REPORT CARD
THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION’S PERFORMANCE ON REFUGEE AND HUMANITARIAN PROTECTION
2019
As Refugees International issues its second report card on the Trump administration’s performance on refugee and humanitarian protection, the United States and other governments continue to confront enormous humanitarian challenges. There are now more than 70 million refugees and internally displaced people around the world, and many millions more displaced by natural disasters made worse by climate change. Thus, it is important that Refugees International evaluates the Trump administration’s progress on refugee and humanitarian protection in seven key areas.

Last year, President Trump and his administration received a failing grade. This year is no different; indeed, performance has only gotten worse. The Trump administration continues to undermine U.S. refugee law and longstanding U.S. humanitarian policy through cruel practices toward families seeking asylum, weakening the U.S. asylum process, and crippling the U.S. Refugee Admissions program. Overseas, President Trump continued restrictions on lifesaving humanitarian aid—including aid to refugee women and girls—failed to lead efforts to end conflicts inflicting humanitarian suffering, and separated the United States from broad-based global efforts to improve global responses on migration and refugees.

**OVERALL GRADE: F**

**TRUMP ADMINISTRATION PERFORMANCE AT HOME**

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INTRODUCTION

In our 2018 Report Card, Refugees International noted that governments around the world confronted humanitarian challenges of enormous proportion. Sadly, those challenges have increased since then. There are now more than 70 million refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) around the world. Because the United States has long played a critical role in helping to meet the needs of refugees and IDPs, it is appropriate and important that Refugees International evaluates the Trump administration’s progress on refugee and humanitarian protection.

We have evaluated the Trump administration in seven critical areas both in the United States and overseas. As was the case last year, the Trump administration has received an overall failing grade for its policies and performance. However, as the analysis in this report card demonstrates, the poor performance of the Trump administration has further deteriorated over the past year. In short, policies that already merited a failing grade have gotten worse.

Over the past 12 months, the Trump administration has continued and accelerated measures to eliminate protections for refugees and asylum seekers under U.S. law, as well as weaken the international system of humanitarian and refugee response. These have included:

- Systematic efforts to effectively end asylum for large numbers of credible claimants at the U.S. southern border.
- Continued and stepped up effort to cripple the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.
- Rejection of international compacts on enhanced protection and management of migrants and refugees endorsed by an overwhelming majority of other governments.
- Proposals for massive cuts to U.S. international humanitarian assistance.
- The absence of presidential leadership on efforts to respond to or even recognize massive human rights violations and forced migrations in places like Myanmar.

The actions of the Trump administration have been discouraging. But as we wrote in last year’s report, there is little that prevents President Trump and his administration from changing course and substantially improving U.S. practices to bring them into conformity with both international refugee law and best practices.

GRADING CRITERIA

For many decades, the United States has led the international community in supporting refugees and displaced people and in upholding international humanitarian principles. This is reflected in dozens of laws, expressions of policy, generous funding, and statements by U.S. officials. In assessing the performance of the Trump administration, Refugees International sets out three broad categories for review:

1. U.S. Commitment to International Humanitarian Leadership: Examples of this commitment over many decades are varied. It appears in the Refugee Act of 1980, the bipartisan legislation overwhelmingly enacted by both houses of Congress, in which the U.S. government declared that it is the “historic policy of the United States to respond to the urgent needs of persons subject to persecution in their homelands.” A strong and bipartisan willingness by the U.S. Congress to generously fund refugee and humanitarian assistance also reflects the U.S. commitment. Finally, President
Trump has articulated the importance of international humanitarian leadership himself. At the United Nations General Assembly in 2017, for example, the president declared that “the United States continues to lead the world in humanitarian assistance,” noting efforts in South Sudan, Somalia, northern Nigeria, and Yemen, as well as on a range of health, gender, and human rights-related initiatives.

2. **U.S. Commitments to Protecting Refugees:** These are most clearly reflected in U.S. accession, during the Lyndon Johnson administration, to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, which include the prohibition against returning any individual to a country where his or her “life or freedom would be threatened on account of his [or her] race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”\(^1\) U.S. commitments are also reflected in the Refugee Act of 1980, which established an annual process for refugee admissions to the United States. There is also U.S. asylum law, by which individuals already in the United States or seeking entry at U.S. borders are considered for asylum based on a fear of persecution in their home countries.

