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**Refugee, Faith and National Security Leaders Call for Congressional Consultation,
Robust Refugee Resettlement Presidential Determination**

Coalition group Refugee Council USA hosted press call featuring diverse group of advocates

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, [Refugee Council USA](#) hosted a press call to highlight the importance of refugee resettlement and the diverse communities that support it, and to call the White House to observe precedent and consult with Congress in advance of setting the presidential determination by September 30. The group also advocated a refugee resettlement ceiling of 95,000 for FY 2021.

Last week the group sent a [letter](#) to President Trump, Secretary of State Pompeo and members of Congress from 183 national, state and local organizations and an interfaith [letter](#) from 471 religious leaders and 135 faith-based organizations across traditions, showing the breadth and depth of support for refugee resettlement, the diversity of the communities that support it and the myriad ways in which refugees enrich communities across the nation. Additionally, RCUSA hosted advocacy days with key members of Congress, connecting them with former refugees, faith leaders and other community members, to ensure that Congressional leaders weigh in with the White House and State Department as they make decisions regarding the refugee ceiling in the next few weeks.

“Before the Trump Administration, for more than 40 years the United States was the world’s leader in refugee resettlement, welcoming around three million people to our shores. In this time of crisis, our refugee resettlement program represents the values that we need most—our compassion and humanity,” **said Immigration and Citizenship Subcommittee Chair Zoe Lofgren.** “The administration must set the presidential determination for refugee admissions in line with those values this year. We must go back to our country’s long humanitarian traditions and restore the refugee resettlement program to historic norms in America.”

“I spent all my life in Baghdad, and I spent all my life in a war zone,” said **Sarah Soper, an Iraqi refugee and refugee resettlement specialist with Catholic Charities.** “When war returned in 2003, I lost my first child. In that moment, I figured out there is no home in any land that has never existed without war. My brother began working with the US government and we were able to arrive in the US through the special immigrant visa program. And now I work to help other refugees. It was so challenging when Catholic Charities office zeroed out because I believe that every person deserves safety. But I always believe that tomorrow will be better.”

“The Christian Reformed Church has been advocating for refugees since the 60s, and as a person of faith, *this* is how we live our faith. God’s word tells us to love him, and to love each other,” said **Colin Watson Sr., executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America**. For me, God’s message is clear. No matter how different a person looks from me, or their experience differs from mine, I must care for them and protect them. This is a time for generosity, not selfishness. We are called to do even more. I also am an immigrant, and have seen the benefits of being resettled in a country that I have come to love deeply.”

“Supporting refugees and refugee resettlement plays an important role in supporting America’s credo laid out by our founders, ‘that all men are created equal,’” said **Steve Schrader, retired air force pilot and volunteer with U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops**. “That all people everywhere have the same value and deserve a life that’s safe, normal, and has dignity. These ideals, these rights are America. It’s not its land, its wealth, or even its people. To be truly American, the people must strive and sacrifice to ensure these rights are available to all men.”

“I want to be very clear...what’s happening with refugee resettlement in the United States – this downward spiral during the Trump administration – is born of hostility to refugee resettlement,” said **Barbara Strack, former chief of Refugee Affairs Division, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security**. “It’s not born of COVID-19 or anything else. The setting of this historically low ceiling of 18,000 significantly predated the COVID problem...We need to restore the program for humanitarian reasons, but also for foreign policy reasons.”

Historical precedent has required the executive branch to determine the refugee resettlement ceiling for the following fiscal year. Regrettably, the United States has had the lowest levels of refugee admissions in the history of the modern U.S. refugee resettlement program, despite a global refugee crisis.

For more information about RCUSA and the global refugee crisis, visit www.rcusa.org.

About RCUSA

RCUSA is a coalition of 29 US-based nonprofit organizations dedicated to promoting efforts for the welcome and well-being of refugees, asylees, asylum seekers, and other forcibly displaced populations. Learn more at rcusa.org.

