

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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August 15, 2016  
Start: 2:16 p.m.  
Recess: 2:51 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm.  
14<sup>th</sup> Fl.

B E F O R E: CARLOS MENCHACA  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Mathieu Eugene  
Daniel Dromm  
Peter A. Koo  
Rafael L. Espinal, Jr.

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

2 [sound check, pause]

3 [gavel]

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Buenos Tardes. I'm  
5 Carlos Menchaca, Chair of the New York City Council's  
6 Committee on Immigration. Before going any further,  
7 I would like to introduce other members of the  
8 committee here today with me, as well as Council  
9 Member Levin, who I...who is also...who's the main  
10 sponsor with me on Proposed Resolution 1105-A  
11 relating to accepting more Syrian refugees for  
12 resettlement in the United States. We want to  
13 welcome Peter Koo, Council Member Peter Koo from  
14 Queens, and Council Member Danny Dromm from Queens as  
15 well. Thank you.

16 On June 27, 2016, the Committee on  
17 Immigration held a public hearing on Reso No. 1103,  
18 which calls upon the Secretary Department of Homeland  
19 Security to designate Ecuador for temporary  
20 protective status to provide temporary immigration  
21 relief to eligible Ecuadorian Nationals in the wake  
22 of a devastating earthquake. This resolution was co-  
23 sponsored by Council Member Julissa Ferreras-Copeland  
24 and Speake Melissa Mark-Viverito. This reso was co-  
25 sponsored and introduced after Ecuador experienced a

2 deadly earthquake of 7.8 magnitude on April 16, 2016.

3 The earthquake resulted in almost 700 deaths and over

4 16,000 injuries. In addition to the human

5 casualties, the earthquake left over 24,000 homes,

6 schools, places of work and other buildings severely

7 damaged or destroyed, and leaving more than 28,000

8 individuals displaced without a safe place to live in

9 Ecuador. Recovery efforts are projected to cost over

10 \$3 billion, and have been significantly delayed by a

11 series of aftershocks and smaller earthquakes. As of

12 mid-July, 2016, Ecuador had...had experience over 26 of

13 these aftershocks. Recognizing that there are many

14 obstacles ahead for Ecuador and as it addresses

15 immediately military (sic) and begins rebuilding

16 efforts, the country formally requested Temporary

17 Protected Status more commonly referred as TPS in May

18 of 2016. A Temporary Protected Status, TPS, des-

19 designation is reserved for situations where

20 immigrants present in the United States are unable

21 to—where immigrants present in the United States

22 aren't able to return safely to their home country

23 due to ongoing armed conflict, environmental disaster

24 or other extraordinary and temporary conditions that

25 prevent safe return. A TPS designation would allow

2 Ecuadorian Nationals who were in the United States at  
3 the time of the earthquake and are able to now return  
4 safely to Ecuador to become eligible to apply for  
5 temporary immigration relief and work authorization  
6 until a safe return is possible.

7           New York City is home to one of the largest  
8 Ecuadorian populations in the country, and boasts a  
9 vibrant community of roughly 140,000 Ecuadorian  
10 residents, many of which will benefit greatly from  
11 TPS status and work authorization. Unfortunately,  
12 the United States government has not responded to  
13 Ecuador's formal request for TPS and it is for this  
14 reason, this New York City Council calls upon the  
15 Department of Homeland Security to promptly issue a  
16 favorable decision on the Ecuadorian government's  
17 request and grant TPS designation for Ecuador.

18           And I just want to say this is August. I  
19 know there's a lot of legislative bodies in the city—  
20 in the—in the country that are not working. We are  
21 working. We are here. We're sending a strong  
22 message, and after today's vote, I hope it gets to  
23 the City Council's Stated tomorrow for the final  
24 vote.

2           On that same day the Committee—Committee on  
3 Immigration heard—heard a reso co-co-sponsored by  
4 Council Member Steve Levin and myself, Proposed  
5 Resolution 110—sorry—1105-A, which calls upon the  
6 President and the State Department to resettle at  
7 least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the United States of  
8 America by the end of Fiscal Year 2016. That was  
9 their promise, and we hope that they make that  
10 promise whole, and to increase it to such number as  
11 65,000 by the end of Fiscal 2017.

12           Since the start of this bloody and multi-  
13 sited civil war in Syria, more than 4.8 million  
14 refugees have fled the country, and are in dire need  
15 of resettlement. The United Nations has called upon  
16 all of its member states to accept and resettle  
17 Syrian refugees. Yet, only about 6—160,000 spots  
18 have been pledged worldwide. That wouldn't—that only  
19 meets about 3.6% of need of resettlement for the  
20 Syrian refugees. For Fiscal Year 2016, the United  
21 States committed only to 10,000. We must, we must,  
22 we must do better. Not only has our commitment paled  
23 in comparison to other countries like for example  
24 German that is now clocking in over a hun...over a  
25 million people from Syria. But it is our ability to

2 keep this commitment, and...and really make sure that  
3 we ensure that we not only meet our 10,000, but again  
4 increase it.

