March 26, 2019

Dear Members of Congress:

As former diplomats and national security officials, as well as leaders of non-governmental organizations, we write to express our most serious concern about the President’s 2020 budget proposal for international refugee and humanitarian assistance. At a time in which global forced displacement, at nearly 70 million, is at its highest level since these numbers have been recorded, it is disheartening that the administration is proposing a reduction in humanitarian aid of more than $3 billion, or more than one-third of the amount the United States is expected to spend on such aid in this fiscal year. Such cuts would have devastating impacts on civilians at grave risk in countries experiencing conflicts or natural disasters, and we urge you to sustain and even augment the current levels of refugee and humanitarian aid.
We are also alarmed by an ill-considered presidential reorganization proposal in the 2020 budget presentation that—if enacted—would dramatically weaken the State Department’s capacity to protect and assist refugees, by removing the authorities of the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) to program and administer overseas refugee assistance.

We believe that removing these authorities from the Department of State would be an error of grave proportion, as refugee issues are rooted in international politics and diplomacy, key concerns of the Department of State and U.S. foreign policy. This misguided proposal would deprive the government of critical expertise provided by PRM in refugee assistance programming and would undermine humanitarian diplomacy. Whether in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, or South Sudan, the Department of State’s efforts to address humanitarian crises must include the tightest coordination of diplomatic engagement and emergency assistance, as displacement needs become key issues of concern for U.S. counterparts during bilateral discussions on issues relating to politics and security. For all these reasons, it is vitally important that the Department of State sustain its role in the programming of refugee assistance.

Our perspectives are unambiguously reflected in the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act, the measure which authorizes the State Department to provide refugee aid and which the president’s budget would effectively eviscerate. The Act recognizes and provides authority for State Department engagement with key international organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. With the troubling change proposed in the president’s budget, we are convinced that these crucial relationships would suffer significantly.

We also firmly believe that the elimination of PRM’s responsibility for programming assistance would have profound and negative implications for our government’s capacity to influence policy issues of key concern to the United States. It would also be ironic, as this is one of the bureaus at State that has enjoyed strong bipartisan support over many years.

In conclusion, we once again encourage you in the strongest of terms to sustain the roles and important mission of the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.

Sincerely,

Former government officials:

Robert M. Beecroft
Former Head of Mission, OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Rand Beers
Former Deputy Assistant to the President for Homeland Security

Daniel Benjamin
Former Ambassador-at-Large and State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism
Robert Blake  
Former Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs  
Former U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia and to Sri Lanka and the Maldives

Barbara Bodine  
Former U.S. Ambassador to Yemen

Reuben Brigety  
Former U.S. Ambassador to the African Union

Mark Brzezinski  
Former U.S. Ambassador to Sweden  
Former National Security Council Director for Russian/Eurasian Affairs and Southeast European Affairs

Ambassador (ret.) Nicholas Burns  
Former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs

William J. Burns  
Former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State

Sarah Charles  
Former National Security Council Director for Humanitarian Affairs

Lorne Craner  
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor  
Former Member, National Security Council Staff

Ryan Crocker  
Former U.S. Ambassador to Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Kuwait and Lebanon  
Member of the Board, Mercy Corps

Sarah Cross  
Former National Security Council Director for Refugee and Migration Policy

James Cunningham  
Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, to Afghanistan and to Israel

Arthur “Gene” Dewey  
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration

Nancy Ely-Raphel  
Former U.S. Ambassador to Slovenia  
Former Coordinator for the Balkans, U.S. Department of State  
Former Senior Advisor to the Secretary of State and Director of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons

Michele Flournoy  
Former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
Gordon Gray  
Former U.S. Ambassador to Tunisia  
Former Director, State Department Office of Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Operations  
Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs

Avril Haines  
Former Principal Deputy National Security Advisor  
Former Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency

David Kramer  
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

Daniel C. Kurtzer  
Former U.S. Ambassador to Egypt and Israel

Ellen Laipson  
Former Vice Chair, U.S. National Intelligence Council

Frank Loy  
Former Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs

Robert “Bud” McFarlane  
Former U.S. National Security Advisor

Phyllis Oakley  
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration  
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research

Lynn Pascoe  
Former US Ambassador to Malaysia and Indonesia  
Former UN Undersecretary General for Political Affairs

Steven Pomper  
Former Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights

James Purcell  
Former Director, Bureau of Refugee Program  
Former Director General, International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Anne Richard  
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration

Ellen Sauerbrey  
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration
William H. Taft
Former Legal Advisor, Department of State
Former U.S. Ambassador to NATO
Former General Counsel, U.S. Department of Defense

Earl Anthony Wayne
Former U.S. Ambassador to Mexico and Argentina
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs

Maureen White
Former Senior Advisor on Humanitarian Issues to the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan

Representatives of Non-governmental Organizations:

Eleanor Acer
Senior Director, Refugee Protection
Human Rights First

T. Alexander Aleinikoff
Director, Zolberg Institute on Migration and Mobility, The New School
Former UN Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees
Former General Counsel, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), Department of Justice

Scott Arbeiter
President
World Relief

Sheba Crocker
Vice President for Humanitarian Policy and Practice
CARE USA

Elizabeth Ferris
Research Professor, Institute for the Study of International Migration
Georgetown University

Rebecca Heller
Executive Director
International Refugee Assistance Project

Mark Hetfield
President and CEO
HIAS
Margaret Huang  
Executive Director  
Amnesty International USA

Anwar A. Khan  
President  
Islamic Relief USA

Erol Kekic  
Executive Director, Immigration and Refugee Program  
Church World Service

Neal Keny-Guyer  
CEO  
Mercy Corps

Abby Maxman  
President & CEO  
Oxfam America

Carolyn Miles  
President and CEO  
Save the Children

David Miliband  
President and CEO  
International Rescue Committee

Eskinder Negash  
President and CEO  
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

Eric Schwartz  
President, Refugees International  
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Population Refugees and Migration

Tsehaye Teferra  
President and CEO  
Ethiopian Community Development Council

Joan Timoney  
Senior Director of Advocacy  
Women’s Refugee Commission
Krish O’Mara Vignarajah  
President & CEO  
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Wendy Young  
President  
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)