United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

SCANNED/RECEIVED BY EXEC SEC
2018 AUG -6 AM 9: 34

June 22, 2018

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

The Honorable Kirstjen M. Nielsen
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Secretaries Pompeo and Nielsen:

We are deeply concerned about the slow pace of refugee resettlement in Fiscal Year 2018 (FY 18). We urge the Administration to make every effort to increase the rate of refugee admissions to meet the number established by the presidential determination for FY18.

We are in the midst of the largest refugee crisis in modern history with nearly 22.5 million refugees worldwide, over half of whom are children.[1] Refugee resettlement is only available to the most vulnerable – less than one percent of all refugees – when safe return or local integration is not feasible.

Since the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980, the United States has resettled an average of over 80,000 refugees per year. Despite the record-breaking level of displacement worldwide, the United States has admitted just 14,331 refugees in the first eight months of this fiscal year. At this slow pace, the U.S. will fall far short of the proposed refugee admissions level of 45,000 refugees in FY18, already the lowest annual commitment in the history of the program.

Refugees are the most carefully vetted of all travelers to the United States. They do not arrive in the U.S. without first clearing extensive biometric, biographic, intelligence, medical, and law enforcement checks, involving multiple agencies. We must continue to screen refugee applicants thoroughly and address the drivers of mass displacement abroad.

Our nation's founders came to our shores to escape religious persecution, and the United States has a long tradition of providing safe haven to refugees. Following the international community's tragic failure to shelter Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazi genocide, the United States has set a positive example for the world by providing safe haven to the world's most vulnerable. Since 1975, the American people have generously welcomed more than three million refugees. With a global refugee crisis unprecedented in scale, the United States must maintain our leadership in welcoming those seeking safety from war and persecution.

For these reasons, we respectfully request your response to the following questions by July 5, 2018:

1) How many refugees do you expect to resettle during the remainder of FY18?

---

[1] http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html

2) What specific steps will you take, if any, to increase the rate of refugee resettlement for the remainder of the fiscal year?

3)

   a. How many circuit rides have your agencies completed in FY 2018?
   b. How many are planned for the remainder of the fiscal year?
   c. How many Refugee Corps officers will join each circuit ride?
   d. For each of these circuit rides, please also provide information regarding the location and the number of interviews conducted.

4) We are concerned about decisions made to reallocate staff and resources away from the program, further impeding refugee resettlement. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has reassigned Refugee Corps officers, who are specially trained to screen refugees abroad, to process domestic asylum cases.

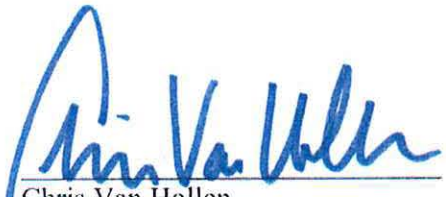
   a. What are the current staffing levels for the Refugee Corps and the Asylum Corps?
   b. How many Refugee Corps officers have been reassigned?
   c. What steps, if any, is the Administration taking to fill the vacancies for reassigned Refugee Affairs Division officer positions?

5) On January 29, 2018, Secretary Nielsen announced additional security measures for refugee admissions for nationals from eleven countries.[2] What steps is the Administration taking to resume the processing of refugees from these eleven countries in a timely manner?

6) The admission of Iraqis who aided the United States mission in Iraq slowed considerably, as new applicants now must apply as refugees through the Direct Access Program for U.S.-affiliated Iraqis. What steps is the Administration taking to ensure that wartime partners, who served alongside U.S. Armed Forces and other government personnel, continue to have access to a path to safety in the United States?

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

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

[2] https://www.dhs.gov/news/2018/01/29/dhs-announces-additional-enhanced-security-procedures-refugees-seeking-resettlement

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Tom Udall
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator

Patrick J. Leahy
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator

Robert Menendez
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

Tina Smith
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Office of the Director (MS 2000)
Washington, DC 20529-2000

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

October 1, 2018

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Van Hollen:

Thank you for your June 22, 2018 letter. Secretary Nielsen asked that I respond on her behalf.

The Department of Homeland Security appreciates your interest and support of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). We are proud of the USRAP's longstanding history of resettling some of the world's most vulnerable refugees in the United States, while ensuring that, now and in the future, we employ rigorous security measures to protect against national security threats. Please find enclosed responses to your questions.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important matter. The co-signers of your letter will receive separate, identical responses. Should you require additional assistance, please have your staff contact the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs at (202) 272-1940.

