

Refugee Council USA

September 9, 2015

President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

On behalf of Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), a coalition of U.S.-based organizations dedicated to refugee protection and welcome, I write to you today with urgent recommendations for how the United States should respond to the spiraling refugee crisis in the Middle East that is now overflowing to Europe and beyond. In addition, we respectfully request the opportunity to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss these recommendations in greater detail.

Our recommendations are as follows:

1. In a letter that RCUSA sent to you on August 7, 2015, we asked that the United States increase its annual ceiling for refugee admissions from 70,000 to 100,000. In light of the continuing escalation of the dire refugee crises in the Middle East, contributing to the largest number of refugees since World War II, we now urge the United States to increase the number of refugees that we resettle to 200,000 for FY 16, with 100,000 of them being Syrian. This would not be the first time that the United States proudly carries out our proud tradition of welcoming refugees in large numbers. After the end of the wars in Southeast Asia, the United States resettled 111,000 Vietnamese refugees in 1979 and then essentially doubled that number to 207,000 in 1980. The United States' rising to the occasion now would both encourage European nations to live up to their refugee protection obligations, and help to prevent further deterioration in the protection climate in the countries bordering on Syria that are currently hosting millions of Syrian refugees.
2. RCUSA believes that the vast majority of European countries have the capacity to welcome and provide protection for the refugees who are now risking their lives to find safety in Europe. However, the United States must show solidarity with its close allies in Europe and resettle a small number of refugees from Europe, including U.S. family reunification cases, unaccompanied refugee minors, and refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan who have close ties to the United States (NGO workers, interpreters, people affiliate with US business and other interests).
3. The United States has provided \$4 billion in funding to address the Syrian humanitarian crisis. We commend this tremendous generosity, but given that only 37% of the U.N's funding

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Members:

Asylum Access
Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL)
Center for Victims of Torture
Church World Service/
Immigration & Refugee
Program
Episcopal Migration Ministries
Ethiopian Community
Development Council
HIAS
Human Rights First
International Catholic
Migration Commission
International Rescue
Committee
Iraqi Refugee Assistance
Project
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
Jubilee Campaign USA
Lutheran Immigration
and Refugee Service
ORAM – Organization for
Refuge, Asylum & Migration
RefugePoint
Southeast Asia Resource
Action Center
U.S. Conference of Catholic
Bishops/Migration & Refugee
Services
U.S. Committee for Refugees
and Immigrants
World Relief

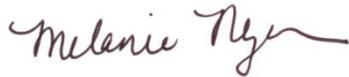
appeal in response to the crisis has been funded, we encourage the United States to continue to urge other countries to increase their funding of the humanitarian response while at the same time continuing to increase the amount that the United States gives.

4. It is abundantly clear that the Syrian crisis is nowhere close to ending, and even when it does, the needs of those displaced by the crisis will take years, if not generations, to resolve. It is therefore imperative that refugee hosting countries in the region allow refugees to start to legally work. Allowing them to do so will provide them with the opportunity to support their families, and in doing so, will help to alleviate the crushing poverty and desperation that are forcing so many to make the treacherous journeys to Europe. It is also imperative that the United States engage with major development actors to encourage the expansion of development plans to include refugee and refugee host communities in a further effort to address the extremely dire conditions in which millions are now living throughout the region. This effort could be supported by the convening of a major international conference where the United States could announce its plans to lead the response.

RCUSA members look forward to our continued work with our government partners to ensure that no refugee in need of protection is left behind. We will also continue to conduct outreach on these issues, including with press events, to help inform a broader audience about our recommendations.

I thank you for your committed leadership on behalf of the world's most vulnerable.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Melanie Nezer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Melanie Nezer, Chair, Refugee Council USA

Cc: John Kerry, Secretary of State

Anne Richard, Assistant Secretary of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), Department of State