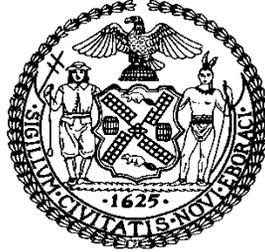


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THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

COMMITTEE REPORT

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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

Hon. Carlos Menchaca, Chair

August 15, 2016

Proposed Res. No. 1105-A: Council Members Levin, Menchaca, Lander, Gibson,
Ferrerias-Copeland, Rosenthal and Cohen

Title: A Resolution calling upon the President and the State Department to resettle at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the United States of America by the end of fiscal year 2016 and to increase such number to 65,000 by the end of fiscal year 2017.

I. INTRODUCTION

On June 27, 2016, the Committee on Immigration, chaired by Carlos Menchaca, held a public hearing to discuss Proposed Resolution No. 1105-A which calls upon the President and State Department to resettle at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the United States of America by the end of fiscal year 2016 and to increase such number to 65,000 by the end of fiscal year 2017. Refugee resettlement organizations, advocates and other stakeholders testified as to the dire need to resettle significantly more Syrian refugees.

At the time of the hearing, the most current figures for Syrian refugee admissions and resettlement for fiscal year 2016 reflected that, as of April 2016, the U.S. had only admitted 1,285 Syrian refugees which equaled only 12.9% of its commitment for this fiscal year. Advocates called upon the U.S. to honor its pledge and, in fiscal year 2017, to significantly increase its commitment to the ever growing Syrian refugee population.

Since the hearing, the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) reports significantly increasing the number of refugee officers in order to conduct more refugee interviews, security screenings and admissions. As a result, beginning in May 2016, Syrian refugee admissions numbers increased exponentially and, as of July 31, 2016, it appears as though the U.S. may be on track to honor its commitment to resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees in fiscal year 2016.

II. BACKGROUND

The staggering number of Syrians in need of humanitarian aid, currently estimated to be well over 11 million, is the result of an ongoing civil war that grew out of anti-government protests and an increasingly violent governmental response.

a. Syrian Conflict

According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), pro-democracy protests erupted in March 2011 after government forces arrested and tortured a group of teenagers that had painted anti-government slogans on a school wall in the city of Deraa.¹ President Bashar al-Assad's security forces opened fire on the demonstrators leaving several dead.² At the victims' funeral the following day, security forces fired shots into a group of mourners, thus spurring additional protests and calls for the president's resignation.³

The BBC further reports that, as the response of security forces grew increasingly violent, civilians organized rebel brigades to battle government forces for control of Syrian cities and countryside.⁴ The civilian brigades have split and experts believe there are roughly 1,000 different factions. Seeing an opportunity to gain control of the embattled nation, outside groups like the Islamic State, began their own offensive strategy thus creating a multi-sided conflict.⁵

¹ British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), "*Syria: The story of the conflict.*" (March 11, 2016) (hereinafter BBC Story of the Conflict), available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>.

² Id.

³ British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), "*What's happening in Syria?*" (March 15, 2016) (hereinafter BBC What's Happening), available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/16979186>

⁴ BBC Story of the Conflict.

⁵ BBC What's Happening.

b. War Crimes

A UN commission of inquiry found that, from the start of the Syrian conflict, the commission of war crimes such as murder, torture and rape has been rampant.⁶ In August 2013, death tolls rose sharply on account of the introduction of chemical weapons into the conflict.⁷ Western powers believe that only the Syrian government had the resources to carry out such attacks and threatened military intervention.⁸ President Assad blamed rebel forces but ultimately agreed to the removal and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal.⁹ Although the destruction of chemical weapons was reportedly completed within a year of the agreement, watchdog organizations continue to document the use of chemical weapons by various parties embroiled in the civil war.¹⁰ While not violent in nature, the use of "civilian suffering" offenses such as blocking access to food, water and health services through the use of sieges has been another prevalent war tactic.

III. REFUGEE CRISIS AND U.S. RESPONSE

According to the United Nations (UN), approximately 250,000 individuals had been killed between the start of the civil war in March 2011 and August 2015.¹¹ Additionally, roughly 6 million individuals were internally displaced and roughly 4.8

⁶ BBC Story of the Conflict.

⁷ Id.

⁸ Id.

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ Human Rights First (HRF), "At least 10,000: A six-month progress report on U.S. resettlement of Syrian refugees." (April 2016) (hereinafter HRF At Least 10,000), available at: <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/HRFReportAtLeastTenThousand-final.pdf>

million had fled the country to seek refuge abroad.¹² The majority of these refugees reside in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, followed by Iraq and Egypt.¹³

In response to the refugee crisis, the United Nations called upon its member states to accept Syrian refugees for resettlement. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry announced in September 2015 that the United States would accept “at least 10,000” Syrian refugees in fiscal year 2016 which concludes on September 30, 2016.¹⁴ As of April 2016, the United States had resettled only 1,285 Syrian refugees; only 12.9% of the promised 10,000.¹⁵

In response to the political pressure applied by elected officials, advocates and the public at large, additional resources were allocated to increase the number of staff conducting refugee interviews and security screenings. As a result, Syrian refugee admission numbers saw significant increases beginning in May 2016. As of July 31, 2016, the U.S. had resettled 7,551 Syrian refugees, thus putting the U.S. back on track to honor its pledge of resettling 10,000 Syrian refugees by September 30, 2016.

