



# ANNUAL REPORT

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# 2019



## A Note from the Executive Director and Founder

We live in a highly interconnected world, relying on each other in unprecedented ways. This reality was reinforced repeatedly over 2019 and even more so in the first half of 2020. This report on our 2019 activities highlights how incredibly important our work was for those we served and for what we built. Those efforts laid the foundation for the ongoing, critical work that we do today.

Alongside unexpected events, forced migration remains a significant challenge for the global community. Human displacement is interlinked in complex ways with other urgent issues. We cannot ignore it or put it on hold while we work on other matters. We must maintain focus, attention, and commitment to individuals and families who have been forced from their homes and the communities that strive to welcome them.

Inspired by our peers working on critical issues from climate change to public health to police reform and government accountability, we continue to understand how these complex issues intersect, and build links with other causes and actors, drawing on principles of equity and non-discrimination that underpin our causes. As we have done in years past, we look ahead with optimism that our efforts will achieve greater understanding, awareness, and respect for rights that are universal. We are confident that we can contribute to the advancement of legal frameworks that uphold human rights, for the betterment of not only the forcibly displaced but all of us in the human family.

RSN is truly a network, and as such, we are dependent on the principled individuals that work with us and that support us. We are ever grateful for all of the generosity and support that helped make our work in 2019, and beyond, a reality.

