

MEMO

To: The Honorable Nikki R. Haley
From: South Carolina Religious Leaders and People of Faith
Re: Resettlement of Syrian Refugees in South Carolina
Date: December 2, 2015
CC: Members of the South Carolina Congressional Delegation

In the wake of terrorist violence, many South Carolina lawmakers, including our governor, have declared opposition to receiving any refugees from Syria for resettlement here. This is a regrettable and saddening position.

As people of faith, many of us leaders in our religious traditions, we challenge our political leaders to show courage in the face of fear. We must not turn our backs on the thousands of human souls fleeing the same violence which we fear. Nor should we turn our backs on our many international allies who need our help to resettle the homeless, hungry, and frightened who have reached their borders.

Furthermore, we abhor the suggestion that immigrants be accepted based on their stated religion. Such a test is contrary to everything our American ideals represent, particularly in a country, and in a state, which is home to dozens of religions, including thousands of peaceful Muslims. South Carolina has welcomed refugees many times over the years, and we can do our part again.

We call on state leaders to trust the existing rigorous process by which immigrants are approved, and to resist demagoguery or any other speech which feeds fear and incites bigotry. During these difficult times we need you to inspire hope, bravery, compassion and service.

Melissa Allgrim
Jennifer Aquart
Zohra Arastu
Rolf Baghdady
Mary Bettuchy
Dr. Adrian Bird
Tia Bivens
Claudia Smith Brinson
Denise Chastain
William G. Collins, Jr.
Bernadette Cooper
Catherine Combiier-Donovan
Brenda Conway
Nicola Daniels
Ruth Deep
Bernice Autumn Drake
Holli S. Emore, *Executive Director, Cherry Hill Seminary*
Christina Emrich
Carl Evans, Ph.D.
Rick Faile
Marguerite Frongillo
Yolanda Ganong
Eli Ghith
Gabrielle Griggs
E. Arden Hallman
Harriet Hancock
Libby Hendley
Elise Hind
Nancy Hendershot

Blanche Hopkins
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Gazala Javed, M.D.
Arnold Karr
Mary Kennerly
Reshma Khan
Rev. Brenda Lynn Kneece, *Executive Director, S.C. Christian Action Council*
Rev. Peggy Konkel, *Unity of Columbia*
Rev. Ed Kosak, *Unity of North Charleston*
Jonathan Leader, Ph.D.
Pamila Lorentz
Bob Lundgren
Sheryl Maffett
Rob McCue
Rev. C. Alexander McDonald
Robert McKie
Elizabeth McLendon
Rev. Roy Mitchell, *Chaplain, Columbia College*
Cheryl Glantz Nail, *Community Relations Director, Columbia Jewish Federation*
Randall Nesmith
Charles Nightingale
M.E. Rader, *Unity of Charleston*
Steven Rau
Clyde Roberts
Rev. Dr. Ron Robinson, *Chaplain, Wofford College*
Chaudhry Sadiq, *President, PICNA Peace and integration Council of America*
Rabbi Dr. Arthur Segal

Omar Shaheed, Imam
Lorri Shannon
Betsy Shoolbred
Jonathan Sifuentes-Winter
Kathy Simmons
Kumkum Singh
Lynn Sloan
Cheryl Soehl
Karen V. Starks
Dee Stogdill
Kira B. Summer
Rev. Thomas A. Summers

Aziz Tajuddin
Jerona Tate
Jane Teas
Kathryn Van Aernum
Susan Vanderborg
Melissa S. Walker
Carole Ward
Alan Waters
James Wilson
Ericka Wooten
Rev. Dr. Herman Yoos, *Bishop, South Carolina
Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

Comments:

We cannot give in to a climate of fear and stereotyping of others. - *Bishop Herman Yoos*

Grandparents on both sides of my family came to the shores of America after being in persecuted situations. If not for the USA letting them in I would not have been born into citizenship in this great country. Let's keep it great! - *Rev. Peggy Konkel, Unity of Columbia*

We are instructed in the Holiness Code (Lev. 19:33) to take to heart the lessons of our own history by treating aliens in our midst with justice and compassion. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." - *Cheryl Glantz Nail, Community Relations Director, Columbia Jewish Federation*

Compassion has been one of our country's greatest strengths. Let's keep modeling the beauty of care and concern for humanity. - *Omar Shaheed, Imam*

We are all brothers and sisters in this human race. How can we turn away from our brothers need? - *Sr. Nancy Hendershot*

