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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

September 9, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

In January 2014, I wrote to you regarding the Syrian refugee crisis in the Middle East. While I appreciate your Administration's commitment to work with our international partners to provide aid to refugees, I remain deeply concerned about the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis and our nation's response. For example, I am extremely disappointed that the United States is only expected to accept about 1,800 refugees by the end of October, when there are four million registered refugees. We have a moral obligation to find the most expeditious solutions to help Syrians in need, especially those who already have Syrian-American family members in the United States.

Last week, the story of Aylan Kurdi, a young Syrian boy who drowned during his family's third attempt to flee Turkey, shocked the conscience of people around the globe. It took the graphic and horrifying image of Aylan's body washed up on Turkey's shore to ignite a global response to the human catastrophe of the Syrian refugee crisis. Tragically, Aylan's 4 year-old brother Galip, and their mother Rehan also passed away while seeking refuge. Unfortunately, the Kurdi's story is only one of many out of millions who have been displaced by this conflict.

Since 2011, the conflict in Syria has killed more than 250,000 people and forced about half of Syria's 22 million people from their homes. Recently, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that more than 300,000 people have risked their lives to cross the Mediterranean Sea so far this year. UNHCR Commissioner António Guterres has repeatedly called on the international community to resettle 10% of the refugee population, which is considered to be essential to the survival and protection of the most vulnerable refugees. Action by Europe and the United States can ease the burden on Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, the three nations of first asylum, home to more than four million refugees.

Historically, the United States has recognized its moral and legal imperative to lead by example in addressing global issues such as refugee resettlement. That is why our nation is the largest resettlement country in the world, taking in almost 70 percent of all refugees resettled by the UNHCR globally last year. It is time for the United States to lend a larger hand in assisting with the world's greatest refugee crisis of our time and significantly increase the number of Syrian refugees resettled in our country. Syrians who are resettled would enjoy the support of an active and engaged Syrian-American community, including in my hometown of Paterson, New Jersey,

where Syrian-Americans have been an important part of our city's cultural identity for over a century. My office fields calls from desperate Syrian-American constituents seeking to bring to the United States family members who have fled the war in Syria. These families would have a home ready for them, a source of financial support and the commitment to return to help rebuild Syria after the war is over.

The numbers are stark. Despite being a leader in providing more than \$4 billion in humanitarian assistance since the start of the Syrian crisis, the number of Syrian refugees our nation is set to admit pales in comparison to the 500,000 Syrian refugees committed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the 24,000 Syrian refugees committed by French President François Hollande, and 20,000 Syrian refugees committed by British Prime Minister David Cameron. As a global leader in refugee resettlement, the United States must drastically expand its refugee resettlement process - the International Rescue Committee suggests that our nation resettle a minimum of 65,000 refugees by the end of 2016.

I understand there are significant national security concerns when refugees from war-torn countries are resettled in the United States, which is why they are subject to intensive screening before entering. However, I call on the Administration to provide additional assistance to the necessary agencies in order to bolster the global effort of addressing the Syrian refugee crisis. I ultimately recognize that it will take the international community to create an environment in Syria where these refugees can ultimately return home, but it is clear that the conflict in Syria isn't going to be resolved soon. In the interim, it is our moral duty to stem this growing humanitarian disaster.

I stand ready to work with you and your Administration to join our allies around the world in providing assistance to millions of people who have been displaced from their homes during the ongoing civil war in Syria.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Pascrell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail that extends downwards and to the right.

Bill Pascrell,
Member of Congress