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# ‘THE MOUNTAIN IS IN FRONT OF US AND THE SEA IS BEHIND US’

THE IMPACT OF US POLICIES ON REFUGEES  
IN LEBANON AND JORDAN

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# CONTENTS

GLOSSARY	1
INTRODUCTION: 'WE EITHER DIE OR SAVE OUR LIVES AND LEAVE OUR COUNTRY, SO WE CHOSE TO LEAVE OUR COUNTRY TO PROTECT OUR FAMILIES'	2
INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS FOR REFUGEE PROTECTION	7
REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT: A VANISHING LIFELINE	11
REFUGEES IN LEBANON AND JORDAN: 'JUST GIVE US HOPE'	17
CASE STUDIES: REFUGEE VOICES FROM JORDAN AND LEBANON	24
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	31

# GLOSSARY

TERM	DESCRIPTION
<b>Asylum-seeker</b>	An asylum-seeker is someone who has left their country seeking protection but has yet to be recognized as a refugee. During the time that their asylum claim is being examined, the asylum-seeker must not be forced to return to their country of origin. Under international law, being a refugee is a fact-based status, and arises before the official, legal granting of asylum.
<b>Fiscal Year</b>	The US government classifies some official information by the Fiscal Year (FY), which runs from October 1 to September 30 of each year.
<b>Muslim Ban</b>	Executive orders signed by US President Trump in January and March 2017 temporarily suspending the US refugee program, cutting refugee admissions to the USA, and barring admission of nationals from multiple Muslim-majority countries.
<b>Presidential Determination</b>	The Presidential Determination for Refugee Admissions establishes the overall admissions levels and regional allocations of all refugees for the fiscal year in the USA. After consulting with the US Congress and relevant US federal departments, the US President ultimately sets the annual number of refugee admissions.
<b>PRS</b>	Palestinian refugees from Syria
<b>Refugee</b>	Refugees are individuals who fled from their countries-of-origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution, from which their governments cannot, or will not, protect them. Asylum procedures are designed to determine whether someone meets the legal definition of a refugee. When a country recognizes an asylum-seeker as a refugee, it gives them international protection as a substitute for the protection of their home country.
<b>Resettlement</b>	Resettlement is the relocation of “vulnerable” refugees, from host countries where they have initially fled, to safe third countries, where they can restart their lives in dignity.
<b>UNHCR</b>	UN Refugee Agency (UN High Commissioner for Refugees)
<b>UNRWA</b>	UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East
<b>USRAP</b>	US Refugee Admissions Program

# INTRODUCTION:

## ‘WE EITHER DIE OR SAVE OUR LIVES AND LEAVE OUR COUNTRY, SO WE CHOSE TO LEAVE OUR COUNTRY TO PROTECT OUR FAMILIES’

Every day, people around the world make one of the most difficult decisions in their lives: to leave their homes in search of safety. These people are refugees – men, women, and children who cannot return to their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations there.<sup>1</sup>

Under the administration of US President Donald Trump, the USA’s discriminatory and restrictive policies, starting with the Muslim ban signed in January 2017, have had a devastating impact on the lives of refugees everywhere. This impact is felt acutely in Lebanon, which hosts the largest number of refugees in the world relative to its size, and Jordan, which hosts the second largest refugee population in proportion to its national population.<sup>2</sup> One in six people in Lebanon is a refugee registered with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), while in Jordan, one in 14 people is a refugee.

Since 2017, the current US administration’s policies targeting refugees from Muslim-majority countries have decimated refugee resettlement from Jordan and Lebanon.<sup>3</sup> Starting with the Muslim ban, and followed by successive refugee bans, cuts to refugee admissions, and extreme vetting, resettlement from both Jordan and Lebanon to the USA has plummeted and not recovered. UNHCR attributes a four-fold decrease in the resettlement of refugees from Jordan alone to the change in US policies.

*Syrian refugee resettlement to the USA from Jordan and Lebanon has plummeted 94 percent in just over three years because of US policies targeting refugees from Muslim-majority countries. Ninety-nine percent of refugees in Lebanon are Syrian, while 87 percent of refugees in Jordan are. Yet, at the end of April 2019, only 219 Syrian refugees had arrived to the United States from Jordan and Lebanon this calendar year, putting the USA on pace to resettle just over 650 by the end of 2019. In contrast, in calendar year 2016, 11,204 Syrian refugees were resettled to the USA from Jordan and Lebanon.*

But not only Syrians are impacted – resettlement to the USA from Jordan and Lebanon of Iraqis, Sudanese, and other nationalities from Muslim-majority countries has precipitously dropped due to the Muslim ban and the successive refugee bans and other policies hindering resettlement to the USA.

- 1 This report focuses on all persons considered refugees – those under the mandate of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and those under the mandate of UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). While encompassing all refugees, the report’s primary focus is the impact of the USA’s discriminatory policies on refugees under UNHCR’s mandate, including how these policies have decimated the resettlement of refugees from Muslim-majority countries out of Jordan and Lebanon to the USA. For discussion of refugees under the protection of UNHCR and UNRWA, see Amnesty International, *Tackling the global refugee crisis: From shirking to sharing responsibility* (Index: POL 40/4905/2016), 2016 (hereinafter: *Amnesty International, Tackling the global refugee crisis*), available at: [www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL4049052016ENGLISH.PDF](http://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL4049052016ENGLISH.PDF)
- 2 UNHCR, *Operations: Lebanon*, February 2019 (hereinafter: *UNHCR, Lebanon Operations*), available at: <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2520>; UNHCR, *Fact Sheet: Jordan*, April 2019 (hereinafter: *UNHCR, Jordan Fact Sheet*), available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/69371>; see UNHCR-Jordan, *Who We Are*, December 2018, available at: [www.unhcr.org/jo/who-we-are](http://www.unhcr.org/jo/who-we-are). According to UNHCR, “Lebanon hosts the largest number of refugees relative to its national population, where 1 in 6 people was a refugee under the responsibility of UNHCR. Jordan (1 in 14) and Turkey (1 in 23) ranked second and third, respectively. When Palestinian refugees under UNRWA’s mandate are included, the figures rise to 1 in 4 for Lebanon and 1 in 3 for Jordan.” UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017* (hereinafter: *UNHCR, Global Trends*), available at: [www.unhcr.org/5b27be547.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/5b27be547.pdf)
- 3 Other countries such as Kenya, for example, which hosts a very large population of refugees from Muslim-majority countries such as Somalia have been affected. See, e.g., Bill Frelick, “Trump’s Policies Are Harming Refugees Worldwide,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 30 May 2019, available at: <https://fpif.org/trumps-policies-are-harming-refugees-worldwide>; Jason Burke, “Refugees in Kenya hit by US travel ban after years of waiting for asylum,” *The Guardian*, 30 January 2017, available at: [www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/30/refugees-in-kenya-may-face-return-to-somalia-after-us-travel-ban](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/30/refugees-in-kenya-may-face-return-to-somalia-after-us-travel-ban)  
Amnesty International last accessed UNHCR data on 14 June 2019. See footnote 58.

***“When someone has to leave his country, he would feel heartbroken . . . We were obliged, we either die or save our lives and leave our country, so we chose to leave our country to protect our families.”***

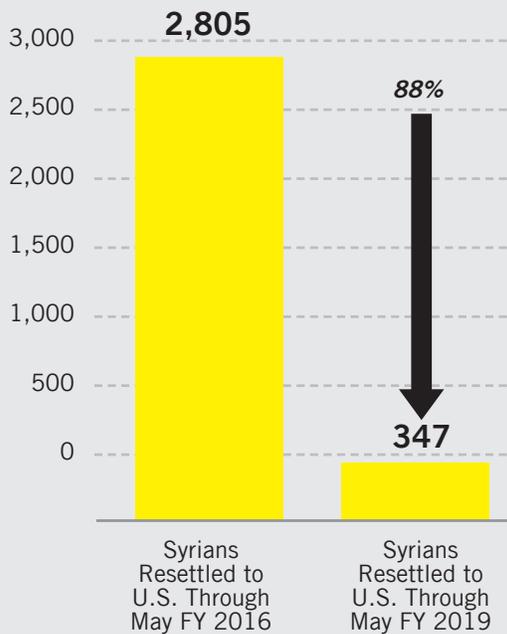
***– Salman, Syrian refugee in Jordan***

Over the course of two weeks, Amnesty International interviewed 48 refugee families and individuals in Jordan and Lebanon to document the experiences of the women, men, and children who fled war and persecution. As the current US administration has rationalized drastic cuts in refugee resettlement on purported security concerns, it has discounted the very real human cost on the ground – people whose lives are on hold, unable to return home or move on to a third country like the USA. Instead they are forced to remain in countries where they have limited access to work, education, and health care.<sup>4</sup>

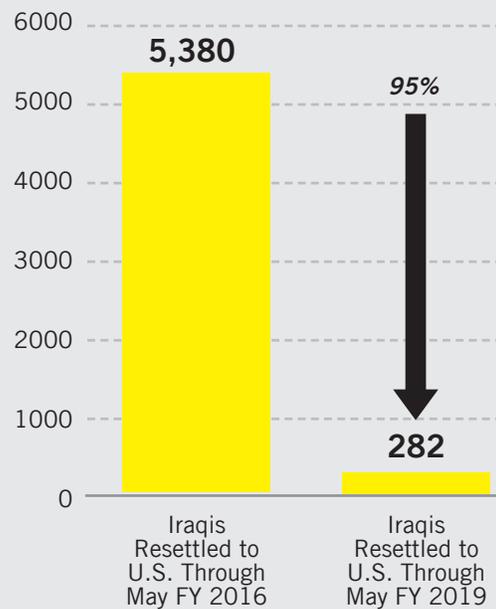
A generation of refugee families bears the weight of the USA’s discriminatory policies and struggles to survive. The majority of Syrian refugees in both countries live below the poverty line, with their assets depleted and dwindling humanitarian assistance. Already an option

available to only a very small percentage of refugees, resettlement has become even more of a chimera of refugee protection. Even as the need for action has never been greater, fewer and fewer refugees are referred for resettlement to a third country due to countries like the USA closing its doors. The US is leading this race to the bottom.

### Syrian Refugee Admissions to the United States



### Iraqi Refugee Admissions to the United States



<sup>4</sup> See Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2017/18: The State of the World’s Human Rights*, “Lebanon 2017/2018” (hereinafter: *Amnesty International Report 2017/18*), available at: [www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/lebanon/report-lebanon](http://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/lebanon/report-lebanon); UNHCR, *Operations: Jordan* (hereinafter: *UNHCR, Jordan Operations*), available at: <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2549>; UNHCR, *Lebanon Operations*.