We must stand up for humanity, justice, peace and compassion! Syrian tragedy is the worst in recent times, so as Americans we must show the world that we care and are ready to share! - *Chaudhry Sadiq President -PICNA Peace and integration Council of America*

Please make me proud to be a South Carolinian. Trust the Department of Homeland Security and Immigrations & Customization to do their job. Do not confuse a person's religious faith with their political choices. - *Holli Emore, Executive Director, Cherry Hill Seminary*

Governor Haley, as you probably well know that Sikhs were considered dangerous insurgents at one time, so it is incomprehensible how we cannot allow Syrian refugees into our state. If we are truly "Carolina Strong" we can open our state to help those in need. - *Kathryn Van Aernum*

I was sadly disappointed with Governor Haley's decision to block refugees entrance to South Carolina. We are better than that. My proudest moment as a Carolinian came when Charleston chose love in response to hate-inspired violence. We must do better and find the way to choosing love in all things. - *Pamila Lorentz*

The reasons given by the national gubernatorial political leadership for the refusal to accept refugees are not based in the reality of how ISIS or Al Qaeda recruits, nor honest in the reality of the vetting process for refugee acceptance. It is time that demagoguery be put aside and actual leadership take over. Substance rather than shallow perceptions for short-term advantages. Gov. Haley, you are better than this. - *Jonathan Leader*

These decisions are important for our long term future, we must not forget who we are, where we all come from and what our Constitution says. - *Mary Kennerly*

Judging by how long it took us to see previous shameful episodes of discrimination and heartlessness (think internment camps and segregation) for what they really were, I hope it will not take long before we open our eyes and see this one. It is heartbreaking that politicians who refuse helping the refugees still claim to be "Christians." That level of hypocrisy is mind-boggling. - *Eli Ghith*

I am so sickened by all this ugliness. Our country is better than this. - *Dee Stoddill*

A main aim of terrorism is to terrorize. It is up to us to allow ourselves to be terrorized or not. The Good Samaritan of the Gospel did not concern himself about the robbers who had beaten the victim, nor did he ask the background of the victim, he simply helped him. We must do likewise. - *William G. Collins, Jr.*

Please, please, may we have some compassion. Let's be proud of our Mother of Exile. - *Dr. Adrian Bird*

People who talk about our country as a Christian nation should ponder what Christian behavior would look like. - *Bob Lundgren*

Refugees are not terrorists; instead, they are trying to escape from terror and persecution that is erupting in their homelands. We need to give them a safe haven. - *Marguerite Frongillo*

If we lose our compassion, we will have lost. We believe in the principle of "Innocent until proven guilty". So, let us act accordingly and welcome those who trusted us enough to turn to us in their time of need. - *Bernice Autumn Drake*

Allow in, but verify, follow, and make sure all laws are obeyed. - *Rabbi Dr. Arthur Segal*

All our leaders claim to be persons of faith. It is a weak faith, indeed, which can be so easily cowed. Christians forget that it was Jews who crucified Jesus. Yet we do not rise up to keep Jews out. Nor should we. Keeping Muslims out simply because they are Muslims, or Syrians just because they are Syrian, makes no more sense than a keep-Jews-out policy would. Let us also remember that the Pilgrims came here to escape religious persecution. And it was other Christians--not Muslims--from whom they fled. - *Brenda Conway*

Welcome the stranger. - *Blanche Hopkins*

Don't let history repeat itself. - *Jonathan Sifuentes-Winter*

To refuse refuge is to deny our own humanity. - *Cheryl Soehl*

We are all human. - *Gabrielle Griggs*

Let us not repeat the mistakes of our past. - *Carole Ward*

"Whatever you do to the least ..." We cannot turn our backs on Him or them. - *Alan Waters*

I understand the fear that some people have about letting in refugees as criminals may sneak in with them. However, let us not make fear rule us to become inhumane. Apply rigorous screening tests and let us welcome our brothers and sisters in need. By the way, not that it should matter but I am Christian. - *Jennifer Aquart*

Every night before I sleep, I get on my knees to give thanks that I have a safe and comfortable place to sleep, food in my belly, satisfying work, a future full of promise and friends and family, who have the same. Then I pray for those same blessings to come again for the refugees and those on the verge of fleeing. I pray also that the terrorists remember that we are all one. - *Elizabeth McLendon*

If we refuse to help these Syrian refugees we'll have more generations of young people who think we don't care, which will, in turn, make them vulnerable to being involved with anti-American terrorist groups. - *Betsy Shoolbred*