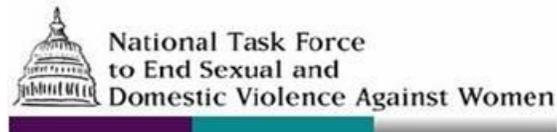


Dear Colleagues and coalition partners. NTF will be sending this to Senators today. We need to follow up with phone calls. Please forward and share with your members and ask them to make calls to your state's two [U.S. Senators](#) as soon as possible. The Senate vote on the punitive [House bill](#) will be next week. If you need more information, feel free to touch base with the contacts below. For worldwide sisterhood and justice.



November 24, 2015

Congressional Communiqué ~ Support refugee women fleeing sexual torture and violence

Dear Senator,

The Steering Committee of the National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence (NTF) comprises national leadership organizations advocating on behalf of sexual and domestic violence victims and women's rights. We represent hundreds of programs, service providers and community organizations across the country dedicated to making sure that all survivors of violence receive the protections and services they need and deserve. For this reason, we urge you to ensure that, through a robust refugee protection system, the United States remains a leader in the fight to end violence against women globally by continuing to accept Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

The calls to deny refugees protection from violence by suspending, delaying, or defunding refugee resettlement programs for individuals from Syria and Iraq fail to honor our promise to defend women's rights everywhere. These proposals would leave survivors of violence and their families out in the cold. As a nation that has fought wars to defend against terrorists who violently restrict the rights of women, the recently passed House measure is a betrayal of our nation's values. We urge the Senate to oppose this legislation that threatens the current rigorous acceptance process and would effectively prevent countless women and children from obtaining the refuge they desperately need to escape from terrible violent crimes including trafficking, rape, sexual torture, domestic violence and other forms of battery.

Most refugees are women fleeing with their children due to violence perpetrated against them. Over 75% of the 4 million refugees are women and children and more than half are under the age of 18.¹ It is well documented that at the hands of ISIS/Daesh, women and children have suffered from widespread gender-based violence, including kidnapping, systematic rape, enslavement, trafficking, stoning, beheading, domestic violence, forced marriage and sexual harassment and assault.²

Refugee women are more susceptible to sexual assault and trafficking than other women. During conflict, when women and children attempt to remain in their country or settle in refugee camps, they are vulnerable to sexual assault, trafficking, domestic violence and unwanted pregnancies.³ For millions of women, the only escape from gender-based harm is to take their small children far from their families and communities to seek help through the global refugee protection system.

Protecting all women is a bipartisan goal and helps in the fight against terrorism. We recently celebrated the twenty first anniversary of the bipartisan Violence Against Women Act (“VAWA”), the result of a nonpartisan commitment to stand up for the rights of women. Fourteen years ago, on the eve of the Thanksgiving holiday, First Lady Laura Bush equated the fight against terrorism with the need to protect women and children from violence: “We respect our mothers, our sisters and daughters. Fighting brutality against women and children is not the expression of a specific culture; it is the acceptance of our common humanity — a commitment shared by people of goodwill on every continent... The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.”

For these reasons, we urge you to affirm the intent and spirit of VAWA and our country’s values and oppose any bill seeking to restrict the acceptance of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, including any bill requiring the heads of federal agencies to personally approve all applicants. Thank you for taking this important step to protect survivors of violence globally.

For more information, please contact Grace Huang, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence at grace@wscadv.org, (206) 389-2515 x 209, Andrea Carcamo, National Latin@ Network: Casa de Esperanza, at acarcamo@casadeesperanza.org, (703) 942-5582, or Kiersten Stewart, Futures Without Violence, at ktewart@futureswithoutviolence.org, (202) 5957382.

Sincerely,

The National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence

1 <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/syria.php>

2 Rukmini Callimachi, “ISIS Enshrines a Theology of Rape,” New York Times, August 2015, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/14/world/middleeast/isis-enshrines-a-theology-of-rape.html? r=0>

3 USAID, “Women in Conflict,” available at https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/toolkit_women_and_conflict_an_introduutory_guide_for_programming.pdf