3. **U.S. Commitments to Lifesaving Humanitarian Aid Based on Need:** In 1984, in justifying its decision to provide humanitarian aid to famine-affected Ethiopia, the Reagan administration declared that “a hungry child knows no politics.” Indeed, U.S. officials have long endorsed a commitment to ensure that life-saving and life-sustaining humanitarian assistance should be only based on humanitarian need, consistent with the principle of humanity (i.e., the belief that profound humanitarian suffering must be addressed wherever it is found).

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Mexico” policy, U.S. officials have summarily interviewed tens of thousands of asylum seekers who have sought refuge at the U.S. southern border and then promptly returned them to Mexico to await adjudication of their cases by U.S. immigration judges. The administration has failed to put in place adequate safeguards to ensure that those returned to Mexico will not be subject to violence and persecution. Moreover, while waiting in Mexico for court dates in the United States, asylum seekers often lack access to food and shelter and have great difficulty finding attorneys. The Department of Homeland Security has separated families, sending some members to Mexico and keeping others in the United States.  

A protester holds a sign during a demonstration outside of the James R. Browning U.S. Courthouse in support of restoring protections for asylum seekers. Photo Credit: JUSTIN SULLIVAN/Getty Images.

“While waiting in Mexico for court dates in the United States, asylum seekers often lack access to food and shelter and have great difficulty finding attorneys.”

The “Remain in Mexico” policy supplements another Trump administration practice called “metering,” which forces asylum seekers to wait in Mexico for weeks or even months before they can even register their asylum claims. These asylum seekers—women, men, and children—are being turned away by border officials without any protection and forced to wait in Mexican border cities until

they are called from informal waitlists. After being called and registering their claims, they will often wait additional weeks and months in Mexico during the adjudication process.

In August 2019, the Trump administration began to ban asylum for anyone who transited through a third country that is party to the Refugee Convention, the 1967 Refugee Protocol, or the Convention against Torture. This policy is being challenged in court on the ground that it violates U.S. law, which only limits asylum seeking by those “firmly resettled” in a transit country. Finally, the Trump administration has recently negotiated a so-called “Safe Third Country” agreement that, if implemented, would enable the administration to send asylum seekers to Guatemala, a country that is not safe and lacks capacity to process asylum claims as required under U.S. law. In addition, the president has asked the attorney general to issue regulations that would add fees to asylum applications and preclude asylum seekers from working legally during their asylum proceedings.

The administration has justified these policies as ways to screen out claims that are unlikely to succeed and to deter those without a genuine need for asylum from making the arduous and dangerous journey from Central America to the United States. But the policies discriminate against asylum seekers from countries that are party to the Refugee Convention, the 1967 Refugee Protocol, or the Convention against Torture.

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Seekers from particular countries. In addition, and most crucially, they block asylum seekers regardless of the merits of their claims and put them at risk of persecution or other abuses by traffickers or drug cartels. This is a clear violation of international treaty obligations and U.S. asylum law. It is also unsurprising since President Trump has called asylum law “ridiculous” and labeled all asylum seeking “a scam.”

“The [Trump administration’s] policies discriminate against asylum seekers from particular countries.”

Second, the Trump administration has made it much more difficult for those who manage to ask for asylum to have it granted. The administration has unreasonably toughened the standards used by asylum officers considering the threshold “credible fear” determination. For example, prior guidance to officers on considering trauma and cultural background when determining credibility has been withdrawn. The administration has also given border patrol officers, whose priority is enforcement and not consideration of asylum claims, the authority to handle these determinations. The administration has insisted that immigration judges fast-track asylum cases and has recently appointed to the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), which hears appeals in asylum cases, among others, immigration judges who have denied asylum cases at much higher rates than immigration judges nationally. The attorney general has also issued decisions that overturn BIA rulings granting asylum to those who seek refuge from gender-based violence and because of harm targeting them as members of particular families. These decisions put asylum seekers at grave risk.

