

August 29, 2016

President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

We, the undersigned national, state, and local organizations and faith communities, write in advance of the September 20th U.S.-led Leaders' Summit on Refugees to thank you for convening global leaders, and to urge you to demonstrate global leadership by making bold new commitments to refugee protection, assistance, and solutions, including increased U.S. resettlement. Faced with dramatic refugee crises at home and abroad, our nation is at a critical moment in its history and confronted by a question that strikes at the heart of our national identity— whether we will rise up to the challenges of our time, or give in to fear, division, and retreat.

Never before has the world witnessed such a dramatic scale of human displacement and suffering. Sixty-five million men, women, and children have lost their homes, and twenty-one million of those have been forced to flee their countries. While the images of overloaded boats in the Mediterranean and desperate crowds sleeping in train stations in Europe are more likely to catch the world's attention, the vast majority of refugee families are struggling to survive in countries neighboring their own – beleaguered host countries with their own political, economic, and security challenges. Many of the countries bearing the most responsibilities to host refugees are at a breaking point, and some could further descend into unrest.

In the face of this reality, we commend you for your leadership to convene global heads of state to collectively commit to increasing humanitarian contributions by 30%, and urge your Administration to do all that it can to increase the U.S. contribution.

While humanitarian assistance is the principal lifeline for most refugees, unfortunately, for some it is simply insufficient to ensure their health, safety, dignity or family unity. For refugees with particularly complex personal circumstances, risks and vulnerabilities, resettlement is often the only viable option and may indeed be life-saving. The United States has historically been a beacon of freedom and hope for the world's most oppressed and persecuted, and our communities have proudly welcomed these families as part of the fabric that make this nation great, but we need to do much more. UNHCR has identified over one million refugees who are in need of resettlement today, yet it will take almost a decade to achieve this target given current commitments.

We urge you to increase the number of refugees, at a level commensurate with global need, who are offered the lifesaving opportunity to create a new life here in the United States. Specifically, we call upon you to provide solutions for 200,000 refugees in FY17 through resettlement and alternative admissions pathways to the United States— at least 140,000 of which should be admitted through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. A commitment to admit more refugees must be matched with a level of resettlement funding which ensures that refugees have access to the services

and support that they need to integrate quickly and successfully upon arrival in welcoming American communities.

Finally, we urge you to demonstrate American leadership by improving the domestic and foreign policy response to the refugee crisis in our own region. Hundreds of thousands of Central Americans – the majority of them women and children – continue to be forced to flee their homes each year, often due to gang-related violence, displacing internally and across borders in an attempt to find safety in the United States and other countries in the region. While we applaud the limited but very meaningful steps the Administration has recently taken, such as the announced expansion of resettlement opportunities for Central American refugees, many core aspects of the U.S.’s enforcement-centric response to this crisis continue to be mis-aligned with our national values and risk returning refugees to the very danger they have fled.

We urge you to amend the current enforcement policies which have the effect of detaining and deporting Central Americans seeking protection in this country, and ensure that all Central Americans – adults, families and unaccompanied children – have a meaningful opportunity to seek asylum and other applicable forms of relief under U.S. law. We also urge you to utilize your legal authority to protect those Central Americans in the U.S. who cannot return because of the widespread violence, such as by designating El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala for Temporary Protected Status. And finally, we urge you to ensure that U.S. support to the Mexican government in response to the regional crisis be focused on increasing capacity to screen for protection needs and adjudicate asylum claims consistent with international law, rather than enforcement and deterrence methods that should not be used against asylum seekers attempting to seek protection at our borders or anywhere in the region.

Only by advancing these specific solutions to protect those displaced by violence and persecution will the United States be able to lead by example when we are on a global stage this September.

As you build your Administration’s final legacy, we thank you for highlighting the need to address the suffering of refugees. We look forward to working with you to making these commitments a reality.

Sincerely,

National Organizations & Faith Communities

AFL-CIO

African American Ministers In Action

Alianza Americas

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA)

American Jewish Committee's Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee

Anti-Defamation League

Bethany Christian Services

Boat People SOS, Inc.

CASA

Catholic Relief Services

Center for Applied Linguistics

Center for Victims of Torture

Church World Service

CODEPINK for Peace

Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

Disciples Center for Public Witness

Disciples Home Missions

The Episcopal Church

Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc.

Fig Tree Revolution

Franciscan Action Network

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ

Guatemala Human Rights Commission

HealthRight International

Heartland Alliance International

HIAS, Global Jewish Organization for Refugees

Human Rights First

International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
International Rescue Committee
Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA)
Just Foreign Policy
Khmer Health Advocates
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
Latin America Working Group (LAWG)
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Liberia Medical Mission
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS)
Lutheran World Relief
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
MoveOn.org
National Council of Churches, USA
National Council of Jewish Women
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Religious Campaign Against Torture
National Center for Lesbian Rights
NETWORK Lobby
No One Left Behind
Nonviolence International-USA
Office of Social Justice, Christian Reformed Church in North America
Oxfam America

Pax Christi USA

Peace Action

Presbyterian Church (USA)

Rabbinical Assembly

Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association

Reconstructionist Rabbinical College/Jewish Reconstructionist Communities

Refugee Alliance Network

Refugee and Immigration Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The Refugee Center Online

Refugee Solidarity Network

RefugePoint

Sister Parish, Inc.

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' Institute Justice Team

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

United Church of Christ

U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services

Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)

We Belong Together

Week of Compassion, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Win Without War

Women's Refugee Commission

State and Local Organizations & Faith Communities

ACCESS (Michigan)

Advocates for Refugees in California (California)

Arkansas United Community Coalition (Arkansas)

The Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture (New York)

Bhutanese Association of St. Louis (Missouri)

Bhutanese Community of Oregon (Oregon)

Boston Center for Refugee Health & Human Rights (Massachusetts)

College of Southern Idaho Refugee Programs (Idaho)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Central States Synod (Kansas & Missouri)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Delaware-Maryland Synod)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Florida-Bahamas Synod (Florida)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Gulf Coast Synod (Texas & Louisiana)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Northwest Washington Synod (Washington)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, South Carolina Synod (South Carolina)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, South Central Synod (Wisconsin)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Southeastern Synod (Tennessee, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama)

English Learning Center (Minnesota)

Family & Children's Association (New York)

Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services (Florida)

International Institute of Los Angeles (California)

Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) (Oregon)

Interfaith Partnership for Refugee Resettlement (Connecticut)

Interfaith Refugee Ministry – Wilmington (North Carolina)

International Center of Kentucky (Kentucky)

International Institute of Akron (Ohio)
International Institute of Buffalo (New York)
International Institute of St. Louis (Missouri)
International Service Center (Pennsylvania)
Jewish Child & Family Services (Illinois)
Jewish Family & Community Services East Bay (California)
Jewish Family Service of Seattle (Washington)
Jewish Family Services of Silicon Valley (California)
Just Peace Circles, Inc. (Maryland)
Karen Organization of San Diego (California)
Kino Border Initiative (Arizona)
Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer (California)
Lutheran Community Services Northwest (Washington)
Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains (Colorado & New Mexico)
Make the Road New York (New York)
Maryland Welcomes Refugees (Maryland)
Massachusetts Peace Action (Massachusetts)
Mosaic Family Services (Texas)
New York Immigration Coalition (New York)
OneAmerica (Washington)
Raleigh Immigrant Community, Inc. (North Carolina)
Refugee Services of Texas (Texas)
Rutland Welcomes (Vermont)
Samaritas (Michigan)
Sandy Spring Friends (Quakers) Peace Committee (Maryland)

Sister Parish, Faith Lutheran Church (North Dakota)

Somali Bantu Community of Greater Houston (SBCGH) (Texas)

South Sudan Center of America (Nevada)

Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning (Colorado)

St. Thomas Lutheran Church (Indiana)

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church (Florida)

Survivors of Torture, International (California)

US Together, Inc. (Ohio)

Utah Health and Human Rights (Utah)

World Relief Fox Valley (Wisconsin)

Youth Co-Op, Inc. (Florida)