



DISCIPLES HOME MISSIONS STATEMENT
TO THE U.S. HOUSE HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE, FOR THE HEARING ON:
Worldwide Threats and Homeland Security Challenges
Wednesday, October 21, 2015

As a North American Christian faith movement of over 600,000 which was birthed on the American frontier, our congregations have long cherished the principle of freedom of religion for communities of all backgrounds. We are grateful to be part of a faith tradition that has spoken again and again of our key faith value of welcoming the stranger despite religious or cultural background. Since the time of WWII, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the U.S. and Canada has worked through our Disciples Home Missions office of Refugee and Immigration Ministries, and in partnership with 33 Church World Service refugee affiliate offices, to resettle over 40,000 refugees in the past six decades.

Now, in these days when our world is facing the worst humanitarian crisis since the end of World War II, we re-affirm strongly our readiness to continue to embrace refugees, and to welcome them without exclusion. We are ready to do so because we are called to love our neighbor as ourselves. Indeed, in light of the reality of over 60 million displaced persons and 20 million refugees in the world, we urge congress to support a greatly increased number of refugee arrivals in the coming years. We are aware that Secretary of State Kerry has requested the U.S. to resettle 85,000 overall refugees in 2016 and 100,000 in 2017.

Instead, we strive for a greater goal of hospitality—one which our history has shown is attainable through strong community and government partnerships. We believe that, just as the U.S. admitted over 650,000 European refugees during WWII, and between 100,000-200,000 Southeast Asian refugees for over a decade and a half after the Vietnam War, the U.S. should now admit 100,000 Syrians and an additional 100,000 refugees of other backgrounds into our nation beginning in 2016. We also urge Congress to expedite the processing of Syrian refugee applications, and improve refugee admissions processes to reduce waiting times for long-suffering families. Further, we recognize that the multiple existing levels of refugee security screenings mean refugees are the most heavily scrutinized of all arrivals into the United States. This amount of security is appropriate. However, we encourage Congress to take note of the voice of Heinz Schaden, Mayor of Salzburg, in his interview with Anderson Cooper this week, who said: “I’m not worried about security...(because terrorists) certainly do not march along with the refugees all the way from Turkey.”

In our international partnerships in mission, we have consistently observed families struggling desperately to stay together, and even to remain alive, because of the spiral of violence in their homelands. We commend the U.S. commitment of \$4.5 billion to the region. Yet, as we encourage other international communities to increase their contributions, we advocate for the U.S. to offer additional humanitarian aid to counter root causes in the Middle East, where the majority of refugees remain. Together with multiple faith partners, we urge that a negotiated solution to the Syria crisis be made a top U.S. diplomatic priority, and that armed involvement of partners must cease, together with provision of arms, and training of opposition groups.

We see many Christians, Muslims, Jews, and families of other faiths persecuted. As we support relationships of peace and solidarity across religious divides internationally, we are absolutely opposed to any legislation here in the U.S. that would prioritize Christian refugees at the expense or rejection of Muslim refugees and individuals of other faiths. Rather, we must counter anti-Muslim sentiment at every turn—allowing us to offer protection to Syrian refugees who are our world’s most vulnerable. By so doing, we will welcome opportunities for relationship with hard working doctors, lawyers, teachers, business owners, coaches, pastors, imams.

There is a moral challenge directly before us. Our congregations are calling us constantly, expressing their willingness to help house, teach English, mentor, employ, and surround the world’s most vulnerable people. Members of Congress, we urge you to do all you can to open these doors of opportunities for the world’s most vulnerable persons—and we are ready to continuing to partner in welcoming all who come to our shores.