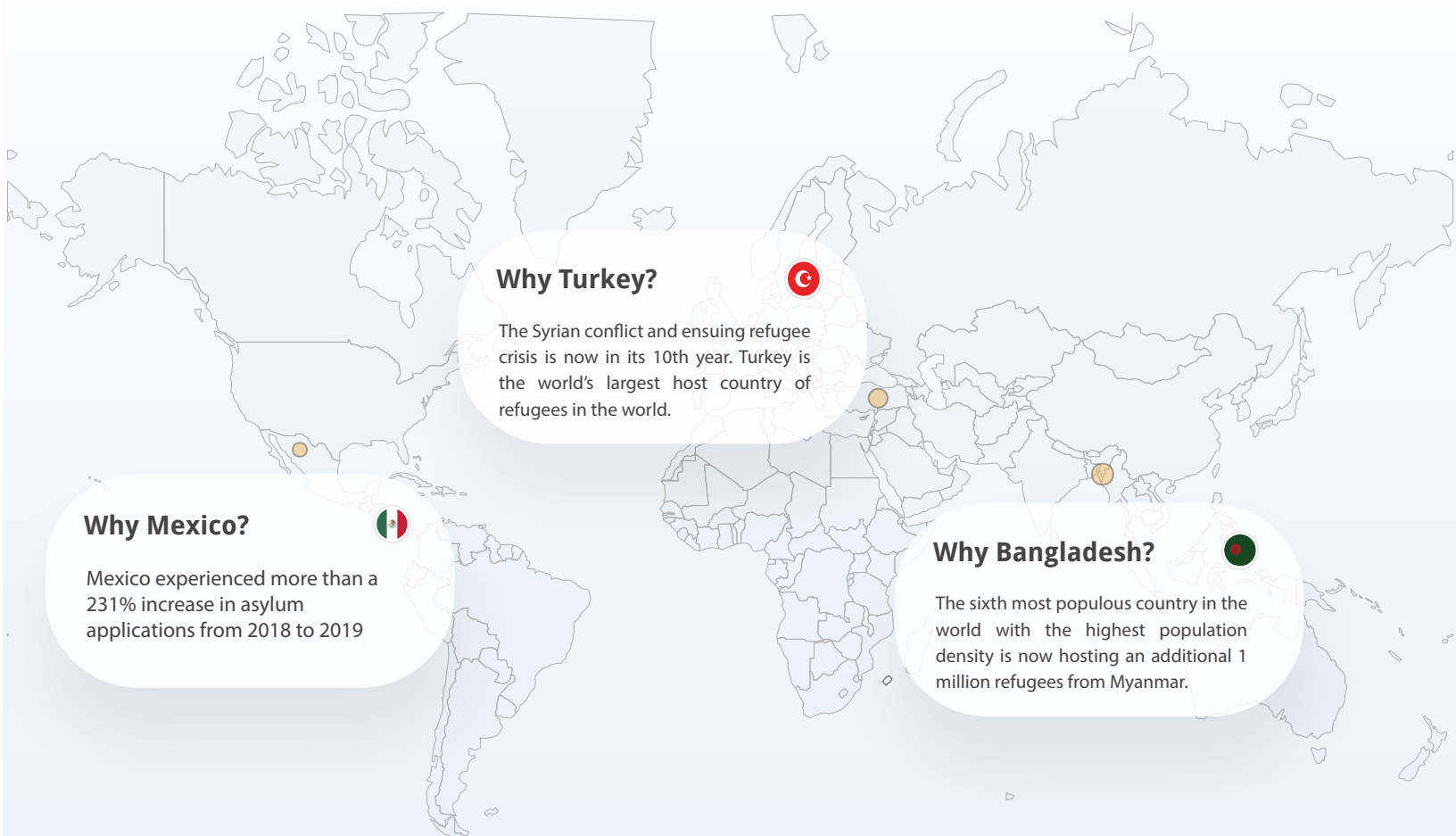
In solidarity,



Zaid Hydari



## Context for RSN's Work



### Why Turkey?

The Syrian conflict and ensuing refugee crisis is now in its 10th year. Turkey is the world's largest host country of refugees in the world.

### Why Mexico?

Mexico experienced more than a 231% increase in asylum applications from 2018 to 2019

### Why Bangladesh?

The sixth most populous country in the world with the highest population density is now hosting an additional 1 million refugees from Myanmar.



## Our Model



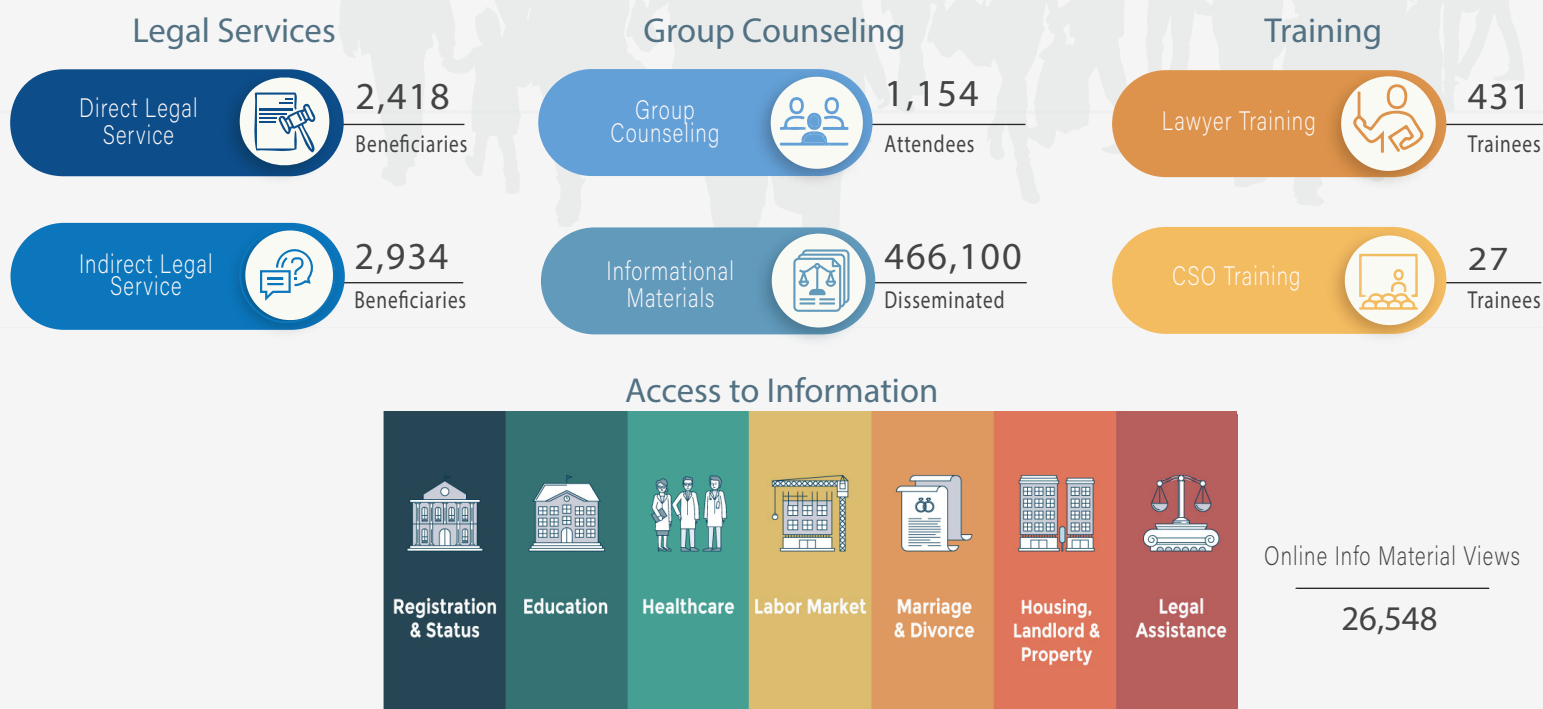
Research  
Advocacy  
Awareness Raising  
Legal Information  
Legal Service Provision



