



The World Refugee Crisis: Conflict, Consequences, Cooperation

Remarks

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Thank you, for that kind introduction. And thank you to the Young Leaders of the World Affairs Council for your invitation to join you. And thank you for devoting your Saturday to learning about refugees around the world and America's responsibility to them.

I am so happy to be in Atlanta, the headquarters of CARE, a great American organization, home to the Centers for Disease Control which does so much good here in the U.S. and around the world, and home also to so many wonderful agencies that help refugees like Refugee Family Services and my alma mater, the International Rescue Committee. I am thrilled to be reunited with Ellen Beattie, my dear colleague and to meet leaders of other resettlement agencies.

My bureau at the State Department, the Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration, provides assistance and protection both to refugees overseas, as well as to the fraction of one percent of refugees who are offered the opportunity for resettlement in a third country.

As we look at the plight of the displaced around the world, we know there are significant humanitarian challenges. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) is concerned about 42 million people worldwide. This includes over 15 million people considered refugees because they have fled their countries and crossed borders, and 6 million stateless persons. The rest—the majority—are considered internally displaced persons (IDPs), meaning people forced to flee within their own countries.

Overseas, we work primarily through multilateral organizations, such as the UN refugee agency, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This multilateral approach offers important opportunities for advancing U.S. priorities.

Alone, the United States cannot meet all of the world's humanitarian needs. But our investment in these organizations generates contributions from other donors. And together, we are better placed to meet these urgent needs. In this way, we improve the effectiveness of our response.

So where are we focusing our attention overseas? In the Middle East, we are a leader of humanitarian assistance in response to the crisis in Syria. The United States has already provided over \$365 million to humanitarian assistance efforts to provide protection and assistance in Syria and to those fleeing the violence. I recently returned from my fourth trip to the region and was proud to represent the United States at an international conference in Kuwait.

In Asia, ethnic and sectarian violence in Burma has led Burmese to seek refuge in neighboring countries. Cognizant of Burma's efforts at reform and opening, we have urged Burma to address this situation in accordance with rule of law and in a manner that builds greater tolerance and understanding across ethnic and religious communities.

In Africa, there are now nearly 570,000 Sudanese and South Sudanese refugees; 40 percent of whom have been displaced in the past year and a half.

In Mali, rebel conflict in the north has produced insecurity and instability and resulted in nearly a quarter of a million internally displaced persons and nearly 165,000 refugees in neighboring countries. This crisis also comes at a time of extreme food shortages in the Sahel region. The French have led a force to retake towns in the North. This has actually produced more refugees – let's hope they will be able to go home soon.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, innocent civilians flee unspeakable abuse. Meanwhile, there are almost a million Somali refugees in the Horn of Africa. Millions more remain at risk inside Somalia. Again, here is a place where we hope refugees may be able to go home soon as a new government strives to bring peace and calm and stability to Somalia.

We also know that refugee women and children are particularly in danger of sexual violence, physical abuse and exploitation, and separation from families – among other threats. We aim to ensure efforts to protect women and girls and other vulnerable people around the world are incorporated into the design and operations of assistance programs.

These are only a few of the many challenges that we are called on to address around the world. It is sobering to add up these needs around the world.

We are fortunate to have generous, bipartisan support from Congress, which allows the United States to play a leadership role in responding to these challenges.

We also play a leadership role in terms of offering resettlement to refugees for whom there is no other protection.

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Why do we do this?

Welcoming refugees is a core part of who we are as a nation. It reflects our national values. America was after all founded as a place of refuge.

The Statue of Liberty welcomes the tired, the poor, huddled masses yearning to breathe free. We welcomed to our shores those fleeing hunger, poverty, persecution, and desperation.

Our culture, our history, and our character are defined by their contributions, by the Americans they became. It is how we become who we are.

It is a point of pride to tell you something that Ellen Beattie mentioned earlier -- that through the U.S. Refugee Admissions program, the United States provides resettlement to more refugees than all other countries combined.

Since 1975, more than 3 million have found a new home in the United States.

Last fiscal year, the U.S. welcomed more than 58,000 refugees from around the world. Some came to Georgia. The three largest groups of refugees arriving in Georgia in recent years have been from Bhutan, Burma and Iraq.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions program relies upon our partnerships with non-governmental organization and municipal partners. Together, we make sure that refugees in Georgia are able to get on their feet during their first weeks and months here. From there, they move steadily toward becoming independent, productive members of their new communities.

And I can tell you that refugees directly benefit the Atlanta economy. Refugees find jobs, pay taxes, and start businesses. In places like Clarkston they have created a vibrant international community. Last year in Clarkston at least 550 apartments were rented by refugees. . And refugee resettlement agencies spent more than \$3 million dollars in the metro Atlanta area, another indication that this program not only changes individual lives but creates economic benefits for communities.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program relies upon our partnership with non-governmental organizations and municipal partners.

While we cannot guarantee easy integration, we can make sure refugees are able to get on their feet during their first weeks and months here – and to move steadily toward becoming independent, productive members of their new communities.

The success of our resettlement program depends upon the work of communities and volunteers, here in Atlanta, and in hundreds of other communities around the United States.

By supporting the US refugee admissions program through your tax dollars, by sharing our streets and schools and playgrounds with admitted refugees, by donating clothes, household goods or your time to community organizations, or by hiring a refugee yourself – you are part of this solution.

Your hard work contributes to a place where refugees get the opportunity for a fresh start. Your hard work, and that of your community, can provide them a safe and stable home and reunite families.

As a refugee once told me, they came to the United States for "a new beginning, a new life, and a new hope." Thank you for the part you play in letting them turn their stories of tragedy into ones of triumph.