



We want to live in a world where people’s human rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled and a world where people who are in danger are not only provided protection, but are able to rebuild their lives. Governments should never force anyone to go back to a country, either directly or indirectly, where they are at risk of human rights violations or abuses. Instead, all people should be offered a safe place to live where they have their human rights to food, drinking water, clothing, shelter, life-saving medical care, essential sanitation, contagious disease prevention, and education met. All people should have fair opportunities to access work, education, and health care wherever they are, and if refugees and asylum seekers wish to return to their country of origin, the international community has a responsibility to help facilitate the conditions for voluntary return where they will be afforded full rights, including access to citizenship.

Unfortunately, the international community has failed to meaningfully share the responsibility for protecting displaced and persecuted people, often with grave consequences. Governments have hardened their punitive policies of deterrence, and many politicians have exploited migration for political gain, fueling racism and xenophobia. People who are the targets of systematic and long-term demonization – including refugees, migrants, and members of ethnic or religious groups– are the least protected and most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, human rights defenders and civil society organizations that help refugees, migrants, and other vulnerable populations have been subjected to unfounded criminal proceedings, undue restrictions, intimidation, harassment, and smear campaigns.

The international community faces many urgent crises which require international solidarity to solve. From the mass detention of Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups in northwestern China’s Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region; the campaign of violence unleashed against the Rohingya by the Myanmar military resulting in crimes against humanity that continue to this day; to the nearly 80 million people forcibly displaced because of war, violence, persecution, or the climate crisis – there are more persecuted, displaced, and vulnerable people in the world than ever before. International solidarity is needed in the best of times. Now, it is an absolute must. We must not allow restrictions on exercise of rights to become the new normal.

The U.S. government has a responsibility to step up and be a robust participant in offering protection for refugees and asylum seekers and lead the way in investing in innovative solutions that protect the human rights of all displaced, persecuted, or at-risk populations. For when countries invest a small amount in protecting displaced, persecuted, and at-risk populations, the dividends pay off for generations to come.

The following briefs offer recommendations on what the next White House Administration can do to offer protection for some of those most at risk in our world.

# U.S. REFUGEE ASSISTANCE

## INTERNATIONAL

### THE ISSUE

The international community faces a displacement crisis of historic proportions that requires bold leadership, innovative solutions, and all countries to do their fair share. Currently, there are nearly 80 million people forcibly displaced because of war, violence, persecution, or the climate crisis – with the number only growing worse every year. Nearly 26 million of those displaced are refugees, having fled their country of origin and unable or unwilling to return voluntarily.

Unable to return home, most refugees stay in their host country where they try to build a new life. For a small minority facing specific protection risks, staying in their initial host country is not an option, making resettlement necessary. The U.N. Refugee Agency estimates that 1.44 million refugees need access to resettlement in 2020. Despite this, only a tiny fraction is afforded this chance.

Resettlement is a lifeline for refugees and a key component of responsibility-sharing that allows states to support each other by agreeing to resettle refugees from host countries. Since the 1980 Refugee Act established the refugee program, the U.S. has historically resettled the largest number of refugees annually. From 1980 until 2017, U.S. administrations have, on average, set the ceiling for refugee resettlement at 95,000. The admissions ceiling for Fiscal Year 2021 is 15,000, the lowest goal ever set by any administration, and accompanied by drastic changes to the types of refugees prioritized.

**Abandoning Responsibility:** A fundamental principle of refugee protection is responsibility sharing and international cooperation. Unfortunately, the U.S. government is abandoning its duty to share in its responsibility to protect refugees. Successive bans and policy changes have taken their toll, with many refugees who expected to be resettled to the U.S. stuck in a never-ending limbo of security vetting.

Instead of upholding its responsibilities, the U.S. is abdicating its duty for refugee protection, drastically cutting the number of refugees it will accept for resettlement. The U.S. Government has also sought to cut programs that offer life-saving and life-preserving humanitarian aid to displaced populations the world over. Responsibility-sharing of all states is critical to reduce the impact of large-scale refugee populations on host countries, and each state should contribute to the maximum of its capacity. The U.S. has not only reduced its commitment to offering protection to refugees in need of resettlement, it has all but abandoned global leadership in ensuring refugee's access to durable, lasting protection opportunities. While other governments have expressed increased interest in creating pathways for refugee protection, including community sponsorship programs for refugees, none of these programs could ever replace the capacity the U.S. refugee program once offered.



