

Nandita Balakrishnan  
222 Ayrshire Farm Ln. Apt. 201  
Stanford, CA 94305  
nbalakr@stanford.edu

December 2, 2015

The Honorable Nikki R. Haley  
Office of the Governor  
1205 Pendleton Street  
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Governor Haley:

As a first-generation American, born of immigrant parents, you are the manifestation of the American dream. You demonstrated that anyone, regardless of background, can command a leadership role in the United States. First-generation, second-generation, we can all be the manifestations of the American Dream. After all, even those that trace their ancestry back to the Mayflower are themselves descendants of refugees.

*Give Me Your Tired, Give Me Your Poor*—these are the words that are engraved on the Statue of Liberty. They indicate that not only does the United States have the *capacity* to show compassion, but that this compassion is also an essential part of our value system. However, we write to you now because lately we have been feeling that the politicians who are meant to represent us, and who are trying to convince us they serve our best interests, seem to be using a rhetoric that demonstrates a complete lack of compassion. It is important to note here that this rhetoric has been present far before the horrific tragedy that took place in Paris. No longer are we hearing that the US is a proud melting pot of different cultures and religions; instead, we are beginning to see a frightening and rapid trend toward an “us vs. them” mentality.

We are writing to you, Madam Governor, because we were disappointed and dismayed by your announcement that South Carolina would not welcome Syrian refugees. We are proud South Carolinians, who were nurtured by the schools and communities of this great state. The South Carolina we know was welcoming to all, but this is not the South Carolina you demonstrated to the world when you made your announcement.

We want to take this opportunity, Madam Governor, to remind you of a few things. The simple reality is that the United States, in spite of claims of being the most compassionate nation, has failed to live up to this standard many times. We claim to be the paragon of the civilized world, but our actions indicate that this is becoming an increasingly empty claim. How can we reconcile the fact the United States turned away refugees fleeing persecution from the Holocaust and yet took in acknowledged Nazis after the end of the Second World War? More importantly, how can we reconcile that we have failed to learn from that tragedy?

refugees. How can we even justify lumping these tormented people with those who perpetrate violence against them? Why? Because they happen to have the same color skin? Maybe believe in the same God? To use that as a justification is quite frankly incredibly ignorant, and we cannot claim to be paragons of society when we spew such uneducated claims.

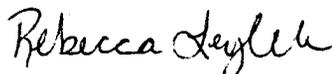
Finally, we are incredibly disappointed by any politician attempting to even justify the need for a religious test for refugees entering the country. Are we really trying to claim that the devotees of one God are more worthy of our compassion than the devotees of another? All religions preach peace, and more importantly, history has shown that all religions have their extremists. We are not discounting the salience of jihadist extremism and the importance of dealing with such terrorists who propagate violence using this ideology, but once again it is important to remember that the refugees we are discussing are victims of these same terrorists. No politician who claims that a Christian is somehow more deserving of our kindness than a Muslim represents us or our interests. Have we forgotten the image of the dead little boy on a Turkish beach? Are we saying we would not try to save the lives of children like him just because his name is Mohammed instead of Mikhael? Madam Governor, you are the child of non-Christians, and what we have learned from your parents' story as well as countless others is that it is their hard work, hand in hand with those of many faiths, that has built the strong social fabric that we have in this country.

We genuinely believe that our country's legacy in regards to compassion towards the foreign needy has been marred by stains, but it does not have to be this way. It is time to not only realize we have the capacity to be compassionate but that we can have the will. We are better than this, Madam Governor. If we are not, then we have to strive to be better. We plead with you, as a mother, as a Governor, and as an American, to take the initiative. Stand strong, and do not fall into an easy trap of bigotry and fear.

Respectfully,



Nandita Balakrishnan  
Stanford University



Rebecca Leylek  
Stanford University