

# FLEEING TO LIVE: SYRIAN REFUGEES IN THE OSCE REGION

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## HEARING BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

JUNE 13, 2013

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# **FLEEING TO LIVE: SYRIAN REFUGEES IN THE OSCE REGION**

**JUNE 13, 2013**

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## **FLEEING TO LIVE: SYRIAN REFUGEES IN THE OSCE REGION**

**JUNE 13, 2013**

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE,  
*Washington, DC.*

The hearing was held from 2:07 p.m. To 4:15 p.m. in 562 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., Senator Benjamin Cardin, Chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding.

*Commissioners present:* Hon. Benjamin Cardin, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Hon. Sheldon Whitehouse, Commissioner, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Hon. Michael Burgess, Commissioner, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; and Hon. Alcee Hastings, Commissioner, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

*Witnesses present:* Anne C. Richard, Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees and Migration, U.S. Department of State; Michel Gabaudan, President, Refugees International; Jana Mason, Senior Adviser for Government Relations, UNHCR Washington Regional Office; and Yassar Bittar, Government Relations and Advocacy Associate, Coalition for a Democratic Syria.

### **HON. BENJAMIN CARDIN, CHAIRMAN, COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

Mr. CARDIN. Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Helsinki Commission hearing we're holding today on Syrian refugees in the OSCE region, "Fleeing to Live." As chairman of the Helsinki Commission, I want to welcome everyone to today's hearing and thank them for their interest in our work.

This hearing is convened as we prepare to commemorate World Refugee Day on June 20th. It is fitting, therefore, that we examine what is quickly becoming a great humanitarian disaster, and determine what more we here in the United States and, indeed, in the entire world community can do to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people and assist those countries that have opened their borders to the refugees.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are now more than 1.6 million Syrian refugees in neighboring countries, and more than 5.1 million displaced within Syria. An average of 8,000 Syrians are crossing into Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt every day. The majority are women and children. The refugees have increased the population of Lebanon by 11 percent, and Jordan by 8 percent. To put the enormity of this crisis in perspective, that would be equivalent in the United States of re-

ceiving 25 (million) to 30 million refugees during the past two years. The host countries are under intense political, social and economic pressure. I commend them for keeping their borders open to those fleeing the ongoing violence in Syria.

In February of this year, I led a commission delegation to the Middle East. While in Turkey, we visited Kilis, the refugee camp which shelters more than 13,000 Syrian refugees on the Turkey-Syrian border. It is one of 17 camps that have been established by the Turkish government. Just prior to our visit, the camp residents held an election: selected leaders for their temporary community. It was the first free election that they had ever participated in. They were excited about that.

Our delegation met with those elected officials who shared stories of their triumph in leading their families to safety in Turkey. Their frustration with the lack of support from the international community was clear. These leaders repeatedly expressed their expectation that the United States would take more decisive action. Our conversations reinforced concerns that destabilizing elements may take advantage of the void of cohesive leadership in the opposition as time drags on.

In December 2012, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees appealed for 1.5 billion (dollars) in contributions from the international community to meet the needs—then expected to be one million—to have fled across Syrians' border by mid-2013. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has already registered more than 1.6 million refugees in the region; however, the December appeal has not yet been fully met.

Last week, The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees issued its updated Regional Response Plan for Syrian Refugees and appealed for 2.9 billion (dollars) in humanitarian assistance, almost double its December 2012 request. They now estimate that by the end of the year, half of the population of Syria will be in need of aid. This includes an anticipated 3.45 million Syrian refugees and 6.8 million Syrians inside the country. The governments of Lebanon and Jordan are also appealing for funds, and the humanitarian appeal for inside Syria is \$1.4 billion. According to the United Nations, the total appeal for assistance for displaced Syrians in 2013 is \$5 billion. This is the largest humanitarian appeal in history.

The United States is doing its best to provide aid to the Syrian people. Since the crisis began, we have contributed \$514 million in humanitarian assistance and remain the single-largest donor of aid to the United Nations, U.N. agencies and the host countries themselves. Clearly, the unprecedented scale of this crisis requires the United States and the entire international community to do more.

After more than two years, the violence in Syria continues and the humanitarian crisis it has spawned continues to spiral out of control with no end in sight. Sadly, and most disturbingly, not only does the violence in Syria continue but, according to the most recent report by the U.N.'s Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, it "has reached new levels of brutality." The Commission states that the report, "documents for the first time the systematic imposition of sieges, the use of chemical agents and forcible displacement. War crimes, crimes against

humanity and gross human rights violations continue apace. Referral to justice remains paramount.” That was what the report said.

We must, and we can, do more to help the Syrian people. I look forward to hearing the views of our distinguished witnesses that we have before us today so we can plan an effective strategy to help accomplish that goal of protecting the Syrian people.

Let me acknowledge my colleague, Senator Whitehouse, and recognize him for any opening statement that you might want to make.

**HON. SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, COMMISSIONER, COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Only very briefly. I want to let folks know that I recently went on a bipartisan CODEL that was led by Senator McCain. I’ve since been back to the region. We met with the Syrian Opposition Council. We went to one of the refugee camps and there was, I believe, unanimous bipartisan sentiment on the part of all of the travelers on that CODEL that we needed to improve and increase the United States’ effort in Syria and improve and increase the United States’ effort in Turkey and in Lebanon, where the refugee problem is the most acute. We have allies who are facing very considerable cost and, indeed, even political risk in those two places because of the inadequacy of the American and international response. We communicated those views to the administration, and I hope this helps communicate them further.

Mr. CARDIN. Well, Senator Whitehouse, let me thank you for taking the time to visit. I know that—how much they appreciate when we all—personally take the time to visit and see firsthand the circumstances on the ground and are able to talk to the people who are directly impacted by this crisis.

Our first panel today we will receive testimony from the Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration, Ann Richard. Prior to her appointment as Assistant Secretary, Ms. Richard was Vice President of Government Relations and Advocacy for the International Rescue Committee. She also served as the Director of the Secretary of State’s Office of Resources, Plans and Policy, and was Deputy Chief Financial Officer of the Peace Corps. We thank you for your service and we look forward to your testimony.

**ANNE C. RICHARD, ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR POPULATION, REFUGEES AND MIGRATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Ms. RICHARD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Senator Whitehouse. And I really want to thank the entire committee for pulling together this hearing today on this important subject, and I want to thank you both for traveling to the region and for meeting directly with Syrians who are in need of our help, and leaving this town and going out there and talking directly to the people affected. Thank you so much.

The crisis in Syria has caused the world’s largest refugee emergency in decades. I’m grateful for this opportunity to update you on the impact this crisis is having on countries in the region and steps our government and the international community are taking to help governments in the region address this massive challenge.

My written testimony offers detailed information about the extremely dangerous situation inside Syria, as well as the effects of refugee influxes on the neighboring countries of Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt. This afternoon, I would like to focus on just a few key points and then I'll be glad to answer your questions.

This is the largest and most complex humanitarian crisis in the world today as you said, Mr. Chairman. Some 5.8 million Syrians have fled for their lives. Of this, an estimated 4.2 million Syrians are displaced inside their own country and 1.6 million Syrian refugees are in neighboring countries. More than 500,000 Syrians have fled to Lebanon. Jordan and Turkey each are rapidly approaching that number as well. More than 150,000 have sought refuge in Iraq and nearly 80,000 have made their way all the way to Egypt.

With disturbing frequency, Syrian families are fleeing not only because they fear an imminent threat of conflict or atrocities in their communities, but also because they are desperate to reach the essentials that are no longer reliably available in their communities, such as clean water, medical care and basic shelter. U.N. humanitarian officials project that the number of Syrian refugees could climb to 3.5 million by the end of this year, more than double the current number. The number of refugees could surge to far more than that if, for example, violence in Damascus itself were to intensify.

Last week, the United Nations called for \$4.4 billion to address emergency needs inside Syria and in neighboring countries that are struggling to accommodate huge refugee populations. It was the largest humanitarian appeal in U.N. history.

The U.S. is providing nearly \$515 million to support emergency humanitarian assistance programs for Syrians, including nearly 260 million (dollars) to protect and assist Syrian refugees. We are looking closely at providing additional financial support in coming weeks as the emergency continues to grow.

The governments of Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt have worked hard and at great expense to accommodate the flood of refugees that are inundating their local communities. One of our most important priorities is to encourage countries in the region to keep their borders open so that Syrians desperate to reach safety can do so. We continue to urge neighboring governments to offer asylum to all Syrians who cross the border. We recognize the tremendous burden that hosting refugees is placing on neighboring countries. Our government's strong financial support for refugee relief operations helps alleviate this burden, and we are committed to doing more to support Syria's neighbors.

