



Ecumenical Declaration: Protecting Welcome, Restoring Hope

On this day, February 10, 2017, we here-gathered representatives of Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican communions in the United States, Church World Service and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States, seek to join our efforts to those of other religious communities striving for the same sacred purposes, and officially declare our strong opposition to the executive order entitled “Protecting the Nation from Terrorist Attacks by Foreign Nationals.” On behalf of our joint membership of 37 national member communions constituting more than 30 million Americans, we stand united in our resolve to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God in fellowship with the vulnerable, the outcast, the widow, the orphan, the immigrant, and all persons in need. As Americans we are a nation of displaced persons.

This executive order drastically reduces refugee admissions, temporarily suspends the entire U.S. resettlement program, ends the resettlement of Syrian refugees indefinitely bans individuals from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Yemen, Somalia and Sudan from entering the United States, and preferences religious minorities. We have already witnessed the heartbreaking consequences of this executive order. Refugees who had waited years to be approved for resettlement to the United States; who had sold their belongings and given up their shelter in preparation to finally find safety, had their flights abruptly cancelled and hopes of being reunited with their families in the United States dashed.

By providing preference Christians and other religious minorities, this executive order actually places them at greater risk in some countries, where they are seen as having special status and protection. We are unequivocally opposed to any policy that restricts access to life-saving protection due to a person’s religion.

This executive order, as well as the two other immigration-related executive orders to build a wall and deport our undocumented community members, counters the values we as people of faith hold dear: to welcome the stranger and assist those most in need. These executive orders have been celebrated by those who use fear to perpetuate racism and xenophobia, which seriously erode shared values, constructive dialogue, and American leadership in the world. As Christians, we have a moral responsibility to speak out and advocate alongside all immigrants and refugees to stop these unjust and immoral executive orders.

Refugee resettlement is one of the most cherished traditions upon which our country was founded, and plays a critical role in U.S. diplomacy and foreign policy. As the world faces the largest displacement crisis in recorded history, the United States should resettle at minimum 85,000 refugees, the same number we welcomed last year. Doing anything less would negatively impact global security and our commitments to our allies, including Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Greece, Kenya, and other countries that already host the largest number of refugees. Our nation’s security and hospitality are in no way mutually exclusive – in fact they are complementary -- and it is imperative that we speak out against the notion that refugees are a threat to our safety - they are not. We have a sense of shared community by being in the world with those who are different from us. Refugees are ordinary people fleeing life-threatening adversity. They are also the most heavily vetted individuals ever to travel to our country; to suggest otherwise simply does not represent the facts.

The U.S. context is very different from the European one. Refugees admitted to the United States do not come here spontaneously, but as a part of a uniquely secure and well managed program. We have as a community worked with CWS for more than 70 years to welcome and integrate refugees into our communities. Our congregations have been a bedrock of support for this demonstration of solidarity and compassion to people around the world. We hereby pledge to do everything in our power to restore and maintain hospitality and welcome to all people — regardless of where they are from, how they pray, or what language they speak.

As we are reminded by Jesus in Matthew 25:35, "For I was a stranger and you welcomed me": we recognize the face of Christ in the migrant and the refugee. In that spirit, we hereby:

1. Request a meeting with President Trump, and urge him and his Administration to immediately rescind all three immigration related executive orders, and to affirm the importance of welcoming policies and a robust refugee resettlement program that provides protection to the most vulnerable, regardless of their nationality or religion.
2. Call on Members of Congress to do everything in their power to rescind these three executive orders, prevent them from taking effect, and robustly support and fund the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.
3. Call on the judicial branch to continue to uphold the decisions that block the implementation of these executive orders.
4. Dedicate one Sunday in the upcoming three months to engage all of our congregations in honoring refugees' and immigrants' journeys, educating our communities about the biblical call to welcome refugees and immigrants, and inviting our congregation members into relational action to provide public witness in support of refugee resettlement and our immigrant community members.
5. Pledge that each of our communions will organize and facilitate meetings with local, state and national policy makers to educate them about our collective support and action in solidarity with refugees and immigrants, and urge them to serve as champions by supporting policies that affirm welcome, meeting with their immigrant and refugee constituents, and appropriating adequate resources to serve refugees.
6. We further resolve to be vigilant in addressing other potential executive orders and congressional actions that would unjustly affect refugees and immigrants in the United States.
7. Provide resources, support and encouragement to our congregations in the organizing of public, prayerful demonstrations of welcome for refugees and immigrants.
8. Commit to raising \$1 million within six months to help refugees who have already arrived in the United States, those who will arrive in the months to come, and our public witness work in solidarity with refugees and immigrants.
9. Establish a Steering Committee that will convene our leadership once a month for a period of at least one year or until the effects of these executive orders have been solved by Administrative, Congressional, or Judicial Action. The Committee's purpose shall be to ensure that the above commitments are fulfilled. The Committee will be co-chaired by the President and CEO of Church World Service, Rev. John L. McCullough, and the General Secretary & President of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States, Rev. Jim Winkler. The Steering Committee will have no less than five (5) members and will include Heads of Communions and Ecumenical Officers represented here in Chicago on this Friday, February 10, 2017.
10. Invite other religious communities to join these commitments to make this an interfaith effort.

It is our resolve to work ecumenically to share information about this Ecumenical Declaration to Protect Welcome and Restore Hope, its goals, and reason for being, through our mainline and social media outlets. We pledge to invite all of our constituents and all other people of faith to join us in promoting a future that is rooted not in a spirit of fear, but in a spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind.

Through this Ecumenical Declaration, we pledge to Protect Welcome and Restore Hope by engaging our congregations and networks in safeguarding the refugee resettlement program and bringing a bold, prophetic voice to stand in solidarity with immigrants and refugees. We affirm our resolve to not rest until the United States fully lives up to its promise as the land of the free, until all refugees are welcome

regardless of their nationality or religion, and until policies designed to sow fear and mistrust among our communities are rescinded. We will make this Ecumenical Declaration to the White House, U.S. Congress, and to all local congregations of participating members, and to communities across these United States and the globe.

“Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action” (1John 3:18). Together, let us protect welcome and restore hope - for we are all truly Greater as 1.

In Christ's name,