



Committee on Migration

c/o Migration and Refugee Services, USCCB

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March 26, 2018

Honorable Kirstjen Nielsen
Secretary of Homeland Security
Department of Homeland Security

Dear Secretary Nielsen,

I write on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Committee on Migration to urge the Administration to honor this nation's historically bipartisan commitment to resettling refugees. As you know, the United States has had an average admissions ceiling of over 95,000 refugees each year since the modern U.S. refugee admissions program was established by the Refugee Act of 1980. We are deeply concerned about both the historically low target that the Administration has set for refugee admissions for Fiscal Year 2018, as well as by the extraordinarily low number of refugees that the United States is on pace to resettle during the current fiscal year. We respectfully ask for a meeting with you to discuss this urgent matter.

The number of refugees that are scheduled to be resettled by the United States has plummeted in the last year. For FY 2018, a target of only 45,000 refugee admissions was set, which is the lowest target in the history of the U.S. refugee resettlement admissions program. Moreover, as of March 16, 2018, nearly the halfway point of FY18, the U.S. has resettled only 9,616 refugees. With these numbers, the United States is on pace to resettle fewer than 20,000 refugees in FY 2018 – a number which is only 25% percent of the number of refugees who arrived just two years before in fiscal year 2016.

The current level of refugee arrivals leaves thousands of vulnerable people in harm's way and searching for protection. This includes 87 Iranian Christians and other persecuted religious minorities from Iran who were recently denied admittance to the United States. Similarly situated Iranians have been granted admission to the United States at a 99% rate in past years. Further, many of the refugees who are being excluded from arriving and resettling in the United States are among the estimated 5% who cannot remain in refugee host countries that neighbor the home countries they fled. Most often they are at-risk women and children who are too vulnerable to remain in the region and/or in situations too dangerous for them to wait in the host country until the conflict at home has ended. Others are often part of a religious or ethnic group not welcome by the host country. These trends signify an abdication of our nation's leadership in humanitarian protection through resettlement and in championing international religious freedom.

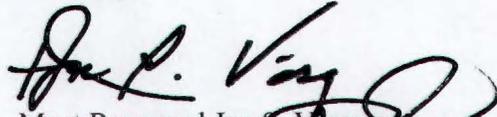
For 37 years, the U.S. has been a world leader in welcoming and resettling refugees, and the U.S. Catholic Church has been a committed partner in this work. As Christians, our concern for refugees is

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integral to our life of faith. The Catholic Church believes that every person is created in God's image. In the Old Testament, God calls upon his people to care for the newcomers because of their own experience as newcomers: "So, you, too, should love the resident alien, for that is what you were in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:19). In his own life and work, Jesus identified himself with newcomers and with other marginalized persons in a special way: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt. 25:35). Jews, Christians, including many Catholics, and other people of faith, continue to be persecuted for their religion, race, ethnicity, political opinion or associations.

In this spirit, we urge the Administration to renew a bipartisan commitment to resettlement for refugees, including religious minorities. More specifically, we request: (1) robust and transparent processing by the Department of Homeland Security to ensure greater processing of refugees for resettlement for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2018; and (2) admittance of at least 45,000 refugees this year and a Presidential Determination of 75,000 refugees next year. Lastly, we again renew our request for a meeting with you to discuss how to address the current state of refugee processing.

Sincerely,



Most Reverend Joe S. Vasquez
Chair, USCCB Committee on Migration

cc: Speaker Paul Ryan
Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi
Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer
White House Chief of Staff John Kelly



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

June 11, 2018

The Most Reverend Joe S. Vásquez
Chairman
USCCB Committee on Migration
3211 Fourth Street, NE
Washington, DC 20017

Dear Bishop Vásquez:

Thank you for your March 26, 2018 letter. Secretary Nielsen asked that I respond on her behalf.

As you express in your letter, the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) has a long history of resettling refugees in the United States and reflects America's highest regard for extending compassion, generosity, and leadership to those in need. As a partner of the USRAP, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) remains committed to the program's mission. We work with interagency partners to continuously review and improve policies and procedures to ensure that USRAP safeguards the American public from threats to public safety and national security, while offering protection to some of the world's most vulnerable refugees.

This year's Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions allows USCIS to better support the domestic asylum backlog, while also maintaining our foreign refugee resettlement mission. For Fiscal Year 2018, the Administration is focusing on our Nation's humanitarian response, which includes not only refugee resettlement, but also the work being done and the challenges confronted in providing asylum to tens of thousands of refugees who are already in the United States.

While we defer to the Department of State on the scheduling of refugees for travel to the United States, 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.

Finally, this Administration remains committed to supporting the Iranian people. Since January 2017, more than 800 Iranian religious minorities have been approved for admission in the United States through USRAP, and they have been successfully resettled in the United States. Eligibility for refugee status is determined on a case-by-case basis. In addition, during the same time period, USCIS has granted asylum to 229 Iranian nationals. We are not able to comment on specific cases.

The Most Reverend Joe S. Vásquez

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Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Should you wish to request for a meeting to discuss this matter further, please contact Leslie B. Akinola, Executive Assistant, USCIS Customer Service and Public Engagement Directorate (CSPED) at (202) 272-1120 or leslie.b.akinola@uscis.dhs.gov.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L. Francis Cissna". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

L. Francis Cissna
Director