

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 8, 2020

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Under Secretary, Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Nebraska Avenue Complex
3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Pompeo, Under Secretary Wolf, and Secretary Azar:

We strongly urge you to restore our nation's long-standing bipartisan tradition of providing safety to the world's most vulnerable refugees and to immediately engage in meaningful consultations with Congress, as required by law, before setting the annual refugee admission target for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021.

We are in the midst of the worst refugee crisis in history. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were more than 79 million people displaced worldwide at the end of 2019, a record high. Among this displaced population are 26 million refugees – the highest number in history – more than half of whom are children. UNHCR estimates that 1.4 million refugees are in urgent need of resettlement.

Since our nation's tragic failure to help Jewish refugees fleeing Hitler, the United States has set an example for the world by providing safe haven to the world's most vulnerable people. Over the past several decades, we have safely and successfully resettled millions of refugees from across the world with strong bipartisan support. For example, during each year of President George H.W. Bush's Administration, the United States accepted over 100,000 refugees. Since the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980, the United States had set an average resettlement goal of 95,000 refugees per year until President Trump took office.

The Trump Administration has decimated the United States Refugee Admissions Program and ignored the statutorily-authorized role of the Senate and House Judiciary Committees. The Administration has set the annual refugee admissions target at embarrassingly low numbers for

three years in a row. In FY 2018, the Administration set a target of 45,000 refugees and ultimately allowed just 22,507 refugees into the United States. In FY 2019, the Administration slashed the target to just 30,000, which was the number of refugees ultimately admitted. This fiscal year, the Administration dropped America's moral standing to a new low by setting a target of only 18,000 refugees and issuing an executive order purporting to allow state and local governments to block refugees from being resettled in their communities. As of September 4, 2020, the Administration has admitted just 9,474 refugees this fiscal year. During the first 10 months of the fiscal year, the United States admitted just 193 refugees from Syria, even though the Syrian refugee crisis continues to be the largest in the world, with more than half of Syria's people having been forced to flee their homes.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe and harmful impact on refugees. According to UNHCR, "the world's 79.5 million refugees and forcibly displaced people are among the most exposed and vulnerable [to the pandemic]. For people who fled wars and persecution, the impact on their mostly hand-to-mouth existence and on their hosts has been devastating."

As you know, prior to any presidential determination on the number of refugees to be admitted in the upcoming fiscal year, the law requires that Cabinet-level officials representing the President engage in a consultation with Senate and House Judiciary Committee leaders. The law is clear that the consultation must occur before the start of the fiscal year. Yet, for the last three years, the Administration has refused to consult with Congress in a timely or meaningful manner. Fiscal Year 2021 begins in less than a month, yet we have not received a proposed refugee admissions plan from the Administration and the consultation has not been scheduled. As such, we urge you to immediately transmit the Administration's proposed refugee admissions report to Congress and expeditiously schedule the statutorily-required consultation.

Given the magnitude of this crisis, the United States must not abandon our leadership role in providing safety to refugees who are most in need of resettlement. Surely we can do more when it comes to helping refugees.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your prompt response.



Richard J. Durbin
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Immigration
Senate Judiciary Committee



Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Committee



Jerrold Nadler
Chairman
House Judiciary Committee



Zoe Lofgren
Chair
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
House Judiciary Committee