



Jesse Arreguín
City Councilmember, District 4

CONSENT CALENDAR
December 15, 2015

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Councilmember Jesse Arreguín
Subject: Reaffirming City of Refuge for Refugees of Syria, Iraq and Other Countries

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution reaffirming of the City of Berkeley's standing as a City of Refuge with respect to refugees from Syria, Iraq and countries with civil conflicts, and expressing the City of Berkeley's position that refugees from Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, Mali and countries with conflicts are welcome in our community.

BACKGROUND

In light of the recent global security threats and events around the world, tensions have been heightened by public officials. Despite President Barack Obama's plans to accept 10,000 Syrian refugees in 2016, as of November 23, 2015, 31 state governors have proclaimed they will not be accepting any refugees from Syria and/or Iraq. Several other lawmakers have suggested only accepting Christian refugees even though the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) has killed more Muslims than any other group of people. These public officials are scapegoating the peaceful and innocent refugees who practice the faith of Islam and are seeking safe refuge from ISIL and other violent factions in the Syrian Civil War. There are now those in positions of great influence and power who seek to pass laws inhibiting refugees who seek safe haven away from the carnage.

The City of Berkeley has long had a standing of welcoming refugees. In 1971, the City Council proclaimed Berkeley as a City of Refuge; a policy that has been reaffirmed in 1986 and 2007. With the refugee crisis currently in the limelight in a local, national, and international setting, the City of Berkeley should re-affirm and reiterate its policy of providing the right to abode for those most exposed and vulnerable to the ongoing conflicts around the world regardless of race, religion, creed, or nationality.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

No adverse effects to the environment.

CONTACT PERSON

Jesse Arreguin, Councilmember, District 4 510-981-7140

Attachments:

1: Resolution

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

REAFFIRMING THE CITY OF BERKELEY AS A CITY OF REFUGE REGARDING REFUGEES FROM SYRIA, IRAQ, NIGERIA, MALI AND COUNTRIES WITH CIVIL CONFLICTS

WHEREAS, recent and global events perpetrated by ISIL have displaced millions and have threatened the institution of international peace; and

WHEREAS, according to Eurostat, the European Union and her member states have granted asylum to over 184,665 people in 2014 with over 715,755 in 2015, thus far; and

WHEREAS, the Federal Republic of Germany has the highest intake of refugees in the European Union with over 800,000 refugees expected to claim asylum by the end of 2015; and

WHEREAS, the German Federal Office of Criminal Investigation (BKA) has released a report showing zero statistical correlation between an increase in crime rates with an increase of refugees; with the amount of crime no different than those of native Germans and proportional to the increase in population; and

WHEREAS, the countries of Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey have been able to receive net economic gains from the millions of refugees spilling over from neighboring conflict regions with Lebanon, according to the World Bank, expecting a 2.5% growth in real terms for 2015; and

WHEREAS, refugees are placed through a rigorous minimum 24-month screening process sanctioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees before going through a separate screening process by their potential host country; and

WHEREAS, the United States sanctions another vetting process which involves checks against multiple government agency databases and terrorist watch lists using biographic and bio-metric information which is quoted by Mark Toner, a State Department spokesman, as "the most stringent security process for anyone entering the United States," with special consideration for Syrian applicants from the U.S. intelligence community; and

WHEREAS, according to the U.S. Department of State, 303 Americans have died worldwide, including 71 on U.S. soil, due to attacks deemed as jihadi and non-jihadi terrorism from 2004-2014, while during that same time period, 320,523 Americans were killed due to gun violence; and

WHEREAS, according to the START Global Terrorism Database, approximately 2.5% of all terrorist attacks on U.S. soil between 1970 and 2012 were carried out by radicalized Islamist extremists; and

WHEREAS, H.R. 4038 (American SAFE Act of 2015) will create significant delays for refugees, who are already facing the added pressures of being in a conflict region, which will further elongate their stay in refugee limbo adding to the danger for those that the UNHCR has classified as most vulnerable and are thus prioritized in undergoing the process of claiming asylum in time-sensitive situations and prolonging their exposure to

war by adding security to a process that Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson has described as, “the most thorough vetting process conducted with respect to anyone who crosses our borders”; and

WHEREAS, over 30 U.S. Governors have now refused to accept the U.S. Syrian refugee commitment of 10,000 people for the year 2016, in their respective states; and

WHEREAS, America is a land settled by immigrants of all nationalities hailing from the farthest reaches of the world, it is irreconcilable to be heedless to those of a different and specific nationality and or religious belief who call for our aid and assistance, succumbing to the fear that some organizations wish to impose on us; free people; and

WHEREAS, to deny safe haven to those that wish to seek it in the face of utter death and destruction is an affront against the American values of liberty, freedom, and self-determination and a showing of indifference in the plight of those who seek refuge; and

WHEREAS, in 1971, the City of Berkeley declared itself a City of Refuge (Resolution No. 44,784 – N.S.); and

WHEREAS, this position was reaffirmed by the City in 1986 (Resolution No. 52,596-N.S.) and 2007 (Resolution No. 63,711 –N.S.).

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that it hereby reaffirms its status as a City of Refuge for refugees from the countries of Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, Mali and all countries with civil conflicts, and that we welcome those who seek refuge in our community, and petition our local, state and federal governments in efforts to provide sanctuary and humanitarian aid for those in dire need in times of crisis and uncertainty.