

GC2 Summit Declaration
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Christian Declaration on Caring for Refugees: An Evangelical Response

Affirmations

Impacting nearly 60 million people,[1] the global refugee emergency is a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented size.[2] Never have so many people been recorded as being displaced, put in danger, and sent on the move.[3] In Syria alone, more than 13 million children and their parents need humanitarian aid.[4] Nearly 4.4 million have been forced to flee to neighboring countries for safety.[5]

Moments like these are when Christians cannot remain silent and still. In light of this crisis, we commit ourselves and our churches to actively care for and minister to global refugees with mercy and compassion, both here and abroad, based on God's compelling concern for all people in need and especially refugees.

In light of these concerns, we affirm the following:

- Refugees possess the image of God and, as such, are infinitely valuable to God and to us.
- We are commanded to love our neighbor, and it is our privilege to love refugees.
- As Christians, we must care sacrificially for the refugee, the foreigner, and the stranger.
- We will motivate and prepare our churches and movements to care for refugees.
- We will not be motivated by fear but by love for God and others.
- Christians are called to grace-filled and humble speech about this issue.

In light of these Christian principles, we cannot allow voices of fear to dominate. Instead, we commit to actions of love and compassion for refugees who have been admitted into our nation(s) in refugee status.

We acknowledge that there are genuine security concerns and encourage governments to be stewards of safety, but we also observe that choosing to come to North America as refugees would be among the least effective ways for those who intend to do us harm.[6]

So, as governments oversee matters of security, we will care for the hurting, calling Christians to embrace refugees through their denomination, congregation or other non-profits by providing for immediate and long-term needs, such as housing, food, clothing, employment, English language classes, and schooling for children.[7]

We distinguish that the refugees fleeing this violence are not our enemies; they are victims. We call for Christians to support ministries showing the love of Jesus to the most vulnerable, those in desperate

need, and the hurting. This is what Jesus did; He came to the hurting and brought peace to those in despair.

Critical moments like these are opportunities for us to be like Jesus, showing and sharing His love to the hurting and the vulnerable in the midst of this global crisis. Thus we declare that we care, we are responding because our allegiance is to Jesus, and we seek to be more like Him, emulating His compassionate care for the most vulnerable.

Theological Foundations

Refugees possess the image of God and, as such, are infinitely valuable to God and to us.

Refugees possess the imago Dei. All persons, regardless of citizenship, ethnicity, or religion, are made in God's image. Humanity is the pinnacle of creation, and it is precisely because we bear God's image that every human has inherent worth and that every person, regardless of nationality or any other differentiating marker, deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. (Gen. 1.26-27; I Cor. 11.7; James 3.9)

We are commanded to love our neighbor, and it is our privilege to love refugees.

Jesus commands us to love our neighbor. The story of the Good Samaritan teaches that Jesus expects His followers to care for those in need, irrespective of ethnic or religious differences. J. I. Packer says: "Your eyes must be open to see others' needs ... your heart must be ready to care for needy souls when you find them; your mind must be alert to plan out the best way to help them; and your will must be set against the trick that we are all so good at—'passing the buck,' going by on the other side and contracting out of situations of need where sacrificial help is called for" (Knowing God, 269). As Christians, we are to "prove to be a neighbor" to the hurting. (Lev. 19.18; Matt. 5.43-48; 19.19; Luke 10.25-37)

As Christians we must care sacrificially for the refugee, the foreigner, and the stranger.

Christians must care sacrificially for the refugee, foreigner, and stranger. The Old Testament teaches that God's people were to care for the oppressed, the needy, the orphan, the widow, and the sojourner. The Gospels portray Jesus as a refugee, fleeing to Egypt to escape the wrath of a murderous monarch. The New Testament commands Christians to ease the suffering of the poor. The Church must sacrificially meet the physical needs of refugees because God reminded the Israelites they were once sojourners in need of compassion and because Jesus teaches that whatever we have done to "the least of these" we have done unto him. This is especially poignant in light of Jesus' own time as a refugee. (Lev. 19.9-10, 33-34; 23.22; 25.35; Deut. 10.19; 14.28-29; 15.11; 24.17-22; Prov. 14.31; Zech. 7.8-10; Matt. 2.13-15; 25.31-46; 26.11)

We will motivate and prepare our churches and movements to care for refugees.

