



U.S. Department of State

Statement by

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FOR A HEARING ON

**“REFUGEE ADMISSIONS FY 2017
AND REFUGEE SECURITY SCREENING:**

**BEFORE
THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
IMMIGRATION AND THE NATIONAL INTEREST**

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Chairman Sessions and distinguished Senators, thank you for holding this hearing and bringing attention to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. Thank you also for the opportunity to appear before your Subcommittee with my colleagues from the Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services and to describe our plans to bring 110,000 refugees to the United States during Fiscal Year 2017. The United States remains deeply committed to safeguarding the American people from security threats, just as we are committed to providing refuge to the world's most vulnerable people. We do not believe these goals are mutually exclusive.

Admitting refugees is an important form of American humanitarian leadership. Our country is made stronger and more vibrant because of the richness that immigrants and refugees bring, with each wave of newcomers deepening what it means to be American -- we share a deep bond with those who come to our country seeking safety, opportunity, and freedom from fear. We are grateful to have the chance to update you on the measures we have taken to protect refugees around the world while keeping America safe from harm. My part of this testimony will address the Department of State's leadership of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

Description of the Need

President Obama led a Leaders' Summit on Refugees at the United Nations on September 20, in response to the largest mass displacement crisis since the Second World War. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are 65 million forcibly displaced people in the world today, 21 million of whom are refugees. The United States and UNHCR recognize that most refugees desire safe, voluntary return to their homeland. In 2015, some 201,400 refugees were able to go home voluntarily from countries of first asylum. This figure marks a nearly 60% increase over 2014, but it is unfortunately still low. Refugee repatriation operations brought refugees home to Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, and Central African Republic, among others. These operations were carried out in a manner that protected returning refugees while seeking ways for them to contribute to the stabilization, reconstruction, and development of their home countries.

Where opportunities for the safe and voluntary return of refugees remain unlikely or impossible, the United States and the organizations we fund promote the self-sufficiency of refugees and temporary, indefinite, or permanent local

integration primarily in neighboring countries. The Department of State encourages host governments to allow integration into local communities. The State Department also funds programs to enhance refugee self-reliance and support community-based social services. Examples of places where refugees had the opportunity for local integration in recent years include Afghans in India, Angolans in Zambia, Burundians in Tanzania, Liberians and Sierra Leoneans in seven countries across West Africa, and Colombians in Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panama and Venezuela.

Less than 1 percent of all refugees worldwide are offered an opportunity to resettle in a third country. These are primarily those who are most vulnerable and for whom there is no option to return home safely or to integrate locally. The United States is proud to have offered the opportunity to build a new life in our country to 85,000 of these refugees in Fiscal Year 2016 and looks forward to welcoming 110,000 refugees in Fiscal Year 2017. Since 1975, we have welcomed more than 3.2 million refugees to the United States who became contributing members of their new communities. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) embodies our highest values as Americans, demonstrating compassion, generosity and leadership.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

Over these forty years, the USRAP has been able to respond to changing needs and wide-ranging global crises. In its first two decades, the program focused on resettling large populations concentrated in a few locations, including refugees from Vietnam, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. In recent decades the program extended its protection to refugees in need from around the world, some 70 different nationalities per year. Today DHS officers are able to conduct applicant interviews in remote locations and focus on refugees who most need resettlement. Although the USRAP has broadened its focus to more diverse groups in need, it has always maintained its focus on ensuring that refugee resettlement opportunities go only to those who do not present a risk to the safety and security of our country. We continue to employ rigorous security measures to protect against threats to our national security. In order to protect our security, applicants to the USRAP are subject to the most intensive screening than any other type of traveler to the United States.

Scale and Populations

The size of theUSRAP has varied over its history, depending on global circumstances. The United States admitted more than 200,000 refugees per year in the 1980s to help those fleeing Southeast Asia, Cuba, and the Soviet Union. After 9/11, refugee arrivals dropped. Through the 2000s, the U.S. government slowly increased the number of refugees admitted into the country while ensuring that additional security measures were added and implemented. With those changes in place, theUSRAP is now able to offer protection to larger numbers of refugees in need, and has met its targets for refugee arrivals for four consecutive years. The United States will admit approximately 85,000 refugees in FY 2016, with the largest numbers coming from Burma, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and Syria. We are proud that the United States operates the largest refugee resettlement program in the world, and resettlement is an important component of U.S. global humanitarian leadership. In late August, we reached the President’s goal of admitting at least 10,000 Syrians this year and expect to admit about 12,300 total by the end of September.

