

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 5791

To establish the position of Special Envoy for Refugees in the Department of State, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 6, 2020

Mr. NEGUSE introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and in addition to the Committee on the Judiciary, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To establish the position of Special Envoy for Refugees in the Department of State, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Special Envoy for Ref-
5 ugees Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

8 (1) In 2019, the world is in the midst of the
9 worst global displacement crisis in history, with

1 more than 70,800,000 forcibly displaced persons, in-
2 cluding 25,900,000 refugees worldwide, over half of
3 whom are children, according to estimates from the
4 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

5 (2) In 2018, less than 5 percent of global reset-
6 tlement needs were met despite there being
7 1,400,000 refugees in need of third-country resettle-
8 ment.

9 (3) The United States refugee admissions pro-
10 gram is a life-saving solution that—

11 (A) is critical to global humanitarian ef-
12 forts;

13 (B) strengthens global security;

14 (C) leverages United States foreign policy
15 interests, including diplomatic and strategic in-
16 terests of supporting allies who often host a sig-
17 nificant and disproportionate share of refugees
18 per capita;

19 (D) stabilizes sensitive regions impacted by
20 forced migration by ensuring that the United
21 States shares responsibility for global refugee
22 protection;

23 (E) leverages refugee resettlement in the
24 United States to encourage other countries to

1 uphold the human rights of refugees, including
2 by ensuring that refugees—

3 (i) have the right to work, the right to
4 an education, and freedom of movement;
5 and

6 (ii) are not returned to a place in
7 which their life or freedom is at risk;

8 (F) serves individuals and families in need
9 of resettlement;

10 (G) provides economic and cultural bene-
11 fits to cities, States, and the United States as
12 a whole; and

13 (H) aligns with the international obliga-
14 tions of the United States, including under—

15 (i) the Convention Relating to the
16 Status of Refugees, done at Geneva July
17 28, 1951 (as made applicable by the Pro-
18 tocol Relating to the Status of Refugees,
19 done at New York January 31, 1967 (19
20 U.S.T. 6223)), of which the United States
21 is a party;

22 (ii) the Convention against Torture
23 and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading
24 Treatment or Punishment, done at New

1 York December 10, 1984, of which the
2 United States is a party;

3 (iii) the Convention relating to the
4 Status of Stateless Persons, done at New
5 York September 28, 1954; and

6 (iv) the Convention on the Reduction
7 of Statelessness, done at New York August
8 30, 1961.

9 (4) The United States has historically been,
10 and should continue to be, a global leader in—

11 (A) responding to displacement crises
12 around the world, including through the provi-
13 sion of robust humanitarian support;

14 (B) promoting the safety, health, and well-
15 being of refugees and displaced persons;

16 (C) welcoming asylum seekers who seek
17 safety and protecting other at-risk migrants, in-
18 cluding survivors of torture, victims of traf-
19 ficking, and stateless people; and

20 (D) working alongside other countries to
21 strengthen protection systems and support.

22 (5) The United States has steadily reduced—

23 (A) access to asylum protection through
24 administrative policy and programmatic
25 changes, including policies and operational deci-

1 sions aimed at reducing or stopping the ability
2 of asylum seekers to access the United States
3 border; and

4 (B) the resettlement of refugees, by way of
5 two consecutive historically low annual refugee
6 admissions goals after nearly 45 years during
7 which the average annual United States refugee
8 admissions goal was over 95,000 individuals.

9 (6) Refugees are—

10 (A) the most vetted travelers to enter the
11 United States; and

12 (B) subject to extensive screening checks,
13 including in-person interviews, biometric data
14 checks, and multiple interagency checks.

15 (7) The people of the United States, and com-
16 munities across the United States, overwhelmingly
17 support refugees and asylum seekers, including peo-
18 ple of faith, members of the Armed Forces, veterans,
19 elected officials, and retired high-ranking officials.
20 As a beacon of safe refuge and pluralistic society,
21 the United States should commit itself to addressing
22 the plight of refugees internationally.

