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March 21, 2023

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

SENT VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Secretary Blinken,

We are writing to you on behalf of hundreds of American citizens who have pending family-based petitions with the DHS's United States Citizenship and Immigration Services and immigrant visa applications with the Department of State for immediate and close relatives impacted by the recent earthquake in Türkiye and Syria. The earthquake that struck both countries last month has created a once-in-a-century humanitarian crisis, and we urge both your departments to work jointly to take immediate action to expedite the review of these applications and petitions.

As you are aware, this earthquake has caused massive destruction, killed over 50,000 people, and has left millions of people homeless or without adequate shelter, including those who were already in the process of immigrating to the United States. Many of the surviving relatives being petitioned for are now homeless and in desperate need of assistance. They have lost their homes, their livelihoods, and many have lost loved ones. We believe that the United States has a moral obligation to assist those who have been impacted by this disaster.

For these reasons, we request the U.S. government prioritize these Turkish and Syrian family immigration visa applications and family-based petitions, reviewing them as quickly as possible. We appreciate that DHS has already announced that it will expedite some immigration background checks on a case-by-case basis. However, we request that DHS and the State Department establish special procedures to jointly work together to ensure that all cases are expedited on humanitarian grounds.

In addition to expediting the process for the family-based petitions and immigrant visas, we also request the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) to acknowledge refugees in Turkey as one of their priorities because they are a group of people with special humanitarian concerns.

USRAP should establish a process to receive refugee referrals from Turkey and send resources and staff to Türkiye to expedite the interviewing and processing of these refugees. While many of the refugee applicants living in Türkiye are from Syria, there are also many refugees from

other backgrounds, including Uyghur Muslims and other Turkic minorities fleeing genocide in China.

We understand that the process of reviewing immigration applications and petitions can be lengthy and complicated, but we believe that in this unique situation, it is important to act quickly to provide relief to those who have been impacted by this devastating earthquake. We are aware that DHS and the State Department have the authority to expedite cases on humanitarian grounds and we urge you to exercise that authority in this situation.

Lastly, we ask for a meeting, either in person or via web-conference, to further discuss and address these requests and the dire situation in Türkiye and Syria.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

ACCESS of WNY
American Coalition for Syria (ACS)
American Muslims for Palestine
Bridges Faith Initiative
Church World Service
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Center
Emgage
ICNA Council for Social Justice (ICNA CSJ)
Islamic Center of Morris County, North Carolina
Islamic Shura Council of Southern California
Islamophobia Studies Center
Jetpac Resource Center
LUCHA
Majlis Ash-Shura: Islamic Leadership Council of New York
Mayor, Borough of Prospect Park, New Jersey
MPower Change
Muslim Advocates
Muslim American Society
Muslim Leadership Council of San Diego
Muslim Legal Fund of America (MLFA)
Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Northern California Islamic Council
Pax Christi USA
Sojourners
South Dakota Voices for Peace

The Mosque Cares (Ministry of Imam W. Deen Mohammed)
The People
Turkish American National Steering Committee (TASC)
Unitarian Universalist Refugee & Immigrant Services & Education
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
United Church of Christ, Justice and Local Church Ministries
US Council of Muslim Organizations (USCMO)



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

April 19, 2023

Matthew Chrastek
Coordinator
American Relief Coalition for Syria (ARCS)
1875 Connecticut Ave NW
Washington, DC 20009
matthew@arcsyria.org

Dear Mr. Chrastek:

Thank you for your March 21, 2023 letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) requesting expedited review of family-based petitions and immigrant visa applications filed on behalf of Turkish and Syrian nationals. I am responding on behalf of the Department.

DHS understands the challenges individual beneficiaries and applicants may face during a humanitarian crisis and recognizes the unique humanitarian needs that many Turkish and Syrian beneficiaries of family-based petitions or other U.S. immigration benefits may be facing.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) grants requests to expedite certain applications and petitions on a case-by-case basis in the event of an emergency or for urgent humanitarian reasons. Because a grant to expedite would place requestors ahead of others who filed earlier, USCIS must consider each request carefully based on the urgency and merit of the specific circumstances.

Expedite requests based on humanitarian need may include a wide range of circumstances and large-scale events that impact a person's safety or welfare. Some examples may include, but are not limited to, illness, disability, extreme poverty, death in the family, or need for urgent medical treatment. USCIS considers all requests for expedited processing, to include petitions and applications filed on behalf of beneficiaries from Türkiye and Syria, on a case-by-case basis.¹

In addition, USCIS has delegated authority to the Department of State (DOS) to accept and adjudicate clearly approvable Forms I-130, Petition for Alien Relative, filed abroad by U.S. citizens for immediate relative beneficiaries under certain exceptional circumstances. DOS may exercise its discretion to accept a Form I-130 petition filed directly with a U.S. embassy or consulate by a qualifying petitioner who is physically present with the beneficiary in the consular jurisdiction impacted by a large-scale event. Filing directly with DOS is intended to assist those

¹ For more information, please visit "Immigration Relief in Emergencies or Unforeseen Circumstances" on the USCIS website at uscis.gov/newsroom/immigration-relief-in-emergencies-or-unforeseen-circumstances.

Matthew Chrastek

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directly affected by disruptive events and may be limited to event-specific dates and circumstances.

In your letter, you also note the importance of continuing to process refugees in Türkiye. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is actively conducting refugee processing in Türkiye, which includes populations of multiple nationalities residing in the affected areas. We have prioritized processing for individuals from the 10 provinces where the state of emergency was declared by the Turkish Government. USCIS does not conduct refugee processing in Syria at this time due to security concerns.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. We hope this information addresses your concerns, and we will explore whether further meetings on this issue might be appropriate. Please share this response with the other organizations that cosigned your letter. Should you require any additional assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ur M. Jaddou", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Ur M. Jaddou
Director