



Universal Periodic Review 50<sup>th</sup> session – Stakeholder's Report

## **United States of America: Refugees and Right to Life**

7 April 2025

**Submission by:**

**The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA)** was founded in 1846 and is a network of churches in over 140 nations that have each formed an evangelical alliance, and over 100 international organizations joining together to give a world-wide identity, voice, and platform to more than 600 million evangelical Christians worldwide.

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## **Background**

1. This submission has been compiled with information from several sources in the United States of America (U.S.) as well as several sources from our international constituency.
2. As armed conflict, natural disasters, epidemics, human rights issues, and other extraordinary circumstances impact communities all around the world, the U.S. has long been a beacon of hope and place of refuge through programs like the Refugee Resettlement Program and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designations. However, over the past 20 years the U.S. has experienced a crisis of unauthorized immigration.
3. As refugee programs have been suspended by Executive Orders, as detailed below, those living in the U.S. under those programs are subject to deportation under circumstances and processes that may violate their human rights.
4. The first several months of 2025 have seen a dramatic increase in the use of presidential powers to reverse laws, change long-standing policies, and cancel programs. Some of these actions violated human rights in the U.S. and others have resulted in violations of human rights in other countries.
5. The U.S., as the largest foreign aid donor, played a key role in global crises and human rights through the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) humanitarian and development efforts. The elimination of USAID and pause in funding has resulted in the termination of many programs protecting human rights and providing life-giving humanitarian assistance for people around the world.
6. As of April 6, 2025, the U.S. has officially withdrawn from the UN Human Rights Council and has terminated the office of the U.S. representative to the Human Rights Council.<sup>1</sup>

## **Refugees and Migrants**

7. There are several programs that allowed refugees, migrants and people from countries with high levels of conflict and violence, including violations of human rights, to live in the U.S. Many of those programs have been abruptly terminated by Executive Orders, as detailed below, and those living in the U.S. under those programs are subject to deportation. Approximately 80% of those subject to deportation are Christians, some of them pastors and church leaders.<sup>2</sup> Many are in families where some are U.S. citizens and others subject to deportation. Thus, families will be separated, violating the right to family life.
8. The attached recent report from several Christian organizations in the U.S., Appendix 1, titled *One Part of the Body: The Potential Impact of Deportations on American Christian Families*, details the refugee and migrant programs in existence in the U.S. in January 2025. These have been cancelled by Executive Orders.
9. States have the right to change policies and laws. However, the changes must be done in a way that does not violate human rights and that is in compliance with

international treaty obligations. This submission raises concerns that the recent, abrupt changes in refugee and migration laws and policies, and the manner that they are being enforced, violates human rights.

10. The U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program has been a vital human rights protection initiative that has, since 1980, provided permanent protection to more than three million refugees fleeing human rights abuses.
11. The program has been available to those who have left their country of origin and have a well-founded fear of persecution due to their race, religion, political affiliation, national origin, or membership in a social group and are unable to find protection from their local government. Refugees undergo security and health vetting.
12. World Relief and Open Doors recently reported: “The number of people globally who have been displaced by persecution, violence, human rights violations, and disruptions of public order has surpassed 120 million for the first time in recorded history. And the number of Christians who face high levels of persecution or discrimination because of their faith has risen to 365 million, accounting for 1 in 7 Christians globally.”<sup>3</sup>
13. Christians and churches have long been involved in care for and ministry to refugees in the U.S. The National Association of Evangelicals issued a statement in 2009 urging the government to reform immigration policy and ensure: “That immigration enforcement be conducted in ways that recognize the importance of due process of law, the sanctity of the human person, and the incomparable value of family.”<sup>4</sup>
14. This avenue for refugee resettlement has been important for Christians, as well as for those of other faiths, who are fleeing persecution due to their religious beliefs. In Fiscal Year 2024, data shows that 29,493 Christian refugees facing persecution for their faith were resettled to the U.S. from 50 countries. Other persecuted religious minorities, such as Jewish, Baha’i and Yezidi refugees, have also benefited from this life-saving process.
15. As of January 20, 2025, the U.S. Refugee Resettlement program was suspended indefinitely due to the Executive Order “Realigning the United States Refugee Admissions Program.”<sup>5</sup> Because of this order, 10,000 refugees who had already completed the necessary security screenings, been approved for resettlement, and planned travel arrangements had their flights cancelled.<sup>6</sup>
16. As of February 26, 2025, the United States terminated cooperative agreements for the ten refugee resettlement agencies in the U.S., abruptly ending a 45-year partnership with the U.S. Department of State.<sup>7</sup> While court cases have been filed attempting to block these actions, there is deep uncertainty about what the future of the refugee resettlement program will be moving forward.
17. As of January 20, 2025, parole programs were suspended under Executive Order “Securing Our Borders.”<sup>8</sup> Humanitarian parole is a special type of immigration protection that allows citizens of other countries to enter the United States due to