23 (8) For the sake of refugees, asylum seekers,
24 other migrants, United States national diplomatic
25 and strategic interests, and local communities that

1 benefit from the presence of refugees, asylees, and
2 other migrants, it is crucial for a dedicated official
3 within the United States Government to coordinate
4 and promote United States initiatives to protect ref-
5 ugees and asylum seekers.

6 **SEC. 3. SPECIAL ENVOY FOR REFUGEES.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—The President shall appoint a
8 Special Envoy for Refugees within the Bureau of Popu-
9 lation, Refugees, and Migration of the Department of
10 State (hereafter in this section referred to as the “Special
11 Envoy”) who shall report directly to the Secretary of State
12 and shall have the rank of ambassador. The Special Envoy
13 shall be an individual of distinction with recognized exper-
14 tise relating to migration, refugees, asylum-seekers, and
15 internally displaced and stateless individuals.

16 (b) DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.—The Special
17 Envoy shall—

18 (1) directly advise the Secretaries of State,
19 Homeland Security, and Health and Human Serv-
20 ices regarding the United States position relating to
21 migration, refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally
22 displaced and stateless individuals;

23 (2) represent the United States in diplomatic
24 matters relevant to the global displacement, migra-

1 tion, refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally dis-
2 placed and stateless individuals;

3 (3) lead interagency coordination to oversee evi-
4 dence-based research related to the global refugee
5 crisis and the United States refugee program, in-
6 cluding research on—

7 (A) the most effective ways to form and
8 implement policy to promote refugee resettle-
9 ment in the United States;

10 (B) durable solutions for globally displaced
11 individuals abroad; and

12 (C) the economic and social impact of re-
13 settlement of refugees and asylum seekers to
14 the United States;

15 (4) ensure that information disseminated by
16 Federal agencies and United States Government
17 partners with regard to refugees, asylum-seekers,
18 and internally displaced and stateless individuals is
19 evidence based;

20 (5) conduct regular consultation with non-
21 governmental and international organizations, in-
22 cluding the United Nation High Commissioner for
23 Refugees, to promote best practices for resettlement
24 and durable solutions for refugees, asylum-seekers,
25 and internally displaced and stateless individuals;

1 (6) lead interagency coordination to assess and
2 develop United States Government policies in re-
3 sponse to the impact of climate change on global dis-
4 placement, including the effects of climate change on
5 the forcible movement of people, the creation of new
6 refugees and other climate displaced people; and

7 (7) lead interagency and international coordina-
8 tion to identify and promote the United States for-
9 eign policy responses to issues that lead to global
10 displacement and the creation of new refugees, in-
11 cluding global threats to civil rights, women’s rights,
12 religious freedom, and violent conflicts.

13 (c) STAFF.—The Special Envoy is authorized to hire
14 such personnel as may be necessary to carry out the duties
15 and responsibilities of the Special Envoy, including, at a
16 minimum, a chief of staff, a deputy chief of staff, and
17 an advisor.

18 (d) CONSULTATION.—The Special Envoy shall work
19 with the Secretaries of State and Homeland Security to
20 ensure that appropriate consultation with Congress occurs
21 in a timely and thorough manner consistent with section
22 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C.
23 1157).

24 (e) REPORTS AND BRIEFINGS.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
2 after the date of the enactment of this Act, and an-
3 nually thereafter, the Special Envoy—

4 (A) shall submit to the appropriate con-
5 gressional committees a report on activities un-
6 dertaken in the preceding 12 months under
7 subsection (b);

8 (B) shall brief the appropriate congres-
9 sional committees on trends leading to global
10 displacement, and new refugees and asylum
11 seekers;

12 (C) should submit to the appropriate con-
13 gressional committees a report on the outcomes
14 of the consultation with Congress undertaken in
15 the preceding 12 months as described in sub-
16 section (d); and

17 (D) shall submit to the appropriate con-
18 gressional committees an assessment of human
19 and financial resources necessary to fulfill the
20 purposes and duties of this Act.

21 (2) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMIT-
22 TEES DEFINED.—In this subsection, the term “ap-
23 propriate congressional committees” means—

1 (A) the Committees on Foreign Affairs
2 and Judiciary of the House of Representatives;
3 and

4 (B) the Committees on Foreign Relations
5 and the Judiciary of the Senate.

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