As Secretary of State Kerry briefed on September 13th as part of the annual consultation mandated by law, the United States intends to admit up to 110,000 refugees in Fiscal Year 2017, which will include growing numbers of refugees from Africa – up to 35,000 – and a greater number of refugees from Near East/South Asia, primarily Syrians, Iraqis, and Iranians, among others.

Africa

We expect to admit up to 35,000 African refugees in FY 2017—the highest allocation we have ever proposed for African refugees and 7,500 more than FY 2016. This increase reflects an Administration goal of doing more to address the urgent need of refugees from Africa for durable solutions to their long-standing displacement. During FY 2017, UNHCR will continue to refer Congolese refugees from Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and Burundi, as the resettlement need for Congolese from the eastern Congo is growing more acute. Admissions of Somalis and Sudanese from Kenya and Ethiopia will continue to be strong, with approximately 3,500 U.S. arrivals projected in FY2016. In all, we expect to admit refugees representing nearly 30 African nationalities in FY 2017.

East Asia

In FY2017, we expect to admit up to 12,000 refugees from East Asia. This will include up to 3,500 members of Burmese ethnic minorities (mostly Karen and Karenni) living in camps along the Thai-Burma border, some 5,500 Burmese (of

various ethnic minorities) in Malaysia, and a number of urban refugees of various nationalities in the region.

Europe and Central Asia

We expect to admit up to 4,000 individuals from Europe and Central Asia in FY 2017. In countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU) the Lautenberg Amendment provides a presumption of eligibility for refugee status for certain historically persecuted religious minorities, including Jews, Evangelical Christians, and Ukrainian Catholic and Orthodox religious adherents with close family in the United States. Applications for this program have increased substantially since the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine.

Latin American and Caribbean

From Latin America and the Caribbean, we expect to admit up to 5,000 refugees, including Cuban refugees eligible for the in-country Priority 2 group designation program; Central American Minors eligible for the in-country Priority 2 group designation program; UNHCR-referred Colombians and Central Americans; as well as a small number of family reunification cases.

Protecting Vulnerable Children and Others in Central America

In December 2014, the Administration established an in-country refugee and parole program for children in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Under the initial program, parents who meet the program's eligibility criteria could file to bring their unmarried children under age 21 to join them in this country, and in certain circumstances, the second parent could be approved to travel with the approved child to the United States. In July 2016, the Administration announced an expansion of the program to include other categories of relatives. As of September 2016, parents have submitted more than 10,000 applications and nearly 1,000 children have arrived to join parents in the United States. Thousands more will be joining parents in the coming months as an increasing number of interviews have been conducted and applications are being approved. Costa Rica recently concluded an arrangement with UNHCR and IOM to accept vulnerable refugees from Central America so they could undergo refugee processing and onward resettlement to the United States or another third country. Through these programs we have expanded our ability to protect Central American refugees.

Near East and South Asia

We expect to admit 40,000 refugees from the Near East and South Asia in FY 2017, including vulnerable Syrians, Iraqis, Bhutanese, Iranians, Pakistanis, and Afghans. We expect UNHCR referrals for all of these nationalities, as well as individuals from various and diverse religious and ethnic groups in the region, such as Assyrians, Mandeans, Iranian Kurds, Syrian Kurds, Yezidi, and Ahmadi Muslims. Many Iraqis, Syrians, and Iranians will also access the USRAP through specific Priority 2 group designation programs.

The USRAP anticipates continued large-scale processing of the cases of Syrians and Iraqis, and, to a lesser extent, Bhutanese, Afghans and Iranians, during FY 2017. In the Near East, the United States recognizes that the possibility of third-country resettlement must be available to the most vulnerable Iraqi and Syrian refugees, and has processing facilities in Amman, Baghdad, Beirut, Cairo, Erbil, and Istanbul.

Iraqis, who worked for the U.S. military, government, or U.S. based NGO, governmental organization or media agency, are another important population we continue to resettle through USRAP and the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program. These individuals have taken tremendous personal risks to assist the U.S. government and we seek to offer them safety for their sacrifice. The United States has been resettling Iraqis in large numbers since 2007, including Iraqis who worked for the U.S. government, military, non-governmental organizations or media outlets, and their family members. Since 2007, we have resettled more than 135,000 Iraqi individuals. Subjects who receive SIVs do not count towards the refugee admissions numbers.

