

Toolkit:

Community Response to Trump Attack on the U.S. Refugee Program

Rapid Response Prayer Vigils & Press Conferences

Time for Action

Now is the time to take action in response to the Trump administration's attack on the refugee program through hosting a press conference, interfaith vigil, sending out a media release or writing an opinion editorial.

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Background

President Donald Trump has announced that the U.S. government will stop resettling refugees from Syria, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Iraq and Iran discriminating against Muslims, pause the refugee resettlement program, and reduce number of refugees we welcome at the very time when they are most in need of safety. This decision flies in the face of our best values of compassion, hospitality and welcome. With more than 65 million people now forcibly displaced in the world—the most in recorded history—it is more important than ever to take action by condemning this new policy.

This announcement is gut-wrenching for many of our refugee community members who are waiting to be reunited with a sister, brother, parent or child, and for refugees overseas with no other options for safety than to be resettled in the U.S. We cannot discriminate against refugees for how they pray or where they are from. Many refugees from Muslim countries are themselves victims of persecution and atrocities; and they need our protection. Refugees are the most thoroughly vetted people in the United States, undergoing biographic and biometric checks, medical screenings, forensic document testing, and in-person interviews. It is critical that President Trump and all Members of Congress hear their constituents decry this announcement and declare their support for refugees from all over the world.

Host Press Conference

Join together with refugee resettlement agencies, refugee leaders, faith leaders and community members, if possible local elected officials (city council/county commissioners) to host a press conference in your city to hold the administration accountable for this devastating policy change for refugees. Contact Wardah Khalid at WKhalid@cwsglobal.org for help with media outreach.

Steps for a successful press conference:

- Be strategic in the choice of location: municipal government building, airport, Senator or Representative offices, etc.
- Be in contact with organizations and coalitions about what the plan will be
- Identify the best speakers and well-known leaders that can address the importance of this issue
- Draft the media advisory and get approval on messaging from core organizers of the event

- Assign the media contact to be point on press outreach and greet the press, having them sign in at the press conference
- Draft talking points to help each speaker stay on message
- Try to keep each speaker at 2-3 minutes speaking time
- Schedule the event at a time best for press, in this case, if you can do it 2 hours after announcement would be best, or the day after around 10 or 11 AM
- Identify a moderator who can introduce the issue and the speakers
- Send press advisory to the media at least a day in advance, follow up by sending it again the day of the event and by doing follow up calls to pitch the event
- Ask speakers to arrive at least 15 minutes early and make sure everyone understands their role in the agenda of speakers
- If you have faith leaders present, you might consider opening with a prayer
- Bring signs that show your message clearly such as “Refugees Welcome” and “#GreaterAs1”
- Take your own pictures and share on social media, create a hashtag for your event, and tag the appropriate social media handles and pages in your posts
- Develop a media release that is similar to the advisory, but also includes quotes of leaders and speaks about what happened at the event, send press release to your press list as soon as you can after the event, with a link to where the photos and/or videos can be seen online
- Make sure to amplify the content of your press release on your social media platforms, too, to help spread the word and reach more audiences

Host an Interfaith Vigil

Hosting interfaith vigils provides the opportunity for faith leaders to express how receiving refugees is part of all faith traditions reflecting on the deep scriptural, spiritual roots of our work to support refugees and immigrants. It also creates an opportunity to show how faith communities are gathering around Muslim partners who are being singled out and targeted in this administration intends to stop resettlement of predominantly Muslim countries such as Syria.

Even a small event, multiplied around the country, will send a powerful message to our the Trump administration and Congress that welcoming immigrants and refugees is moral issue that is important to people of faith and conscience.

