



**Amnesty International USA**

# **I WELCOME**

## **Refugee Resolutions Toolkit**

**September 2017**



#IWelcome

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



Dear Activist,

Today, there are 22.5 million people refugees around the world, and more than half of them are children. World leaders have consistently failed to ensure the rights and safety of refugees in the face of this global crisis. In response, Amnesty International has **launched a global campaign: *I Welcome***, which mobilizes public pressure on governments to welcome refugees. Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) will be working to ensure that the U.S.: 1) continues to resettle refugees and provide needed humanitarian aid, and 2) halts the practice of detaining families seeking asylum.

In the United States, **polling shows that Americans overwhelmingly would welcome refugees** into our country, yet politicians continue to attack refugees, particularly Muslim refugees. **This rhetoric has real consequences:** hate crimes against Muslims are on the rise, the President ordered a suspension of refugee resettlement for 120 days and enacted a travel ban targeting six Muslim-majority nations, and several U.S. states have withdrawn from the U.S. refugee resettlement program.

These national and state policies happen because politicians believe that local communities do not welcome refugees and will not stand for the rights of refugees. **We need people in every town to take action.** To combat this, local municipal resolutions supporting refugee rights and resettlement and rejecting anti-refugee and Islamophobic rhetoric have become powerful tools in saying NO to policies that discriminate against some of the most vulnerable people in the world.

In the toolkit, you'll find:

- An explanation of "Why Local Resolutions?"
- Draft letter to your local council member in support of refugee resettlement
- Draft resolution in support of 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](http://www.amnestyusa.org/refugee), you will also find:

- [Discussion guidelines for holding conversations](#) around this (often controversial) topic
- [Community mapping tools](#)
- [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!*

In Solidarity,

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## Why Local Resolutions?

*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.... – Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees*

### Local Action, Countrywide Change

Experience shows that, when our elected officials at the city level say on the record they welcome refugees, our state and federal representatives do hear that their communities want refugees resettled. **The critical piece is passing local “welcome refugees” resolutions.**

It may seem like a “small” thing to pass a local resolution in the face of such extreme hate and fear coming from national leaders, **but here’s what municipal resolutions achieve:**

- They educate your community and elected leaders
- They get local press coverage (and Congress reads their local press!)
- They show that there is resistance to anti-refugee sentiment and policies

### Refugees: The Big Picture

We are living in a global refugee crisis. The vast majority of refugees will never be resettled but will live their lives in “impermanent” camps or housing, without access to basic needs or protections. The U.S. and other countries have a moral obligation to do more to address this refugee crisis and resettle more refugees.

Until recently, the U.S. was the largest resettled of refugees in the world. But in March 2017, President Trump signed an executive order that suspended the U.S. refugee resettlement program for 120 days, starting at the end of June 2017, and slashed the total number of resettlement slots to 50,000.

This is a crisis for those seeking safety—and it’s getting worse. The president has slashed the refugee admission ceiling for 2018 to the historically low number of 45,000. The lowest number ever set was for 67,000 refugee admissions in 1986. In 2016, 85,000 refugees were admitted.

As the current administration and U.S. politicians continue to scapegoat refugees, we are in danger of a shutdown of the U.S. refugee resettlement program.

### Resolutions Make the Case

Elected officials at local, state, and national levels press anti-refugee policies because they believe their constituents do not welcome refugees and do not stand with refugees. In the face of discriminatory executive orders, refugee program shutdowns, and cuts in funding, we must show that communities reject fear and hate and welcome refugees. **That’s why**, in every town across America, we need you to pass resolutions through your municipal government that shows your community welcomes refugees.

A municipal resolution doesn’t decide where refugees are resettled – that’s done by the federal and state governments through the Office of Refugee Resettlement. But a municipal resolution does send a strong signal to elected officials and community members that we will not stand for hatred and bigotry, that we welcome refugees.

This message is needed now more than ever. When our elected officials at the city level say on the record they welcome refugees, our state and federal representatives hear that their communities want refugees resettled. City by city, these resolutions are helping form a quilt of welcoming communities across the country. By passing a “welcome refugee” resolution, you’re helping change the narrative about refugees, and you’re strengthening the fabric of human rights.



## HOW TO WRITE A LOCAL COUNCIL RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN

1. Connect with AIUSA Refugee & Migrant Rights Campaigner (Denise [DBell@aiusa.org](mailto: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](http://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 (draft in toolkit) 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.



## [DRAFT] LETTER TO LOCAL COUNCIL MEMBER IN SUPPORT OF REFUGEE

Dear [NAME],

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

We believe that refugee resettlement will:

- Offer crucial support to the most vulnerable refugees, including children traveling alone, members of the LGBTI community, and survivors of torture.
- Demonstrate solidarity with countries that are currently housing a vast majority of refugees.
- Relieve political, social, and economic pressure on host communities that have housed, cared for, educated, and protected refugees during the global refugee crisis.

Currently, there are 22.5 million refugees worldwide, with 12 million housed in 10 countries alone. The global refugee crisis calls for U.S. leadership in refugee resettlement in order to alleviate the suffering of those fleeing war, persecution, and violence.

