

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Admitting Syrian Refugees: The Intelligence Void and the Emerging Homeland Security Threat***

June 24, 2015 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee hearing entitled “Admitting Syrian Refugees: The Intelligence Void and the Emerging Homeland Security Threat”:

“The United States refugee program was greatly impacted by the terrorist attacks of September 11. In the aftermath of those attacks, a review of refugee-related security procedures was undertaken, refugee admissions were briefly suspended, and enhanced security measures were implemented.

However, more than a decade after these enhanced security measures have been undertaken with limited instances of fraud, there are those that believe certain populations are unable to be properly vetted for security purposes. Rather than focus on the fear and concern surrounding Syrian refugees, I think we should focus on the known facts about the Syrian refugee population. The Syrian people are the primary victims of the violent conflict in Syria and the brutal actions of ISIL.

They are the most vulnerable to the violence and know first-hand the cruelty of ISIL and other groups that have brought harm upon their communities. These refugees, like most others that arrive in the US, are fleeing difficult, even life-threatening, situations. The idea that they would be met with suspicion and hate upon arrival in the United States is an affront to the values we uphold and promote.

Like Americans, most Syrians consider ISIL to be their enemy, as well. Within the United States, the Syrian American Council has already partnered with the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties within the Department of Homeland Security to organize community briefings for Syrian Americans focused on countering violent extremism. Groups like this encourage a robust Congressional debate on how ISIL can be stopped both at home and abroad.

In fact, the leading demographic of those seeking or joining ISIL in the U.S are U.S.-born citizens, including citizens with no ancestry from majority-Muslim countries. Therefore, preventing vulnerable Syrian refugees from entering the United States will not address the United States’ issues with violent extremism.

Time and time again, I have urged this Committee not to have a narrow view of violent extremism, which ignores violent extremist activity of domestic groups. Regrettably, last week’s attacks at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston brought this issue into stark focus. Congress, the President, and the Department of Homeland Security need to come together with State and local governments to honestly acknowledge that domestic terrorism is a threat to the safety and security of the American homeland, including the refugees who resettle within our borders.

We must move beyond the perceived fears of the unknown and focus on credible threat information and allow the security vetting systems we have in place to work.”

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