

Pastor: Make America great again by welcoming refugees

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Jalil Dawood, pastor of the Arabic Church of Dallas, understands the plight of refugees. He wishes President Donald Trump—for whom he voted three times—understood, as well.

Trump issued an [executive order](#) suspending the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program “until such time as the further entry into the United States of refugees aligns with the interests of the United States.”



Jalil Dawood, pastor of Arabic Church of Dallas. (Photo / Heather Davis)

Dawood—who fled Iraq to escape violence and persecution before he resettled in the United States as a refugee in 1982—sees that as a missed opportunity for the United States to be the “shining city on a hill” President Ronald Reagan envisioned.

“Be a voice for the voiceless, the persecuted and the oppressed. ... That will make America great again,” Dawood said.

He still considers himself “an enthusiastic supporter” of Trump. Dawood applauded the conservative judicial appointments Trump made in his first term as president, and he supports Trump’s positions on abortion, gender identity, national security and illegal immigration.

However, he believes the United States has a responsibility to welcome properly vetted victims of persecution—particularly persecuted Christians.

“The leader of the world can execute the justice and mercy of God,” said Dawood, founder of World Refugee Care, a small Texas-based nonprofit organization that offers spiritual and physical aid to refugees.

Refugees can ‘be blessed and be a blessing’

Trump’s [executive order](#) states: “The United States lacks the ability to absorb large numbers of migrants, and in particular refugees, into its communities in a manner that does not compromise the availability of resources for Americans, that protects their safety and security, and that ensures the appropriate assimilation of refugees.”

Churches can help reduce the burden on the government by sponsoring refugees, providing them with short-term support until they are able to provide for themselves and their families, Dawood said. But they need a system that offers them that opportunity.

He agrees refugees have a responsibility to become assimilated, and he sees the need for “balance” in considering security issues and compassion for people escaping persecution.

However, refugees who work hard, pay their taxes and obey the laws can “be blessed and be a blessing” to the United States, rather than a drain on society, Dawood asserted.

Trump and other elected leaders need to be reminded refugee policies “have human consequences,” a statement the [Burma Advocacy Group](#) released on Jan. 24 said.

The group—which focuses particularly on displaced Burmese nationals who have fled Myanmar after a military coup in February 2021—asserted Trump’s executive action ignores the “solid contributions” refugees have made to the United States.

“Burma adult refugees have created new businesses across our country and have provided a trustworthy workforce in the communities where they live,” the group stated. “They bring with them core religious values rooted in their Christian, Buddhist and Muslim faiths that strengthen our moral fiber as a nation.”

‘Light of hope has been extinguished’

The Burma Advocacy Group—led by Roy Medley, executive director emeritus of the American Baptist Churches USA—noted refugees “are subjected to a thorough vetting by U.S. Homeland Security before they are approved for resettlement” and undergo cultural orientation to help them assimilate.



Rohingya refugees cry while praying during a gathering to mark the fifth anniversary of their exodus from Myanmar to Bangladesh, at a Kutupalong Rohingya refugee camp at Ukhiya in Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh, in this 2022 file photo. (AP File Photo/ Shafiqur Rahman)

“Just two year ago, a light of hope shone again in Thailand when the Thai government, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the U.S. government agreed to again resettle Burma nationals—Rohingya, Christian, Buddhist and other, who have been in the camps there,” the group stated.

“The Burma Advocacy Group was there to witness the thorough effort of all three bodies to vet those eligible for resettlement.”

However, “that light of hope has been extinguished” by Trump’s executive order, the group stated.

“Families that have bought tickets for their resettlement flights awoke on Jan. 22 to the news that all flights had been cancelled and no new arrangements were to be made,” the group stated. “This is a blow to those on the cusp of long-awaited resettlement who had been thoroughly vetted

and approved for entry.”

The executive order also directly affects the level of care provided in refugee camps. The [Karen Information Center reported](#) health care services were suspended Jan. 27 in refugee camps operated by the International Rescue Committee along the Thailand-Myanmar border.

The Burma Advocacy Group also pointed to the impact of another executive order halting Temporary Protected Status for migrants who seek to enter the United States to escape violence and persecution.

“Not only do these presidential executive actions lead to despair within Malaysia, India and the camps in Thailand; it also leads to despair among the Burma nationals here in this country, whose hope has been to be reunited with family members in the promise of freedom and security that America offers,” the group stated.

When refugee resettlement was curtailed during the first Trump administration, resettlement agencies had to lay off staff and close offices.

The Burma Advocacy Group pointed to the long-term impact the latest executive orders will have on the United States’ future ability to respond to the urgent needs of refugees in crisis.

“We have seen in the past four years how difficult it is to rebuild the components for the regulated, compassionate and carefully vetted resettlement of those who have fled persecution and war waged against them by despotic, anti-democratic forces that are guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity,” the group stated.