

For Immediate Release

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*****Press Release*****

Faith and Community Leaders Launch National Refugees Welcome Initiative

With support from over 50 national organizations, prominent religious and community leaders launched a national initiative to create welcoming communities

WASHINGTON - In response to the largest refugee crisis since the end of World War II, leaders from over 50 national faith and community organizations announced their support for a new national welcoming campaign, Refugees Welcome.

Through welcoming dinners and opportunities for refugees to share their stories during worship services and community events, the initiative aims to educate the public on the global refugee crisis, build more welcoming communities, and connect refugees with policy makers and neighbors in their new homes. The initiative has already resulted in dozens of congregations and communities hosting welcoming events in their local areas. To date, the campaign has helped connect over 200 refugees, local community members and elected officials through welcoming dinners and community forums.

As over 60 million people around the world are currently displaced, leaders from faith-based, social justice, and refugee communities have joined together to emphasize the importance of demonstrating welcome through the Refugees Welcome campaign.

Below are selected quotes from organizations that support the campaign:

“We are proud to stand with the Refugees Welcome campaign. Founded by migrants fleeing civil war in El Salvador, our work continues to be about integrating Central American migrants who are fleeing new forms of violence and deserve to be recognized as refugees. Diaspora communities in the United States need to unite to ensure that we are welcoming and protecting the most vulnerable in our world, and uplifting the positive contributions of refugees to our society.” **Abel Nunez, Executive Director, CARECEN DC**

“As the General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), I have heard countless stories of congregations around the country welcoming refugees through offering donations, uplifting refugee leadership, volunteering at resettlement offices, tutoring English, highlighting refugees in worship, advocating refugee rights, and working hand-in-hand with their community leaders to demonstrate that without a doubt, refugees are welcomed neighbors. In this era of unprecedented numbers of refugees in the world, and unfortunate pushback against them in many areas, World Refugee Day—and indeed every day—provides

us with wonderful opportunities to live out God's urging in scripture to 'love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.' (Dt. 10:19)" **Rev. Dr. Sharon E. Watkins, General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada**

"Our faith calls us to welcome the sojourner, love our neighbor and stand with the vulnerable. As we face the largest refugee crisis of our generation, we must act with compassion to welcome refugees into communities. These are our brothers and sisters, fleeing unimaginable violence, persecution and circumstances. To do any less would be to dishonor our values as people of faith and as Americans. In a time where some political leaders are calling for an end to refugee resettlement, it is more important than ever that we honor the values of our faith by welcoming refugees into our hearts and communities, which is why Church World Service is proud to support the Refugees Welcome campaign." **Rev. John L. McCullough, President and CEO of Church World Service**

"Franciscan Action Network (FAN) endorses the National Refugees Welcome Campaign with gratitude and enthusiasm for this effort. Relationship building is a core Franciscan value. We are committed to creating friendships with diverse communities, to learn from them, and to celebrate their contributions to the larger society." **Sister Margaret Magee, OSF, President of Franciscan Action Network**

"It is our responsibility to welcome those most in need, offer refuge and lift up our shared humanity. From its very founding, the Friends Committee on National Legislation's early endeavors included advocating for refugees seeking safe haven from war-torn countries. Our nation of immigrants must open its doors to far greater numbers of refugees and Syrians in particular as this crisis continues to unfold. FCNL is proud to stand with the National Refugees Welcome Campaign to welcome all refugees, regardless of their country of origin or religion. We support the moral and ethical imperative to help refugees fleeing violence and persecution begin new lives." **Diane Randall, Executive Secretary of the Friends Committee on National Legislation**

"To welcome refugees is to affirm our shared humanity, our common destiny and our mutual belonging as brothers and sisters in the family of God." **Jim Moos, Executive Minister, Wider Church Ministries; Co-Executive, Global Ministries**

"In more than 130 years of resettling refugees to the United States, HIAS has seen firsthand how invaluable community support is, helping newly arrived refugees feel at home in their new lives. The torah calls on us, as Jews, to welcome the stranger. HIAS is pleased to support the Refugees Welcome campaign, which allows us one more way in which to fulfill that command." **Mark Hetfield, President and CEO of HIAS**

"Refugees are the most thoroughly vetted foreigners to arrive in America, undergoing a years-long process before even reaching our shores. Turning our backs on those fleeing

violence and oppression is not only contrary to our values - it makes America and the world less safe.” **Michael Breen, Member, International Refugee Assistance Project Board of Directors; President & CEO, Truman Center for National Policy**

“At a time when the world is in desperate need of humanitarian relief, some are calling for the suspension of the US refugee resettlement program, the rationing of mercy based on religious creed, an end to funding for Syrians, and the deportation of Central American families seeking refuge. Such actions violate the tenets of our faith and the principles of our nation.

