

DAVID N. CICILLINE
1ST DISTRICT, RHODE ISLAND

2244 RAYBURN BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
(202) 225-4911
(202) 225-3290 (FAX)

1070 MAIN STREET, SUITE 300
PAWTUCKET, RI 02860
(401) 729-5600
(401) 729-5608 (FAX)



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COURTS,
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY, AND THE INTERNET
SUBCOMMITTEE ON REGULATORY REFORM,
COMMERCIAL AND ANTITRUST LAW
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MIDDLE EAST
AND NORTH AFRICA
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH,
GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS, AND
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

September 11, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President

We are writing because we are concerned about the dire circumstances of the increasing number of refugees fleeing the chaos in the Middle East. This month the image of 3-year old Aylan Kurdi's body shocked the conscience of people around the world. Aylan, his 5-year-old brother Galip, and their mother Rehan all perished during an attempted crossing to Europe. The image of Aylan's body washed up on shore has made its way across the internet and throughout the media, calling attention to the increasingly dire situation for refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria and throughout the region. Journeys like this are not new. Refugees have historically endured countless hurdles to reach places of safety, but what has changed is the sheer magnitude of the crisis.

There are currently more refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced persons – nearly 60 million – than at any time since World War II. Indeed, the plight of refugees from around the globe is garnering significant media attention with stories and poignant images of dangerous journeys, tragic deaths, unwelcoming refugee policies, and the particular challenges faced by women and children fleeing violence.

The number of Syrian refugees that the United States has resettled since the start of the conflict – approximately 1,500 – is insufficient in light of the current crisis. We appreciate the recent announcement that your Administration plans to increase the refugee quota for 2016 and we strongly feel that such an increase must be bold, and take into account the enormity of the current crisis.

More than four million Syrian refugees have been forced to flee the country, and the conflict shows no sign of abating. Of these refugees, 76% - over 3 million – are women and children. Lebanon has absorbed more than a million refugees, increasing their population by a quarter; Turkey has taken in more than 2 million; Jordan half a million. The neighbors of Syria are maxed out, and the thousands of refugees risking death by taking treacherous journeys by land or water have demonstrated the desperation felt by the people who have been left with virtually nothing and see no lifelines.

We agree with Refugee Council USA's recent recommendation that the United States resettle a minimum of 200,000 refugees by the end of 2016, including 100,000 Syrian refugees. RCUSA is a coalition of 20 of the country's premiere refugee protection organizations. Due to the expanding scope of the crisis, this recommendation is an increase over the refugee community's previous recommendation that the U.S. take 65,000 additional refugees from Syria.

The U.S. has historically taken the largest number of refugees in the world; last year we took almost 70% of all refugees globally. Other countries look to the United States to lead when it comes to refugee resettlement, and so it is absolutely critical that the U.S. lead by example. The U.S. should use its considerable global influence to encourage other nations, including within the European Union, to accept additional refugees and increase the resources available to support them.

There are those who will oppose taking in additional refugees. They will say it is a security risk, or will hurt our economy. This criticism ignores the fact that the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program subjects applicants to more thorough security vetting than any other traveler or immigrant to the United States. We recognize the importance of security checks and will continue to support your Administration's strong background checks for all refugees. This criticism also ignores the reality that refugee populations, such as the Vietnamese and those from the former Soviet Union, have prospered and brought economic growth and innovation to our country.

We pledge that we will do everything we can to ensure that, if steps are taken to accommodate additional refugees, there will be adequate additional resources for U.S. resettlement agencies, and for security checks, in order to meet the increased demand. The United States is home to 320 million people. Allowing an additional 130,000 refugees into our country would make up less than a quarter of one percent of our population. Lebanon's population by contrast has grown 25% with the influx of refugees in its borders. How can we tell little Aylan's family that we simply can't manage to welcome them, that it would be too dangerous, or take away jobs? Surely we can do better.

The United States has a long history of helping the world's most vulnerable people, but we have also faltered when faced with difficult decisions to allow refugees into the country. Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past. It is our moral duty, as a nation founded on the principles of equality and freedom, to do what we can to assist our brethren who are in desperate turmoil, and are searching for the slightest gesture of goodwill. As Americans and Members of Congress, we believe it is our duty to do the right thing and offer protection to those fleeing violence and turmoil in the Middle East.

Thank you for your consideration.

Rep. David N. Cicilline (RI-1)
Rep. Karen Bass (CA-37)
Rep. Don Beyer (VA-8)
Rep. Earl Blumenauer (OR-3)
Rep. Madeleine Bordallo (Guam)
Rep. Lois Capps (CA-24)
Rep. Judy Chu (CA-32)
Rep. Yvette Clarke (NY-9)
Rep. Gerry Connolly (VA-11)
Rep. John Conyers (MI-13)
Rep. Joe Crowley (NY-14)
Rep. Susan Davis (CA-53)
Rep. Rosa DeLauro (CT-3)
Rep. Mark DeSaulnier (CA-11)
Rep. Ted Deutch (FL-21)
Rep. Debbie Dingell (MI-12)
Rep. Lloyd Doggett (TX-35)
Rep. Tammy Duckworth (IL-8)
Rep. Donna Edwards (MD-4)
Rep. Keith Ellison (MN-5)
Rep. Eliot Engel (NY-16)
Rep. Anna Eshoo (CA-18)
Rep. Elizabeth Esty (CT-5)
Rep. Sam Farr (CA-20)
Rep. Chaka Fattah (PA-2)
Rep. Lois Frankel (FL-22)
Rep. Ruben Gallego (AZ-7)
Rep. Alan Grayson (FL-9)
Rep. Raul Grijalva (AZ-3)
Rep. Luis Guterierrez (IL-4)
Rep. Janice Hahn (CA-44)
Rep. Alcee Hastings (FL-20)
Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC)
Rep. Mike Honda (CA-17)
Rep. Steve Israel (NY-3)
Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (TX-18)
Rep. Marcy Kaptur (OH-9)
Rep. Joe Kennedy (MA-4)
Rep. Dan Kildee (MI-5)
Rep. Barbara Lee (CA-13)
Rep. Sandy Levin (MI-9)
Rep. Ted Lieu (CA-33)
Rep. Alan Lowenthal (CA-47)
Rep. Michelle Lujan Grisham (NM-1)
Rep. Carolyn Maloney (NY-12)
Rep. Jim McDermott (WA-7)

Rep. Jim McGovern (MA-2)
Rep. Ann McLane Kuster (NH-2)
Rep. Gregory Meeks (NY-5)
Rep. Jerrold Nadler (NY-10)
Rep. Grace Napolitano (CA-32)
Rep. Rick Nolan (MN-8)
Rep. Beto O'Rourke (TX-16)
Rep. Frank Pallone (NJ-6)
Rep. Bill Pascrell (NJ-9)
Rep. Chellie Pingree (ME-1)
Rep. Mark Pocan (WI-2)
Rep. Jared Polis (CO-2)
Rep. Mike Quigley (IL-5)
Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (CA-40)
Rep. Tim Ryan (OH-13)
Rep. Jan Schakowsky (IL-9)
Rep. Bobby Scott (VA-3)
Rep. Albio Sires (NJ-8)
Rep. Mark Takano (CA-41)
Rep. Paul Tonko (NY-20)
Rep. Chris Van Hollen (MD-8)
Rep. Juan Vargas (CA-51)
Rep. Marc Veasey (TX-33)
Rep. Nydia Velazquez (NY-7)
Rep. Peter Welch (VT-AL)
Rep. Frederica Wilson (FL-24)