Seventy five percent of Syrian refugees are women and children. They typically are the most vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation, domestic violence, poor health care, forced early marriage, survival sex and long-term trauma caused by the dangers and atrocities they experienced or witnessed in Syria. I have traveled to the region four times in my tenure as assistant secretary, and each time I have met with Syrian women and children to hear their stories.

One of our ongoing priorities is to provide the safe shelter, education and therapeutic activities that refugee women and children



desperately need. Most Syrian refugees do not live in refugee camps. They instead have taken shelter in villages and cities where local residents have generously shared what they can. During the second half of 2013, we will place a priority on giving more help to these local communities that are struggling to accommodate the large Syrian refugee population.

The presence of so many refugees has inflamed local tensions in some areas and has aggravated local pressures. If these communities are to continue hosting Syrian refugees, they will need help. We must strengthen bilateral economic and development aid to help maintain and expand public services for refugees and the local residents alike.

Another priority as we move forward, Mr. Chairman, will be robust contingency planning. The current humanitarian challenges are great, but these challenges will only grow larger. Regrettably, we must plan ahead for even more scenarios. We will continue to engage in frank discussions with U.N. humanitarian agencies and refugee-hosting governments about the possibility of massive new refugee surges and other contingencies. It is critical that we prepare now for what might come in the future.

Mr. Chairman, I hope to depart later this month on my fifth trip to the region. Deputy Assistant Secretary Kelly Clements is traveling in the region this week. Our bureau bases refugee coordinators in the region, deploys humanitarian advisers to identify humanitarian needs, analyzes and reports on challenges and monitors programs. We work very closely with all the U.S. embassies in the region, and we have very good working relationships with them. And they are working night and day.

This is a regional crisis, and it has our full attention. We deeply appreciate the strong congressional support that has made our efforts possible. We are always ready to brief you and your colleagues about what we are seeing and the actions we are taking. So in closing, let me thank you again for holding this hearing, and I welcome any questions you might have.

Mr. CARDIN. Well, your entire statement, as will all the witnesses', will be made part of the record. So just want all of you to be aware of that. And thank you for what you're doing and thank you for returning to the region.

We need a dual strategy here. We've got to deal with Syria and the crisis in Syria so that it is safe for people to live in Syria, that will allow a certain number of the refugees to be able to return to their homes in safety. That clearly has to be a priority. And the message we heard very clearly from the people who have been victimized and the opposition leaders said they need more decisive international action and more predictable action. And I'm going to talk about that in a moment.

The second area of priority is to protect the people who are now vulnerable, whether they're living in refugee camps, whether they're living in communities outside of Syria or whether they're displaced within Syria. And you point out, particularly with those who have left, the large majority are women and children. You also point out that there are widespread abuses: forced marriage, prostitution, et cetera. What are we doing to protect the women and children?

Ms. RICHARD. Thank you for asking that question. It's very much on my mind on a daily basis. As you know, there have been reports of gender-based violence, including sexual violence. We're working closely with our humanitarian aid agency partners to beef up protection for vulnerable refugees. We are concerned about the allegations of exploitation of Syrian refugee women and girls through early marriage, in addition to the violence.

And protection of these populations is a core part of what our partners do. If you—if you read their documents, they don't just aid people. They try to protect and aid them. But in some of the largest—in on the largest camps, in Zaatari camp, in Jordan, this has proven very, very difficult. Right now, we are working with the government of Jordan, with our embassy in Jordan and other bureaus of the State Department to enhance the security of that camp overall. And we're trying to look at ways the U.S. can help the Jordanians, who have the responsibility for the camp's protection, to beef that up and also potentially to help people inside the camp, some of the Syrians who live there, to mount their own neighborhood watch so that they're protecting themselves, each other.

That camp grew so quickly over such a short time period, with so many people coming in, I think that is one of the reasons that it has problems today. So in the camp, we are increasing the number and reach of gender-based violence awareness sessions. There is a women's clinic. I was up in New York yesterday talking to the head of U.N. Population Fund, Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, about that clinic, where it is, making sure that it has services. There's also a clinic run by IMC and others. We want women to have counseling services if they have been victimized.

One of the things I just learned about was we're using children who go to the child-friendly spaces to get word to their mothers, if they need help where they can go and get it, which in that culture makes a lot of sense. I've met with the head of the Jordan Health Aid Society, JHAS, and talked to him a lot about this, because they have mobile clinics that go to neighborhoods then to reach people who are not in the camps. We also fund just generic health programs for urban refugees.

Some of our nongovernmental organization partners are providing training to ministries of health to be sensitive to the situations and sensitive to these needs. You know, our funding that goes to the U.N. High Commission on Refugees, UNICEF, U.N. Population Fund and these international nongovernmental organizations are in part to coordinate protection and services to aid and protect women and girls in the region. So we're doing a lot. I think we need to do even more. And I'm afraid that's going to be a theme of several of the issues we may be talking about today.

But in this particular area, the good news, I guess, is that we're well aware of the need, and so we are focused on these programs. And this is where the U.S. is seen as in the forefront of putting pressure on these partners to do that.

Mr. CARDIN. Well, as I said in my opening comments, I'm for us doing more. So I agree with that. But I am for accountability. And U.S. participation must come with strict accountability to make sure that families are protected.

You point out that a large number—I believe it's about 75 or 76 percent of the refugees outside of Syria—don't live in camps. In camps we have a chance to see firsthand the resources that are available to protect families.

Ms. RICHARD. Yeah.

Mr. CARDIN. But with three-quarters living outside of camps, we don't have that same opportunity. What do we do about the vast majority that is not living in an organized camp?

Ms. RICHARD. Well, in some ways people living outside camps live a more normal life in that if they can get their kids enrolled in schools, if they can get some work, they can live among—

Mr. CARDIN. But let me say, do we have information that would let us know whether the abuses that are taking place against women and children are more prevalent in the camps or outside the camps, more prevalent in one country versus another? Do we have that type of information?

Ms. RICHARD. I don't have the answers on that. My suspicion is that the camp—the Zaatari camp, not the camps in Turkey, but the Zaatari camp is a more dangerous place right now than living outside the camp because people are completely dependent on aid to survive and they don't have their own resources. And there is a sort of thriving underground economy that's partially run by criminals that has got to be stamped out. And so that's where people, I think, are vulnerable to exploitation.

Outside the camps—this is why we're big supporters of refugees being registered by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees because then they—who they are, where they've come from, what their needs are, what their special needs are if there's someone disabled or elderly, that gives a profile of what the needs are, and that way they can get the help that they need. We can provide it through our NGO partners.

Mr. CARDIN. I understand the registration; it's so that they can get services. Are they getting the services? They getting the help?

Ms. RICHARD. If they're registered, then they're on the map and they're getting help they need, definitely, yes. Is it enough to survive? I think it's a very challenging existence, as it is for refugees everywhere. I mean, it's not a comfortable existence.

Mr. CARDIN. Well, I would appreciate more information being made available to us by camps and countries and regions. I believe Senator Whitehouse went to the same camp I did—was it Kilis that you went to? And that's really an incredible investment by Turkey to have the camp and the schools there.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Lebanon.

Mr. CARDIN. You were at a different one? But I was very impressed by what I saw, but I also—believe that's not typical.

Ms. RICHARD. That is not the typical camp, yeah.

Mr. CARDIN. Right, circumstance. So, I don't want to be—

Ms. RICHARD. In Turkey, the standards not only meet but they exceed international standards for refugees. And it's tremendously generous.

Mr. CARDIN. So, let me ask one last question. How do we make sure the resources get to where they need to be? If we're going to put more money up, how do we make sure that we get that to the most vulnerable to protect them?

Ms. RICHARD. My strong belief is that the most important thing we could do is get other countries to contribute and donate because I think that the nongovernmental organizations and international organization partners we're working with know what to do. And I think the U.S. is out in front in contributing, but we know that there aren't enough resources coming to respond. And so I think the most important thing for us to do as diplomats and the State Department is to get other countries, convince them to join us and to take this as seriously as you all are taking it and as my boss, Secretary Kerry, is taking it.

Mr. CARDIN. Senator Whitehouse.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Thank you, Chairman. I have to go down to the classified briefing that we're having, but I wanted to thank you for the attention that you're bringing to this issue. And I just wanted to propose to the assistant secretary that I recognize that America has spent a lot of money and put a lot of effort into supporting the opposition and into supporting the refugee population coming out of Syria, but it's possible to spend a lot of money and spend a lot of effort and still be behind the curve, still be that day late and that dollar short.

