a refugee determination, no refugees, including those fleeing religious persecution, may legally come to the United States after September 30. This is unacceptable at any time, particularly during a global refugee crisis.”

“Make no mistake: the Trump administration is systematically dismantling the bipartisan US refugee resettlement program – for decades the world’s largest and most successful – in front of our very eyes,” said **Abby Maxman, President of Oxfam America**. “Shirking their responsibility to set a refugee admissions goal that is appropriate to the scale of global need is a reprehensible move that signals to the world that the United States is willing to abandon our founding principles and outright reject our human rights obligations and values.”

REFUGEE COUNCIL USA

Rev. John L. McCullough, President and CEO of Church World Service issued the following statement: “The Trump Administration’s failure to comply with the Refugee Act and their subsequent delays and cuts to the refugee program are moral failures and a disgrace to the American legacy of welcome. Refugee resettlement is not a partisan issue. Each day that resettlement is paused is a matter of life and death for the thousands of refugees waiting to rebuild their lives. Congress must not overlook this blatant disregard for human life and our legal process. They must demand that they be consulted as soon as possible and that the refugee program be restored. The proposed refugee resettlement number of 15,000, a more than 80% cut over historic norms, is unacceptable. Our values as a nation and as people of faith demand that we take action when people’s lives are in danger. But for the past three years, President Trump and his administration have strayed so far from these basic principles in the name of their cruel, racist and partisan goals that the life-saving refugee resettlement program is a shadow of what it once was. I urge all Americans to insist that Congress hold the White House accountable to operating the refugee program as required by US law.”

Eskinder Negash, CEO of USCRI said: “The proposed refugee ceiling weakens our longstanding global humanitarian leadership role. This is happening at a time when global displacement is at an all time high of nearly 80 million people. Restoring the refugee ceiling to the decades long average of 95,000 sends a clear and powerful message to the global community on our commitment to the world’s most vulnerable people.”

“This Administration must stop making political pawns of refugees,” said **Krish O’Mara Vignarajah, president and CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service**. “If anything, we owe refugees a debt of gratitude for strengthening our economy, making our communities safer, and enriching our culture. It’s past time the administration respects its legal obligations, and our common humanity, by consulting with Congress and establishing a refugee admissions goal.”

“The number of displaced people worldwide was at a record high at the end of 2019,” said **Bethany Christian Services President and CEO Chris Palusky**. “The challenges of COVID-19 are especially severe for people who are on the move and who are desperately seeking safety. I’ve spent my entire career working with humanitarian groups to address global crises, and I’ve never seen a crisis of such scale and urgency. The President has repeatedly expressed his commitment to persecuted religious minorities around the world. It is imperative that the US commit to resettling more refugees in 2021. We have the infrastructure to respond and to do so in a manner that keeps refugees and Americans safe.”

“Welcoming refugees into the United States reflects the best of our nation. Jesuit Refugee Service/USA strongly supports building back the resettlement program, which has already been cut by more than 80 percent,” said **Joan Rosenhauer, Executive Director of Jesuit Refugee Service USA**. “It is our moral,

REFUGEE COUNCIL USA

religious, and legal obligation that more refugees have the opportunity to be resettled and reunited with family members.”

Eric P. Schwartz, President of Refugees International stated: “The president’s action is disappointing but not surprising. It is part of an overall strategy of fear-mongering and vilification of refugees. It is also ironic, as hundreds of thousands of already resettled immigrants and refugees are on the front lines of the COVID-19 response, providing their fellow Americans with health and other essential services.”

Hans van de Weerd, Vice President of Resettlement, Asylum, and Integration at the International Rescue Committee remarked: “Since coming to power, President Trump has slashed refugee admissions year on year despite record-breaking numbers of displaced people worldwide. This year, the Administration looks to ignore this crisis, along with US law, by not setting a refugee admissions goal altogether. The White House is reneging on its promises to protect those fleeing religious and political persecution, such as refugees from Hong Kong or our allies in Iraq and Afghanistan. The IRC urges the Administration to set an admissions goal on time, in line with historic norms at no less than 95,000 refugees per year, and commensurate with global needs. Communities across the US support refugee resettlement, recognizing the importance and also the contribution to the US inherent in providing safe haven to those fleeing conflict, persecution and disaster.”

“After three years of systematically dismantling the refugee resettlement program, it is outrageous yet unsurprising that the Trump Administration would set such a shamefully low Presidential Determination for the coming year, and in doing so completely eschew its moral responsibility to lead the world by example in welcoming refugees,” said **Nili Sarit Yossinger, National Director for Refugee Congress**. “Refugees have always enjoyed bipartisan support, and all credible evidence points to the invaluable cultural and economic contributions that refugees have made and continue to make to our communities – especially during the COVID-19 crisis, serving on the front lines to protect our communities. As the only organization that is built and led by refugees, this decision is deeply personal for all us at Refugee Congress and is a complete dismissal of all that we have given to this country we call home. We call upon our neighbors, friends, co-workers, and elected officials of all affiliations to take action immediately and implore this Administration to set a Presidential Determination that is in good faith, and in line with our historic norm of at least 95,000.”

RCUSA is a diverse coalition advocating for just and humane laws and policies, and the promotion of dialogue and communication among government, civil society, and those who need protection and welcome. Individual RCUSA members do not all address all refugee-related issues, nor do all individual members approach common refugee-related issues identically.

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