



March 30, 2021

Hon. Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

We very much welcomed the February executive order on Rebuilding and Enhancing Programs to Resettle Refugees and Planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration. It offers the possibility of a historic U.S. commitment to address climate change and forced migration, through increased efforts at resilience, protection pathways for individuals displaced by climate, and opportunities for international cooperation. We also welcomed the charge in the EO for a report by August 3, detailing policy options on these and other issues.

The Climate, Migration, and Displacement Platform (CMDP) is a global network of civil society organizations which aims to ensure that urgent issues concerning human mobility in the context of climate change are addressed in a way that is accountable to those who are affected and upholds their rights and dignity. We, the undersigned participants in the CMDP, commend the administration for these timely measures. To ensure that the requested report delivers a bold and forward-looking blueprint for much-needed policy changes, we urge that the following priorities inform its preparation:

- **Focus on human security and its connection to broader national security interests as you engage the national security agencies of government.** With deep engagement on climate issues in recent years by the Department of Defense (DOD) and the National Intelligence Council, much of the attention around climate change has focused largely on traditional national security threats. In 2010, the DOD characterized climate change-related displacement “as an accelerant of instability or conflict, placing a burden to respond on civilian institutions and militaries around the world.” It should be understood, however, that these challenges inevitably result from the absence of human security, including the right to food, water, and an adequate standard of living. This understanding should underpin analysis in the report; and

people-centered recommendations that address broader development, resilience, and protection issues should be given greater attention.

- **Be prepared to break new ground on protection and resettlement options.** The EO calls for options for protection and resettlement, as well as “mechanisms for identifying such individuals, including through referrals.” This will be a critical but complex task, as displacement is multi-causal, and disentangling climate change impacts will be challenging. As most people moving in the face of climate change will do so inside of their own countries, it will be critical to propose legal and operational mechanisms that enable climate-displaced individuals to live in safety and dignity in their own country *as well as* for those for whom there is not an adequate domestic remedy who should be considered for international protection. Policy options must be broadly inclusive and as transparent as possible to ensure they are equitable and just.

- **Recognize that the U.S. will not be breaking new ground in a vacuum—and that significant progress has been made from which to build upon.** While the Trump administration made a concerted effort to withdraw from international accords and frameworks, they persisted without us; and in many cases, have made significant progress from which we should learn. The Nansen Protection Agenda and the Platform on Disaster Displacement, and specific work done with our neighbors and allies on the Regional Conference on Migration; as well as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, should serve as guiding frameworks and processes. The U.S. should re-engage and contribute to these processes rather than try to go it alone.

- **Acknowledge that migration can be a form of adaptation and should not be vilified, securitized, or stopped altogether.** Migration has always been a way to diversify income and spread risk—and has been recognized as a reasonable form of climate change adaptation. We can already see that climate change is altering migration patterns and dynamics. Instead of only focusing on stopping it, we need policies that anticipate and address this reality in a way that fosters peace, security, and human rights, including by offering new migration pathways that include the United States and other countries.

- **Make the report as actionable as possible.** The report must include clear policy recommendations and timelines of implementation in order to be effective. Communities are already grappling with climate change impacts and the time to step up is now.

- **Establish an open channel of communication with experts and civil society that have deep experience on this issue and can provide valuable perspectives to inform the report.** In recent years, the amount of data and research related to understanding climate change and migration has grown exponentially. However, not all of the published information on these issues is of the caliber and quality needed to inform meaningful policymaking. Your team should consult with experts outside of the government in evaluating existing research as well as members of civil society, especially in frontline communities, to better appreciate the needs and perspectives of those most affected by climate change.

Respectfully,

1. Alianza Americas
2. Church World Service
3. Climate Refugees
4. Human Rights Watch
5. International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
6. The National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR)
7. Oxfam America
8. Refugees International
9. Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)

CC:

Hon. Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor

Hon. Anthony Blinken, Secretary, Department of State

Hon. Lloyd J. Austin III, Secretary, Department of Defense

Hon. Avril Haines, Director of National Intelligence

Hon. Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary, Department of Homeland Security

Ms. Gloria Steele, Acting Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development