



World Relief Policy Statement on Refugee Resettlement January 2017

For nearly four decades, World Relief has empowered local churches to welcome, serve, and stand with refugees and other immigrants. Our commitment to displaced people is grounded in the Scriptures. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God's people are repeatedly called to "do what is just and right; rescue the oppressed from the power of the oppressor, [to not] exploit or mistreat the immigrant, the orphan, and the widow" (Jeremiah 22:3 CEB). The Church is called to "practice hospitality" (Romans 12:13 NIV)—literally, to practice *loving strangers*—mindful that Jesus Himself was once a child refugee, forced to flee from a tyrannical genocide. Whenever we welcome one of "the least of these" in Jesus' name, we welcome Him (Matthew 25:40).

Throughout our time working with refugees and other immigrants, World Relief has valued our longstanding partnership with the U.S. government and understand that while governments and policies may change, we remain committed to standing with vulnerable immigrants including refugees, undocumented immigrants, and victims of human trafficking.

Current Crisis

We are facing the world's worst displacement crisis since World War II. With more than 65 million refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people in the world, there is an unprecedented number of people who find themselves vulnerable and afraid. The conflict in Syria alone has forced approximately 4 million individuals to flee the country, with millions more displaced internally. Much of global displacement is a result of faith-based persecution, and we remain concerned about the deliberate, brutal targeting of Christians solely because of their faith.

Our Rich Heritage

The refugee resettlement program started in 1975 as a humanitarian and national security response to world crises. Since its inception, 3 million refugees have started their lives anew in the United States. Individuals from Vietnam, the former Soviet Union, Sudan, Iraq, and most recently Syria have found new homes in the United States of America. Many of these refugees have been welcomed by local church communities that have helped them get back on their feet. Just last year alone, the United States resettled close to 85,000 refugees. In 1980, the United States received more than 200,000 refugees in one year. Resettlement to the United States is not the sole or primary solution to the displacement crisis, but this important tool in humanitarian protection rescues the most vulnerable refugees and embodies the best of our country's values. It also promotes a positive image of our country abroad and encourages other nations to follow our example.

Opposition to a Temporary Suspension

Any temporary halt or hold of the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) abdicates our responsibility to protect the persecuted and lessens America's standing in the world as a beacon of freedom and hope, the "shining city on a hill" as Ronald Reagan described.

A concern for security is entirely appropriate; as Christians, we affirm the God-ordained role of government to protect its citizens. World Relief is willing to work with the administration to ensure understanding of and confidence in the resettlement program—a program based on designated priorities set by the U.S. Department of State. We are confident in the U.S. resettlement process and want to work with the administration to ensure that the American public is also confident in this vital, compassionate program.

However, to designate an arbitrary period of time to verify or augment an already robust security and vetting processes in place for refugees entering the United States disrupts bilateral and multilateral agreements on refugee protection, puts the lives of the refugees waiting to be resettled in more precarious and dangerous situations, and increases the responsibility of frontline states to provide refuge to those arriving to their shores. This action compounds a human tragedy at this time of the greatest refugee crisis in recent history, leaving far too many people in desperate circumstances and far too many families separated. We call on the administration and the Department of Homeland Security to complete any review quickly without adding additional layers of bureaucracy to a proven system that will not make us any safer but keep us from providing refuge to people whose lives have already been threatened.

People Who Will Be Impacted by a Resettlement Ban

- **American Families-** At World Relief, 70% of our refugee cases involve the reunification of people who have been torn apart by war and violence. Any temporary suspension of the program keeps families apart—even in cases where family members abroad have fully completed the refugee vetting process and have their plane tickets purchased.
- **Translators Who Helped U.S. Troops-** The US is committed to resettling individuals from Iraq and Afghanistan who supported U.S. troops and are at risk for their association with the US. For the past several years, thousands of translators who are threatened because of their association with the US have come through the refugee and SIV programs. These brave men and women have put themselves and their families at risk for our freedoms, and they deserve our protection.
- **Christians Who are Not Religious Minorities-** The largest groups of nationalities to come into the United States over the past several years have been Burmese and Congolese refugees. Many of these refugees are Christian, even though being a Christian may not be the primary reason for their persecution, and they remain vulnerable as they await resettlement.

Preference for Certain Refugees Based on Religion or Nationality

The USRAP rightly designates groups of special humanitarian concern to the US to prioritize for resettlement. This includes groups of Burmese refugees in Thailand; Jews, evangelical Christians, and other religious minorities from Iran; Iraqis associated with the US; and political or religious dissidents in Cuba. While we encourage the administration to support efforts to provide protection to religious minorities—including persecuted Christians—we are also concerned with the well-being of individuals persecuted for their ethnicity, political opinion, or other reasons enumerated in U.S. law, even though they may not be religious minorities. The hallmark of our refugee resettlement program is that it accepts refugees based on vulnerability and ties to the United States. Any designated preference by the United States needs to be within a broader program to accept other vulnerable refugees, and not identified as the only refugees to be resettled to the United States. Christians in many parts of the world already are perceived to believe in a “Western” religion and any real or perceived notion that the US will only accept Christians could unintentionally fuel extremist sentiments against Christians and other religious minorities within particular regions where they already face persecution.

Countries of first asylum host large numbers of refugees without categorizing refugees based on religion or nationality but based on vulnerability and risk. It is fundamental to good humanitarian policy for countries assisting and protecting displaced persons to do so without partiality towards nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class, or political opinion. In addition, refugees often arrive from areas where there is a delicate demographic and religious balance. The diversity and pluralism in many parts of the Middle East, for example, often strengthen religious freedom for minorities. It is critical, then, for refugee resettlement to be based on protecting the most vulnerable to ensure such diversity and pluralism is preserved.

