



WRITTEN TESTIMONY

OF

LAWRENCE BARTLETT

Director, Office of Refugee Admissions

BUREAU OF POPULATION, REFUGEES, AND MIGRATION

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

FOR A HEARING ON

**“REFUGEE ADMISSIONS
FISCAL YEAR 2016”**

BEFORE

THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION & THE NATIONAL INTEREST

OCTOBER 1, 2015

2:00 P.M.

226 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC

Testimony of Director of Office of Refugee Admissions Lawrence Bartlett

Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Schumer, and distinguished Senators, thank you for holding this hearing and bringing attention to the importance of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. Thank you also for the opportunity to appear before your Subcommittee with my colleagues from the Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services and to update you on the measures we have taken to protect refugees around the world and provide new homes to some of the most vulnerable. My part of this testimony will address the Department of State's leadership of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

Description of the Need

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) latest statistics, there are nearly 20 million refugees in the world. The vast majority of these refugees will receive support in the country to which they fled until they can voluntarily and safely return home. The United States contributes to the programs of UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Organization for Migration, and other international and non-governmental organizations that provide protection and assistance to refugees until they can return home. In 2014, some 126,800 refugees voluntarily repatriated to their country of origin – the lowest recorded number since 1983. A small number of refugees may be allowed to become citizens in the country to which they fled, and an even smaller number -- primarily those who are the most vulnerable -- will be resettled in a third country. While UNHCR reports that fewer than 1% of all refugees are eventually resettled in third countries, the United States welcomes over half of these refugees.

The crisis in Syria is a dramatic illustration of the humanitarian situation refugees face. Syrians are now the largest refugee population in the world, numbering over four million. Another 7.6 million have fled their homes but are trying to survive inside Syria in other areas. The Government of Turkey estimates that it now hosts almost two million Syrians. Over one million Syrian refugees are living in Lebanon. Jordan hosts over 600,000 Syrians and has established the largest refugee camp in the Middle East to provide temporary protection for tens of thousands. Egypt and Iraq have opened their borders to almost 400,000 Syrians and are providing assistance and protection.

In the Syrian context, the impact on hosting communities in countries of first asylum is overwhelming. Schools have moved to double-shifts to accommodate Syrian children. There are water shortages in Jordan and Lebanon. The United States has provided over USD 4.5 billion in humanitarian assistance since the start of the Syrian crisis, including essential needs like food, shelter, health care and education. Beyond the clear humanitarian case for resettlement, our resettlement of Syrian refugees helps to promote regional stability.

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

Since 1975, Americans have welcomed over three million refugees from all over the world. Refugees have built new lives in communities in all 50 states. The United States is proud of its history of welcoming immigrants and refugees. As Secretary Kerry said recently, “All of us in positions of responsibility, nations with power and capacity and opportunity, have an obligation to come together and restore hope.” As such, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) reflects the United States’ highest values and aspirations of compassion, generosity and leadership.

During its history, the USRAP has responded to changing circumstances. The end of the Cold War dramatically altered the context in which the USRAP operated. The program shifted its focus away from large groups concentrated in a few locations (primarily refugees from Vietnam and the former Soviet Union) and began to admit refugees representing over 50 nationalities per year. In FY 2015 we admitted refugees of 67 nationalities. Resettlement opportunities are focused on refugees who have immediate needs for durable and lasting solutions.

While maintaining the United States’ leadership role in humanitarian protection, an integral part of this mission is to ensure that refugee resettlement opportunities go only to those who are eligible for such protection and who are not known to present a risk to the safety and security of our country. Accordingly, the USRAP is committed to deterring and detecting fraud among those seeking to resettle in the United States and applicants to the USRAP are subject to more intensive screening than any other type of traveler to the U.S. to protect against threats to our national security. The Department of State collaborates with the Department of Homeland Security on this, and also collaborates closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to protect the health of U.S. - bound refugees and the U.S. public.

Refugees resettled in the United States enrich our nation. The USRAP is premised on the idea that refugees should become economically self-sufficient as quickly as possible. The Department of State works domestically with agencies participating in the Reception and Placement program to ensure that refugees receive services in the first thirty to ninety days after arrival in accordance with established standards. During and after the initial resettlement period, the Office of Refugee Resettlement at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS/ORR) provides leadership, technical assistance, and funding to states, the District of Columbia, and nonprofit organizations to help refugees become self-sufficient and integrated into U.S. society.

