

September 7, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

RE: Protections for Climate-Affected Refugees and Other Climate-Displaced Populations

Dear President Biden,

As leaders of refugee resettlement, protection, and policy organizations, we write to urge you to follow through on your pledge to strengthen protection pathways for refugees and other vulnerable populations displaced by climate disaster. We appreciate your administration's attention to the effects of climate change on migration and displacement. We agree that action is needed by Congress to [establish a legal pathway](#) to directly address the protection needs of this population. However, as many of our leaders [wrote](#) in 2022, there are powerful administrative tools currently at your disposal that can bring to safety many vulnerable populations impacted by climate disaster, including **climate considerations in your administration's reports on refugee admissions to Congress, Priority 2 group designations and private sponsorship of climate-affected refugees, and regional processing of climate-displaced individuals in Central and South America**. We hope that this letter will spur immediate action to implement these recommendations.

Your administration's Fiscal Year 2024 and 2025 reports to Congress on proposed refugee admissions provide important opportunities to enumerate the administration's understanding of the impacts of climate disaster on the global refugee situation and the needs and priorities of the U.S. Refugee Admission Program (USRAP) in response. We urge the State Department to incorporate provisions that require climate-related considerations for refugee determinations into these reports, such as details on plans to provide access to resettlement for refugees who are displaced or at heightened risk of harm due to climate disaster and to expedite processing for refugees facing pressing risks due to climate-related factors.

Priority 2 group designations are a mechanism to extend protection to displaced populations that meet the refugee definition *and* face ongoing risks from climate disaster. We urge use of this P-2 mechanism [or other steps] to facilitate resettlement of these particularly vulnerable groups:

- [South Sudanese refugees](#), many of whom were displaced by violence and persecution stemming from the civil war beginning in 2013 and continue to experience new cycles of displacement and insecurity from the ongoing crisis in Sudan. This is compounded by climate-related risks from drought and floods, particularly in southern Sudan and northern South Sudan.
- [Ethiopian](#) and [Eritrean](#) refugees in Sudan, who were displaced by the 2020 to 2022 Tigray conflict. These refugees have been further exposed to climate-related risks from flooding and droughts while residing in camps in eastern Sudan.

- **[Guatemalan and Honduran nationals](#), including many [Indigenous peoples](#), who qualify for refugee status.** These individuals are at heightened risk of harm due to exposure to climate-related disasters in-country or after they have fled across a border.
- **[Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh](#), who survived genocide at the hands of the Burmese military.** Many experience additional significant safety risks while residing in refugee camps located in areas prone to flooding, mudslides, and cyclones.

Assigning these specific groups with P-2 designations is warranted given their underlying protection needs that are exacerbated by significant climate disasters.

Additionally, the eligibility criteria for the second phase of the Welcome Corps private sponsorship program for Priority 4 (P-4) designation should explicitly recognize those displaced by climate disaster may, in many cases, meet the refugee definition and qualify for USRAP resettlement and sponsorship. The U.S. government is already working with segments of civil society to use the Welcome Corps to extend protection to specific groups of refugees for sponsorship, such as the [Welcome Corps on Campus](#) initiative enabling U.S. colleges and universities to resettle refugee students. In a similar manner, the U.S. government should collaborate with private sponsor and recruitment organizations to facilitate initiatives to refer climate-impacted refugees for sponsorship and resettlement under the Welcome Corps.

Regional processing in Central and South America, including through the establishment of Safe Mobility Offices (SMOs), presents an important opportunity to provide relief for persons displaced due to climate disaster in the Western Hemisphere. Personnel at the SMOs must be trained to recognize how individuals experiencing climate-related risks may still meet the refugee definition under Immigration and Nationality Act Section 101(a)(42) and qualify for protection. For those who do not meet the refugee definition, parole should also be considered on a case-by-case basis for at-risk individuals displaced by climate disaster who are in urgent need of relocation outside their country of origin.

We strongly agree with your administration's [assessment](#) that the United States has a "compelling national interest in strengthening global protection for individuals and groups displaced by the impacts of climate change." The proposals outlined above will act on that assessment, build upon the recommendations and framing contained in the 2021 White House Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Migration, and constitute a significant step in fulfilling your administration's [early vision](#) to assist vulnerable individuals impacted by climate-related disasters. We thank you for your consideration of these requests and welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the urgent need for action.

Sincerely,

Eskinder Negash, President and CEO, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

Jeremy Konyndyk, President, Refugees International

Michael Breen, President and CEO, Human Rights First

Nicole Melaku, Executive Director, National Partnership for New Americans

Nili Sarit Yossinger, Executive Director, Refugee Congress

Mark Hetfield, President and CEO, HIAS

Tsehaye Teferra, Ph.D., President and CEO, Ethiopian Community Development Council

Abby Maxman, President and CEO, Oxfam America

Nisha Agarwal, Deputy Executive Director of Impact, International Refugee Assistance Project

Erol Kekic, Senior Vice President, Programs, Church World Service

Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, President and CEO, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

cc: The Honorable Antony Blinken, Secretary of State

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security

The Honorable Julieta Valls Noyes, Assistant Secretary of State for the Department of Population, Refugees, and Migration