



**Public Papers of the Presidents
Harry S. Truman
1945-1953**

140. Special Message to the Congress on Admission of Displaced Persons

July 7, 1947

To the Congress of the United States:

On several occasions I have advocated legislation to enable a substantial number of displaced persons to enter the United States as immigrants. I stated this view in opening the Second Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. In the Message on the State of the Union on January 6, 1947, I said:

"... The fact is that the executive agencies are now doing all that is reasonably possible under the limitation of existing law and established quotas. Congressional assistance in the form of new legislation is needed. I urge the Congress to turn its attention to this world problem, in an effort to find ways whereby we can fulfill our responsibilities to these thousands of homeless and suffering refugees of all faiths."

I express appreciation to the Congress for the attention already being given to this problem, an appreciation which appears to be generously shared by the public with increasing understanding of the facts and of our responsibilities.

Because of the urgency of this subject I should like again to call attention to some of its fundamental aspects. We are dealing here solely with an emergency problem growing out of the war--the disposition of a specific group of individuals, victims of war, who have come into the hands of our own and the other Western Allied Armies of Occupation in Europe.

We should not forget how their destiny came into our hands. The Nazi armies, as they swept over Europe, uprooted many millions of men, women, and children from their homes and forced them to work for the German war economy. The Nazis annihilated millions by hardship and persecution. Survivors were taken under the care of the Western Allied Armies, as these Armies liberated them during the conquest of the enemy. Since the end of hostilities, the Armies of Occupation have been able to return to their homes some 7,000,000 of these people. But there still remain, in the Western Zones of Germany and Austria and in Italy, close to a million survivors who are unwilling by reason of political opinion and fear of persecution to return to the areas where they once had homes. The great majority come from the northern Baltic areas, Poland, the Russian Ukraine and Yugoslavia.

The new International Refugee Organization, supported by the contributions of this and other countries, will aid in the care and resettlement of these displaced persons. But, as I have pointed out before, the International Refugee Organization is only a service organization. It cannot impose its will on member countries. Continuance of this Organization and our financial support of its work will be required as long as the problem of these homeless people remains unsolved.

It is unthinkable that they should be left indefinitely in camps in Europe. We cannot turn them out in Germany into the community of the very people who persecuted them. Moreover, the German economy, so devastated by war and so badly overcrowded with the return of people of German origin from neighboring countries, is approaching an economic suffocation which in itself is one of our major problems. Turning these displaced persons into such chaos would be disastrous for them and would seriously aggravate our problems there.

This Government has been firm in resisting any proposal to send these people back to their former homes by force, where it is evident that their unwillingness to return is based upon political considerations or fear of persecution. In this policy I am confident I have your support.

These victims of war and oppression look hopefully to the democratic countries to help them rebuild their lives and provide for

the future of their children. We must not destroy their hope. The only civilized course is to enable these people to take new roots in friendly soil. Already certain countries of Western Europe and Latin America have opened their doors to substantial numbers of these displaced persons. Plans for making homes for more of them in other countries are under consideration. But our plain duty requires that we join with other nations in solving this tragic problem.

We ourselves should admit a substantial number as immigrants. We have not yet been able to do this because our present statutory quotas applicable to the Eastern European areas from which most of these people come are wholly inadequate for this purpose. Special legislation limited to this particular emergency will therefore be necessary if we are to share with other nations in this enterprise of offering an opportunity for a new life to these people.

I wish to emphasize that there is no proposal for a general revision of our immigration policy as now enunciated in our immigration statutes. There is no proposal to waive or lower our present prescribed standards for testing the fitness for admission of every immigrant, including these displaced persons. Those permitted to enter would still have to meet the admission requirements of our existing immigration laws. These laws provide adequate guarantees against the entry of those who are criminals or subversives, those likely to become public charges, and those who are otherwise undesirable.

These displaced persons are hardy and resourceful or they would not have survived. A survey of the occupational backgrounds of those in our Assembly Centers shows a wide variety of professions, crafts, and skills. These are people who oppose totalitarian rule, and who because of their burning faith in the principles of freedom and democracy have suffered untold privation and hardship. Because they are not communists and are opposed to communism, they have staunchly resisted all efforts to induce them to return to communist-controlled areas. In addition, they were our individual allies in the war.

In the light of the vast numbers of people of all countries that we have usefully assimilated into our national life, it is clear that we could readily absorb the relatively small number of these displaced persons who would be admitted. We should not forget that our Nation was founded by immigrants many of whom fled oppression and persecution. We have thrived on the energy and diversity of many peoples. It is a source of our strength that we number among our people all the major religions, races and national origins.

Most of the individuals in the displaced persons centers already have strong roots in this country--by kinship, religion or national origin. Their occupational background clearly indicates that they can quickly become useful members of our American communities. Their kinsmen, already in the United States, have been vital factors in farm and workshop for generations. They have made lasting contributions to our arts and sciences and political life. They have been numbered among our honored dead on every battlefield of war.

We are dealing with a human problem, a world tragedy. Let us remember that these are fellow human beings now living under conditions which frustrate hope; which make it impossible for them to take any steps, unaided, to build for themselves or their children the foundations of a new life. They live in corroding uncertainty of their future. Their fate is in our hands and must now be decided. Let us join in giving them a chance at decent and self-supporting lives.

I urge the Congress to press forward with its consideration of this subject and to pass suitable legislation as speedily as possible.

HARRY S. TRUMAN

NOTE: On June 25, 1948, the President approved the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 which authorized for a limited period of time the admission of certain European displaced persons for permanent residence (62 Stat. 1009).

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