**Empowered Refugees & Resilient Host Communities**

## Legal Center for Refugee Rights

Our long-standing partnership with Refugee Rights Turkey (RRT) is designed to ensure that refugees can access protection in Turkey and that national advocates and institutions in the country are strengthened in the long-term. The following are some of the service-related achievements of RSN and RRT over the course of 2019.



### Advocating for Legal Aid:

## White Paper on State-Funded Legal Aid Services for Refugees in Turkey

In January 2019, RSN's sister organization, RRT, published a report on legal aid in Turkey, entitled "Access to State-Funded Legal Aid Services by Asylum-Seekers and Migrants in Turkey: Challenges and Opportunities" under a collaborative project with RSN. This report focuses on ways to strengthen the availability and quality of free-of-charge legal assistance and representation services for refugees and other vulnerable migrants in Turkey. The primary version of the report was launched in Turkish, aimed at national stakeholders to contribute to the ongoing discussion around the legal aid system, refugee protection, and access to justice.

RSN and RRT created an English version of the report for international audiences interested in understanding an important aspect of Turkey's refugee protection landscape, as well as those who are interested in exploring and gauging the potentials of the state-funded legal aid model as an access to justice multiplier in other national contexts beyond Turkey. RSN and RRT view such outputs as potentially relevant for host countries in the Global South that do not have well-established refugee response frameworks. RSN draws on such outputs in facilitating South-South dialogue in a triangular capacity.

## Pilot Project for Refugee Protection in Turkey

Building off of our previous efforts to promote pro bono, including the launch of the White Paper on pro bono partnerships (“Pro Bono for Refugee Protection: A Practical Guide for Pro Bono Partnerships in Emerging Refugee Host States”) and a study visit in 2018 for RRT leadership to learn about pro bono projects based in the US, RSN and partner RRT launched a pilot project in 2019 with 2 private law firms, GKC Partners (local affiliate of White & Case LLP) and Dündar & Sir.

The pilots allowed for law firm associates to assist with legal research and channel findings into the content of group counseling presentations with RRT. Over 2019 three such group counseling sessions reached approximately 100 protection-seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Cameroon, Nigeria, Uganda, Côte d’Ivoire, and Congo.