Lost in the US national security debate is one simple fact: refugees are not numbers. Refugees are women, men, and children with unique stories to tell. Amnesty International interviewed teachers, artists, engineers, laborers, and homemakers living out the abrupt shift in US policies. Many of them once owned property, but they now live in refugee camps in trailer-like structures or makeshift accommodations in dense urban environments. All they want is what any person in their situation would want: safety, a place to call home, work to support themselves, and education for their children. They want to live with dignity. Amara, a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, told Amnesty International, *“We don’t want to just think about food, and our basic needs . . . we want to live lives.”*

For these refugees and untold others as well as the countries hosting them, the US government is abandoning its duty to share responsibility for refugee protection. A fundamental principle of refugee protection is responsibility-sharing and international cooperation. These are required to reduce the impact of large-scale refugee populations on host countries, and each state should contribute to the maximum of its capacity.<sup>5</sup>

Instead of upholding its responsibilities, the USA is abdicating responsibility for refugee protection. It is repeatedly and drastically cutting the number of refugees considered for resettlement to the USA. Resettlement is a key component of responsibility-sharing and allows States to support each other by agreeing to settle refugees from host countries.<sup>6</sup>

It is also imposing discriminatory and restrictive policies that undercut refugee admissions. Nondiscrimination on grounds including nationality, ethnicity, sex, gender, race, and religion is a core provision in all international human rights instruments.<sup>7</sup> Executive orders and policies intended to discriminate against Muslims, and that have the effect of disadvantaging Muslims, are unjustifiable under international human rights law.<sup>8</sup>

***“We want to thank the US people, and we still have the hope that they will make a decision to help the refugees. We know that America sacrificed too many [people] during wars, and that is happening now with us [in Syria].”***

***– Manar, Syrian refugee in Jordan***

The causes of the so-called global refugee crisis are amplified and sustained by bad policies such as these – a failure of wealthier countries such as the USA to share responsibility for refugee protection. As the USA seeks to keep out refugees, it and other wealthy countries are asking lower- and middle-income countries to do more than their fair share: 85 percent of the world’s refugees live in developing countries.<sup>9</sup>

Amnesty International calls on the USA to reaffirm its commitment to sharing responsibility for refugee protection by admitting more refugees, abandoning policies that undermine resettlement, and adhering to the principle of nondiscrimination in refugee protection. The USA should admit all 30,000 refugees set in the Presidential Determination for Fiscal Year<sup>10</sup> (FY) 2019, and commit to resettling 95,000 refugees in

5 Amnesty International, *‘I want a safe place’: Refugee women from Syria uprooted and unprotected in Lebanon* (Index: MDE 18/3210/2016), February 2016, p. 8 (hereinafter: Amnesty International, *‘I want a safe place’*), available at: [www.amnesty.org/pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/I-want-a-safe-place-1.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org/pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/I-want-a-safe-place-1.pdf)

6 Amnesty International, *Amnesty International urges governments to make the Global Compact on Refugees fit for the future* (Index: IOR 40/8227/2018), April 2018, available at: [www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/IO4082272018ENGLISH.PDF](http://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/IO4082272018ENGLISH.PDF)

7 See Amnesty International, *‘I want a safe place’*, p. 23.

8 See Amnesty International, *‘My family was in shock’: The Harm caused by President Trump’s Executive Orders on travel to the US* (Index: AMR 51/6207/2017), 2017 (hereinafter: Amnesty International, *‘My family was in shock’*), available at: [www.amnestyusa.org/files/my\\_family\\_was\\_in\\_shock\\_report.pdf](http://www.amnestyusa.org/files/my_family_was_in_shock_report.pdf)

9 Amnesty International, *The world’s refugees in numbers*, available at: [www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/global-refugee-crisis-statistics-and-facts](http://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/global-refugee-crisis-statistics-and-facts); UNHCR, *Global Appeal: 2019 Update* (hereinafter: UNHCR, *Global Appeal*), available at: [http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/ga2019/pdf/Global\\_Appeal\\_2019\\_full\\_lowres.pdf](http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/ga2019/pdf/Global_Appeal_2019_full_lowres.pdf)

10 The US government’s fiscal year (FY) for operations does not correspond to the calendar year. The fiscal year runs from October 1 until September 30.



the Presidential Determination for FY 2020.<sup>11</sup> US authorities should reverse policies that hinder resettlement to the USA, and ensure processing of resettlement cases is timely and all refugees are considered fairly and fully and without discrimination for resettlement to the USA. The USA should robustly fund the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and ensure critical humanitarian aid reaches refugees and displaced populations, including for Palestinian refugees.

The US government has the power to change the lives of the refugees with whom Amnesty International met, and the many more whose story goes untold. Amnesty International urges the US government to reaffirm its commitment to resettling the world's most vulnerable refugees without discrimination and ensuring critical humanitarian aid reaches all refugees.

## METHODOLOGY

This briefing draws on 48 interviews Amnesty International conducted in November 2018 with refugee families and individuals registered with UNHCR and with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Amnesty International conducted some of the interviews in the refugee camps of Zaatari and Azraq in Jordan, and the Palestinian refugee camps of Shatila and Burj Barajneh in Lebanon. The organization also interviewed refugee protection professionals from UNHCR, UNRWA, international and national agencies, local refugee service providers, and community-based organizations in Jordan and Lebanon. Amnesty International has withheld names and other personal details of those who spoke to researchers for their privacy and security.

Amnesty International thanks all the women, men, and children who generously gave their time to share their experiences of displacement and life as refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. Amnesty International also thanks the advocates, refugee protection professionals, local refugee service providers, and community-based organizations who shared their expertise.

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<sup>11</sup> The US Immigration and Nationality Act requires that each year US executive branch officials, in consultation with the US Congress, set refugee admissions for the fiscal year. Sections 207(d)(1) and (e) of the Immigration and Nationality Act. After consultations with US federal departments and the US Congress, the president signs the Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions. The Presidential Determination establishes the overall admissions levels and regional allocations of all refugees for the upcoming fiscal year. No refugees may be admitted in the new fiscal year until the Presidential Determination has been signed. See US Department of Homeland Security, US Citizenship and Immigration Services, "The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) Consultation & Worldwide Processing Priorities" (hereinafter: *USRAP Consultation & Worldwide Processing Priorities*), available at: [www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum/refugees/united-states-refugee-admissions-program-usrap-consultation-worldwide-processing-priorities](http://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum/refugees/united-states-refugee-admissions-program-usrap-consultation-worldwide-processing-priorities)

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

## To the US President and relevant federal agencies<sup>12</sup>

- Admit 30,000 refugees as set in the Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2019
- Ensure that each regional allocation as set in the Presidential Determination for Fiscal Year 2019 is met, including the regional allocation of 9,000 refugee admissions for the “Near East/South Asia” region. If the regional allocation is unable to be met, a clear justification should be provided to the US Congress on what steps were taken to meet the regional allocation, and what steps have been taken to ensure the overall refugee admissions goal is met
- Set the Presidential Determination for Fiscal Year 2020 to admit at least 95,000 refugees
- Reverse policies and procedures limiting refugee resettlement, including those that disproportionately impact refugees from Muslim-majority countries and unnecessarily prolong and delay resettlement processing
- Apply the provisions of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol to refugees without discrimination
- Restore in full critically needed funding for UNRWA at levels consistent with the US’s historical contributions

## To the US Congress

- Hold the US Presidential Administration and relevant federal agencies accountable to admitting 30,000 refugees set in the Fiscal Year 2019 Presidential Determination, including ensuring each regional allocation is met
- Call on the US Presidential Administration and relevant federal agencies to set the Fiscal Year 2020 Presidential Determination to admit at least 95,000 refugees, and conduct vigorous oversight to ensure the US administration works to achieve the goal it set
- Appropriate robust funding for the US Department of Health and Human Services’ Refugee and Entrant Assistance account; the US Department of State’s Migration and Refugee Assistance account and Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance account; and the US Agency for International Development’s (USAID) International Disaster Assistance account to provide life-saving and life-preserving international assistance for refugee and displaced populations around the world
- Appropriate robust funding to ensure the US Refugee Admissions Program is provided the resources needed to resettle the amount of refugees expected each Fiscal Year
- Further strengthen and make explicit policies of non-discrimination protections in both US refugee and asylum systems
- Co-sponsor and pass the National Origin-Based Antidiscrimination for Nonimmigrants Act, otherwise known as the NO BAN Act (H.R. 2214/S. 1123), which would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on religion
- Co-sponsor and pass the Guaranteed Refugee Admission Ceiling Enhancement Act, otherwise known as the GRACE Act (H.R. 2146/S. 1088)
- Appropriate funding to restore humanitarian assistance to UNRWA at levels consistent with the US’ historical contributions

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<sup>12</sup> The US President, along with the US Department of State, the US Department of Homeland Security, and the US Department of Health and Human Services, collectively determine, coordinate, and implement refugee admissions and integration to the USA. While the president consults with US federal departments and agencies, along with the US Congress as required by US law, in setting the Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions, ultimately it is the president that sets the Presidential Determination at the start of each fiscal year in October.

# INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS FOR REFUGEE PROTECTION

The international community came together in a commitment of solidarity and legal protection for refugees through the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its accompanying 1967 Protocol.<sup>13</sup> The Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”<sup>14</sup> The US Congress incorporated this definition into US immigration law in the Refugee Act of 1980.

Refugees have a right to international protection and fall under the mandate of UNHCR, which is charged with overseeing the implementation of the Refugee Convention.<sup>15</sup> UNHCR pursues three durable solutions for refugees: voluntary return to countries of origin, local integration in host countries, or resettlement or relocation through alternative pathways to a third country.<sup>16</sup> The resettlement process is normally coordinated by UNHCR, which identifies recognized refugees based on a set of vulnerability criteria and submits their cases to countries that have offered resettlement places who then decide whether to accept them for resettlement.<sup>17</sup> If a resettlement country agrees to admit a refugee, it then actively facilitates the safe transport of refugees to and their integration in their country.<sup>18</sup>

States have the power to control admissions by non-citizens to their territory within limits imposed by their obligations under international law.<sup>19</sup> In particular, differences in treatment between different categories of non-citizens can only be justified under international human rights law if they are necessary to achieve a legitimate objective, including, among others, the protection of national security.<sup>20</sup>

In human rights terms, resettlement is needed because a refugee’s “life, liberty, safety, health or fundamental human rights are at risk in the country where they sought refuge.”<sup>21</sup> UNHCR prioritizes “vulnerable” refugees for resettlement, including survivors

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13 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), 189 UNTS 137, available at: [www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10](http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10). Although the United States did not ratify the 1951 Convention itself, it acceded to the 1967 Protocol, by which it became bound by Articles 2 to 34 of the 1951 Convention. Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1967), 606 UNTS 267, available at: [www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/nwmain?docid=3ae6b3ae4](http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/nwmain?docid=3ae6b3ae4)

14 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

15 Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (1950), available at: [www.unhcr.org/3b66c39e1.html](http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c39e1.html)

16 UNHCR, “Solutions for Refugees: Chapter 7,” *The 10-Point Plan*, 2007, available at: [www.unhcr.org/50a4c17f9.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/50a4c17f9.pdf)

17 Amnesty International, *Hardship, Hope and Resettlement: Refugees from Syria tell their stories* (Index MDE24/0004/2015), 4 February 2015 (hereinafter: Amnesty International, *Hardship, Hope and Resettlement*), available at: [www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/0004/2015/en](http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/0004/2015/en)

18 Amnesty International, *Hardship, Hope and Resettlement*.

19 See UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 31[80], Nature of the General Legal Obligations Imposed on States Parties to the Covenant, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13 (26 May 2004).

20 According to Article 12(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), restrictions on rights can only be justified if they “are provided by law, are necessary to protect national security, public order (order public), public health or morals or the rights and freedoms of others, and are consistent with the other rights recognized in the present Covenant.” See Amnesty International, *‘My family was in shock.’*

21 Amnesty International, *‘I Want a Safe Place’* (citing UNHCR, *Resettlement Handbook*, 2011).

of violence and torture; those with serious medical needs; women and girls at risk of gender-based violence; people discriminated against due to their sexual orientation or gender identity; and unaccompanied children.<sup>22</sup>

The principle of responsibility sharing, rooted in international human rights and refugee law, requires the international community to share responsibility for hosting and supporting the global refugee population by resettling the most “vulnerable” refugees and by ensuring that UN appeals for funding are met. States have obligations to assist each other to host refugees, and obligations to seek, and provide, international cooperation and assistance to ensure that refugees can enjoy international protection.<sup>23</sup>

## ‘WE NEED SOMEONE TO GIVE US HUMAN RIGHTS’: PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON AND JORDAN

Since US President Donald Trump took office in January 2017, US government policies have had a devastating impact on the lives of refugees in Jordan and Lebanon – particularly on Syrian and Palestinian refugees, including Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS). Whether under the mandate of UNHCR or UNRWA,<sup>24</sup> refugees in Lebanon and Jordan are part of one global ecosystem for international refugee protection, and the international community should address their needs holistically.



