

**The Ecumenical Declaration to Protect Welcome and Restore Hope:
A Comprehensive Response to the Refugee Crisis
May 2017**

Situation overview:

On January 27th, 2017, President Trump issued an Executive Order which attempted to suspend the admission of all refugees to the United States for 120 days; suspend resettlement of all Syrian refugees indefinitely; reduce the overall number of refugees to be admitted to the U.S. in Fiscal Year 2017 from 110,000 to 50,000; and place a 30-day ban on issuing visas to nationals of seven Muslim-majority countries: Syria, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen and Libya. Direct effects of this order were felt immediately, as travellers to the U.S. were intercepted at airports, denied boarding, and, in some instances, detained and forcibly repatriated. Refugee admissions were suspended, and a number of refugees, who about to access the protection that resettlement in the U.S. offers were instead returned to refugee camps.

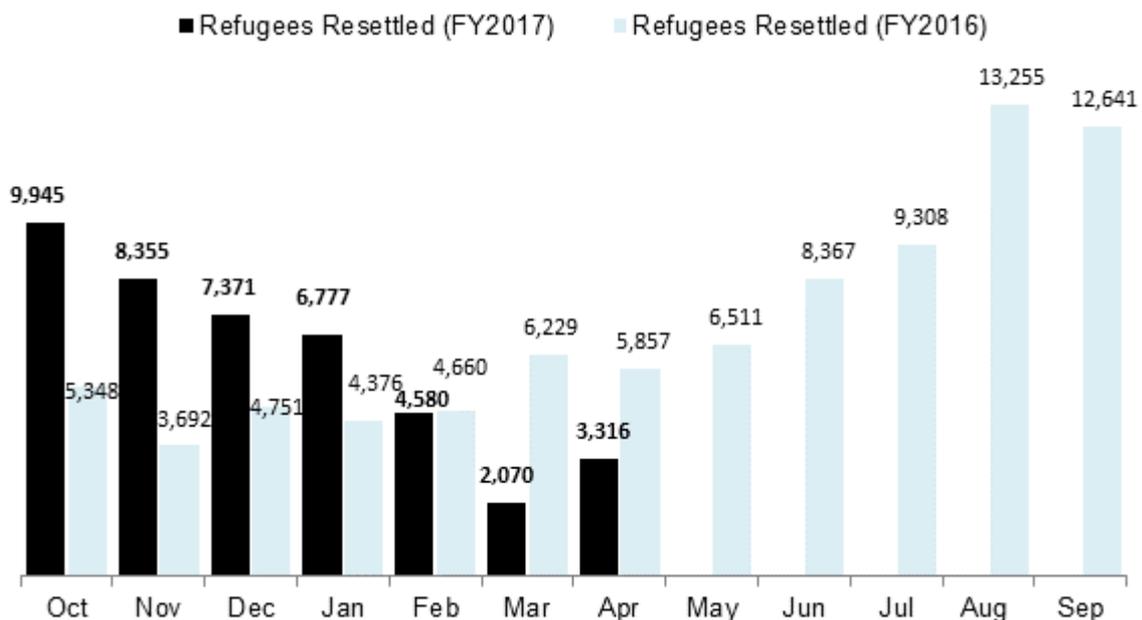
Judicial action followed, and the full implementation of this order was blocked soon thereafter. The reduction of the overall refugee admissions goal, however, was not affected by the courts' decision—which meant that 60,000 refugees worldwide who were slotted to arrive to the U.S. in FY 2017 were now denied that opportunity.

Unsatisfied with the court's decision, the Trump administration issued on March 6 a new Executive Order, which suspended the initial one. The new EO, by the administration's own admission, was designed to get around the legal language and the halt placed by the court, but maintained the same set of provisions for the refugee admissions program, still reducing the overall admissions goal from 110,000 to 50,000, still mandating the 120-day suspension of the program overall, and insisting on additional vetting procedures to be devised by the government.

As with the first EO, this one was challenged in the courts: the State of Hawaii filed one, and our colleague agencies HIAS and IRAP worked with ACLU to file another. In both cases, the judges decided against the federal government. In both cases, the government appealed, and the cases are now to be heard by the 4th and the 9th Appeal Circuit courts, respectively, on May 8 and 15 of this year.

In the meantime, the decision reached by Judge Watson in the State of Hawaii case imposed the stop on the administration's decision to implement the measures directly affecting the refugee admissions, including lowering of the overall goal. The program thus continues to operate, albeit, at a lower level—since the damage caused by the initial order severely reduced the overseas capacity to pre-screen and depart refugees.

Thus far, the USRAP has 42,414 refugees and 11,908 Special Immigrant Visa holders (Iraqi and Afghan nationals who worked with the U.S. Armed Forces) arrived or booked for travel in this fiscal year. The chart below offers a comparison with the previous fiscal year.



CWS has 5,807 individuals arrived or booked for travel in the same time period.

