

Statement for
Multifaith Alliance (MFA) for Syrian Refugees
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At a time when the world faces the most serious refugee challenges since World War II and the highest number of refugees in our world's history, the Multifaith Alliance, a coalition committed to responding to the Syrian refugee crisis, comprised of nearly 90 secular and faith-based participating organizations including Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh, is urging the U.S. government to maintain refugee admissions for FY 18 at absolutely no fewer than 75,000, a number that has been surpassed by every administration since 1980.

We urge this, as part of our mission, to mobilize an effective interfaith response to the Syrian humanitarian crisis. Such a response requires, in addition to efforts aimed at ensuring adequate funds to alleviate suffering and cultivating partnerships to advance future stability in the region, advocating for sensible and humane refugee policies that represent American's values, strategic interests and national security concerns.

Since 1975, we have brought more than three million refugees into the United States. The faith community's remarkable refugee resettlement agencies have played a key role in these efforts. These refugees have strengthened our economy as 85% of newly resettled refugees to the US are employed within 180 days. Syrian refugees have higher educational and income levels than most other refugees.

As an Ambassador-at-Large, I have seen personally — from inside the government — the intensive vetting process to establish that incoming refugees do not impose a security threat; this is a process that can take up to two years of investigations. It should be noted that not one of the three million refugees the United States has admitted since 1975 has committed an act of terrorism. As a rabbi, I know all too well the disastrous consequences when the United States abdicates moral obligations and turns away refugees at its shores. As a faith leader committed to interreligious expression, I know our collective voice speaks to the obligation, as well as to the value to our country, of a moral response to the refugee crisis, as well as our commitment to work to its resolution.

Across the globe, it is often poor or middle-income nations that bear the brunt of refugee crises. Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey have taken vast numbers of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Pakistan bears the disproportionate brunt of Afghan refugees; Bangladesh, of Burmese Rohingya refugees; and Uganda and Kenya, of refugees from South Sudan and other nearby states. The numbers they have had to house threatens the stability of those nations and the entire region. The United States has vested interests in helping to ease those burdens not only by maintaining support for the UNHCR that plays such a key role in global humanitarian assistance and in initial identification of refugees to the US, but also by meeting our fair share obligation to take in more refugees. President Obama set a target of 110,000 refugees in FY17, more appropriate to the global crisis. While that was an increase from some prior years—which generally averaged 95,000— I would remind us all that President Reagan went as high as 140,000 refugees. To allow the numbers to drop below 75,000 would be unconscionable, betraying American values and those of all of our faiths, and undercutting both our strategic interests and our world leadership across the globe.