And I worry from what we're seeing—from what I've seen in the press, from what I've seen in my visits to that area, that we've been just behind the curve on supporting the opposition, and the momentum as a result has shifted to the point where at one point the administration was saying that, you know, Assad's days are numbered, and now people are saying, well, looks like he's winning.

And in terms of support for the refugees, it seems that we're always just behind the curve so that the burden on the—on our local allies is always so great that it's potentially destabilizing. And we have few better friends than the Turkish government and then King Abdullah in that area, so I would just urge you that it's not so much how much we're spending; it's whether we're on the right side of the curve and whether we're on the right side of the momentum. And it looks to me that despite our efforts, we remain both a day late and a dollar short in both these things.

And the incremental marginal difference not to be a day late and a dollar short against what we're spending may not be a very big difference, but strategically I think it's all the difference. So, I, for one, would urge you to take the message back to the administration that there's considerable support for trying to make sure you're actually at that point where the momentum is with you and you're ahead of the curve.

Mr. CARDIN. Thank you.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Thank you.

Mr. CARDIN. You mentioned that we want to get more contributions from the international community to the United Nations. What can the United States do to encourage U.N. contributions from other countries to be made?

Ms. RICHARD. I think that in all of our meetings with other countries on a whole variety of issues, we need to add this to the talking points and we need to encourage them to give and encourage them to do what you did, which was to travel to the area.

You know, the economic downturn a few years ago has meant that traditional donors like the Europeans are not expanding their

giving. And everyone has put the hopes on emerging donors—so-called emerging donors. These are countries in the Gulf area but also the BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa. And so we have seen generosity from some of these countries in the past but not necessarily through international organizations. Sometimes, some of these countries prefer giving bilaterally or giving things instead of contributing cash. Cash is always more helpful, especially when it goes to professionals who know what they're doing. So, my sense is that we have to look for every opportunity to have these conversations, invite these officials to come travel with us, encourage them to attend international conferences we have. Our diplomats are out traveling.

I think another piece of this is—which I'm doing with colleagues—is speaking through the media to raise the profile, to point out the shortages in the funding. I know the Helsinki Commission has relationships overseas, and so I know you all are well-placed to have those kinds of international conversations about these very, very serious issues.

Mr. CARDIN. That's a very good point. Whenever I travel to an area that's affected by refugees, I try to visit refugees. So, when I was in Syria two years ago, two and a half years ago, I visited the Iraqi refugees. Are the Iraqi refugees heading back to Iraq? Where are they?

Ms. RICHARD. Many of them have headed back to Iraq. And I, like yourself, I visited Iraqi refugees in Syria a few years ago. And at the time, I thanked all the Syrians I met for hosting them, so it is a sad and cruel turn of events that Syrians are now fleeing their own country.

Many of the Iraqis have gone back to Iraq. Others are moving on for a second time. We have been working very hard to help Iraqis get out of Syria. It's very tricky because we can't do interviews of refugees in the country, so we're working with other countries to help get Iraqis out if they were in line to come to the U.S.

Mr. CARDIN. How do you assess the risk factor that borders may not be as open as they are today? We have been very fortunate and we have complimented the governments from Turkey to Jordan to Lebanon, where there have been borders that have been available for people fleeing persecution and danger. The numbers are extreme in these countries and there's at least conversations that that policy—that these policies could change. How great of a risk is it that borders could be less than freely opened?

Ms. RICHARD. I think it's a real and live concern, and this is why in all our conversations with the neighbors, we thank them. We are usually trying to provide additional help so that they understand that we understand their tensions, their domestic tensions in trying to help their own citizens and then shoulder the burden—the additional burden of taking in refugees. And then we've been very vigilant in talking to these countries when there are difficulties at the borders about, you know, really pushing them to keep them open. It's a very serious issue.

You know, I think of Jordan where they have Palestinian refugees who've been there for decades. And then they took in Iraqi refugees, so this is actually the third population of refugees coming to a very small country. So the one thing that gives me hope there

is that the king has been very forward-leaning in saying that they must allow people to cross, out of humanitarian motives. But it's clear that inside the country this creates some domestic tensions, and so that's where our help to not just the refugees but to the local communities, especially impoverished communities so they don't feel that things that they deserve are going to these visitors and that they are somehow disadvantaged by this. Aid to local communities is very important.

Mr. CARDIN. King Abdullah was here not too long ago, and he was pretty firm about his commitment to keep borders open. But when you start looking at the numbers, you know that it's a challenge. I think he has some domestic concerns. I mean, I think there is a real serious question being raised on these issues.

Dr. Burgess, good to have you here.

**HON. MICHAEL BURGESS, COMMISSIONER, COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

Mr. BURGESS. Thank you, Senator.

Mr. CARDIN. We're about completed with this panel. Would you like to ask a question—sort of give you a chance to jump in here.

Mr. BURGESS. Thanks, Chairman, I would. And, Secretary, once again, thank you for speaking with me earlier this week to give me some background.

Ms. RICHARD. Thank you so much for your interest in this issue.

Mr. BURGESS. Well, I got to tell you I'm very concerned. And, I mean, you raised some serious problems that are being faced by the three countries that are bordering Syria. And shortly after our discussion, I had an opportunity to read an article in the L.A. Times about perhaps resettlement plans to the United States for Syrian refugees. And I got to tell you that got my attention; that certainly aroused a significant amount of concern.

I think we are—several of us are wondering what the position is of the administration going forward. I recently took a trip to Kabul and on the way there stopped in the United Arab Emirates, and the emir of that country voiced some concern as to what seemed to be an inconsistent policy toward Syria. And I know they're working with their other partner-countries to try to have a unified response, but I'll just tell you the—I don't want to say lack of direction because that's really not quite fair, but the fact that there is a confused analysis or what appears at least in the press to be a confused analysis—hundreds of thousands of people pouring over the border to neighboring countries, and now you have people talking in our press about resettlement of refugees in this country, all of that on top of the possibility that the United States should take some additional action in Syria. But I've got to tell you that concerns me, and it concerns the people that I represent back home.

So, what can you say to mollify me today to assuage those concerns, to reassure me that there is a consistent policy coming out of the—out of the department and the White House, that there is a road ahead, there's a trajectory that—a strategy that's been defined and a trajectory that's being followed?

Ms. RICHARD. Well, you'll understand I'm authorized to talk about the humanitarian piece of this, and we have been consistent on this as we have been in other crises, where we're the world's

leader in contributing to the response—to the international response.

You know, many of us hoped that this would be a short-term crisis and that the people who I've met in the Middle East living in camps and living in villages would have been able to go home by now. And the longer this has gone on, it has meant that not only that more people are coming across but that the road back home will also be more challenging because so much of Syria has been bombed and is ruined, and so many horrible things have happened that there are children who really have been traumatized and so getting over that will be very, very hard.

In terms of resettling refugees in the United States, you may know that each year the U.S. leads the world in accepting thousands of refugees to come and restart their lives in the U.S. We tend to take the most vulnerable people, for whom there is no going home. Sometimes it's ethnic minorities, sometimes it's female-headed households with lots of children who, you know, have no way of making it on their own overseas but can get a fresh start in the U.S.

We're hoping to bring 70,000 refugees to the U.S. this year. That's just a drop in the bucket compared to the 42 million, 45 million displaced people in the world or the 1.6 million Syrian refugees in the region. And these 70,000 come from all over the world. The top countries are Iraq, Burma and Bhutan right now.

So, when I've been asked if we would be open to resettling Syrian refugees, I've said yes. But we're going to follow the recommendations of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. We don't bring people quickly. We generally have refugees go through a process where we check their stories and we work very closely with partners—organizations but also the Department of Homeland Security, who gets to determine who is a bona fide refugee by U.S. standards; not just international standards but by U.S. standards.

So, I could foresee a time when some refugees will come here from Syria, particularly if they have some situation where they really feel they can't go home again. We have brought only a handful so far, and I don't think it's going to happen quickly and I don't think it's going to happen in very large numbers. One reason to do it, in addition to help those refugees themselves, is it will demonstrate to these countries in the region that they're not the only ones hosting refugees. Germany, for example, has done that. They have offered to take 5,000. When Germany offers that, they mean temporarily. When the U.S. offers refugees a fresh start in the U.S., we generally mean permanently. If they're happy here—and most refugees are very successful here—then they often become U.S. citizens over time and stay.