IV. PROPOSED RESOLUTION NO. 1105-A

Proposed Resolution No. 1105-A (“the Resolution”) calls upon the President and the State Department to resettle at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the United States of America by the end of fiscal year 2016 and to increase such number to 65,000 by the end of fiscal year 2017.

¹² Id.

¹³ Amnesty International, “Syria’s refugee crisis in numbers.” (February 3, 2016) (hereinafter AI Syrian Numbers), available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/02/syrias-refugee-crisis-in-numbers/>

¹⁴ HRF At Least 10,000.

¹⁵ Id.

The Resolution states that March 2016 marked the fifth anniversary of the start of Syria's civil war, which caused almost five million Syrians to flee the country and left roughly seven million displaced within Syria's borders.

The Resolution acknowledges that United Nations (U.N.) has called on the United States (U.S.) and other stable countries to accept these vulnerable victims of conflict whose numbers are only expected to increase.

Further, the Resolution contains data from the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which states that, as of May 2016, the U.S. had received over 39,324 referrals for Syrian refugees from UNHCR since 2011 but has only resettled only about 23.99% of that number.

The Resolution recognizes that the UNHCR projects that 10 percent of the 4.8 million Syrian refugees living in Syria's neighboring countries will need resettlement assistance by the end of 2018.

The Resolution contemplates that the U.S. has admitted approximately 9,434 Syrian refugees since the beginning of the 2011 Syrian civil war; 440 of which have resettled in New York State.

The resolution explains that, In March of 2016, the State Department reaffirmed its commitment to resettle at least 10,000 Syrians in fiscal year 2016 and stated that, in fiscal year 2017, the U.S. will resettle a total of 100,000 refugees from various countries.

The Resolution further acknowledges that the State Department did not announce how many Syrian refugees the U.S. will resettle in fiscal year 2017.

For all of these reasons, the Resolution calls upon the President and the State Department to resettle at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the United States of America by

the end of fiscal year 2016 and to increase such number to 65,000 by the end of fiscal year 2017.

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Proposed Res. No. 1105-A

Resolution calling upon the President and the State Department to resettle at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the United States of America by the end of fiscal year 2016 and to increase such number to 65,000 by the end of fiscal year 2017.

By Council Members Levin, Menchaca, Lander, Gibson, Ferreras-Copeland, Rosenthal and Cohen

Whereas, March of 2016 marked the fifth anniversary of Syria's civil war, which caused almost five million Syrians to flee their homeland as refugees and displaced almost seven million; and

Whereas, The number of Syrian refugees has exponentially increased as the conflict in Syria has worsened, and the number is only expected to grow; and

Whereas, The United Nations ("U.N.") has called on the United States (U.S.) and other stable countries to accept the most vulnerable victims of the conflict; and

Whereas, According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees ("U.N.H.C.R."), as of May 2016, the U.S. has received over 39,324 referrals for Syrian refugees from U.N.H.C.R. since 2011 but has resettled only 23.99% of that number; and

Whereas, The U.N.H.C.R. projects that 10 percent of the 4.8 million Syrian refugees living in Syria's neighboring countries will need resettlement assistance by the end of 2018; and

Whereas, The U.S. has admitted approximately 9,434 Syrian refugees since the beginning of the 2011 Syrian civil war; and

Whereas, Of this number, over 440 refugees have been resettled in the New York State; and

Whereas, Historically, the U.S. has admitted half of all cases referred by the U.N.H.C.R., but during this crisis has accepted far fewer cases; and

Whereas, In March of 2016, the State Department reaffirmed its commitment to resettle at least 10,000 Syrians in fiscal year 2016 and increase the total number of resettled refugees from around the world to 100,000 by the end of fiscal year 2017; and

Whereas, As of July 31, 2016, the U.S. had resettled only 7,551 refugees in fiscal year 2016; and

Whereas, The State Department did not announce how many Syrian refugees will be accepted in fiscal year 2017; and

Whereas, In 2015, at least 14 U.S. senators called for the government to take in 65,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2016; and

Whereas, During the current robust U.S. screening process refugees are assessed by the National Counterterrorism Center, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the departments of Homeland Security, State and Defense; and

Whereas, Coalitions such as the Refugee Council USA call on the U.S. to accept much larger numbers of Syrian refugees than are currently accepted; and

Whereas, Thousands of refugees, including entire families and children, have died attempting to flee Syria; and

Whereas, In response to terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels, some state officials have recently called for the U.S. to discontinue accepting Syrian refugees and have announced that Syrian refugees are not welcome to be resettled in their states; and

Whereas, The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed H.R. 4038 or the American Security Against Foreign Enemies Act of 2015, which would restrict the admission of Iraqi and Syrian refugees to America by requiring that they undergo extra security procedures; and

Whereas, Innocent Syrian civilians need a safe place to go and as a world leader the United States has a moral obligation to expediently assist these individuals, instead of turning them away or creating additional restrictions on their settlement; and

Whereas, The U.S. has a proud history of welcoming refugees, and has the highest aspirations to compassion, generosity and leadership, and should welcome additional Syrian refugees in fiscal year 2017; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the President and the State Department to resettle at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the United States of America by the end of fiscal year 2016 and to increase such number to 65,000 by the end of fiscal year 2017.

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