

RCUSA Advocacy Days 2025 – News Conference Media Kit

June 3, 2025 | Washington, D.C.

Organized by Refugee Council USA (RCUSA)

#WeWillWelcome | #RefugeeAdvocacyDays | rcusa.org/rcusa-advocacy-days/

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Key Messages

- The U.S. resettlement program as we know it has ended – and absent urgent congressional intervention, it will never be the same. It's essential that our elected leaders pressure the federal government to restore refugee protections and live out the best of who we are.
 - The Trump administration's indefinite refugee ban remains in place. Resettlement has only resumed for a group of about 100 white South Africans and approximately 160 "injunction-protected" refugees, whose cases are moving forward as part of the *Pacito v. Trump* lawsuit.
 - RCUSA's Advocacy Days are an opportunity for refugee, asylum-seeking, and immigrant leaders at the forefront of this fight to call on Congress to act boldly in restoring and protecting humanitarian pathways.
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Policy Priorities

- **Invest in refugee programs, the asylum system, and other pathways for humanitarian protection, and safeguard the administration's use of these investments in good faith.**
 - Support and safeguard funding for refugee resettlement, integration, legal services, and overseas humanitarian programs through ORR, USCIS, MRA, IDA, and ERMA.
- **Strongly pressure the administration to robustly restore the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for the most vulnerable refugees.**
 - Demand compliance with court orders and uphold the Refugee Act of 1980 to ensure the U.S. resettles the most vulnerable refugees without discrimination.

- **Advance critical oversight initiatives and legislation that improve and protect the lives of refugees, asylum seekers, and other forcibly displaced populations.**
 - Champion investigations, reject harmful budget measures, and support pro-refugee and pro-asylum legislation such as the Refugee Protection Act and Afghan Adjustment Act.
 - **Take a public stand for refugee, asylum, and humanitarian protections, defend due process and the rule of law, and pressure the administration to stop abuses that target marginalized groups.**
 - Defend due process, oppose unjust executive actions, share impacted community stories, and reject harmful policies and bills that undermine humanitarian protection.
 - See the full policy priorities <https://tinyurl.com/AdvocacyDaysAsks2025>
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Voices from Advocacy Days

"We gather this week as part of RCUSA Advocacy Days with nearly 400 participants, including approx 150 refugee leaders and individuals with lived experience of forced displacement, to share their stories and why refugee, asylum, and humanitarian protection is important to them. Together, we join a chorus of community members urging our members of Congress to do everything in their power to invest in and safeguard the U.S. refugee, asylum, and humanitarian programs. Congress must uphold the core principles of the Refugee Act of 1980, which established a nondiscriminatory framework to ensure that the U.S. refugee resettlement and asylum programs respond to the humanitarian needs of forcibly displaced individuals, regardless of their race, country of origin, or faith."

—John Slocum, Executive Director, Refugee Council USA (RCUSA)

"Federal court orders have called for processing and resettlement for the approximately 12,000 refugees with arranged and confirmable travel plans, as they had a strong reliance interest in their upcoming travel when President Trump took office. It is critical that these court orders are complied with and these refugees resettled regardless of where they come from, the color of their skin, or what religion they practice. The US has made a commitment to these persecuted individuals, and we must honor it. The rule of law, the bedrock of our society, demands it. The US Refugee Program advances global stability, supports national security and promotes prosperity. It is not just the right thing to do, it is in our self-interest as a country to restore the US Refugee Admissions Program and other forms of lawful humanitarian relief. We must do it."

— **Diya Nijhowne**, Human Rights Advocate and former Director of Refugees and Social Services

“Historically, generosity and welcoming have been America's values. I learned these values many years ago when I was a refugee in a refugee camp in Uganda, where I received aid and education support from the American people. I have carried these values since I stepped onto American soil. As we navigate crises around the world with more than 120 million people displaced, we should continue being a humanitarian leader, welcoming refugees and immigrants facing persecution in their home countries who, in turn, contribute to making our nation stronger. I call upon our government to reinstate the refugee admission program and work towards humane immigration policies.”