Mr. BURGESS. Well, actually, let me ask you this. Because the area that I represent back in Texas—part of Tarrant County and a good chunk of Denton County—we actually have two groups of refugees that have been settled by the State Department in the 10 years that I've been in Congress. I will say that I was surprised when I found that they had been resettled in the area. And I would have thought—I was a relatively new member at that point, and I would have thought there would have been some conversation with the representative from that area, recognizing that there was

this enormous responsibility that was coming to the neighborhood and where the congressional office could be helpful with the municipality, with the county government, with local aid agencies. I thought there could have been a better coordination of that activity. But that's just been my own experience in the brief time that I've been in Congress.

I'll just say again I've remained very concerned about what I'm seeing and what I'm hearing. I don't see a good answer to this, but I do want to convey the message that there needs to be a strategy developed. There needs to be—of course, obviously, the administration does need to work with the House and the Senate about whatever type of military activity might be contemplated. And we all need to think through the timeline. If the—you know, I came here after the authorization for (acting ?) in Afghanistan had already occurred, but if there's one thing that's become painfully apparent over the last 10 years it's the lack of the definition of a timeline, the lack of adherence to a timeline that has caused a great deal of the difficulty. It even leads to some of the ambiguity that we see today in—as far as our relationship with those two countries.

But, I thank you for your time being here. Thank you for the effort to educate me about this earlier in the week. And, Mr. Chairman, I'll yield back.

Ms. RICHARD. Thank you. Can I just mention one thing? You know, I agree 100 percent with you on the need to make sure that local elected officials know about the refugees coming to the areas that they represent. And not only do I agree with that but the Government Accountability Office also came out with a report saying we have to do even more of it than we have been in the past. So, this is one of my priorities in the admissions program, is to make sure we're talking to the mayor, the head of the school board who's going to be seeing the—you know, the teachers are going to be seeing these kids come in; to make sure that people in the neighborhoods understand who their new neighbors are and why they're coming. Why this is an American tradition and why it has been successful, and really to allay people's fears and make sure we're very careful in where we bring people.

Mr. BURGESS. OK, thank you.

Mr. CARDIN. And I will point out that there are some efforts being made in the immigration reform bill to give a little better direction on these programs and numbers, we have our differences with how the law has been implemented, but we'd like you to move faster, in some cases, than you've been able to move. We understand homeland security, we understand the procedures, but these people are extremely vulnerable so I think definitive action is important and we need to have the resources in place to be able to deliver on what we claim to be our international responsibility to accept refugees.

We're joined by the long-time leader of the Helsinki Commission, who has been going through a change in his body as far as getting new parts, so we welcome him back from his surgery. He still has that smile. Congressman Hastings.



**HON. ALCEE HASTINGS, COMMISSIONER, COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you very much, Senator, and thank you so very much for holding this hearing.—I don't know how Dr. Burgess got over here faster than I did from our vote on the House, but I apologize for being delayed and I apologize to the secretary and other witnesses and all that are assembled.

Senator, this is an extremely important hearing, and I know that Secretary Richard's portfolio contemplates many of the things—in light of the fact that I am late, I really will ask first that the statement that I would have made at the opening be put in the record by unanimous consent.

Mr. CARDIN. Without objection, it will be included.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you so very much.

Mr. CARDIN. Dr. Burgess's statement will also be put in the record.

Mr. HASTINGS. All right, I deeply appreciate that. Senator, you and I in January were in Kilis. Secretary Richard, we saw the extraordinary work that the government of Turkey is doing with reference to our refugees. They are building two camps now. And in the midst of all of that, new matters have arisen regarding the Turkish government with reference to their own internal politics.

The stress that the Syrian people are experiencing, with 1.6 million refugees—at least 1.3 million of them registered—and being scattered to the wind, for lack of a better expression, I'd like for you to give me your overview with reference to your opinion and the administration's opinion, with reference to the effects of this refugee crisis on the governments of Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. And what, if anything, aside from the fact that the United States government should be proud of the fact that they are the largest of the contributors, but my understanding—and we will hear later, I believe, from UNHCR that they're requesting \$5 billion, and so the amount that we have contributed thus far for humanitarian aid is just not sufficient.

Let me put my bona fides on the table. The senator mentioned that I had been involved in the Helsinki Commission for a long time. We have some extraordinary people up here that work with us and have worked with us for a long period of time. We've been in and out of that region frequently, and I don't recall that anybody on your staff—and I'm not resentful at all—have ever asked me a single question about anything, and I believe I know more about the Middle East than most of your staff, at least, if not you. And the reason being for no other reason than I've been there, and I've been there often. And I'm not bragging; I'm just telling you what is a fact. When I speak about the king of Jordan, I'm speaking about a friend. I served, just for your information, eight years on the intelligence committee. Need I say more regarding how important Jordan is and the implications for all of this?

I'd like for you to tell me what's happening with Iraqi refugees that went to Syria. Where are they? I'd like for you to tell me what's happening with refugees as it pertains to Russia and what's happening to refugees as it pertains to Iran. And then I'd like very much at some point for you and I to have a conversation so I can edify you regarding some things we missed. When I met with

Assad in 2010, I knew that he was not going to accept any terms at all, and I know that now. And I don't know what the plan is. I join Dr. Burgess in saying that I'm not certain as to what we are going to do. But I know what we should have done; that we didn't do. And somebody needs to speak up around here when these matters are ongoing.

You were not in the Department of State when Rwanda was going on. My good friend, and the senator's good friend, and Dr. Burgess didn't get to know him as well—Donald Payne and I begged the State Department to call that genocide. And it wasn't until many years later that it was put on the bubble and called for what it was worth. Now, I said I wasn't going to say very much, but I am—I'm beside myself when I see children and women and—different from Dr. Burgess, I attended a function in Broward County, Florida, in December, and there I was stunned that there were 1,700 Syrians that—Syrian nationals that were at that function. They live in the congressional district that I represent, so you don't have to tell me very much when they're coming there. They tell me.

The point that I'm making to you is I've seen the slowdown on Iraq with refugees. We have people that helped us, who helped American soldiers; interpreters that helped them, people that saved American lives, and they were left by the wayside. And it wasn't until a substantial amount of time before we began to accept people. We need to have a process in place with reference to the Syrians that allows that we can expedite—I wanted to ask you, and perhaps I'll wait until we meet personally—to ask you if you say 70,000 are coming, I'll make you a bet before the end of the year we won't have 2,000 or 3,000. And if not, then correct me and tell me the 'when' of it, and why there will be an accelerated pace for the acceptance.

I hope you don't take my attitude about this to mean that it's directed towards you or the secretary of state. But something is drastically wrong with our lack of communication when I can cite to you right here four people that have been on the ground, that are sitting behind me, that have been on the ground in this issue, and that I have dealt with it from the Maghreb all the way back across the board for the greater portion of the last 16 years. And I rarely, if ever, unless I force the issue, hear from anybody from the State Department. That doesn't make sense to me. That's just—not because I'm important or you're important, but that we as a government are and that we're doing things and there's no communication.

There was no brief-out after the senator and I and the delegation that we were with went to Kilis. Nobody asked us about who we met with in Turkey or what we did while we were there. Nobody asked us about the fact that we were going there from Israel and the implications for all of this as it pertains to Israel. In there somewhere is the question.

Thank you very much.

Ms. RICHARD. Congressman, I want to assure you that I'm quite certain you know more than I do about the Middle East because that is not my area of expertise, and many of the refugee crises that I have worked on in the past were Burmese and Thailand and also throughout Africa. And like Senator Cardin, the first time I

went to the Middle East it was for meeting with Iraqi refugees. And this is why I rely so much on the experts in the Near East and Asia Bureau of the State Department because I know that without that historical context, without understanding the unique situation of each of these countries, you can't really understand what's happening with the—with these governments, the precarious situation they're in, and, you know, all the many rocks upon which this humanitarian enterprise could founder.

Taking these countries, then, that you've mentioned, I'll start with Turkey since both you and Chairman Cardin have been there. As we said, their response is far and away the best response to refugees there has ever been on Earth, probably. They have been tremendously generous. Part of the dilemma they have is that they started this when there were fewer refugees coming across, and now it is becoming a very expensive enterprise for them to support that many refugees in the way they would like to, where they not only meet international standards; they exceed them. And so I've been there a couple times to two different camps.

And I have thanked the Turks with whom I met for their generosity. And we have looked for ways that we could provide support. They—once the numbers really started to grow, they asked us to provide funding directly to them, and we explained that our humanitarian assistance appropriated by Congress is used not to pay governments directly but to go through these trusted international organizations and nongovernmental organizations. So, we have looked for ways to offset some of their costs by, for example, the World Food Program, which—to which the U.S. is a top funder. Not my bureau; USAID does that. But to fund a card that the Turkish Red Crescent gives to refugees so that they can go shopping on a local market. And it's much better for the mental outlook of the refugees. It's better for the locals because they have customers coming and shopping and buying their products, and it's—all in all, it's been a beneficial thing, then, offsetting costs that the government and the people of Turkey would have to fund.