urgent humanitarian circumstances. It appears that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has paused all humanitarian parole.<sup>9</sup>

18. In the Immigration Act of 1990, Congress created a form of temporary immigration status called Temporary Protected Status (TPS). TPS is provided to individuals when their countries of origin are facing armed conflict, natural disasters, or other extreme circumstances that make it unsafe to return to their home country. TPS designations can be made for 6, 12, or 18 months at a time. The decision to extend or terminate TPS designations is made by the Secretary of Homeland Security. TPS does not provide a pathway to permanent residence or citizenship.
19. Since 1990, TPS has provided protection for hundreds of thousands of individuals. As of September 23, 2024, there were 863,880 people with TPS living in the United States.<sup>10</sup> As of January 2025, 17 countries were designated for TPS.<sup>11</sup>
20. Examples of TPS include Venezuela, Ukraine, Afghanistan and South Sudan. Due to severe political instability, economic crisis, violations of human rights, and humanitarian concerns in Venezuela, for example, TPS for Venezuelans was designated on March 8, 2021. Since then, the program was extended twice, in 2022 and 2023. As of January 10, 2025, there were approximately 600,000 Venezuelans living and working in the United States with TPS.<sup>12</sup>
21. As of January 20, 2025, under Executive Order “Securing Our Borders,” the Secretary of Homeland Security is directed to end TPS protections for all Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans (“CHNV parole programs”). On March 21, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security terminated the CHNV parole program, ending TPS protections for more than 530,000 people.<sup>13</sup>
22. On January 21, 2025, the United States rescinded guidelines for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers that prohibited immigration enforcement actions in and around “sensitive locations.”<sup>14</sup> These protected areas included churches, schools, and hospitals. This protection, which had been enacted for decades and then expanded in 2021, allowed immigrants to access basic community services and attend their respective houses of worship without fear for their or their family's safety. Now, immigrants may be hesitant to access necessary medical care, to send their children to schools to receive an education, and to gather communally for religious worship services.
23. Pastors of Latino churches in the U.S. have reported that members of their congregations have stopped coming to church out of fears that they may be detained or deported. Further, they are not sending their children to school out of fears that they may be detained or separated from their parents. In addition, some pastors of Latino churches are subject to deportation, which could leave church communities without leadership.<sup>15</sup>
24. The Deferred Actions for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program was enacted in 2012, allowing hundreds of thousands of immigrants who were brought to the United States as children to live and work in the U.S. without fear of deportation. Under DACA, individuals may be eligible for employment authorization, but there is

currently no pathway to permanent residency. As of September 30, 2024, there were around 538,000 active DACA recipients in the United States.<sup>16</sup>

25. USCIS is still accepting and processing DACA renewal requests (for a two-year reauthorization) but is not accepting any new applications.
26. The U.S. government has deported some people whose legal status to live in the U.S. has been revoked. Some of those deported have been placed in jails in El Salvador. Some of those are innocent Venezuelans whose families have not been able to contact them.<sup>17</sup>
27. We recognize that the U.S. has been debating issues related to refugees and migrants for many years. Serious concerns have been raised that migrants enter illegally. Other concerns are that known criminals were admitted into the U.S. and that refugees and migrants are not properly screened. However, those subject to deportation should be provided due process.