## Gaining Inspiration and Exploring Future Potential: PILNet Singapore

In November, Alex Zetes (RSN’s Global Advocacy & Policy Manager) presented at the PILnet Annual Conference in Singapore on RSN-RRT’s pro bono pilot project as a part of a panel on “Expanding Pro Bono for Refugees in Asia” with representatives from APRRN, DLA Piper (Australia), and Barun Law (South Korea). The panel focused on innovative pro bono models to address the complex legal needs that refugees in Asia face. RSN-RRT’s pilot in Turkey serves as a case study for other emerging contexts. The event also allowed for RSN to network with other advocates from around the world; gain inspiration and insights into comparative settings; and channel that energy into our own efforts.





## Research and Advocacy on National Protection in Bangladesh

Throughout 2019, RSN continued a partnership with Open Society Justice Initiative to research the legal framework in Bangladesh in a bid to help clarify what laws are in fact applicable to the Rohingya community there. As part of the research, RSN engaged in consultation with civil society stakeholders at the national level.



## Building Links with the Rohingya Community Beyond Bangladesh



While the RSN-OSJI research project focuses on Bangladesh, the country in Asia hosting the largest Rohingya community, the research has sought to bring a comparative dimension by examining how the region has responded to the Rohingya. By carrying out regional research the project draws inspiration from other settings and made links with actors, from the community and from civil society, working on Rohingya rights. As part of that effort, RSN and OSJI organized an expert regional consultation in Kuala Lumpur in April.

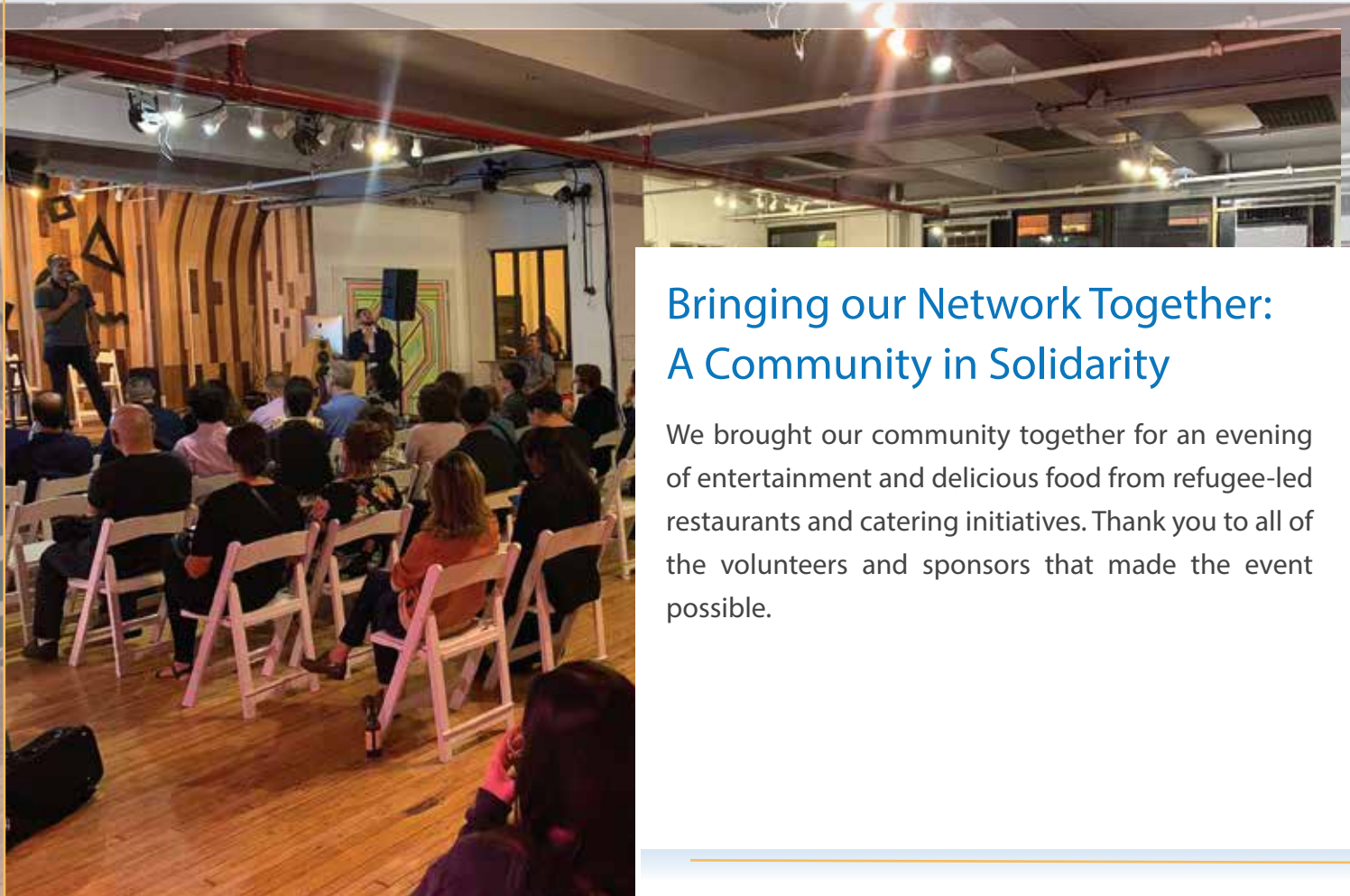
## Facilitating Knowledge-Sharing: Mexico-Turkey Triangular Cooperation