Just over five million of the world’s 25.4 million refugees are Palestinians.<sup>25</sup> The majority live in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank.<sup>26</sup> Palestinian refugees, both those who are long-term residents of Lebanon and Jordan and those who have fled from Syria,<sup>27</sup> are excluded from UNHCR’s resettlement program because they are under UNRWA’s mandate in its countries of operation. However, UNRWA has no authority to refer Palestinian refugees for resettlement to third

countries, as this goes beyond its mandate of providing humanitarian assistance, including access to primary health care and primary education, housing assistance, and emergency food aid.

<sup>22</sup> Amnesty International, *Tackling the global refugee crisis*.

<sup>23</sup> First reflected in the Preamble to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the principle of responsibility-sharing was then included in the 1967 UN General Assembly Declaration on Territorial Asylum and the 1969 OAU Convention on Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. See also Article 2(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The importance of resettlement, a key aspect of burden- and responsibility-sharing, has been repeatedly emphasized by the Executive Committee of High Commissioner’s Programme (ExCom), the governing body of UNHCR. See UNHCR, *A Thematic Compilation of Executive Committee Conclusions*, pp 471-478, available at: [www.unhcr.org/53b26db69.html](http://www.unhcr.org/53b26db69.html)

<sup>24</sup> Established in 1949, UNRWA serves Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Palestinian refugees and their descendants fled their homes in what is now Israel between late 1947 and the first half of 1949 to escape the violence linked to the creation of the state of Israel and the Arab-Israeli war of 1948; others became refugees in 1967 when Israel occupied territory, including in Gaza and the West Bank. Under international law, Palestinians who fled or were otherwise forcibly displaced from their homes and land in the original territory of Mandate Palestine and their descendants – have the right to return. Amnesty International, *‘I Want a Safe Place’*; see Amnesty International, *Israel and the Occupied Territories/Palestinian Authority: The right to return: The case of the Palestinians* (Index: MDE 15/013/2001), 29 March 2001, available at: [www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE15/013/2001/en](http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE15/013/2001/en)

<sup>25</sup> UNHCR reports that there are 25.4 million refugees globally – over half of whom are under the age of 18. UNHCR, *Figures at a Glance*, 19 June 2018 (hereinafter: UNHCR, *Figures at a Glance*), available at: [www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html](http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html). More than a fifth of these are Palestinians under the care of UNRWA. UNHCR, *Figures at a Glance*. Sixty-eight percent of all refugees registered with UNHCR come from just five countries: Syria (6.3 million); Afghanistan (2.6 million); South Sudan (2.4 million); Myanmar (1.2 million); and Somalia (986,400). UNHCR, *Global Appeal*.

<sup>26</sup> Amnesty International, *Tackling the global refugee crisis*.

<sup>27</sup> Palestinian refugees from Syria have been severely affected by the ongoing armed conflict and limited humanitarian access. Amnesty International, *Denied Refuge: Palestinians from Syria seeking safety in Lebanon* (Index: MDE 18/002/2014), April 2016, available at: [www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE18/002/2014/en](http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE18/002/2014/en)

***“We depend on UNRWA. UNRWA can’t be replaced. NGOs can’t take the role of UNRWA because it provides services for all Palestinians.”***

***– Awad, Palestinian refugee in Lebanon***

***“We need someone to give us human rights. We need our rights, especially in Lebanon. Life is so hard to be here. We need basic rights in schooling, jobs, to be able to move freely.”***

***– Hiba, Palestinian refugee in Lebanon***

Approximately 450,000 Palestinian refugees are registered with UNRWA in Lebanon and reside in formal and informal camps.<sup>28</sup> Although the majority were born in the country and have lived there all their lives, they cannot acquire Lebanese nationality, and many remain stateless and deprived of access to public services including medical care and education.<sup>29</sup> Discriminatory laws bar Palestinians from practicing over 30 professions, including medicine, dentistry, law, architecture, and engineering.<sup>30</sup> Such restrictions have trapped many Palestinian refugees in deprivation and poverty.

Around 2.1 million Palestinian refugees live in Jordan, of whom 370,000 live in camps where conditions are generally sub-standard.<sup>31</sup> Approximately three quarters of Palestinian refugees in Jordan have been granted Jordanian citizenship, giving them access to health care and education. However, over 600,000 Palestinian refugees have never been naturalized, including some 150,000 who fled to Jordan from the Gaza Strip following the 1967 Israeli-Arab conflict, and as a result do not have sufficient access to public services.<sup>32</sup>

28 UNRWA, *Where We Work: Lebanon* (hereinafter: UNRWA, *Where We Work: Lebanon*), available at: [www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon](http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon); see UNHCR, *Lebanon Crisis: Response Plan 2017-2020*, available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/68651>. An official census conducted in 2017 recorded the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon as 174,422 individuals, living in 12 official camps and 156 informal camps. A much higher number of Palestinian refugees – some 450,000 – are registered in Lebanon with UNRWA, which runs the official camps, but the agency acknowledges that many of them live outside the country. Amnesty International, *Seventy+ years of suffocation* (hereinafter: Amnesty International, *Seventy+ years of suffocation*), available at: <https://nakba.amnesty.org/en/about>

29 Amnesty International, *Seventy+ years of suffocation*.

30 UNRWA, *Employment of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon: An Overview*, May 2016, available at: [www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/2017\\_employment\\_of\\_palestine\\_refugees\\_in\\_lebanon\\_arabic\\_and\\_english\\_ve.pdf](http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/2017_employment_of_palestine_refugees_in_lebanon_arabic_and_english_ve.pdf)

31 UNRWA, *Where We Work: Jordan* (hereinafter: UNRWA, *Where We Work: Jordan*), available at: [www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/jordan](http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/jordan); Amnesty International, *Seventy + years of suffocation*.

32 For discussion of the complex reasons why some 600,000 Palestinian refugees in Jordan were not naturalized, see Amnesty International, *Seventy + years of suffocation: Chapter 2: Jordan*, available at: <https://nakba.amnesty.org/en/chapters/jordan>

## DISPLACED ONCE MORE: PALESTINIAN REFUGEES FROM SYRIA

Palestinian refugees in Syria have been severely affected by the ongoing armed conflict and limited access of humanitarian organizations. According to UNRWA, almost all of the 560,000 Palestinian refugees inside Syria require humanitarian assistance. Of these, some 120,000 have fled to neighboring countries, including Lebanon and Jordan – both of which have imposed tight restrictions on their entry – and to Europe.

Nearly ten thousand PRS have fled to Jordan since 2011. UNRWA estimates that the majority of them live in poverty and with irregular status.<sup>33</sup> There are approximately 32,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria living in Lebanon; almost 90 percent live under the poverty line and 95 percent are “food insecure.”<sup>34</sup> In Jordan and Lebanon, UNRWA provides healthcare, education, and cash assistance to cover the basic needs of Palestinian refugees from Syria. Aside from exceptional cases, Palestinian refugees from Syria in Jordan and Lebanon are generally not resettled to third countries.

The majority of those who have remained in Syria have been displaced multiple times and are disproportionately affected by the conflict, due to their proximity to conflict areas inside Syria and high rates of poverty.

In 2018, the US administration *eliminated* funding for UNRWA. This draconian action by the current US administration severely threatens the agency’s ability to provide assistance to Palestinian refugees. Since 2008, the USA has on average contributed more than \$277 million yearly to UNRWA, a quarter of the agency’s budget.<sup>35</sup> Even with stop-gap funding from other donors, UNRWA has been forced to make many cuts in basic services.<sup>36</sup> Future funding that originally offset some of the USA’s funding cuts is not guaranteed to continue, with devastating implications for UNRWA’s ability to provide resources to meet basic needs and services such as food and shelter assistance, health care, and education.<sup>37</sup>

Palestinian refugees Amnesty International interviewed consistently reported that UNRWA support is the difference between surviving and having nothing.<sup>38</sup> Humanitarian assistance provided by UNRWA was the only way they could meet basic needs – shelter, food, heat and electricity, medical care, schooling for children. With limited opportunities to work and without assistance and access to UNRWA services, options for finding adequate shelter and food for their families, let alone schooling and medical care, are extremely limited.

Amnesty International is gravely concerned that the current US administration’s decision to eliminate funding for UNRWA is prioritizing political interests over the urgent humanitarian needs and human rights of Palestinian women, men, and children.<sup>39</sup>

33 UNRWA, *Where We Work: Jordan*.

34 UNRWA, *Where We Work: Lebanon*.

35 UNRWA, *Donor Charts*, available at: [www.unrwa.org/how-you-can-help/how-we-are-funded](http://www.unrwa.org/how-you-can-help/how-we-are-funded)

36 UNRWA, *Impact of U.S. Budget Cuts on UNRWA Operations*, 2019.

37 Amnesty International interview with anonymous refugee protection professionals in November 2018.

38 Amnesty International interview with anonymous Palestinian refugees in November 2018.

39 NGO Letter to Members of the US Congress, 27 March 2019, available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/506c8ea1e4b01d9450dd53f5/t/5c9c0c47ee6eb02cd983b235/1553730634813/Letter+to+Members+of+Congress+on+Aid+to+Palestinian+Civilians.pdf>

# REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT: A VANISHING LIFELINE

Unable to return home, the majority of refugees stay in their host country where they try to build a new life, but for a small minority with specific protection risks staying in their initial host country is not an option and resettlement is necessary.

## WHAT IS RESETTLEMENT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?<sup>40</sup>

Resettlement is the relocation of “vulnerable” refugees from countries where they have initially fled to safe third countries where they can restart their lives in dignity. Resettlement benefits refugees who are facing particular hardships or vulnerabilities. Resettlement also relieves some of the pressure on countries hosting large numbers of refugees.

UNHCR initially identifies vulnerable refugees for resettlement according to set criteria. Those with serious medical needs, survivors of torture/violence, women and girls at risk, children and adolescents at risk, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people are among some of those prioritized for resettlement. Once refugees have been identified by UNHCR, their cases are put forward to resettlement countries which then decide whether to accept them for resettlement. If accepted, these governments actively facilitate the safe transport of refugees to their country and help them to integrate into their new countries.

In addition to UNHCR-coordinated resettlement, Amnesty International encourages other means of relocating refugees safely including through other admission pathways, such as humanitarian admission programs, family reunification, and sponsorship programs so long as they guarantee the rights of refugees.

Fewer than one percent of the world’s refugees will have the opportunity to resettle in a third country like the United States.<sup>41</sup> Refugees do not get to choose to resettle to the USA or any specific country. A refugee is only admitted to the USA after referral to the US resettlement program by UNHCR and then undergoing extensive security checks and being found eligible for admission under US immigration laws.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Amnesty International, *Hardship, Hope and Resettlement*.