Third, the Trump administration has continued to detain asylum seekers inhumanely and unnecessarily. In an April 2019 decision, the attorney general ruled that even asylum seekers who had established a credible fear of persecution were ineligible for a bond hearing by an immigration judge. In August 2019, the administration published a rule that would expand and prolong family detention and revoke standards protecting children in custody. Using immigration detention as a punishment is illegal, and holding children hostage to deter asylum seekers—as appears to be the case—is unconscionable. Detaining asylum seekers is all-the-more troubling in light of effective alternatives to detention.

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Moreover, as several of DHS’s own reports have shown this year, conditions in detention are appalling. Detaining asylum seekers this way dehumanizes them, as does the president’s references to asylum seekers as “invaders,” and his jokes about violence against them. Incendiary comments such as these have led to hostility toward those seeking protection in the United States.

“Using immigration detention as a punishment is illegal.”

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

GRADE: F (UNSATISFACTORY—FAILING GRADE)

Since passage of the Refugee Act of 1980 (unanimously in the Senate and by a huge bipartisan majority in the House), the United States has successfully resettled more than 3 million refugees under the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. Under this program, the president, after consulting Congress, annually determines how many refugees the United States will resettle from countries of temporary refuge around the world. Other countries also resettle refugees as part of an international effort to share responsibility.

While refugee resettlement is a solution for only a small percentage of the world’s refugees, it can be a critically important solution for especially vulnerable refugees as well as refugees in other special circumstances (such as those who have been in protracted situations). Moreover, a U.S. commitment to refugee resettlement signals a willingness to share responsibilities with governments—such as Turkey, Jordan, Uganda, Ethiopia, and many others—hosting many hundreds of thousands and even millions of refugees.

Since taking office, however, the Trump administration has reduced refugee admissions dramatically, to the lowest levels since the start of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program in 1980. It has done this despite the well-documented social and economic benefits of the resettlement of refugees for the United States and despite the fact that purported threats posed by refugees have been wildly exaggerated.

In FY2018, the Trump administration came nowhere near reaching the then record-low ceiling of 45,000 it had announced, admitting only 22,491 refugees (also an historic low). For FY2019, the Trump administration announced a ceiling of 30,000 refugee admissions, another historic low.

The Trump administration has also dramatically reduced the percentage of resettled refugees from Muslim-majority countries, despite the fact that such refugees make up a substantial proportion of refugees worldwide. In 2016, the final year of the

Obama administration, some 47 percent of refugees resettled in the United States were from Muslim-majority countries. In the first nine months of FY2019, that percentage was only 11 percent.\(^\text{19}\) Between October 2018 and July 2019, fewer than 650 refugees arrived in the United States from Syria, Somalia, and Yemen combined—countries all suffering from war and humanitarian crisis.\(^\text{20}\) The administration has also slowed to a trickle the admission of Iraqis, many of whom assisted U.S. forces, and recently closed U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services international offices that process applications allowing refugees to join family members in the United States.\(^\text{21}\)

“The United States has abandoned its leadership on resettlement at a time when the number of refugees is at the highest level in recorded history.”

The United States has abandoned its leadership on resettlement at a time when the number of refugees is at the highest level in recorded history. The administration’s FY2020 budget request also drastically cuts funding for services for refugees. In recent

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weeks, some administration officials have reportedly suggested settling no refugees at all in the United States in 2020.\textsuperscript{22} The administration is also reportedly preparing a new policy that would allow state and local jurisdictions to deny entry to refugees who have been approved for resettlement in the United States.\textsuperscript{23} This measure is not only unnecessary and probably illegal (as the Refugee Act already has a provision relating to consultation with states and localities on distribution of refugees), but it will also strand refugees oversees, hurt American communities revitalized by resettlement, and dangerously undermine maintenance of unified national immigration policies.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Other Forms of Humanitarian Protections}
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  \item \textbf{GRADE: F (UNSATISFACTORY–FAILING GRADE)}
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Under U.S. law, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) provides humanitarian protection in the United States to foreign nationals from designated countries who are unable to return home due to conflict, natural disasters, or other extraordinary conditions. The Trump administration’s efforts to revoke TPS for approximately 320,000 individuals from some of the most crisis-affected countries in the world—including El Salvador, Haiti,