### **Foreign Aid and Right to Life**

28. The United States has been the world's largest foreign aid donor, providing vital humanitarian and development aid as well as human rights support. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has been pivotal in addressing global crises and promoting human rights around the world.
29. USAID has implemented numerous programs aimed at strengthening global human rights initiatives, supporting human rights defenders, and promoting democracy abroad.<sup>18</sup> In May 2024, for example, USAID launched the Support for Human Rights Defenders Activity. This provided one- to two- year fellowships for up to 40 human rights defenders from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.<sup>19</sup>
30. Through the USAID Human Rights Grants Program (HRGP), the U.S. government provided funding to address urgent human rights abuses through local partners. Between 2022-2023, the HRGP provided \$14 million to USAID Missions globally to respond to time-sensitive human rights needs.<sup>20</sup>
31. As of January 20, 2025, under Executive Order "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid," the U.S. government has paused a substantial portion of its aid portfolio, pending a system-wide review.<sup>21</sup> These abrupt and widespread funding reductions have had and will continue to have community level impacts.
32. Significant cuts to USAID personnel indicate that many of the programs that were administered by USAID may not resume, at least in their current form. The sudden cessation of lifesaving aid for millions of people can be considered a violation of the right to life. This sudden cessation of essential aid, and the way in which it has been done, jeopardizes the lives of millions of people who depend on this aid. One example of this is the PEPFAR program that provides life-saving treatment for children with AIDs in Africa.<sup>22</sup> Other examples include programs providing essential aid to Indigenous peoples living in poverty in several countries in Latin America.

33. Many programs that have resumed activity are for “lifesaving” operations, such as medical or food support, but concerns remain that, in practice, USAID is no longer able to carry out these programs. Furthermore, these programs do not include many of the programs aimed at strengthening democracy and promoting human rights. Sustained cuts to these programs could have negative consequences on human rights globally. Among those affected is the World Evangelical Alliance’s partner in Sri Lanka, which is faced with terminating critical projects designed to document religious freedom and freedom of expression violations, provide legal support, and strengthen advocacy networks. A project focused on strengthening religious freedom documentation and advocacy across multiple provinces was terminated.
34. Until now, the U.S. has played a crucial role in strengthening religious freedom for minority communities in Sri Lanka, including Evangelical Christians, who make up a tiny minority. However, the impact extends beyond Sri Lanka, dealing a severe blow to the religious liberty of Christians living as minorities in countries across South Asia where the majority religion is the state or de facto state religion. In countries where authoritarian regimes are in power or where a state religion exists, and Christians are a minority, U.S. support is needed the most.

### **Recommendations**

Therefore, the World Evangelical Alliance respectfully recommends that the U.S.:

1. Re-engage with the UN Human Rights Council.
2. Ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as supported in the 3<sup>rd</sup> UPR cycle, and implement it in national law.
3. Ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, as supported in the 3<sup>rd</sup> UPR cycle, and implement it in national law.
4. Reinstate programs for refugees, TPS holders and asylum seekers and provide due process for immigrants facing deportation proceedings.
5. Reinstate longstanding guidance to ICE agents prohibiting routine immigration enforcement in and around churches, schools and hospitals.
6. Ensure that no immigrants or asylum seekers are deported to countries where they are at risk of persecution or to countries that lack adequate means to receive them, particularly that innocent people are not imprisoned.
7. Provide permanent legal status to immigrants who came to the country as children.
8. Re-invest in USAID programs that provide live-saving humanitarian assistance and medications globally.
9. Re-invest in USAID programs that promote and protect human rights, more specifically the right to life and religious freedom initiatives globally.