To better prepare refugees for arrival in the United States, the USRAP provides several days of overseas cultural orientation where possible. To strengthen the integration of refugees and immigrants and ensure that all community members have the tools and opportunities to fully contribute to the nation, the White House Task Force on New Americans prepared a plan to better integrate refugees and immigrants into American communities. Under this plan, federal agencies are taking actions such as extending competitive grant funding for citizenship preparation programs in communities across the country, and providing information and tools to employers about increasing access to ESL courses, education services, and other training programs for immigrant and refugee workers.

Upon arrival, refugees are immediately eligible for employment, and after one year are required to apply for adjustment of status to that of lawful permanent resident. Five years after admission, a refugee who has been granted lawful permanent resident status is eligible to apply for citizenship. The vast majority of refugees go on to lead productive lives, receive an education and work hard. Some serve in the U.S. military and undertake other forms of service for their communities and our country.

Scale and Populations

The scale of the USRAP has been adjusted since 1975 in response to refugee needs. At its highest level in 1980, more than 200,000 refugees were admitted to the United States in response to large displacements from Southeast Asia, Cuba, and those fleeing religious persecution from the Soviet Union. After 9/11, arrivals fell dramatically until additional security protocols could be implemented for all U.S. immigration programs. For the past three fiscal years the USRAP has met its target for refugee arrivals, an unprecedented achievement in the program's history. In FY 2016 the program is intended to grow to serve 85,000 refugees, at least 10,000 of whom will be Syrians, in order to respond to the increased needs in the Middle East.

We are planning for 25,000 African refugee arrivals in FY 2016. Two countries of origin – Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – will account for the vast majority of refugee admissions from Africa, followed by refugees from Eritrea, Sudan and Ethiopia. We expect to admit up to 13,000 refugees from East Asia. These will include up to 6,000 members of Burmese ethnic minorities (mostly Karen and Karenni) living in camps along the Thai-Burma border, some 6,000 Burmese (of various ethnic minorities) in Malaysia, and a small number of urban refugees of various nationalities in the region.

The allocation for refugees from the Near East and South Asia for FY 2016 is 34,000, including vulnerable Iraqis, Bhutanese, Iranians, Syrians, Pakistanis, and Afghans. Syrian refugees will make up at least 10,000 of this regional allocation. Iraqis who worked for the U.S. military, government, or U.S.-based media organization or NGO will be another important population resettled from this region. We also expect individual UNHCR referrals of members of various religious and ethnic minority groups in the region.

The FY 2016 allocation for refugees from Europe and Central Asia is 4,000 individuals. The overwhelming majority of these are expected to be members of religious minorities from Russia and Eurasia processed under the Lautenberg Amendment. While Jews comprised an average of 85% of the applicant pool in the early nineties, Evangelical Christians now make up over 90% of the applicant pool. Applications for the Lautenberg program have increased substantially since the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine.

The 3,000 allocation for Latin America and the Caribbean for FY 2016 comprises Cuban refugees eligible for the in-country program; Central American minors eligible for the in-country program; UNHCR-referred Colombians; as well as a small number of family reunification cases. We are holding 6,000 unallocated admissions numbers to be used, if needed, for additional

refugee admissions from any region. The unallocated numbers would only be used following notification to Congress.

Services and Support at the Community Level

The USRAP enjoys substantial support from state and local governments as well as community members. The program resettles refugees to 48 states, 173 cities and towns, and 304 sites. As a public-private partnership, it requires the support of American non-governmental organizations, charities, faith-based groups and thousands of volunteers and supporters of the program in hundreds of communities across the country. Recently the Department of State has received an outpouring of interest from individuals, churches, and community organizations wishing to help with Syrian refugee resettlement.

Benefits and services for refugees include the Reception and Placement grant provided by the State Department and time-limited assistance programs (up to eight months from arrival) and social service programs (up to five years) funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS/ORR). These programs help refugees find employment, become economically self-sufficient, and integrate into American society. The Administration will continue to explore ways of sustaining a strong federal-state-community partnership and ensuring that refugees can integrate successfully.

Conclusion

In closing, let me thank you again for holding this hearing. While starting life anew in the United States may be daunting, it also offers hope and unparalleled opportunity. It is a chance not only to escape from violence and persecution but to start again. The assistance the American people provide helps newcomers find their footing and become a part of their new communities. Refugees are not the only ones who benefit; they add to America's vitality and diversity and make substantial contributions to our economic and cultural life. With the continued support of Congress and the American people, refugee resettlement will remain a proud American tradition for many years to come.

Thank you.