



MARYKNOLL OFFICE FOR GLOBAL CONCERNS
Peace, Social Justice and Integrity of Creation
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Marych 21, 2023

Dear Chair Alex Padilla and Ranking Member John Cornyn,

On behalf of Catholic missionaries known as Maryknoll missionaries, some of whom are serving the needs of refugees in Uganda, Kenya, Thailand, and Bangladesh, I wish to thank the Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship and Border Safety for holding the hearing “Living Up to America’s Promise: The Need to Bolster the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.”

The need for the United States to live up to the promise of welcoming refugees is urgent. The number of refugees worldwide is higher than ever – more than 27 million – and the U.S. refugee admissions program is weaker than ever, admitting only 25,465 in fiscal year 2022.

It’s also important to recognize that two-thirds of the people displaced across borders come from just five countries: Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar. These are strong people, capable of surviving the most challenging adversity on Earth, who have a lot to offer their new country.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions program gives refugees a pathway to integration, lawful residence, and citizenship. Established 1980, it was for many years a shining example for the world to follow.

We appreciate President Biden raising the refugee ceiling to 125,000. Now we urge Congress to rebuild U.S. capacity to reach that ceiling. It is a shame that 85 percent of refugee slots will expire unused by the end of the year because the program lacks the capacity to admit them.

To rebuild the U.S. refugee program, we need members of Congress to appropriate necessary funds for critical infrastructure; restore the U.S. asylum program so that people can actually access it; affirm the rights of stateless people living in the United States; and provide a pathway to protection for people who have been displaced by climate change.

The strong, coordinated U.S. response to Ukrainians displaced by the Russian invasion of their country demonstrates what the U.S. needs to do to address the global refugee crisis. What refugees from Myanmar or South Sudan experience in regard to their interaction with the United States is quite different from what Ukrainians have experienced in the Biden administration’s Uniting for Ukraine initiative. Yet, they too are people worthy of welcome.

Not only are refugees worthy of welcome, but it is also a demonstrated fact that refugees add value to communities across the United States. Refugees graduate from our public schools and colleges. Refugees buy homes, open small businesses, create jobs, pay taxes, join community organizations and faith groups, and much more. Refugees give back to the communities that welcome them. Refugees are a good investment.

Please do what it takes to rebuild the U.S. refugee resettlement program.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Susan Gunn
Director