Respectfully,

L. Francis Cissna
Director

Enclosure

The Department of Homeland Security's Response to Senator Van Hollen's June 22, 2018 Letter

1. **How many refugees do you expect to resettle during the remainder of FY 2018?**

   We defer to the Department of State (DOS) on the pace of arrivals for the remainder of the fiscal year (FY).

2. **What specific steps will you take, if any, to increase the rate of refugee resettlement for the remainder of the fiscal year?**

   As you are aware, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), together with DOS, law enforcement, and the intelligence community, have worked very hard in the last year to analyze the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and introduce new measures to make the program more secure and enhance national security. The implementation of new security vetting procedures, while necessary, has lengthened processing times for some cases and as a result, admissions have slowed. The need to address the asylum backlog has been prioritized throughout the fiscal year in terms of resource allocation.

   U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) continues to conduct refugee processing circuit rides to interview refugee applicants, and to interview refugee applicants in locations where USCIS has staff posted abroad. USCIS has done this while also assigning refugee officers to domestic duties with the asylum program. As a result, USCIS has fewer trained officers available to conduct refugee interviews overseas. The Refugee Affairs Division will continue to support the Asylum Division in its protection mission and efforts to address the backlog by detailing staff to the Asylum Division for the remainder of FY 2018.

   We anticipate that over time, as we and our vetting partners adjust to these changes and address resource constraints, refugee processing will speed up.

3. a. **How many circuit rides have your agencies completed in FY 2018?**

      Please see Attachment 1 for locations where USCIS has conducted refugee processing in FY 2018. This list includes refugee processing in locations where USCIS has staff posted abroad.

   b. **How many are planned for the remainder of the fiscal year?**

      Circuit rides for FY 2018 are listed in Attachment 1 mentioned above.

   c. **How many Refugee Corps officers will join each circuit ride?**

      The attachment noted above provides information regarding staff that joined each circuit ride. These numbers include Supervisory Refugee Corps Officers, Refugee Corps Officers, Fraud Detection and National Security (FDNS) Officers, and In-Field Trainers and finger printers. They may also include staff members who are posted overseas. Team composition varies based on interview location and interview schedule.

d. **For each of these circuit rides, please also provide information regarding the location and the number of interviews conducted.**

Attachment 1 provides information regarding interview locations. Attachment 2 provides interview numbers for quarters 1-3. At this time, USCIS does not have a mechanism to accurately report the number of interviews it conducts and relies on data from DOS, which maintains the case management system for refugee resettlement processing. There are some slight discrepancies between interview locations and circuit ride locations and we are working with DOS to reconcile the data. We do not yet have a final number for the FY 2018 quarter 4 interviews.

4. **We are concerned about decisions made to reallocate staff and resources away from the program, further impeding refugee resettlement. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has reassigned Refugee Corps officers, who are specially trained to screen refugees abroad, to process domestic asylum cases.**

a. **What are the current staffing levels for the Refugee Corps and the Asylum Corps?**

As of September 21, 2018, the Refugee Affairs Division had 140 Refugee Officers and 28 Supervisory Refugee Officers on board.

As of September 21, 2018, the Asylum Division had 555 Asylum Officers and 118 Supervisory Asylum Officers onboard.

b. **How many Refugee Corps officers have been reassigned?**

The Refugee Affairs Division will continue to support the Asylum Division in its protection mission and efforts to address the backlog by detailing staff to the Asylum Division for the remainder of FY 2018. The Refugee Affairs Division has detailed to the Asylum Division an average of the equivalent of 100 full-time staff equivalents throughout FY 2018 and will continue to do so through the end of FY 2018. This includes Refugee Officers and Supervisory Refugee Officers.

c. **What steps, if any, is the Administration taking to fill the vacancies for reassigned Refugee Affairs Division officer positions?**

These staff members were not permanently detailed to the Asylum Division. The Refugee Affairs Division was authorized 157 permanent Refugee Officers for FY 2018. At the beginning of the fiscal year, the Refugee Affairs Division was overstaffed. For example, in quarter 1 of FY 2018, the Refugee Affairs Division had an average of 191 Refugee Officers on board. Therefore, the Refugee Affairs Division did not fill permanent vacancies until the Refugee Affairs Division "right-sized" through attrition.

