



## This Holiday Season, Join Us for 14 Days of Advocacy as We Celebrate Open Hearts and Fresh Starts

By Russell A. Smith, LMSW, CEO of Refugee Services of Texas

Americans have endured many trials these past two years. For many of us, the holiday season is a chance to reclaim lost time with family and friends, relax by a fire, eat good food, and enjoy the comforts of life in a country that has been blessed beyond measure.

However, for the tens of thousands of refugees who are desperate to be resettled in a safe place like the United States, the holiday season will be anything but relaxing. And, the same goes for the dedicated team members and volunteers at Refugee Services of Texas who will be working overtime to [ensure families find a new home for the holidays](#).

Since the United States withdrew its forces from Afghanistan in August, humanitarians across the U.S. have been in disaster-response mode due to the sheer volume of people they must process and deadlines they must meet. They've had little rest, vacation, and, some, little sleep.

I am proud to say that they are living out the letter and the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which States in Article 14 that "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution." These hard-working humanitarians are doing everything they can to ensure this obligation is fulfilled.

Americans are at their best when they engage in this kind of hard work that requires nights, weekends, and yes, holidays. These dedicated servants of the common good deserve our praise, but most of all they need our help.

As the global community commemorates International Human Rights Day on Dec. 10, I hope each of us will take some time to remember those who are on the front lines caring for the world's most vulnerable families and defending the human rights we often take for granted in this country. [There is no better time to celebrate their contributions and to consider giving back ourselves than in the season of giving](#).

International Human Rights Day celebrates the day in 1948 when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, shortly after the horrors of the Holocaust revealed the danger of turning people away and sending them back to dangerous

homelands. We remember this day because of the profound effect it had on the refugee resettlement program and the renewed commitment it sparked in this country to welcoming the stranger.

The efforts by dedicated humanitarians at Refugee Services of Texas and other agencies have never been more important. In Texas alone, we anticipate resettling 2,750 Afghan evacuees across the state this year, on top of 225 non-Afghan evacuees, and it has required all the energy we have.

Resettling nearly 3,000 people is a major challenge, and it requires tireless work by staff members and the volunteers who partner with them who must go the extra mile to give families a chance to celebrate the holidays a bit more stress-free—something many of these diligent workers and volunteers may not be able to do this year. That is why RST needs your help.

Leading up to International Human Rights Day, we've kicked off [14 Days of Advocacy](#), a first-of-its-kind initiative that will promote the amazing work we're undertaking with refugees, engage the our donors and partners in our efforts, and allow others to reflect on how they can get involved.

The 14 Days of Advocacy will include a book club event highlighting the importance of listening to refugee voices, resources to contact state and local representatives, opportunities to help draft cover letters and resumes for refugees seeking employment, a letter-writing event to welcome new arrivals, and so much more.

The 14 days will culminate in an exclusive interview on December 10 with an SIV (Special Immigrant Visa) entrant to the United States about their experience leaving their home country and arriving in a new one.

In this season of hope and thanksgiving, please remember those who are sacrificing their holidays to help refugees restart their lives, and [consider giving to a cause](#) that is bringing a little bit of cheer to those who need it most.