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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

March 23, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas:

As Vladimir Putin continues his horrific assault on the Ukrainian people, I strongly urge you to accelerate plans for the resettlement of Ukrainian refugees to the United States, particularly those looking to reunite with family already in the United States. I also urge you to establish a robust humanitarian parole program. Given the global refugee crisis, and lessons learned from the Afghanistan evacuation, we need multiple legal pathways for Ukrainians to find safety in the United States.

By swiftly resettling Ukrainian refugees in the United States, your Administration would send a strong signal of solidarity to our European allies and partners, including Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Moldova, who have welcomed Ukrainian refugees. Since the start of the conflict, more than 3.5 million people have fled and millions more are expected to flee in the coming months. Neighboring countries have quickly stepped up to offer refuge, work permits, schooling for children, and other assistance. At the same time, they are warning that the speed and size of Ukrainian forced displacement is becoming unmanageable, in what is now the fastest growing refugee crisis in Europe since World War II.

Offering refuge to Ukrainians fleeing the war will be another powerful demonstration of U.S. commitment to the Ukrainian people in their fight for freedom in the face of Putin's illegal and unjustified invasion. The vast majority of those who have fled are women and children. History has repeatedly shown that women and girls who are forcibly displaced are especially vulnerable to gender-based violence, arbitrary killings, rape and trafficking, making our effort to provide safe refuge all the more pressing. Refugee applications for Ukrainians with family members already in the United States – while maintaining all appropriate security measures and standards – must be expedited. Refugees, particularly those in the midst of a war, should not have to wait for years to reunite with family in the United States.

If we are to swiftly resettle Ukrainian refugees, the Administration must mobilize significant resources now. After the Trump administration worked to gut it, the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) requires rebuilding in order to increase the capacity of refugee processing and resettlement operations. This will enable the United States to safely resettle Ukrainian refugees, while also maintaining our important commitments to resettling refugees from Afghanistan, Venezuela, Burma, Ethiopia, and elsewhere in the world. This will require

expanding overseas capacity by opening new Resettlement Service Centers and hiring more refugee officers while also increasing the resources of resettlement agencies here at home.

It will not, however, just be families who are at an increased risk of harm. Activists, journalists, LGBTQI+ individuals, and other minority groups are particularly vulnerable in this conflict and should be considered for expedited resettlement or humanitarian parole. I urge the Administration to expeditiously create a robust humanitarian parole program for all eligible Ukrainians fleeing the conflict. The Secretary of DHS holds broad discretionary authority to grant parole to certain fully-vetted individuals for admission for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit. For Ukrainians, the “urgent humanitarian reasons” for which parole should be extended are clear—with Russia unleashing a brutal, systematic attack on civilians, choking off access to food, water, and electricity for thousands in besieged cities, and targeting humanitarian corridors. Offering a program for humanitarian parole will provide life-saving protection to a broad swath of vulnerable Ukrainians who may otherwise be ineligible for refugee status, do not desire to permanently resettle in the United States, or who are waiting for their refugee application to be processed. I also urge the Administration to mobilize the necessary resources to efficiently and fairly adjudicate humanitarian parole cases and to apply reasonable and just standards to Ukrainians in desperate need of protection.

Finally, I encourage the Administration to consider the overwhelming desire of Americans to welcome Ukrainians to the United States. I have heard from employers, community organizations, and civil society groups who want to welcome Ukrainians into their communities. I urge the Administration to consider how we can use this moment of global crisis to allow more people to sponsor, support, and integrate Ukrainian refugees. Doing so would build out new networks of support that could eventually help refugees of all nationalities.

Amid Putin’s brutal war, we must do our part as a nation to stand in solidarity with our European allies and support the Ukrainian people. I urge the Administration to take the necessary steps to facilitate the expeditious resettlement of Ukrainian refugees to the United States.

I thank you in advance for your work on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent "R" and "M".

Robert Menendez
Chairman