

April 10, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf  
Acting Secretary  
Department of Homeland Security  
2801 Nebraska Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Acting Secretary Wolf:

I write to express my concern regarding the Administration's decision to suspend resettlement programs within the U.S. I further request that the Administration include asylum seekers and refugees in its plans to counter Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

On March 17, 2020, the Administration announced that Border Patrol agents would immediately turn back anyone who tries to cross the southern or northern border between legal ports of entry to their home countries. The Administration also announced that asylum seekers would not be held for any length of time in any facility, nor would they be given due process. Once apprehended, these individuals would be driven to the nearest port of entry and returned to Mexico or Canada without further detention. U.S. border officials should allow people to follow U.S. legal process for asylees, and be properly screened and referred to health facilities, if necessary.

Similarly, the Department of State confirmed a temporary suspension of resettlement travel programs. Through abuse of the Migrant Protection Protocol, the Administration has already sent tens of thousands of people seeking refuge to some of the most dangerous parts of Mexico, forcing these vulnerable individuals to live in unsafe, unsanitary and inhumane conditions that endanger their health and safety. COVID-19 is certain to have tragic consequences to refugees around the world. Refugees living in crowded and unsanitary conditions are especially at risk of exposure to COVID-19 without access to clean water and food. An extended ban on resettlement programs will endanger the lives of even more refugees, further jeopardizing our collective public health. The Administration should not use this global health emergency as a means to permanently deny entry to those who seek safety in the United States.

I request that the Administration include refugees and asylees in plans to counter COVID-19, and honor our country's long tradition of aiding in the health security of the world's most vulnerable populations. The United States cannot not use this global emergency as ammunition

for anti-migrant or anti-refugee policies, or use it as an excuse to shut the door on those fleeing war or persecution. Furthermore, the U.S. should not make individuals wait longer to be reunited with their family members already in the country. While I urge the Administration to take proactive measures to manage public health risks in response to COVID-19, I strongly discourage any long-term suspension of the United States' responsibility to those seeking safety or refuge.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael F. Bennet". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" being the most prominent part.

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Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator