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Statement by the Catholic Bishops of Kansas on the Resettlement of Syrian Refugees in the United States

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There is great controversy today over the policy of resettling Syrian refugees in the United States. The recent terrorist attacks in Paris have served as a reminder, if any was needed, that terrorism remains a grave threat and that all people of good will should stand in solidarity with one another against such deplorable acts of violence and murder.

While emotions are understandably running high, the plight of our brothers and sisters in Syria must not be ignored. The Syrian people are on a daily basis bearing the brunt of the Syrian civil war, the Assad regime's ruthless tactics, and ISIS's reign of terror. Christians are being persecuted and even martyred in brutal fashion. Members of other faiths are suffering enormous hardships as well, as ISIS terrorizes anyone who does not share its radical extremist ideology. It is estimated that around 11 million people in Syria and surrounding countries have had to flee their homes, making this a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions. The 10,000 refugees in question represent a tiny fraction of those who have been displaced.

Our great country has long been a beacon of hope for the oppressed peoples of the world. What a terrible tragedy it would be for humanity if America suddenly became a country that turns away even women and children fleeing the horrors of war and terrorism.

At the same time, it is entirely legitimate, and indeed obligatory, for public officials to make the security of our nation and the safety of Americans a paramount consideration. This is why all of the refugees must undergo a thorough, multi-agency vetting process that takes on average 18-24 months. Undoubtedly this process will continue to be examined and improved upon, however the mere possibility that someone admitted as a refugee could commit an act of terror is not reason enough to cease resettlement of all Syrian refugees. There are other, and perhaps considerably easier, avenues for a determined enemy of the United States to enter the country than to submit to a two year review by American intelligence, defense, and law enforcement agencies. We should not stop helping some of the world's most desperate people in a vain effort to make America perfectly safe.

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We do not in any way wish to deny the seriousness of the threat of terrorism or ISIS's determination to attack America. Nor do we consider it impossible that someone who wishes America harm could infiltrate the United States through the refugee program. But given the scale of human suffering in Syria and the security measures in place to scrutinize refugees, we believe that resettlement should continue. We cannot allow fear to harden our hearts.

Finally, it is already sadly evident that some are using this issue to attempt to gain political advantage. We the Catholic Bishops of Kansas hope and pray that all elected officials, on all sides of this issue, will respect each other's sincere concerns and act with the common good, and not political opportunism, in mind.