

United States Senate

August 1, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

RECEIVED

By ESEC at 1:40 pm, Aug 03, 2022

Dear President Biden:

We respectfully ask that you work urgently to increase the rate of refugee admissions for the remainder of Fiscal Year (FY) 2022. Furthermore, we urge you to maintain or increase the target of 125,000 refugee admissions in FY 2023 and take meaningful steps to meet this target.

We applaud your Administration's work to expeditiously bring to the United States 85,000 Afghan nationals, U.S. citizens, and lawful permanent residents through Operation Allies Welcome (OAW). Similarly, we commend your support for those displaced by Russia's brutal war in Ukraine through the Uniting for Ukraine parole program, which has allowed Americans to welcome and support more than 20,000 people in just the first three months of its operation. The success of these initiatives demonstrates our government's capacity to swiftly offer protection to vulnerable people fleeing war and persecution.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a record high of more than 89.3 million people, 42 percent of whom are children, were displaced at the end of 2021. The displaced population includes 27.1 million refugees. UNHCR estimates that in 2023 over two million refugees will need to be resettled. In our own region, Central America faces a growing refugee crisis, with more than 800,000 people who have sought refuge in neighboring nations or have been internally displaced. Haiti is also facing a rapid decline in internal security and a compounding political, environmental, and humanitarian emergency. In West Africa, amidst an ongoing civil war, Cameroon is facing high levels of internal displacement, as well as receiving thousands of foreign refugees. These are just a few examples of the current refugee challenges around the world. We urge your Administration to ensure that the United States scales up capacity to process refugees in these regions and across all nationalities with protection needs, particularly those who have been languishing in precarious situations awaiting resettlement, such as family reunification cases.

Since the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980, the United States resettled an average of more than 80,000 refugees per year, until the Trump Administration slashed the refugee admissions ceiling each year it was in office, ending at an historic low of just 15,000 for FY 2021. We understand that the Trump Administration's drastic cuts to refugee admissions also hobbled the resettlement infrastructure in United States, with many refugee resettlement organizations closing offices and laying off employees.

Combined with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and staffing vacancies resulting from a yearlong hiring freeze at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services imposed by the previous Administration, these cuts have made it difficult to quickly rebuild the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). Although you raised the refugee ceiling to 65,000 for FY 2021,

the United States only resettled 11,411 refugees last fiscal year, the lowest figure since the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980.

We commend you for recommitting the United States to its historic role as a global leader in refugee resettlement by setting a ceiling of 125,000 for FY 2022. However, we are deeply concerned that as of June 30, 2022, the United States has only resettled 15,100 refugees this fiscal year. Despite the challenges of rebuilding the USRAP that your Administration inherited, we can and must do better. The dismantling of programs by the Trump Administration has hindered our efforts to resettle more refugees, and as such, your Administration must take the necessary steps to promptly ensure the United States has a robust, functioning, durable refugee resettlement system.

It is imperative that your Administration continue to invest in the sustainability of the refugee resettlement program. We appreciate the steps that your Administration has taken this fiscal year to rebuild the overseas and domestic infrastructure to ready the USRAP for higher arrival numbers. However, more work needs to be done so that we can restore and expand our nation's capacity to welcome the most vulnerable refugees from around the world.

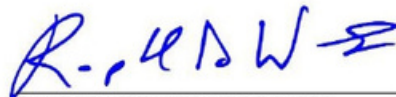
The success of OAW and Uniting for Ukraine have proven that, under your leadership, our country is fully capable of bringing vulnerable displaced people to safety in the United States when you commit the government to doing so. We urge you to expeditiously and safely admit all qualified refugees who are waiting to be resettled. Additionally, we urge you to set a robust target for USRAP in FY2023 as soon as possible and devote sufficient resources to meet this target.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to your response.

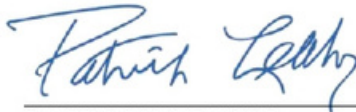
Sincerely,



RICHARD J. DURBIN
United States Senator



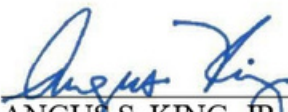
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**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

October 04, 2022

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Durbin:

Thank you for your August 1, 2022 letter to President Biden regarding refugee admissions for the remainder of Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 and FY 2023. Secretary Mayorkas asked that I respond on his behalf.

I appreciated the opportunity to brief you and your colleagues on September 15, 2022, at the annual Consultations with the Congress on Refugee Admissions. As U.S. Department of State (DOS) Secretary Blinken, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary Contreras, and I conveyed, we are all deeply committed to increasing refugee admissions to reflect America's values as a nation that welcomes and supports refugees and to working together to rebuild the program. I am proud of the progress we are making to meet the refugee admissions goals set by President Biden, though I am aware of the challenges that we continue to face in streamlining our resettlement process.

As noted at the Consultations, DHS is working closely and urgently with DOS to identify ways to process cases more efficiently through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) while maintaining the security and integrity of the program. However, as you noted in your letter, the continuing operational impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as significant cuts and limits made to the USRAP overall in recent years, continue to challenge our progress.

Thus far in FY 2022, through our partnership with DOS, we have deployed staff on 72 refugee processing circuit rides reaching applicants in 62 countries and have interviewed twice the total number of refugee applicants interviewed in fiscal years 2020 and 2021 combined. Given these actions, we anticipate refugee arrivals in FY 2022 will be nearly double those of fiscal year 2021. We plan on continuing to increase refugee interviews as we hire and train new staff. Since the start of FY 2022, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has increased the number of adjudicating refugee officers and first-line supervisors by 92%, from 136 to 261. Robust recruitment continues, and over 100 selected candidates are currently undergoing pre-employment clearances, so they can onboard.

In addition to staffing increases, we are leveraging and exploring technology enhancements that will increase efficiency in processing. We are working closely with DOS to

enhance processing capacity and more expeditiously complete cases in the post-interview pipeline while ensuring the integrity and robust security of the USRAP. We will further strengthen and modernize the USRAP through implementing actions stemming from a major review of USRAP processing currently being conducted across the interagency. As our efforts continue, our commitment to resettling those most vulnerable and in need of protection remains steadfast.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. The cosigners of your letter will receive a separate, identical response. Should you require any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs at (240) 721-3801.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ur M. Jaddou", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Ur M. Jaddou
Director