

UN agency 'alarmed' by uncertainty facing refugees in the process of being resettled in US

30 January 2017 – The head of the United Nations refugee agency today said he is “deeply worried” by the uncertainty facing thousands of refugees around the world who are in the process of being resettled to the United States after the country suspended its refugee programme last week.

According to a news release from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 800 refugees were set to make America their new home this week alone, but instead find themselves barred from travelling to the US.

The statement follows President Donald Trump’s signing last Friday of an Executive Order that, among things, suspends the US refugee programme for 120 days and, according to the media, bars entry of refugees from several mostly Muslim countries, including Syria, until further notice.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi underlined once again UNHCR’s position that refugees should receive equal treatment for protection and assistance, and opportunities for resettlement, regardless of their religion, nationality or race.

UNHCR estimates, based on average monthly figures for the last 15 years, that 20,000 refugees in precarious circumstances might have been resettled to the US during the 120 days covered by the Order.

“Refugees are anxious, confused and heartbroken at this suspension in what is already a lengthy process,” the release said.

“Those accepted for resettlement by the United States are, after a rigorous US security screening process, coming to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity. UNHCR hopes that they will be able to do so as soon as possible,” the release added.

Noting that for decades, the US has been a global leader in refugee protection, a tradition rooted in the tolerance and generosity of the American people, UNHCR expressed the hope that the country will continue its strong leadership role and its long history of protecting those who are fleeing conflict and persecution.

Meanwhile, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) issued a statement on child refugees that might be affected by the new US policy.

“The needs of refugees have never been greater. Worldwide 28 million children have been uprooted by conflict, driven from their homes by violence and terror. They need our help,” the statement said.

“The United States has a long and proud tradition of protecting children fleeing war and persecution. We trust that this support will continue and that the recent measures will prove to be temporary. All refugee children need our support.”

UNICEF said it is committed to continuing its work with governments and other partners around the world to help some of the most vulnerable children everywhere, from Syria to Yemen to South Sudan.