

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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August 15, 2016

Start: 2:16 p.m.

Recess: 2:51 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm.
14th Fl.

B E F O R E: CARLOS MENCHACA
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Mathieu Eugene
Daniel Dromm
Peter A. Koo
Rafael L. Espinal, Jr.

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

2 [sound check, pause]

3 [gavel]

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Buenos Tardes. I'm
5 Carlos Menchaca, Chair of the New York City Council's
6 Committee on Immigration. Before going any further,
7 I would like to introduce other members of the
8 committee here today with me, as well as Council
9 Member Levin, who I...who is also...who's the main
10 sponsor with me on Proposed Resolution 1105-A
11 relating to accepting more Syrian refugees for
12 resettlement in the United States. We want to
13 welcome Peter Koo, Council Member Peter Koo from
14 Queens, and Council Member Danny Dromm from Queens as
15 well. Thank you.

16 On June 27, 2016, the Committee on
17 Immigration held a public hearing on Reso No. 1103,
18 which calls upon the Secretary Department of Homeland
19 Security to designate Ecuador for temporary
20 protective status to provide temporary immigration
21 relief to eligible Ecuadorian Nationals in the wake
22 of a devastating earthquake. This resolution was co-
23 sponsored by Council Member Julissa Ferreras-Copeland
24 and Speake Melissa Mark-Viverito. This reso was co-
25 sponsored and introduced after Ecuador experienced a

2 deadly earthquake of 7.8 magnitude on April 16, 2016.

3 The earthquake resulted in almost 700 deaths and over

4 16,000 injuries. In addition to the human

5 casualties, the earthquake left over 24,000 homes,

6 schools, places of work and other buildings severely

7 damaged or destroyed, and leaving more than 28,000

8 individuals displaced without a safe place to live in

9 Ecuador. Recovery efforts are projected to cost over

10 \$3 billion, and have been significantly delayed by a

11 series of aftershocks and smaller earthquakes. As of

12 mid-July, 2016, Ecuador had...had experience over 26 of

13 these aftershocks. Recognizing that there are many

14 obstacles ahead for Ecuador and as it addresses

15 immediately military (sic) and begins rebuilding

16 efforts, the country formally requested Temporary

17 Protected Status more commonly referred as TPS in May

18 of 2016. A Temporary Protected Status, TPS, des-

19 designation is reserved for situations where

20 immigrants present in the United States are unable

21 to—where immigrants present in the United States

22 aren't able to return safely to their home country

23 due to ongoing armed conflict, environmental disaster

24 or other extraordinary and temporary conditions that

25 prevent safe return. A TPS designation would allow

2 Ecuadorian Nationals who were in the United States at
3 the time of the earthquake and are able to now return
4 safely to Ecuador to become eligible to apply for
5 temporary immigration relief and work authorization
6 until a safe return is possible.

7 New York City is home to one of the largest
8 Ecuadorian populations in the country, and boasts a
9 vibrant community of roughly 140,000 Ecuadorian
10 residents, many of which will benefit greatly from
11 TPS status and work authorization. Unfortunately,
12 the United States government has not responded to
13 Ecuador's formal request for TPS and it is for this
14 reason, this New York City Council calls upon the
15 Department of Homeland Security to promptly issue a
16 favorable decision on the Ecuadorian government's
17 request and grant TPS designation for Ecuador.

18 And I just want to say this is August. I
19 know there's a lot of legislative bodies in the city—
20 in the—in the country that are not working. We are
21 working. We are here. We're sending a strong
22 message, and after today's vote, I hope it gets to
23 the City Council's Stated tomorrow for the final
24 vote.

2 On that same day the Committee—Committee on
3 Immigration heard—heard a reso co-co-sponsored by
4 Council Member Steve Levin and myself, Proposed
5 Resolution 110—sorry—1105-A, which calls upon the
6 President and the State Department to resettle at
7 least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the United States of
8 America by the end of Fiscal Year 2016. That was
9 their promise, and we hope that they make that
10 promise whole, and to increase it to such number as
11 65,000 by the end of Fiscal 2017.

12 Since the start of this bloody and multi-
13 sited civil war in Syria, more than 4.8 million
14 refugees have fled the country, and are in dire need
15 of resettlement. The United Nations has called upon
16 all of its member states to accept and resettle
17 Syrian refugees. Yet, only about 6—160,000 spots
18 have been pledged worldwide. That wouldn't—that only
19 meets about 3.6% of need of resettlement for the
20 Syrian refugees. For Fiscal Year 2016, the United
21 States committed only to 10,000. We must, we must,
22 we must do better. Not only has our commitment paled
23 in comparison to other countries like for example
24 German that is now clocking in over a hun...over a
25 million people from Syria. But it is our ability to

2 keep this commitment, and...and really make sure that
3 we ensure that we not only meet our 10,000, but again
4 increase it.

