Wednesday, June 20 is **World Refugee Day**. This important day offers the opportunity to once again rededicate our efforts to help the world’s refugees and internally displaced peoples (IDPs).

There can be no greater example of need than what the UNHCR has characterized as “the world’s greatest humanitarian crisis” – the plight of those impacted by the war in Syria. There are 13.1 million in need in Syria, 5.6 million who have fled to neighboring countries, and more than 6.1 million IDPs in Syria, the victims of a war that is now in its eighth year. The daily lives of those who remain in Syria are punctuated by barrel bombs, double tap bombs, chemical weapons, kidnappings and a lack of food, water, sanitation and housing.

MFA, with its faith-based roots and focus, has developed materials that your congregation may find helpful in drafting sermons or newsletter articles, putting together focus group discussions, and other initiatives, as we head towards World Refugee Day.

Refugees, particularly Syrian refugees, continue to count on us to not forget them and to keep up the pressure needed to help solve this massive humanitarian crisis.

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**Speak to Your Congregation About the Crisis**

June 2018

Whether you are a congregant or a religious leader, you have an important voice that can help Syrian refugees in this country and around the world. You can offer to give a sermon at weekly religious services, put a paragraph about the crisis in your congregation bulletin, run a small study group around this and other topics, or something else. We can help by supplying you with materials for ideas you might have.

As people of faith, we have a moral obligation to speak to this disaster and offer ways both to care for those suffering now and to help alleviate the crisis going forward. As a nation, we must uphold our values of generosity, hospitality and compassion. Our actions must match the need and live up to our welcoming legacy.

**Accordingly, we have compiled some short sermon points that may be of use as you speak to your congregation:**
Goal of the Sermon: The goal of your sermon should be to move people to action to help Syrians. As so many other world and personal issues vie for everyone’s attention, the public is far less focused on the Syrian crisis than they were even a few years ago: they’ve moved on to other priorities in their lives. But, we absolutely cannot forget Syrian suffering.

We have to continue to push for humanitarian aid until a peaceful resolution is found. The Syrian crisis has only gotten worse since it began, and we, as people of faith, have an obligation to raise our voices in unison to help those suffering so much from the crisis. You can emphasize the human obligation to help Syrians by sharing important facts about the crisis so that your congregants understand the vast scale of this conflict, and by utilizing religious texts to move people to meaningful action.

Opening of the Sermon: Some may choose to open a religious sermon with a prayer or intention. For example:

“As we gather here on this day, secure in our place, may our thoughts [and prayers] turn to those whose lives are not so secure, not so safe: the Syrian people who suffer endlessly at the hands of those who would destroy their livelihoods, their homes—even their very lives. They are driven from their hometowns and forced away by bombs and troops and gunfire, seeking any place of safety, only to constantly be turned away as the world turns a blind eye to the murder that has been going on in Syria for much too long. May we find the strength [or: G-d/Allah/Divine Spirit, grant us the strength] to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves.”

Syrian Background:
- The crisis began with peaceful protests in March 2011.
- This was followed by a severe crackdown by President Bashar al-Assad.
- Other players have entered the conflict over time, including ISIS, Russia, and Iran.
- We have now entered the 8th year of the conflict.

Current Information You Can Include:
- 13.1 million Syrians—more than half of the country’s prewar population—is in need in Syria.
- It is believed that more than 100,000 Syrians have been arrested, forcibly disappeared, or abducted in the past seven years.
- Physicians for Human Rights have documented that 492 healthcare facilities were attacked between 2011 and the end of 2017.
• An incredible 5.5 million people have fled Syria. (Per remarks of Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Ursula Mueller to the UN Security Council, January 30, 2018)

• In the first half of Fiscal Year 2018 (from October 2017 until now), only 44 Syrian refugees have been resettled in the U.S. In all of Fiscal Year 2016, more than 12,000 Syrian refugees were resettled.

• For Fiscal Year 2018, the limit for all refugees entering the United States is a woeful 45,000. This 45,000 number is the lowest ever set in the 38-year history of the U.S. refugee resettlement program. Even more appalling, the projection for the actual number of all refugees to be resettled this year is a paltry 20,000. With millions in grave danger, in Syria and elsewhere, this is patently unacceptable.

Possible Texts to Use:

• General
  o Inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, a poem by Emma Lazarus: “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

• Jewish
  o Leviticus 19:16 (“Do not stand idly by while your neighbor’s blood is shed.”)
  o Isaiah 2:4 (“And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not take up sword against nation; they shall never again know war.”)

