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Rebuilding and Enhancing U.S. Refugee Resettlement Programs

PRESS STATEMENT

ANTONY J. BLINKEN, SECRETARY OF STATE

FEBRUARY 4, 2021

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President Biden's Executive Order sends a message loud and clear: refugees are welcome in the United States of America. Today, the United States is recommitting to treating all individuals applying for U.S. refugee programs with dignity and respect, and free from discrimination. I look forward to implementing the Executive Order with the State Department's team of dedicated professionals and with our partners at other departments and agencies, as together we restore the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and other humanitarian programs for generations to come.

Over the coming months and years, we will rebuild and expand the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and other humanitarian programs so they reflect our values as a nation and are commensurate with global need, consistent with our domestic laws and international obligations, as well as our fundamental responsibility for the safety and security of the American people.

AILA Doc. No. 21020530. (Posted 2/5/21)

This Order will spur innovation and draw on technological expertise to enhance the effectiveness of security vetting and fraud detection, streamline application processing, and strengthen data-

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driven decision-making. The concrete steps in the Order will also improve senior-level engagement and coordination, and fill significant staffing gaps in essential positions responsible for the refugee admissions process and other humanitarian programs. The United States will address processing backlogs and pursue security vetting processes that are effective, fair, and efficient, consistent with the humanitarian goals of our programs as well as the national security and foreign policy interests of the United States.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program would not be where it is today if not for the millions of Americans in local communities across the country who have so generously welcomed refugees from around the world. Going forward, a key part of our collective effort will be the creation of broader linkages with community and private sponsorship programs that will strengthen the program. This approach will complement the traditional system of working with our network of domestic resettlement agencies to welcome and place new refugees. The State Department will continue its longstanding track record of meeting, consulting, and communicating regularly with state and local authorities to plan and coordinate refugee resettlement.

Nor would the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program be where it is today without sustained bipartisan support from Congress, over decades. President Biden's Order formally revokes executive actions that defied the spirit of the 1980 Refugee Act with restrictions that undermined the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

This Order is only the first step in revitalizing the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and improving upon other humanitarian programs, even as we cope with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. President Biden has made clear his intention to significantly increase refugee resettlement over the next four years and we are committed to scaling back up as expeditiously as possible. With these new improvements to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, I am eager to consult with Congress on the President's plan to increase the Fiscal Year 2021 target significantly to address the dire refugee situation, and to start the process of increasing the capacity of the program to allow for higher annual refugee admissions targets in future Fiscal Years. I share the President's ambitious vision for restoring these critical elements of U.S. leadership in humanitarian affairs globally at a time when the world's most vulnerable people need us the most.

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