

## Evangelical Immigration Table

Council for Christian Colleges  
and Universities

Ethics and Religious Liberty  
Commission of the Southern  
Baptist Convention

Korean Churches for  
Community Development/Faith  
and Community Empowerment

National Association of  
Evangelicals

National Hispanic Christian  
Leadership Conference

The Wesleyan Church

World Relief

August 7, 2018

Dear Secretary Pompeo, Secretary Nielsen, and Ambassador Brownback,

As leaders of the Evangelical Immigration Table, we lead ministries, denominations, and organizations that represent and serve evangelical Christians throughout the country. Many of our groups participated in the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom that occurred last month in Washington, D.C. We are grateful for the strong focus on promoting and protecting religious freedom around the world. As evangelical Christians, we are deeply committed to the conviction that all individuals must have the freedom to serve and worship God and practice their faith as their conscience dictates, without government interference. We're grateful for your strong statements of support for religious freedom for all people.

We're writing to express our deep concern about the impact on international religious freedom of recent changes in the U.S. refugee resettlement program, which is coordinated by the Department of State but also involves a thorough screening process coordinated by the Department of Homeland Security.

Throughout our history, the United States has offered safe haven to those fleeing religious persecution. The Refugee Act of 1980 specifically identifies religion as one of five enumerated grounds on which a claim to refugee status can be based, and many of the more than three million refugees admitted to the country since that time have fled persecution that was inflicted on them specifically because of their faith.

Over the past decade, for example, the top country of origin for refugees has been Burma (also known as Myanmar). Among others, the Burmese government has brutally oppressed the Karen, Chin, Karenni and Rohingya, many of whom are both religious and ethnic minorities in the mostly-Buddhist country. According to the State Department's Refugee Processing Center, 70 percent of the 150,249 Burmese refugees admitted to the U.S. between 2008 and 2017 were Christians and an additional 11.5 percent were Muslims.

Over the past year, however, despite an increase in the world's refugee population to more than 25 million, the highest number since such statistics have been tracked, the overall number of refugees admitted to the U.S. has decreased dramatically—down approximately 70 percent from about 36,000 in the first six months of 2016 to fewer than 11,000 during the same months of 2018. The number of religious minorities who have been offered the opportunity to escape oppression and rebuild their lives in the freedom of the United States is down dramatically as a result.

These declines have been most stark for persecuted Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East, many of whom have endured a genocide at the Islamic State. During the first half of 2016, 1,574 Middle Eastern Christian refugees were admitted from the region, but in the first half of 2018, the United

## Evangelical Immigration Table

Council for Christian Colleges  
and Universities

Ethics and Religious Liberty  
Commission of the Southern  
Baptist Convention

Korean Churches for  
Community Development/Faith  
and Community Empowerment

National Association of  
Evangelicals

National Hispanic Christian  
Leadership Conference

The Wesleyan Church

World Relief

States has admitted only twenty-three, a decline of 98.5 percent. In short, cuts to our refugee admission program affect all persecuted religious minorities, but these cuts significantly impact our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ.

We appreciate and share the commitment of this administration, expressed repeatedly at the recent Ministerial, to leveraging U.S. influence to ensure that people around the world are able to practice their faith without facing persecution or restrictions. So long as such persecution continues to exist, however, we believe the U.S. should continue to welcome some of the most vulnerable refugees who have been persecuted for their faith, alongside those who have been persecuted for their political opinion, ethnicity, and other reasons enumerated in U.S. law.

We ask you each to do all that is within your authority to ensure that the various departments of the U.S. government cooperate to resume refugee resettlement at a level consistent with historical norms, including recommending to the president a refugee ceiling of at least 75,000 for fiscal year 2019 and allocating necessary resources to ensure that refugees are being processed and vetted as efficiently as possible overseas.

As you do so, please know that we are praying both for persecuted people throughout the world and for you, as our governmental leaders.

Respectfully,

Leith Anderson, President, National Association of Evangelicals

Scott Arbeiter, President, World Relief

Shirley V. Hoogstra, President, Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

Hyepin Im, President & CEO, Korean Churches for Community  
Development/Faith and Community Empowerment

Jo Anne Lyon, Ambassador, General Superintendent Emerita, The Wesleyan  
Church

Russell Moore, President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern  
Baptist Convention

Samuel Rodriguez, President, National Hispanic Christian Leadership  
Conference