

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 27, 2019

The Honorable Donald Trump  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington D.C. 20500

Mr. President,

We write to strongly urge you to revise the proposed ceiling for the admission of refugees that is in keeping with our longstanding commitment to vulnerable people around the world. We are concerned about press reports indicating that the Trump administration, in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, will further slash the refugee ceiling to 18,000. This is well below FY2019, which, at 30,000, was already at its lowest historical level. We ask that you to immediately reverse course and heed the recommendation of top U.S. military officials and faith leaders to open our doors to eligible refugees from all corners of the world.

We know that returning refugees to their countries of origin would put their lives in immediate danger and would perpetuate the very cycle of violence from which they sought to escape. A generous U.S. refugee policy spares tens of thousands from terrible fates. For instance, U.S. refugee admissions in FY2018 saved the lives of Muslim and Christian minorities who escaped atrocities in Burma, and of Ukrainians caught in the crossfire of a protracted conflict in Eastern Ukraine. We also know that refugee resettlement increases U.S. global influence, counters anti-Western propaganda, and promotes regional stability in foreign countries hosting large numbers of refugees. Conflict has led refugee camps to swell in size, from Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh to Zaatari in Jordan – straining the finite resources of our key allies and partners.

National security leaders attest that a refugee policy that embraces robust admissions of persons of all religions, races, and nationalities, is a foreign policy tool we have to combat groups like ISIS who sell a false narrative that Muslims are not welcome in the United States. As the number of complex humanitarian emergencies has reached a level not seen since World War II — with 70 million displaced, 25 million of whom are refugees — the United States must rise to this global challenge.

A failure to exercise U.S. humanitarian leadership also betrays our economic interests and national security. A 2017 study from the CATO Institute found that refugees, from 2005 to 2014, paid \$63 billion more in taxes than they received in government benefits. Moreover, purported security concerns, which the Trump administration used to justify deep cuts to the U.S. refugee ceiling in FY2018 and FY2019, have no basis in reality. Stanford University's Immigration Lab concluded that the Trump Administration's January 27, 2017 Executive Order to halt all refugee admissions for 120 days had "no discernible impact on crime rates" in the United States. The rest of the world resettled nearly three times the number of refugees as the United States in FY2017, while the Trump administration slashed America's refugee cap to its lowest level since 1980 — a dramatic reversal from our bipartisan, historic average of 95,000 people each year.

Top U.S. military leaders are among the strongest proponents of restoring U.S. global leadership in welcoming refugees, particularly in the areas where U.S. Armed Forces

operate. Each U.S. embassy and geographic combatant command depends on the assistance of a cadre of translators, security officers, and other advisors from host countries. Our foreign partners risk their lives in support of our national security, and the refugee resettlement program is one way we can show gratitude. That is why two dozen retired generals wrote you to ensure “that the next refugee admission (FY2020) goal is commensurate with global resettlement needs.” Their call was echoed by former Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, who urged that the United States not leave our allies in the lurch: “over the 17 years of war, numerous Iraqi nationals have risked their lives and their families by aligning with the our diplomats and warfighters providing essential mission support. We owe them support for their commitment.”

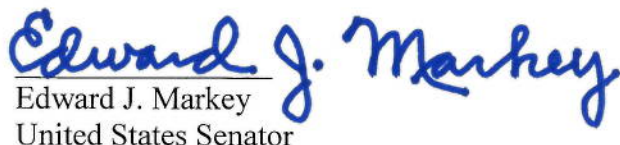
We also join religious leaders and U.S. resettlement organizations in rejecting any plan to reduce refugee admissions in FY2020 below an already historically low ceiling in FY2019. As a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of religion or belief are key defining factors in determining refugee eligibility, the Chair and Vice Chair of the United States Commission on Religious Liberty (USCIRP) urged the Administration to not “dramatically (reduce) the number of refugees” in the fiscal year to come. Even as conflict displaces a growing number of people outside their countries of origin, your Administration’s admission cuts have forced the nine resettlement agencies – many of which are faith based – to close offices. That is why absent an upwards shift in actual refugee resettlements for FY2020, we may lose the national capacity to respond meaningfully to a future manmade humanitarian crisis.

For millions of new Americans, the Statute of Liberty stood as the first landmark to greet them on the voyage to their new home. Those arrivals included an eleven-year-old girl who fled with her family from Communist rule in the former Czechoslovakia. Five-decades later, Madeleine Albright would rise to become America’s top diplomat, the 64<sup>th</sup> Secretary of State. For the sake of those seeking a future free from persecution, we ask that you uphold the promise of America by keeping the door open to the world’s refugees.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



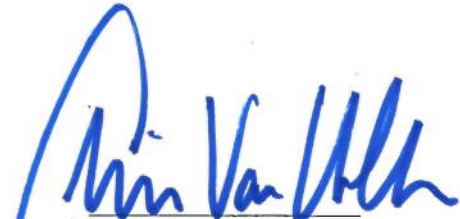
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator




Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

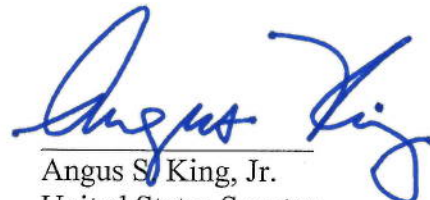


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