

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

October 21, 2015

The Honorable Jeh Johnson  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Nebraska Avenue Center  
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable John Kerry  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretaries Johnson and Kerry:

We write regarding the need to ensure that, as the United States considers increasing the number of refugees—and in particular Syrian refugees—allowed into the country, we maintain rigorous security vetting of all applicants.

Secretary Kerry, on September 20<sup>th</sup>, you said that “the United States will significantly increase our numbers for refugee resettlement in the course of this next year and the year after...We are now going to go up to 85,000 with at least, and I underscore the “at least” – it is not a ceiling, it’s a floor – of 10,000 over the next year from Syria specifically even as we also receive more refugees from other areas. And in the next fiscal year, we’ll target 100,000, and if it’s possible to do more, we’ll do.”

Since March 2011, the Syrian conflict has driven more than 4 million Syrians into neighboring countries as refugees. More than 7.5 million other Syrians are internally displaced. Many of those fleeing Syria are Christians, Yazidis and other religious minorities trying to escape brutal persecution at the hand of ISIS.

The United States aims to consider for resettlement at least half of the refugees referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for resettlement worldwide each year. By law, the annual number of refugee admissions and the allocation of these numbers by region of the world are set by the President after consultation with Congress.

While the United States is a compassionate country and has a role to play in alleviating the suffering of people caught up in this tragedy, and in welcoming those seeking to practice their faith without fear of persecution, we must also ensure that our national security is not compromised in this process.

Secretary Kerry, you also acknowledged that post-September 11<sup>th</sup>, “we have new laws and new requirements with respect to security background checks and vetting, so it takes longer than one would like and we cannot cut corners with respect to those security requirements.”

We must be aware that groups like ISIS will infiltrate refugee camps and try to seek admittance into the United States. As you move forward with the process of admitting more refugees into this country, it is critical that rigorous background checks and security measures are in place. We must know with certainty who we are allowing into this country.

The United States must stand for those who are persecuted, particularly those who are targeted for their religious beliefs, both at home and abroad. However, while we support efforts in providing aid to those who are seeking refuge, safety of our people on our own shores is of utmost concern and your agencies should not take any actions that would sacrifice the thoroughness of the security vetting process in order to admit more people into this country. As you consider accepting additional Syrian refugees, we ask for your commitment in maintaining the highest level security protocols.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical matter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke.

JAMES LANKFORD (OK)  
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J. Randy Forbes" in a cursive style, with a horizontal line underneath.

J. RANDY FORBES (VA)  
Member of Congress