and Sudan—many of whose children have American citizenship, have been halted, at least for time being, by the federal courts. Though the administration has recently extended TPS for Syria, it has not re-designated Syria for TPS, thus failing to protect Syrians recently arrived in the United States. Legislation providing TPS status for Venezuelans passed the House with bipartisan support, but the Senate has not acted and the administration has refused to designate Venezuela despite engagement with the Venezuelan crisis and professed concern about displaced Venezuelans.

In the case of El Salvador and Honduras, TPS beneficiaries have been living in the United States as law-abiding residents for nearly two decades; returning them to their home countries would impose extraordinary burdens and unnecessary risks on them and their families. In addition, as of 2017, some 273,000 American children had parents from El Salvador, Honduras, and Haiti who were TPS holders and who now face deportation. Without extension or other arrangements to recognize these equities, many of these families would be torn apart or the parents forced into undocumented status.

The administration also has a dismal record regarding other humanitarian protections for the most vulnerable. The administration has prolonged adjudication and increased denials of applications for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (a visa for abused and abandoned children) and attempted to limit eligibility to those who applied before turning 18.

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ably denied critical assistance to vulnerable communities around the world.

Seeking to cut foreign assistance: Unveiled in early 2019, the Trump administration’s 2020 budget proposal called again for unprecedented cuts—about 30 percent—that would dramatically reduce U.S. food aid, “zero out” a critical refugee emergency fund, and significantly reduce contributions to maternal and child health, and peacekeeping activities, among other reductions. The U.S. Congress has soundly rejected these kinds of proposed cuts in prior years, and Refugees International hopes and expects that this will be the case again. In 2018 and 2019, the Trump administration attempted to make rescissions—the cancellation of monies provided by Congress—of billions of dollars in foreign assistance. While these rescissions did not directly target humanitarian aid, such cuts to development support and other programming would have devastated the overall capacity of operational organizations in the field. Thankfully, Congress and the NGO community forcefully and successfully pushed back, but this was yet another demonstration of the administration’s perspectives on foreign assistance.

Denying critical assistance to vulnerable communities: Having been denied its preferred funding reductions by Congress in the legislative process, the Trump administration has at times proposed and implemented devastating funding freezes to key foreign aid programs and used questionable tactics to circumvent legislative authority. Reprogramming of State Department and USAID funding has been used as a tool by the president to punish countries, most notably in the case of targeting FY2017, FY2018, and FY2019 foreign assistance funds for Central America. These measures, which undermine both fundamental humanitarian (and strategic) objectives, were strongly opposed by key members of both parties on Capitol Hill. And though the targeted funds came from development rather than humanitarian funding accounts, the humanitarian implications for Central Americans were obvious.

Diplomacy to Save Lives

Grade: D (Unsatisfactory, though minimally acceptable)

Failure of presidential leadership in humanitarian crisis prevention and response: As was the case last year when we reported on this issue, among the humanitarian crises currently causing the greatest suffering are those in Myanmar, Syria, and Yemen. President Trump is responsible for none of them, but U.S. presidential leadership could be critical to mitigating future suffering. To date, the president’s actions—and failures to act—have been extremely damaging to vulnerable populations in these countries.

Myanmar: The brutal expulsion of some 700,000 Rohingya in 2017, and the killings of many thousands more by Myanmar’s security forces, were incidents of ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and abuses among the most egregious in modern history. Senior American officials, including Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and his predecessor, Rex Tillerson, have publicly decried these atrocities, with the vice president invoking President Trump’s name in a call for UN Security Council action. In November 2018, the vice president

told Myanmar’s de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, that “the violence and persecution by military and vigilantes that resulted in driving 700,000 Rohingya to Bangladesh is without excuse.” He further asked her about progress toward accountability for those who perpetrated such crimes. In addition, some Myanmar security officials have been subjected to targeted sanctions, including a visa ban against Commander-in-Chief of the Myanmar Armed Forces Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

But these actions have been slow, do not go nearly far enough, and do not represent a serious or comprehensive strategy designed to promote accountability and return of Rohingya refugees in safety and dignity from Bangladesh to Myanmar, with respect for their human rights.

