

Dear chair and subcommittee members,

Thank you for allowing me to testify about this very important matter of my expertise, but also to my heart, which is the rising number of refugees worldwide.

I hail from Venezuela, the nation that has produced the largest number of refugees and displaced persons in the world, numbering 9 million today. This is a shocking fact because Venezuela used to be the fourth richest country in the world, it welcomed millions of immigrants in the second half of the 20th century, including my four grandparents. Venezuela used to be the world's top oil exporter, yet it is now the world's top people exporter. It's the country with the largest oil reserves on the planet, yet there is no gasoline. I was forced to line up for food, medicines, and other necessities for hours, the government told me when I could visit the grocery store and what I could buy, inflation destroyed my family's income and made us poor, I lost power and water in my home frequently, and my childhood was plagued with fear of robbery, kidnapping, and murder by rising crime.

Unlike other refugee crises, the world's largest refugee crisis wasn't caused by a foreign invasion, ethnic or religious conflict, or a natural disaster. The world's largest refugee crisis was caused by socialism. The socialist policies of the initially democratically elected regime such as nationalizations of businesses, price and currency controls, and limitless government spending and deficits turned my beautiful nation into a horrible and dangerous place. Socialism is why Venezuelans flee.

But it's not just Venezuelans, it's Cubans, it's Nicaraguans, it's Eritreans, it's North Koreans, and it's millions of other people today and in the past who have died, suffered, and fled from socialism.

And it's also not just socialism behind rising numbers of refugees. Authoritarian regimes of many ideologies and their actions are why most of the world's refugees have fled. Think of Syria, Russia, and China.

The question before you now is what to do about this.

I'd like to suggest two sets of actions:

- First is to attack the causes of refugee crises and that means taking a stand against evil. You should stop allowing authoritarian regimes to take advantage of you to enrich themselves. For example, Canada continues to trade and enrich the Cuban regime in the hopes that this is the best course of action with the oldest and most evil dictatorship in our region. Instead of maintaining normal relations with Cuba, an ethical and smart approach is to take a stand against evil and support the Cuban people, not the regime, by, for example, helping provide free satellite internet on the island and funding democratic resistance.

If you knew your neighbor was kidnapped in his house, what would you do? Would you call the police? Would you try to save him? This is the situation that afflicts well over a billion people around the world, they are kidnapped by tyrants, and it is our moral duty to help them.

Advancing freedom abroad is even more important because you simply can't welcome all of the world's refugees, and they would rather stay in their countries with freedom than go to Canada.

- Second, you must have a rational and effective refugee policy that picks the right number and kind of refugees, and then helps refugees to succeed.

My research with the Manhattan Institute on immigrant assimilation and their fiscal impact in the United States has many lessons applicable to Canada: The immigrants who are most likely to succeed economically are those who speak the language of their new home country, are more highly educated, and arrive as children or young adults. These are also the immigrants who tend to pay more taxes than receive benefits from the government. Selecting refugees who are younger, speak English or French, and are more educated, means you can welcome more of them at no cost.

Canada has a successful privately-run and funded refugee program but a recent explosion in asylum claims, and government-funded refugee sponsorship threatens the long admired Canadian immigration model. Excessively high numbers of less selected immigrants lead to a strain on public resources and housing that Canadians are now feeling; and increased job competition affects mostly previously arrived recent immigrants, undermining their assimilation.

Canada has already taken a good step to fix this by reimposing visa requirements for Mexicans, but you can continue by limiting government-funded refugee sponsorship and being more selective about which privately-funded refugee sponsorships and family migration can be allowed, reducing elderly and less educated immigration.

Subcommittee members, I have met countless refugees especially in my role as founder of the Dissident Project, my organization sends immigrants from countries ruled by tyrants to speak at American high schools and tell their stories. I view refugees as an asset, too, an asset to democracy. You should use the stories of the thousands of people who fled tyranny and you have welcomed in Canada to educate young Canadians about the privilege of living in a free country.

The best thing you can do for refugees is to honor the promise of freedom Canada has for the world and not let your nation turn into another place people flee like it happened to mine.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Daniel Di Martino