So, it hasn't been completely problem-free, but I think—Turkey has really moved quickly to host large numbers, build lots of camps, 17, and more under construction, and to provide a really outstanding level of support to refugees.

In Jordan, we have close ties but Jordan is not as economically advantaged as Turkey is, so we have a bilateral relationship that has—not run by my office but to provide assistance—economic assistance to the government to help with their own needs of their own people, especially impoverished people who live in Jordan. And then also we are working very closely with U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees to provide help to refugees in Jordan. Some are in camp; some are living in the villages in the communities. And we're trying to get aid to both groups and it requires different approaches for each group. We meet often with the Jordanians. We visit often. I talk every week to the U.S. ambassador to Jordan. He is intensely interested in what's going on and, you know, really has his finger on the pulse of what's happening. He talks to everybody; from refugees who he meets with when he visits the camps, to the king.

In Lebanon, because of the way they are governed, it is harder for us to have that close a relationship in terms of bilateral aid, and so we really rely more on the international organizations. I have, however, met with the prime minister of Lebanon, I've met with the president of Lebanon; I have assured them I care what happens there. We want to make sure that they are not forgotten in this situation. They are used to tensions in their own country and—but, you know, Beirut is very, very close to Damascus. It's driving distance. It's just a couple hours away. And you really feel that when you're there.

So, one of the things we've done lately is really try to bring more attention to Lebanon, and I've talked especially to the European—my counterparts in Europe about this because they may be able to do more in Lebanon whereas we could do more in Jordan, and trying to make sure both countries get the help they need. There are no camps in Lebanon to this date. The Lebanese took people in but they're also living in clinics, in schools, in partially completed buildings. You know, anything that has a structure turns into a shelter for refugees, so it's a very, very sobering situation.

The numbers of refugees going to Iraq are fewer. My colleague, the deputy assistant secretary, Kelly Clements, was in Iraq. The last couple days, we sent her up to Erbil and then to Baghdad to investigate the situation for refugees there. As we were talking about a moment ago, not only are Syrians going to Iraq; Iraqis who'd fled Iraq are going back to Iraq. And so this is really heart-breaking. I mean, these poor people have been displaced twice.

I'll have to get back to you on Russia and Iran. Iran, you know we have a program to help people flee Iran, so I don't know about Syrians going to Iran. Iran already hosts 1.7 million Afghans, so, you know, this is a place where we are constantly working on the edges of in terms of refugee situations.

I was on the State Department payroll when Rwanda happened. I was a civil servant. I had taken a leave to go help start the International Crisis Group. And as we went around and talked about the need for an organization like that, the Rwandan genocide was unfolding. And your former colleague, Steve Solarz, had left Congress at that point. I accompanied him to some of the meetings in where Rwanda became the case of what we had to not have happen ever again.

And I can't hear Donald Payne's name without thinking of all that he did. You know, he was "the" expert on Africa. So, you don't have to convince me that sometimes members of Congress know more than State Department people because if you just mention Donald Payne, you rest your case.

Let's see, in terms of bringing Syrians to the U.S. The 70,000 refugees we intend to bring this year would come from countries in the rest of the world. The top three places we're bringing refugees right now are Iraq, Burma and Bhutan. Only a handful of Syrians were really anticipated when we put that number together. And the president, you know, proposed that all to you. So, by the end of the year, there may be very few Syrians who have come in. That is true. We will probably get all 70,000 refugees but they won't be Syrians. I appreciate what Senator Cardin said about trying to find

mechanisms to bring in refugees who need to be brought to safety quickly; out of these situations quicker.

You know, this has been a conversation we've had ever since we, the U.S. government, had to get some of these translators and drivers and those who'd helped—Iraqis who'd helped American troops out. And then, our procedures are deliberately designed to be super careful so that we don't let terrorists in.

One thing that the State Department has set up, before my time, was to fund UNACR to have three places around the world: ETCs, where refugees can go if they have to get out of wherever they are, the place for them if the new country that they're headed to is not ready to take them yet. So, there's one in Romania. Somebody back here knows the other two.

Mr. CARDIN. Well, thank you for that comprehensive answer to Congressman Hastings. I'm just going to make an observation. You are correct, there is a reason for time to pass before we can resettle refugees, but the resources have not been made available in the right locations, so it could have been done a lot quicker. And there have been a lot of letters from Congress to the administration on this issue. Many of us have observed this first-hand and have tried to get the system working more efficiently, and we'll be glad to follow up with you on this issue, but I think you're going to see some additional congressional direction in order to expedite those that are at risk.

Ms. RICHARD. We welcome that.

Mr. CARDIN. Thank you. Thank you very much for your testimony, appreciate it.

Ms. RICHARD. Thank you all very much for your interest and for your travels, too. I appreciate that.

Mr. CARDIN. Thank you. We'll now turn to our second panel that consists of three experts on Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons. We have Dr. Michel Gabaudan, who is President of the Refugees International. He testified before the commission in 2008 regarding the plight of Iraqi refugees when he served as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Regional Representative for the United States in the Caribbean. Trained as a medical doctor in addition to holding a master's degree in tropical public health, Dr. Gabaudan's career at UNHCR has spanned more than 25 years.

We also have Ms. Jana Mason, who is Senior Adviser for Government Relations and External Affairs at the Washington, D.C. office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. Prior to joining the High Commissioner's office, Ms. Mason was Director of Government Relations and Advocacy at the International Rescue Committee and also worked for 11 years with the U.S. Committee for Refugees.

And then we have Ms. Yassar Bittar, who is Government Relations and Advocacy Associate for the Syrian-American Council in Washington, D.C. She is responsible for briefing congressional offices and the Department of State on the Syrian crisis and for grassroots mobilization with the Syrian-American community.

We will start with Dr. Gabaudan.

**MICHEL GABAUDAN, PRESIDENT, REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL**

Mr. GABAUDAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And Chairman Cardin, Congressmen Hastings and Burgess, thank you very much for inviting me to testify to this very important hearing, which timing, of course, is fantastic, between the largest appeal of the U.N. and World Refugee Day.

We have at Refugees International undertaken four missions to the region to the four countries hosting refugees and to the northern part of Syria in the past year and a half. And I will share with you my key impressions from these trips as we are preparing for our next one very soon.

I think the Syrian crisis, the way it affects people, we have to look at under three different dimensions. First, there is the strict level of human suffering and humanitarian needs and how best to respond to these. I was certainly dramatically impressed a year ago when we met the children of the first families who had managed to escape Hama and Homs and who arrived in Jordan. And in 30 years of refugee work, I've never seen such a blank stare in small children, who should never have seen things that we regret to imagine.

On the question of gender abuse, I was also quite stricken to the fact that the extent of violence against women inside Syria has led to families leaving in order to avoid being subjected to this sort of violence. I had never heard that in my life before. So there is a level of brutality to the conflict that is reaching almost unheard-of heights.

The second dimension, of course, is the impact this refugee outflow is having on neighboring countries. We were absolutely pleased to be the tremendous welcome that Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey have given to refugees with very open borders, with rather easy access to services and in general—and it's evolving—a pretty open attitude toward the international community in its ability to come and help.

But this open-arms policy is slowing—is showing some strains right now. First, they are at risk of importation of the increasing sectarian nature of the conflict in Syria into neighboring countries, Lebanon in particular. And I think we should all be very happy to see that Lebanon hasn't done worse than it has done to date with this strict—this close relationship it has with Syria.

But there is the impact in the local population. When we were in Jordan last year, the health and education ministries have seen their budgets cut by 25 percent, because of the economic situation of Jordan, at a time when they're offering access to schools and to the facilities to the very large number of Syrians they have. Now, that of course is something that a local population is going to tolerate for just a small amount of time. And at one point, they will say, what about—what about us?

So in general, what we're seeing right now, I think, is what we would call a reduction of the protection space in this country, which is certainly of great concern and needs to be addressed, not through the humanitarian means and response that we had, but perhaps, more to development aid, to the multilateral banks, et cetera.

And finally, there is the situation inside Syria, where we see an increasing atomization of the power structures in different areas.

And it has a series of impacts. The first one is that, as Assistant Secretary Richard mentioned, is that we are seeing now refugees who get out of Syria because of the breakdown in services, because of the very high price of commodities, not only because of the brutality of the conflict, because—but just because the living conditions are becoming unbearable.