Steps to a successful prayer vigil:

- Coordinate a public prayer vigil with faith leaders, refugee resettlement agencies, immigrants’ rights groups, refugee leaders, community members, and if possible local elected leaders
- Identify the core leaders and speakers, make sure there are Muslim organizations and Imams who are invited to help plan and speak at the event
- Consider inviting elected officials including Representatives, Senators, City Council Members or the Mayor
- Be clear about your goals, what you want to accomplish, and how many people you hope to join the event
- Identify the best location for the vigil which is generally somewhere central in a symbolic memorial, state capitol, park or city hall
- Apply for any permits needed for the location; reserve or order any equipment you’ll need such as microphones, cameras, banners, candles, projectors; and make sure you can access electrical outlets.
- Choose a time of day best for attendance and media--most news reports take place at 5-6 PM and 9-10 PM, so a few hours before those time blocks is best for press events
- Promote the event through social media, public service announcement, flyers, websites, and congregation bulletins
- Agree with coordinating committee on messaging and talking points
- Bring signs that are consistent with your messaging and agreed on ahead of time
- Assign specific talking points to each speaker and ensure they have time limit

- Invite the media through issuing a media advisory and following up with a media release after the event
- Invite participants at the vigil to be part of further action and advocacy by writing and calling the White House and their Representatives and Senators -- [see action alert here](#)

The set up for the vigil should ensure that all faiths are respected and welcomed with awareness and consciousness. Drawing on the faith traditions and rituals can make vigils much more powerful, raising the creative and dramatic tension.

- Ask Clergy attending to wear collars, stoles, robes and any other appropriate attire
- Foot washing of individuals impacted by immigration policies
- Procession with candles to symbolic location
- A Prayer Wall with handwritten prayers for immigrants and refugees
- Lift up stories in sacred texts
- Highlight passages in scripture and present to members of congress
- Collect and deliver prayers to your senators and representatives
- Make visuals – photos, drawings, art, etc. that show the consequences of Trump announcements

Sample Media Advisory

(This sample advisory could be used for an interfaith vigil, just adjust title)

*****MEDIA ADVISORY*****

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: [Date]

MEDIA CONTACT: [Phone and Email]

PRESS CONFERENCE

Resettlement Agencies, Refugee Leaders and Faith Leaders to Condemn President Trump's Executive Action on Refugee Resettlement

Community members strongly oppose Trump administrations' halt of resettlement and exclusion of refugees based on their religion

[CITY, STATE] Faith leaders, refugee resettlement agencies, refugee leaders, civic leaders, and elected officials will join together for a press conference to denounce the Trump administration's executive action on refugee resettlement, which turns our backs on Syrian refugees and refugees from around the world at the very time when they are most in need of safety. By halting refugee resettlement for 120 days, this announcement will grind refugee processing to a halt. Furthermore, by stopping the resettlement of Syrian refugees and narrowly preferencing religious minorities, this announcement is tantamount to the Muslim ban that Donald Trump threatened during his campaign. Civic society will gather to call on members of this new administration and the 115th Congress to do everything in their power to reverse this announcement.

What: Press conference to decry the Trump administration's announcement on refugee resettlement

When: [DATE and TIME]

Where: [LOCATION]

Who: [list participants/organizations attending, specify names and title of speakers]

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*****MEDIA RELEASE*****

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: [date]

CONTACT: [media contact phone and email]

**Resettlement Agencies, Refugee Leaders and Faith Leaders Condemn
President Trump's Executive Action on Refugee Resettlement**
*Community members decry Trump administration's halt of resettlement and exclusion of
refugees based on their religion*

[CITY, STATE] Faith leaders, refugee resettlement agencies, refugee leaders, civic leaders, and elected officials joined together for a press conference today to denounce the Trump administration's executive action on refugee resettlement. This action turns our backs on Syrian refugees and refugees from around the world at the very time when they are most in need of safety. By halting refugee resettlement for 120 days, this announcement will grind refugee processing to a halt. Moreover, by stopping the resettlement of Syrian refugees and narrowly preferencing religious minorities, this announcement is tantamount to the Muslim ban that Donald Trump threatened during his campaign. Civic society members called on the new administration and the 115th Congress to do everything in their power to immediately reverse this announcement.

[QUOTE], said Executive Director of [ORG NAME],

Rev./ Imam/ Rabbi X said, [QUOTE].

