AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA

ACTIVIST TOOLKIT FOR
PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Syrian Refugee Crisis
Dear Activist,

Thank you for your commitment to the human rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. **We need you to raise your voice now more than ever.**

In 2015, **more than 60 million people were forced from their homes by armed conflict, persecution, and extreme violence** taking place on every continent in the world. In the Middle East, millions of Syrians and Iraqis were on the run; in South East Asia, more than a hundred thousand Rohingya people fled persecution in Myanmar; and in the Americas, tens of thousands of children and their families fled murder, forced recruitment into gangs, and rape and gender-based violence.

Alongside this, there have been unprecedented attacks on the rights of refugees and migrants by elected officials, politicians, and candidates, **including proposals to ban all Muslims from entering the U.S.** While the U.S. climate for refugees and migrants has steadily deteriorated over the last 20 years, what is taking place now constitutes a wholesale challenge to the human rights of all people on the move, and has resulted in an increase in Islamophobia and hate crimes that threaten all people of color.

Amnesty International will launch a global campaign for the protection of refugee and migrants’ rights (RMR) Fall 2016. As we prepare, you can find more resources and information on these issues at [www.amnestyusa.org/RMR](http://www.amnestyusa.org/RMR). **This toolkit focuses on the urgent protection needs of Syrian refugees**, who are in the midst of a brutal conflict that has forcibly displaced more than half their population in five years.

We need you to join this movement. **Be the voice in your community that mobilizes supporters for refugees and migrants.** Join us today, and stand with the **more than 60 million people forced from their homes** whose rights to dignity, security, and protection must be promoted and protected. Use this toolkit to pass a resolution, write a letter to the editor, talk to politicians/neighbors, and defend human rights.

In solidarity,

Tarah Demant, Identity and Discrimination Unit, [tdemant@aiusa.org](mailto:tdemant@aiusa.org)

Geoffrey Mock, AIUSA Syria Country Specialist, [geoffrey.mock@duke.edu](mailto:geoffrey.mock@duke.edu)
In 2015, for the first time since World War II, the number of those forcibly displaced from their homes exceeded 60 million. While Syria presents the world’s biggest refugee crisis, with more than half its population on the move, it is by no means the only one.

In Africa, people fleeing conflict and persecution in countries like South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), Nigeria, and Burundi have added hundreds of thousands to the longstanding refugee populations from countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Since 2014, more than 100,000 unaccompanied children have arrived at the U.S. border, most seeking protection from gangs, narco-traffickers, and corrupt local officers.

The International Community has not met these mass movements with compassion or coordination. In April 2015, more than 1,000 people died in the space of ten days while attempting to cross the Mediterranean to secure refuge in Europe. The world witnessed harrowing scenes as fishing boats crammed with refugees and migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh were pushed back to sea by neighboring countries. Desperate children, men, and women were left without food, water or medical care for weeks. More than 1000 people died on the Andaman Sea in 2015.

The Mediterranean and South East Asia crises exposed governments’ willingness to ignore legal obligations and humanitarian imperatives. In situations where lives were known to be at risk and states had the means to save them, they chose not to act for political reasons.

The lives lost were not a result of a violent conflict or an unavoidable natural disaster – most were entirely preventable deaths.

The international refugee protection system is facing a defining moment – it is time for the United States to reaffirm its commitment to human rights by increasing refugee resettlement and humanitarian assistance globally.
12 million Syrians have fled their homes in fear. Half of them are children.

95% of Syrian refugees are hosted in just five countries:
- Turkey
- Lebanon
- Jordan
- Iraq
- Egypt

Rest of the world

450,000 of Syria’s most vulnerable refugees need urgent resettlement.

All countries have a duty to protect people fleeing conflict and persecution.

Just 2.6% of the Syrian refugee population have been offered resettlement places globally, since the start of the Syria crisis.
In the face of massive displacement and arrivals, very often the first reaction of politicians is to resort to scaremongering... A real response can only be based on solidarity and human rights, on responsibility sharing and respect for international law. – Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

On average, 42,500 people are fleeing their homes every day, and half of them are women. Five million Syrian refugees are being hosted in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq, and almost 1 million have applied for asylum protection in Europe. Five years on, the vast majority of Syrian refugee adults still have no right to work and Syrian children are not attending school. Ninety percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan live below the poverty line.