<sup>41</sup> UNHCR, *Less than 5 per cent of global refugee resettlement needs met last year*, 19 February 2019, available at: [www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/briefing/2019/2/5c6bc9704/5-cent-global-refugee-resettlement-needs-met-year.html](http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/briefing/2019/2/5c6bc9704/5-cent-global-refugee-resettlement-needs-met-year.html). UNHCR defines resettlement as “[resettlement] involves the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State which has agreed to admit them as refugees with permanent residence status. The status provided ensures protection against *refoulement* and provides a resettled refugee and his/her family or dependants with access to rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals. Resettlement also carries with it the opportunity to eventually become a naturalized citizen of the resettlement country.” UNHCR, *Resettlement Handbook*, available at: [www.unhcr.org/46f7c0ee2.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/46f7c0ee2.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Not all refugees considered for resettlement to the USA are referred by UNHCR. There are three priorities for resettlement consideration to the USA: 1) “Priority 1”: Cases identified and referred to the US refugee program by UNHCR, a US Embassy, or a designated NGO; 2) “Priority 2”: Groups of special humanitarian concern identified by the US refugee program; 3) “Priority 3”: Family reunification cases involving close relatives of persons admitted as refugees or granted asylum. Most refugees are referred to the USA for resettlement consideration by UNHCR. See USRAP Consultation & Worldwide Processing Priorities.



Resettlement is a lifeline for refugees with specific protection risks, and the USA has historically resettled the largest number of refugees annually from around the world.<sup>43</sup> Since the USRAP was established by the 1980 Refugee Act,<sup>44</sup> and until 2017, US administrations have, on average, set the ceiling for refugee resettlement to the USA at 95,000. Annual admissions to the USA have averaged 80,000 refugees.<sup>45</sup>

***“We came to Jordan in 2013. The revolution started [in Syria] in 2011, so we lived for three years there under bombing, war pressure, checkpoints, and kidnapping. We faced lots of tragedies there but we weren’t thinking about leaving despite all of that. But at the end we didn’t have another choice. There was no way: either we die or we leave... we didn’t have another choice or solution.”***

***– Saad, Syrian refugee in Jordan***

Under the current US administration, that lifeline has been strangled, with grave implications for resettlement to the USA and worldwide. Since January 2017, a series of Muslim and refugee bans, various policies imposing additional security screening measures, and drastic cuts to the annual ceiling for refugee admissions have made the US refugee program a shadow of what it was only a few years ago.

Within a week of taking office, President Trump reversed nearly 40 years of US support for refugee protection through a

<sup>43</sup> See UNHCR, *Resettlement Data*; see also Pew Research Center, *For the first time, U.S. resettles fewer refugees than the rest of the world*, 5 July 2018 (hereinafter: Pew Research Center, *For the first time, U.S. resettles fewer refugees than the rest of the world*), available at: [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/07/05/for-the-first-time-u-s-resettles-fewer-refugees-than-the-rest-of-the-world](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/07/05/for-the-first-time-u-s-resettles-fewer-refugees-than-the-rest-of-the-world); Donald Kerwin, “How America’s refugee policy is damaging to the world and to itself,” *The Economist*, 19 June 2018, available at: [www.economist.com/open-future/2018/06/19/how-americas-refugee-policy-is-damaging-to-the-world-and-to-itself](http://www.economist.com/open-future/2018/06/19/how-americas-refugee-policy-is-damaging-to-the-world-and-to-itself)

<sup>44</sup> The US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is an interagency effort involving a number of US government actors and NGO partners both overseas and in the United States. USRAP is managed by the US Department of State in cooperation with the US Department of Homeland Security and US Department of Health and Human Services and involves coordination with UNHCR, Resettlement Support Centers (RSC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and NGOs. See USRAP Consultation & Worldwide Processing Priorities.

<sup>45</sup> US Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Refugee Processing Center, Admissions & Arrivals (hereinafter: Refugee Processing Center, Admissions & Arrivals), available at: [www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals](http://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals); see also Migration Policy Institute, *U.S. Annual Refugee Resettlement Ceilings and Number of Refugees Admitted, 1980-Present*, available at: [www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-annual-refugee-resettlement-ceilings-and-number-refugees-admitted-united](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-annual-refugee-resettlement-ceilings-and-number-refugees-admitted-united)

single discriminatory act with catastrophic consequences. On 27 January 2017, he signed the Muslim ban, which suspended the USRAP for 120 days and imposed an indefinite ban on the resettlement of refugees from Syria, among other provisions.<sup>46</sup> A revised executive order took effect in March 2017, which lifted the indefinite ban on Syrian refugees but still suspended the US refugee resettlement program.<sup>47</sup> A June 2017 ruling by the US Supreme Court allowed a limited version of the March executive order to take effect.

Refugees whom Amnesty International interviewed continue to live out the consequences today of the Muslim ban. Their cases were put on hold after this initial Muslim ban and 2.5 years later, they are still awaiting resettlement to the USA.

**Ahmed Amari\* and his family are Syrian refugees who fled to Beirut, Lebanon, in 2013. They registered as refugees with UNHCR in 2014, and were accepted for resettlement to the USA in late 2016. In December 2016, he and his family were told to prepare for their new home in Virginia. When President Trump signed the Muslim ban in January 2017, Ahmed inquired about his case. He told Amnesty International that he learned “he was banned.” He and his family were shocked. He was told to wait until the ban was over and then his case would proceed. Since January 2017, his case has been stuck, subjected to seemingly endless review.**

Nine months into his presidency, Trump continued to systematically roll back US systems for refugee protection. On 24 October 2017, even as President Trump signed an executive order to resume the USRAP “with enhanced vetting procedures,” he also imposed an additional 90-day ban on refugees from 11 countries while ordering that changes to security vetting procedures be applied retroactively.<sup>48</sup> Nine of the 11 countries in the new refugee ban were Muslim-majority, and accounted for 43 percent of US refugee admissions for the previous fiscal year, 2017.<sup>49</sup> In January 2018, the US administration issued a memorandum ordering additional security procedures for refugees from the 11 countries designated in the October 2017 executive order.<sup>50</sup> These successive discriminatory executive orders and memorandum set in motion long-term and negative consequences for refugee resettlement, disproportionately affecting refugees from Muslim-majority countries.

46 Executive Order 13769, Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States, 27 January 2017, available at: [www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states](http://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states). US President Trump’s original executive order barred the entry of nationals of seven majority-Muslim countries (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen) for at least 90 days; suspended the US refugee resettlement program for 120 days; cut the total number of refugees admitted for resettlement to 50,000 in FY 2017; and imposed an indefinite ban on Syrian refugees. See Amnesty International, ‘*My family was in shock.*’

47 Executive Order 13780, Protecting the Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into the United States, 6 March 2017, available at: [www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states-2](http://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states-2). Amnesty International has previously stated that “[m]otivated by anti-Muslim animus, and disproportionately impacting Muslims, both executive orders violate the principle of nondiscrimination, codified in treaties binding upon the United States. They evince a view of immigrants and other non-citizens that is intolerant, bigoted, and offensive. Amnesty International, ‘*My family was in shock.*’

48 Executive Order 13815, Resuming the United States Refugee Admissions Program with Enhanced Vetting Capabilities, 24 October 2017, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-executive-order-resuming-united-states-refugee-admissions-program-enhanced-vetting-capabilities>. Executive Order 13815 placed a 90-day ban on refugees from Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Mali, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.

49 Following are the approximate percentages of the populations of the nine Muslim-majority countries affected by the 90-day refugee ban: Egypt, 94.6 percent; Iran, 99.4 percent; Iraq, 99 percent; Libya, 96.6 percent; Mali, 92.5 percent; Somalia, 98.5 percent; Sudan, 97 percent; Syria, 92.2 percent, and Yemen, 99.1 percent. In FY 2017, they accounted for 23,166 refugee admissions, out of 53,716. Pew Research Center, *Mapping the Global Muslim Population*, 7 October 2009, available at: [www.pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population](http://www.pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population); see Amnesty International, ‘*My family was in shock.*’

50 US Department of Homeland Security, *DHS Announces Additional, Enhanced Security Procedures for Refugees Seeking Resettlement in the United States*, 31 January 2018, available at: [www.dhs.gov/news/2018/01/29/dhs-announces-additional-enhanced-security-procedures-refugees-seeking-resettlement](http://www.dhs.gov/news/2018/01/29/dhs-announces-additional-enhanced-security-procedures-refugees-seeking-resettlement)

# Thank you



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***“We would like to thank the American people for standing by the Syrian people. They wanted to help the Syrian people in a better way, but all of a sudden, the support stopped. We don’t know what the reason is. I mean, America is the country of freedom. The country that doesn’t oppress people.”***

***– Fatima, Syrian refugee in Jordan***

to resettle fewer than 25,000 refugees for the current fiscal year. Similarly, it is not on pace to reach the 9,000 allocation for refugee admissions for countries under the category of “Near East/South Asia.”<sup>52</sup> In contrast, in FY 2016, the USA resettled nearly 85,000 refugees.

The USA has turned its back on refugees – and renounced its commitments to share responsibility for hosting refugees. The bare math of refugee resettlement tells the story. Under the current US administration, refugee resettlement dropped 74 percent in three

The current US administration has further dismantled refugee protection by drastically limiting refugee admissions in the yearly Presidential Determination, which designates the annual number of refugees to be resettled to the USA. One of President Trump’s first acts in office was to cut refugee admissions from 110,000 for FY 2017, as set under President Obama in his last year in office, to 50,000. For FY 2018, President Trump lowered the ceiling to 45,000, breaking precedent. It was the lowest refugee admissions ever set. Compounding this harm, the USA then barely resettled 22,000 refugees – the lowest number admitted through the USRAP in the history of the program.<sup>51</sup>

The downward spiral continues: the ceiling for refugee resettlement in FY 2019 is 30,000 – setting a new record for the lowest ceiling for refugee admissions since the US refugee program started in 1980. As of May 2019, the USA is on pace

<sup>51</sup> Refugee Processing Center, Admissions & Arrivals (last accessed 14 June 2019).

<sup>52</sup> The current US administration has precipitously cut refugee resettlement from the Near East/South Asia: in FY 2016, the regional allocation was 38,000; in FY 2019, it was 9,000.

years.<sup>53</sup> President Trump has decimated the USA's global leadership on resettlement, not only by cutting refugee admissions to the USA, but also exemplified by the dramatic renunciation of US policy commitments in President Obama's Leaders' Summit in 2016 and the global compacts on refugees and migrants.

US policies have undermined the international refugee protection system itself. The decline in global resettlement since 2017 – despite the urgent and consistent need – is due in large part to policies enacted by the current US administration. The number of refugees resettled worldwide dropped nearly 50 percent from 2016 to 2017. During that same period, the USA resettled 65 percent fewer refugees.<sup>54</sup>

As the USA has cut its refugee admissions and enacted discriminatory refugee policies, starting with the Muslim ban, fewer refugees have simply been resettled worldwide because the US has shut its doors and other countries have not filled the gap. This failure is due partly to other countries' inability to offer a larger number of resettlement slots because they do not have the same infrastructure for processing refugee admissions.<sup>55</sup> The US refugee program was, as Amnesty International was told, built for size.<sup>56</sup> It is also because the USA's policies have emboldened other countries to adopt similarly restrictive policies that undermine responsibility-sharing, including limiting resettlement, and create unwelcoming environments for refugees.<sup>57</sup>

Once a leader in resettlement, since 2017 the USA has cut the number of refugees it admits more than any other resettling country.<sup>58</sup> In 2016, the USA resettled 62 percent of all refugees referred by UNHCR. In 2017, this number dropped to 38 percent. In 2018, the USA was resettling only half of the number of the world's refugees that it once did – it resettled only 31 percent of all refugees referred by UNHCR. As of the end of April 2019, the USA had resettled only 38 percent of all refugees referred by UNHCR for resettlement around the world.<sup>59</sup> While this number indicates the USA is on pace this calendar year to resettle slightly more refugees of all those referred by UNHCR, the USA still resettles around half as many refugees that the UNHCR refers for resettlement globally as it once did.

The shocking reduction in resettlement of refugees from Muslim-majority countries since the Muslim ban has further eroded refugee protection.