[Name] a refugee leader from [community] spoke about his/her experience in the refugee resettlement program, [QUOTE]

Watch the video of this event at: [LINK to public video reporters can access, if available]

View the photos from this event at: [LINK to public photos reporters can access, if available]

Learn more about X' work on Y at: [LINK to your organization's website]

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[Find Talking Points Here](#)

Social Media

Sample Tweets with your event/solidarity selfie pictures included:

- My America doesn't turn its back on refugees. @POTUS #SolidaritySelfie #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1

- RT if you agree: America must continue to say #RefugeesWelcome - because we're #GreaterAs1. @POTUS #SolidaritySelfie
- [@POTUS](#), you can shut down the @WhiteHouse phones - but you cannot silence us. #SolidaritySelfie #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1
- [@POTUS](#): An attack on one of us is an attack on all of us. I stand in solidarity #WithRefugees--because we're #GreaterAs1.
- [@POTUS](#): we will not be silent--and we will not turn our back on refugees. #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1
- [@POTUS](#): you are betraying longstanding US tradition of welcome for those in need. #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1

Sample Facebook posts:

- Our office [OR ADD ORGANIZATION NAME] is letting President Trump know we stand with refugees. LIKE or SHARE if you do, too, and post your own #SolidaritySelfie to share with your friends and family. #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1
- As people of faith, we must tell our neighbors and leaders that anti-refugee and anti-Muslim rhetoric do not reflect our shared values of peace, welcome and compassion. With today's announcement, President Trump is betraying those values and our longstanding tradition of welcome. LIKE and SHARE if you continue to stand in solidarity with refugees. #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1
- With today's announcement by President Trump against refugees, it is more critical than ever to join our global homepage for refugee solidarity: GreaterAs1.org SHARE to spread the word--It's time to stand with and for our brothers and sisters who are seeking safety and peace. #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1

#SolidaritySelfie

The goal of the #SolidaritySelfie is to create a "virtual march" on social media to register our opposition to the executive orders. We're hoping to create enough momentum to make sure the Trump administration – and the media – take note of our opposition and are forced to contend with it.

Here's what you can do: Urge your staff, your members, and allies to tweet photos of themselves at @POTUS using the hashtag #SolidaritySelfie.

Here's how to make a #SolidaritySelfie:

- 1) Write a short note on a piece of paper – something like "Refugees Welcome," "Here to Stay" or "I stand with immigrants"
- 2) Take a picture of yourself with the paper
- 3) Tweet the photo of yourself, along with a note, at @POTUS. Make sure to include the hashtag #SolidaritySelfie!

Make sure to post and tweet out your photos and quotes from speakers at the event. Use hashtags: #RefugeesWelcome #HereToStay and #GreaterAs1

Solidarity Selfies: To be in solidarity with refugees and immigrants, take a selfie with a sign that says #RefugeesWelcome #SolidaritySelfies and #GreaterAs1

Sample Op-Ed

Trump Betrays Longstanding U.S. Tradition of Welcome and Hospitality

As a [faith leader, executive director, civic leader] [share personal experience with refugee program's success]

By halting refugee resettlement for 120 days, this announcement will grind refugee processing to a halt. Each step of the refugee security check process is time sensitive, so a pause in processing will mean that refugees are pulled off of planes, families who are anticipating their loved ones are devastated, and communities that have planned for refugees to arrive are left in limbo. Such an interruption in processing will force refugees who were set to arrive in the United States today to wait months--and even years--to go through fingerprinting, interviews, health screenings, and multiple security screenings yet again, all while their lives are in danger.

By reducing refugee admissions from 110,000 to 50,000, Donald Trump is going back on America's promise to refugees and abdicating America's leadership role on human rights and refugee protection. By stopping the resettlement of Syrian refugees and narrowly preferencing religious minorities, this announcement is tantamount to the Muslim ban that Donald Trump threatened during his campaign. This is a clear case of religious discrimination and must be decried as such.

