

***Global Forced Migration Report
Remarks by Ranking Member Bob Menendez
Washington, DC – June 18, 2020***

Thank you, Charlotte for that introduction, and thank you to all of you who are joining this event from New Jersey and across the country. Global forced migration is one of the most profound and least understood crises facing the world today. In a sharp uptick from previous years, UNHCR reported this morning that more than 79.5 million are currently displaced. I think we can all agree this immense upheaval and suffering demands our action.

I want to especially thank Dr. Madeline Albright for joining us this morning. Madame Secretary: you remain one of our greatest national security leaders; your dedication to translating your own experiences as a refugee into decades of championing policies for refugees and displaced people has inspired countless people around the world.

We are also honored to have Honorable Lloyd Axworthy, the current Chair of World Refugee and Migration Council, and one of Canada's leading voices on global migration and refugee protection. He has served as Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as Immigration.

Finally, Dr. Farida Almuslem joins us from Northern Syria. She is a Syrian physician and the director of the Adana Maternity and Children's Hospital in Northern Syria. Throughout the Syrian conflict, she has risked her life in order to care for her patients. Dr. Farida was the last OB-GYN in the besieged city of Aleppo, operating under constant bombardment of her hospital chemical weapons attacks. After being forced to flee her home, Dr. Farida, her husband, and young daughter settled in the Idlib region of Syria, only for fighting to displace them once again this year. Today, Dr. Farida continues to work in Northern Syria, where forced displacement has more than doubled due to forced displacement.

It is a pleasure to have you all join us this morning.

This report is a call to action. The United States must reassert its global and moral leadership to address this crisis—given the urgent plight of millions of people forced to flee their homes due to conflict, violence, persecution, and severe climate-related events. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated this urgency; with forced migrants at even greater risk as they often live in extreme poverty, in overcrowded settings, lacking access to basic healthcare or good sanitation.

But let's first take a step back: Conflict and violence today are driving an unprecedented number of people from their homes and forcing them to live decades in displacement.

Tragically, part of the reason more civilians are fleeing – and dying- in today's conflicts is because brutal perpetrators of violence increasingly and devastatingly target non-military

assets. State actors like Russia and the Syrian regime actively target civilians, viciously eschewing humanitarian laws designed to protect civilians during conflict. Their intentional destruction of critical civilian infrastructure including hospitals, markets, clinics and schools devastatingly increases the number of people who suffer as well. Moreover, non-state actors including terrorists in the Sahel and violent gangs in Central America also threaten, terrorize, and kill ordinary people...driving even more waves of mass displacement across the globe.

Beyond this systematized violence, other drivers of forced migration, including generalized violence, and severe climate-related events, such as droughts, flooding, extreme weather, and rising sea levels, show no signs of abating.

So let me give a snapshot of what you probably already know:

- More than 31 million children were displaced last year as refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs.
- The brutality of the Syrian conflict has displaced over 10 million men, women and children.
- The greed and viciousness of Nicolas Maduro's regime has decimated Venezuela and forced over 4.6 million Venezuelans to flee, the largest exodus in Latin America in recent history; accounting for the largest influx in the United States of any asylum seekers.
- Violence, extreme food insecurity and disease outbreak in Burundi have forced hundreds of thousands people to shelter in overcrowded, destitute camps in neighboring countries.

Simply put, the international community's response has been woefully inadequate to address the enormity of this crisis. We have failed to address the underlying drivers of violence, instability, and resource scarcity that drive people to flee. International organizations and countries that host refugees are simply struggling under the tremendous need to protect the most vulnerable and find durable solutions.

More than ever, we need U.S. leadership to foster and catalyze a global coalition to address this crisis.

The United States was founded on the hopes and dreams of those fleeing violence, persecution and oppression; those simply seeking a better lives for their families. We have historically put that narrative into practice: welcoming desperate people with open arms—from European Jews following World War II to Indochinese boat people to Kosovar victims of ethnic cleansing—reinforced our reputation as a place of refuge.

Many of those who originally came to the United States seeking protection have gone on to become artists, innovators, public servants, and even representatives of the U.S. government.

The Trump Administration, however, has abandoned this proud history, abdicating U.S. leadership and undermining a global response.

Despite our collective efforts, President Trump has nearly destroyed our nation's asylum system, refugee resettlement program, and other protections to people fleeing for their lives.

Refugees from Muslim-majority countries, including those fleeing atrocities in Syria, have been barred.

Small children have been forcibly separated from their families and held in detention centers.

Asylum-seekers fleeing violence and threats to their lives have been returned by our governments to dangerous border encampments in Mexico. There, they must wait in squalid open-air camps waiting for decisions on their applications which may take months or even years.

The United States was built on the hopes and dreams of those fleeing persecution and oppression, those seeking better lives for themselves and their families. The values and moral compass that embraced these individuals and shone as a beacon of freedom have made this country great. In times of crisis, the United States traditionally asserted global leadership through these values that have made this country so successful. That leadership served as an important uniting and motivating voice in the face of tremendous international challenges.

Against this challenging landscape, I commissioned this new report by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Democratic staff to assess and document the latest challenges posed by the global forced migration crisis. The report lays bare the facts of today's crisis, the drivers of displacement, the international community's response, and the current Administration's handling of the crisis.

It describes a global forced migration crisis that is, at its crux, a political crisis requiring political solutions. It calls for strong, courageous and compassionate political leadership. It underlines the need for governments to both confront the drivers of forced migration today, as well as help the large numbers of people living for decades in displacement. It makes clear the critical role that innovation must play in addressing the magnitude of the crisis.

I want to thank Charlotte Oldham-Moore of my staff who travelled to Bangladesh, Mexico, Ethiopia and Colombia to research and write this report. I also want to thank the many other SFRC staff who worked on this significant paper.

So how can we deliver that change? Our report includes more than 30 recommendations, and I will highlight just a few –

First and foremost, the U.S. must make a dramatic course correction and lead a global response to address the world's forced migration crisis. We now know that forced migration will fuel future destabilization if not addressed correctly. Our government must pursue protection for forced migrants worldwide. We must ensure that protections afforded to refugees, IDPs, and other forced migrants by international and national laws are upheld within, at, and outside our borders.

The US government must also champion respect for international humanitarian law and engage more in the hard work of resolving conflicts – which is a primary driver of forced migration. To this end, the Departments of State and Defense should ensure that military assistance, such as arms sales, military training, and other defense services, is contingent on adherence to international humanitarian law.

The United States needs to restore the U.S. refugee resettlement program – which is a national treasure -- and create complementary pathways for protection. We have to end the Trump administration's disastrous policies towards forced migrants, including the "Remain in Mexico" policy and the "Safe Third Country" agreements.

The United Nations must do more to enforce international humanitarian law and improve protections for forced migrants. The UN's role in responding to and alleviating the forced migration crisis has never been more important. The UN must use all its tools, including Boards of Inquiry, Commissions of Inquiry, and the International Court of Justice, to enforce international law and end rampant impunity by publishing findings and identifying perpetrators of violations of international law.

The UN Secretary-General should also call on host countries to incorporate forced migrant populations into their national action plans, and promote greater awareness and better responses for IDPs, a large group of vulnerable people who have largely been ignored by the international community.

Finally, innovation must be supported and scaled up. Recent efforts in humanitarian financing by the World Bank, humanitarian diplomacy, humanitarian assistance by NGOs and the private sector highlight opportunities for extraordinary innovation but they require greater support. These creative initiatives include new international and national compacts on refugees, the World Bank's concessional financing, and a myriad of private partnerships aimed at providing work and educational opportunities to forced migrants.

In closing, my hope is for this report we are announcing today to serve as a catalyst towards more action to help stem this crisis....Without an ally in the White House, we need to build a bipartisan sense of urgency in Congress for renewed efforts to reform our domestic policies and international work relating to migration. Ignoring the plight of millions of forced migrants worldwide will only ensure that our future—the world's and the United States'—will be far less secure and far bleaker. As the world grapples with global crisis, we must come together in global solidarity and remember those among us who have experienced the utmost dangers and require protection.

Let that be our task, let it be our goal. And as we take up this charge, I will stand with you every step of the way.

Thank you very much.

It is a great honor to introduce Dr. Madeline Albright. In 1997, Dr. Albright was named the first female Secretary of State and became, at that time, the highest ranking woman in the history of the U.S. government.

As Secretary of State, Dr. Albright reinforced America's alliances, advocated for democracy and human rights, and promoted American trade, labor, and environmental standards abroad. Dr. Albright served as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and was a member of the President's Cabinet.

Dr. Albright received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, from President Obama in 2012.

In addition, many forget that this extraordinary woman was also a refugee. She was a refugee twice – first, when her family fled Czechoslovakia after the Nazis consumed the country in 1939, and then again after 1948, when the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia took over the government, with support from the Soviet Union.