5 In addition to the relatively low numbers of  
6 refugees the U.S. pledged to resettle in Fiscal Year  
7 2016, the lengthy refugee vetting process and delays  
8 in admitting approved refugees resettled in very low  
9 numbers of refugees actually entering the United  
10 States. There was significant doubt that the U.S.  
11 would be able to meet its commitment since as of  
12 April 2016 only 1,285 refugees were physically  
13 present in the United States. After significant  
14 pressure from elected officials, advocates and the  
15 public and the New York City Council through our June  
16 hearing, admission numbers rose sharply over the next  
17 few months, and so we're going to report the updates.  
18 The Department of Homeland Security recently release  
19 admission numbers confirming that 7,551 Syrian  
20 refugees had been admitted as of July 31, 2016 for  
21 Fiscal Year 2016. This first part of this resolution  
22 serves to maintain pressure on President Obama and  
23 the Department of State to fully meet its commitment  
24 to resettle those 10,000 Syrians in the U.S. by the  
25 end of Fiscal Year 2016. Further, we must ensure

2 that the U.S. increases the number of refugees  
3 settled in Fiscal 2017 at least to 65,000, and we  
4 will join others in more-more refugees if we can  
5 build-build that commitment.

6           So in closing, the New York City supports  
7 immigrants, assailees, refugees who cannot safely  
8 return to the homes on account of war, natural  
9 disasters and other extreme and dangerous conditions.  
10 And to that end today, the Committee on Immigration  
11 will vote on Reso 1103, which calls upon the  
12 Secretary's Department of Homeland Security to  
13 designate Ecuador for Temporary Protected Status, to  
14 provide temporary immigration relief to eligible  
15 Ecuadorian Nationals in the wake of a devastating  
16 earthquake and proposed Reso 1105-A, which calls upon  
17 the President and State Department to resettle at  
18 least 10,000 refugees—Syrian refugees in the United  
19 States by the end of Fiscal Year 2016 and to increase  
20 such number to 65,000 at least by the end of Fiscal  
21 Year 2017. [Speaking Foreign Language] And with  
22 that, I'm going to hand this over to Council Member  
23 Steve Levin for some remarks on the resolution.

24           COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
25 Chair Menchaca. I'm very honored that this committee

2 today will vote on a resolution that I introduced  
3 with the Chair Carlos Menchaca calling on the  
4 President and the State Department to resettle at  
5 least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the United States by  
6 September 30<sup>th</sup> of this year 2016. While the State  
7 Department appears to be on track to meet this  
8 pledge, it has yet to announce how many refugees will  
9 be resettled going forward. As such, this resolution  
10 also calls for an increase in the number of refugees  
11 to resettle by end of 2017 to 65,000. This is  
12 particularly important because in September all eyes  
13 will be on the United States as world leaders meet  
14 here in New York City to discuss an international  
15 response to large movements of refugees and migrants  
16 now and in the future. President Obama is also  
17 expected to host a leader's summit on refugees, which  
18 will appeal to governments to make new significant  
19 commitments to resettlement. Our country, the United  
20 States should lead by example in this crisis taking  
21 bold action to stand with refugees and victims of  
22 war. I would like to extend my gratitude to those  
23 who shared their expertise and personal experience at  
24 the June hearing underlining the importance of  
25 opening up our communities to a significantly larger

2 number of refugees. In particular, I want to thank  
3 Habat Shakagi (sp?), Abiaail Ziv or the International  
4 Rescue Committee; China Ward at Refugee Council USA,  
5 Dr. Georgette Bennett of the Multi-Faith Alliance for  
6 Syrian Refugees; Lena Alhuseni, and Umbreen Coreshi  
7 of the Arab-America Family Support Center in my  
8 district, and many more that testified. I have been  
9 honored to work with Chairman Menchaca to champion  
10 Resolution 1105, and I am grateful to the Speaker and  
11 to Ramon Martinez, our Chief of Staff here at the  
12 Council for the support of this effort. I would also  
13 like to thank our Council staff for their intensive  
14 research and coordination including Amy Anna Porta  
15 (sic), Kalyn Boland, Will Hungatch (sp?), Julie  
16 Barrow, Edward Polino and Adriana Garcia. In the  
17 National Political climate increasingly hostile to  
18 immigrants and to Muslims now more than ever we must  
19 stand up to the rights and dignity of all people  
20 especially the most vulnerable in our global  
21 community. Xenophobia and racism are not new in  
22 America. You can go to Ellis Island and see the  
23 exhibits of anti-immigrant literature. It is also  
24 part of our heritage that is represented at Liberty  
25 Island where we see the words, "Give me your tired,

2 *your poor, you huddled masses yearning to breathe*  
3 *three—breathe free.”* That is our heritage in this  
4 country. That is the ideals that our country was  
5 founded upon. Now more than ever, right now it is  
6 absolutely essential that we reaffirm those values,  
7 and we stand up in the face of the virulent racism  
8 and xenophobia that we see as a major threat in our  
9 count. And so I’m so proud of this Council that we  
10 are taking a stand. We are making our voice hear,  
11 and we’re saying that we in New York City know what  
12 our true heritage here is in the United States. I am  
13 very proud and thankful. Thank you very much, Mr.  
14 Chairman. I also want to thank Chair Menchaca and—  
15 and Council Member Julissa Ferreras-Copeland for  
16 their leadership on Resolution 1103 in support of TPS  
17 for Ecuadorians. Our New York values guide us to  
18 reject xenophobia and welcome vulnerable people—  
19 vulnerable people with open arms because we recognize  
20 that diversity strengthens our city and enables us to  
21 flourish. So, I hope that all of my colleagues will  
22 join me in supporting both resolutions 1105 and 1103.  
23 Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman for your time and  
24 consideration. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Council  
3 Member Levin, uh, for your words and I, uh, I—I stand  
4 with you my brother, um, on this and everything we're  
5 doing out of the Immigration Committee to stop, um,  
6 and—to stop not only xenophobia, but Islamophobia,  
7 and all the phobias that hit our immigrant  
8 communities in this city. Thank you. I want to hand  
9 it over to Council Member Dromm.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Thank you very much,  
11 Chair Menchaca, and I couldn't agree more than with  
12 the words that you have said, and also with the, um,  
13 words spoken by my colleague Steve Levin as well. I  
14 think that these two pieces of legislation are  
15 sending a strong message about where New York City  
16 stands in the whole immigration. I'm particularly  
17 honored as a person who represents one of those very  
18 large Ecuadorian communities along with Council  
19 Member Julissa Ferreras who is the prime sponsor of  
20 this legislation to be very much in favor of the  
21 legislation that we're going to pass here today, and  
22 on the floor of the Council tomorrow. It's long  
23 overdue. We've had to wait now for at least four or  
24 five months. We've been requesting the  
25 Administration to create TPS for our Ecuadorian

2 citizens—our Ecuadorian residents, and—and this wait  
3 has been long and it's overdue. So this legislation  
4 today is going to be very important in terms of  
5 sending a message to Washington that the City of New  
6 York welcomes, and in fact, asks our immigrants to be  
7 a full part of our society. [coughs] In Regard to  
8 the legislation, the resolution put forth by Council  
9 Member Levin regarding the Syrian refugees, I think  
10 it's really important that we take at least 10,000  
11 Syrian refugees. I know that that the country where  
12 my ancestors came from, Ireland, is committed to  
13 taking 4,000, and Ireland is a country of only six  
14 million people. The United States of America has  
15 over 300 or 320 million people. So we have to do our  
16 fair share of the job in terms of taking care of  
17 them, and welcoming into our country these refugees,  
18 and I think it's really important in light of the  
19 current political climate, and Council Member Levin  
20 has made reference to that New York City sends a  
21 message such as the message we're sending today of  
22 welcoming to our immigrant community. So I intend  
23 vote yes on both of these pieces of legislation.  
24 Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank  
3 you, Council Member Dromm, and—and finally, before we  
4 get to the vote, I want to make sure that as we speak  
5 about the work that the Council does everyday to  
6 support our immigrant communities, today, where  
7 particularly the Syrian and Ecuadorian communities  
8 will be getting that extra energy and effort to bring  
9 the federal government, um, to a place where we feel  
10 whole again. But here in the city our Ecuadorian and  
11 Syrian and all our immigrants can actually get  
12 connected to services. And so we want to plug in  
13 IDNYC and now with a—a kind of new commitment as we  
14 get into our communities to make sure that everyone  
15 has this ID. And so if you do not have any kind of  
16 identification card right now in the city, you can  
17 get a government issued identification card that we  
18 call IDNYC by calling 311 and making an appointment  
19 at the nearest center. You could call our district  
20 offices. Our staff are ready to take your questions,  
21 and get your card. We are in many neighborhoods in  
22 the city where you can get this card that NYPD will  
23 be able to take for reasons of summons or to report a  
24 crime or to enter your—enter your schools, enter your  
25 local schools, a library card or get access to

2 cultural institutions in the city. This is  
3 something—this is just one of many programs that  
4 we're doing here in the city to make our commitment  
5 clear as the City of New York, and to send our  
6 commitment out like a flag that we raise with pride  
7 to the federal government to Washington, D.C. So  
8 with that, we'll call the roll for voting.

9 CLERK: Committee Clerk Mathew Destefano,  
10 Committee on Immigration, roll call on Resolution  
11 1103 and Resolution 1105-A. Chair Menchaca.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes on both.

13 CLERK: Eugene. Dromm

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: I vote aye on both.

15 CLERK: Koo.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: I vote aye on both.

17 CLERK: By a vote of 3 in the affirmative, 0  
18 in the negative and no abstentions, the resolutions  
19 have been—have been adopted.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much,  
21 and I'm going to leave it—the roll open for Council  
22 Member Eugene and, um, and then we'll close it, we'll  
23 close the committee hearing. Thank you. [pause]  
24 Okay. So the final vote count, please.

1 COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

16

2 CLERK: Committee on Immigration the final 3  
3 in the affirmative, 0 in the negative and no  
4 abstentions.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you and this  
6 concludes our hearing on Immigration. Thank you.

7 [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date August 17, 2016