Most significantly, President Trump himself has been silent on the horrendous atrocities committed by the government of Myanmar. The absence of presidential leadership undermines any international effort to convince Myanmar to create conditions that may ultimately permit the Rohingyas’ return in safety and dignity. And when a Rohingya civil society leader visited the White House as part of the U.S.-hosted Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom and asked what the United States might do to help the Rohingya, the president’s response was to ask, “Where is that exactly?”

Moreover, and despite a careful State Department review of abuses committed by the Myanmar military, it is inexplicable that the Department has failed to state the obvious conclusion that the armed forces are responsible for crimes against humanity. Nor has the State Department offered any

views on the appropriateness of a formal investigation of whether the crime of genocide has been committed. This silence is further evidence of the U.S. lack of global leadership on this issue.

Syria: While the Trump administration has slowed its disengagement from northeast Syria, its policy approach continues to lack coherence—in large measure due to conflict between apparent disinterest from President Trump and concerns among senior officials that the United States should not hastily disengage. The resulting uncertainty led other major donors to temporarily suspend a much-needed recovery assistance for the civilian population in places like Raqqa, the former capital of the Islamic State. The administration has been partially successful in negotiating with Turkey a limited buffer zone between Turkey and Syrian-Kurdish forces in northeast Syria. However, it has failed to commit adequate diplomatic resources toward efforts to address the humanitarian catastrophe in Idlib in Syria’s northwest. This has given Russia and the Syrian regime a free hand in the region. In late April 2019, they launched a brutal military campaign that has killed hundreds of civilians and displaced more than half a million people. Many more remain under threat in Idlib, where two-thirds of the nearly 3 million civilians depend on humanitarian assistance.33

Yemen: In Yemen, there are more than 24 million people in need of assistance and protection, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.34

The Trump administration has consistently failed to bring pressure to bear on the Saudi-led coalition to end abuses against civilians harmed by military operations. President Trump vetoed three joint congressional resolutions prohibiting his administration from selling weapons worth billions to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The president did this despite reports that the Saudi-led coalition has engaged in indiscriminate bombing and killed thousands of Yemeni civilians. The continued administration support to Saudi Arabia will likely exacerbate the dire humanitarian situation in the country where some 20 million Yemenis are food insecure and nearly 10 million of them are “one step away from famine.” Moreover, by late 2018, more than 85,000 Yemeni children under five are estimated to have died from starvation.

South Sudan: In Africa, there are several critical humanitarian and displacement crises, but the continent and its humanitarian challenges have received little attention from the Trump administration. Among those challenges is South Sudan. Given significant prior U.S. engagement in South Sudan and the U.S. role in helping to bring independence to the country, the absence of continued U.S. engagement has been sorely felt. Despite a fragile peace agreement, food insecurity levels and displacement remain among the highest in the world. The position of U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan remained vacant until earlier this year, when the post was filled—but only for Sudan. The risk of famine and further atrocities remains high, yet the United States is largely absent.

Refugee Women and Girls

GRADE: D (UNSATISFACTORY, BUT MINIMALLY ACCEPTABLE)

Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to abuses in humanitarian crises and already existing inequalities are often worsened during displacement. As during the first half of Trump’s presidency, his administration continues to impose policies that either roll back or threaten important global gains for the protection of women and girls.

“The Trump administration continues to impose policies that either roll back or threaten important global gains for the protection of women and girls.”