And that exit, if left to fester and to continue, of course, will make returns impossible. And the longer the refugees stay in neighboring countries, of course, the more the reactions of these neighboring countries are going to stiffen and to make protection difficult. So we are caught in a vicious circle. And in my view, we have to address the response to the Syrian crisis by looking at support for neighboring countries and what we can do inside Syria, in addition to the traditional means of delivering humanitarian aid to the refugees and to those Syrians we can access inside Syria.

For the sake of time, I don't want to go over issues that you have covered in your statement, Mr. Chairman, and that Ms. Richard has also addressed. I would like, perhaps, to mention just two issues that we were quite stricken with. The situation in Lebanon and Jordan, for good reasons, because they have the highest number of refugees, have been largely covered and benefit from the large impact of the humanitarian community. Though things could be improved, they are on the radar screen.

Iraq is much less, and the Kurdish Regional Government has responded almost singlehandedly to the refugee crisis. The appeals for Iraq have not been met at the same level as the others. But it's further complicated that the relationship between Baghdad and the Kurdish government make international aid much more difficult to get there. And I think this is something we have to try to see how we can break.

The second issue is regarding Turkey. As was mentioned, their response was outstanding in the way they run camps. We've been to Kilis also—I think we all believe Kilis is perhaps the showpiece, probably the best of the camps. But even if the others are not as good, it's certainly well above average. The Turks have the tradition of responding to earthquakes; people coming to camps, and after six months, they go out. So they can afford a pretty high level of standards.

In this case, they have now to maintain standards for a long time. I understand that the bill for one year is \$1 billion; they cannot sustain that. And all the Turkish officials we've talked to are appealing for international aid, but not international aid as we do in usual refugee emergencies; they want bilateral aid, because they have their own way of responding. And I don't think we should pretend that we should run the camp in their stead; not at all. But we should see how we can eventually support them, a difficult proposition, even though Turkey is a fairly wealthy country, it doesn't figure on the international aid targets.

But they have shown also more willingness to accommodate international help in dealing with the growing population of urban refugees. And I think, as time goes, we will see a higher proportion of refugees living in cities. And we have to learn from the experience with Iraqi refugees, when the U.N. had some fairly creative

ways to assist urban populations, ways that have not yet been into practice for urban refugees in the region.

The last comment I would like to make, Mr. Chairman, is that of our assistance to programs inside Syria. Some international NGOs are having some problems bringing aid inside Syria, but there are a lot of recently created NGOs or loose association of Syrians that you find on the border.

They are businessmen from Aleppo, they are former professionals who took refuge from Damascus because they were persecuted, they are Syrians working in the—on the diaspora, some working from—in the Gulf states, other Syrian-Americans who have left their business in the states, gone back on the border and tried to do what they can. They are completely out of the loop of international aid. And they are—these are people who think as we do about the future of Syria, and they are highly frustrated and diffident about the West that they see dumping them completely.

I think it's a tremendous mistake because on the one hand, they could contribute, if properly assisted and perhaps trained, you know, coached, in delivering more aid inside Syria. They will also be essential in the period of recovery and reconstruction to have as allies. And I think, if we're missing the boat right now, we're condemning ourselves for the long run. It's not traditional to help these groups; there are perhaps some risks involved. But I think we should take these risks and give all the Syrians a chance to be recognized as bona fide recipients of the effort we are all making.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, I would like to say that unless we start supporting local organization, looking at development aid to the neighboring countries, we are not going to address the complexity of the crisis as required.

And the last comment on appropriations, as it will impact very much where we are in 2014: The administration request on the migration and refugee account was 2 million (dollars) less than last year. We hope that the Senate, in its tradition, will boost this up. I hope more than in the past, because these funds will be needed next year. We certainly support very much the administration's request to boost the emergency refugee and migration account to \$250 million; I think this is absolutely needed. And we certainly welcome the fact that the IDA has been tremendously increased.

I know your comment, Mr. Chairman, on how to get others—Europeans have been slow to respond, as usual. They have much less of an excuse as they try to have, in the case of Iraqis, where they said this is an American problem; let them fix it. They don't have that excuse at all in the case of Syrians. I think it's important that we seek ways to incorporate them. And perhaps the convenient—convening an international conference on the Syrian humanitarian crisis, you know, that UNHCR could do, as it did in the case of Iraq and did create a bit more visibility for the issue, would be a way forward and should be encouraged.

Thank you very much for your attention, Mr. Chairman and congressmen.

Mr. CARDIN. Thank you very much for your comments. Ms. Mason.



**JANA MASON, SENIOR ADVISER FOR GOVERNMENT  
RELATIONS, UNHCR WASHINGTON REGIONAL OFFICE**

Ms. MASON. Thank you very much, Chairman Cardin and other members of the commission. I'd like to express, first of all, my appreciation for the chance to appear before you today and offer the perspectives and concerns of the U.N. Refugee Agency, UNHCR, regarding the humanitarian situation of displaced Syrians.

Two days ago I returned from a 10-day trip to Jordan and Lebanon where I traveled throughout both countries and witnessed the staggering human consequences of the Syrian conflict. I had the opportunity to interview refugees in both countries. And I also met with government officials, NGOs, community members and, of course, my UNHCR colleagues in various parts of both countries. Two members of our delegation also traveled to Egypt during that time. I should mention Turkey was also on the itinerary initially but, due to recent events, we weren't able to go there.

Very briefly, let me just mention UNHCR currently has three offices inside Syria and 13 in the five neighboring countries that now have received the majority of Syrian refugees. As mentioned, these are Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt and Iraq. We currently have over 2,000 staff working in the region. UNHCR leads and coordinates the refugee response—the response in the host countries. And we work closely with host governments and with more than 100 U.N. and NGO partners.

Inside Syria, since there was no lead agency for all internally displaced situations, we're part of a collective U.N. and NGO response led by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and the OCHA, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. My remarks today are going to focus on our main observations and main messages regarding the whole crisis, and particularly on my visit to Jordan and Lebanon.

My written statement includes additional information on all the countries that we work on, in addition to our operations inside Syria where we are providing much needed but very limited humanitarian assistance, understandably because of the security concerns. But if you're interested more on the inside situation, I can certainly follow-up with more information on that.

As others have already noted, and as you noted in your very comprehensive opening statement, Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Hastings noted as well, there are at least 1.6 million Syrian refugees in the region. Of those, one million—I think this should be noted—one million of 1.6 (million) fled the country in the last six months alone. So we've seen it's not only the numbers, but it's the pace of arrivals and the escalation in recent months.

Civilians have crossed borders in record numbers because of increased fighting and because of the way the fighting moves around, as we've seen, cities and towns taking control—or being controlled by different factions at different times. Many Syrians cross the borders after having already been internally displaced. We learned on the trip that in many cases Syrians are displaced two or three times before crossing a border. Crossing a border is sometimes the fourth movement.

And this decision to cross a border is often taken in haste, at the last minute, because they're at imminent risk. Therefore, they ar-

rive with almost nothing but the clothes on their back. As a consequence, they have few resources to rely on and are desperately in need of aid by the international community. We saw this with the Iraqis, but many of them had a little bit more time to flee and had resources that dwindled over time. Many of the Syrians don't come with these resources.

It's also important to know, as has already been mentioned, that three-quarters of the refugees are women and children. But of this, three-quarters of the total women and children, but in most of the countries over half are children alone. In Jordan alone, 20 percent—or roughly 20 percent are under age five. So as many of my UNHCR colleagues have mentioned, this is in many ways a children's crisis.

I've traveled to many refugees camps, as I—as I know many of you have, you always see a lot of children. But I was just struck by the number of children in Zaatari refugee camp and even in the urban areas. In Zaatari camp in Jordan, 60 to 70 children are born each week. And that's one camp in one country. We saw a lot of—I saw a lot of newborn babies on this trip, so that's obviously very troubling, raises a host of protection concerns, as has been mentioned.

One of the main messages I came away with from this trip—which is not a surprise; it's been echoed by colleagues today—is that the refugee numbers are putting enormous strain on the local communities. UNHCR and our partners provide a range of services, both to the—to the camp refugees and to the non-camp refugees. We call them urban refugees because they live in cities and towns. Sometimes urban means a small village; sometimes it means Amman.

Increasingly, we're also providing assistance to the host communities as well, to the residents, local populations. The problem is that these communities have already been hosting the refugees for two years and they're now reaching the breaking point. I can't tell you how many times on the trip I heard the term “the breaking point.”

The problem is particularly acute in Lebanon where there are no camps and where refugees are housed in a wide variety of shelter, ranging from—if you can call it shelter, in some cases—ranging from rented apartments—which are probably the best, even though these are often substandard apartments at inflated rents—to unfinished buildings to what we call collective centers and maybe an unused school, to, in Lebanon alone, almost 300, what we call, informal tented settlements, and tent is an overstatement. It would be nice if they were tents. They were usually—sometimes they were tearing down billboards to build some sort of a shack, or they scrounged around for some materials. These are not run by UNHCR, but as we access them, one by one, we're trying to provide more assistance.

Now, the problem is also particularly dangerous in Lebanon given the country's complex sectarian divisions. As I know the commission is well aware, the political and security situation in Lebanon is very precarious. We have reports of more spillover incidents along the border, with rockets fired from Syria continuing to strike Bekaa in the north, as well as prolonged unrest in Tripoli.

We were supposed to go into Tripoli during this delegation, but the security—we had to drive around the mountain roads and bypass Tripoli and go to other areas of the north.

We did go to the Bekaa as well. This situation, of course, is exacerbated by Hezbollah's recent engagement inside Syria that we're all aware of. During this visit, for example, in Lebanon, we learned that the funerals of Hezbollah fighters who have been killed in Lebanon were being used as occasions to fire shots over the tented settlements where Syrian refugees were living. Obviously, that's very much of concern.

Now, in Jordan, most media attention has focused on Zaatari refugee camp in northern Jordan, which currently houses about 120,000. Zaatari is a city actually—I mean, it's a camp. But as a camp, it constitutes the fifth-largest city in Jordan and it basically sprung out of the desert in July of last year. That camp is only 12 kilometers from the border so the refugees and the workers there routinely hear artillery fire at night. The location is harsh and some of the conditions are quite difficult.

Yet, ironically, sometimes even though UNHCR likes to say that we're moving around from camps—for very good reasons, because camps aren't good locations to live and for children to be born and raised. But at least, in this camp and in other camps, we're able to provide assistance that's at least in walking distance for the refugees. However, as mentioned, three-quarters of Syrian refugees live in urban areas, in cities or villages. And they share many of the concerns with the urban refugees in Lebanon.

These include high rents, inadequate cash assistance, problems accessing health care, lack of job opportunities, problems keeping kids in school and a whole host of protection issues including gender-based violence. These problems often force families to turn to what we refer to as negative coping strategies, which includes such things as child labor, early marriage, forced marriage and other forms of exploitation. We're very concerned about trafficking and all sorts of things in these circumstances.

Now, another key finding from the trip, as you've already mentioned, is the ongoing need to assure open borders. UNHCR continues to work with governments in the region to convince them to keep providing access to territory to all Syrians fleeing as well as other nationals fleeing the conflict. We're very grateful for the commitment that they've already offered. By taking in thousands of new refugees every day, we have to remember that these countries which are on the front lines of the crisis are saving lives and supporting the families and communities.

And very important, they're also helping Syrians prepare for what we hope will be an eventual return to their homeland. And at this point at least, every Syrian I met in Lebanon and Jordan said that they want to—they want to go home. But this ability to keep borders open and offer services is, of course, linked to international support to governments and host communities. If that support isn't available, acceptance towards the refugees may soon diminish, which would threaten to further destabilize what's already a fragile region.

I heard about this over and over. I was told the host communities were initially welcoming to the refugees. Many landlords, for exam-

ple, were deferring rent payments, or reducing rents. Neighbors were providing food. Communities were chipping in. It's clear, however, that the tide has turned and that tensions in host communities are growing.

And this is leading to the threat of violence and instability. One government official I met with said the refugee crisis is bringing out the worst in society. He said what people think is morally acceptable behavior is skewed. And another official said, when you don't have enough yourself, you're not as willing to share as you used to be. Two very quick stories about refugees that I met, and then I'll conclude.

In Amman, I met with an urban refugee family in an apartment—a very substandard apartment. Husband, wife, six kids, a daughter-in-law and a newborn grandchild. The son was still in Syria. They were from Daraa—Daraa region in Syria. The husband had participated in protests in Daraa and had been detained twice and tortured. He told us very directly he had a nervous breakdown because of this. The Syrians are very forthcoming with mental health issues, which is unlike a number of refugee populations I've met with before. He said he was receiving treatment. What forced him to leave was that he was asked for a third time to come in by military intelligence, and at this point, he was—he was afraid—he didn't want to go through the torture again and maybe lose his life, so he fled to Jordan.

In addition to the concerns over rent and other assistance, their family is very worried because the newborn grandchild doesn't have birth registration. They're concerned about his ability to move as well as to access services like education. When we were leaving—and this is what struck me—we were walking down the steps, and the women said to our translator, boy, they're very lucky—meaning myself and our delegation. I thought they meant, largely, we're lucky because we're not coming from a war-torn country or we come from the United States or what. All they meant, when I asked about it, is that we were lucky that we were leaving the apartment, because they never do. They happen to live in a neighborhood that doesn't have as many Syrians, and they were afraid that they were becoming—there were increasing hostilities in that neighborhood to their presence.

The second story, very quickly, is at a tented settlement in the Beqaa Valley of Lebanon. We met a little boy who had visible scars on his face from when a house explosion—he was in a house that exploded in Syria, and the burns were quite difficult to look at. We asked about assistance—the UNHCR staff with us said they would certainly follow up with them, but I wondered—you know, we just happened to be there. They hadn't seen aid workers for a while, because again, they're so scattered. How long would it be before he would be able to get some assistance? Next to him was a little girl who we were told was so emotionally distressed that she couldn't move her hands—that was just the way her symptoms were manifesting it.

This visit really highlighted the need for adequate shelter as well as adequate assistance. So in conclusion—and let me just note that the—as we've discussed here, the conflict in Syria has put an unbearable strain on the population of Syria and its neighbors. The

host countries have been very generous, but the overwhelming message that I received is that the welcome is now being strained as the conflict continues and refugees keep arriving. If our goal really is, as it is, to encourage these host countries to keep their borders open and continue allowing refugees to access basic services, then we have to do more to assist these governments and their local populations as well.

Of course, we have to be very smart in how the resources are used, but the reality is that significant additional resources will probably be needed this year and beyond. New donors, including the private sector, have to be tapped, and as was mentioned earlier, including by Dr. Gabaudan, the development agencies have to be more engaged as well and work hand-to-hand with the humanitarian groups. The experiences of the refugees in neighboring countries may very well determine what a future Syria looks like, and the welfare of the host countries will determine the future stability and prosperity of the entire region. Thank you very much.

Mr. CARDIN. Thank you very much. Ms. Bittar.

**YASSAR BITTAR, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS AND ADVOCACY  
ASSOCIATE, COALITION FOR A DEMOCRATIC SYRIA**

Ms. BITTAR. Chairman Cardin and members of the commission, thank you for inviting me to testify on behalf of the Coalition for a Democratic Syria's work on Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons. I'd also like to thank you for actually traveling to the region and meeting with Syrian people on the ground.

What began in March 2011 as a peaceful revolution in Syria with hundreds of thousands taking to the streets calling for freedom and democracy in the face of bullets and tanks has evolved into what president of Oxfam, American Ray Offenheiser, describes as a humanitarian catastrophe of "Darfur-level insanity if not worse,".

As mentioned earlier, the U.N. made yet another aid appeal of \$5 billion, its largest ever, maintaining that nearly half of the country's population will need aid. My comments today will focus on the coalition's work for the 1.6 million Syrian refugees and 4.25 million IDPs, many of whom have been displaced multiple times.

I will then relay my observations from my recent trips into Syria, during which I took a closer look into the depth and complexity of the humanitarian crisis on the ground. CDS represents the Syrian-American community advocacy in support of the Syrian revolution. Our generous constituency throughout the country has been the driving force in our work for Syrian refugees and IDPs.

According to data compiled by the American Relief Coalition for Syria, the Syrian-American community contributed \$45 million in humanitarian aid in 2012; this number is projected to double in 2013. The networks of these organizations are able to reach areas under extremely difficult circumstances, at times when access by the UN is very limited or altogether lacking.

The international community's efforts in addressing the humanitarian crisis in Syria have somewhat improved in recent months, through the introduction of cross-line and cross-border aid deliveries by international NGOs, albeit on a scale that does not measure up to the massive needs.