While neighboring states have shown solidarity with Syria’s refugees, the international community response to the crisis remains dismal: in the absence of sufficient financial support, aid agencies have repeatedly had to reduce humanitarian assistance to refugees, resulting in less food, less shelter, and less protection.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has determined that 10 percent of the 4.7 million Syrian refugees are in need of resettlement out of the region, and yet, President Obama has committed to resettling only 10,000 Syrians in 2016. As of March 2016, only 816 Syrian refugees have arrived to the U.S.

At the end of last year, 33 U.S. governors refused to accept resettled refugees. In contrast, Canada resettled 25,000 Syrian refugees in four months and plans to resettle more refugees throughout 2016. The U.S. has the capacity and responsibility to do so much more, and given the stakes, we cannot betray our obligations to do so now.

In his last year in office, President Obama should significantly increase the number of refugees resettled in the U.S., and the U.S. Congress should both appropriate sufficient funds to support their humanitarian needs, and reject any legislation that restricts their arrival based on discriminatory grounds, including religion.

Make a commitment to counter xenophobic attacks and work toward the resettlement of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees, including orphaned children, survivors of torture, the physically disabled, and members of the LGBTI community. In this section you will find the materials you need to:

- Help pass a city council resolution welcoming refugees
- Write letters to the press in support of refugee rights
- Urge your elected representatives to speak out in support of refugees
- Have conversations about refugee rights and respond to criticisms and concerns that may arise

TAKE ACTION IN SUPPORT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES
1. Before launching the campaign, contact the Amnesty International USA Refugee and Migrants’ Rights Campaigner at rmrcampaigner@aiusa.org, who can work with you on a campaign plan.

2. Learn which refugee resettlement organizations work in your community. These are the groups that will welcome and help resettled refugees to transition into U.S. communities. The list can be found here: http://tinyurl.com/pkc7blp (Find a tip-sheet for working with groups on our website)

3. In coordination with refugee resettlement organizations, write a local resolution and contact a member of your community’s city council or governing board to ask them to introduce the resolution supporting the resettlement of refugees in your community.

4. Build grassroots support for the resolution by reaching out to churches, mosques, synagogues, Arab-American and Latino associations, your local bar association, college student groups, and any others active or interested in refugee and/or human rights issues.

5. Write an op-ed, and start a letter to the editor or social media campaign supporting the resolution.

6. When the resolution is raised for discussion, attend the council session in large numbers to show support for the resolution.

7. If the resolution passes, write letters thanking the council members and publicly showcase the council’s action.

8. If the resolution does not pass, contact AIUSA to discuss alternative ways to build support for refugee resettlement in your community.

9. Stay in touch with the refugee resettlement organization so that when refugees are resettled into your community, you and other supporters of the resolution can volunteer to help. Resettlement agencies are always in need of volunteers to help refugees learn about their new communities, prepare necessary paperwork, find jobs, and complete homework.
Dear [NAME],

On behalf of the Amnesty International members in this community, I write to encourage you to speak in support of Syrian resettlement in our community. Refugee specialists working in our community agree that our community has the capacity to welcome and receive Syrian refugees in need of resettlement.

We believe that Syrian resettlement will:

- Offer crucial support to the most vulnerable Syrian refugees, including children traveling alone, members of the LGBTI community and survivors of torture.
- Demonstrate solidarity with Syria’s neighbors that are hosting more than 90 percent of Syrian refugees.
- Relieve political, social, and economic pressure on host communities that have housed, cared for, educated, and protected almost five million Syrian refugees for 5 years.

Five years into a brutal conflict, more than 12 million Syrians have been forced to leave their homes. Five million of them are refugees, and neighboring countries host more than 90 percent of the population. Even now, Europe is hosting only six percent of all Syrian refugees. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has determined that 10 percent of Syrian refugees are in need of resettlement out of the region because they remain vulnerable even in host countries. They include children traveling alone, survivors of torture, members of the LGBTI community, and people with disabilities.

No Syrian refugees will be permitted to enter the U.S. until they have successfully passed through a lengthy and rigorous security screening involving the Departments of Homeland Security and Defense, the State Department, and the FBI, among others. The process can take 18 months or longer to complete. While no vetting process can ensure 100 percent protection, resettlement organizations in our community have worked successfully with refugees from [NUMBER OF COUNTRIES]. And they have been resettled time and time again without incident.

