

Progress Report

Women's Refugee Commission's Priority Recommendations to the Biden Administration

March 9, 2021

With record levels of people displaced by conflict, climate change, and other drivers of displacement, the majority of whom are women and children, the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) crafted a list of priority recommendations for the Biden administration to take action on within the first 100 days.

Based on our work with those most at risk of violence and exploitation, we know it is vital for the Biden administration to move quickly to restore global US leadership and reset US priorities globally and at home.

On Monday, March 8, 2021—to mark International Women's Day—President Biden signed an executive order establishing the White House Gender Policy Council, a reformulation of the Obama-era White House Council on Women and Girls.

According to White House officials, the name change reflects a more inclusive definition of gender in advancing equal rights, be it for women, girls, men, LGBTQ+ people, and more. President Biden emphasized that the council is evidence of his administration's commitment to ensure that every domestic and foreign policy pursued under his administration rests on a foundation of dignity and equity for women.

WRC welcomes this action and stands ready to assist with our gender expertise. As an active member of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security, we value the administration's plans to implement the US government's commitments to women's involvement in peace and security efforts, which must include the meaningful participation of refugee women and girls in peace negotiations and humanitarian action.

WRC also welcomes the specific recognition of the needs and contributions of women and girls in humanitarian crises and in development assistance. The administration should honor this recognition by making sure that humanitarian response is age, gender, and disability sensitive, that displaced women and girls are consulted, and their rights respected in line with international humanitarian and human rights law.

We value the administration's commitment to lead a "comprehensive, interagency review and update of the 2016 United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally" and urge the council to utilize the expertise and leadership of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies to conduct this review. In particular, the recently revised and updated Call to Action Roadmap (2021-2025) can provide a helpful blueprint for concrete actions to take forward, including the provision of sexual and reproductive health care, as well as taking an intersectional approach to the prevention of GBV.

See below for a progress update on WRC's top priorities for the Biden administration:

Propose strong increased funding in the President's Budget Request for humanitarian assistance that is rights based; addresses the needs of those most at risk, particularly women and girls; promotes gender equality; and

supports self-reliance goals. Include needed resources for a revived and robust US Refugee Admissions Program.

(In progress) Renew the US commitment to gender equality in its humanitarian, development, and peace and security work. Using USAID's 2012 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy as the starting point, develop an updated policy that builds on progress and learning to date, emphasizes the importance of sexual and reproductive health care, and promotes the full participation of the most marginalized, including adolescent girls, LGBTQI persons, and women and girls with disabilities. Also review, update, and resource the US Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security and agency implementation plans to ensure a more detailed framework with strong accountability mechanisms.

Take action to ensure access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion care.

✓ This includes rescinding the Mexico City Policy (also known as the Global Gag Rule)

and working with Congress to repeal the Helms and Hyde amendments and repeal the Kemp-Kasten amendment and replace it with language consistent with the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

Expand efforts to address gender-based violence in humanitarian settings. Immediately affirm US membership in and leadership support for the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies.

Re-establish US leadership on global humanitarian and human rights policy and practice by joining the United Nations Global Compact for Migration, affirming full support for the Global Compact on Refugees, and strengthening US engagement on effective implementation of both Compacts. Re-engage with the UN Human Rights Council and strengthen advocacy on the rights of crisis-affected people, including women human rights defenders.

(In progress) Restore funding for UNFPA.

✓ Restart US participation in the World Health Organization (WHO), whose role in humanitarian response in the time of COVID-19 is more critical than ever.

Also restore funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which provides assistance and protection for more than 5 million Palestinian refugees.

✓ Rejoin the Paris Agreement to help prevent and mitigate climate-related disasters and displacement.

Restore the rights and respect the dignity of displaced people in search of protection. Reverse policies that have closed the border to asylum seekers and unaccompanied children, including:

(In progress) Ending the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP, also known as "Remain in Mexico");

Ending the use of Asylum Country Agreements (ACAs) with Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras; rescinding the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) order barring entry to asylum seekers; and immediately resuming the processing of asylum seekers at the border.

(In progress) Repeal all iterations of the Muslim, African, and asylum travel bans.

Ensure that foreign policy addresses root causes of migration and supports access to protection (including asylum), and is not focused on deterrence.

Immediately begin to restore the integrity of the asylum system. Restore eligibility for asylum for survivors of domestic violence, victims and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), gang violence, and members

of the LGBTQI community. Withdraw or reverse decisions by the Attorney General and the Board of Immigration Appeals that narrowed the refugee definition and due process in contradiction with human rights norms.

Phase out the use of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention. Apply a presumption of release and invest in appropriate community-based case management programs instead of immigration detention. Immediately end family detention. Implement meaningful oversight and accountability mechanisms over DHS detention and custody policies.

Stop separating families at the border and in the interior. Immigration policies and practices must respect family unity. Families should neither be separated nor detained together.

(In progress) End the use of expedited processing and other measures that inhibit due process. Immediately reverse the expansion of “expedited removal” and ensure that all those in immigration proceedings have a fair day in court. Protect sensitive locations from enforcement actions.

The Women’s Refugee Commission looks forward to working with the Biden administration and the Congress to repair the devastating impacts of the previous administration’s actions, and to proactively advance the rights and protections of displaced persons around the world.