

**NAFSA: Association of  
International Educators**

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President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Secretary of State John F. Kerry  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. President and Secretary Kerry:

NAFSA: Association of International Educators applauds your recent announcement to resettle 110,000 refugees in the United States. As you embark on the Leaders' Summit on the Global Refugee Crisis, NAFSA urges you to focus on steps to ensure that refugees who seek higher education have a path to do so.

NAFSA is the world's largest professional association dedicated to the promotion and advancement of international education and exchange. Our more than 10,000 members believe that connecting students, scholars, educators, and citizens across borders is fundamental to building mutual understanding among nations; preparing the next generation with vital cross-cultural and global skills; and creating the conditions for a more peaceful world. A commitment to fostering peace and security through international education demands that we go beyond providing the basic necessities of some of the world's most vulnerable people. As an association that was founded to respond to the needs of European students following WWII, we recognize that in order not to lose a generation of minds to the ravages of war and terror, we must educate them.

As Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." The United States has a proud history of promoting mutual understanding through international education and exchange. In the decades since World War II, U.S. institutions of higher education have welcomed and educated millions of students from all over the world, with many becoming world leaders and some of our closest friends and allies. These students are among our greatest foreign policy assets, for it is through their time here that they come to understand our country firsthand.

The United States should move quickly to facilitate the matriculation of eligible refugee students to study at U.S. institutions of higher education, and to provide U.S. higher education assistance in online educational opportunities in the nations bordering Syria. The U.S. Department of State has many tools at its disposal to facilitate the education of refugees while still ensuring the safety and security of U.S. citizens. Specifically, the State department should streamline the F-1 visa process in order to make it easier for refugee students to obtain foreign student status. Currently, in order to be eligible for an F-1 visa, foreign students must demonstrate, among other things, that they have no intent to immigrate to the United States. Given current conflicts in Syria and other nations, U.S. consular officers may assume certain visa applicants intend to immigrate to the United States, rather than return to war torn nations. Applicants should be allowed to assert that they intend to return to their country of origin when it is safe to do so. Continuing their education will make it more feasible for them to return and contribute to rebuilding their country.

Second, to complete their visa application process, students are required to have face-to-face interviews at U.S. consulates. The U.S. Department of State should make accommodations to allow students expedited access to appointments at various locations to compensate for the severe logistical challenges refugee students face.

Finally, the Department of State should create an Exchange Visitor Program to provide another avenue for refugees to study at U.S. institutions of higher education. Even when visa issues are resolved, enabling refugees to study in this country will require the cooperation of institutions of higher education as well as other stakeholders in the private sector. To that end, the administration should convene a working group of relevant parties in the government, higher education, and the private sector to collaborate on addressing the practical hurdles—travel costs, application fees, missing transcripts and test scores, tuition and living expenses—Syrian students are likely to face. U.S. institutions of higher education must pledge to accept as many refugee students as possible and to waive application fees and document requirements. Corporations, foundations, and other NGOs must work independently and in public/private partnerships to provide funding to offset travel and tuition expenses. Taken together, these actions would benefit Syrian refugees in the short term and foster the goodwill essential to building mutually beneficial partnerships among nations in the future.

It is imperative that we provide those who want to continue their education in the United States with the means to do so. If we fail to offer educational opportunities to qualified refugees, we risk fostering the isolationism that helps to drive anti-Western sentiment. On the other hand, offering them an opportunity to continue their education will build good will and cross-cultural understanding that enhances our own national security. Clearly, we must choose the latter. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Marlene M. Johnson  
Executive Director and CEO

cc: The Honorable Jeh Johnson, Department of Homeland Security  
The Honorable John B. King, Jr., Department of Education