

Farmer, Citizen Activist, and Refugee Watchdog

Exclusive interview with Ann Corcoran, editor of Refugee Resettlement Watch

PETER B. GEMMA

Ann Corcoran, a Maryland farmer and citizen activist, created the blog “Refugee Resettlement Watch”* in 2007, and has written nearly 9,000 posts to date. She was included in the left-wing Southern Poverty Law Center’s Field Guide to Anti-Muslim Extremists because of her “presence in national and local media and for [her] pernicious brand of extremism and hate.” Mrs. Corcoran has 13,000 followers on Twitter, her Facebook page has 47,000 “likes,” and one of her YouTube videos (on Muslim immigration) has received 2.6 million views since it went up in 2015.

On the 2016 campaign trail, President Trump mentioned that he had been talking to “some experts,” Ann Corcoran was one he named, and said she was “so good, she was telling things that you wouldn’t even believe.” Citing Mrs. Corcoran’s blog, Trump asserted, “if you come from Europe, you’re European, you’ve done great in school, you want to come, you want to come to the United States, you can’t get in. But if you’re Muslim, you can get in.”

A monograph by Ann Corcoran, *Refugee Resettlement and the Hijra to America*, published by the Center for Security Policy Press, is available on Amazon.com. Her speech, “Local Perspective on Refugee Resettlement,” to the 2010 Writers’ Workshop, is available at <http://www.thesocialcontract.com/>.

Peter Gemma: *Thank you Ann for taking time to answer some questions. First, why did you get involved with the refugee issue?*

Ann Corcoran: Well, about ten years ago I came across some news item about a non-profit group, the Virginia Council of Churches, who had been bringing refugees into the city of Hagerstown, Maryland, for a couple of years. Some problems arose and citizens started to take an interest and ask questions about how this federal pro-

gram works. The local paper seemed to have no interest in digging into the story, so I decided to research the issue and recruited friends to help. One of the many startling things we found out about this very quiet effort is that non-profit groups, like the Virginia Council of Churches, bring in thousands of Muslim refugees from the Middle East, Africa, the Balkans, etc., almost completely funded by the U.S. government through grants and contracts to non-government agencies. At that time, 125 of the 168 refugees brought to my local county were Muslim.

Because the issue is much more complicated than we initially realized, we set up an online community organizing center, which quickly became a national clearing house about refugee resettlement programs. “Refugee Resettlement Watch” now has thousands of posts, and hundreds of them involve refugee resettlement agencies that have operated under the public scrutiny radar, ripped off taxpayers, and left refugees in the lurch. America’s refugee resettlement program has become a bureaucracy where government and non-profit agencies, work to protect their jobs and expand “services.” And like any other government-funded industry, they have in my opinion forgotten their original mission.

I think not only should there be a national debate about who comes to America and how many, but once they are here—and until there is some sensible reform of the program—these private agencies with taxpayer-funded contracts to resettle the refugees better darn well do their jobs.

PG: *Isn’t it a unique part of the American tradition to accept refugees from political persecution and natural disasters? Who can oppose giving shelter to those most in need of help?*

AC: The Refugee Act of 1980 created the United States Refugee Admissions Program. It hasn’t been our tradition for longer than that to admit to the U.S. “refugees” who have been chosen by the United Nations. They are flown to unsuspecting towns and cities and given over to federal contractors—who are paid by the head—who then place refugees in local communities and get them signed up for all forms of welfare. In three months time, the contractors move on to the next batch of paying clients.

Peter Gemma, a contributing editor to The Social Contract, has been published in a variety of venues, including USA Today (where more than 100 of his commentaries have appeared), Military History, the DailyCaller.com, and the Washington Examiner.

PG: *How is the designation “refugee” defined?*

AC: Right now, legitimate refugees must prove they are persecuted for one of several reasons: political persuasion, religion, race, etc. Efforts are under way by the refugee industry to expand the definition. They want the public to think that any persons moving anywhere for any reason are all refugees. Most movement worldwide is due to economic migration: Central American kids are not escaping persecution, they are escaping crimes and a poor economy with no jobs. Running from a crime-ridden country does not make one a refugee. The No Borders movement wants you to think that they are all refugees. The latest kick is the climate refugee movement. Those trying to escape a changing weather pattern where they live are now “refugees” too.

Escaping natural disasters does not make a person a refugee—they must prove they are threatened with persecution. But everyone is falling for the Left’s expanded definition that anyone running from anything is a legitimate refugee—they are not. Most people on the move around the world are economic migrants.

We did admit refugees prior to 1980, but they were largely cared for by private individuals and churches—refugees from Southeast Asia after the Vietnam War, for example—and they were not the same burden on taxpayers as they are today. Those refugees assimilated because they were taken under the wing of other Americans for much longer than a couple of months. If we went back to that sort of program, private sponsorship, the numbers would naturally come under control.

