

Jewish Federation of Lane County Statement on Refugees (May 2016)

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

Many parts of the world are suffering in turmoil, leading to the highest number of refugees in 20 years, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). More than 15 million refugees were registered with the UNHCR in 2015; millions more are unregistered. The most staggering refugee situation today is the crisis stemming from Syria's civil war, now in its fifth year. An estimated four million Syrian refugees have fled their country, and eight million people are internally displaced within the country. Refugees in host countries face inadequate housing and food, limited access to medical and psychological care, and lack of educational opportunities. The scope of the crisis is so vast that it threatens to destabilize the entire region as deteriorating conditions in countries of first asylum are causing secondary mass displacements.

The United States has provided significant funding to assist refugees, but it is not enough to meet the growing needs. With the largest and most sophisticated refugee resettlement program in the world, the U.S. can and should do more to help the many victims of persecution worldwide. Like the many Jewish refugees and other immigrants who arrived in the United States and became a vibrant part of our national community, resettled refugees have a historical track record of embracing American values and boosting the economies of the communities where they settle. Calls to close our borders to asylum seekers are a stark betrayal of American and Jewish values.

The Jewish Federation of Lane County calls on:

- The international community to respond to the current Syrian refugee process. Money has been pledged but only a small portion has been allocated to date. The larger community must support countries of first asylum, strengthening their ability to host refugees and ensuring that proper resources are allocated to provide services to both citizens and asylum seekers.
- The United States to increase the number of refugees it will accept and the funds necessary to provide adequate screening and resettlement. Refugees must be treated with dignity, compassion, and respect.
- Congress and the Executive Branch to undertake a sensible and careful review of the screening program for refugees. The process under which individuals can enter the U.S. on tourist, student, and work visas must likewise be reviewed.
- All citizens to speak out when others, including community, religious and political leaders label refugees with hateful or xenophobic invective. We must not tolerate attempts to segregate, label, or discriminate against persons on the basis of their religion. Nor can we acquiesce in the calls for monitoring or limitations on places of worship merely due to their religious affiliation. We should not turn our backs on innocent victims escaping oppression and seeking freedom. This is a bedrock American ideal and part of the legacy of the Jewish people.