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## THE HUMAN COST

Malik is an Iraqi refugee stranded with his family in Beirut, Lebanon, after the U.S. government failed to keep its promise to resettle him, his wife Sana and their two sons.\* After years of harassment and discrimination, fearing for their lives because they are Christian, they fled Iraq in 2013. Malik and his family thought their dream had come true when they were accepted for resettlement to the U.S. in 2016, however the current administration's first Muslim ban halted their resettlement process from moving forward. Since that time, their case has been stuck in limbo — in “security checks” – indefinitely. Malik should be able to enjoy his human rights as a refugee, and should not live in limbo, without hope. \*Pseudonyms used to protect their privacy and security

## TALKING POINTS

- The U.S. must be a robust participant in refugee protection and lead the way in investing in innovative solutions that protect the human rights of refugees.
- International solidarity is needed in the best of times. Now, it is an absolute must. The United States must not allow restrictions on exercise of rights to become the new normal.
- When a country invests a small amount in refugee protection, the dividends pay off for generations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Immediately reverse policies and procedures intended to limit refugee resettlement and asylum in the United States - which violate the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other internationally recognized human rights standards - including rescinding the Muslim, African, refugee, asylum, and immigration bans (Presidential Proclamations 9645, 9822, 9983, 9984, 9993, and 10014, and Executive Orders 13769, 13780, 13815, and 13888). The President should also publicly repudiate xenophobia and apologize for these official acts of discrimination by the U.S. government that have impacted so many families and individuals.
- Apply the provisions of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol to refugees without discrimination.
- The U.S. should ease pressure on countries currently hosting the greatest number of refugees by participating in equitable and predictable pathways to protection for refugees, including by expanding access to traditional resettlement, and by facilitating the successful integration of refugees in their host countries or helping to facilitate the conditions for voluntary return to refugees' countries of origin.
- Notify Congress of an intent to increase the FY 2021 admissions goal to 100,000 refugees, restore regional allocations for refugee admissions to reflect global needs, reestablish the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program's acceptance of UN High Commissioner for Refugees referrals, and request additional funds from Congress to allow for increased refugee admissions in FY21.
- In addition to expanding resettlement, the U.S. should invest in other admission pathways, including humanitarian programs, family reunification, and a private sponsorship model, and expand community involvement in resettlement by robustly promoting community sponsorship through co-sponsorship programs and private sponsorship.
- Expand refugee resettlement options from Central American countries and establish a regional resettlement initiative for Central American and Venezuelan refugees, including through expansion and improvement of the Protection Transfer Arrangement and reestablishing and improving the

Central American Minors program.

- Restore in full critically needed funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) at levels consistent with the US's historical contributions.
- For refugees who remain in displacement, the U.S. should increase its financial support of international humanitarian programs that enhance refugees' self-reliance through educational opportunities, job and livelihood programs, focus on women's and children's unique needs, energy support, and other independence measures.
- Increase financial support to international organizations working on the front lines to address refugees' needs, including ensuring that refugee camps and host countries have medical personnel and supplies, along with clean running water.
- Work with the international community to ensure that all displaced persons have access to timely and accurate information along with access to healthcare in the host state's public health systems, without discrimination, and access to testing, treatment and preventive measures for COVID-19.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- "Refugees and Migrants Forgotten in COVID-19 Crisis Response," (May 2020) (available [here](#))
- "Refugee-led organizations need support to continue their vital work," (August 2020) (available [here](#))
- "The Mountain is in Front of Us and the Sea is Behind Us': The Impact of U.S. Policies on Refugees in Lebanon and Jordan," (June 2019) (available [here](#))

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# MUSLIM MINORITIES IN CHINA

## INTERNATIONAL

### THE ISSUE

China's growing economic and political influence around the world makes it one of the most consequential relationships the U.S. will have to manage. The next President should reframe the U.S.-China relationship to put human rights front and center of its policy. Whether the U.S. succeeds will have significant consequences not only for the human rights of people in China, but also for the global and international human rights agenda as China's government builds support for its efforts to reframe human rights and undermine its institutions.

In recent years, China's government has drafted and enacted a series of restrictive laws in the name of national security that present grave dangers to human rights and human rights defenders. Human rights defenders, including lawyers and activists, are increasingly subjected to monitoring, harassment, intimidation, detention, and imprisonment. In Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang), an estimated one million predominantly Muslim people have been held in internment. Detainees have been subjected to political and cultural indoctrination, children have been separated from their parents, and there have been numerous allegations of torture and other ill-treatment in these camps.

