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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**ILLINOIS HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS READY TO WELCOME SYRIAN REFUGEES
Groups Call on Governor Rauner to Reverse Rhetoric, Uphold American Promise, and
Protect the Persecuted**

Chicago, IL; November 17, 2015—We share our deepest sympathies with the people of Paris, Beirut, Egypt, and the thousands of Syrians who have been forced to flee persecution in their homeland. We are heartbroken for the loss and devastation suffered by so many people in recent months.

Illinois has long been a welcoming community for immigrants and people fleeing violence. Our moral compass, our values, and our history demand that we show compassion for those seeking safety. In this time of crisis, Illinois must remain a compassionate voice for the men, women, and children who are fleeing from the very violence and terror that led to Friday's attacks in Paris. To turn our backs on the victims of such violence is unconscionable.

Refugee resettlement in Illinois has been able to restore peace for families and children with nowhere else to turn. Indeed, Illinois's resettlement program has long been a model for the country. Thus far, Illinois has taken in around 100 Syrian refugees, and we must work to do more, not less. Syrian refugees are fleeing terror, not bringing it with them.

This most recent violence underscores the need for an accessible U.S. refugee program. We can and do welcome refugees while ensuring our security. Indeed, the U.S. refugee program involves rigorous security screenings before refugees are resettled in Illinois. We urge Governor Rauner, and the other governors throughout the country who have announced they will refuse Syrian refugee resettlement in their states, to reverse their rhetoric and instead work to ensure the safety of all individuals and families. Governors do not have the authority to choose which refugees they want to resettle.

The United States and communities throughout Illinois have long benefited from the contributions of refugees. Albert Einstein, Oscar-winning director Milos Forman, Presidential Medal of Freedom author Isabel Allende, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and super-computing pioneer Philip Emeagwali, all refugees or asylees, have helped move the United States and the world forward. A robust refugee resettlement program and an inclusive Illinois are not only central to advancing our values of compassion and opportunity, but bring innovation, new talent, and commitment to Illinois communities to help them grow and thrive.

Heartland Alliance, the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, and the National Immigrant Justice Center stand with Syrian refugees and people fleeing persecution around the globe. We ask Governor Rauner and the State of Illinois to do the same.

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Heartland Alliance, one of the world's leading anti-poverty organizations, works in communities in the U.S. and abroad to serve those who are homeless, living in poverty, or seeking safety. It provides a comprehensive array of services in the areas of health, housing, jobs and justice – and leads state and national policy efforts, which target lasting change for individuals and society. For more information, visit www.heartlandalliance.org

*With offices in Chicago, Indiana, and Washington, D.C., Heartland Alliance's **National Immigrant Justice Center** is a nongovernmental organization dedicated to ensuring human rights protections and access to justice for all immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers through a unique combination of direct services, policy reform, impact litigation and public education. Visit immigrantjustice.org.*

*The **Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights** is a statewide coalition of more than 130 organizations dedicated to promoting the rights of immigrants and refugees to full and equal participation in the civic, cultural, social, and political life of our diverse society. For more information, visit www.icirr.org.*