

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Barack Obama,

We write to you today to strongly urge the creation of a new, privately-funded refugee category to respond to the current refugee crisis. A bipartisan group in Congress including Ron Johnson, Chairman of the Senate Homeland Security Committee, John Conyers, Ranking Member of Judiciary Subcommittee, and Zoe Lofgren, Ranking Member of the Immigration Subcommittee, have all advocated for such a category similar to existing models implemented in Canada.

The United Nations confirms that the Syrian refugee crisis is the worst refugee crisis since World War II. Eight million persons are internally displaced and four million persons have been externally uprooted. The United Nations predicts that more than 500,000 refugees will risk their lives while attempting to reach European soil by sea this year. Thus far, 2,500 have already died while attempting to cross the Mediterranean.

The United States is proud to have a long and thriving tradition of refugee resettlement. Since 1975, the United States has resettled more than 3 million refugees. In our recent history, the United States resettled nearly 400,000 refugees from the former Soviet Union, more than 180,000 from Vietnam, about 170,000 from the former Yugoslavia, and 100,000 from both Iraq and Myanmar.

In the past 4 years however, the United States has only resettled 2,000 Syrians. As a nation with a deep history of welcoming immigrants, resettling refugees, and serving as the global beacon of hope for the dispossessed worldwide, the United States should expand its program to reflect the reality of its status as a global leader and to continue its historical trend.

In 1987, the Reagan administration created the Private Sector Initiative (PSI) by entering into Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with ethnic charities. From 1988 to 1993, PSI and a related program privately resettled almost 16,000 refugees outside the regular refugee limit, with groups covering the resettlement costs. PSI was similar to a Canadian program which exists today and under which more than 230,000 refugees have been privately resettled since 1978.

The present is the perfect time to replicate PSI's success. In addition to your Administration's commitment to increasing the total cap on refugees, which we believe should be further increased by 100,000, we urge you to create a separate refugee limit for refugees entering under MOUs with groups that agree to cover all the costs for 18 months or until the refugee becomes self-sufficient, whichever is earlier. Enabling such a program would empower the United States to become home to a greater number of refugees. Private refugee sponsorship remains an optimal, fiscally responsible, and humane manner by which to resettle refugees.

Syrian American Council  
Syrian American Medical Society  
Syria Relief and Development

Arab American Institute  
Turkish Heritage Organization  
Muslim Public Affairs Council  
Islamic Society of North America  
Karam Foundation  
Watan USA