5 In addition to the relatively low numbers of
6 refugees the U.S. pledged to resettle in Fiscal Year
7 2016, the lengthy refugee vetting process and delays
8 in admitting approved refugees resettled in very low
9 numbers of refugees actually entering the United
10 States. There was significant doubt that the U.S.
11 would be able to meet its commitment since as of
12 April 2016 only 1,285 refugees were physically
13 present in the United States. After significant
14 pressure from elected officials, advocates and the
15 public and the New York City Council through our June
16 hearing, admission numbers rose sharply over the next
17 few months, and so we're going to report the updates.
18 The Department of Homeland Security recently release
19 admission numbers confirming that 7,551 Syrian
20 refugees had been admitted as of July 31, 2016 for
21 Fiscal Year 2016. This first part of this resolution
22 serves to maintain pressure on President Obama and
23 the Department of State to fully meet its commitment
24 to resettle those 10,000 Syrians in the U.S. by the
25 end of Fiscal Year 2016. Further, we must ensure

2 that the U.S. increases the number of refugees
3 settled in Fiscal 2017 at least to 65,000, and we
4 will join others in more-more refugees if we can
5 build-build that commitment.

6 So in closing, the New York City supports
7 immigrants, assailees, refugees who cannot safely
8 return to the homes on account of war, natural
9 disasters and other extreme and dangerous conditions.
10 And to that end today, the Committee on Immigration
11 will vote on Reso 1103, which calls upon the
12 Secretary's Department of Homeland Security to
13 designate Ecuador for Temporary Protected Status, to
14 provide temporary immigration relief to eligible
15 Ecuadorian Nationals in the wake of a devastating
16 earthquake and proposed Reso 1105-A, which calls upon
17 the President and State Department to resettle at
18 least 10,000 refugees—Syrian refugees in the United
19 States by the end of Fiscal Year 2016 and to increase
20 such number to 65,000 at least by the end of Fiscal
21 Year 2017. [Speaking Foreign Language] And with
22 that, I'm going to hand this over to Council Member
23 Steve Levin for some remarks on the resolution.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you very much,
25 Chair Menchaca. I'm very honored that this committee

2 today will vote on a resolution that I introduced
3 with the Chair Carlos Menchaca calling on the
4 President and the State Department to resettle at
5 least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the United States by
6 September 30th of this year 2016. While the State
7 Department appears to be on track to meet this
8 pledge, it has yet to announce how many refugees will
9 be resettled going forward. As such, this resolution
10 also calls for an increase in the number of refugees
11 to resettle by end of 2017 to 65,000. This is
12 particularly important because in September all eyes
13 will be on the United States as world leaders meet
14 here in New York City to discuss an international
15 response to large movements of refugees and migrants
16 now and in the future. President Obama is also
17 expected to host a leader's summit on refugees, which
18 will appeal to governments to make new significant
19 commitments to resettlement. Our country, the United
20 States should lead by example in this crisis taking
21 bold action to stand with refugees and victims of
22 war. I would like to extend my gratitude to those
23 who shared their expertise and personal experience at
24 the June hearing underlining the importance of
25 opening up our communities to a significantly larger

2 number of refugees. In particular, I want to thank
3 Habat Shakagi (sp?), Abiaail Ziv or the International
4 Rescue Committee; China Ward at Refugee Council USA,
5 Dr. Georgette Bennett of the Multi-Faith Alliance for
6 Syrian Refugees; Lena Alhuseni, and Umbreen Coreshi
7 of the Arab-America Family Support Center in my
8 district, and many more that testified. I have been
9 honored to work with Chairman Menchaca to champion
10 Resolution 1105, and I am grateful to the Speaker and
11 to Ramon Martinez, our Chief of Staff here at the
12 Council for the support of this effort. I would also
13 like to thank our Council staff for their intensive
14 research and coordination including Amy Anna Porta
15 (sic), Kalyn Boland, Will Hungatch (sp?), Julie
16 Barrow, Edward Polino and Adriana Garcia. In the
17 National Political climate increasingly hostile to
18 immigrants and to Muslims now more than ever we must
19 stand up to the rights and dignity of all people
20 especially the most vulnerable in our global
21 community. Xenophobia and racism are not new in
22 America. You can go to Ellis Island and see the
23 exhibits of anti-immigrant literature. It is also
24 part of our heritage that is represented at Liberty
25 Island where we see the words, "Give me your tired,