The decision to restrict all entry of refugees and other immigrants from particular regions contradicts the American tradition of welcoming families who come to the United States to start their lives again in safety and dignity. Religion and nationality are factors to consider in evaluating the refugee claim, but the program should not exclude a refugee on one of those grounds alone. Each refugee story is unique and as such should be treated on its own merit. The American people—most of whom can trace their own families' stories through a similar immigrant journey in search of freedom—are a hospitable people. Many evangelical churches embrace people of all nationalities, cultures, and religions.

Facts around Resettled Refugees and Religion

Since 2001, when data on the religious affiliation of refugees started being collected, the US has resettled more Christian refugees than refugees of any other religion. While these refugees' Christian faith was in some cases a factor in their persecution claim, many were persecuted for reasons other than their faith.

Since 2003, the US has resettled nearly 81,000 Christians from the seven Muslim-majority countries on the list of countries of particular concern (Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Syria, Libya, Somalia, and Yemen) including more than 600 Christians so far in 2017, and more than 4,700 in 2016.

In the past decade, 1 in 4 refugees resettled from these countries of particular concern were Christians. Iraq and Iran had the highest share of religious minorities resettled, with about 95 percent of Iranian refugees being Christians or other non-Muslim faiths and about 37 percent of Iraqis refugees being Christians since 2007. Any temporary suspension of the refugee program or restriction from certain regions will mean fewer arrival of Christian refugees even with a prioritization for religious minorities.

National Security

Refugees are the most highly vetted immigrants to come to the United States. Each refugee being considered for resettlement by the United States must pass through a series of security screenings, including biographic and biometric checks. The information collected is checked against law enforcement, intelligence community, and other relevant databases, including those administered by the National Counterterrorism Center, Department of Defense, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of State, and Department of Homeland Security. If there is doubt about whether an applicant poses a security threat, he or she will not be admitted to the US.

It takes on average 18-24 months for a refugee to be fully vetted through the security process. In addition, each refugee has a face-to-face interview with a trained Department of Homeland Security official as well as a thorough medical screening before they are admitted. This process has worked to exclude individuals who could be a potential threat to our national security.

Foreign Policy Implications

Welcoming refugees helps to stabilize some of our key strategic allies in countries and regions that are disproportionately affected by forced displacement. Refugee resettlement is an option used only when refugees cannot return home or locally integrate. Allowing a certain number of refugees to be resettled to a third country relieves pressure off front line countries and helps stabilize countries in turbulent regions. Tanzania, for example, locally integrated hundreds of thousands of Burundian refugees as the US committed to resettle several thousand Burundian refugees. Resettling Syrian refugees has alleviated pressure off our regional allies, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, and increased the chance that vulnerable Syrians are not forced back to a war zone.

Refugee Resettlement as a Federal Program

The U.S. refugee resettlement program is a federal responsibility that depends on the cooperation of local and state governments, as well as churches and volunteers. Consultations with local and state jurisdictions are critical to this effort. The administration should work with state and local elected officials to ensure that states continue to fulfill their responsibilities toward refugees. In addition, the refugee program should remain a federal program where local and state jurisdictions are consulted but decisions regarding placement are ultimately made by the Department of State to ensure consistency and evenness in placement and full support upon arrival. Many businesses and faith communities welcome refugees and work in close partnership with local and state governments to help refugees become self-sufficient, quickly integrated, contributing members of their communities. The public-private nature of the refugee program creates local ownership of a refugee's success and facilitates the quick integration of refugees.

Contributions of Refugees

Resettled refugees are eager to give back to the country that has welcomed them and make significant economic and cultural contributions to their communities. Newly arrived refugees have been the driving force behind the rejuvenation of many cities across the United States, for example, helping to create jobs and opportunities through small-business development in once-strained rust-belt communities. Those granted refuge in the US successfully support their families, pay taxes, and contribute to the country in a myriad of ways. Refugees are employed in a wide range of sectors in the U.S. economy, from the hospitality and food service industry, to the teaching profession, to the fields of engineering, nursing and medicine. Many refugees give back by volunteering as interpreters or mentors to other newly-arriving refugees and immigrants. Albert Einstein, Henry Kissinger, Madeleine Albright, and Sergey Brin, the founder of Google, are former refugees whose accomplishments demonstrate what the US has to gain from welcoming refugees.

Care for Refugees as an Expression of our Faith

Since World Relief began resettling refugees in the late 1970s, we have partnered with thousands of local churches and tens of thousands of volunteers to welcome and help integrate refugees. A policy dramatically limiting refugee resettlement will starkly limit these churches ability to practice their Christian faith by welcoming refugees. The policies will also dramatically limit the ability of World Relief and other faith-based organizations to provide support directly to refugees and to churches and volunteers seeking to serve.

A Compassionate and Secure Response

As an evangelical Christian organization, biblical teachings are our top authority. The Scriptures are replete with God's commands to His people to love, welcome, and seek justice for refugees and other immigrants. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan—a man whom Jesus presents as the model of neighborly love when he provides assistance to a person in need of a different religious tradition—is our standard. Starkly limiting (and, for at least a season, halting with limited exceptions) this ministry opportunity clashes with these biblical values, which are an important authority for many Americans.

As we have done with the past six presidential administrations, World Relief is eager to work with the Trump administration to ensure that the proud American tradition of resettling refugees from around the world continues. While governmental policy may change, our commitment to standing alongside the persecuted, displaced, and vulnerable remains firm. As such, we are committed to praying for President Trump and his administration as they consider these and other vital decisions that will impact the lives of millions of vulnerable people, both within the United States and abroad.