To give an idea of the staying power of the refugee program, consider this: when we began taking Southeast Asian refugees in the late ’70s, the refugee agencies hired temporary workers, thinking the program would only go on for a few months. Now, 40 years after the last American left Vietnam, we are still taking refugees from Southeast Asia. At least 1.5 million have come in as refugees alone. And it has detonated chain migration of non-refugee immigrants.

PG: *Is there a problem with refugees staying longer than their permit allows?*

AC: This is one of the greatest misunderstandings the general public has about the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. Anyone getting to the U.S. as a refugee or anyone who was granted asylum (after getting here on their own) becomes a legal permanent resident on track to citizenship. They do not ever leave!

In fact, whenever you hear someone say that Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan take so many more refugees than we do, there is no comparison because in those countries they are only hosted temporarily, and will never be voting citizens.

In the U.S., they are permanent and ultimately become voting citizens. In fact, the U.S. takes the largest number of permanent refugees of any country in the world.

Those who don’t have a firm handle on all of our legal immigration sometimes confuse the refugee program with temporary protected status that is supposed to be temporary.

PG: *Isn’t the number of refugees limited per year?*

AC: Every year the President sets a ceiling for the refugee admissions for the upcoming fiscal year. He sets that figure based on the number of refugees those federally sanctioned private contractors tell him they can handle in hundreds of towns and cities across America.

There are many federal refugee contractors—paid with our tax monies—making resettlement plans for your towns and cities. The list includes church-related groups such as the Episcopal Migration Ministries, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. There are secular agencies too, like the Ethiopian Community Development Council and the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants.

These contractors send their wish list—created in virtual secrecy—to Washington in the summer, and by September the U.S. State Department puts together what is called a Presidential Determination. The President sends his determination with a ceiling number and a report on where the refugees will be coming from to Capitol Hill. Congress’s only role is to “consult” and, of course, appropriate money. I must emphasize that the ceiling number is not a target, it is a limit. The President just must stay under the limit.

PG: *How many people are we talking about?*

AC: In 2007, about 48,000 refugees were allowed in; by 2013 that number rose to 70,000. Last year, 85,000 were welcomed to our shores. Over the last 10 years, more than 700,000 refugees have come to America and settled here permanently.

So, the President sets the ceiling, but now the United Nations is mostly picking our refugees, many from UN camps. The Department of Homeland Security is supposed to screen them abroad, and then the U.S. State Department, working with private contractors, decides where in America the refugees will be sent. They are divvied up in a sometimes competitive process I call “bidding for bodies.”

The contractors’ job is to help refugees find work and housing, sign them up for welfare, get them their medical care, and get the kids enrolled in school, before the contractors move on to a new set of paying

“clients.” Refugees are the most desirable category of entry to the U.S. because they are immediately eligible for welfare and they have someone to hold their hand while they are signed up for services.

According to Ken Tota, Deputy Director at the Office of Refugee Resettlement, Congress has never in his 25-year tenure questioned the refugee quota proposed by the administration. By law, Congress is supposed to consent to the annual quota but obviously refuses to take this role seriously.

PG: *Can you give an example of a particular reform or restriction that can make a difference in the resettlement of refugees?*

AC: Here’s one that can be fixed quickly: the Obama administration placed a priority on asylum seekers and refugees who claim discrimination and prosecution because of their sexual identity. This has resulted in an upsurge of asylum requests — even from countries like England! One private refugee agency has set up an office in Nairobi, Kenya, to assist gay refugees. This office also advises about how to get into the refugee pipeline. In other words, a private contractor is recruiting refugees who will eventually become the contractor’s profit-generating clients. At one conference of refugee contractors sponsored by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, a refugee contractor demanded that Medicaid pay for sex change operations if needed by newly arrived refugees.

There is simply no logic to U.S. refugee policies. In July, a State Department report named Somalia as “a safe haven for terrorists who used their relative freedom of movement to obtain resources and funds, recruit fighters, and plan and mount operations within Somalia and in neighboring countries.” Between the beginning of the 2016 fiscal year, and December 7, 2016, a total of 2,775 Somali refugees arrived in the United States. That rate is more than 30 percent higher than the previous record during the same period of time in the last 14 years. We have admitted 130,000 Somalis to the U.S. since 1983.

Who’s in charge?

PG: *What does it cost taxpayers to take in refugees?*

AC: What does it cost taxpayers? Literally billions every single year. On average, it takes over a billion dollars just to get 60,000 refugees into the country, but that doesn’t account for the welfare they are eligible for immediately upon arrival. It doesn’t account for the local costs of educating the kids, their medical care, their food stamps, their translator needs, and the impact on the criminal justice system. Tracking those numbers is virtually impossible because most local social service offices do not separate out refugees when they compile data on welfare use.

