

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 19, 2019

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

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

We write with concern about reports that the Department of State may be considering lowering to zero the annual cap on refugees admitted to the United States. While we agree that all refugees must be carefully vetted before being welcomed to America, we believe a decision to end refugee admissions would be inconsistent with American ideals and national security interests.

Before the Second World war, our country wrongly turned away Jewish refugees and others fleeing Nazi terror, sending many back to Europe to their deaths. Ever since, America has maintained a tradition of welcoming people fleeing death and persecution of their families and children.

In 1948, Congress passed the Displaced Persons Act, allowing the admission of 400,000 refugees from war-torn Europe. During the Cold War, we admitted hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing communist regimes from Hungary to China to Vietnam to Cuba. In 1980, Congress passed the Refugee Act, which empowered presidents to set an annual cap on the number of admitted refugees. That cap has varied from year to year, starting at over 200,000 during the presidencies of Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. But all presidents, of both parties, have recognized that admitting refugees facing death or persecution if they returned to their homes is the right thing to do and good for America.

In recent years, our refugee program has helped many worthy people resettle in the United States, including Christians fleeing ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Ukrainians escaping Russian aggression, and Rohingya victims of genocide. Today, we are seeing human rights crises in places like Venezuela that cannot be overlooked.

Among the most important beneficiaries of the program have been Iraqi and Afghan interpreters and translators. These individuals are employed by the United States military to protect our troops and provide essential mission support. As a result, these allies and their families face imminent threats from terrorist organizations in their home countries. It is estimated that over 1,000 translators have already lost their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan. While a number of these brave individuals are eligible for the Special Immigrant Visa program, the backlog is growing and many depend on regular refugee admissions that fall under the annual cap. It is our understanding that the Department of Defense strongly supports retaining a reasonable annual refugee quota in part for this reason, as did former Secretary of Defense James Mattis.

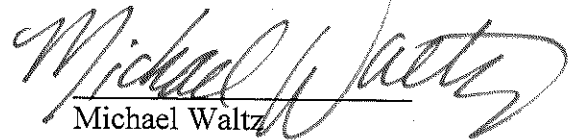
We recognize that the administration feels it must balance admission of asylum seekers on our southern border with resettlement of refugees from around the world. But we have managed that balance in the past without eliminating the global refugee program. .

Accordingly, we ask that you not make any further significant changes to the cap without full consultation with Congress, as well as with our allies around the world. Any changes to our refugee policies should take into account our long tradition of compassion to victims of persecution, the national security implications of upholding our promise to those who have helped America in times of war, and the need to maintain our global leadership.

Sincerely,



Tom Malinowski
Member of Congress



Michael Waltz
Member of Congress