News



A family from the first group of white South Africans granted refugee status for being deemed victims of racial discrimination under U.S. President Donald Trump's refugee plan, attend a meet-and-greet event at Dulles International Airport in Virginia May 12, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Kevin Lamarque)

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Arlington, Va. — May 13, 2025
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Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington has confirmed to OSV News that its offices are assisting with some travel expenses, at the request of the state of Virginia,* for dozens of white South Africans known as Afrikaners, whose refugee applications were expedited by the Trump administration due to what the White House called "racial discrimination."

The administration's fast-tracking of the Afrikaner applications comes amid its own indefinite suspension of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program until "further entry into the United States of refugees aligns with the interests of the United States."

The administration has also ended protections for other groups of migrants, such as those from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela, majority-Catholic countries where violence, political and economic instability are endangering millions, as well as those fleeing Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

A flight carrying an initial group of 59 Afrikaner refugees landed in Washington May 12.

The State Department called the relocation, directed by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, "a "tremendous accomplishment" that "responds to President Trump's call to prioritize U.S. refugee resettlement of this vulnerable group facing unjust racial discrimination in South Africa." It said the move was "in alignment with the administration's America First foreign policy agenda."

"No one should have to fear having their property seized without compensation or becoming the victim of violent attacks because of their ethnicity," it stated. "In the coming months, we will continue to welcome more Afrikaner refugees and help them rebuild their lives in our great country."

In a statement provided to OSV News, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington said that it was "providing limited and temporary assistance to South Africans traveling through Dulles International Airport this week to final destinations elsewhere."

The agency said it was doing so "at the request of the Virginia Office of New Americans" — an office established by the commonwealth in 2000 that comprises both immigrant and refugee service divisions — "which is working with the U.S. State Department."

In response to questions from OSV News, Catholic Charities said it was "asked to provide luggage fees for the South Africans' next domestic flight to their final destination," doing so "on behalf of the Commonwealth which is reimbursing us for the service and expenses.

"No further assistance from us is requested for this group," said the agency.

The aid comes amid a lawsuit filed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops against the Trump administration for terminating a long-standing contract with the USCCB for refugee resettlement.

The termination of the refugee resettlement contract has led to mass layoffs of Catholic Charities employees involved in refugee resettlement all over the U.S.

The case, opened in February, is now on appeal, after U.S. District Judge Trevor McFadden ruled against the USCCB, saying the court did not have the authority to provide the emergency relief — including some $13 million in federal funding — the bishops requested.

Arlington's Catholic Charities said Virginia's Office of New Americans was "aware of the USCCB lawsuit" and that the USCCB was in turn aware of the agency's aid to the South African group.

The agency added, "This process has no bearing on USCCB's lawsuit."

OSV News is awaiting a response to its request for comment from the USCCB.

Another faith-based migration outreach, Episcopal Migration Ministries, refused a federal government directive to assist in the South African resettlement under the terms of the ministries' federal grant.

"In light of our church's steadfast commitment to racial justice and reconciliation and our historic ties with the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, we are not able to take this step," wrote presiding Bishop Sean W. Rowe of the Episcopal Church in a May 12 letter. "Accordingly, we have determined that, by the end of the federal fiscal year, we will conclude our refugee resettlement grant agreements with the U.S. federal government."

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Rowe explained he wanted "to be very clear about why we made this decision."

"It has been painful to watch one group of refugees, selected in a highly unusual manner, receive preferential treatment over many others who have been waiting in refugee camps or dangerous conditions for years," Rowe said.

He pointed to "brave people who worked alongside our military in Iraq and Afghanistan and now face danger at home because of their service to our country.

"I also grieve that victims of religious persecution, including Christians, have not been granted refuge in recent months," said Rowe in his letter.

On May 12, the same day the U.S. government flew in the Afrikaner refugees, Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem announced Afghans with temporary protections from deportation would have to return to their home country by July 12 owing to "an improved security situation, and its stabilizing economy."

Church World Service president and CEO Rick Santos said in May 9 statement that the Trump administration's move to admit the Afrikaners comes at the same time the administration is delaying compliance with a district court order to resettle 12,000 refugees who had already been approved, with travel scheduled before Jan. 20, to come to the U.S.

Santos said the Christian agency "remains committed to serving all eligible refugee populations seeking safety in the United States, including Afrikaners who are eligible for services," noting "our faith compels us to serve each person in our care with dignity and compassion."

However, Santos said, "We are concerned that the U.S. Government has chosen to fast-track the admission of Afrikaners, while actively fighting court orders to provide life-saving resettlement to other refugee populations who are in desperate need of resettlement."

The Trump administration had announced the relocation program in February, saying that the minority Afrikaner group — white South Africans descended from Dutch, German and Huguenot colonial settlers, with Afrikaans as their language — were facing racial persecution by their majority Black government.

Since 1948, the minority Afrikaners had dominated South Africa with the "apartheid" (meaning "apartness" in Afrikaans) legal system, systematically disenfranchising and impoverishing the Black South African majority, brutally enforcing racial separation while seizing most of the land for the white minority. The apartheid regime ended in 1994; however, the country is still dealing with its social and economic consequences decades later.

Trump and his South African-born adviser Elon Musk have alleged the South African government is inciting violence against the white South Africans, blaming it for violent attacks on white farmers. On May 12 in the Oval Office, Trump said a "genocide" was taking place against the white South Africans, with "white farmers" targeted and their land confiscated.

South Africa's government has denied such discrimination as "completely false," with the Afrikaners — the largest white group in that nation, representing some 2.7 million — being among "the most economically privileged." Afrikaans is also one of the country's official languages.

South Africa's government has also argued its land reform laws are limited in scope, with white South Africans owning 72% of the country's agricultural land — a result of deliberate land confiscation over a century under colonial and apartheid governments — according to a 2017 audit.

South Africa has one of the highest crime rates in the world at 41.9 intentional homicides per 100,000, according to World Bank data. The vast majority of victims are Black South Africans. Only a small fraction involve white farmers.

AfriForum, an Afrikaner-advocacy group, recorded 49 farm murders in 2023.

Government statistics from 2023 show that more than 27,000 people were killed in South Africa, a rate of 75 people per day.

**This article and its headline have been updated to clarify the limited extent of Catholic Charities' involvement.*

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.