

The Syrian Refugee Crisis

The Jewish Labor Committee is a founding member of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, a network of 14 national and 125 local independent agencies that encourage civic and social involvement, and deliberate on key issues of importance to the Jewish community. As a sponsor of this resolution, the JLC helped secure its adoption at the JCPA's October 2015 Town Hall Plenum.

Guided by our own history as refugees as well as our shared biblical and prophetic mandate to protect and welcome the stranger, the American Jewish community has always been a stakeholder in refugee resettlement and protection, both in the U.S. and in other countries — offering new beginnings, including helping to welcome more than three million refugees who have arrived in the U.S. for resettlement since the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980.

By definition, refugees are persons who cannot return to their countries of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of who they are or what they believe. The 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol (the Refugee Convention) prohibits returning a refugee to his or her country of persecution; requires access to fair and humane asylum procedures for all asylum seekers; and states that countries shall not penalize refugees for illegal entry or presence. There are 148 countries that have signed either one or both of these international legal instruments, including the United States, Israel, and all European Union member states.

The most staggering refugee situation today is the crisis stemming from Syria's civil war — now in its fifth year. There are an estimated four million Syrian refugees who have fled their country and eight million people internally displaced within the country. These people have faced horrific violence and persecution, many risking their lives in an effort to reach a country that will provide refuge.

Over the last five years, conditions have gone from bad to worse in Syria and for those fleeing from the conflict. Refugees in host countries, whether in camps or in urban environments, face inadequate housing and food, limited access to medical and psychological care, lack of educational opportunities, and limited resources.

The United States has provided significant funding to assist Syrian refugees, but it is nowhere near enough to meet the growing needs. The countries bordering Syria — primarily Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey — are struggling with the challenges of hosting large numbers of refugees and are preventing many refugees from entering. The scope of the crisis is so vast that it threatens to destabilize the entire region, and deteriorating conditions in countries of first asylum are causing secondary mass displacements.

For many of the refugees who have fled their homes in Syria, resettlement to a third country is, for the foreseeable future, the best opportunity for them to restart their lives in safety.

With the largest and most sophisticated resettlement program in the world, the U.S. can and should increase the number of refugees it resettles from Syria and enhance efficiency of the resettlement program. This leadership will encourage other countries to step up their efforts as well.

In addition to saving lives in this crisis, we take note that resettled

refugees have a historical track record of enhancing diversity and boosting the economy in communities around the country. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is built on a model of self-sufficiency — refugees receive employment authorization upon arrival, and they are encouraged to become employed as soon as possible. Most refugees begin working in entry-level jobs at first, and before long they start businesses, pay taxes, and purchase goods and services.

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs believes:

- ◆ The international community must respond to the Syrian refugee crisis. This must include contributing significant aid and utilizing refugee resettlement to save lives and share responsibility with countries of first asylum.
- ◆ Refugees must be treated with dignity and respect. This includes providing access to protection, livelihoods, medical services, and education.

The community relations field should:

- ◆ Urge the international community to significantly increase humanitarian aid funding to ensure that Syrian refugees' basic needs are met in countries of first asylum.
- ◆ Call on the international community and Syrian refugee-hosting countries to strengthen the infrastructure of refugee-hosting communities to ensure that proper resources are allocated to provide services both to their citizens and to refugees.

- ◆ Encourage the international community, led by the United States and Europe — and in alignment with the principles of international customary law and the generous humanitarian intent behind the Refugee Convention of 1951 and its 1967 Protocol — to share responsibility with host countries, particularly Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, and
- resettle meaningful numbers of Syrian refugees. In the case of the United States, with the most sophisticated resettlement program in the world, we urge the Administration to increase annual admissions of Syrian refugees while maintaining the rigorous security screenings that are integral to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.
- ◆ Strive to create a welcoming environment for Syrian refugees and speak out when others — including community, religious, and political leaders — label them with hateful or xenophobic invective, or conflate them with terrorists, particularly given that many Syrian refugees are themselves victims of terror.

Jewish Labor Committee

The Jewish voice in the labor movement, and
the voice of the labor movement in the Jewish community.

Founded in 1934, the Jewish Labor Committee was formed to mobilize unions, Jewish organizations and mutual aid societies across North America to help fight Nazism in Germany. The JLC supported anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist forces throughout Europe, and aided Jewish, trade union and democratic socialist leaders targeted by the Nazis.

Today, the JLC brings together the organized labor movement and the organized Jewish community to promote workers' rights, civil rights and human rights in the workplace and the community-at-large; to combat anti-Semitism and all other forms of prejudice; to strengthen the historic relationship between American and Israeli trade unions, and to promote a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

The Jewish Labor Committee is an IRS-registered 501 (C) (3) non-profit organization (ID: 13-1675650)

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