



Responsibility Sharing for Refugees:

Now is the time to increase, not decrease, refugee resettlement worldwide

In recent years, the world has seen a rise in the number of people forcibly displaced, primarily due to persecution, conflict, violence and terrorism. There are currently over 21 million refugees worldwide, the vast majority hosted in low and middle income countries neighbouring conflict areas. Sadly, we have also witnessed the steady deterioration of respect for humanitarian and human rights laws and policies. This has translated into the further worsening of living conditions of displaced populations: they face the increasingly restrictive policies of many countries in which they seek refuge. This poor state of the global climate towards refugees and asylum seekers is reflected in the rising number of deaths affecting those forced to move irregularly over rugged terrain and across the Mediterranean Sea, the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean and other areas.

The recent decisions taken by the Government of the United States represent the latest example of this negative trend. The Executive Order issued on 27 January 2017 temporarily banning the entry of refugees, migrants and citizens of seven predominantly Muslim countries stands contrary to the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in contradiction to other international instruments. In particular, it stands contrary to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees which calls on states to apply its provisions “without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin” and enshrines the principle of *non-refoulement*. This new U.S. policy directly affects thousands of vulnerable refugees who have been anxiously waiting for an opportunity to start a new life, in safety and dignity. They now find themselves bereft of the only hope they have had, the only silver lining in the dark conditions of despair they otherwise face. Security concerns of all nations are valid, however, there are means to ensure the safety and security of ones’ citizens without having to undermine the hope of millions. Countries who provide refugee resettlement, including the U.S., are already working hard to share best practices when it comes to strengthening the integrity of their screening systems.

ICVA (the International Council of Voluntary Agencies) strongly urges the Government of the United States to quickly revert to its tradition of providing protection to the world’s most vulnerable and show leadership in demonstrating compassion for fellow human beings. We also call on all other States to adhere to their humanitarian and human rights commitments.

This episode also demonstrates that, merely months after the adoption of the New York Declaration at the 19 September Summit for Refugees and Migrants, which reaffirmed the principle of ‘responsibility sharing’, States must ensure global resettlement needs are met by a broader constituency. Over the past few days, a few States have indicated a willingness to intensify their contributions to and support for international refugee protection. We hope that those initial positive reactions signal a turning point, towards a virtuous circle for improved treatment of refugees and respect for their rights. Through the New York Declaration, States also committed to combating xenophobia, racism and discrimination. The ongoing worldwide mobilization of people – standing up for refugees – is also indicative of the popular support for humanitarian principles over discriminatory practices.

NGOs working with and for refugees throughout the world remain committed to ensure that refugees, forced migrants and other vulnerable groups have a chance to seek protection and begin new lives in the United States and elsewhere, safe from persecution, discrimination, xenophobia and racism.

We remain committed to a world where the rights of all people are respected and we shall work together to ensure that the world is safer, kinder and humane.