

July 9, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence  
Vice President  
Eisenhower Executive Office Building  
West Executive Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Michael Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

-VIA EMAIL-

Re: Resettlement Needed for Refugees Including Those Fleeing Religious Persecution

Dear Vice President Pence and Secretary Pompeo,

We write to you out of concern for refugees fleeing religious persecution and other critical needs for resettlement. We have a strong commitment to religious freedom and protection of vulnerable refugees, including support for and partnership with the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). We appreciate the Trump Administration's prioritization of protecting religious freedom and religious minorities as acknowledged in the National Security Strategy, and promoted by two Religious Freedom Ministerials, noted in the recent 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom<sup>1</sup> and advanced through the June 2 Executive Order on Advancing International Religious Freedom. We also take this opportunity to commend the Trump Administration for keeping the door open for urgent resettlement cases during the COVID-19 crisis.

In that collaborative spirit, we urge you to exercise flexibility in your administration of USRAP by reallocating the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Presidential Determination (PD) refugee categories to ensure that the refugee program can maximize its life-saving mission amidst the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. With low arrival numbers in the categories of Iraqi P-2s (86) and Central Americans (255)<sup>2</sup>, we urge you to expand resettlement in the two other

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<sup>1</sup>2019 Report on International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State, June 20, 2020, available at <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/> / At the roll out of the 2019 Report, Secretary Pompeo stated: "There is no other nation that cares so deeply about religious freedom, that we gather accounts from all across the world – it's an enormous, it's a comprehensive accounting of this fundamental human right."

<sup>2</sup> Refugee Processing Center, Arrivals by Admission Category, June 5, 2020, <https://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>

admission categories to reach the full 18,000 FY20 PD, including by increasing slots for refugees fleeing religious persecution. Additionally, if COVID-19 prevents full resumption of the refugee program and as a result, there is a shortfall in reaching 18,000 refugees resettled for FY 2020, we urge you to:

- increase the refugee admissions in the FY 2021 PD beyond the FY2020 level of 18,000 by at least the number not resettled from the FY 2020 allocation;
- count refugees who were ready for departure in FY 2020 toward the FY 2020 PD, even if they arrive in FY21; and
- return, as soon as possible, to average historical admission levels of 75,000 or more so that the U.S. program is commensurate with global need, and traditional U.S. global leadership on this issue is restored, given that we face the largest forced global displacement crisis on record.

With implementation of these changes, it is estimated that 15,000 more refugees fleeing religious persecution alone would be protected through refugee resettlement.<sup>3</sup> We view this as an issue of extreme importance especially given the precipitous decline of resettlement of refugees facing religious persecution in recent years: for example, the number of Iraqi Christians resettled declined 94.2% from FY 2016 to FY 2019, from 1524 individuals to 89 individuals, and the number of Jewish refugees resettled from Iran declined 97.2% from FY 2016 to FY 2019, from 72 individuals to 2 individuals.<sup>4</sup>

“We cannot, nor should we look the other way when, in many parts of the world, believers of different religious denominations are persecuted,” Pope Francis has said. “The use of religion to incite hatred, violence, oppression, extremism and blind fanaticism, cries out to God.”<sup>5</sup> Protection of religious minorities, including Christians, is an extremely important issue for Catholics worldwide and in the United States<sup>6</sup> as well as Evangelicals<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> “Statement of Barbara L. Strack, Retired, Former Chief, Refugee Affairs Division, Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Directorate, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security (2005-2018),” page 6, Hearing on The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program, House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Immigration & Citizenship, February 27, 2020,

<https://www.congress.gov/116/meeting/house/110569/witnesses/HHRG-116-JU01-Wstate-StrackB-20200227.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Data compiled by World Relief. All data is reported from the U.S. State Department's Refugee Processing Center ([www.wrapsnet.org](http://www.wrapsnet.org)) as of September 30, 2019. Religious affiliation is self-reported and various denominations within a particular religious tradition (i.e., Methodist, Catholic, Orthodox, simply “Christian,” etc.) have been aggregated by Matthew Soerens of World Relief. Jehovah's Witnesses and other religious groups that self-identify as Christians are included in that category, even though some other Christians would classify them as a distinct religious tradition. Years reported are fiscal years lasting from October 1 through September 30, not calendar years.

<sup>5</sup>Inés San Martín, “Pope, UN chief decry religious violence, including against Christians, Crux, Dec. 21, 2019 available at <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2019/12/pope-un-chief-decry-religious-violence-including-against-christians/>

<sup>6</sup>Catholic News Service, “Survey: Number of Catholics concerned about Christian persecution rises” Mar. 21, 2019, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/quick-reads/survey-number-catholics-concerned-about-christian-persecution-rises>

<sup>7</sup> In 2017 National Association of Evangelicals President Leith Anderson wrote to President Trump, “Christians and churches have been welcoming refugees for 2,000 years, and evangelicals are committed to continue this biblical mission. Thousands of U.S. evangelicals and their churches have welcomed hundreds of thousands of refugees over the past 40 years through World Relief and other federally approved resettlement agencies. We don’t want to stop now.” <https://www.nae.net/nae-calls-president-trump-continue-resettling-refugees/>

In the coming months, we urge you to flexibly adjust USRAP operations and in the coming fiscal year, we urge you to pursue the above described recommendations to increase the number of lives the United States saves through resettlement, including the lives of thousands of families fleeing religious persecution. We pledge to work with you on this and welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how we can move forward in the vital work of protecting individuals and families persecuted on account of religion both in the United States and worldwide. Please feel free to follow up with the USCCB Migration and Refugee Services Policy Director, Ashley Feasley at [afeasley@usccb.org](mailto:afeasley@usccb.org) and USCCB International Justice and Peace Office Director, Lucas Koach at [lkoach@usccb.org](mailto:lkoach@usccb.org) to arrange a meeting with the undersigned for further discussion. We welcome the chance to dialogue on this important matter.

Yours truly,

Most Reverend Mario Dorsonville  
Auxiliary Bishop of Washington  
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Migration

Most Reverend David J. Malloy  
Bishop of Rockford,  
Chairman, USCCB Committee on International Justice and Peace

Most Reverend Thomas Wenski  
Archbishop of Miami  
Chairman, USCCB Committee for Religious Liberty

Scott Arbeiter  
President  
World Relief

The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry  
Presiding Bishop and Primate  
The Episcopal Church

Donald Kerwin  
Executive Director  
Center for Migration Studies

Walter Kim  
President  
National Association of Evangelicals

Donna J. Markham OP, PhD, ABPP  
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Catholic Charities USA

Russell Moore  
President  
Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

Chris Palusky  
President & CEO  
Bethany Christian Services

Joan Rosenhauer  
Executive Director  
Jesuit Refugee Service

Monsignor Robert J. Vitillo  
Secretary General  
International Catholic Migration Commission

CC: The Honorable Stephen Biegun, Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of State  
The Honorable Chad Wolf, Acting Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
The Honorable Alex Azar, Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
The Honorable Samuel Brownback, Ambassador at Large for International Religious  
Freedom