*Since FY 2016, resettlement to the USA of refugees from Muslim-majority countries listed in the Muslim ban and other executive orders has dropped 98 percent as of June 2019.*<sup>60</sup> To put a finer lens on it, even as 42 percent of the world's refugees requiring resettlement are from Syria,<sup>61</sup> only 347 Syrians have been resettled to the USA through May in FY 2019.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, at this same point in FY 2016, the USA had resettled 2,805 Syrians. By the end of FY 2016, the USA had resettled 12,587 Syrians, whereas the USA is on pace to resettle just over 500 Syrian refugees in total in FY 2019. Similarly, 282 Iraqis have been resettled through May in FY 2019 as compared to 5,380 resettled at the same point in FY 2016.<sup>63</sup> By the end of FY 2016, the USA had resettled a total of 9,880 Iraqi refugees, but is on pace to only resettle just over 400 Iraqis in FY 2019.

53 Refugee Processing Center, Admissions & Arrivals, reflecting FY 2016, FY 2017, and FY 2018 (last accessed 14 June 2019).

54 UNHCR, *Global Trends*.

55 Amnesty International interview with anonymous refugee protection professionals and service providers in November 2018.

56 Amnesty International interview with anonymous refugee protection professionals and service providers in November and April 2018.

57 Amnesty International interview with anonymous refugee protection professionals and service providers in November 2018.

58 UNHCR, *Resettlement Data*, May 2019 (hereinafter: UNHCR, Resettlement Data), available at: [www.unhcr.org/en-us/resettlement-data.html](http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/resettlement-data.html); see, e.g., Pew Research Center *For the first time, U.S. resettles fewer refugees than the rest of the world*. Amnesty International last accessed UNHCR data on 14 June 2019. UNCHR reports that data reflects resettlement through April 2019; however, according to UNCHR, "some data presented may differ from statistics published previously due to retroactive changes or the inclusion of previously unavailable data. In addition, resettlement departure figures reported by UNHCR may not match resettlement statistics published by States as Government figures may include individuals who were resettled outside of UNHCR processes."

59 UNHCR, *Resettlement Data* (last accessed 14 June 2019).

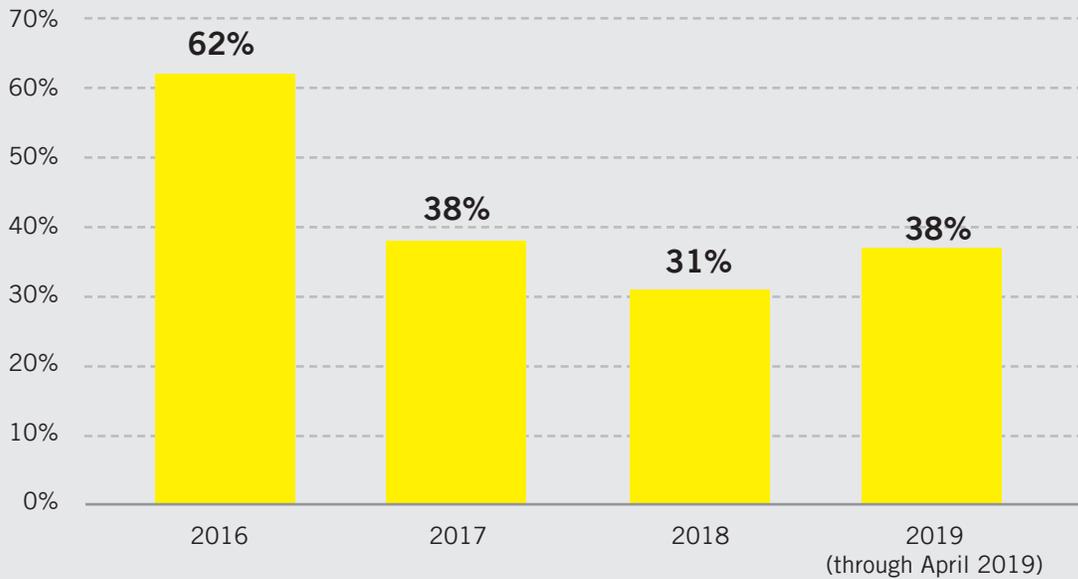
60 US Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Refugee Processing Center, Interactive Reporting: Admissions and Arrivals (hereinafter: Refugee Processing Center, Interactive Reporting: Admissions and Arrivals), available at: <http://ireports.wrapsnet.org/>. Refugees from these Muslim-majority countries reflected 43 percent of total resettlement in FY 2016; at the current pace of resettlement in FY 2019, they will represent less than five percent of all refugees resettled to the USA.

61 The top three nationalities in need of resettlement are: Syrian (42 percent); Congolese from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (11 percent); and South Sudanese (11 percent). UNHCR, *Global Appeal*. Given their urgent needs and the impact on host countries, UNHCR in 2019 has designated the "resettlement out of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey in the context of the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) situation a priority." UNHCR, *Global Appeal*.

62 Refugee Processing Center, Admissions & Arrivals (last accessed 14 June 2019).

63 Refugee Processing Center, Admissions & Arrivals (last accessed 14 June 2019).

## Percentage of UNHCR-Referral Refugees Resettled to the United States



## A SHADOW OF ITSELF

The US refugee program is now a shadow of itself. In multiple interviews, Amnesty International was told how processes that could be done in several weeks now take a year or longer due to changes in vetting. Because of changes to the security vetting process, it is a challenge at best to estimate how long it will take someone to move through the refugee resettlement pipeline. Not only are more human resources needed, the process also needs to be faster. Changes implemented to purportedly improve the system have harmed it instead. This has resulted in significant processing delays and a continued inability to meet the annual refugee admissions ceiling set by the Presidential Determination.

Amnesty International also observed the toll taken on refugee protection professionals working with refugees. Amnesty International was told of the types of impossible decisions facing them: whether a 63-year-old man with end-stage cancer or a 13-year-old with a medical need should be put forward first for resettlement, knowing that the elderly man may not live until the security processing is completed, even for an expedited case, due to the backlog. Cases simply do not move quickly. This, coupled with the inability to provide answers to those waiting beyond a general statement that their case is in “security checks,” have resulted in deep stress to employees seeking to fulfill their mission.

Through successive and discriminatory policies restricting refugee resettlement to the USA, the current US administration is failing to share responsibility for refugee protection. According to the principle of responsibility sharing and international cooperation, the USA, like all countries, should do its fair share to support refugee protection through resettling refugees. But it is not. When the USA abrogates its responsibilities, not only does it harm individual lives in grave danger who might have been resettled to the USA, it also shrinks the protection space for refugees worldwide.

# REFUGEES IN LEBANON AND JORDAN: ‘JUST GIVE US HOPE’

In Jordan and Lebanon, the impact of the USA cutting its resettlement commitments has had an acute impact on the international protection system and on refugees themselves. People feel hopeless, and US policies have contributed to that.

Due to the current US administration’s targeting of refugees from Muslim-majority countries and the high concentration of refugees from some of these countries in Jordan and Lebanon,<sup>64</sup> *resettlement out of Jordan and Lebanon has been decimated*. UNHCR reports that resettlement out of Jordan dropped by more than four-fold from 2016 to 2017, “primarily due to the change in the US resettlement policy at the beginning of 2017.”<sup>65</sup> It anticipates that in 2019, resettlement from Jordan will remain around the 2017 levels.<sup>66</sup> While the effect of US policies on Lebanon has not been as marked, it has contributed to the drawing down: to date, resettlement out of Lebanon has dropped 89 percent since 2016.<sup>67</sup>

According to UNHCR, in calendar year 2016, 11,596 refugees were resettled from Jordan to the USA alone, out of a total of 19,303.<sup>68</sup> In calendar year 2017, the USA resettled 1,374 refugees from Jordan – only 12 percent of its commitment in 2016. In calendar year 2018, the USA admitted 19 refugees from Jordan out of the 5,106 total who were resettled worldwide from the country. In Lebanon in 2016, 19,502 refugees were resettled worldwide, of whom the USA resettled 1,072 – 5 percent of all refugees from Lebanon. In 2017, the USA resettled only 400 refugees from Lebanon, out of 12,617 resettled worldwide – only 37 percent of its commitment in 2016. In calendar year 2018, the USA resettled merely 27 refugees out of 9,805 refugees resettled from Lebanon worldwide.<sup>69</sup>

The numbers in this instance tell a shocking story – of the shuttering of USA resettlement from Jordan and Lebanon. The top two nationalities resettled from both countries to the USA are Syrian and Iraqi.<sup>70</sup> According to UNHCR, in calendar year 2016, 11,204 Syrian refugees were resettled to the USA from Lebanon and Jordan; by the end of April 2019, 219 were resettled. In calendar year 2016, 1,164 Iraqis were resettled to the USA from Lebanon and Jordan; as of the end of April, only 32 were resettled. The drastic drop-off continues for other nationalities: 25 Sudanese were resettled from Lebanon and Jordan through April 2019, compared to 228 in 2016; zero Somalis have been resettled to the USA from Lebanon and Jordan in calendar year 2019, while 40 were in 2016.<sup>71</sup>

64 In Lebanon, only one percent of refugees are non-Syrian; in Jordan, 13 percent are non-Syrian. Other refugee populations include Iraqis, Sudanese, Somalis, Yemenis, and other nationalities. The Lebanese government estimates there are 1.5 million Syrian refugees, including 976,002 registered with UNHCR, and some 20,000 refugees of Iraq, Sudanese, Ethiopian, and other nationality. UNHCR, *Lebanon Operations*. As of March 2019, 762,420 refugees lived in Jordan: 671,579 were Syrian; 67,600 Iraqi; and some 23,241 refugees of Yemeni, Sudanese, Somali, and other nationalities. UNHCR, *Jordan Fact Sheet*.

65 UNHCR, *Jordan Operations*.

66 UNHCR, *Jordan Operations*.

67 UNHCR, *Resettlement Data* (last accessed 14 June 2019).

68 UNHCR, *Jordan Operations*; UNHCR, *Resettlement Data* (last accessed 14 June 2019).

69 UNHCR, *Resettlement Data* (last accessed 14 June 2019).  
In calendar year 2017, 4,995 refugees were resettled worldwide out of Jordan, while 12,617 refugees were resettled worldwide out of Lebanon.

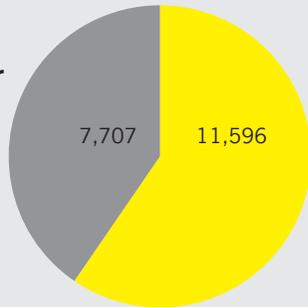
70 UNHCR, *Resettlement Data* (last accessed 14 June 2019).

