

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES ON AMERICA'S COMMITMENT TO REFUGEES

The world today is gripped by the worst refugee crisis since World War II. Some sixty million people - half of them children - have fled persecution and violence, the highest number ever recorded. From Syria to Burma to Eritrea, desperate people are seeking freedom from brutal regimes, lawless militias, and genocidal terrorist groups. Thousands have died trying to find safety and millions are struggling to survive.

The United States has long been a refuge for those seeking safety and freedom, and for a simple reason: Americans believe their compassion and openness are sources not of weakness but strength. The demonstration of these qualities accords with the core ideals on which our nation was founded, and on which our greatness rests. For more than two centuries, the idea of America has pulled toward our shores those seeking liberty, and it has ensured that they arrive in the open arms of our citizens. That is why the Statue of Liberty welcomes the world's "huddled masses yearning to breathe free," and why President Reagan stressed the United States as "a magnet for all who must have freedom, for all the pilgrims from all the lost places who are hurtling through the darkness."

Today there are many hurtling through that darkness.

Yet despite America's role as the global leader in resettling refugees, many voices call for closed doors rather than open arms. To give in to such impulses would represent a mistake of historic proportions. Now is the time for the United States to reaffirm its commitment to protecting refugees.

Americans are rightly concerned not only for the security of refugees but their own as well. For this reason, refugees are vetted more thoroughly than any other category of traveler seeking to arrive in the United States. The security process includes screenings by national and international intelligence agencies, fingerprint and other biometric data checks against terrorist and criminal databases, and multiple rounds of interviews.

As we ensure the safety of our own citizens, we should recognize that refugees serve as a source of national renewal. Fleeing horrors today, they will tomorrow emerge as patriotic citizens who give back to the country that welcomed them in their time of desperation. And accepting refugees demonstrates, at a time when it is so sorely needed, that America leads the world in marching toward a better future.

We believe:

- The United States should provide refuge to those fleeing violence and persecution, consistent with our nation's founding ideals.
- Accepting refugees, and encouraging other countries to do so, advances U.S. interests by supporting the stability of our allies struggling to host large numbers on their own.
- Welcoming refugees, regardless of their religion or race, exposes the falseness of terrorist propaganda and counters the warped vision of extremists.
- The United States must not abandon those targeted by terrorists because they worked with American troops and diplomats in support of our missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Religious bans and tests are un-American and have no place in our immigration and refugee policies.
- American leadership is essential in addressing the global refugee crisis.

Sincerely,

(Names in alphabetical order)

Madeleine K. Albright
Former Secretary of State

William J. Burns
Former Deputy Secretary of State

Michael Chertoff
Former Secretary of Homeland Security

Derek Chollet
Former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

Henry Cisneros
Former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development

William S. Cohen
Former Secretary of Defense and U.S. Senator

Ryan C. Crocker
Former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Kuwait, and Lebanon

Tom Daschle
Former U.S. Senator

Michele A. Flournoy
Former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

Richard Fontaine
President, Center for a New American Security

Robert S. Ford
Former Ambassador to Syria and Algeria

Stephen J. Hadley
Former National Security Advisor to President George W. Bush

Chuck Hagel
Former Secretary of Defense and U.S. Senator

General Michael V. Hayden, U.S. Air Force, (Ret.)
Former Director, Central Intelligence Agency

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William J. Perry
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Former Assistance Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor and U.S. Ambassador to Czech Republic

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Former Commander, U.S. Southern Command

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Former Homeland Security Advisor to President George W. Bush

Paul D. Wolfowitz
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