

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Chad Wolf
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

March 31, 2020

Secretary Pompeo and Acting Secretary Wolf:

We write to request that your Departments take action to ensure that refugees and individuals who possess or are applying for visas, parole, and entry permits, are not unjustly affected by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

As you know, foreign nationals often wait for months or years and go to great lengths and expense to obtain visas and other forms of authorization to enter the United States. They include valued employees of U.S. companies, close relatives of U.S. citizens, individuals persecuted because of who they are and what they believe, and individuals who face risk because of faithful and valuable service to the U.S. Government. Applicants spend hundreds or thousands of dollars to apply and often have waited for a visa or other entry permit for many years. Some are required to travel to foreign countries to complete interviews.

These visas and entry permits have limited validity periods, and many applicants will see their visa or entry permits expire as a direct result of the pandemic. Many individuals are following sound advice to postpone travel to limit risk of exposure to COVID-19. Many others are prohibited from traveling to the United States due to restrictions from their country of residence or from Presidential Proclamations restricting entry.

We write to request that the Departments of State and Homeland Security take all action afforded you by law to extend validity periods and deadlines that will pass before the end of the current global pandemic and travel restrictions. Failing to extend these expiration dates would punish individuals who have satisfied all requirements for admission to the United States. For individuals with valid visas, we urge the Department of State to extend validity periods as a matter of policy pursuant to 9 FAM 504.10-5(A). We urge you to consider limiting additional medical checks to checks for infectious diseases and providing them at no cost to the applicant.

We also request the Department of State to decide, as a matter of policy, to wait to terminate pending visa petitions under INA Section 203(g) until after the U.S. travel restrictions are lifted and the virus moves to a post-pandemic stage. Similarly, the Department of Homeland Security should extend the time period for responding to Requests for Evidence and other deadlines such as filing an I-730 petition or a Priority-3 Affidavit of Relationship. Individuals may be unable to obtain evidence requested by a consular officer or by USCIS, unable to travel to an interview, or unable to access their visa application in the current circumstances.

We request the Department of State and its vetting partners to take steps to limit the harm of this pandemic on applicants for admission as refugees and special immigrants. The Departments of State and its vetting partners should continue processing and issuance of humanitarian-based immigration benefits to the extent such processing is unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic and extend security check validity periods for refugees and special immigrants.

The Department of State should resume refugee admissions expeditiously, consistent with general travel restrictions from refugees' countries of residence, and reallocate refugee admissions to ensure that the Presidential Determination for fiscal year 2020 can be reached.

All of these measures will promote fair outcomes to individuals who have gone to great lengths to travel to this country, and to encourage individuals to limit travel during this time of global pandemic.

Respectfully,

Ads-Up Refugee Network
Aldea - The People's Justice Center
American Immigration Lawyers Association
American Jewish World Service
American Muslim Empowerment Network
Americans for a Free Syria
The Anti-Defamation League (ADL)
Arkansas United
Asian American Arts Alliance
Asian American Federation
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
Association of Wartime Allies
Asylum Access
Bellevue Program for Survivors of Torture
Bethany Christian Services
Capuchin Franciscan Province of St. Mary (New York and New England)
Caritas of Austin
Catholic Relief Services
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
Center for Victims of Torture
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) - Week of Compassion
Christian Reformed Church Office of Social Justice
Church World Service
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)

Columban Mission Center
Columbia Law School Immigrants' Rights Clinic
Community Refugee & Immigration Services (CRIS)
Congregation Beth Israel
Council of Peoples Organization
Dar al-Hijrah Islamic Center
Demand Progress Education Fund
DFW Asylum Seeker Housing Network
Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries
East Bay Sanctuary Covenant
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
Equality Labs
Equality North Carolina
Felician Sisters of North America
Forum for Youth Investment
Franciscan Action Network
Franciscan Province of the Sacred Heart
Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph
Franciscans for Justice
Freedom for Immigrants
Friends of Human Rights
GirlForward
Hamilton-Madison House
Heartland Alliance International
Helping Hand for Relief and Development
HIAS
Hispanic Federation
Human Rights First
Human Rights Initiative of North Texas
Humanitarian Immigration Law Clinic, Elon University School of Law
The Hunger Project
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda
International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
International Rescue Committee
Islamic Relief USA
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Journey's End Refugee Services
Justice in Aging
The Legal Project
Libyan American Alliance
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area
Migration and Refugee Services/USCCB

Multicultural Refugee Coalition
Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Jewish Women
National Employment Law Project
National Immigration Forum
National Immigration Law Center
New American Pathways
New York Immigration Coalition
New York Justice for Our Neighbors, Inc
Niskanen Center
Norwegian Refugee Council USA
NY-Justice For Our Neighbors
Oasis Legal Services
OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates
OneAmerica
Oxfam America
PCUN, Oregon's Farmworker Union
Presbyterian Church USA
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)
Red T
Refugee Congress
Refugee Services of Texas
RefugeeOne
Refugees International
Rian Immigrant Center
Sampreshan Inc
School Sisters of St. Francis
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team
Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi
Sisters of St. Joseph TOSF
SparkAction
Syrian American council
Tahirih Justice Center
Temple Beth Shalom Social Justice Core Team
Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition
Third Order Society of St. Francis Province of the Americas
Turning Point for Women and Families
Union for Reform Judaism
United Stateless
USC International Human Rights Clinic
Veterans for American Ideals

We Are All America
Witness at the Border
World Relief