

February 27, 2018

Vice President Mike Pence  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Secretary Rex Tillerson  
Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Secretary Kristjen Nielson  
Department of Homeland Security  
3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20016

Dear Vice President Pence, Secretary Tillerson and Secretary Nielson:

We, the undersigned organizations, are deeply troubled by the recent news that the United States will not welcome a number of Iranian Christian and other religious minorities who have been waiting for resettlement in Vienna, Austria.

These refugees applied to participate in the U.S. refugee resettlement program before they left Iran. They sold their possessions, and have since had to spend their life savings supporting themselves as they have waited for what turned from months into a year or more for their cases to be processed.

The Trump Administration's decision to reject these refugees has left them stranded without any good options for the future. Those denied permission to enter the United States had traveled to Vienna, under a U.S. government processing program, with the understanding that they would soon reunite with their loved ones in the United States. Prior to last year, on average, the wait time for case processing was under three months, and in the past few years the U.S. government approved nearly all of these pre-screened and thoroughly vetted cases.

This administration has expressed concern about the low numbers of Christian refugees coming to the United States and the deteriorating security and human rights situation in Iran. However, when presented with the opportunity to welcome Iranian Christians, the U.S. has turned its back on them and their American families.

Keeping these persecuted members of minority religious faiths out of the United States does not make this country safer. These denials instead will separate families and send refugees back to danger in Iran.

Since 2001, under the Lautenberg Amendment, the United States has welcomed more than 32,000 Iranian religious minorities through Vienna to reunite with their family members in this country. The Lautenberg Amendment was first enacted in 1990 to allow for the resettlement of Jews from the former Soviet Union, and later expanded to include persecuted religious minorities from other countries, including Jews and Christians in Iran.

We urge the administration to take the necessary steps to reconsider these denials and to preserve this legal route for Iranian religious minorities to find refuge in the United States. To do anything less would be a betrayal of the refugees who trusted and relied on our offer of safety, religious minorities who remain at risk in Iran, and families in the U.S. who are desperate for their relatives to join them in safety and freedom.

Sincerely,

African American Ministers in Action

Anti-Defamation League

B'Nai B'rith International

Church World Service, Immigration and Refugee Program

Congregation of our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces

Disciples, Refugee & Immigration Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc.

Franciscan Action Network

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Human Rights First

In Defense of Christians in the Middle East

International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) at the Urban Justice Center

International Rescue Committee

Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Jubilee Campaign USA

Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Commission, Priests of the Sacred Heart, US Province

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Council of Jewish Women

Office of Social Justice, Christian Reformed Church in North America

The Center for Victims of Torture

U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

Union for Reform Judaism

Veterans for American Ideals

World Relief