September 15, 2016

Dear President Obama,

We are writing to you today to applaud your leadership in convening a Refugee Summit later this month on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, presenting the international community with a historic opportunity to take bold actions to meet the needs of an estimated 65 million people, the highest levels of displacement in recent human history. But while we support the important commitments that have been announced ahead of this Summit, we want to urge you to expand the Summit agenda to address the primary driver of global displacement – violent conflict.

Just ten years ago, approximately 80% of humanitarian aid went to helping the victims of natural disasters, but today that ratio is reversed, with 80% of aid going to meet the needs of people whose lives have been turned upside down by conflict.¹ The change has been so dramatic that in early 2016, the World Bank revisited its “World Development Report 2011 on Conflict, Security and Development” to revise one of its findings, declaring that conflict is not one of the causes of suffering and poverty but the primary cause.² Recognizing your leadership and commitment to eradicating extreme poverty by 2030, we believe that focusing the power of US foreign assistance to deal with violent conflict must clearly be a cornerstone of your legacy if we are to achieve this ambitious and critically important goal.

While conflict is erupting worldwide, and the displacement crisis intensifies, gaps in the strategies intended to address such crises have been exposed. As we’ve seen time and again, in the face of today’s challenges, diplomacy and short term humanitarian relief work are often insufficient and are not working to end many intractable crises. We believe that stepped up investments in peace building, conflict mitigation and reconciliation programs can reinvigorate stalled or otherwise unsuccessful diplomatic efforts to find political solutions to the conflicts driving forced displacement and help pave the way for greater peace by averting the outbreak of violence, reducing or ending violent conflict and promoting peace.

Paradoxically, while these approaches are proven to be effective, the international aid community currently spends an infinitesimal amount of money on conflict mitigation and peacebuilding relative to other types of foreign aid and military spending in countries where preventing conflict should be a top priority. Based on analysis of OECD data, we calculate that less than 1 out of every 20 dollars in ODA is being spent on peacebuilding and conflict mitigation in the most fragile states.³

To address this gap, we urge you and partner nations to make a targeted commitment at your Summit to double funding for peacebuilding alongside strong commitments for humanitarian funding, which are urgently needed to address real and critical needs. This could be implemented by supporting key accounts that fund conflict mitigation and peacebuilding – including USAID’s Complex Crises Fund and Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation, the State Department’s Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Office, and contributions to the UN Peacebuilding Fund. We also urge that any increase in funding

not come at the expense of other effective humanitarian and development assistance, which work together to serve the common goal of building a safer and more prosperous world.

US leadership at the Summit will galvanize other pledging countries to make critical investments in proven programming and is in line with your administration’s two Quadrennial Development and Diplomacy Reviews and your 2010 and 2015 National Security Strategies – both of which elevated conflict prevention and resolution as core pillars of US National Security. Importantly, this focus will ensure that this Summit is proactive in addressing root causes of displacement, and lays the foundation for productive consultations between Congress and the next Administration. Without this focus, we are deeply concerned that the Summit will only treat symptoms of the problem, without investing in a cure.

The American people are generous, and they are also problem solvers. But they are also impatient and very concerned about their own safety. Now more than ever, we need opportunities to demonstrate that we are listening and seeking to proactively solve the crisis of global forced displacement. Your refugee Summit represents a unique opportunity to be compassionate as well as pragmatic, and is a chance to tell the American people that we are actively working to reduce, resolve, and end violent conflict in order to promote more stability, certainty, and opportunity.

Now is the time to be more strategic with funding and programming and to positively affect the conflicts that are fueling forced displacement, as well widespread loss of life, human suffering, and economic hardship. We look forward to working with you and your staff to ensure this important Summit succeeds in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable and in preventing further violence and displacement.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Peacebuilding
American Friends Service Committee
Better World Campaign
CARE USA
Carl Wilkens Fellowship
The Carter Center
CDA Collaborative Learning Projects
Church World Service
Conference of Major Superiors of Men
Darfur and Beyond
The Educators’ Institute for Human Rights
Equal Access International
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Graduate Program in Conflict Resolution and Coexistence, Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University
Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict
Heartland Alliance International
Institute for Resource and Security Studies
Invisible Children
Islamic Relief
Jewish World Watch
Jubitz Family Foundation
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Mercy Corps
Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies
Nonviolent Peaceforce
Peace Direct
Peace Initiative Network
Peace X Peace
Peacebuilding Advisory Service
Peacebuilding Connections
The Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative
Salam Institute for Peace and Justice
Search for Common Ground
Spectrum Media
STAND: The Student Lead Movement to End Mass Atrocities
Stop Genocide Now
Syria Relief and Development
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
United Nations Association of the National Capital Area
United Nations Association of the United States
Watchers of the Sky Initiative
War Prevention Initiative
Woman Graduates – USA
World Vision