

Dear Honorable Members of the United States Congress,

As religious leaders from a variety of backgrounds, we are called by our sacred texts and faith traditions to love our neighbor, accompany the vulnerable, and welcome the sojourner. War, conflict and persecution have forced people to leave their homes, creating more refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people than at any other time in history. According to a recent United Nations report, 60 million people are currently displaced – 1 in every 122 people on earth.

This nation has an urgent moral responsibility to receive refugees and asylum seekers who are in dire need of safety. Today, with more than four million Syrian refugees fleeing violence and persecution, the United States has an ethical obligation as a world leader to reduce this suffering and generously welcome Syrian refugees into our country. This is why we are calling on the Obama Administration and U.S. Congress to show bold leadership and increase the number of Syrians refugees resettled in the United States, in addition to the recently announced global resettlement admission numbers. The United States has a rich history as a leader in refugee resettlement, with significant precedent, including after World War II and after the fall of Saigon.

The U.S. Refugee Resettlement program has been and should remain open to those of any religious tradition who face persecution on account of the reasons enumerated under U.S. law. We write today to specifically state opposition to any legislation or proposal that would prevent Muslim refugees and individuals from other faiths from accessing the U.S. refugee resettlement program. Proposals that would have the U.S. State Department perform a religious litmus test on people fleeing persecution fly in the face of the very principles this nation was built upon, contradict the legacy of leadership our country has historically demonstrated, and dishonor our shared humanity.

As the United States joins the world in seeking ways to meaningfully respond to the Syrian refugee crisis, it is paramount that the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) stay true to its mandate to resettle the most vulnerable. Vulnerable individuals from a host of religions, ethnicities and backgrounds have been and should continue to be resettled in the United States.

Together, representing our various faiths, we decry derogatory language that has been used about our Muslim friends and neighbors. Inflammatory rhetoric has no place in our response to this humanitarian crisis. We ask our elected officials and candidates for office to recognize that new Americans of all faiths and backgrounds contribute to our economy, our community, and our congregations. Refugees are an asset to this country. They are powerful ambassadors of the American Dream and our nation's founding principles of equal opportunity, religious freedom, and liberty and justice for all.

As people of faith, our values call us to welcome the stranger, love our neighbor, and stand with the vulnerable, regardless of their religion. We pray that in your discernment, compassion for the plight of refugees will touch your hearts. We urge you to be bold in choosing moral, just policies that provide refuge for vulnerable individuals seeking protection.

Sincerely,

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