

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

September 13, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
U.S. Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Elaine Duke
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Nebraska Avenue Complex
3801 Nebraska Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Tom Price
Secretary of Health and Human Services
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Tillerson, Acting Secretary Duke, and Secretary Price:

Press reports have indicated that President Trump is considering lowering the number of refugees the United States will accept in the upcoming fiscal year to an abysmally low 50,000. We write to remind you that prior to any final presidential decision on the number of refugees admitted, the law requires the Administration engage in a meaningful consultation involving Senate and House Judiciary Committee leaders and Cabinet-level officials. Existing law is also clear that the consultation must occur before the start of each fiscal year.

To date, we have not received a proposed refugee admissions plan for fiscal year 2018 or received any cooperation from your agencies in scheduling the refugee consultation. We request that the proposed refugee admissions report be transmitted to Congress promptly and that we immediately begin the process of scheduling the consultation.

As you know, the U.S. has a long history of welcoming the most vulnerable refugees from among all those who have been displaced due to war, conflict, or persecution. Consistent with its role as a humanitarian leader, our country has safely and successfully resettled millions of refugees from across the world over several decades with strong bipartisan support. For example, during each year of the Administration of Republican President George H.W. Bush, the United States accepted over 100,000 refugees. The refugees we have admitted have greatly enriched our country and contributed to our communities in a number of important ways.

Former refugees like Albert Einstein, Madeleine Albright, and Sergey Brin have profoundly influenced American history, society, and culture. Millions of other refugees may not have garnered as much attention but have also made valuable contributions to our nation.

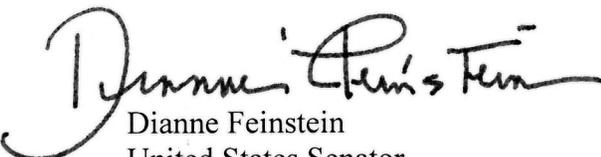
The protection of the most vulnerable refugees in the world should not be politicized. The generous admission of refugees by the American government has always been the right thing to do. American leadership could not be more critical. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were 65.6 million people displaced at the end of 2016. This is a record high. Among this displaced population are 22.5 million refugees worldwide, the highest number since World War II. Children make up nearly half of these refugees. Several terrible conflicts and crises, including in Syria, sub-Saharan Africa, Burundi, Iraq, Eritrea, Afghanistan, and Nigeria, are the source of a significant number of these refugees. In our hemisphere, the political crisis in Venezuela and continued extreme violence in Central America have fueled protection needs.

Given the magnitude of these crises, our nation must be strong and we must not retreat from our generous humanitarian traditions. We urge the Administration to establish a robust refugee admissions target for Fiscal Year 2018, in line with the recommendation of refugee resettlement agency partners.

Even after the horrifying events of September 11th, following a temporary suspension and review of the refugee program, rather than retreat from our values, the U.S. set a ceiling of 70,000 refugees. Despite confronting one of the most tragic events in modern American history, our country chose to reinforce its reputation as a beacon of hope and safety for the persecuted. In the face of today's urgent global humanitarian crisis, we must continue to honor that history. Current circumstances underscore the need for meaningful consultation to assess humanitarian crises around the world and the role of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, and to discuss how the Administration plans to provide sufficient funding and support for the admission of refugees in the upcoming fiscal year. Therefore, in accordance with the law, we ask you to initiate appropriate consultation with the House and Senate Judiciary Committees as soon as possible.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator


Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator