

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

February 24, 2014

Dear Secretary Kerry and Secretary Johnson:

We write in support of the administration's two new exemptions from the overly-broad inadmissibility provisions of U.S. immigration law, announced in the Federal Register on February 5, 2014. These inadmissibility provisions continue to prevent approximately 3,000 people in the United States who have already passed the difficult test to prove they are bona fide asylees and refugees from becoming permanent residents of the United States and reuniting with their families. The provisions also threaten to exclude from refugee protection many vulnerable Syrians who have engaged in no wrongdoing and pose no national security threat to the United States.

In 2001, Congress enacted legislation that significantly broadened the definition of "terrorist activity." Because the definition was so broad, it encompassed some activities that had no real-life connection to terrorism. Many refugees seeking safety were barred from entering the U.S., resulting in family separation in some cases, and many refugees and asylees already offered protection and living in the U.S. were barred from obtaining green cards and reuniting with family members. While statutory authority to grant exemptions from these provisions had been added to the statute as part of the REAL ID Act of 2005, implementation of that authority was very slow. In 2007, a bipartisan coalition in Congress led by Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Jon Kyl (R-AZ) broadened the statutory exemption authority to authorize the Administration to provide relief to persons with no actual connection to terrorism from the broad anti-terrorism provisions of the immigration law.

As the administration's most recent use of the Congressionally-authorized exemption authority indicates, these overly-broad provisions of law are a bar to refugees "who do not pose a national security or public safety risk." We are hopeful that these exemptions will benefit extremely vulnerable Syrian refugees who have fled the ongoing civil war, including women and children, as well as persons previously granted asylum or refugee status whose later applications for permanent residency or family reunification have been held up for years because of the overly-broad provisions.

We thank you for approving these exemptions, and we continue to urge you to take other measures within the authority granted to you by Congress to resolve the problem of these overly-broad provisions that have caused so much pain and uncertainty for so many. On grounds of

compassion, good policy, and rule of law, we call on you to continue working to ensure that refugees with no real connection to terrorism can finally find safety in the United States.

Sincerely,

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