

Statement in Support of U.S. Commitment to Refugees

In his final Presidential address to the American people, Ronald Reagan described the United States as a “shining city on a hill” that is “still a beacon, still a magnet for all who must have freedom, for all the pilgrims from all the lost places who are hurtling through the darkness, toward home.” Thirty three years ago, the Refugee Act of 1980, which passed Congress with strong bi-partisan support, enshrined into domestic law America’s commitment to protect the persecuted.

The 2012 Republican National Platform reaffirmed our belief that American exceptionalism is demonstrated in our commitment to freedom and human dignity. Our platform echoed President Reagan’s words by stating, “To those who stand in the darkness of tyranny, America has always been a beacon of hope, and so it must remain. That is why we strongly support the work of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, established by Congressional Republicans to advance the rights of persecuted peoples everywhere.”

The United States has granted asylum and provided resettlement to thousands of refugees who have fled political, religious, ethnic, racial and other persecution. These refugees have come from Burma, China, Colombia, Cuba, Liberia, Iran, Iraq, Russia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Viet Nam and other places where people have been persecuted for who they are or what they believe. In some cases, they are people who stood with America, against tyranny, even when it was dangerous or unpopular in their own country.

With courage, determination and industriousness, these refugees and their families have been able to rebuild their lives in safety and freedom in the United States. They have enriched their communities and the nation by creating and building new technologies and businesses, supporting our religious and community institutions, enriching our political dialogue, and diversifying our neighborhoods.

It should be obvious to all that our immigration system is in dire need of an overhaul. We must have fair and enforceable immigration laws that reflect our national interest and that uphold core American values and our history as a country committed to humane treatment and dignity of the individual. Our policies toward refugees are at the heart of our American values and, as the 2010 Council on Foreign Relations Independent Task Force on Immigration Policy stressed, the U.S. commitment to protect refugees from persecution “is enshrined in international treaties and domestic U.S. laws that set the standard for the rest of the world; when American standards erode, refugees face greater risks everywhere.”

As Congress and the President consider reform of our immigration laws and policy, they have the opportunity to remove or reform barriers and challenges that are preventing legitimate refugees from receiving this country’s protection. Congress should eliminate unjust barriers that deny or delay U.S. protection to legitimate refugees, support a fair and timely decision-making process for those seeking refuge, and implement the recommendations of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. In doing so, they would eliminate unnecessary restrictions on liberty that are inconsistent with this country’s values.

As Republicans, we stand with President Reagan and our Party's platform, and especially with those oppressed people who yearn to live in freedom.

The Honorable Carlos Gutierrez

Governor Sam Brownback

Dr. Paula Dobriansky

Senator Mel Martinez

Suhail A. Khan

Governor Jeb Bush

The Honorable Tom Ridge

Grover Norquist

The Honorable Alberto Mora

The Honorable Jim Ziglar