Staffing needs are continuously reviewed, along with attrition rates, taking into account the amount of time it takes to hire and onboard an employee to project upcoming staffing needs. As soon as it appeared that the Refugee Affairs Division would reach its authorized staffing levels, steps were taken to initiate recruitment. As a result, the Refugee Affairs Division is in the process of hiring Refugee Officers.

USCIS is in the process of completing its annual staffing models to determine appropriate staffing levels for FY 2019, including those needed for refugee processing. The final analysis will be adjusted as appropriate once decisions are made on the FY 2019 refugee admissions ceiling.

5. **On January 29, 2018, Secretary Nielsen announced additional security measures for refugee admissions for nationals from eleven countries. What steps is the Administration taking to resume the processing of refugees from these eleven countries in a timely manner?**

On December 23, 2017, a federal court issued an order that enjoined the Government from enforcing Executive Order 13815, and its accompanying Memorandum, suspending or inhibiting the processing of refugee applications or the admission of refugee applicants from Security Advisory Opinion (SAO) countries (or those who last habitually resided in an SAO country). The preliminary injunction was limited, however, to refugees with a bona fide relationship to a person or entity in the United States. USCIS immediately complied with that order and continued to process cases of applicants from SAO countries. Since Secretary Nielsen's announcement on January 29, 2018, USCIS has worked to swiftly implement new enhancements, which have included providing training and guidance to staff conducting refugee processing as well as a number of other enhancements to security vetting. USCIS is interviewing and adjudicating applications from nationals of SAO countries under these new procedures. As with refugee applicants, regardless of nationality, USCIS processes cases as timely as possible, but will approve a case only after all security checks have cleared.

6. **The admission of Iraqis who aided the United States mission in Iraq slowed considerably, as new applicants now must apply as refugees through the Direct Access Program for U.S.-affiliated Iraqis. What steps is the Administration taking to ensure that wartime partners, who served alongside U.S. Armed Forces and other government personnel, continue to have access to a path to safety in the United States?**

USCIS has continued to interview Iraqi refugee applicants in numerous locations during FY 2018. USCIS and DOS have been working together to identify U.S.-affiliated Iraqis in the USRAP who may be able to travel this fiscal year. To that end, USCIS has been prioritizing review of cases that are post-DHS interview and have cleared required security checks.

Attachment 1

FY2018 Refugee Processing Circuit Rides

Quarter	Location	Duration	Team Size
FY17 Q1	Iraq - Baghdad	10	16
FY18 Q1	Burundi	27	5
FY18 Q1	Tanzania	31	13
FY18 Q1	El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras	80	4
FY18 Q1	El Salvador	79	10
FY18 Q1	Malta	4	2
FY18 Q1	Moldova	10	2
FY18 Q1	Morocco	8	3
FY18 Q1	Nepal	3	4
FY18 Q1	South Africa	1	1
FY18 Q1	Sri Lanka	5	3
FY18 Q1	Thailand	1	2
FY18 Q1	Ukraine	19	7
FY18 Q2	Malaysia	24	11
FY18 Q2	Nauru/PNG	57	10
FY18 Q2	Thailand	27	5
FY18 Q2	Burundi	27	7
FY18 Q2	Uganda	27	10
FY18 Q2	Rwanda	27	10
FY18 Q2	Tanzania	27	12
FY18 Q2	Algeria	5	3
FY18 Q2	Indonesia	24	4
FY18 Q2	Ivory Coast	11	2
FY18 Q2	South Africa	5	2
FY18 Q2	Malawi	14	3
FY18 Q2	Namibia	10	2
FY18 Q2	Thailand	5	3
FY18 Q2	Saudi Arabia	1	2
FY18 Q2	Ukraine	44	2
FY18 Q2	Zambia	11	2
FY18 Q3	Turkey	47	6
FY18 Q3	Iraq - Baghdad	31	5
FY18 Q3	Egypt	48	7
FY18 Q3	Iraq - Erbil	16	3
FY18 Q3	Malaysia	48	7
FY18 Q3	Uganda	47	6
FY18 Q3	Ethiopia	41	7
FY18 Q3	Kenya, Uganda	41	9
FY18 Q3	Rwanda	41	7
FY18 Q3	Ecuador, El Salvador, Costa Rica	44	5
FY18 Q3	Pakistan	8	4
FY18 Q3	Israel	12	2
FY18 Q3	Thailand	1	2
FY18 Q3	Malaysia	5	2