As Refugees International highlighted in last year’s report card, in January 2017, the administration reinstated and expanded what had been known as the Mexico City Policy, also known as the Global Gag Rule. The misnamed “Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance” policy blocks U.S. financial assistance to foreign NGOs that advocate for or provide information, referrals, or services related to legal abortion, even when such activities are financed by non-U.S. government funds. According to research conducted by Stanford University, the policy actually leads to an increase in unintended pregnancies and abortions. The International Women’s Health Coalition

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recently conducted a study on the effects of this policy and found that after two years, the policy has affected $9 billion in funding and has made a broad range of crucial health services inaccessible to some of the most marginalized communities around the world, including survivors of gender-based violence.\(^{39}\)

In early 2019, the administration took the policy even further. The U.S. government now will not fund foreign NGOs that use any monies—even if those monies do not come from the U.S. government—to support other organizations that provide information on abortion.\(^{40}\)

As we indicated last year, there is an exception to these prohibitions in the case of humanitarian and disaster-related foreign assistance accounts, which is one of the reasons Refugees International has awarded the Trump administration a D rather than a completely failing grade. But much non-emergency funding, which has been affected by the prohibition, builds resilience for women and girls who may find themselves in humanitarian emergencies.

In a separate action, for the third year in a row, the United States withheld funding completely from the UN Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), the lead UN agency ensuring that women and girls who have fled conflict obtain access to critical sexual and reproductive health services, as well as services relating to preventing and responding to gender-based violence. The terminated U.S. funding to UNFPA had also included support for humanitarian and disaster response. In June 2019, Senior Advisor to the President Ivanka Trump, presented the United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security to Congress, as mandated by the Women, Peace, and Security Act, which became law in October 2017.

The strategy recognizes that women and girls are disproportionally and uniquely affected by conflict, have untapped potential, and should be afforded significant participation in peace processes, which is the other reason the administration received a D rather than an F. According to the strategy, “In many conflict-affected and fragile settings around the world, malign actors deliberately target and attack women and girls, often with impunity, for various forms of violence including, but not limited to, physical and sexual violence, torture, mutilation, trafficking and slavery.”\(^{41}\) It goes on to note that, “Most survivors never receive justice and instead, face considerable challenges in gaining access to the medical, psychological, legal and economic support that is needed to help them rebuild their lives.” However, there is no mention of sexual and reproductive health in the strategy, leaving out a vital part of women’s recovery from conflict.

Further eroding U.S. leadership on women’s protection worldwide, in April 2019 the administration stood alone in vetoing a version of what became UN Security Council Resolution 2467, which condemns sexual violence against women and girls during wartime and recommits UN member states to provide the necessary support to survivors of such violence. The United States was the only country in the world to vote against the resolution.\(^{42}\) Instead of recognizing that

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42. Allison Herrera, “A UN Resolution Condemning Sexual Violence Against Women Should’ve Been Uncontroversial,” Public
women and girls who are victims of rape should be afforded sexual and reproductive health services necessary to heal and regain their lives, the United States strong-armed the removal of the phrase “sexual and reproductive health.” The United States signed on once the phrase was removed, but the initial veto and subsequent change in language were deeply disappointing.

These actions are even more alarming considering the escalation of widespread crimes of violence against women and girls. The number of reported incidents of sexual violence globally, both in and out of wartime, doubled in the first three months of 2019 compared to the same period in 2018. So far in 2019, the countries with the highest recorded incidents of sexual violence against women and girls include the Democratic Republic of the Congo, followed by India, South Sudan, Burundi, and Mozambique and Zimbabwe.43

The decisions made by this administration will directly affect the abilities of the U.S. government, and the capacity of UNFPA and other aid agencies, to provide women and girls with critical sexual and reproductive assistance in the context of conflict, disasters, and in rehabilitation programs.

Strengthening the Multilateral System of Refugee, Migration, and Humanitarian Response

GRADE: F (UNSATISFACTORY—FAILING GRADE)

In December 2018, UN Member States voted overwhelmingly to approve two landmark international arrangements: the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Global Compact on Migration (GCM). The GCR aims to strengthen the international response to large movements of refugees and protracted refugee situations. The GCM is an agreement among governments to establish common principles and approaches to deal with the growing challenges of international migration.

The United States supported neither. While the Trump administration participated in two years of negotiations on the GCR and offered support for much of what was included in the final agreement, the United States ultimately voted against the UN resolution that approved it. Explaining its rationale, the administration noted its objection was due to language in the resolution that runs counter to U.S. sovereign interests, including that it “calls upon” member states to implement the GCR.44,45 Out of all UN Member States, only Hungary joined the United States in voting no. Governments around the world,

UN organizations, civil society groups, international financial institutions, the private sector, and others are all working toward the effective implementation of the GCR while the United States sits on the sidelines.