In 2019 RSN took an important step in its role as a facilitator of South-South knowledge and experience-sharing. Long recognizing the similarities between Turkey and Mexico in their role as developing countries increasingly shouldering responsibility as refugee host countries, RSN organized a unique study visit that enabled members of our Turkish sister organization and RSN to travel to Mexico to learn first-hand from a range of Mexican counterparts on the situation in Mexico, with an emphasis on how pro bono legal services are being mobilized in response.



As a US-based non-profit working mostly on issues outside of the US, RSN works to channel its experience to members of our network in NY.

We regularly organize and participate in events, such as the March 2019 “Conversation with Shireen Huq” at Fordham Law School. The opportunity allowed for a NY audience to hear directly from one of the founders of Naripokkho, described by many as the mother of the Bangladeshi women’s movement.



## Bringing our Network Together: A Community in Solidarity

We brought our community together for an evening of entertainment and delicious food from refugee-led restaurants and catering initiatives. Thank you to all of the volunteers and sponsors that made the event possible.



## Team

Since our last annual report we welcomed Shehzeen Saied as Operations Manager, Kevin Cole as our Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning Manager, and Alexandra Zetes as our Global Advocacy and Policy Manager.



Alexandra Zetes



Shehzeen Saied



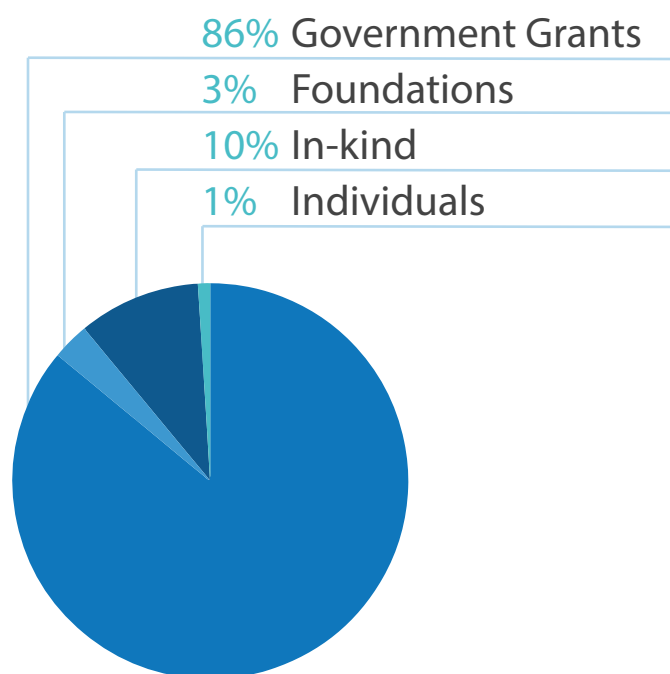
Kevin Cole

## Volunteers

RSN was happy to host Ipek Toksavul and Isabella Cajiao as legal fellows, and Claudia Bennet, Mayra Cuevas, and Paola Flores-Marquez as interns during the course of 2019.

