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Will America Stand Again With the World's Refugees?

Matthew Soerens

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One year ago on Saturday, President Trump issued an executive order to severely restrict the entry of refugees and other immigrant groups to the United States. This first version of the so-called travel ban set off protests at airports, lawsuits and global outcry — while thrilling some of the president's supporters who were pleased by his swift fulfillment of a campaign pledge.

After court rulings and subsequent decrees from the Trump administration, refugees are now being resettled in the United States at a distressingly slow rate, with many applicants subject to delays and onerous reviews. The impact of the Trump policies has proved disastrous.

In the first year of the Trump administration only 29,725 refugees were admitted to the United States, a big drop from the 99,183 allowed in the previous year. In 1980, by comparison, the United States welcomed more than 200,000 refugees.

In October, Mr. Trump set the limit for refugee arrivals for the current fiscal year at a historical low of 45,000. And unless the pace of arrivals increases significantly, the United States will not reach even half that goal. This year, the United States is on track to resettle fewer refugees than Canada, which has a population roughly one-tenth that of the United States.

I lived for most of the past decade in a community where most of my neighbors were resettled refugees. Many of these friends have relatives still living abroad — people threatened by persecution in their countries of origin or languishing in refugee camps in a neighboring country, whose hopes of resettlement to the United States have been in a holding pattern, if not permanently dashed.

My colleagues at World Relief, which for about 40 years has partnered with the State Department and thousands of churches to welcome and help integrate refugees, have had to inform church partners that there are not enough refugees arriving to match their interest in helping.

The travel restrictions have been disparaged by critics as a “Muslim ban,” and, indeed, Muslim refugees — including those fleeing the Syrian civil war — have been the most harmed. About 80 percent fewer Muslim refugees were allowed in during the first year of the Trump administration than in the last year of the Obama administration.

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But despite Mr. Trump's statement that the United States would prioritize persecuted Christians, the number of persecuted Christians resettled in the United States has also declined drastically. About 27,000 fewer Christian refugees were admitted in the first year of the Trump administration than in the previous year.

By slashing total refugee resettlement numbers — and by halting all resettlement from Muslim-majority countries such as Iran and Iraq from which persecuted Christians had been a significant share of refugee arrivals — these policies have harmed thousands of Christians as well.

The harm goes beyond just the people who might have been resettled to the United States. Countries like Kenya, Lebanon and Jordan — each of which shelters hundreds of thousands who have fled persecution in neighboring countries — face domestic pressure to turn away those who need refuge. As the United States takes in far fewer refugees, Americans have lost the moral credibility to insist that those countries continue to take in asylum-seekers.

The limits to refugee resettlement were imposed, ostensibly, to protect national security. Mr. Trump tweeted just this month that further limits to immigration were necessary for security.

In reality, as [an analysis by the conservative Cato Institute](#) reveals, 78 percent of all murders in terrorist attacks in the United States since 2002 have been perpetrated by native-born Americans. Refugees, who are subjected to a more thorough vetting process than that of any other visitors or immigrants, have not taken a single American life in a terrorist attack since the Refugee Act of 1980 was passed into law.

One of Mr. Trump's executive orders mandated a report on the fiscal impact of refugee resettlement. But the administration never released that report, perhaps because the results did not suit its agenda.

A [draft of the report](#) from the Department of Health and Human Services obtained by The New York Times found that, over the past decade, refugees have contributed \$63 billion more in government revenues than they cost. That's consistent with the findings of economists, such as a recent study that found that refugees, on average, are paying more in taxes than they receive in governmental services and benefits by the ninth year after arrival.

The past year has been a disaster for refugees and for those of us who are deeply concerned — many because of the convictions of our faith — with their well-being. But, because of my Christian faith, I also believe that people can repent, turning from a wrong direction and moving in the right way.

It's not too late for our leaders to examine the facts, apply the values of the faith traditions that inspire many Americans' concern for refugees, and change course.