• Christian (incl. Jewish texts above)
  o Luke 10:27 (“...Love your neighbor as yourself.”)

• Islam
  o Quran 51:24-27 (“Has the story reached you of the honored guests of Abraham? Behold, they entered his presence and said: ‘Peace!’ He said: ‘Peace!’ [and thought: ‘They seem] unusual people.’ Then he turned quickly to his household, brought out a roasted fattened calf, and placed it before them. He said: ‘Will you not eat?’”)

Concrete Asks:
You can ask your congregants to take action now.
1. Tweet
   a. #RefugeesWelcome
   b. #WRD2018 (World Refugee Day, on June 20)
c. #WithRefugees

2. Advocate
   a. Call your Senators and Representatives to tell them your community welcomes refugees and you want more positive action on the Syrian refugee crisis. (1-866-940-2439) For specific bills, see below.

3. Fundraise
   a. Raise money to send supplies into Syria through MFA’s Fund A Container program (described below).
   b. Visit multifaithalliance.org/amazon to send supplies directly from Amazon to our partners, who will then bring it into Syria.

Closing Suggestion:
May we together work towards a time when suffering will end and communities can come together in peace. Amen/Ameen.

Additional Resources to Consider:
These links contain information that may be helpful when planning your initiatives.

(1) RCUSA Tool Kit for World Refugee Day 2018
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/577d437bf5e231586a7055a9/t/5ae9d25488251bf7871b1d59/1525273173252/RCUSA+WRD+2018+Toolkit_FINAL.pdf
A comprehensive tool kit with a variety of initiatives and suggestions on refugee advocacy compiled by the Refugee Council U.S.A. (RCUSA). It is a 25-member coalition, of which MFA is a member, which is “dedicated to refugee protection, welcome and excellence in the U.S. resettlement program.”

(2) MFA’s Fund A Container Program
For detailed information please visit https://www.multifaithalliance.org/container, or contact Ionut Gitan at: ionut.gitan@multifaithalliance.org

This program enables individuals or congregations to sponsor a shipment of humanitarian relief into southern Syrian for just $5,500. MFA has already shipped more than $114 million of donated medicines, medical supplies, medical equipment, food, clothing, and other supplies. Through groundbreaking partnerships between the Israeli government and Syrian NGOs, the relief is shipped to Israeli ports, then trucked to the Golan Heights.
by the Israel Defense Forces, and turned over to MFA’s Syrian NGO partners for delivery to those in need. The program is both delivering critically-needed aid and having a dramatic impact on both sides of the border as a model of cooperation for the region. Sponsors can follow the progress of their container from packing to shipping and delivery to Syria.

(3) **On the religious roots of charity in different traditions:**
https://hds.harvard.edu/news/2013/12/13/why-give-religious-roots-charity#

(4) **Holocaust Museum Report -- Syria: Is the Worst Yet to Come?**
https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Syria_Bearing_Witness_Report_031218.pdf

**Legislation that Assists Syri ans:**
These bills are on the Senate side at the moment-so please focus on them.

- **HR 1677 The Caesar Syria Civilian Act of 2017**
  Introduced by Rep. Engel (D-NY) and Rep. Royce (R-CA)
  This bill calls for the end of the wholesale slaughter of the Syrian people, as well as calls for the prosecution of those guilty of Syria war crimes. This bill has passed the U.S. House and is now in the U.S. Senate (so only your Senators should be contacted to show your support).

- **HR.4681 The No Assistance for Assad Act**
  Introduced by Rep. Engel (D-NY) and Rep. Royce (R-CA)
  This bill aims to limit U.S. assistance in areas of Syria controlled by the government of Syria. This does not curtail the distribution of humanitarian aid. This bill has passed the House and is now in the U.S. Senate (so only your Senators should be called or emailed to show your support).

- **S. 2144 The SECURE Act**
  Introduced by Sen. Van Hollen (D-MD)
  This bill would provide a process for granting lawful permanent resident status to aliens from certain countries (including Syria) that meet specified eligibility requirements. There is no U.S. House version of this bill, yet.

**About MFA:**
The Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees (MFA), a project of the Tides Center, is a coalition of more than 95 faith-based and secular organizations. MFA’s mission is to mobilize the interfaith response to the Syrian humanitarian crisis, advocate for sensible and humane refugee policies, create awareness of the facts, needs, and opportunities for positive action, deliver humanitarian aid and raise funds for direct services on the ground, and cultivate groundbreaking partnerships in the region.