



ETHICS & RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION  
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

January 30, 2017

President Donald Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Executive Order on “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States”

Dear Mr. President,

In June 2016, the Southern Baptist Convention reaffirmed its decades-long commitment to care for and minister to refugees. The resolution states, “Scripture calls for and expects God’s people to minister to the sojourner.” Southern Baptist churches throughout the United States lead the way in carrying out this calling.

The church’s commitment to welcoming the stranger has long been reflected in our country’s policies toward those fleeing persecution in their home countries. A commitment given voice through the inscription on our Statute of Liberty, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” Indeed, as our country recalled on Friday, one of our nation’s darkest chapters was our refusal to allow European Jews fleeing the Third Reich to find safe harbor on American soil.

As Southern Baptists, we believe the role of government is first and foremost to protect its people from harm. Every sovereign nation has a responsibility to defend its citizens. Our convention’s resolution affirms this, calling for the government to “implement the strictest security measures possible in the refugee screening and selection process” in order to keep Americans safe.

As a nation, we must seek to resolve the tension created by these two values—compassion for the sojourner and the security of our citizens—in a way that upholds both values. While we know refugees are already the most vetted category of immigrants to the United States, the FBI and others raised legitimate questions about the sufficiency of these procedures. It is crucial these questions be resolved. As a result, we are sympathetic to the desire to strengthen our nation’s security processes.

However, we have concerns about the Executive Order's consequences. We share the concerns of Representative Mark Walker (R-N.C.), a Southern Baptist lawmaker, who said, "The language of the order should not apply to legal permanent residents of the United States, and if it is being enforced in any other way, the administration should step in swiftly to clarify." Preventing the Iraqi interpreters who served our military—crucial allies in the fight against global terrorism—from seeking refuge in the very country they risked their lives and the lives of their families to serve is unacceptable.

We understand the Department of Homeland Security, Justice Department, State Department, Department of Defense, and National Security Council legal counsel were not adequately consulted before the implementation of the order. We join with Southern Baptist Senator James Lankford (R-Okla.), who stated, "This executive action has some unintended consequences that were not well thought out."

Southern Baptists are among the many Americans living in majority-Muslim countries to carry out the biblical call to love their neighbors. We are deeply concerned that the order will cause widespread diplomatic fallout with the Muslim world, putting Southern Baptists serving in these countries in grave danger and preventing them from serving refugees and others who are in need with humanitarian assistance and the love of the gospel.

Achieving the right balance between compassion toward refugees—one of the most vulnerable groups of people among us—and protection of Americans is crucial if the United States is to remain a model for freedom around the world. It is one thing to debate whether the vetting process is adequate. It is quite another to seek to potentially turn our backs on Syrian refugees permanently.

As such, I call upon your Administration to:

1. Clarify, through a rigorous interagency review and coordination, the extent of the Executive Order to resolve the status of green card holders, Iraqi military interpreters, and other ambiguities;
2. Implement additional screening measures in order that the Refugee Admission Program may be resumed as soon as possible, including for refugees from Syria;
3. Work to ensure the safety of Americans serving in majority-Muslim countries and to preserve their ability to continue serving the "least of these" in the region; and
4. Affirm your administration's commitment to religious freedom and the inalienable human dignity of persecuted people whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Yazidi, or other, and adjust the Executive Order as necessary.

Finally, assimilation into American life is crucial for both the security of our existing citizens and the well-being of refugee families. Christian churches and other faith communities have proven their unique ability to facilitate such adjustments. Southern

Baptists know that our responsibility is to care for and serve refugees here in the United States and around the world, and we remain committed to that mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell D. Moore". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Russell D. Moore, PhD  
President

cc: Vice President Mike Pence  
Leader Mitch McConnell  
Speaker Paul Ryan