The United States also voted against the adoption of the GCM. This was not a surprise since the administration withdrew from negotiations on the Compact back in 2017. U.S. engagement had made great sense as the United States is host to the largest number of migrants in the world. In withdrawing from the diplomatic discussions around GCM and opposing its adoption, the United States has abdicated responsibility for an important global agreement that will play a key role in developing programs of cooperation between governments, common approaches on provision of assistance, and measures to combat human trafficking, among other initiatives.

While both documents are clearly designed to encourage consensus on critical issues facing humanity, neither document is legally binding, making the U.S. decision to isolate itself based on claimed concerns about sovereignty especially disappointing.

Refugees International remains concerned by the Trump administration’s politicization of humanitarian aid. U.S. administrations have historically embraced the principles of neutrality, which means that humanitarian assistance providers should not take sides in political conflicts, and independence, which means that humanitarian action must be separate from political objectives of one side or another in a conflict. For this reason, Refugees International and many other international organizations and NGOs were profoundly concerned by the United States’ willingness, early in 2019, to tie Venezuela’s political opposition with a U.S.-supported effort to provide cross-border assistance from Colombia into Venezuela.

To be clear, sustaining the principles of neutrality and independence in the provision of humanitarian aid would not constitute acceptance of the political status quo in Venezuela; nor would it require that the United States avoid actions to promote political change in Venezuela. But humanitarian action must not be leveraged for political ends, in large measure because the politicization of aid in this manner makes it likely that parties to a conflict will limit access to those in need; politicization also threatens the safety of humanitarian aid providers.

“Humanitarian action must not be leveraged for political ends.”

As we indicated in last year’s report, a third principle, known as impartiality, has also guided U.S. policymakers, however imperfectly, over many years. In the area of humanitarian response, impartiality means that life-saving and life-sustaining humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations should be delivered “solely on the basis of need, without discrimination between or within affected populations.” And as we also reported last year, the Trump administration disregarded this principle of impartiality when it ended U.S. contributions to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). To be sure, administration officials made post-hoc claims about UNRWA effectiveness and management (and those would be fair concerns to raise in the context of a

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**CONCLUSION**

Over the past two years, day in and day out, the country and the world have witnessed a range of practices and policies from the White House that exhibit full-spectrum hostility towards some of the world’s most vulnerable people. Refugees International believes it is critical to account for the totality of the administration’s decisions and actions in a comprehensive and singular document. Hence, this report card. It is quite one thing to read about a policy in isolation, or even several in sequence; it is quite another to read about all of them in one place. This document shows a continuum of cruelty that should shock the conscience of all Americans and call them to question what is being done in their names. We expect a common reaction among readers who care about these issues to be: *We didn’t know it was this bad.*

And make no mistake: As bad as last year’s performance by the Trump administration was, this year’s performance is even worse. Its effects are rippling around the world because the influence of U.S. policies doesn’t stop at the water’s edge. The president’s anti-refugee and anti-asylum rhetoric has been adopted and amplified by other politicians around the world. If left unmonitored and unchecked, these sentiments will lead to a world that is not only less compassionate, but less equipped to deal effectively with humanitarian challenges that are so compelling and will impact societies in both the global south and north.

“As bad as last year’s performance by the Trump administration was, this year’s performance is even worse.”

That is why we at Refugees International believe so strongly in our responsibility to bear witness to the practices and the policies of the U.S. administration, and to report and advocate around lifesaving assistance and protection for refugees and other displaced persons. That is why we began last year to issue this report card and will do so annually in the years to come. We believe strongly that the conversation around humanitarianism and refugees can be moved in a more responsible and compassionate direction.

The world is watching the United States and this administration. And so are we.
ABOUT

REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL

Refugees international advocates for lifesaving assistance and protection for displaced people and promotes solutions to displacement crises around the world. We do not accept any government or UN funding, ensuring the independence and credibility of our work.