Speaker Bios

Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren

Zoe Lofgren has been a Democratic member of the United States House of Representatives since 1995. She represents the 19th District of California, based in the “Capital of Silicon

Valley," San Jose, and the Santa Clara Valley.

As the Chair of the Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship, and a former immigration attorney and immigration law professor, Zoe is recognized as an established champion of top-to-bottom immigration reform and a national leader in immigration policy. During the 113th Congress she played a key role in negotiating a comprehensive reform bill in the House Representatives as part of an eight-person bipartisan working group.

Zoe is also the Chair of the California Democratic Congressional Delegation. It is the most diverse delegation in the House and outnumbers all other state House delegations.

Sarah Soper

Has been working with Catholic Charities Dallas for more than 5 years serving the most vulnerable clients of the refugee and asylee populations through my position as an intensive case manager. She focuses on the women population and how to empower them by education and integration with the new culture. She came to the US as a refugee makes her understand the hardships and the barriers the clients are going through and how to overcome them and succeed to establish a good life in the new home — her passion and main goal. She is originally from Iraq; she has a bachelor's degree in agricultural engineering and science from the university of Baghdad. She is married and a mother of two wonderful sons (16 and 14) years old.

Steve Schrader

Steve Schrader served in the US Air Force flying F-16s for 26 years. He was stationed in Germany, Korea, Japan, Alaska, and Italy. He was both a squadron commander and vice wing commander at Aviano Air Base, Italy. He participated in combat operations over Iraq and Kosovo. He was also a joint staff political-military affairs officer assigned as a country officer to both Pakistan and Afghanistan. He has experience working in a refugee camp in Greece. He leads a People Organized to Welcome Immigrants and Refugees (POWIR) team in Southeastern Massachusetts. POWIR teams assist in the US Conference of Catholic Bishops in its "volunteer agency" role of sponsoring refugees entering the country via the U.S. Resettlement Program (USRP). Steve is a member of Veterans for American Ideals, is retired and lives in Sagamore Beach, MA.

Colin P. Watson Sr.

Colin P. Watson Sr. is the Executive Director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). He is a retired executive from two Fortune 500 Companies. He has served the CRCNA in various capacities including as a member of the Synodical Committee on Race Relations (SCORR), a member of the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture, and as a member of the board of Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) where he served as President (US and International). Mr. Watson and his wife, Freida, are active members of Madison Square Church in Grand Rapids and have three adult children.

The CRCNA has welcomed refugees for decades. Throughout the 1960s, CRC ministries and congregations across North America extended welcome to over 25,000 Cuban refugees fleeing persecution. Today, CRC partners World Renew and Bethany Christian Services to coordinate sponsorship of refugees with CRC churches, allowing members to open their homes and congregations to refugees from across the globe.

Barbara L. Strack

Barbara Strack retired as Chief of the Refugee Affairs Division at US Citizenship and Immigration Services at the Department of Homeland Security in 2018, after 27 years of federal government service. She led that office for 12 years, with responsibility for managing overseas refugee interviews as well as related antifraud, national security, quality assurance, and training initiatives. This entailed close collaboration with the Department of State, the federal law enforcement and intelligence communities, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and nongovernmental organizations. Ms. Strack frequently briefed congressional staff and Members, and she testified at several hearings. She received a Presidential Rank Award for Meritorious Service.

Prior to working at USCIS, Ms. Strack's experience included both the public and private sectors, including leading an NGO initiative promoting immigrant integration and directing the policy office at the former Immigration & Naturalization Service during the Clinton Administration. She also worked for a Senate subcommittee staff and practiced law at O'Melveny & Myers in Washington, DC.

Ms. Strack has frequently spoken on refugee-related topics at conferences and been featured as a refugee expert in *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *This American Life*, *Time.com*, and other media outlets. She has also been a guest lecturer at American University Washington College of Law, the University of Michigan Law School, the Center for Forced Migration Studies Summer Institute at Northwestern University, and the University of Virginia. She currently serves on the Advisory Committee for Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program.