On a broader scale, an increasingly assertive China has worrying implications for the human rights system as a whole. China's leaders are operating from within the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council to shrink the space available for the UN and civil society to hold states accountable for their human rights records, as well as making efforts to reframe human rights as a "cause," as opposed to a state's legal obligations to its people. As China has become more powerful, it has been able to shut down human rights dialogues and intimidate those that criticize its record. In 2013, Xi Jinping launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), steering much of this finance into infrastructure projects. Many of the projects that make up BRI are based in countries where there is much potential for exploitative labor practices, environmental degradation, and weak governance and accountability.

In July 2015, an unprecedented government crackdown on human rights lawyers and other activists began during which nearly 250 targeted individuals were questioned or detained by state security agents. Many detained human rights lawyers and activists are held incommunicado for months awaiting trial. Without access to families or lawyers of their choice, they remain at grave risk of torture and other ill-treatment. A number of other lawyers have been disbarred and thus are no longer able to use their legal expertise to seek justice for victims of human rights abuses. The effects of this crackdown are being felt throughout Chinese society.

The internment of predominantly Muslim ethnic groups in Xinjiang has intensified since March 2017, when a "Regulation on De-extremification" was adopted in the region. Open or even private displays of religious and cultural affiliation, including growing an "abnormal" beard, wearing a veil or headscarf, regular prayer can be considered "extremist" under the regulation. Since then there has been a growing government campaign of mass internment, intrusive surveillance, political indoctrination and forced cultural assimilation against Uyghurs, Kazakhs and others in Xinjiang. An

estimated one million people have been held in internment camps where they have endured a litany of human rights violations.

China is systematically harassing Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic groups even after they have fled the country. Across the globe, Chinese authorities are carrying out a [campaign of intimidation against diaspora communities](#) through pressure from Chinese embassies abroad, as well as through messaging apps and threatening phone calls. Chinese embassies and consulates abroad are tasked with collecting information about members of Uyghurs, Kazakhs and others ethnic groups originally from Xinjiang residing in other countries.

Several [interviewees](#) told Amnesty International that local authorities in Xinjiang had targeted their relatives back home as a way to suppress the activities of Uyghur communities living abroad. Individuals reported being warned that family members would be detained if they did not return to Xinjiang or that they would not be able to see their family again if they refused to provide information about other Uyghurs living in their communities. Adding to the anxieties of those living abroad are aggressive efforts by Chinese security officials to recruit informants to spy on others in overseas Uyghur communities.

Chinese authorities have a history of pressuring other governments to repatriate Uyghurs who have left China. Chinese Uyghurs living abroad fear that, if they were to be returned, they would inevitably end up detained in Xinjiang's "re-education" camps. For those awaiting asylum status in the countries where they are staying, deportation is a source of tremendous stress and concern.

## TALKING POINTS

- The deterioration of civil society and rule of law in China appears to signal a systematic effort by the Chinese government to tighten its controls on free expression and undermine the will of its own people, including the rights of its ethnic minorities, such as Uyghurs and Tibetans, guaranteed under China's own Constitution.
- As President, I plan to work with allies and partners to use all diplomatic and economic tools to push back on China's systematic attack on international human rights norms, whether they be inside China, globally or at the United Nations.
- Our values need to be front-and-center as we manage our relationship with China. A rights-respecting China is a U.S. national security imperative and would help the U.S. achieve our other political, economic, and security goals.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The U.S. should robustly fund and support human rights non-governmental organizations that support human rights defenders (HRDs) including by prison visits, legal representations, consultations with HRDs, provisions of visas, and trial monitoring in China.
- The U.S. should make the human rights crisis in Xinjiang a national security priority by calling for and supporting a [UN fact finding mission to Xinjiang](#), holding accountable the Chinese government officials who are responsible for abuses, providing protection opportunities to Uyghurs and other ethnic Muslims to ensure humanitarian pathways to the U.S., and banning surveillance exports that pose a substantial risk of violating human rights in their destination.

- The U.S. should aggressively push for international human rights norms vis-à-vis China in bilateral, regional, and multilateral forums through positive and negative diplomatic and economic incentives and disincentives.

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# THE ROHINGYA

## INTERNATIONAL

### THE ISSUE

In August 2017, an armed group known as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) launched coordinated attacks on security force posts in northern Rakhine State, Myanmar. In response, the Myanmar security forces, led by the Myanmar Army (“Tatmadaw”), attacked the entire Rohingya population in villages across northern Rakhine State. In the ten months after August, the Tatmadaw drove more than 700,000 women, men, and children—more than 54% of the Rohingya who lived in northern Rakhine State at the outset of this crisis in 2017—into neighboring Bangladesh.

An overwhelming population of the affected communities in Bangladesh, including about 500,000 Rohingya, are school-aged children who have no access to accredited education and are vulnerable to forced recruitment into armed groups, child labor, sexual exploitation, and child marriage.

The Myanmar Security Forces carried out a relentless and systematic campaign in which they unlawfully killed thousands of Rohingya, including young children; raped and committed other sexual violence against hundreds of Rohingya women and girls; tortured Rohingya men and boys in detention sites; pushed Rohingya communities toward starvation by burning markets and blocking access to farmland; and burned hundreds of villages in a targeted and deliberate manner.

Crimes against humanity continue against the estimated 600,000 Rohingya who are still living in Rakhine State. Their rights to equality, a nationality, freedom of movement, and access to adequate healthcare, education, and work opportunities are routinely violated. Seven years after they were forced from their homes, some 128,000 people remain confined to squalid detention camps within Rakhine State, reliant on humanitarian assistance for their survival. The Rohingya have long faced systematic persecution; for example, the 1982 Citizenship Law stripped many of their Myanmar citizenship and deprived them of their right to a nationality.

The Myanmar Military and the Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic Rakhine armed group, have clashed on and off for years—though the last year marked a clear escalation in the violence, with nearly 45,000 people displaced in Rakhine and Chin states as of December 2019. Amnesty has documented serious human rights violations against civilians committed by the military, including unlawful attacks, arbitrary arrests, torture and other ill-treatment, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, and forced labor. Many of these constitute war crimes.

Shan State in northern Myanmar has also seen decades of conflict and violence. In 2011, conflict renewed in northern Myanmar between the military and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). Despite efforts to end the fighting—including through a national peace process—conflict has continued, with civilians often bearing the brunt. Amnesty has documented war crimes and other serious violations by the Myanmar military in the ongoing conflict, including arbitrary arrests, detention on military bases, torture and other ill-treatment, and unlawful attacks.

## TALKING POINTS

- We say “never-again,” yet the international community continues to watch and fail to put an end to the systematic and widespread persecution of the Rohingya population, which has resulted in war crimes and crimes against humanity.
- As President, I will seek to bring justice to the millions of Rohingya and other ethnic minorities in Myanmar who have been displaced at the hands of the Myanmar military. Whether through supporting international accountability mechanisms or through multilateral sanctions, I will make sure that we protect the most vulnerable and support our values through our engagements.
- More than half a million Rohingya children have yet to see the inside of a classroom since they arrived in the refugee camps of Bangladesh more than two years ago. That’s almost an entirely lost generation in a volatile region where extremist groups are operating. We should support, sustain, and increase humanitarian assistance—including access to education—to help give the Rohingya and other refugees in the region a better future.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The United States should ensure that any international aid, development projects or financial assistance in Rakhine State are explicitly and specifically contingent on non-discrimination, non-segregation and equality, that Myanmar takes immediate action to cease ongoing violations against the Rohingya community and prevents the destruction of evidence.
- The United States should use all of its diplomatic and political levers to push for a United Nations Security Council referral of the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court to bring those most responsible for atrocity crimes to justice.
- The United States should create a global coalition to respond to the Myanmar human rights crisis, calling for multilateral targeted sanctions against senior military officials responsible for atrocities.
- The United States should increase and sustain its support for humanitarian assistance—including access to education—for refugees in Bangladesh and in Myanmar.
- The United States should ensure all decisions related to Rohingya refugees are clearly detailed in a consultation-based, publicly accessible, transparent and rights-respecting policy document, which outlines a framework of representation of Rohingya refugees, in order to protect their human rights.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Let us Speak for Our Rights: Human Rights Situation of Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh” (September 2020) (available [here](#))
  - COVID-19 Response Flaws Put Older Rohingya Refugees in Imminent Danger (April 2020) (available [here](#))
  - Indiscriminate airstrikes kill civilians as Rakhine conflict worsens (July 2020) (available [here](#))

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