



STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE BENJAMIN L. CARDIN (D-MD)

June 20, 2017

WORLD REFUGEE DAY

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I rise today to introduce a resolution to mark World Refugee Day, and to address the ongoing displacement crisis across the globe. War, conflict and persecution have forced millions of people to leave their homes, creating more refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people than at any other time in history. Today, there are more than 65 million displaced men, women, and children worldwide, the highest level ever recorded in history. To put this number into perspective--if the global displaced population were a country, it would be the 21st largest country, more populated than the United Kingdom.

The global displacement trends we are witnessing now, due to conflict, severe human rights abuses, and climate change, are not going away. U.S. leadership in responding to these crises, whether it is the immense suffering of refugees from South Sudan or the plight of the internally-displaced in Syria and Iraq, is critical. How we respond—or whether we respond at all—will undoubtedly shape the landscape and the lives of future generations for years to come.

The United States has a long and proud history of providing safe harbor to the world's most vulnerable refugees— women and children, survivors of torture and other violence, and those with severe medical conditions. This included after World War II and after the fall of Saigon, when we resettled hundreds of thousands of refugees.

At the same time, we take the security of our citizens seriously. That is the reason the United States has the most rigorous refugee screening process in the world, involving the Department of Defense, Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and National Counter Terrorism Center. The process includes biometric checks, medical screenings, forensic testing of documents, DNA testing for family reunification cases, and in-person interviews with highly trained homeland security officials.

The U.S. Refugee Resettlement program has been and should remain open to those of all nationalities and religions who face persecution. The Trump Administration's proposals that would have the U.S. State Department disqualify refugees from protection based on their nationality or religion fly in the face of the very principles this nation was built upon. They also contradict the legacy of leadership our country has historically demonstrated, and dishonor our shared humanity.

It is clear, however, that the Trump Administration is determined to undermine longstanding American tradition and values, and in doing so they weaken our national security. As we all know, one of President Trump's first executive orders sought to drastically reduce the number of refugees entering the United States and turn away refugees from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. This un-American policy, rooted in fear not fact, cannot be tolerated. We collectively must reject the misplaced notion that some refugees are more deserving of protection than others.

Again and again, the federal courts are signaling to the White House a real need for the President to immediately rescind his discriminatory executive order targeting Muslim refugees and travelers. Even while stayed by the courts, President Trump's executive orders have made America less safe, damaged our relationships with our allies, and harmed countless numbers of law-abiding citizens, travelers, and their families. America is a compassionate nation steeped with a history of welcoming immigrants and refugees.

I was proud to join Members of Congress who filed legal briefs in opposition to the President's discriminatory executive orders, along with HIAS in Silver Spring, Maryland, whose motto is to "welcome the stranger" and "protect the refugee." Recently the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit provided a valuable check and balance on the President's authority. The court correctly pointed out that the President's most recent Executive Order "speaks with vague words of national security, but in context drips with religious intolerance, animus, and discrimination" which violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. No American president is above the law.

Turning away refugees—whether they are from Syria or Somalia, Burma or Iraq, whether they are Muslims or Christians, Hindus or Jews-- means turning our backs on the international humanitarian system and the mechanisms of stability and security that are the bedrocks of international order. Refugees remain powerful ambassadors of the American Dream and our nation's founding principles of equal opportunity, religious freedom, and liberty and justice for all.

The Trump Administration again revealed its determination to erode American leadership with the release of its Fiscal Year 2018 Budget request. Their FY18 budget represents a wholesale repudiation of U.S. global leadership on virtually every critical matter, including humanitarian assistance and protection of the most vulnerable populations. The President's budget called for a 44 percent cut in humanitarian assistance—a truly horrifying reduction made even more appalling given the level of global need. According to a group of leading NGOs, the human cost of these cuts could be staggering. The proposed 18 percent cut to the Migration and Refugee Assistance account could result in over 3.5 million refugees and internally displaced persons not receiving assistance globally, including about 1 million in the Middle East and 1.1 million in Africa.

The United States has been a beacon of hope for so many around the world for centuries, and it is imperative that we remain so for others in this century, and beyond. We need to be unified on this and the United States must lead by example. It is a universal human desire to live in peace and security and to create a better life for our families and loved ones. We must do our part to facilitate that. We need to keep our doors—and our hearts—open to those who so desperately need safe harbor.

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