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- <sup>1</sup> President Donald Trump, Withdrawing the United States from and Ending Funding to Certain United Nations Organizations and Reviewing United States Support to all International Organizations, February 4, 2025. Available online: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-and-ending-funding-to-certain-united-nations-organizations-and-reviewing-united-states-support-to-all-international-organizations/>.
- <sup>2</sup> World Relief, National Association of Evangelicals, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Center for the Study of Global Christianity, One Part of the Body: The Potential Impact of Deportation on American Christian Families, March 2025, p. 14. Available online: [https://worldrelief.org/content/uploads/2025/03/OnePartoftheBody-Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://worldrelief.org/content/uploads/2025/03/OnePartoftheBody-Report_FINAL.pdf).
- <sup>3</sup> World Relief and Open Doors, State of the Golden Door: Persecuted Christians and the U.S. Refugee and Resettlement Asylum Processes, updated October 2024, p. 2. Available online: <https://worldrelief.org/content/uploads/2024/10/StateoftheGoldenDoor2024.pdf>.
- <sup>4</sup> National Association of Evangelicals, Immigration, January 1, 2009. Available online: <https://www.nae.org/immigration-2009/>.
- <sup>5</sup> President Donald Trump, Realigning the United States Refugee Admissions Program, The White House, January 20, 2025. Available online: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/realigning-the-united-states-refugee-admissions-program/>.
- <sup>6</sup> Church World Service, Stories of Impact: Trump Refugee Ban and Travel Halt, 2025. Available online: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kAZXyzhomL222BOq9cHIWtnOCsFgCJotjm87Y\\_Ned90/edit?tab=t.0](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kAZXyzhomL222BOq9cHIWtnOCsFgCJotjm87Y_Ned90/edit?tab=t.0).
- <sup>7</sup> Fisayo Okara, U.S. Dept. of State Ends Historical Agreement with Resettlement Agencies, Putting into Question Promised 90 Day Review, Documented, February 28, 2025. Available online: <https://documentedny.com/2025/02/28/state-dept-ends-coop-agreement-refugee-agencies/>.
- <sup>8</sup> President Donald Trump, Securing our Borders, The White House, January 20, 2025, sec. 7. Available online: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/securing-our-borders/>.
- <sup>9</sup> U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, The Administration Suspends Humanitarian Protection Programs, January 30, 2025. Available online: <https://refugees.org/the-administration-suspends-humanitarian-protection-programs/>.
- <sup>10</sup> National Migration Forum, Temporary Protected Status (TPS): Factsheet, March 14, 2025. Available online: <https://immigrationforum.org/article/temporary-protected-status-fact-sheet/>.
- <sup>11</sup> American Immigration Council, Temporary Protected Status: An Overview, January 22, 2025. Available online: <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/temporary-protected-status-overview>.
- <sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, DHS to Extend Temporary Protected Status for Venezuela, January 10, 2025. Available online: <https://www.dhs.gov/archive/news/2025/01/10/dhs-extend-temporary-protected-status-venezuela>.
- <sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Termination of Parole Processes for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans, March 25, 2025. Available online: <https://public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2025-05128.pdf>.
- <sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Statement from a DHS Spokesperson on Directives Expanding Law Enforcement and Ending the Abuse of Humanitarian Parole, January 21, 2025. Available online: <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2025/01/21/statement-dhs-spokesperson-directives-expanding-law-enforcement-and-ending-abuse>.
- <sup>15</sup> World Relief, et al., One Part of the Body, p. 14.
- <sup>16</sup> KFF, Key Facts on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), February 11, 2025. Available online: <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/fact-sheet/key-facts-on-deferred-action-for-childhood-arrivals-daca/>.
- <sup>17</sup> Didi Martinez, Daniella Silva and Carmen Sesin, Families of deported Venezuelans are distraught their loved ones were sent to El Salvador, NBC News, March 19, 2025. Available

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online: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/families-deported-venezuelans-are-distraught-loved-ones-sent-el-salvad-rcna196950>.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of State, Supporting Human Rights Defenders: U.S. Department of State's and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Top Achievements during the Summit for Democracy's Year of Action, March 28, 2023. Available online: <https://2021-2025.state.gov/supporting-human-rights-defenders-u-s-department-of-states-and-u-s-agency-for-international-development-usaid-top-achievements-during-the-summit-for-democracys-year-of-action/>.

<sup>19</sup> Institute of International Education, IIE to Administer New USAID Program for Central American Human Rights Defenders, May 7, 2024. Available online: <https://www.iie.org/news/iie-administers-usaid-program-for-central-american-human-rights-defenders/>.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of State, Supporting Human Rights Defenders.

<sup>21</sup> President Donald Trump, Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid, The White House, January 20, 2025. Available online: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/reevaluating-and-realigning-united-states-foreign-aid/>.

<sup>22</sup> Chris McGreal, US evangelical groups urge Trump to spare HIV/Aids program from aid cuts, The Guardian, 17 March 2025. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/17/hiv-aids-pepfar-christians-trump>.