Amnesty International USA

I WELCOME

Refugee Rights Toolkit

October 2016
Dear Activist,

Today, more than 21.3 million people are refugees: the largest refugee crisis since WWII, and world leaders have consistently failed to ensure the rights and safety of refugees, doing little to effectively address the crisis. In response, Amnesty International has launched a global campaign: I Welcome. Over the next three years, we will be campaigning for the rights of refugees around the world to ensure 1) that governments resettle more refugees and provide more humanitarian aid, 2) that people have safe and legal pathways to asylum and refuge, and 3) that asylum processes are fair and efficient.

In the United States, polling shows that Americans overwhelmingly would welcome refugees into our country, yet politicians continue to attack refugees, particularly Syrian and Muslim refugees, and anti-Muslim rhetoric has real consequences: numerous governors and officials have spoken out against against Syrians and Muslims, hate crimes are on the rise against Muslims (or perceived Muslims) in the US, and a few states have halted the resettlement of all refugees because of the perceived “terror threat” from Syrian and Muslim refugees. The same is happening at the national level, where anti-refugee legislation is often overtly anti-Muslim, including proposals to ban Syrians and/or Muslim refugees from entering the U.S. There are over 4.8 million Syrian refugees, who have been forced from their homes and are seeking safety—we cannot turn our backs.

To ensure the rights of all refugees, we must address the Islamaphobia at the root of much of the anti-refugee rhetoric and policies and show politicians that we welcome refugees across this country! That’s why our first toolkit of the I Welcome campaign focuses on building support specifically for Syrian refugees in your communities. We need people in every town to take action.

In the toolkit, you’ll find:
- Take Action: what you can do for Syrian Refugees
- Draft letter to your local council member in support of refugee resettlement
- Draft resolution in support of Syrian Refugees for your local city council
- Draft Letter to the Editor
- Talking points to educate your community/elected officials about refugees

On our website, www.amnestyusa.org/refugee, you will also find:
- Fact sheets on refugees, anti-Muslim hate, and more
- Counter-arguments you may encounter (and how to respond)
- Discussion guidelines for holding conversations around this (often controversial) topic
- Resettlement organizations in your area and tips for working in coalition
- Tips for passing a City Council resolution
- and more!

Global change starts with two words—I Welcome—and it starts with you!

In Solidarity
Denise Bell, AIUSA Refugee and Migrant Rights Campaigner, dbell@aiusa.org
Geoffrey Mock, AIUSA Syria Country Specialist, geoffrey.mock@duke.edu
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

In 2016, the Obama administration resettled 10,000 Syrians in the United States, which is admirable, but not nearly enough. Unfortunately, we have seen politicians and elected officials decry Syrian refugees as “terrorists,” and anti-Muslim and anti-refugee rhetoric threatens to shut down refugee resettlement in individual states and to block federal funding for refugees. 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.

The United States must significantly increase the number of refugees resettled in the U.S., and the U.S. Congress should both appropriate sufficient funds for resettlement and humanitarian needs, and reject any legislation that restricts their arrival based on discriminatory grounds, including religion.

We need you in every county across America to counter Islamophobic attacks and to 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.

A City Council resolution doesn’t decide where refugees are resettled in the U.S.—that’s a process done by the Federal and State governments through the Office of Refugee Resettlement—what it does do is send a strong signal show elected officials and community members that we will not stand for hatred and bigotry, that that we welcome refugees—this message is needed now more than ever.

Five years into the civil war in Syria, almost half of all Syrians have been forced to flee their homes in search of safety. 6.6 million are internally displaced; 4.8 million are refugees. 85% of Syrian refugees currently live in just 5 countries: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt, where they await the opportunity for permanent resettlement elsewhere. The vast majority of Syrian refugee adults still have no right to work and Syrian children are not attending school. 70% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and 86% in 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.

10 percent of Syrian refugees are in need of immediate resettlement out of the region, yet world leaders, particularly in wealthier countries, have failed to step up.

TAKE ACTION IN SUPPORT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES
1. Before launching the campaign, connect with AIUSA Refugee & Migrant Rights Campaigner (Denise DBell@aiusa.org) and your Field Organizer (at this link) who can work with you on a campaign plan and connect you to other activists who have succeeded.

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 is posted on our website www.amnestyusa.org/refugee along with a tip-sheet for working with other groups.

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 currently house almost 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 11 million Syrians have been forced to leave their homes—half the country’s population. 4.8 million of them are refugees, and neighboring countries host almost 90 percent of the refugee population. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has determined that 10 percent of Syrian refugees are in need of immediate 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 Department of Homeland Security, Department of Defense, the State Department, and the FBI, among others. The process takes on average 18-24 months 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]
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 the country 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 High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has determined that 10 percent of Syrian refugees are in need of immediate 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 over 7,000 refugees have died trying to cross the Mediterranean into Europe since January 2015, and two children die every day in this crossing;

WHEREAS we commend the United States for the resettlement of over [14,463] Syrian refugees since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, but note the ability of and need for our country to do more;

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.
Over 21 million people across the world are refugees; 51% of them are children. We are experiencing the largest refugee crisis since World War II and biggest humanitarian crisis of our time. Almost half (12 million people) of all refugees are hosted by 10 countries – and the U.S. has offered far too little to support these nations or the refugees who remain in dire need.

Syria’s refugee crisis especially 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 86% 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.

The resettlement of 10,000 Syrian refugees in the United States 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.

We are a welcoming people, and a welcoming country. Our country 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.

We are at a defining moment in the world, and in our country— the United States must reaffirm the values upon which it was built.
The refugee resettlement process in the U.S. is lengthy, extremely thorough, 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, and children traveling alone.

Refugees are not allowed to travel to the U.S. until all security screenings through multiple law enforcement and intelligence agencies have been successfully completed. Refugees are the most vetted individuals to enter the United States, and Syrians go through more security screenings than other refugees seeking resettlement in the U.S.

Refugees cannot choose where they are resettled. When a refugee is registered with UNHCR, they cannot “pick” where they would like to go, i.e., they cannot plan to go to the US or anywhere else specifically. The process of resettlement is determined by UNHCR and potential resettlement countries.

U.S. law forbids returning individuals to a country where they be would at risk of torture or persecuted on account of their race, religion, political opinion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group—no matter how that person arrived to the United States.

We are experiencing the worst refugee crisis since WWII, with over 21 million refugees across the globe. Unprecedented numbers have fled from their homes because of war, conflict, and persecution. The vast majority of refugees are currently hosted in developing countries.

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

Half of the world’s refugees are currently living in 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.

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Educating your community—family, neighbors, politicians—about the crisis is critical. More talking points @ www.amnestyusa.org/refugee

TALKING POINTS

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- Rhetoric that is based on fear rather than fact makes us less safe. Fear-mongering and hateful rhetoric against refugees, particularly Islamophobic rhetoric, inflames hate and violence at home and abroad.
WE STAND WITH ALL THOSE SUFFERING WAR AND VIOLENCE

I WELCOME

#IWelcome