## Financial

### Income

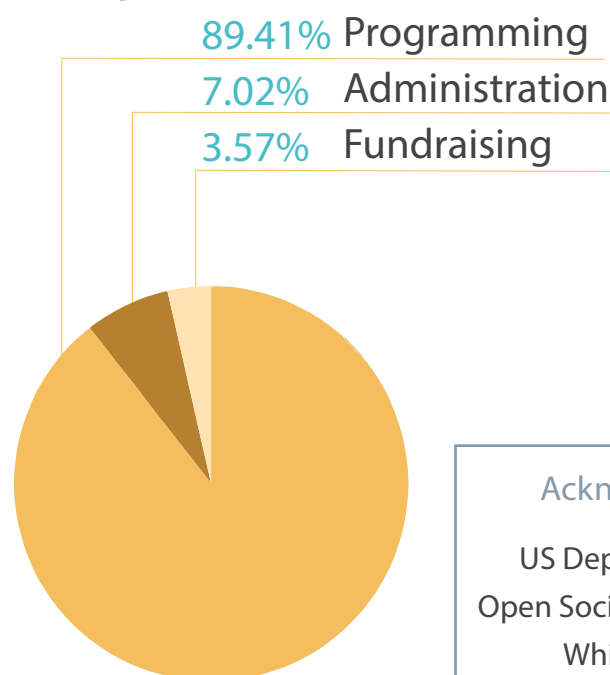


These figures include gifts of services in-kind which are not reflected in our 990

Copies of RSN's 990 can be requested by emailing:  
[info@refugeesolidaritynetwork.org](mailto:info@refugeesolidaritynetwork.org)

RSN wholeheartedly thanks all of our institutional and individual supporters for all of their contributions.

### Expenses:



### Acknowledgments

US Department of State  
Open Society Justice Initiative  
White & Case LLP  
Paul Hastings  
American University

## A note from the RSN Board of Directors

Dear Friends and Supporters,

In 2019, RSN collaborated with new partners and strengthened existing relationships in new arenas. We expanded our global reach and helped additional refugee populations while strengthening the local partnerships that make RSN a unique player in the field.

Working with regional experts, RSN spearheaded a research and advocacy project to share information and legal expertise relating to the Rohingya refugee crisis. We hosted consultations in Malaysia and Bangladesh and started a weekly development tracker focused on Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh to increase information sharing on the ground. These resources continue to fill a gap in the legal resources available to Rohingya refugees and their advocates.

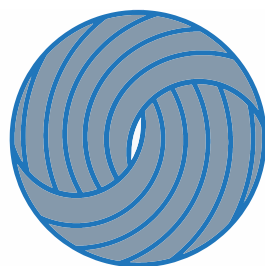
In partnership with Refugee Rights Turkey (RRT), we launched an online information platform for refugees in Turkey. We organized a study visit to Mexico in partnership with RRT and Sin Fronteras to facilitate South-South cooperation.

Finally, we welcomed Kevin Cole as our new Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning Manager and Shehzeen Saied as Operations Manager.

As anti-immigration rhetoric, law, and policy continue to permeate the political discourse, it is more important than ever to support the civil society and refugee rights advocates working on behalf of some of the most vulnerable people and children. We thank you for your continued support.

RSN Board of Directors





**RSN**

REFUGEE SOLIDARITY NETWORK

STAY INFORMED AND JOIN THE CONVERSATION



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