

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

September 21, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20006

Dear President Obama:

We write to you regarding your administration's plan to begin accepting at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the next fiscal year, in response to the worsening situation in Syria. According to numerous UN sources, since the conflict began in March 2011, more than 4 million Syrians have become refugees in neighboring countries and more than 7.5 million other Syrians are internally displaced. Recently, the world has watched as thousands of these refugees have attempted to flee the ongoing conflict and seek asylum in Western Europe. Many have tragically lost their lives as they journeyed across the Mediterranean and are exploited by smugglers and other human traffickers. As this crisis continues, we urge you to pursue a more holistic approach to the demographic profile of the additional 10,000 refugee allotments. In particular, we ask that Christians, Yazidis, and other religious minorities fleeing brutal persecution from ISIL be included in this, or any future, announced increase to the refugee ceiling and regional allocations.

As you are well aware, when ISIL established control over new territory last year, they warned religious minorities living under its jurisdiction they had three choices: convert to Islam; pay a cumbersome religious tax; or be executed. These religious minorities included Christians, Yazidis, Turkmen, and Shabak— all of which have a long and rich history in the region. Many thousands have been murdered or abducted, and an unknown number of women and girls have been sexually assaulted, sold into slavery, and forced into marriage. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, approximately 9 million Syrians have fled their homes since the conflict began, and about 3 million have fled to neighboring countries like Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan.

The United States, in coordination with an international coalition, must ensure that addressing the plight of religious minorities remains a key part of a comprehensive strategy to respond to the conflict. The US has a strategic and moral imperative to reaffirm our commitment to protecting religious freedom around the world and must do more to support religious minority groups under siege by ISIL. As a country with a proud history of welcoming those seeking to practice their faith without fear or discrimination, the United States is well suited to resettling these refugees into existing faith communities. Several countries have already made commitments to help refugees that were able to flee, including Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, and others.

We strongly believe that we must do more to protect those facing mass atrocities and crimes against humanity simply because of their religious beliefs. Thank you for your consideration of this request, and we look forward to continued engagement on this very important issue.

Sincerely,



Rob Portman  
U.S. Senator



Tom Cotton  
U.S. Senator



Mark Kirk  
U.S. Senator



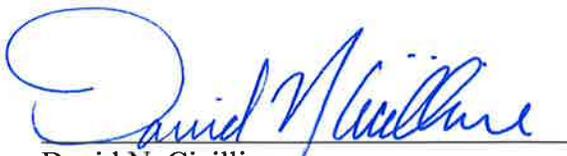
James Lankford  
U.S. Senator



Juan Vargas  
Member of Congress



Judy Chu  
Member of Congress



David N. Cicilline  
Member of Congress



Joseph Crowley  
Member of Congress

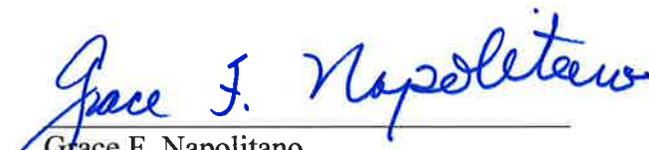
  
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Jeff Denham  
Member of Congress

  
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Daniel M. Donovan, Jr.  
Member of Congress

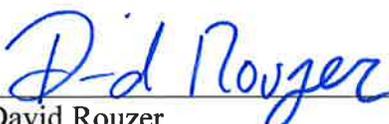
  
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Anna G. Eshoo  
Member of Congress

  
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Jeff Fortenberry  
Member of Congress

  
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Ted Lieu  
Member of Congress

  
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Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress

  
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Scott Peters  
Member of Congress

  
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David Rouzer  
Member of Congress