



**RSN's Statement to the Committee on the Judiciary of the U.S. House of Representatives
pertaining to the hearing on
The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Impact on the Security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program
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The war in Syria, now in its fifth year, has been described as the worst humanitarian crisis of our time. Nearly 4 million people have fled the country, of which well over 90% reside in neighboring countries Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Turkey alone hosts some 2 million Syrians, in addition to over 200,000 individuals that have fled Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, and Somalia.

The Refugee Solidarity Network (RSN) is a US-based non-profit organization that seeks to protect and advance refugee rights worldwide, with a current focus on Turkey. In addition to building capacity of local legal advocates and supporting legal assistance initiatives on the ground in Turkey, RSN advocates for ways in which the international community can better respond and share in the responsibility of this human tragedy.

One way is through resettlement. The United States has a long and significant history of resettling populations in need. Since 1975, the U.S. has resettled more than 3 million refugees to its shores with annual admissions figures ranging from a high of 207,000 in 1980 to a low of 27,110 in 2002. Since the war in Syria broke out in March 2011, the U.S. has resettled less than 2,000 individuals from Syria.

On September 10, 2015 the White House announced a commitment to increase refugee resettlement to the US over the next two years. RSN welcomed this announcement, acknowledging it as a step in the right direction and advocating along with several partner organizations to further expand those commitments. However, some elected officials responded to these initiatives with derogatory remarks and offensive rhetoric, stoking fear against this program and against individuals in urgent need of assistance.

The recent heinous events in Beirut and Paris have only made matters worse. Governors and Congressional officials have spoken out against resettlement of all Syrians, with varying degrees of inflammatory generalizations and prejudice. Like all challenging moments, this has provided an opportunity to reflect not only on our moral obligation, but on the robustness of the security screening procedures carried out as part of the US Refugee Admissions Program.

Refugees are the most vetted and screened of any immigrants granted entry to the U.S. There is no objective basis to challenge the integrity of the security process, a rigorous and lengthy procedure that on average takes over 2 years from start to finish for each and every refugee selected for resettlement. Comparisons to the European context are simply not relevant, as asylum-seekers in Europe do not undergo advanced intensive screening.

While resettlement is not the only solution to this complex crisis, it is a critical gesture of burden-sharing to first countries of asylum like Turkey, where the government and host population have sacrificed a great deal, both monetarily and otherwise, to receive and protect the displaced. RSN and its partner's efforts to improve standards in Turkey are made difficult when other global leaders do not contribute their fair share.

RSN furthermore unequivocally opposes proposals to prioritize or favor resettlement of certain religious groups before others. RSN and its partner on the ground disseminate information to and advise refugees on their eligibility for humanitarian programs in Turkey and discriminatory distinctions between ethnic and religious groups adversely affect humanitarian aid providers and their programs. In addition to creating confusion, such policies stoke resentment and tarnish the image of the United States among vulnerable populations and on the world stage.

As it has done so many times in the past, the US should lead by example, encouraging other developing nations to increase their participation in humanitarian funding and resettlement, instead of participating in a race to the bottom. Congress should continue to promote funding appropriations for humanitarian assistance overseas, while increasing resettlement and family reunification opportunities to the US. RSN urges members of Congress to abandon harmful and misleading discourse instead of abandoning refugees in need of protection.