71 UNHCR, *Resettlement Data* (last accessed 14 June 2019).

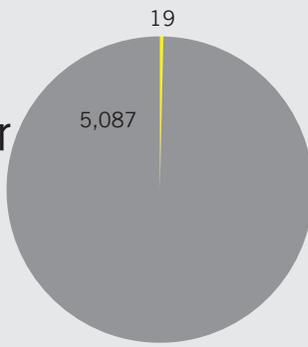
## Refugee Admissions from Jordan and Lebanon to the United States

■ Refugees Resettled from Jordan to the United States
 ■ Refugees Resettled from Jordan to all Other Countries

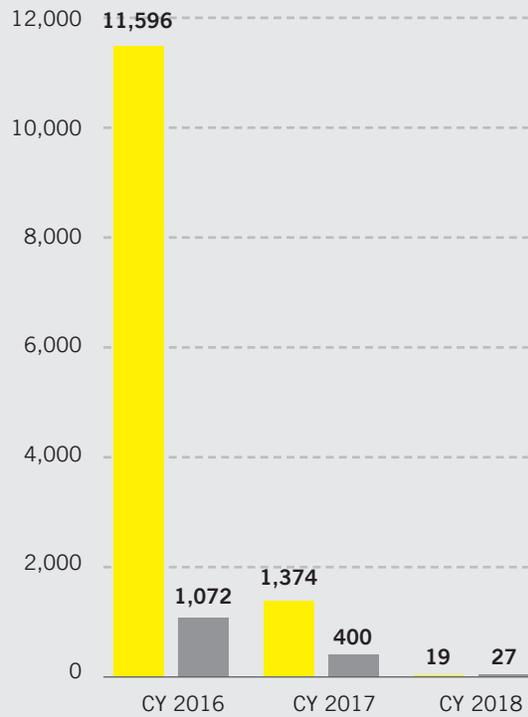
Calendar Year 2016



Calendar Year 2018

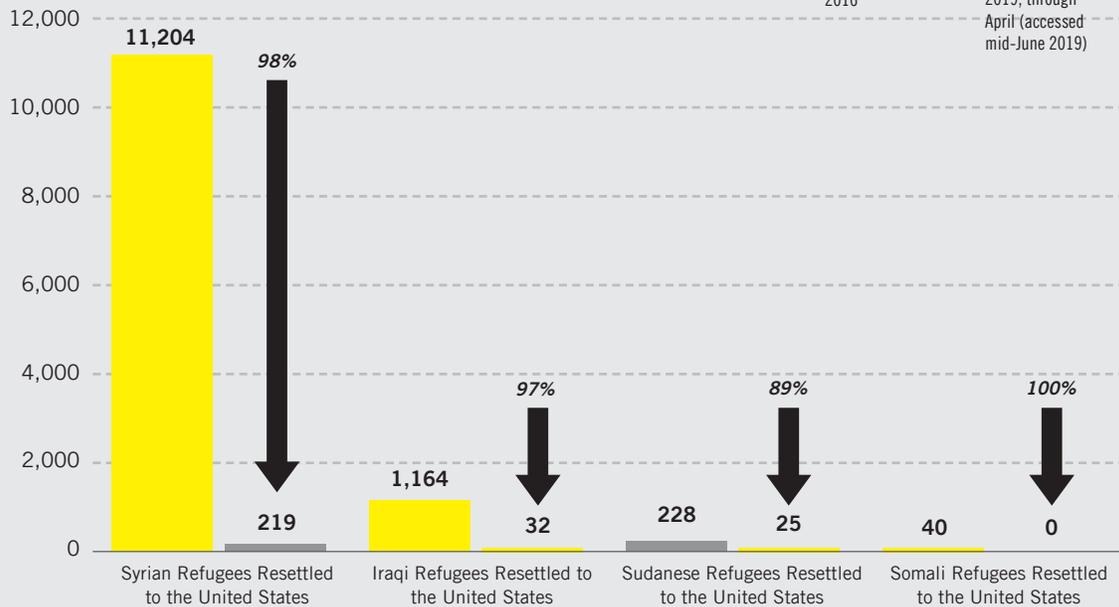


■ Refugees Resettled from Jordan to the United States
 ■ Refugees Resettled from Lebanon to the United States



## Refugee Admissions to the United States from Jordan and Lebanon

■ Calendar Year 2016
 ■ Calendar Year 2019, through April (accessed mid-June 2019)



## RESHAPING THE RESETTLEMENT LANDSCAPE

The current US administration's refugee policies have not only affected admissions to the USA, they have also dramatically reshaped the resettlement landscape in Jordan and Lebanon and disproportionately affected the most vulnerable refugees. The USA resettlement program accepts a wide cross-section of case profiles, while other countries tend to prefer refugees of certain nationalities, those with smaller families, those with higher levels of education, and/or those with limited medical needs. Now that the USA is no longer the top resettlement-receiving country for refugees submitted from Lebanon and Jordan, these refugee profiles are doubly impacted and far less likely to be resettled. More than ever, UNHCR must consider not only the "vulnerability" criteria but also the likelihood of acceptance to a particular country. With so few resettlement spaces and such lengthy processing times, the stakes are high and no one wants to risk the USA or any country rejecting a case for resettlement consideration.<sup>72</sup>

These cuts to resettlement are causing immeasurable stress and changing the course of lives of refugees. Refugee protection professionals in Jordan and Lebanon described to Amnesty International how refugees are searching for any piece of information to understand why they are still waiting for an answer on their case after years. When refugees inquire about cases, they say, "just give us hope."<sup>73</sup>

Refugees have been forced to put their lives on hold. Refugee protection professionals and service providers in Jordan and Lebanon told Amnesty International that refugees are holding off having children or getting married for fear of further delaying the processing of their resettlement case after years of waiting. The fear is not unfounded. The birth of a newborn, for example, requires new paperwork during which time medical and security clearances can lapse, pushing a refugee's case further back in an already long pipeline.<sup>74</sup>

## FEAR OF ANTI-MUSLIM AND ANTI-REFUGEE SENTIMENTS IN THE USA

Another subtle change is how the USA is perceived: refugees in Jordan and Lebanon awaiting resettlement to the USA still want to come, but they are aware of anti-refugee, anti-Muslim sentiment in US government policies and are apprehensive about how they will be affected. During stakeholder roundtables between resettlement professionals and refugees and cultural orientation classes, multi-day trainings to prepare refugees for their new life in the United States, refugees are asking more often about how they will be received: "Will we be discriminated against in the USA?" "Is there a ban against Muslims or against Arabs?" "Can we be deported from the USA?" "Can I wear a hijab?"<sup>75</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Amnesty International interview with anonymous refugee protection professionals in November and April 2018.

<sup>73</sup> Amnesty International interview with anonymous refugee protection professionals in November 2018.

<sup>74</sup> Amnesty International interview with anonymous refugee protection professionals in November 2018.

<sup>75</sup> Amnesty International interview with anonymous refugee protection professionals in November 2018.

***“[In the United States], there are a lot of opportunities . . . more than here. You can move freely and there are many things that you can do for a living. One can dream bigger. There are a lot of people who have started businesses in America. Over here, it’s not like refugees are happy with receiving aid and staying at home. It’s quite the opposite; if they find an opportunity, they will work and be productive. I’ve been unemployed for three months now. If I find any job, I’ll take it. Yesterday, I was looking for a job. There are no jobs.”***

***– Yasir, Syrian refugee in Jordan***

The longer refugees wait, the greater the human toll and the greater their vulnerability in host countries. As thousands fewer refugees depart each year, aid agencies and national governments require additional assistance; without it, they need to spread similar levels of funding over larger populations, leading to assistance being cut after a period of time.<sup>76</sup> Because of resource constraints, in part generated by protracted refugee situations and also funding remain constant or declining, the UN has had to make painful decisions on who receives assistance in the first instance or continues to receive aid.<sup>77</sup> Refugees reported to Amnesty International that UNHCR stopped their assistance to help other refugees who had not yet received aid, or they had received assistance for a few months only, despite living in Jordan or Lebanon for years.<sup>78</sup> This has led to refugees, with increasingly desperate needs, receiving limited or no assistance.

As described below, refugees in Lebanon and Jordan face deteriorating situations.

## LEBANON

For refugees in Lebanon who cannot return home or be resettled, the situation is tenuous, with dire living conditions and restrictive government policies in an increasingly hostile environment.<sup>79</sup> On 31 October 2014, Lebanon effectively closed its borders to refugees from Syria. Six months later, UNCHR stopped registration of Syrian refugees at the request of the Lebanese government. Syrian refugees continued to arrive, but were unable to register with UNHCR. The government estimates there are 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon, including 976,002 registered with UNHCR. There are also some 20,000 refugees of Iraqi, Sudanese, Ethiopian, and other nationalities.<sup>80</sup>

The Lebanese government has stated that refugees cannot become permanent residents – that is, one of the three durable solutions open to refugees – local integration – is not available.<sup>81</sup> Because refugees in Lebanon cannot integrate, they need to maintain residency permits. However, refugees encounter steep financial and administrative difficulties in obtaining or renewing residency permits from the Lebanese government, exposing them to a constant risk of arbitrary arrest, detention, and forcible return to their home countries as well as restricting their access to work, education, and health care.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Amnesty International interview with anonymous refugee protection professionals and service providers in November and April 2018.

<sup>77</sup> Amnesty International interview with anonymous refugee protection professionals and service providers in November and April 2018.

<sup>78</sup> Amnesty International interview with anonymous refugees in November 2018.

<sup>79</sup> Amnesty International, Q&A - why are returns of refugees from Lebanon to Syria premature? (Index Number MDE 18/0481/2019), 12 June 2019 (hereinafter: Amnesty International, Q&A - why are returns of refugees from Lebanon to Syria premature?), available at: [www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1804812019ENGLISH.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1804812019ENGLISH.pdf)

<sup>80</sup> UNHCR, *Lebanon Operations*.

<sup>81</sup> See, e.g., United Nations and the Government of Lebanon, *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017–2020*, available at: [www.un.org.lb/library/assets/67780-035714.pdf](http://www.un.org.lb/library/assets/67780-035714.pdf)

<sup>82</sup> *Amnesty International Report 2017/18*.

# ESCALATING DANGER: CONSTRUCTIVE REFOULEMENT OF REFUGEES TO SYRIA

In the past two years, prominent Lebanese political figures from a variety of political parties have publicly called for the immediate return of all refugees to Syria, blaming the refugee population for the deterioration of the security and economic situation. In July 2018, the Lebanese government announced that they will facilitate the return of refugees to Syria under an agreement with the Syrian government. In March 2019, Lebanese General Security announced that 172,046 refugees returned to Syria since December 2017 due to easing administrative restrictions and facilitating and organizing returns. For the return of refugees to their country of origin to be truly voluntary, it must be based on their free and informed consent. International law prohibits “constructive” refoulement, which occurs when states use indirect means to coerce individuals to return to a place where they would be at real risk of serious human rights violations. Amnesty International believes that, in many cases, the Lebanese government’s unfair policies represent a fundamental factor in the decision to leave the country. In these cases, the refugee’s consent to repatriation cannot be considered free. Lebanon would therefore be in breach of its obligation not to return refugees to a place where they would be at risk of persecution or other serious human rights violations.<sup>83</sup>

Due to Lebanese policy, there are no refugee camps administered by UNHCR in Lebanon.<sup>84</sup> Rather, refugees live in cities, villages, or informal tented settlements throughout the country. Some Syrian refugees who are not Palestinian have moved into Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, which has increased overcrowding and worsened conditions.

According to UNHCR, 69 percent of Syrian refugee households lived below the poverty line and more than half lived in substandard conditions in overcrowded buildings and densely populated neighborhoods. Syrian refugees “have limited possibilities to become self-reliant and are still largely dependent on humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs and stay resilient against exploitation, evictions and other risks.”<sup>85</sup>

***Nadima\*, a Sudanese refugee in Beirut, was accepted for resettlement to the United States in 2015. While walking to work on 14 October 2018, she was caught in a raid by Lebanese authorities on Syrian refugees. She was detained for 26 days and only released after an intervention by a local NGO serving refugees, because she was a UNHCR-registered refugee awaiting resettlement to the USA.***

Refugees face restrictions to finding official work and are subjected to curfews and other restrictions on their movement in a number of municipalities. Several municipalities have served refugees with eviction notices, forcing them to seek alternative places to live in an increasingly hostile and xenophobic environment.<sup>86</sup>

83 Amnesty International, Q&A - why are returns of refugees from Lebanon to Syria premature?

84 “[A]n estimated 73 percent of all refugees rent in residential buildings in cities or rural settlements. The housing units are often in poor condition – lacking kitchen, toilet, doors, windows, electricity and/or running water. Approximately a third of refugee households share basic lodgings with other families in overcrowded conditions. An estimated 18 percent live in fragile makeshift tents in spontaneously set-up settlements. The remaining nine percent live in non-residential structures including garages, shops, worksites, and farm buildings.” UNHCR, *Lebanon: Shelter*, available at: [www.unhcr.org/lb/shelter](http://www.unhcr.org/lb/shelter)

85 UNHCR, *Lebanon Operations*; UNHCR, *VASyR 2018: Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon*, December 2018, available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/67380>

86 *Amnesty International Report 2017/18*.

While Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, it remains bound by customary international law, including the international principle of non-refoulement and by other international human rights instruments that apply to refugees and non-refugees alike.

## JORDAN

Similarly, refugees in Jordan face an increasingly difficult situation. Jordanian authorities began tightening border controls with Syria in 2012 and closed its borders to Syria's refugees in 2014, with some limited exceptions.<sup>87</sup> Jordan hosts 762,420 refugees: 671,579 are Syrian, while 67,600 are Iraqi; and some 23,241 are Yemeni, Sudanese, Somali, and other nationalities.

Refugees in Jordan face significant challenges in supporting themselves and accessing services. UNHCR reports refugees "have entered a cycle of asset depletion, with savings exhausted and levels of debt increasing." In 2018, the Jordanian government raised the cost of public health care services for Syrian refugees, putting basic care beyond the reach of most, as over 85 percent of Syrian refugees live below the poverty line. Eight-four percent of all refugees in Jordan live in urban areas, while approximately 16 percent of Syrian refugees live in one of three UNHCR camps.<sup>88</sup>

Like Lebanon, Jordan has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, but remains bound by customary international law and by other international human rights instruments that apply to refugees and non-refugees alike. However, there is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between UNHCR and the Jordanian government on refugee protection operations.<sup>89</sup>



<sup>87</sup> UNHCR, *Tackling the global refugee crisis*.

<sup>88</sup> UNHCR, *Jordan Fact Sheet*. UNHCR camps in Jordan house only Syrian refugees.

<sup>89</sup> UNHCR, *Jordan Operations*.

# REFUGEE CAMPS

Amnesty International visited the Zaatari and Azraq camps, which house only Syrian refugees.<sup>90</sup> In coordination with UNHCR and the Jordanian government, multiple NGOs provide a range of services and programs for refugees, such as schooling, health care, skills development, arts programming, and sports. In Zaatari, there is a crowded unpaved main street filled with stalls selling household goods, clothes, appliances, and food. In Azraq, there is a square of such stalls selling similar goods and food. Yet, refugees living in the camps reported to Amnesty International a sense of confinement and limited opportunity.<sup>91</sup> Their lives are on hold.

Located near the city of Mafraq, Zaatari is a walled-off dusty compound holding some 80,000 refugees with heavy security to enter and leave. It has the feel of a bustling small town, albeit one ringed by walls and patrolled by security and intelligence authorities from the national government. The Azraq refugee camp, home to approximately 40,000 refugees, looks and feels like a military compound, with quadrants of shelters set up in a grid system. There is nothing for miles around the camp except barren landscape. On the approach to Azraq, a city of white tents appear on the horizon, looking like an outpost for a military installation.

For refugees in these camps, this is the extent of their world. Once they enter, they cannot leave – unless they choose to return home, even if the reason for their persecution and flight still exists, or they are resettled. Freedom of movement is highly restricted. Refugees need permission to leave a camp, and refugees who are found outside a camp without the correct papers are returned to the camp and in some cases deported.

These camps are not residential spaces. They feel like prisons, surrounded by walls with concertina wire at the top.

Even as refugees try to make a “home” in an impossible situation, they cannot escape the literal and figurative barriers keeping them there. These camps are not places for homes; they are a place of containment.

A generation of children is growing up there.



***“I don’t have a life here. It is reduced to watching TV. I am dying here.”***

***– Manar, Syrian refugee in Azraq Camp***

***“We feel restricted in every way. We are restricted when we go out, we are restricted when we come back.”***

***– Hibah, Syrian refugee in Zaatari Camp***

<sup>90</sup> For information on the Zaatari camp, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/68566>; on the Azraq camp, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/67369>.

<sup>91</sup> Amnesty International interview with anonymous refugees in November 2018.

# CASE STUDIES: REFUGEE VOICES FROM JORDAN AND LEBANON

“R efugee” is only a temporary term; it does not reflect the whole identity of a woman, man, and child who has left their home in search of safety. A person’s legal status as refugee cannot express their full identity and personality.

In multiple interviews, people shared with Amnesty International stories of their lives before they were forced to flee their homes, their hopes for their children and their own future, and how now their lives were on hold – they cannot return home, they cannot plan for an unknown future, and for those awaiting resettlement, the promise of safety in the USA remains illusory. Of the parents with whom Amnesty International spoke, their biggest hope is for their children to be educated. Adults want to work to be able to support themselves and their families, but jobs are scarce even as UNHCR aid is cut.

***“The mountain is in front of us and the sea is behind us.”***

***– Fatima, Syrian refugee in Jordan***

Syrian refugees interviewed by Amnesty International wonder why the USA has stopped resettling them. Like any person, they miss their home but many feel they can never go back because they would be at risk of harm by Syrian authorities. Others would like to return one day but cannot see returning for the foreseeable future because of the continuing armed conflict and other human rights threats, like forced conscription and enforced disappearances.<sup>92</sup>

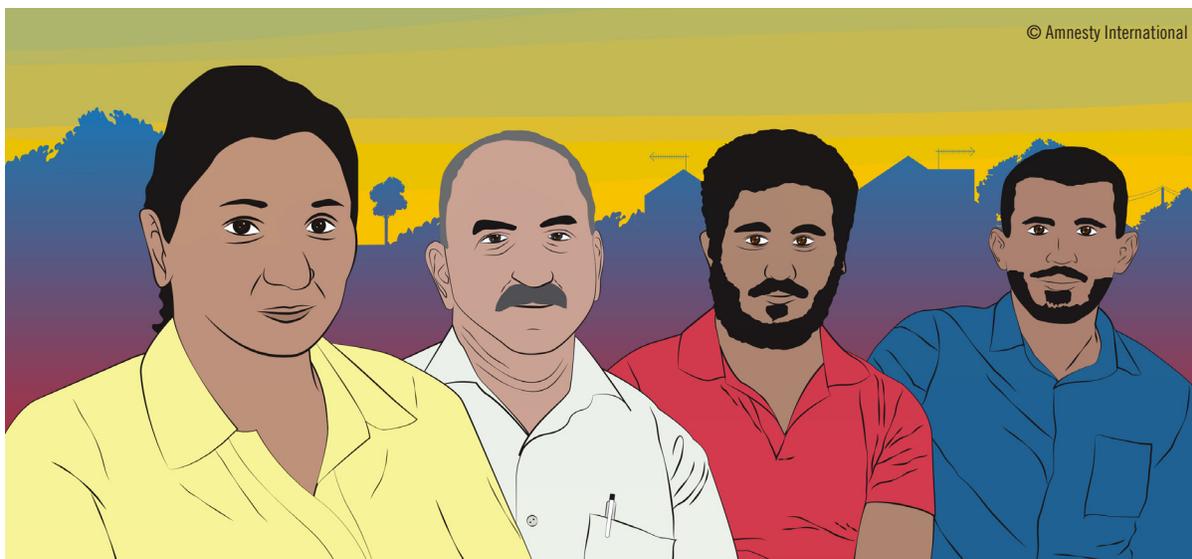
Following are some of their stories. Their accounts show the harm of US policies on refugee protection in host countries, the shared concerns of people everywhere for safety, education, employment to support themselves and be productive, and people seeking lives with dignity and hope no matter their circumstances.

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<sup>92</sup> Amnesty International interview with anonymous refugees in November 2018.

# ‘WE WANT TO LIVE; WE WANT TO LIVE IN PEACE’

*Beirut, Lebanon*



Fearing for their lives on account of their Christian faith, Malik, 65, fled Baghdad, Iraq, to Beirut, Lebanon, with his wife and two sons in 2013. Three years later they were accepted for resettlement to the United States. As proof of his place in the resettlement process, Malik proudly showed Amnesty International his cultural orientation certificate, which indicated that he and his family had participated in a multi-day training to prepare them for their new life in the United States.

Malik and his family were awaiting the final step of the resettlement process after cultural orientation – being told to pack their bags for a flight to their new home – when the Muslim ban was signed in January 2017. Malik does not know when, if ever, his case will be resolved. He is told only that his case is on hold for “security checks,” a confusing explanation as his case was once approved.

This perpetual sense of limbo in which he and his family have been placed by the US government is taking a psychological toll. Malik told Amnesty International:

*We are suffering. We are suffering a lot. Quite frankly, we used to have a problem every day in the house, especially my wife. The kids would say, ‘What can we do, mother?’ It’s out of our control. It’s something that’s out of our control . . . I used to comfort her too . . . But every day she would say, ‘Why us? What did we do? We are good people. We love people. We don’t hurt anyone. We’ve never, in our lives, hurt any person.’*

Like most refugees in Lebanon, Malik and his family do not have residency permits, putting them at risk for arrest, detention, and even deportation, even though they are registered with UNHCR and are awaiting resettlement to the USA.

Malik had greeted Amnesty International with, “I welcome you, but I wish I would’ve met with an organization like yours two years ago or with [other] people who defend our rights. We don’t know who to go to, that’s why I want to thank you, because I’ve already completed my paperwork and I’m only waiting for a visa.”

When asked what he would say if he could speak with President Trump, Malik said, “We are refugees. We’re human refugees. We’re refugees because there are difficult situations that made us flee . . . Please, so that we’re able to live. We want to live; we want to live in peace.”

# 'IT IS OUR ONLY HOPE'

*Beirut, Lebanon*



In late December 2016, Amina\* and Ahmed\* were told to buy luggage and prepare to move to the United States. They had been approved for resettlement to the United States and informed their new home would be in Richmond, Virginia. They gave away the belongings they could not bring and their excitement grew. They had fled Aleppo, Syria, in 2013, and now they finally were going to be resettled. Ahmed told Amnesty International, "We felt at the time this was our new home."

When President Trump signed the Muslim ban in January 2017, Ahmed and his family were shocked. He was told to wait until the ban was over and then his case would proceed. Since that time, his family's case has been stuck in processing. He has no sense of when his family will be able to travel to the USA.

Two-and-a-half years after expecting to begin a new life in Richmond, Virginia, Amina and Ahmed and their four children are still waiting, in an increasingly desperate situation. Ahmed will soon lose his residency status, exposing him and his family to the risk of arbitrary arrest, detention, and forcible return to Syria. The carpet store where he works is closing in a few months. He is looking for a job but without a residency permit, he is not sure how he will find a new one and support his family. UNHCR had provided them limited financial support, but he was told by UNHCR that it was discontinued due to budgetary shortfalls.

"It is really hard, really difficult [living in limbo in Lebanon]," Amina and Ahmed told Amnesty International. They cannot return to Syria because of the war. Ahmed is fearful of forcible conscription by the Syrian military, and believes that returning would endanger his family's life due to the ongoing armed conflict, which forced them to flee originally.

Just as they cannot return home, they cannot move forward in their resettlement to the USA. When Ahmed calls about the status of their case, he is told that it is in security checks. Ahmed told Amnesty International, "Every time the phone rings, we think it will be positive news. It is our only hope."

Ahmed and Amina were excited to go to the USA because there, people have rights and "children can go to school." Their eldest daughter, Hasna\*, wants to be a designer when she grows up, and their second daughter, Mayiran\*, a surgeon. Their third daughter, Raja\*, wants to be an orthopedist. Their son, Amir\*, wants to be a doctor.