Churches and Christian movements need training. Likely, the most overlooked component of the Great Commission is that believers are instructed to teach disciples “to observe all that [Jesus] commanded.” Such a directive includes His teachings on the poor and the downcast, those who are in need but who cannot give back: “When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be paid at the resurrection of the just.” New Testament epistles are replete with instructions for teaching believers to submit to civil authorities and be ready to do “every good work.” Refugees have already and will continue to come to our nation(s) with governmental permission. Christians must respect this decision and need to be equipped to provide sensitive, compassionate care for them. In doing so, believers are able “to help cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful.” (Matt. 28.18-20; Luke 14.12-14; Titus 3.1, 8, 14)

We will not be motivated by fear, but by love for God and others.

Christians must be motivated to love refugees, not to fear them. The writer of Hebrews instructs his congregation to show hospitality to strangers, sometimes unknowingly entertaining angels. After further instructions on sexual ethics and contentment, he says such behavior is possible because “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” Christians can love because we have no reason to be afraid. God is our helper. Paul instructs Roman Christians to owe nothing but love to one another. Love, not fear, fulfills the law. Christians cannot love their neighbor as themselves if they fear refugees. (Ps. 27.1; 118.6; Matt. 22.34-40; Rom. 13.8-10; Heb. 13.1-6; I John 4.13-21)

Christians are called to grace-filled and humble speech about this issue.

Christians must display grace in our words as we discuss this issue. We acknowledge that not all Christians share the same perspective on how best to minister to refugees. We reject, however, hateful rhetoric and fear-inspiring speech that is prevalent from many Christians who oppose active support for refugees. This is not how we are to conduct ourselves. Scripture instructs us to be gracious in our speech and that conversations filled with a kind tone towards others can be persuasive. Even as we disagree, we are called to walk “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love” because we are all members of one body. (Prov. 16.21; Eph. 4.1-4, 31-32; Col. 4.6)

Footnotes

[1]According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are 59.5 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide. This includes 19.5 million refugees and 38.2 million internally displaced people. This data can be found at: <http://www.unhcr.org.uk/about-us/key-facts-and-figures.html>. Accessed December 10, 2015.

For the sake of clarification, proper definitions are always helpful. “Refugees are people who are outside the country of their nationality ‘owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted’ (1951 Refugee Convention). Internally displaced persons (IDPs) have fled their homes but have not crossed an

international frontier.” These definitions were found at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/war-and-law/protected-persons/refugees-displaced-persons>. Accessed on December 10, 2015.

[2] Half of the 60 million displaced by political and military conflicts are children. This total does not include the number of people displaced due to natural disasters such as drought or earthquakes. Incorporating these figures raises the humanitarian crisis to 87.6 million. This data can be found at the Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNCHA), as found here: <http://www.unocha.org/2016appeal/>. Accessed December 10, 2015.

[3] One out of every 122 humans is classified as a refugee, IDP, or seeking asylum. Collectively, these persons would comprise the 24th largest country in the world, right behind Italy. <http://www.unhcr.org/558193896.html>. Accessed December 10, 2015.

[4] According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there were 59.5 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide as of the end of 2014. This includes 19.5 million refugees and 38.2 million internally displaced people. This data can be found at: <http://www.unhcr.org.uk/about-us/key-facts-and-figures.html>. Accessed December 10, 2015.

[5] By the end of 2014, Syria became the world’s highest producer of refugees, having overtaen Afghanistan, which held the position for more than 30 years. Today, almost one in four refugees are from Syria. <http://www.unhcr.org.uk/about-us/key-facts-and-figures.html>. Accessed December 10, 2015.

[6] “The refugee program is simply the toughest way for any foreigner to enter the U.S. legally. For most people, getting a tourist visa to enter the United States is much easier, but still requires an in-person interview and involves a typical background check. The process takes anywhere from a few days to a couple months.” <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/20/politics/paris-attack-refugee-visa-waiver/> “Because the refugee is abroad while the U.S. government checks their background, potential terrorist links, and their claims to refugee status, the vetting is a lot more thorough and can take up to two years for non-Syrians. For Syrians, the vetting can take about three years because of the heightened concerns over security. . . . Deputy State Department Spokesman Mark Toner called the security checks for refugees ‘the most stringent security process for anyone entering the United States.’” <http://www.cato.org/blog/syrian-refugees-dont-pose-serious-security-threat>

[7] World Vision estimates that between 2.1 to 2.4 million Syrian children are currently displaced from school. <http://www.worldvision.org/news-stories-videos/syria-war-refugee-crisis>. Accessed December 10, 2015.