No refugees is 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 politicians are resorting to scaremongering and xenophobic attacks to discourage the entrance of refugees. But suspending our refugee program or building a wall is not a solution to the unprecedented number of people fleeing conflict and extreme violence—and it does not make us safer. 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 refugees in our community.

Sincerely,

[INSERT YOUR NAME HERE]

## [DRAFT] RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN [CITY]

WHEREAS there are more refugees in the world today than at any time since World War II, and more than half of the world's refugees are children;

WHEREAS refugees are fleeing armed conflict and human rights abuses in Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Central America, and other regions;

WHEREAS more than half of the world's refugees are hosted by only ten countries, and many of these countries do not have adequate resources to keep refugees fed, housed, or safe, leaving some refugees to survive on less than fifty cents a day;

WHEREAS ninety-nine percent of Syrian refugees are hosted by only five countries: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, and one in four people in Lebanon is a Syrian refugee;

WHEREAS there is a continued lack of funding for humanitarian aid for host countries, and food rations and medical aid have been repeatedly cut for refugees;

WHEREAS refugees who need to be resettled include torture survivors, people with severe medical conditions, LGBTI individuals, children alone, and women and children at risk – all of whom who cannot return home and cannot stay in their host country due to their extreme vulnerability;

WHEREAS the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has determined that 1.2 million refugees are in need of immediate resettlement, but less than 150,000 resettlement places are available worldwide;

WHEREAS refugees in need of resettlement represent only .3 percent of the world's population;

WHEREAS we applaud the historic, bi-partisan tradition of the United States in welcoming refugees, in keeping with our national values and respect for human rights;

WHEREAS a refugee does not get to choose to be resettled in the United States or the country of his or her choice;

WHEREAS, even if a refugee is a candidate for resettlement in the United States, he or she must still be found admissible under U.S. immigration law;

WHEREAS every single refugee must undergo a security vetting process that is lengthy, extremely detailed, and very safe, taking 18 to 24 months and involving multiple law enforcement and intelligence agencies;

WHEREAS, refugees are the most vetted individuals to enter the United States and are not permitted to travel to the U.S. until all security screenings have been successfully completed;

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 refugees in [CITY];

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

RESOLVED, [NAME] City Council declares its support for the resettlement of refugees no matter their religion, race, nationality, or country of origin, in [CITY] and calls upon other [STATE] communities to join them in supporting a stronger national effort to resettle the most vulnerable refugees.

## DRAFT LETTER TO THE EDITOR

There are 22.5 million people across the world who are refugees; 51% of them are children. We are experiencing the largest refugee crisis since World War II, the biggest humanitarian crisis of our time. Half 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.

The global refugee crisis calls for U.S. leadership and response. The suffering of refugees will not be alleviated by the fear-mongering and hate we all too often hear from U.S. officials.

The President's recent suspension of the refugee resettlement program and lowering of the total number of refugees the United States will resettle – if and when that program is restarted – is a cruel failure of people who have suffered persecution and extreme violence and who want nothing more than a safe home.

These moves are also totally out-of-touch with the reality of who refugees are and the extreme vetting process they face to get to the U.S. 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 or country of origin.

We are at a defining moment in the world – and in our country – and the United States must reaffirm the values upon which it was built.



## TALKING POINTS

Educating your community—family, neighbors, politicians—about the crisis is critical. More talking points @ [www.amnestyusa.org/refugee](http://www.amnestyusa.org/refugee)

- **We are experiencing the worst refugee crisis since WWII, with 22.5 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.
- More than 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.**
- Globally, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) gives priority for resettlement to the most vulnerable refugees, including torture survivors, people with serious medical conditions, orphaned children, LGBTI individuals, and women and children at-risk. **Available to less than 1% of the world's refugees, resettlement is the last resort for refugees who cannot return to their homes and cannot safely rebuild their lives in a nearby country.**
- **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.
- **U.S. leadership matters.** The U.S. is one of only 37 resettlement countries. In 2016, anchored by U.S. commitments, wealthy nations agreed to double global resettlement slots. Many of these countries were participating in resettlement for the first time. Instead, with the recent U.S. retreat, there has been a nearly 60 percent decline in refugee resettlement slots over this time last year.
- The U.S. must continue to fund refugee resettlement and assistance programs and humanitarian aid for host countries at FY17 funding levels.
- **The refugee resettlement process in the U.S. is lengthy, extremely thorough, and very safe.** Refugees are the most vetted individuals to enter the United States. They undergo 18-24 months of vetting by multiple law enforcement and intelligence agencies such as the FBI, Department of Homeland Security, and National Counterterrorism Center. If the U.S. government does not know who a refugee is, he or she is not admitted. It's as simple as that.
- **Refugees cannot choose where they are resettled.** When a refugee is registered with UNHCR, they cannot "pick" where they would like to go. The process of resettlement is determined by UNHCR and potential resettlement countries, and the U.S. government ultimately chooses the refugees to be resettled in the U.S.





**WE STAND WITH ALL THOSE  
SUFFERING WAR AND VIOLENCE**



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