Resettlement processing for Bhutanese refugees in Nepal is continuing smoothly and the United States remains committed to considering for resettlement all Bhutanese refugees who expressed interest to UNHCR. The United States has resettled over 90,000 Bhutanese refugees since late 2007 and we anticipate that we will complete the processing of all Bhutanese refugees who have declared interest in resettlement within two years.

Syria

The refugee crisis caused by the conflict in Syria is the worst the world has witnessed in a generation, resulting in more than 5 million refugees in the region. The U.S. government is deeply committed to assisting the Syrian people and has provided nearly \$5.6 billion in humanitarian assistance since the start of the crisis, more than any other donor. While the vast majority of Syrians would prefer to return home when the conflict ends, it is clear that some remain extremely vulnerable in their countries of asylum and would benefit from resettlement.

The United States is one of 32 countries that have agreed to accept referrals from UNHCR as part of its ambitious international effort to secure permanent or temporary resettlement for up to 10 percent of Syrian refugees. As of mid-2016, UNHCR has secured commitments from these countries to admit more than 220,000 Syrians for permanent resettlement, humanitarian admission, private sponsorship, or academic scholarships. The United States is playing a significant role in this effort. The majority of Syrian referrals will be processed in Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt, and to a lesser extent in Lebanon and the Kurdistan region of Iraq, and elsewhere. The Administration plans to increase Syrian refugee resettlement efforts in FY2017, but has not established a target.

Refugees of every nationality are subject to a higher level of security checks than any category of traveler to the United States – a multi-step screening process that takes many months. Syrian refugees go through yet additional forms of security screening tailored to the particular conditions of the Syrian crisis, the classified details of which have been shared with Congress.

Given the importance of refugee resettlement as a durable solution to global humanitarian crises, it is essential that USRAP admit only those refugees who are not known to present a risk to the safety and security of our country. We understand that in order to continue to be able to offer this much needed protection to 110,000 refugees in FY2017, we need the confidence of the American people that we have taken every step to vet refugees before we approve them to resettle in the United States. Although refugees typically are living in extremely difficult conditions in urban areas or refugee camps with inadequate shelter and little access to education or jobs, they must move through the extensive USG vetting process before we can approve them for admission to the United States. We do this to protect against threats to national security and to ensure that we will continue to lead the world offering much needed refuge to those who have no other option. The Department of State works extremely closely with the Department of Homeland Security to ensure that every aspect of our process to bring refugees to

the United States takes advantage of the U.S. government's tools and databases for ensuring the security of our border.

Services and Support at the Community Level

Refugees resettled in the United States enrich our nation. The USRAP is premised on the idea that refugees should become economically self-sufficient as quickly as possible. The Department of State works domestically with agencies participating in the Reception and Placement program to ensure that refugees receive services in the first 30 to 90 days after arrival in accordance with established standards. During and after the initial resettlement period, the Office of Refugee Resettlement at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS/ORR) provides technical assistance and funding to states, the District of Columbia, and nonprofit organizations to help refugees become self-sufficient and integrated into U.S. society.

From the very beginnings of the program, the USRAP was a public-private partnership. This partnership is the very heart of refugee resettlement. Our confidence in the strength of this partnership is why the Administration has set a target of bringing 110,000 refugees to the United States next year. This month the White House announced that 51 companies from across the American economy made new, measurable, and significant commitments to aid refugees in the United States and around the world in response to the President's June *Call to Action*. These companies, representing more than 2.5 million employees, more than \$775 billion in annual revenue, and more than \$3.2 trillion in market capitalization, are standing with the Administration to demonstrate that private sector innovation and resources can have a durable impact on refugees residing in countries on the frontlines of the global refugee crisis and in countries of resettlement, like the United States. In total, these 51 companies have committed to investing, donating, or raising more than \$650 million.

Americans from all walks of life have supported individual refugee families, tutoring them in English, explaining what the PTA is or how to read a report card. Americans have given their time, money and talent to assist more than 3 million refugees in this program, because they want to give back, they often recognize the assistance their own families received from relatives and from other community members when they arrived in the United States. Indeed, it is deeply gratifying to see the enthusiasm that communities around the United States demonstrate to welcome refugees in their cities and town. We are testifying as representatives of the U.S. Government, but those that form the backbone of this program are the

countless faith-based volunteers, community members, local organizations and elected leaders that ensure its success in communities across the country. Our dialogue with local community members and authorities ensures that US Refugee Admissions Program remains a robust and sustainable solution for truly vulnerable refugees and an American tradition of which we can all be proud.

Thank you.