FY18 Q3	Sri Lanka	10	3
FY18 Q3	Ukraine	37	8
FY18 Q3	Zambia	4	1
FY18 Q4	Jordan	50	8
FY18 Q4	Iraq - Baghdad	31	6
FY18 Q4	Iraq - Erbil	16	4
FY18 Q4	Morocco	13	2
FY18 Q4	Malaysia/Thailand	49	9
FY18 Q4	Nauru/PNG	42	7
FY18 Q4	Burundi	47	7
FY18 Q4	Guinea	12	1
FY18 Q4	Togo	12	1
FY18 Q4	Rwanda	47	7
FY18 Q4	Kenya, Uganda	42	10
FY18 Q4	Ecuador, Honduras, El Salvador	31	5
FY18 Q4	Bahrain	3	1
FY18 Q4	Costa Rica	4	2
FY18 Q4	Germany	11	3
FY18 Q4	Indonesia	21	5
FY18 Q4	Krygyzstan	3	2
FY18 Q4	Malawi	11	1
FY18 Q4	Malta	8	2
FY18 Q4	Mozambique	11	1
FY18 Q4	Niger	18	1
FY18 Q4	South Africa	1	1
FY18 Q4	Ukraine	47	6
Ongoing	Thailand	No circuit ride- in-office processing	NA
Ongoing	India	No circuit ride- in-office processing	NA
Ongoing	Kenya	No circuit ride- in-office processing	NA
Ongoing	Russia	No circuit ride- in-office processing	NA
Ongoing	El Salvador	No circuit ride- in-office processing	NA

Ongoing	China	No circuit ride- in-office processing	NA
Ongoing	Jordan	No circuit ride- in-office processing	NA

Last updated 9/26/18

Attachment 2

8/30/2018

USCIS Interviews by Region and Country, 8/24/2018

		Q1		Q2		Q3		FY18 Totals	
Region	Country of Interview	Cases	Individuals	Cases	Individuals	Cases	Individuals	Cases	Individuals
Africa	Burundi	206	653	218	634	0	0	424	1,287
	Ethiopia	0	0	0	0	368	880	368	880
	Ivory Coast	0	0	31	80	0	0	31	80
	Kenya	1	1	47	52	161	199	209	252
	Malawi	0	0	65	204	1	4	66	208
	Namibia	0	0	42	118	0	0	42	118
	Rwanda	1	1	187	403	303	727	491	1,131
	South Africa	5	9	15	51	0	0	20	60
	Tanzania	350	1,309	241	891	0	0	591	2,200
	Uganda	0	0	241	787	648	1,737	889	2,524
	Zambia	0	0	28	105	14	44	42	149
East Asia	China	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	3
	Indonesia	0	0	126	271	0	0	126	271
	Malaysia	0	0	307	598	483	898	790	1,496
	Nauru	0	0	198	242	1	1	199	243
	Papua New Guinea	0	0	116	116	132	132	248	248
	Thailand	97	253	189	368	42	102	328	723
Europe	Algeria	0	0	18	21	0	0	18	21
	Belarus	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	4
	Israel	0	0	2	2	37	108	39	110
	Malta	20	26	0	0	0	0	20	26
	Moldova	32	101	0	0	0	0	32	101
	Russia	126	350	133	347	156	364	415	1,061
	Ukraine	308	1,214	110	262	229	536	647	2,012
Latin America/Caribbean	Costa Rica	0	0	0	0	28	58	28	58
	Ecuador	0	0	0	0	140	304	140	304
	El Salvador	539	625	373	465	40	84	952	1,174
	Guatemala	58	65	0	0	0	0	58	65
	Honduras	80	92	92	112	0	0	172	204
Near East/South Asia	Egypt	0	0	0	0	178	572	178	572
	India	10	18	13	21	14	32	37	71
	Iraq	95	262	0	0	176	554	271	816
	Morocco	20	26	0	0	0	0	20	26
	Nepal	24	52	0	0	0	0	24	52
	Pakistan	0	0	0	0	16	51	16	51
	Saudi Arabia	0	0	13	43	0	0	13	43
	Sri Lanka (Ceylon)	32	90	0	0	51	105	83	195
	Turkey	0	0	0	0	194	418	194	418
	Total	2,005	5,151	2,805	6,193	3,415	7,913	8,225	19,257

**Data derived from PRM report Cumulative DHS Interviews by Quarter, Month, Priority, Location and Nationality, 8/24/2018*