— **Bahati Kanyamanza**, Global Partnerships Director, International Refugee Assistance Project

“RCUSA's Advocacy Days is a powerful opportunity for me and my fellow refugee leaders to meet face-to-face with our Senators and Representatives—to build meaningful relationships and remind them that refugees are part of their constituency. We are contributing members of our communities: teachers, doctors, business owners, and civic leaders. We represent the cities we live in, and we are here to affirm that America stands for welcome. Today, we raise our voices together to say, loud and proud: We Will Welcome.”

— **Jessi Calzado-Esponda**, Refugee Congress Delegate, Local Business Owner & Entrepreneur

Speaker Bios

John Slocum, Executive Director, Refugee Council USA (RCUSA)

John Slocum has served since January 2021 as the Executive Director of RCUSA. John was previously co-coordinator of the Repository of Documentation Relating to Disappearances in Mexico (RDDM) and an independent consultant to foundations and nonprofits, providing strategic planning and executive recruitment services in the fields of migration, refugees, and human rights. From 1997 to 2016, he worked for the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, where he served as program director for grantmaking initiatives on global migration, the Central America-Mexico-U.S. migration corridor, and U.S. immigration policy. John also directed MacArthur's Higher Education Initiative in Russia and its Research and Writing grants competition. He is a member of the advisory board for Justice in Motion, and a

past board member of Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees. John holds a PhD in political science from the University of Chicago, taught at the University of Oklahoma, and has published articles and commentary on migration, philanthropy, and Russia.

Diya Nijhowne, Human Rights Advocate and former Director of Refugees and Social Services

Diya Nijhowne has over 20 years of experience protecting human rights globally, as well as over 12 years serving as a senior manager and leader within the non-profit sector. Most recently, Diya served as the Director of Refugee and Social Services at one of the ten federally funded agencies resettling refugees. She recruited and coached over 30 staff members, providing technical guidance to more than 40 agencies nationwide, supporting refugees and migrants in integrating into US society. For over a decade, she was Executive Director of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, an international advocacy group comprised of UN agencies and international NGOs and chaired by Human Rights Watch and Save the Children. Under her tenure, the coalition spearheaded the Safe Schools Declaration, a political commitment to safeguard education in armed conflict, endorsed by 118 countries before she left. Diya has worked with the UNHCR and international NGOs in Africa, Asia, and the Americas on child protection, women's rights, and peacebuilding. Her work has influenced international policy that has saved lives in some of the world's most challenging environments. She holds a Juris Doctor and Master of Social Work from the University of Toronto.

Bahati Kanyamanza, Global Partnerships Director, International Refugee Assistance Project

Bahati Kanyamanza is a nonprofit leader and a naturalized U.S. citizen from the Democratic of Congo. He was a refugee for 23 years. He is a publisher, educator, advocate, and Global Partnerships Director at the International Refugee Assistance Project. He is also co-founder of COBURWAS International Youth Organization to Transform Africa and Advisor to the United States Refugee Advisory Board.

Jessi Calzado-Esponda, Refugee Congress Delegate, Local Business Owner & Entrepreneur

Jessi Calzado-Esponda is the Refugee Congress Honorary Delegate for DC. At the age of 7, she became a political refugee after being placed in a raft that was headed to America. In the blink of an eye, Jessi lost all contact with her family and her home in Cuba. Jessi has worked with members of Congress and is a successful businesswoman and entrepreneur. As the CEO of Cuba Inspires and Inspire Entrepreneur Academy, she hopes to inspire the world one person at a time.

Calls to Action

- **Urge your Members of Congress** to champion legislation that restores refugee protections and invests in humane, community-based alternatives to detention.
 - **Join the movement** by using **#WeWillWelcome** and amplify the stories of directly impacted leaders and service providers.
 - **Visit** rcusa.org/rcusa-advocacy-days/ for toolkits, talking points, and action alerts.
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