Unfortunately, some elected officials and people running for public office in the U.S. are resorting to scaremongering and xenophobic attacks to discourage the entrance of Syrian refugees. But building walls to keep people out is not a solution to the unprecedented number of people fleeing conflict and extreme violence. This response will only increase the suffering of people who have already suffered the unthinkable, and increase the likelihood that they will resort to the use of smugglers and traffickers who will only further endanger them.

We are in a defining moment – it is time for the United States to reaffirm the values upon which it was built. Please take a position that supports the resettlement of Syrian refugees in our community.

Sincerely,

[INSERT YOUR NAME HERE]
[DRAFT] RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF RESETTLEMENT OF [Syrian] REFUGEES IN [CITY]

WHEREAS there are more refugees in the world today than at any time since World War II, including almost 5 million Syrians who have fled their homes since the Syrian conflict began in 2011;

WHEREAS Turkey is now hosting almost 3 million Syrian refugees, neighboring countries are hosting another 2 million, and Germany is processing the asylum applications of almost 1 million Syrians;

WHEREAS the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has determined that 10 percent of Syrian refugees are in need of resettlement to nations outside of the region due to a heightened vulnerability to further harm, but less than 200,000 resettlement places have been pledged by nations - with the U.S. pledging only 10,000 places this year;

WHEREAS Syrian refugees in need of resettlement are identified based on their vulnerabilities and risk of further exposure to violence and exploitation – including children traveling alone, female-headed households, victims of torture, the physically disabled, and members of the LGBTI community;

WHEREAS hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees are making life and death decisions to flee Syria and neighboring countries because they are unable to access shelter, health care, education, or protection, and neighboring countries have closed their borders to new arrivals;

WHEREAS 4000 refugees have died trying to cross the Mediterranean into Europe since January 2015, and two children die every day in this crossing;

WHEREAS the United States has traditionally taken the lead in resettling refugees but has resettled only 1800 Syrian refugees since the beginning of the conflict in 2011 and pledged to resettle only 10,000 in 2016;

WHEREAS all refugees resettled by the United States undergo an extensive and rigorous security screening process including biometric analysis, and all Syrians go through an additional screening procedure;

WHEREAS [RESETTLEMENT ORGANIZATIONS IN THE COMMUNITY], the organizations responsible for resettling refugees in this community, as well as numerous other community organizations and religious institutions have declared their support for resettling Syrian refugees in [CITY];

WHEREAS [RESETTLEMENT ORGANIZATIONS] have resettled more than [NUMBER] refugees in [CITY] since 2011 from more than [NUMBER} countries including [LIST COUNTRIES];

Resolved, [NAME] City Council declares its support for the resettlement of Syrian refugees in [CITY] and calls upon other [STATE] communities to join them in supporting a stronger national effort to resettle the most vulnerable Syrian refugees.
Last year, 42,500 people fled their homes every day. With more than 60 million people now forcibly displaced, the world is experiencing the greatest refugee crisis since World War II, and the biggest humanitarian crisis of our time. Ninety percent of all refugees are hosted by 10 countries – and the U.S. has offered precious little to support these nations or the refugees who remain in dire need.

Syria’s refugee crisis, specifically, underscores the need for U.S. leadership. Almost 5 million Syrian refugees are facing increasing hardship in neighboring countries, and most are unable to find stable shelter or regular food. In Jordan and Lebanon, more than 90% of Syrian refugees live below the local poverty line. The suffering of Syrians will not be alleviated without much greater support from other countries, including the U.S.

President Obama’s commitment to resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees in 2016 is a good start, but does not begin to match the needs of Syrian refugees and the capacity of the U.S. to help them. The U.S. resettlement process is lengthy and rigorous and includes security screening by the Departments of Homeland Security and Defense, the State Department and the FBI, among other intelligence agencies.

In his last year in office, President Obama should significantly increase the number of refugees given the opportunity to resettle in the U.S., and the U.S. Congress should both appropriate sufficient funds to support their humanitarian needs, and reject any legislation that restricts their arrival based on discriminatory grounds, including religion.

