



Remarks at the Office of Refugee Resettlement, National Consultation 2012

Remarks

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Thank you and good morning. It is an honor to be here and a pleasure to be among so many friends.

As you probably know, the United States resettles more refugees than all other countries combined. But I don't know if you know that this year we estimated that the total number of refugees resettled from abroad and brought to the United States since 1975 totals three million refugees. Pretty good.

We are fortunate to have generous, bipartisan support from Congress, which allows the United States to play this leadership role in refugee resettlement.

Resettlement is undoubtedly a challenging process for most refugees; we cannot guarantee it will be easy, but we can make sure that most 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. Time and time again, we've seen how refugees actually strengthen communities and GIVE BACK.

In traveling around the United States, I've heard from city and municipal leaders, employers, school officials and most importantly, from refugees themselves about their successes and concerns for the program.

While working at the International Rescue Committee (IRC), I visited refugees and resettlement offices in Silver Spring and Baltimore, Maryland, in Charlottesville, Virginia and New York, Miami. There's a lot of Floridians up here in the front, I want you to know, a very shy and retiring group. San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, and Seattle.

Since becoming Assistant Secretary, I've been able to see how other organizations help refugees, and have been deeply impressed. I've visited affiliates of HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society; USCCB, U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops. I know Ambassador Young is here today. And U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants in Cleveland, Pittsburgh – there's the Pittsburgh contingent – and Portland. And now that I'm Assistant Secretary, I've actually had to pay closer attention to what people in these affiliate offices are saying to me! And be polite and listen, instead of the usual way I treat my colleagues.

Over the years, I have witnessed how refugees in America were able to move beyond tragedy in their adopted country and restart their lives and help their families thrive.

And I've been fortunate to work for or alongside some of America's most accomplished refugees, including Madeleine Albright, Alejandro Mayorkas and Eskinder Negash.

I do want to quickly tick off some of the recent improvements made in the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration to the resettlement program.

· In 2010, under my predecessor Eric Schwartz, and I think most of you know this by now, we doubled the amount of money we provide to help with the initial reception and placement of refugees.

· We've given partner agencies a guaranteed minimum amount of funding – what we call it floor funding – so that resettlement agencies can manage their workforce and provide quality reception and placement services to arriving refugees – even if a lower than expected number of refugees are admitted or if there are unavoidable delays in arrivals.

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- We ensured that more medical and case information is provided in advance of a refugee's arrival.
- Our Admissions office co-hosts quarterly placement meetings with ORR, and I believe the Deputy Secretary mentioned this morning, one of which will take place in this consultation.
- We've seen changes made to strengthen the security check process for refugees. And we've subsequently seen refinements to these changes in order to ensure the pipeline of bona fide refugees continues to flow to this country. The numbers of refugees coming to this country are climbing once again.
- At the local level, we've championed more consultation. We want to make sure that we listen to local communities that welcome refugees and provide the services needed for successful resettlement.

Looking ahead, we expect to have higher arrivals in the coming year since we have improved our security clearance systems. We are working with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, on a large-scale resettlement program for refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, some of whom may begin to arrive at the end of fiscal year 2013

We will continue to take Department outreach to U.S. communities and stakeholders. We'd like to involve more employers, like Tysons Foods and National Safety Apparel of Cleveland and El Dorado Furniture in Miami – founded by a refugee from Cuba. They want to hire refugees and see refugees as a strong asset in their workforces.

You should know that we've worked not just to bring more refugees to the United States, but also to convince and help other countries to offer safe haven to refugees. Twenty-five countries now resettle refugees, and we are working with both Uruguay and Bulgaria to provide technical advice to strengthen their new resettlement programs.

Of course, these are just some of the things going on in the Admissions part of the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. As the Assistant Secretary, I am also very involved in other programs to protect and aid refugees. Crises in Syria, the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, as our keynote speaker next, the Sudans, all these require my attention and the attention of my colleagues.

In Southeast Asia, there are a number of PRM issues related to developments in Burma. Yesterday I was in a remarkable small meeting with a Burmese opposition leader you may have heard of Aung San Suu Kyi. The thought that she could come to the United States, and sit down, and we could talk and my Undersecretary Maria Otero could speak to her about the situation Burmese refugees face on the Thai-Burmese border. I just never thought that day could come. And so I was very, very happy. It's a hopeful sign for the future of Burma.

Final decisions about how to allocate our budget fall to me, and keeping an eye on our budget is very important during a season here in Washington of continuing resolutions and unknowable election outcomes.

I should also mention that I do take the "P" and "M" parts of PRM seriously – so have devoted part of my time to reproductive health (or population) issues and learning about the U.S. government's role in international migration policies.

In closing, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program gives refugees the opportunity to turn their stories of tragedy into ones of triumph. Here they can experience "a new beginning, a new life, and a new hope."

You are those who make all that happen. I know how hard you work and what a difference you make. I share your dreams that America will remain a sanctuary for those fleeing persecution and violence. So let me end these brief remarks with four words, "Thank You Very Much."

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