Steven Camarota, Director of Research at the Center for Immigration Studies, found that in their first five years in the United States, each refugee from the Middle East costs taxpayers about \$65,000 — 12 times what the UN estimates it costs to care for one refugee in neighboring Middle Eastern countries. The cost of resettlement includes heavy welfare use by Middle Eastern refugees: 91 percent receive food stamps and 68 percent receive cash assistance. Costs also include processing refugees, assistance given to new refugees, and aid to refugee-receiving communities. Given the high costs of resettling refugees in the U.S., providing for them in neighboring countries in the Middle East may be a more cost-effective way to help them.



Ann Corcoran

Although we all have sympathy for persecuted and suffering people, there are real questions to be answered about the wisdom of this policy. Part of the problem now is that since the contractors are paid by head count, there is no incentive to ever adjust the flow.

PG: *Has the definition of “refugee” changed to allow more people to enter the U.S.?*

AC: A refugee or an asylum seeker must show a “well-founded” fear of persecution because of a political view or membership in a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group. The definition of a refugee has been widely stretched by all three branches of the government. In fact, Congress can name whatever group it wants to be a refugee or asylum seeker. For instance, Congress passed a law declaring China’s one-child policy to be an

example of persecution based upon a political view. So, it's not surprising that China now heads up the list of successful asylum seekers.

In recent years, up to 95 percent of the refugees coming to the U.S. were referred by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees or were the relatives of UN-picked refugees. Until the late '90s, our government picked the large majority of refugees for resettlement in the U.S. Considering that the refugee influx causes increases in all legal and illegal immigration as family and social networks are established in the U.S., the UN is effectively dictating much of U.S. immigration policy.

PG: *Has the Trump administration addressed flaws in refugee settlement policies?*

AC: For the most part no, but President Trump has definitely slowed the flow, and that is a good thing. We are told they have beefed up security screening. But nothing has been done about the negative impact on communities and the secrecy by which refugees are placed in unsuspecting towns and cities. Any citizen who wants answers to questions about crime, the health status of refugees, costs to schools, etc., is treated by the federal government and its contractors as if the questioner is an evil hatemonger. That is a blatant effort to shut them up.

President Trump had a perfect opportunity in September when he submitted his first full year Presidential Determination for FY 18 to simply stop the program altogether. Senator Ted Kennedy, the original Senate sponsor of the bill that became the Refugee Act of 1980—signed by President Jimmy Carter—gave the President a lot of power.

If President Trump had said we are halting the program until Congress reviews the whole thing, then something serious might have happened. For the most part Congress loves this program, and even the Republican establishment loves it, because it supplies workers for their big business and Chamber of Commerce donors. They should have actually rolled up their sleeves and tried to make the program more America First friendly. They won't do that next year because it is an election year. It seems to escape the Republicans' notice that most immigrants vote for Democrats as soon as they can vote.

Combining the so-called travel ban with changes to the refugee program in that first executive order was a fatal flaw in strategy. It allowed the No Borders advocates to continue to confuse the public about the issue of refugees with general immigration issues. Again, not every person entering the U.S. legally is a refugee, but try to tell that to the general public.

PG: *Just recently, President Trump announced that the United States is withdrawing from the Global Compact on Migration. Isn't that a good thing?*

AC: The non-binding Global Compact on Migration pact aims to coordinate international migration and refugee issues and was meant to boost international cooperation on migration issues.

Just a reminder that this compact was not some longstanding agreement: it was created only in September of 2016, when Obama, walking out the door, put on his little sideshow on refugees at the UN General Assembly meeting. It has little weight, but if we didn't get out now, the chances were great that after a forthcoming meeting and more to follow in 2018, we would be drawn deeply into something that is not to America's benefit.

Overall, I'm withholding judgment on the Trump administration. As a matter of fact, his reluctance to put his own person at the head of the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration at the U.S. State Department has resulted in the "deep state" bureaucrats undermining the White House at every chance they get. If the White House doesn't know the intricacies of this program, they are and will be continually snookered.

PG: *I know you are accused of being a "hater" and an "extremist." How are you able to carry on?*

AC: Here's where I'm coming from. First, I believe that Americans in towns receiving resettled refugees have every right to know all the details about who is being placed in their towns by the federal government and its contractors—and have a say in it. After all, it is taxpayer money that supports the whole thing. That shouldn't be scary or surprising to anyone.

Then, if we are going to be bringing thousands of impoverished people for permanent resettlement, the resettlement agencies darn well better take care of them—not just dump refugees in towns with little notice to the public. That's not an extreme position—it's just logical.

I will say that not the least of my concerns is the secrecy by which refugees are placed, and when citizens ask questions, they are immediately called racists, xenophobes, haters, etc.

Really, Peter, I am working every day to get the truth out about the program, and let the chips fall where they may. ■

* <https://refugeeresettlementwatch.wordpress.com>