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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

April 16, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write to thank you for reaffirming last week your commitment to welcoming 125,000 refugees in Fiscal Year 2022. We also urge you to move swiftly to issue the revised Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2021. The United States has a proud, bipartisan tradition of providing refugees protection through resettlement. In this time of great global need, the United States must demonstrate its robust commitment as a nation by resettling the world's most vulnerable refugees. Throughout our country, refugees have enriched our communities through cultural, economic, and scientific contributions.

As your Administration reported to Congress earlier this year, “unforeseen developments including new political violence, humanitarian crises, and growing threats to refugees in countries of asylum all support a need to increase the refugee admissions number for FY 2021 since the Presidential Determination was signed on October 27, 2020.” That Determination by the previous administration set the refugee admissions ceiling at 15,000 refugees—the lowest cap on refugee admissions since the inception of the refugee resettlement program 40 years ago.

The Administration's delay in issuing the revised Presidential Determination for 2021 has had serious repercussions. By failing to issue a revised Determination, the White House has not only stymied the number of refugees permitted entrance into the United States, but also it has prevented the Department of State from admitting vetted refugees currently waiting in the system who do not fit into the unprecedentedly narrow refugee categories designated by the Trump administration. Tragically, this has resulted in the flights of over 700 refugees being cancelled, and an indefinite suspension on arrivals of similarly situated refugees. Due to the delay, your Administration is on track to fall well short of welcoming a scant 15,000 refugees for FY21, itself an appallingly low admissions level set by the previous administration. Failing to issue a new Determination undermines your declared purpose to reverse your predecessor's refugee policies and to rebuild the Refugee Admissions Program to a target of 125,000 people in FY22, and threatens U.S. leadership on forced migration.

As we face the largest global refugee crisis in history, with 29.6 million refugees worldwide, resettlement serves as a critical tool in providing protection to those fleeing persecution because of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. We look forward to working with you to restore America's promise to refugees and hope to see the Administration take the first step by issuing a revised Presidential Determination.

Sincerely,

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

Robert Menendez
Chairman