

September 17, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House

Senator Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
U.S. Senate

Senator Harry Reid
Senate Minority Leader
U.S. Senate

Representative John Boehner
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives

Representative Nancy Pelosi
House Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Mr. President, Senator McConnell, Senator Reid, Representative Boehner and Representative Pelosi:

As former national security, international humanitarian and human rights appointees of both Democratic and Republican administrations, we write to strongly urge greater U.S. leadership in the effort to provide a resolution to the conflict in Syria, and to meet the humanitarian needs of millions of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons.

We appreciate that the United States has been the largest provider of humanitarian assistance to Syrians, but current efforts are not adequate. Humanitarian aid is falling short in the face of unspeakable suffering, and putting enormous pressure on governments in the region that are hosting refugees. In addition, as the United States encourages governments in Europe and the Middle East to treat refugees humanely, we must demonstrate a willingness to do more.

First, we urge that you announce support for a refugee admissions goal of 100,000 Syrian refugees on an extraordinary basis, over and above the current worldwide refugee ceiling of 70,000. With some four million Syrian refugees in neighboring countries and hundreds of thousands of Syrian asylum-seekers in Europe, this would be a responsible exercise in burden-sharing that would help to alleviate the suffering of vulnerable refugees most in need of resettlement. Moreover, this kind of leadership is in our nation's best traditions and would send a powerful signal to governments in Europe and the Middle East about their obligations to do more.

Second, we hope that the Administration and Congress will work together to make more resources available, on an exceptional basis, to meet this challenge. We urge the additional allocation of up to two billion dollars to support the admission and resettlement of Syrians and to provide more support for underfunded international appeals. And we encourage the Administration to bring governments together in an international effort to meet funding shortfalls.

Finally, we urge you to take extraordinary measures, as were taken for refugees from Vietnam, Northern Iraq and Kosovo, to provide expedited yet secure processing measures to ensure that this is a rescue program. We do not underestimate the challenges of a more robust U.S. response, but as officials who are familiar with U.S. government capacities – in fact, several of us participated in prior emergency rescue and resettlement operations – we are confident the United States has the capacity to implement this recommendation. History has demonstrated that these earlier rescue efforts strengthened not only the fabric of our society, but also our leadership role in the world.

For these reasons, we urge that you take prompt action on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

(Names in alphabetical order)

Morton I. Abramowitz
Former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey and Thailand
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research

Gordon Adams
Former Associate Director for National Security and International Affairs,
Office of Management and Budget

J. Brian Atwood
Former Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development
Former Undersecretary of State for Management

Derek Chollet
Former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

Roberta Cohen
Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights

Lorne Craner
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
Former Member, National Security Council Staff

Ryan Crocker
Former U.S. Ambassador to Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Kuwait and Lebanon

Paula Dobriansky
Former Undersecretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs

Michele Flournoy
Former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

Richard Fontaine
Former Member, National Security Council staff

Robert Ford
Former U.S. Ambassador to Syria and to Algeria

Robert P. George
Former Commissioner, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

Morton Halperin
Former Director of Policy Planning, U.S. Department of State
Former NSC Senior Director for Democracy
Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense

L. Craig Johnstone
Former Director for Resources, Plans and Policy, Department of State
Former U.S. Ambassador to Algeria

Harold Hongju Koh
Former State Department Legal Advisor
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

David J. Kramer
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

Mark P. Lagon
Former Ambassador-at-Large to Combat Trafficking in Persons

Stephen Rickard
Former Senior Advisor for South Asian Affairs, Department of State

Kori Schake
Former Deputy Director for Policy Planning, Department of State
Former NSC Director for Defense Strategy and Requirements

Eric P. Schwartz
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration
Former NSC Senior Director for Multilateral and Humanitarian Affairs

Kristen Silverberg
Former Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs
Former U.S. Ambassador to the European Union

Paul Wolfowitz
Former Deputy Secretary of Defense
Former U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia