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ACLU-TN
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November 24, 2015

The Honorable Bill Haslam
Governor of Tennessee
First Floor, State Capitol
Nashville, TN 37243

RE: Request to Suspend Syrian Refugee Resettlement in Tennessee

Dear Governor Haslam:

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals, urge you to rescind your request to the federal government to suspend the resettlement of Syrian refugees in Tennessee. In the wake of recent global tragedies, we are called to act with compassion and leadership, not fear and misplaced blame. We are committed to the values of our state and our nation and stand ready to work with your administration to ensure that all refugees are welcomed, supported, and fully integrated into our community.

After your request to suspend Syrian refugee resettlement, the rhetoric in our state took a vitriolic and troubling turn. We applaud your recent statement that “we must not lose ourselves,” nor “abandon our values” or “mistreat our neighbors who made it here after enduring unimaginable hardships.” We ask for your ongoing moral and courageous leadership as our state responds to the current political moment.

Tennessee and the United States have a critical and historic role to play in our current global refugee crisis, the largest displacement of people since World War II. Specifically, we must do our part to provide safe refuge to the 4 million Syrian refugees fleeing violence and terror. As the Department of State reminds us, “the U.S. refugee resettlement program reflects the United States’ highest values and aspirations to compassion, generosity and leadership.”

Historically, the U.S. has been a leader in resettlement, offering protection to refugees from across the world and Tennessee has benefitted from these previous waves of resettlement. The courageous men,

women, and children who have been resettled in Tennessee over the years are now our neighbors and friends, small business owners, and pillars of our community. In this moment, it is more important than ever that we honor this commitment and tradition with courageous leadership and compassion. Our communities stand ready and willing to welcome more refugees—from Syria and across the world—because we know that through offering resettlement and protection we can save lives and strengthen our communities.

In the wake of the tragedies in Paris, Beirut, and Baghdad we will not allow fear to override our better instincts. We know that refugee resettlement will not make our communities any less safe. We know that refugees must wait months and often years to pass the rigorous screening process and are the most scrutinized of any migrants to the United States.

We believe it is morally reprehensible to turn our backs on Syrian refugees fleeing terror and violence. These men, women, and children are themselves victims of ISIS and must not be blamed for the very terror they are fleeing.

We urge you to immediately rescind your request to the federal government to suspend Syrian resettlement and to commit to working with the federal government to uphold our highest American values by continuing to provide protection to refugees and investing in a generous and robust refugee resettlement program.

Sincerely,

Ninety-five organizations:

Action by Christians Against Torture
African Great Lakes Action Network
Allies of Knoxville's Immigrant Neighbors
American Center for Outreach (ACO)
American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee (ACLU-TN)
American Muslim Advisory Council (AMAC)
Amnesty International Nashville
Anam Cara
APSU Hispanic Cultural Center
Ballet Folklorico Sol de Mexico
Bedford County Democratic Party
Belle H. Bennett Fellowship at Scarritt Bennett
Bolton Music Therapy
Bridge Refugee Services
Center for Refugees and Immigrants of TN
Chattanooga Organized for Action
Chimes for Justice
CHOICES
Comité Popular de Knoxville
Community Nashville
Compound
Conexion Americas

Cordell Hull Nashville Chapter, United Nations Association- USA
East Tennessee Feminist Collective
Edgehill Neighborhood Partnership
EPIScopal Peace Fellowship
Ezell Consulting
Faith & Culture Center
Fervent Assistance to Survivors for Healthy Adjustment
Gallery Luperca
Garriott Industries
Global Education Center
Gopal & Pedigo PC
Hardee Accounting, PC
Harriet Tubman House
Hi Tech Service
Hispanic Family Foundation
Hispanic Organization for Progress and Education
Immuno Technologies Inc
Interfaith Worker Justice of East Tennessee
Ironware International.com
Jim Carls – Data Management Consultant
Jobs With Justice East Tennessee
Latino Memphis
Manna House
Mid East Council of the Tennessee Society of Healthcare Social
Workers
Middle Tennessee Jobs with Justice
MUSEA
Muslim Women's Council
Muslims in Memphis
Nashville Adult Literacy Council
Nashville Feminist Collective
Nashville For All of Us
Nashville Global Shapers
Nashville International Center for Empowerment
Nashville Professional Counseling Services
Neighborhood Health
No Exceptions Prison Collective
NOAH (Nashville Organized for Action and Hope)
Open Table Nashville
P & L Translations
Palmer Solutions
Pax Christi Memphis
Pond Gap Service Club

Progressive Nashville
ProLingua Inc
Refugee Empowerment Program
Roosevelt at UTK
S.P.E.A.K. (Students Promoting Environmental Action in Knoxville)
School Facility Management, LLC
SE Brandon Consulting
Sexual Assault Center
Sexual Empowerment and Awareness at Tennessee
Showing Up For Racial Justice (SURJ) - Nashville
Six String Jazz
Stu Smoke
Student Alumni Associates
Teamsters Local 480
Tennessee Alliance for Progress
Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition
Tennessee Justice for Our Neighbors
Tennessee Transgender Political Coalition
Tennessee United for Human Rights
The Branch of Nashville
The Red Clover
TN Returned Peace Corps Volunteers
TN State Conference NAACP
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Socialist Union
VIVE for a Dream
Williams Immigration & Nationality Law Firm
Workers' Dignity
World Relief Memphis
World Relief Nashville
YWCA of Nashville and Middle Tennessee
Zacchaeus Ministries - Healing Human Hearts

Thirty-three faith leaders and institutions:

Allyn Maxfield-Steele, Pastor, Central Christian Church
Balmoral Presbyterian Church
Calvary Episcopal Church
Church of the Savior, UCC
Cookeville Quakers
Dr. Joshua Graves - Otter Creek Church
Family of Abraham
First Congregational UCC, Memphis
Freedom's Chapel Christian Church (DOC)
Hobson United Methodist Church
Interdenominational Ministers Fellowship

Islamic Center of Murfreesboro
Islamic Center of Nashville
Memphis Interfaith
Mt Olive Missionary Baptist Church
Nashville Friends Meeting (Quakers)
New Covenant Christian Church (DOC)
Pleasant Hill Community Church United Church of Christ
Presbyterian (U.S.A.) pastor, Dr. Dwyn Mounger
Rabbi Mark Schiftan of The Temple
Rabbi Shana Mackler of The Temple
Rev. Dr. Eugene Turner
Rev. Elaine Ruth of Lonsdale United Methodist Church
Second Presbyterian Church
Selah Center for Spiritual Formation
Social Justice Committee of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville
St. Barnabas Episcopal-Lutheran Church
Tennessee Conference of the United Methodist Church Committee on Church and Society
Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church
Tyson House Lutheran & Episcopalian Campus Ministry
Vine Street Christian Church
Women of Faith of Rutherford County
Turtlehill Sangha

Cc: Members of the 109th Tennessee General Assembly, Senator Bob Corker, Senator Lamar Alexander, Congressman Phil Roe, Congressman Jimmy Duncan, Congressman Chuck Fleischmann, Congressman Scott DesJarlais, Congressman Diane Black, Congressman Jim Cooper, Congressman Marsha Blackburn, Congressman Stephen Fincher, Congressman Steve Cohen