

United States Senate

September 30, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write in regards to the current crisis impacting refugees, internally displaced people, and persecuted religious minorities from Syria and Iraq.

Violence in Syria and Iraq has created an untenable security situation. The government of Bashar Al-Assad, supported by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, has waged a civil war since the summer of 2011 that has killed countless innocent Syrian men, women, and children. ISIS continues persecuting religious minorities in Syria and Iraq, including Christians, Yezidis, Turkmen, Kurds, and others who have been systematically kidnapped, tortured, and murdered.

Iraq and Syria are home to ancient civilizations and great religions, yet may lose this diversity forever if steps are not taken to protect religious minorities. The presence of minorities can create a moderating, and often democratic, factor in these nations that is compatible with American interests.

The world has been moved by the plight of refugees who have undertaken life-threatening journeys to escape violence and persecution. Many of those seeking admission to the United States are members of ancient peoples whose historical homeland has been ravaged by war and terror. These are people who would prefer to remain at home in peace, but are unfortunately compelled to flee in hopes of achieving basic security for their family.

I understand that you have set a goal of resettling 85,000 refugees, including at least 10,000 Syrian refugees, in the United States next fiscal year through the United States Refugee Admission Program (USRAP). This would be a welcome increase from the approximately 1,200 refugees from Syrian already resettled in the United States to date in Fiscal Year 2015.

However, I am concerned that this goal is not sufficient given the number of Syrian refugees referred to USRAP from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), reportedly close to 18,000. It is our understanding that the State Department has already prepared cases for more than 10,000 Syrian refugees while UNHCR continues to refer up to 1,000 Syrian refugees to USRAP each month, a number that shows no signs of slowing down given the current exodus of refugees from the region.

I request that you set an immediate goal of resettling a total of at least 30,000 refugees from Syria and persecuted religious minorities from both Iraq and Syria, and account for this goal when issuing the Presidential Determination setting the refugee ceiling and regional allocations for Fiscal Year 2016. This will be an important first step, and in the coming years the

United States should be prepared to accept at least 100,000 refugees from Syria and persecuted religious minorities.

An undertaking at this level will demonstrate the United States' continued commitment to our proud history of welcoming refugees of special humanitarian concern. Achieving a resettlement target in this range may require additional resources and reforms to current USRAP processes. I stand ready to work with you to provide additional funding or authorizations required, including deploying additional personnel for refugee interviews and efforts to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of security checks while continuing to subject refugees to the highest level of security checks required of any traveler to the United States.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and your commitment to protecting refugees and religious minorities worldwide.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gary C. Peters", with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the name.

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator