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By Andrea Gillespie

If the Lost Boys of Sudan were seeking safety in the United States today, they would be out of luck.

In 1999, the United States signaled its leadership in refugee protection and human rights by resettling more than 3,000 unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) who were displaced by the civil war in Sudan. These orphaned children known as the [Lost Boys of Sudan](#) built new lives in the United States, earning college degrees and attaining citizenship.

But today The Trump Administrations erroneous argument that refugee resettlement agencies do not satisfy the requirements of the Supreme Courts ruling of a bona fide relationship with a U.S. entity is preventing orphaned children who are [more susceptible](#) to physical and sexual violence, forced military recruitment, trafficking, and discrimination in health and education access from accessing safety and becoming [members of loving families](#) across the United States.

Before the refugee ban, vulnerable orphans could enter the United States through the [Unaccompanied Refugee Minors \(URM\) Program](#) the only program of its kind across the globe. Created in 1980, the URM Program is a small, but integral piece of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. Each year, resettlement agencies [recruit devoted foster parents](#) and group homes to provide around 200 unaccompanied refugee children or approximately less than one half of one percent of all refugees resettled a stable home. After an intensive training program [often lasting around six months](#) that includes briefings and cultural orientations, resettlement agencies are able to issue an assurance and often facilitate the delivery of a foster parents letter of welcome and picture to the children before the final stage of resettlement. For foster families across the United States, the training process and letter is the first of many steps toward helping the children to not only develop the skills to enter adulthood and achieve social self-sufficiency, but also to regain a stable, loving support system.

The dedicated work of foster parents and group homes in the URM Program has also been widely effective. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), the two agencies responsible for helping to develop and implement the URM Program, [found](#) that 13 out of 16 URM service-providers reported that the Eritrean youth they have worked with have largely been successful in attaining the life skills necessary to succeed, and that the youth are dedicated to learning. In addition to resettlement agencies, research organizations have corroborated the achievements of the program. According to a National Bureau of Economic Research [working paper](#), unaccompanied refugee children attend school at much higher rates than natives during their 20s, suggesting a continuing desire to overcome the obstacles of childhood forced displacement.

The Trump Administrations failure to acknowledge the bona fide nature of an assurance from a resettlement agency has left more than 100 minors in dangerous situations abroad. Facing legal limbo, some of these children also run the risk of being returned to their home countries as their status in the country of first asylum is often temporary. For foster families, the refugee ban can be heartbreaking. The [Rooneys](#), who were awaiting the arrival of their 16-year-old foster son, have been unable to contact the young boy and described an unexpected ride of grief while hoping that he knows a family wants him.

It also prevents the processing of other orphaned children who face continued harm abroad. Held by traffickers in Sudan for nearly three months, an [Eritrean girl](#) who fled her country to escape forced conscription was subjected to repeated acts of sexual violence and physical abuse. Though she was able to escape to Egypt in January 2017, the Trump Administration slammed the door to refugees the same month. While waiting in Egypt for access to resettlement, the young girl was raped again and as a result, became pregnant. The young girl has contemplated suicide and, as a soon-to-be mother, lacks a familial support system for when the baby arrives.

Should the Trump Administration ban unaccompanied refugee children? The answer is unequivocally no. Instead, the Trump Administration should offer a categorical exemption for unaccompanied refugee minors due to their particular vulnerabilities, the responsibilities of a U.S. entity in their care, and the excitement of foster parents awaiting them.

With the ban in place and the future of the URM Program at risk, the United States ensures that lost generations become a normal phenomenon.

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