

March 14, 2011

The Honorable Mark Kirk  
United States Senate  
387 Russell Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Kirk,

We, the undersigned faith leaders, write to ask for your support at a challenging time for refugees and displaced populations overseas and in our local communities. The United States has been a world leader on protection of those fleeing from persecution. We are concerned about the drastic budget cuts the House is proposing for assistance to refugees and other vulnerable populations. As people of faith we are called to serve “the least of these” and to “welcome the stranger”. The United States support to refugees and the resettlement program are expressions of those values.

Funding cuts to the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account will have a devastating impact on those displaced persons around the world who are almost entirely dependent on the international system for life-saving assistance. The needs of displaced populations have increased in the last years: Iraqi refugees continue to live in deepening poverty in the urban centers across the Middle East or are displaced inside their country.

The MRA account not only funds assistance to refugees overseas, but also the refugee admissions program. It is important that the United States continue saving lives of thousands of refugees through resettlement to the U.S. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), the domestic program that serves refugees once they arrive to American communities, is also in need of robust funding. The resettlement program is a real expression of the responsibility, expressed in the Abrahamic tradition, of welcoming the stranger, and as such it requires that we welcome our brothers and sisters with dignity to ensure successful integration into our communities. This program is the last resort for those refugees who cannot stay in their country of refuge and cannot return home, including Iraqi refugees who are targeted because of their work for the U.S. government, Burmese fleeing a repressive regime, and Darfuris driven out of their homes and surviving in harsh camp conditions.

As partners with the government in the U.S. refugee program, we commit our ministries, religious services, and resources to helping refugees. As faith leaders, we see the positive impact refugees have on our communities, as well as the challenges they face as newcomers to our country. The U.S. refugee program is a real expression of our joint responsibility to welcome our brothers and sisters to our nation, even in difficult economic times. We know of your commitment to those in need and hope that you will support robust funding for the MRA and ORR accounts.