

Refugee Council USA

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March 30, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable John F. Kelly
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Tillerson and Secretary Kelly:

I write on behalf of Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), a coalition dedicated to refugee protection and welcome, representing the interests of hundreds of thousands of refugees and their millions of supporters and volunteers across the country. We welcome refugees and assist in their integration with the strong support of local mayors, churches, synagogues, community groups, employer partners, corporate supporters, and a growing corps of volunteers. We write to seek partnership with the Administration in ensuring that the refugee resettlement program, founded on a history of strong bipartisan support, can continue to fulfill its primary mission: to protect and save the lives of some of the world's most vulnerable and voiceless people.

We respect the need and indeed encourage the Administration to review and continuously improve refugee processing and vetting. The integrity of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is essential for the American people, the refugees themselves, and all of the communities throughout the country that continue to support refugee resettlement. It is not mutually exclusive for the United States to welcome refugees from around the world, of all faiths, while also prioritizing national security.

Therefore, as the Administration proceeds with a full review of security vetting in immigration processing, it is our hope that the review of the USRAP component be conducted with two overarching goals in mind: maintaining a robust refugee admissions program and keeping the homeland safe. As you move forward with this important mandate, our recommendations include:

- 1) **Conduct a security review concurrently with continued admissions of refugees.** Prior administrations of both political parties have conducted such reviews concurrently with refugee admissions, making course corrections and introducing new procedures during refugee processing. We encourage this administration to do the same.
- 2) **Conduct the review expeditiously.** We encourage the Administration to evaluate existing security procedures immediately, and to conclude a review as swiftly as possible to prevent further uncertainty and hardship for refugee families waiting overseas. If new or amended procedures are identified during the review process, they should be synchronized with all of the other existing security checks as quickly and efficiently as possible to prevent further delays for families whose processes are already underway.
- 3) **Conduct the review in a bipartisan and transparent manner.** Given the significant national attention that refugee resettlement has received, it is of particular importance that the review be transparent, identifying current steps in the review process, isolating any known gaps, and addressing these gaps expeditiously and in good faith. In addition, upon completion of the review, the Administration should fully brief Congress on the outcomes of the process, including in a public forum.

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Members:

Amnesty International USA

Asylum Access

Boat People SOS

Center for Applied Linguistics

Center for Migration Studies

Center for Victims of Torture

Church World Service/
Immigration & Refugee
Program

Episcopal Migration Ministries

Ethiopian Community
Development Council

HIAS

Human Rights First

International Catholic
Migration Commission

International Refugee
Assistance Project

International Rescue
Committee

Jesuit Refugee Service/USA

Jubilee Campaign USA

Lutheran Immigration
and Refugee Service

Refugee Center Online

RefugePoint

Southeast Asia Resource
Action Center

Upwardly Global

U.S. Conference of Catholic
Bishops/Migration & Refugee
Services

U.S. Committee for Refugees
and Immigrants

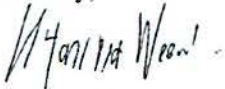
World Relief

- 4) **Ensure that changes to existing vetting processes are consistent with international norms observed by all resettlement countries that have signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol.** The international protection regime established by the Refugee Convention and its Protocol establish the unique predicament of refugees, having fled repressive regimes, states that have failed to protect their citizens, and government actors that have actively persecuted them on political, religious, ethnic or other grounds. In such a context, refugees' own governments are not credible validators of the identity or circumstance of refugees and therefore cannot be relied upon in the refugee selection process. The U.S. and other resettlement countries have long relied upon multiple, effective mechanisms, including intelligence sharing with host countries and allies as well as multiple interviews conducted by highly-trained and specialized staff, that have proven effective in confirming individuals' identities, persecution claims, and documentation.
- 5) **Develop procedures to ensure that refugees do not suffer unnecessary delays due to expiring validity periods under current screening procedures.** Each step in the security vetting and health screening process has its own validity period. Expiration of any one can result in a domino effect that can delay refugees' travel for months or even years, through no fault of their own. Steps should be taken to ensure that refugees cleared for entry are not forced to repeat checks or restart what can be a two-year process due to expiring validity periods. Such steps would save the U.S. Government money and make the bureaucratic process of resettlement more efficient without in any way compromising the integrity of the program.

We believe that the U.S. can continue to welcome refugees, and in doing so, uphold one of the proudest American traditions, while at the same time maintaining a secure refugee resettlement program. We stand at the ready to continue to support the ongoing arrival and integration of our new American neighbors while the Administration conducts a rapid, efficient and effective security procedure review. We remain committed to working with the Administration on this common endeavor, and look forward to strengthening our partnership.

Naomi Steinberg, Director of RCUSA, is our point of contact for further information on our recommendations. Her e-mail address is: nsteinberg@rcusa.org, and her phone number is: 202-319-2103.

Sincerely,



Hans Van de Weerd
Chair, Refugee Council USA

Cc: Dan Coats

Admiral Garry Hall



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

September 13, 2017

Hans Van de Weerd
Chair
Refugee Council USA
1628 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009

Dear Mr. Van de Weerd:

Thank you for your March 30, 2017 letter. Secretary Kelly asked that I respond on his behalf.

In compliance with Executive Order 13780, "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States," 82 Fed. Reg. 13209 (Mar. 6, 2017), the Supreme Court's June 26, 2017 order in *Trump v. IRAP* and the District Court of Hawaii's July 13, 2017 ruling, the United States, having reached the revised ceiling for refugee admissions in Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 of 50,000, continues to admit refugees to the United States who have a credible claim to a bona fide relationship with a person or entity in the United States. As of July 14, 2017, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) has admitted 50,168 refugees to the United States in FY 2017.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) remains committed to the integrity of USRAP. We work with interagency partners to continuously review and improve its policies and procedures to ensure that USRAP safeguards the American public from threats to public safety and national security, while offering protection to some of the world's most vulnerable refugees.

We appreciate your leadership on refugee protection issues and thank you for Refugee Council USA's recommendations on USRAP. We look forward to further engagement with regard to DHS's role in USRAP.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James W. McCament". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "James" and last name "McCament" clearly visible.

James W. McCament
Acting Director