2 *your poor, you huddled masses yearning to breathe*
3 *three—breathe free.”* That is our heritage in this
4 country. That is the ideals that our country was
5 founded upon. Now more than ever, right now it is
6 absolutely essential that we reaffirm those values,
7 and we stand up in the face of the virulent racism
8 and xenophobia that we see as a major threat in our
9 count. And so I’m so proud of this Council that we
10 are taking a stand. We are making our voice hear,
11 and we’re saying that we in New York City know what
12 our true heritage here is in the United States. I am
13 very proud and thankful. Thank you very much, Mr.
14 Chairman. I also want to thank Chair Menchaca and—
15 and Council Member Julissa Ferreras-Copeland for
16 their leadership on Resolution 1103 in support of TPS
17 for Ecuadorians. Our New York values guide us to
18 reject xenophobia and welcome vulnerable people—
19 vulnerable people with open arms because we recognize
20 that diversity strengthens our city and enables us to
21 flourish. So, I hope that all of my colleagues will
22 join me in supporting both resolutions 1105 and 1103.
23 Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman for your time and
24 consideration. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Council
3 Member Levin, uh, for your words and I, uh, I—I stand
4 with you my brother, um, on this and everything we're
5 doing out of the Immigration Committee to stop, um,
6 and—to stop not only xenophobia, but Islamophobia,
7 and all the phobias that hit our immigrant
8 communities in this city. Thank you. I want to hand
9 it over to Council Member Dromm.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Thank you very much,
11 Chair Menchaca, and I couldn't agree more than with
12 the words that you have said, and also with the, um,
13 words spoken by my colleague Steve Levin as well. I
14 think that these two pieces of legislation are
15 sending a strong message about where New York City
16 stands in the whole immigration. I'm particularly
17 honored as a person who represents one of those very
18 large Ecuadorian communities along with Council
19 Member Julissa Ferreras who is the prime sponsor of
20 this legislation to be very much in favor of the
21 legislation that we're going to pass here today, and
22 on the floor of the Council tomorrow. It's long
23 overdue. We've had to wait now for at least four or
24 five months. We've been requesting the
25 Administration to create TPS for our Ecuadorian

2 citizens—our Ecuadorian residents, and—and this wait
3 has been long and it's overdue. So this legislation
4 today is going to be very important in terms of
5 sending a message to Washington that the City of New
6 York welcomes, and in fact, asks our immigrants to be
7 a full part of our society. [coughs] In Regard to
8 the legislation, the resolution put forth by Council
9 Member Levin regarding the Syrian refugees, I think
10 it's really important that we take at least 10,000
11 Syrian refugees. I know that that the country where
12 my ancestors came from, Ireland, is committed to
13 taking 4,000, and Ireland is a country of only six
14 million people. The United States of America has
15 over 300 or 320 million people. So we have to do our
16 fair share of the job in terms of taking care of
17 them, and welcoming into our country these refugees,
18 and I think it's really important in light of the
19 current political climate, and Council Member Levin
20 has made reference to that New York City sends a
21 message such as the message we're sending today of
22 welcoming to our immigrant community. So I intend
23 vote yes on both of these pieces of legislation.
24 Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank
3 you, Council Member Dromm, and—and finally, before we
4 get to the vote, I want to make sure that as we speak
5 about the work that the Council does everyday to
6 support our immigrant communities, today, where
7 particularly the Syrian and Ecuadorian communities
8 will be getting that extra energy and effort to bring
9 the federal government, um, to a place where we feel
10 whole again. But here in the city our Ecuadorian and
11 Syrian and all our immigrants can actually get
12 connected to services. And so we want to plug in
13 IDNYC and now with a—a kind of new commitment as we
14 get into our communities to make sure that everyone
15 has this ID. And so if you do not have any kind of
16 identification card right now in the city, you can
17 get a government issued identification card that we
18 call IDNYC by calling 311 and making an appointment
19 at the nearest center. You could call our district
20 offices. Our staff are ready to take your questions,
21 and get your card. We are in many neighborhoods in
22 the city where you can get this card that NYPD will
23 be able to take for reasons of summons or to report a
24 crime or to enter your—enter your schools, enter your
25 local schools, a library card or get access to

2 cultural institutions in the city. This is
3 something—this is just one of many programs that
4 we're doing here in the city to make our commitment
5 clear as the City of New York, and to send our
6 commitment out like a flag that we raise with pride
7 to the federal government to Washington, D.C. So
8 with that, we'll call the roll for voting.

9 CLERK: Committee Clerk Mathew Destefano,
10 Committee on Immigration, roll call on Resolution
11 1103 and Resolution 1105-A. Chair Menchaca.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes on both.

13 CLERK: Eugene. Dromm

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: I vote aye on both.

15 CLERK: Koo.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: I vote aye on both.

17 CLERK: By a vote of 3 in the affirmative, 0
18 in the negative and no abstentions, the resolutions
19 have been—have been adopted.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much,
21 and I'm going to leave it—the roll open for Council
22 Member Eugene and, um, and then we'll close it, we'll
23 close the committee hearing. Thank you. [pause]
24 Okay. So the final vote count, please.

1 COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

16

2 CLERK: Committee on Immigration the final 3
3 in the affirmative, 0 in the negative and no
4 abstentions.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you and this
6 concludes our hearing on Immigration. Thank you.

7 [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date August 17, 2016