We reject the false choice currently being proffered by some in Washington, state capitols across the country, and on the campaign trail. We need not choose between the gospel call to welcome the stranger and our legitimate need for security.

As women religious and citizens of the United States, we choose to stand for life and hope. We will not give in to fear. We will not allow others to divide us by race or creed or nationality and we will not turn our back on our refugee sisters and brothers in their hour of greatest need.” **Ann Scholz, SSND, Director of Social Mission, Leadership Conference of Women Religious**

“Our faith calls us to care for those in need and welcome the stranger. We are so pleased to be a part of this collaborative effort to welcome refugees. As a nation that has proudly stood as a beacon of hope for those in need, we are defined by our commitment to compassion for the vulnerable and justice for all.” **Linda Hartke, President and CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service**

“It is a disgrace to stand idly by as innocent refugees flee violence and persecution. We must rise above prejudice and fear to open our communities to the men, women, and children who seek sanctuary in the United States. As Jews we are taught *va'ahavtem et ha-ger* — as we were once strangers, so must we love the stranger. Our nation must find the moral courage to welcome those seeking refuge from fear, persecution, and hate.” **Nancy K. Kaufman, CEO of the National Council of Jewish Women**

“Throughout our history, the United States has been a haven for those fleeing violence and persecution. The commitment etched on the base of the Statue of Liberty has been the touchstone for our policies: ‘Give me your tired, your poor.’ But now, many want to turn their backs on the refugees of our time. This is wrong, and we need to end these phobias. We are better than this. Our generation needs to live up to our ideals. Pope Francis and President Franklin D. Roosevelt both challenge us with the truth that we as a nation will be measured by how we treat those who are most in need. Faith and patriotism demand it. We must welcome refugees with open hearts.” **Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director of NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice**

“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” (Lev. 19:33). Having

experienced slavery, and been the stranger ourselves, we are commanded not just to welcome, but also to love the stranger. The work that we are doing together to support refugees in our midst, fulfills a commandment and is an act of love. Inspired by our values, we commit to ensuring that our elected officials know that we, as a faith community, are ready to welcome refugees of all religious backgrounds who are fleeing violence and persecution.” **Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism; Senior Vice President, Union for Reform Judaism**

“In a time of much politicization of the plight of refugees, it is critical for people to hear and see faith communities across the country coming together over dinner tables and in many other forums to say 'welcome'. We know from past experience that our communities are enriched by newcomers, and together we must uphold America's promise of being a respite for those seeking safety and liberty. This is how we uphold American values - by honoring the many communities that call this country home.” **Catherine Orsborn, Campaign Director of the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign**

“Through this program refugees will find the means to connect with their new neighbors and even more importantly have the chance to share their stories. The best thing we could do for them to help empower them is to help amplify those voices and let them share why they fled their homes and what they are looking forward to.” **Mirna Barq, President of Syrian American Council**

“The mistreatment refugees face when trying to rebuild their lives is shameful. As people of faith and conscience, it is our moral imperative to counter this dangerous trend. I strongly encourage all to join the Refugees Welcome Campaign. Together, we can create welcoming spaces for refugees, raise awareness to their plight, and restore compassion in our communities.” **Rev. Peter Morales, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association**

"We are horrified by the political rhetoric that is fanning the flames of fear, xenophobia and discrimination in our country. It is a betrayal of all that this country stands for.

UUSC is proud to join with our interfaith brothers and sisters in creating a welcoming community in the United States. Refugees of all walks of life, who have faced so many trials already, need our help. People of faith must demonstrate the moral courage to welcome the stranger and resist allowing fear to overwhelm our humanity. Our own lives – and our country – will be the better for it.

We encourage all Unitarian Universalist congregations to host or otherwise support welcoming events in their communities and we offer online tools to assist in being a strong advocate for all refugees' rights.” **Rev. Dr. William Schulz, President and CEO, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee**

"As people of Christian faith, we are disciples of one whose family was forced to flee. We welcome the stranger, the persecuted, the ostracized, and all in need of safety. We welcome the refugee. And in welcoming the refugee we welcome the Christ." **Rev. Dr. Traci D. Blackmon, Executive Minister, Justice & Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ**

"Jewish tradition teaches, 'You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor' (Leviticus 19:16). In today's global village, we are all neighbors. And so, we must not remain bystanders as villages are destroyed and people are terrorized into leaving their homes. We must not wait patiently for the politicians and diplomats to debate protocol while thousands of people are drowning. We call upon the nations of the world, including our own government, to provide a swift response to this global crisis by welcoming refugees in search of safe haven." **Rabbi Marla J. Feldman, Executive Director of Women of Reform Judaism**