

June 20, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
301 7th Street SW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear President Biden, Secretary Mayorkas, and Secretary Blinken,

Today on World Refugee Day we, the undersigned state, local, and national organizations, urge you to prioritize family reunification for refugee families. In his first weeks in office President Biden signed an Executive Order regarding the U.S. commitment to refugees which clearly stated: “reunifying families is in the national interest.”¹ However, two years later, extremely slow processing and bureaucratic red tape continue to keep refugee families separated. Biased and inefficient vetting and screening processes have led to these delays disproportionately impacting Black and Muslim families. And families whose kinship ties are not formally recognized in their countries of origin or first asylum, such as LGBTQIA+ couples and parents, are also subject to unfair restrictions and delays.

Long delays, lack of transparency, and inequitable processing exist across all refugee family reunification programs, including the Follow-to-Join Refugee and Asylee Process, Priority 3 (P3) family reunification, the Iraqi and Syrian I-130 Priority 2 Direct Access Program, and the Central American Minors (CAM) Program. Delays have compounded in recent years with little transparency for families waiting in the process.

These issues take a significant emotional and economic toll on families stuck in the process. Due to prolonged separation, families miss important life events and milestones together, including weddings and birthdays. This is time that cannot be reclaimed—indeed, some refugee families lose family members before being able to be reunited with their loved ones. Further, research² has shown that family-based immigration is critical to strengthening the United States economy and building strong communities. Family immigration spurs positive outcomes such as high rates

¹<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/02/04/executive-order-on-rebuilding-and-enhancing-programs-to-resettle-refugees-and-planning-for-the-impact-of-climate-change-on-migration/>

² <https://www.fwd.us/news/future-immigration/> and <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/advantages-family-based-immigration>

of self-employment and high earnings growth, improved well-being, and better integration outcomes.

For Black and Muslim families, processing hurdles are even more onerous. Due to the continuation of policies growing out of the Muslim Ban, families from certain countries now face additional scrutiny and red tape, which delay their cases.³ Families like the Mohamed family from Somalia suffer from the ongoing delays and bureaucratic obstacles that are common in refugee family reunification programs and even more pronounced for families from Muslim-majority countries.⁴ Rabi Mohamed was resettled to Minnesota in 2015 and is still waiting to reunite with his wife and children in the United States seven years later. Rabi says that when he speaks to his children they ask him, “‘When are you coming? When are you going to take us with you?’ They ask me things that I am unable to provide for them or make happen — things that I’ve been waiting for years to happen.”

Sadly, these heart-wrenching stories are all too familiar. Jayarajah Antony Rajeevan Kulas, a Sri Lankan Tamil refugee living in Texas, has been waiting to reunite with his wife and children in the United States for more than nine years. He says, “My only hope is for my family to join me. I worry constantly for their safety and it pains me to think about how many moments I have missed without them by my side.” Every day that passes is another day Rabi, Jayarajah, and many other refugee families are subject to worry and fear for their family’s safety overseas.

On this World Refugee Day, we ask that your administration fulfill its stated commitment to family reunification by implementing the following recommendations.

- **Invest resources** to address long backlogs of pending family reunification cases and reduce the time that families are separated moving forward.
- **Improve transparency** and communication so families know where they stand in the reunification process and are alerted about any additional actions they need to take.
- **Root out inequities** in family reunification processes that subject Black and Muslim families to more scrutiny and higher standards.

Family reunification has long been a bedrock of the United States immigration system. By implementing these recommendations, you will help reunite many families with their loved ones. It’s past time to prioritize reforming these pathways so that families can be together.

Sincerely,

Afghan Refugee Relief

ACCESS of WNY

³ <https://refugeerights.org/news-resources/how-the-muslim-ban-lives-on-for-some-refugees>

⁴ <https://www.startribune.com/st-cloud-man-suing-federal-officials-after-failed-efforts-to-move-family-to-u-s-from-refugee-camp/600269272/>

Afghan-American Chamber of Commerce (AACC)
Afghans Empowered
African Communities Together (ACT)
African Diaspora of Las Vegas
Al Otro Lado
American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)
Americans for Immigrant Justice
Amnesty International USA
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO
Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP)
Berrien Immigration Solidarity Network
Bethany Christian Services
Burma Refugee Families and Newcomers
Cabrini Immigrant Services of NYC
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC)
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
Center for Victims of Torture
Church World Service
Columbia Law School Immigrants' Rights Clinic
Community Refugee & Immigration Services (CRIS)
Community Supported Film
CONGOLESE COMMUNITY OF LAS VEGAS
Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants
Diocesan Migrant and Refugee Services Inc
Dorcas International Institute of RI
Dorothy Day Catholic Worker, Washington DC
First Congregational Church of SanJose
First Congregational United Church of Christ
HAITIAN BRIDGE ALLIANCE

HIAS
HIAS Pennsylvania
Human Rights Initiative
Humanitarian Immigration Law Clinic, Elon Law
Immigrant Allies of Marshalltown
Immigrant Defenders Law Center
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
Immigration Equality
Immigration Hub
Indivisible Brooklyn
Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti
Interfaith Welcome Coalition - San Antonio
International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
International Rescue Committee
Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice
Islamic Relief USA
Japanese American Citizens League
Journey's End Refugee Services, Inc.
Justice Action Center
Justice For Our Neighbors North Central Texas
Khmer Maine
Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center
Law Office of Patavee Vanadilok, P.C.
Lawyers for Good Government
Louisiana Organization for Refugees and Immigrants
Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area (LSSNCA)
National Education Association
National Immigration Law Center
National Immigration Litigation Alliance
National Immigration Project (NIPNLG)
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR)
National Partnership for New Americans

Neighbors Immigration Clinic
New International Hope for Refugee &
Immigrants
Nigerian Center
OPAWL - Building AAPI Feminist
Leadership
Oxfam America
Pilgrim United Church of Christ
Rainbow Railroad
Refugee Advocacy Lab
Refugee Congress
Refugee Council USA
Refugees International
RefugePoint
Rohingya Women Development Network
Save the Children
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Tahirih Justice Center
Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB)
The 5ive Pillars Organization
The Episcopal Church
The Lamia Afghan Foundation
U.S. Campaign for Burma
U.S. Committee for Refugees and
Immigrants
UMCOR
Unitarian Universalist Refugee & Immigrant
Services & Education
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
(UUSC)
United Church of Christ
Value our Families
VECINA
We Are All America
Welcoming America
Westchester Jewish Coalition for
Immigration
Witness At The Border
Women for Afghan Women (WAW)
Women's Refugee Commission

Young Center for Immigrant Children's
Rights