



STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ROBERT MENENDEZ

June 20, 2018

World Refugee Day

Mr. President, I rise today in honor of World Refugee Day and to express my deep concern over the Trump Administration's systematic assault on refugees, asylum seekers, and the United States' refugee resettlement program.

Manmade conflict, natural disasters, poverty and violence have left the world in the midst of the largest refugee crisis in recorded history with over 25 million refugees worldwide. Tragically, less than 1 percent of these individuals will ever be resettled to a third country.

The United States was built on the hopes and dreams of those fleeing persecution and oppression, those seeking better lives for themselves and their families. The values and moral compass that embraced these individuals and shone as a beacon of freedom have made this country great. In times of crisis, the United States traditionally asserted global leadership through these values that have made this country so successful. That leadership served as an important uniting and motivating voice in the face of tremendous international challenges.

Unfortunately, instead of asserting moral and strategic leadership, the Trump Administration has chosen to retreat. The President has traded in our proud tradition of lifting up the most vulnerable for an agenda of degrading and insulting those who seek our support. Starting with his assertion that Mexicans are “rapists” and “drug dealers”, this President has spent his tenure as our nation’s leader attacking America’s immigrant and refugee communities. The President said he wanted to protect Dreamers, yet he abruptly ended the DACA program throwing the lives of 800,000 people into great uncertainty. He imposed a slap-dash Muslim ban that has been repeatedly struck down by the courts. And he has slowed refugee admissions to a trickle, closing America’s doors to some of the most vulnerable people on the planet, reducing America’s global leadership standing.

Driven by vitriolic voices, the President and the Attorney General together have worked to effectively destroy the refugee resettlement program, which traditionally received broad bipartisan support. Last September, the President decreed that the number of refugees to be admitted in Fiscal Year 2018 should be 45,000--half of the historic average. Even more concerning, it is now clear that this administration is further rigging the admissions program to ensure that only a fraction of that number of people will be allowed in. In the first quarter of 2018, just 6,704 refugees were resettled, compared to 25,671 in 2017 and 13,791 in 2016.

The US Refugee Resettlement Program -- and the faith groups, organizations, families and individuals that assist it -- supports the most vulnerable. These are the victims of torture, people with urgent medical needs, and desperate women and children. They are not safe in their home country. They have gone through extensive multi-agency vetting before even reaching the United States. We are witnessing the intentional dismantling of a program that has helped the world's most defenseless, built our leadership abroad, and here at home helped create thriving, diverse communities across the country, including in places like Camden and Elizabeth in my home state of New Jersey.

Despite its effort to prove the opposite by commissioning a study by the Department of Health and Human Services, the Administration's own report found that refugees have had a net positive economic impact in the United States over the past decade. The study concluded that between 2005 and 2014, refugees "contributed an estimated \$269.1 billion in revenues to all levels of government," and estimated the net positive fiscal impact of refugees over the 10-year period to be \$63 billion.

Alarming and horrifically we have witnessed the Administration's callous and misguided approach to migrants and refugees most recently on our southern border. American citizens and people around the world have watched in horror as U.S. officials are forcibly pulling babies and children out of their parents' arms, tearing families apart, and using preposterous defenses for their actions. This is not the United States I know. This is not the United States that has stood as a champion for the rule of law and human rights.

The President has blamed those fleeing persecution. He has blamed Democrats. He has taken no responsibility. His tweets have only gotten more hysterical. His repeated demands for a ridiculous wall are not a solution and only further fuel negative perceptions of the United States.

The party of "family values" has become the part of "family separation." This "policy" is not required by U.S. law. This is a choice that this administration has made. And it was a policy choice to charge asylum seekers in criminal court with illegal entry. In essence, it seems that President Trump and Attorney General Sessions want to turn every asylum seeker into a criminal and every child into a foster child.

It's easy to be distracted by the President's tweets and outlandish statements. The palace intrigue coming from the White House provide endless fodder for the talking heads on TV. But we cannot lose focus on the real harms being done to our fellow human beings and to our global standing.

On this World Refugee Day let us come together and remember that part what makes America great is our open doors that have welcomed people from all over the world. We have been a shining city on a hill; a beacon of light and hope. Since 2001, the United States has settled nearly a million refugees.¹ They are our friends, our neighbors, our coworkers. They sit next to your kid in school and someday they may grow up to be a Secretary of State like Madeleine Albright.

What kind of a country do we want to be? A country where we rip children from their parents? A country that keeps out refugees because of their religion? I've seen a quote posted on twitter, pasted on signs at rallies, at even on a church bulletin board, I don't know who said it first, but it bears repeating here: "Rather than a wall, America needs to build a giant mirror to reflect on what we've become."

¹ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/by-numbers-united-states-refugees-180962487/>