With tears in his eyes, Ahmed told Amnesty International that if he could speak to President Trump, he would tell him that they come in peace. They are the victims and are looking for security and safety. They are asking for his help.

# 'WE ARE HOPING THAT THE COUNTRIES WOULD SUPPORT US THROUGH RESETTLEMENT'

*Azraq Refugee Camp, Jordan*



In Dara'a, Syria, Fatima\* was an English teacher, and her husband worked at an electricity company. In 2013, a plane destroyed their home. Her husband left for Jordan first, and shortly after, she followed with their son. Today they live in Azraq refugee camp.

Until October 2018, Fatima facilitated operations for teachers at an international NGO in the camp. Due to funding cuts to the NGO, she lost her job. Now, she teaches her son and her neighbor's daughters during the day. Her son likes math and wants to become an engineer. Fatima would like to run a small school for students with learning challenges, or work within a larger school to help address the special needs of children there.

Fatima says that UNHCR funding cuts have impacted people living in Azraq camp. Before, she says, people used to be able to buy clothing and afford medicine. That's no longer true. The food vouchers, equivalent to 20 JOD per month, per person, are not enough.

Fatima knows she cannot return to Syria, where her home was destroyed and there is no peace. All of the people who go back, she says, are arrested or killed. Fatima hopes to be resettled to the USA one day and does not understand why the USA stopped helping:

*I mean, this is our voice through you, the voice of all Syrian refugees in Jordan. We are asking for your help. We are hoping that the countries would support us through resettlement. We have qualified professionals, qualified educators, skilled people who are self-sufficient.*

# 'I JUST HOPE THEY SHOW COMPASSION TO ME AND MY CHILDREN'

*Beirut, Lebanon*



Before fleeing to Lebanon, Nadia\* lived for 10 years in the port city of Latakia with her six children and their father. They left Syria after the war began in 2011 and registered with UNHCR shortly after. The children's father sold cigarettes and coffee to support them, but left the family some time ago.

Today, Nadia and her children live in the Ain Al-Hilweh camp in Lebanon, a Palestinian camp where many Syrians also live, because it is cheaper. She and her six children share a small structure with one room for the children, one room for her, a kitchen, and a bathroom. Her "zinco" roof has been leaking for two months, and the blankets and linens are always wet.

Arafat\*, her son, was shot in the head in Lebanon in 2017 while he was on his way to buy kanafeh, a traditional Levantine dessert. He was caught in the cross-fire between rival armed factions. He now suffers from epilepsy, and Nadia says he is not always able to get the treatment he needs for the brain damage he suffered. "They're doing everything they can, but his condition is terrible. He has no life."

At the camp, he is taunted by others who call him derogatory names because of his medical condition; people start fights with him, and push him into walls. The day before Nadia interviewed with Amnesty International, she was struck in the face when she interrupted a group of people who were hitting her son.

The thought of returning to Syria does not even cross her mind. It is impossible. She is afraid to return, and photos and news reports do not capture what she and her family have experienced. She wants to leave Lebanon for her children's benefit. Her six-year-old daughter recently told her, "I want to die."

Of herself she just says, "I'm tired." Nadia doesn't have child care assistance because she cannot afford it. When she speaks to people in Lebanon, they insult her, and tell her that Syrians should get out of their country. At one point during the interview, Arafat told his mother not to cry and hugged her, beginning to cry himself. After spending a few moments hugging him, she pushed Arafat away, assuring him, "I'm not crying."

Nadia says she would like to go to any country, anywhere else: "I just hope they show compassion to me and my children."

# 'I WANT [MY CHILDREN] TO BE LIKE OTHER PEOPLE, LIKE THE OTHER YOUTH'

*Zaatari Refugee Camp, Jordan*



Sania\*, a Syrian refugee, lives at Zaatari refugee camp with her three children, Ali\*, Fauzia\*, and Sameer\*. The family fled Dara'a in 2012 because of the war. Sania's husband left the family, remarried, and moved back to Syria. Sania is grateful for her life at Zaatari, where "no one hits or shoots me and my kids." She cannot envision returning to Syria.

She receives vouchers from UNHCR worth 80 JOD per month. Because it's not enough to support the family, she sometimes uses them to buy goods, which she then re-sells for a higher price. Without the 80 JOD per month, she and her children would not be able to live. Even if she were authorized to work, she would be unable to because two of her children have disabilities and no school will accept them. She must stay home to take care of them. She's been told they need to go to a "special school" where their needs will be met. Sania herself requires medical care for back pain that is becoming debilitating.

"I want my kids to receive treatment and I want them cured from their conditions. I want them to be like other people, like the other youth. I ask God to give me strength to be able to provide for them. That's my wish. I ask the Lord of worlds to give me strength for them. And I pray to God and ask him to heal them."

Sameer says he likes school because he gets meals there. He likes bananas, apples, and sandwiches best. He wants to be a teacher one day. Ali wants to grow up to be a man and take care of his mother, and Fauzia wants to grow up to be a lady and to play with other girls.



## 'THEY HAVE DREAMS'

*Beirut, Lebanon*

Zainab\* and her three children, Farah\*, Basma\*, and Hamza\*, are originally from As-Suwayda in Syria. Zainab farmed in Suwayda, and her children attended school. In early winter 2012, as they fled by car to escape shelling, their vehicle was hit by shrapnel. It erupted in flames, and they escaped only thanks to onlookers who pried them out of their car. The family was very badly burned, and they thought they would die while waiting hours for care at a hospital.

For six years, they moved around Syria in search of safety and medical care, but in 2018 fled for Lebanon. In November, they started receiving assistance for rent and food from UNHCR.

When they first came to Lebanon, life was hard. Sometimes they only had one meal a day because they couldn't afford food. Other times, people would share their food with them to help. They want to work, but when people see their burned hands, they won't hire them. Zainab says, "We can work with our hands but people think otherwise."

Her children do not go to school and spend their days at home because of their injuries. Zainab is afraid that they will be mistreated because of their burn scars, and that this will have hurt them psychologically. Her children do not let their injuries deter them. "They have dreams," she says. Farah would like to be a school teacher or lawyer, and Basma a drawing teacher. Hamza, the youngest, likes computers.

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The USA's retrenchment in refugee protection has had profound global effects. For the first time since the US refugee program began in 1980, the USA is no longer the global leader in refugee resettlement.

This has been a deliberate choice by the current US administration, executed through a series of discriminatory policies disproportionately affecting refugees from Muslim-majority countries and other policy decisions slashing refugee admissions and adding extreme vetting processes. Other countries have not filled the gap created by the precipitous drop in refugee resettlement, in part emboldened by the USA's discriminatory and restrictive policies. Global resettlement dropped 84 percent from calendar year 2016 through April 2019. Behind every number is a face, a name, a person who has experienced deep loss and who hopes for a better future.

During its two-week mission to Jordan and Lebanon, Amnesty International documented firsthand these profound impacts – from the refugees themselves living out the consequences of the US' discriminatory and restrictive policies. In multiple interviews in Jordan and Lebanon, men, women, and children spoke of lives in limbo. Universally, all said they could not go home for fear for their security and lives. Refugees, above all, expressed the same desire any person in their situation would have: the desire to live with dignity, provide for their families, and have a sense of purpose and clarity about their situation and future. Palestinian refugees universally told Amnesty International how UNRWA's assistance was the critical difference between a subsistence life and having nothing.

The catastrophic reach of the Muslim ban continues. Consistently, refugees expressed disbelief that the USA could not resettle them as promised, and bewilderment and even pain at the USA's abrupt change toward supporting and welcoming refugees. Amnesty International met with refugees who, two-and-half years later, are still in the resettlement pipeline to the USA. They continue to await an answer on their cases, and for those on the cusp of being resettled in early 2017, are still waiting for the USA to make good on its promise to resettle them to their new homes. They carry with them forever the knowledge, in their words, they were “banned.”

People working directly with refugees described how the current US administration's policies have distorted a once well-functioning refugee protection program, rendering it a shadow of itself. US policies have shifted the resettlement landscape, doubly impacting some of the most vulnerable refugees and creating other harm in untold ways. These abrupt policy shifts have produced incredible stress for people working to support and assist refugees, let alone refugee men, women, and children already in difficult situations.

Amnesty International urges the USA to reverse its discriminatory and restrictive policies on refugee protection and uphold its commitments to share responsibility for refugee protection. The USA should ensure it admits the number of refugees set for resettlement in the Presidential Determination for FY 2019, and commit to resettling at least 95,000 refugees in the next Presidential Determination. US authorities should revise policies that hinder resettlement of refugees to ensure processing is timely and all refugees are considered fairly and fully for resettlement to the USA, without discrimination. The USA should further provide robust, sustained funding for humanitarian aid to protect displaced populations around the world, including for Palestinian refugees, and provide robust funding and support for the US refugee program.

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93 UNHCR, *Resettlement Data* (last accessed 14 June 2019).



## TO THE US PRESIDENT AND RELEVANT FEDERAL AGENCIES

- Admit 30,000 refugees as set in the Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2019
- Ensure that each regional allocation as set in the Presidential Determination for Fiscal Year 2019 is met, including the regional allocation of 9,000 refugee admissions for the “Near East/South Asia” region. If the regional allocation is unable to be met, a clear justification should be provided to the US Congress on what steps were taken to meet the regional allocation, and what steps have been taken to ensure the overall refugee admissions goal is met
- Consult with the US Congress, as required by US law, in setting the Presidential Determination
- Set the Presidential Determination for Fiscal Year 2020 to admit at least 95,000 refugees
- Reverse policies and procedures limiting refugee resettlement, including those that disproportionately impact refugees from Muslim-majority countries and unnecessarily prolong and delay resettlement processing
- Apply the provisions of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol to refugees without discrimination
- Enact policies, in consultation with the US Congress, that ensure refugees can be safely resettled to the USA at a pace that ensures the US government meets the annual refugee admissions ceiling set in the Presidential Determination
- Provide answers to those who have been waiting for years for a final decision on their resettlement cases
- Request funding to support a robust US Refugee Admissions Program
- Restore in full critically needed funding for UNRWA at levels consistent with the US’s historical contributions

# TO THE US CONGRESS

- Hold the US Presidential Administration and relevant federal agencies accountable to admitting 30,000 refugees set in the Fiscal Year 2019 Presidential Determination, including ensuring each regional allocation is met
- Call on the US Presidential Administration and relevant federal agencies to set the Fiscal Year 2020 Presidential Determination to admit at least 95,000 refugees, and conduct vigorous oversight to ensure the US administration works to achieve the goal it set
- Appropriate robust funding for the US Department of Health and Human Services' Refugee and Entrant Assistance account; the US Department of State's Migration and Refugee Assistance account and Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance account; and the US Agency for International Development's (USAID) International Disaster Assistance account to provide life-saving and life-preserving international assistance for refugee and displaced populations around the world
- Appropriate robust funding to ensure the US Refugee Admissions Program is provided the resources needed to resettle the amount of refugees expected each Fiscal Year
- Ensure the US federal agencies responsible for the security vetting of refugee populations are provided the resources they need to reach the refugee admissions ceiling as set in the annual Presidential Determination
- Further strengthen and make explicit policies of non-discrimination protections in both US refugee and asylum systems
- Co-sponsor and pass the National Origin-Based Antidiscrimination for Nonimmigrants Act, otherwise known as the NO BAN Act (H.R. 2214/S. 1123), which would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on religion
- Co-sponsor and pass the Guaranteed Refugee Admission Ceiling Enhancement Act, otherwise known as the GRACE Act (H.R. 2146/S. 1088)
- Appropriate funding to restore humanitarian assistance to UNRWA at levels consistent with the US' historical contributions



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