Sixty years after the international community agreed that it would never deny refugees protection again, we are at a defining moment – the United States must reaffirm the values upon which it was built.
The refugee resettlement process is lengthy, extremely detailed, and very safe. Only those Syrian refugees registered by the UNHCR and identified as being particularly at risk will be considered for U.S. resettlement. Globally, the UNHCR gives priority to the most vulnerable refugees, including torture survivors, people with serious medical conditions, children traveling alone, and women and children at risk.

Refugees are not allowed to travel to the U.S. until all security screenings have been successfully completed, and Syrians go through more security screenings than other refugees.

The United States has an obligation pursuant to international law, the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, and the 1984 UN Torture Convention to ensure that individuals are not returned to a situation where they would face “a risk of irreparable harm” or torture or have a well-founded fear of persecution upon return due to their political opinion, race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group.

Rhetoric that is based on fear rather than fact makes us less safe. Such rhetoric against refugees, particularly Islamaphobic rhetoric, inflames hate and violence at home and abroad.

2015 has seen the worst refugee crisis in recent history with over 20 million refugees across the globe. Unprecedented numbers of refugees have arrived on Europe’s shores, while countries in the Middle East, South East Asia, and Africa continue to host the majority of the world’s refugees.

Millions of people are fleeing their homes because of war, armed conflict, violence, and other factors that force them to leave. They cannot safely return to their homes, and they are incredibly vulnerable on their journey to refuge.

90 percent of the world’s refugees are being hosted by only 10 countries, and many of these countries do not have adequate resources to keep refugees fed, housed, or safe. Some refugees are surviving on less than 50 cents a day. The U.S. must increase its support for refugees by increasing its financial contribution to the UNHCR and NGOs that assist refugees.

A note on terminology in reference to what media and the USG often refer to as ISIS/ISIL: Amnesty uses “the armed group calling itself Islamic State (IS) on first reference, and “IS” thereafter.
**Counterarguments**

What are arguments that one might hear to challenge these talking points?

**Counterargument:** We need to prevent terrorists from coming into the United States/X bill is to protect our national security:

**Answer:** Most refugees seeking protection are themselves fleeing persecution and attacks by armed groups. Those fleeing Syria, for example, are escaping the Assad regime and assaults by the armed group calling itself Islamic State and other armed groups. What's more, the U.S. system for vetting refugees is already lengthy, extremely detailed, and very safe. Refugees will not be admitted until all security screenings have been successfully completed, and this takes more than 18 months on average. Syrians also undergo additional security screenings to ensure that they pose no threat to U.S. national security.

**Counterargument:** The United States already takes in more than its fair share of refugees/we should limit intake of refugees and focus on domestic issues.

**Answer:** President Obama's recent commitment to resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees is a good start, but given that neighboring countries are hosting almost 5 million Syrians, and a million Syrians have applied for asylum protection in Europe, this number is not enough. The U.S. must ensure that nations neighboring Syria do not continue to bear the disproportionate burden in addressing immediate needs. This solidarity is essential for the Middle East and Europe now, but may well be needed by the U.S. in the future.

**Counterargument:** Those crossing the U.S./Mexico border are not refugees; they are illegal immigrants.

**Answer:** People in need of protection from extreme violence and persecution in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (Northern Triangle) have a legal right to make an application for asylum in the U.S. Many Northern Triangle children and families are fleeing life-threatening and targeted violence, including death threats, rape, forced conscription, sexual slavery, and torture. Many have already lost family members and friends to violence. No matter what a person's status, the U.S. is obligated to ensure that individuals and families who say they are afraid to return to their home countries have the opportunity to apply for asylum with the assistance of legal counsel and the help of an interpreter and have their claims reviewed by an independent and impartial decision maker.

**Counterargument:** States/communities (within the U.S.) should be allowed to decide who comes into the state/allowed to refuse refugees.

**Answer:** While countries retain their right to police their borders, they also have the duty to protect the rights of others and a legal and moral obligation to take in refugees when they have the means and capacity to do so—these two principles are not at odds with each other. Individual states in the United States cannot “opt out” of the international human rights commitments and obligations entered into by the United States.
WE STAND WITH ALL THOSE SUFFERING WAR AND VIOLENCE

WE WELCOME REFUGEES

#RefugeesWelcome