While the decision on the future of the refugee program now depends on the courts' decisions, and as some admissions continue, the other important factor to consider is the federal budget which appropriates funds to federal agencies managing the program. The federal government has just recently enacted a spending package for the remainder of this fiscal year, in a "continuing resolution" document. The level of funding allocated to the two government agencies—Departments of State, and Health and Human Services/Office of Refugee Resettlement—that manage refugee admissions and assistance should technically be sufficient to admit 85,000 in FY 2017. Programmatically, that number will be hard to reach even if the courts decide in favor of the program. Since the funding for the program is based on per capita reimbursements, if agencies do not resettle refugees, they will not receive funding they planned on for this fiscal year.

On March 27, 13 states—including 12 attorney generals and one governor—filed a "friend of the court" brief in a Maryland federal court to support President Trump's refugee and Muslim ban. On April 10, 15 states—including 14 attorney generals and one governor—asked the Hawaii federal court if they could submit a similar brief. These endorsements of President Trump's refugee and Muslim ban run counter to our values of freedom, opportunity and compassion, and do not reflect the welcome we see in communities across the country.

States offering support to the administration's EOs include:

- Alabama
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- Florida
- Kansas
- Louisiana
- Mississippi
- Montana
- North Dakota
- Oklahoma
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- Texas
- West Virginia

Even if the federal courts reach the decision that is supportive of the program, the Administration vowed to take the case all the way up to the Supreme Court, now fully staffed. If the case goes before the Supreme Court, it is unlikely that the hearing would be scheduled before this fiscal year ends in September. This would prolong an unresolved situation, and by extension delay, delaying refugees' potential arrival to the U.S.

This administration also tackled immigration issues by mandating expedited removal—as in deportations, creating an office for Victims of Immigrant Crime – VOICE—adding thousands of border patrol agents, and demanding that local law enforcement across the country act as a surrogate for ICE. The administration has further attempted to eliminate federal funding for sanctuary cities, a move blocked by a federal judge.

All these actions have made our offices across the country hubs of activity. Those eligible to adjust their status to Legal Permanent Resident or apply for citizenship are increasingly trying to do so and ask for help from our staff. Refugees are filing additional documentation for their family members still abroad and hoping to get them here before the program experiences another challenge. Undocumented immigrants sometimes ask for Chain of Custody documents—in case they don't come home from work, for being arrested and deported while their minor children, who in some instances are U.S. citizens, stay behind.

Actions by this administration to reduce the refugee admissions and place enormous pressures on asylum seekers and other immigrants to the U.S. are taking place against the backdrop of the largest forced displacement crisis in recorded history, whereby the number of forcibly displaced revolves around 66 million, most of them women and children.

Our response:

Immediately after the first EO was issued, CWS responded by soliciting emergency contributions to its program from the general public and its members. To date, we have raised \$500,000. This money is being spent on meeting the increased demand for immigration legal services, family reunification documents, and care for refugees and immigrants in need of specialized services from employment to health-related issues. We expect to complete this phase of the response by the end of June.

Secondly, CWS and the NCC met with our broader membership in Chicago on February 10, 2017 to create a unified voice for the Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican faith communities in the U.S. against the Executive Orders that functionally decimated the refugee resettlement program in the U.S., and advancing immigration detention and deportation. As a result of this fruitful gathering, the [Ecumenical Declaration to Protect Welcome and Restore Hope](#) was launched. Theof the Ecumenical Declaration is aimed at reaching the White House, members of Congress, the judiciary branch, and our own local judicatories, presbyteries, parishes, and dioceses across this nation, pledging to stand firmly in opposition to any policies preventing refugees and immigrants from accessing safety, and declaring our joint resolve to mobilize our 30 million members to engage in a faithful action that shows compassion and love for the stranger.

CWS has been reaffirmed as the resettlement agency assisting refugees and immigrants on behalf of its 37 members and one of the nine national resettlement agencies in the U.S. In 70 years, CWS has successfully resettled over 850,000 refugees and other immigrants, and it will continue to represent its wide constituency in this matter with the support of its members.

The current CWS response under this jointumbrella is three-pronged:

1. Advocacy and grassroots organizing, engaging of religious leaders, refugees and constituents
2. Ongoing legal and social services to refugees and immigrants
3. Sanctuary Movement- helping grow and resource congregations helping targeted individuals find safety

Altogether, this grassroots ecumenical movement brings together large groups of our constituency in a powerful display of American compassion and generosity.

This movement, however, does need basic infrastructure to operate and be successful. To that end, our declaration signers jointly committed to raising \$1 million to help support the organizing, education, outreach, and advocacy activities, assistance and services, and access to sanctuary for immigrants and others targeted by hateful policies and rhetoric. It is our plan to run this sustained campaign until a final decision is reached by the courts, or the EOs are completely revoked.

We are hopeful that we will be able to together dedicate one Sunday to refugees and immigrants in all our congregations across the country. Ideally, we would all do it on the same day, as together, we represent more than 30 million Americans—and that

is a powerful statement. We do, however, understand the all denominations function under different realities, and that the specific Sunday may have to be allocated at different times. We have created a map at greateras1.org/act/congregations/congregational-events/ for congregations to add their worship service, to demonstrate the collective power of congregations across the country.

This joint action throughout our membership will reiterate our strong resolve to continue the resettlement of refugees as per our joint commitment detailed in the Ecumenical Declaration. In our declaration, we intend to:

1. Request a meeting with President Trump, and urge him and his administration to immediately rescind all three immigration-related executive orders, and to affirm the importance of welcoming policies and a robust refugee resettlement program that provides protection to the most vulnerable, regardless of their nationality or religion.
2. Call on members of Congress to do everything in their power to rescind these three executive orders, prevent them from taking effect, and robustly support and fund the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.
3. Call on the judicial branch to continue to uphold the decisions that block the implementation of these executive orders.
4. Dedicate one Sunday to engage all of our congregations in honoring refugees' and immigrants' journeys, educating our communities about the biblical call to welcome refugees and immigrants, and inviting our congregation members into relational action to provide public witness in support of refugee resettlement and our immigrant community members.
5. Pledge that each of our communions will organize and facilitate meetings with local, state and national policymakers to educate them about our collective support and action in solidarity with refugees and immigrants, and urge them to serve as champions by supporting policies that affirm welcome, meeting with their immigrant and refugee constituents, and appropriating adequate resources to serve refugees.
6. We further resolve to be vigilant in addressing other potential executive orders and congressional actions that would unjustly affect refugees and immigrants in the United States.
7. Provide resources, support and encouragement to our congregations in the organizing of public, prayerful demonstrations of welcome for refugees and immigrants.
8. Commit to raising \$1 million to help refugees who have already arrived in the United States, those who will arrive in the months to come, and our public witness work in solidarity with refugees and immigrants.
9. Establish a Steering Committee that will convene our leadership once a month for a period of at least one year or until the effects of these executive orders have been solved by administrative, congressional, or judicial action. The Committee's purpose shall be to ensure that the above commitments are fulfilled. The Committee will be co-chaired by the President and CEO of Church World Service, Rev. John L. McCullough, and the General Secretary



& President of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States, Rev. Jim Winkler. The Steering Committee will have no less than five (5) members and will include Heads of Communions and Ecumenical Officers represented in Chicago at the February 10, 2017 meeting.

10. Invite other religious communities to join these commitments to make this an interfaith effort.

The response will be organized in three phases:

1. May-June 20: prepare for the events around World Refugee Day and create resources for the Refugee Sunday.
2. June 20-September 30: intensify advocacy, grassroots organizing, and service provision efforts to ensure adequate support and funding for a robust program in FY 2018 and have refugees apply for greencards, greencard holders to apply for citizenship, and citizens to register to vote, all in a 501(c) friendly way. robust
3. October 1-on: Continue to build capacity at the local and state levels to offer and provide sanctuary and organize and equip constituencies with information and tools to advocate in solidarity with refugees and immigrants. Challenge any discriminatory policies stemming from EOs and other mechanisms deployed to minimize access to life-saving protection that resettlement and asylum offer or reduce the rights of immigrants.

CWS plans to use a portion of the funds raised under this joint effort to continue the local and national advocacy work to combat anti-refugee policy and sentiment. Currently, CWS staff in Washington, D.C. and across the country manage our advocacy and organizing efforts. We jointly must increase this capacity as we seek to engage faith leaders in efforts to stand up and fight for the value of welcome that the United States—and CWS—has embraced throughout its history. This includes the implementation of the Ecumenical Declaration, drafted with CWS members, as one of many efforts to elevate the faith voice. This declaration, alongside CWS efforts to unite its programmatic and advocacy efforts under the campaign #GreaterAs1—housed on our new digital platform GreaterAs1.org—will help unite efforts to build a sustained movement in support of immigrant and refugee rights.

#GreaterAs1 was launched to offer refugee and immigrant allies an organizing space that mobilizes offline action. We seek for this campaign to function as a global homebase for refugee solidarity—and advocacy—that unites the global community in support of immigrants and refugees by providing members of the public with ample resources and various levels of engagement around the refugee crisis. This action-driven platform aims to serve as a repository of asks, tools, information and shareable materials that empower anyone visiting this space to do one thing to help mitigate the refugee crisis—maximizing our collective impact on this critical issue.

Currently, CWS staff lead the Interfaith Immigration Coalition, RefugeesWelcome.org, the Sanctuary Movement, and employ a staff person tracking state level legislation. We also employ an Director National Grassroots Coordinator, and three full-time and one additional part-time organizer in three states. And our staff [proactively works with the media](#) to elevate stories of the success refugees enjoy in the U.S. and the support that faith communities and



others offer to refugee resettlement¹. Additional funds are needed to further this work, so that we can successfully see sustainable change in the narrative about refugees and immigrants.

Financial Needs:

Program Area	Detail	Amount	Total
Grassroots Organizing and Communications Support		\$400,000	
Services Provided to Refugees in Local Communities		\$450,000	
Infrastructure/Staffing		\$150,000	
			\$1,000,000

¹ <https://greateras1.org/learn/in-the-news/>