Providing protection to people seeking safety is one of our nation's proudest traditions--this decision directly contradicts our longstanding legacy of welcome and hospitality. Our nation is proud that we resettled Jewish refugees during World War II, Vietnamese refugees in the 1980s, and more recently refugees from the Sudan, Burma / Myanmar, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria.

[Local Story of refugee in your region from Sudan, Burma / Myanmar, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria]

This announcement dismantles the leadership role that the U.S. holds in refugee protection and human rights, as resettlement plays a key role in U.S. foreign policy and encouraging other countries to take in refugees and assist refugee hosting countries. Available to less than 1 percent of the world's refugees, resettlement is literally the last resort for refugees who cannot return to their homes and are not permitted to rebuild their lives in a nearby country.

For all of these reasons, the new administration must immediately reverse this announcement, to reaffirm the importance of welcoming refugees, and to commit to never discriminate against individuals based on their nationality or religion.

Sample Vigil Program

Welcome—a few words about the focus and purpose of your vigil. Why now? What's the concern? Who's affected? How can this vigil convince your members of congress to support refugees and immigrants? What values shape your faith traditions' response to these concerns?

This may take the form of brief comments from one of your speakers, or a welcome and an opening prayer.

Opening Prayer: Ask clergy or key lay leader to open with a prayer Song—A singer, choir or instrumentalist can perform, or a few singers can lead participants in singing. Reading—for ideas see suggested readings below.

Speaker—A personal story from a local community member of how the broken immigration system has impacted families. More than one story can be integrated throughout the program as well. Creative Ritual: Integrate creative symbols or rituals from faith traditions that draw more attention to the importance of immigration reform (see above suggestions)

Prayer—One person may lead the prayers, or you might invite several faith leaders to pray according to their traditions. Involve vigil participants in praying a refrain throughout your prayer time, or pray in a circle so everyone has the opportunity to pray. Consider offering prayers in multiple languages.

Song & Closing—reiterate the focus and purpose of your vigil, and send participants off with a call to welcome newcomers and raise their voices in the public sphere for compassionate immigration reform. Consider a procession or march to another symbolic and strategic location.

Sample Invite to Your Member of Congress

Dear Honorable Senator / Representative,

Thank you for your support of refugees over the years.

We would like to invite you to attend [ORGANIZATION/ COALITION]'s prayer vigil/ press conference on [DATE] at [LOCATION] along with faith leaders and civic leaders who are speaking out against the new administration's executive action stopping resettlement of Syrian refugees, pausing the refugee resettlement program for 120 days, and reduce number of refugees we welcome at the very time when they are most in need of safety.

We would be honored to have presence as a speaker at this press conference/ vigil. Other speakers include [list 2-3 top speakers] Please let us know as soon as you can if you are able to attend by contacting me at [email]. If you are able to be there we will connect about the details on messaging and agenda.

Sincerely,

Suggested Readings from Scripture :

"The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Lev 19:33-34)."

The Qur'an tells us that we should "serve God...and do good to...orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer that you meet, and those who have nothing (4:36)."

The Hindu scripture Taitiriya Upanishad tells us: "The guest is a representative of God (1.11.2)"

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured." --Hebrews 13:1-3

In the Qur'an, it is written that Muslims should "serve God ... and do good to ... orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer that you meet, [and those who have nothing]." (Qur'an 4:36)

"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was

in prison and you visited me...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." --Matthew 25:35-40

Action Alert - please help us spread the word!

● **Resources:**

- [RCUSA refugee 101 backgrounder](#)
- [RCUSA background on the security screening process](#)
- [Refugee Resettlement State Profiles](#)
- [Letters and articles, national and state-by-state, demonstrating welcome for refugees](#)
- [Letter from former Secretaries of the Department of Homeland Security](#)
- [Letter to Congress from 20 Former National Security Officials](#)
- [Letter from 800 faith leaders affirming welcome for refugees of all religions](#)
- [In-Process quotes from faith leaders](#)

Contact Information:

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