

Together, we call on our elected officials to protect the fundamental right to seek asylum in the United States.

The right to flee one's country and seek safety in another is protected under both U.S. and international law. For those requesting asylum in the U.S., to be denied a fair process could mean a return to situations most of us cannot imagine in some of the most intolerant countries in the world.

Over the past few years, the Trump administration has chipped away at the rights of asylum seekers. We believe that denying a refugee asylum because of a technicality -- e.g. they did not arrive before a certain date, they did not apply for asylum within one year, they transited other countries before arriving at the United States, etc -- is a moral abomination. Whether or not a person will be harmed or killed if returned to their home country, and whether or not they deserve our protection, is not changed by these bureaucratic restrictions. We must grant protection to those who will face severe persecution and death because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. The United States needs to re-commit to protecting refugees and providing a safe harbor to those who face persecution or death.

Furthermore, the backlog of asylum petitions in this country is unacceptable. Over 300,000 asylum seekers nationwide are waiting for adjudication of their applications. Many have been waiting for years, living under the constant fear of deportation, unable to heal from the trauma they suffered, reunite with family, or start new lives in the US. And instead of increasing the number of asylum officers available to adjudicate these applications, USCIS has recently announced a cutback. This will inevitably result in even more applications being backlogged, and even more people's lives being in limbo.

We therefore call on the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice to immediately take these steps:

- Hire more asylum officers and commit to adjudicating the backlogged asylum petitions within one year.
- Reject in its entirety the proposed regulations from June 15, 2020, 85 FR 36264.

And we call on Congress to immediately take these steps:

- Pass legislation to clarify the standards for asylum and reject in their entirety the proposed regulations from June 15, 2020, 85 FR 36264.
- Pass legislation to eliminate the one-year bar to asylum.

We need to end irrational bars to asylum that seek only to limit the number of asylum approvals, but do not actually seek to protect asylum seekers who need and merit protection. We cannot have their blood on our hands. Whether we were born in this country or we immigrated here, whether we were refugees ourselves or are the grandchildren of refugees, no matter where we live or have lived, each one of us is human, and we are all connected by our struggle, our hope, our resilience and our humanity.