

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee,
On the Hearing on the Administration's FY 2016 Refugee Resettlement Program,
Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest
October 1, 2015**

The United Nations estimates that in 2014, there were almost 60 million refugees and internally displaced people around the globe. Not since World War II has the world faced such a refugee crisis. It is therefore entirely appropriate that we are turning our attention to our own capacity to assist and resettle refugees.

As a nation of immigrants, the United States has long benefitted from the flow of new arrivals, including people who have fled violence and war. In my home state of Vermont, I have seen how the admission of these refugees and asylum seekers – about 6,700 since 1989 – has revitalized and enriched our communities, resulting in the creation of new businesses, safer neighborhoods, and stronger schools. As they become small business owners, nurses, and soccer coaches, these new neighbors contribute to the wellbeing and vibrancy of our communities, and their culture enriches ours. Refugee resettlement is a challenging undertaking, but the benefits to our communities and our country can be so rewarding. In fact, a recent study has found that welcoming refugees has a positive, or at least a neutral, effect on a host community's economy and wages.

After September 11, 2001, we understandably slowed our efforts to resettle refugees while we improved our immigration processes and implemented tougher screening measures. Since then, we have been slowly returning to our historic high refugee admission numbers, which in some years involved the successful resettlement of more than 100,000 individuals.

The current crisis demands we do more -- now. We have a moral obligation to act and it is time that we again step forward and lead by example. As Pope Francis said on his historic visit to the United States last week, "We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation. To respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal."

Our response to this global refugee crisis must be humane, whether we are responding to those fleeing uncontrolled gang violence in Central America or those fleeing civil war in Syria. I have been awed by the response of Syria's neighbors, like tiny Lebanon, which has now taken in more than one million refugees. In contrast, we have done everything to avoid taking refugees on our own border. We have tried to seal Mexico's southern border, effectively locking in mothers and children fleeing extreme violence. We have built a new detention facility, run by the private prison company Corrections Corporation of American, to lock up those who make it this far – at a cost of more than \$800,000 a day. The Pope was right to call on us to do better. We must treat these vulnerable families with the same compassion with which we want to be treated.

The United States has learned much in the 14 years since 9/11. We must apply that knowledge. We can and must be careful, but we can be more efficient. Our refugee resettlement program, including our community and faith-based partners, is a program of which we should be proud. Let us use that program to rise to the challenge before us and increase our refugee admission numbers. The time is now.

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