I saw small examples firsthand in the IDP camps inside Syria. My first trip, I saw very little presence of UN agency work; rather, the tents were donated by non-profit organizations willing to cross the border. While on the border, two tents caught fire as families used candles to keep warm, killing 7 children; these children survived the landing of a mortar shell in their kitchen only to be killed by their supposed source of refuge. During my second trip, two months later, several UNHCR tents were set up throughout these camps as the number of IDPs at the border approximately doubled to reach 60,000 people.

Unfortunately, other needs such as food and sanitation remain in desperate condition. Refugees are forced to purchase their own food from local villages as their daily allocation of one loaf of bread, a tub of butter and jam, and one water bottle is often not sufficient.

My experience as I traveled further into Syria was even more heartbreaking. As I traveled two hours into the country, I saw a physically beautiful Syria as a backdrop to the reality that the Assad regime has forced upon the people. We drove by homes that have been brought to the ground, places of worship that have been destroyed and buildings that had been leveled. I saw families living in remnants of ancient buildings and structures that once housed livestock.

After arriving at the city of Kafrenbal, I made my way to the statistics bureau of the local civilian council, a body formed by activists to meet the needs of the population in the absence of government services. As I was visiting the school that housed displaced children, an attack helicopter flew over our heads, and the children reassured me, saying, "If we are meant to die, it is God's will. Don't be scared." According to the head of the humanitarian bureau of the local council, the aid that we delivered into the city had been the first delivery in at least one month; he delivered food baskets to women who accepted them with tears streaming down their faces. That night, we faced six hours of non-stop regime shelling; the following day, we escaped to Turkey.

On the Turkish side of the border, we stayed in the border town of Rehanlye, whose population has doubled since the beginning of the crisis to reach 80,000 people. According to USAID, Turkey is home to approximately 380,000 registered Syrian refugees; of them, 100,000 Syrians reside in non-camp settings. The total amount of aid, as we discussed, spent in Turkey has reached \$1.5 billion with the Turkish government going above and beyond by providing over \$600 million.

Although I was not given access to the Turkish refugee camps, I visited several Syrian families living amongst the urban population. I saw very difficult living conditions for families paying up to 700 Turkish pounds in rent; a family of six was living in a shed without running water or electricity. Another family of seven was living on the rooftop of a building with a makeshift roof for coverage.

The number of refugees and IDPs is at a scale in which, according to assessments from the ground, there is little room for error on behalf of the international community. These numbers will only increase as the situation on is deteriorating by the day. Just last week, in the city of Qusayr, thousands of civilians were forced to

flee to neighboring villages as Assad forces, backed by Iranian and Hezbollah militias, placed a vicious siege on the city of 25,000 people.

Although positive steps in aid delivery have been made, a disconnect remains in ensuring proper and efficient aid delivery on behalf of the international community. We believe it is important to partner with the Assistance Coordination Unit of the internationally-recognized Syrian Coalition, the provincial councils in the liberated areas, as well as the Syrian NGOs that have proven to deliver to disaster stricken areas. More importantly, the U.S. has to demonstrate strong resolve and serious commitment to helping solve the crisis in Syria, the root cause of the humanitarian disaster. Absence of U.S.-led international action has permitted the crisis to fester and reach its current tragic proportions, and continued inaction will only worsen it.

Without addressing the root cause of the problem—the illegitimate Assad regime—the staggering numbers of IDPs and relentless exodus of refugees will continue to overwhelm the humanitarian response and destabilize OSCE member Turkey, OSCE partner Jordan, and all of Syria’s neighbors.

Thank you very much for your time.

Mr. CARDIN. Well, we thank all three of you.

I particularly appreciate, Ms. Bittar, your observations of what’s happening inside of Syria. I think that’s very important for us. We know that it depends greatly as to what part of Syria you’re in and who controls the different areas, but one of our challenges is how do we get aid inside of Syria? We know there are NGOs working, but to oversight, the route of that aid is not always certain in that we’re not clear whether the resources are getting to responsible people or not. So we appreciate your observations and we’re going to continue to do what we can to develop the networks, but it is very, very challenging.

I have one question and then I’ll yield to my colleagues. What I said originally, we have two priorities: to try to deal with the people who have been victimized, those that have been displaced and are refugees, to get them aid. The other is to bring some semblance of order to Syria. And the strategy is to try to get change in the regime as quickly as possible, and to do that in a way that provides for governance in Syria that respects the rights of all of its citizens so that people can live in peace.

Now, in order to accomplish that, the opposition people have been urging for more definitive U.S. assistance and international assistance. If the amount of international activity increases inside of Syria, the discussions about lethal force, what impact could that have on the Syrian population dealing with the issues that we’re currently dealing with? Do you have a view—or the nation has already been shocked to such a point that anything more won’t make much of a difference, could there be another round of large increases of displaced individuals within Syria?

Mr. GABAUDAN. Well, reading my cup of tea, Senator, as a matter of course I would say if you introduce more weapons in an area which is already in conflict, which may lead to faster resolution of the conflict, hopefully and perhaps, but during that time there would be more civilian casualties.

I think the nature of the conflict has already proven that civilians are bearing an immense cost in the conflict and I cannot see how adding more weapons to that conflict would make civilians safer in the short term. In the longer term that would be more of a military expertise to perhaps address that because I cannot really vouch on that.

Mr. CARDIN. I guess my point about this is—and I'm for resolving the situation in Syria as promptly as we can and helping the opposition. My concern is we already—we don't have the infrastructure in place today to deal with the current displaced people. Putting additional pressure on it is going to make at least the short-term circumstances even worse, and making it even more urgent that we get the resources we need to try to develop a network to deal with those who are being displaced.

Ms. MASON. Well, as UNHCR being a humanitarian organization, I can't directly address the military situation inside Syria, or what would be or wouldn't be the impact of different courses of action the U.S. could take. I only wanted to mention that on the trip everyone we met with—government officials, U.N., even the refugees themselves—were very tied in to what's going on back at home, were saying that they still expect greater displacement regardless of what happens. We kept hearing it over and over: The worst is yet to come. For example, the battle for Aleppo hadn't happened yet.

Regardless of what happens with Assad, they were concerned that there could be future violence that would then—you know, maybe more sectarian violence that would then lead people to leave. So just to say that regardless of the course of action the assumption was more displacement is going to happen.

And that's why as the U.N. we're calling for increased funding this year and then probably beyond, because as was also mentioned, regardless of what happens, if Syrians are to return someday, there's going to have to be great investment in infrastructure and rebuilding that country, because with agricultural land destroyed, homes destroyed, entire villages, there's very little right now for people to go back to.

Mr. CARDIN. Let me just—you can answer that—Ms. Bittar, I just want to ask you, what percentage of Syria today do you believe we have effective ways of getting help to those who are in need?

Ms. BITTAR. I mean, if we look at the liberated regions, I believe the number that we have as far as liberated areas in Syria, I believe the percentage is about 60 percent. But what we have through the networks on the ground, through these Syrian NGOs, they're able to reach, like I mentioned, areas that normally the U.N. agencies can't reach. For example, there was a neighborhood in the city of Homs called Alwad (ph), which has been—which was left by the regime until they were tightening the siege on the city. And there's 600,000 IDPs in that neighborhood itself.

So they tightened the siege on the city. And in response, American Relief Coalition for Syria was able to raise about half a million dollars of aid and find access through their networks on the ground into these areas that have been under siege. So if the area isn't liberated, which a lot of Syria is despite the change on the ground



militarily, as we're seeing, there are the networks on the ground through these Syria NGOs, as I mentioned earlier.

But then also, in response to your earlier question, in regards to—the goal of course is to end the conflict in Syria so that all the Syrians can return back to their country and those that are internally displaced can return back to their homes. Arming, in our belief, would help of course bring that conflict to an end in that as we look at the situation we see Iran and Hezbollah on the ground in Syria. They're making gains on the ground.

We have seen them take over, regain the city of Qudsaya, for example. They are amassed in the suburbs of Aleppo. So we're seeing these troops and the Assad regime kind of take the path towards regaining formerly liberated areas. So what happens in these formally liberated areas is that these civilians are forced out, leading to the increase of internally displaced people.

So in order to make sure that this liberated area is not regained by these Iranian and Hezbollah troops on the ground, we must equal the playing field on the ground by providing arms to the Free Syrian Army on the ground, by providing a no-fly zone so that the Assad regime can land their air force and the SCUD missiles are not killing innocent civilians on a daily basis.

So providing arms, although it seems one would predict that would lead to, like my colleague mentioned, a short-term displacement, it helps solve the crisis, helps solve the conflict, which brings people back home and levels the playing field on the ground, so that we don't lose, so that the Free Syrian Army does not lose any ground—any of the liberated regions. So, yes.

Mr. CARDIN. Well, thank you for that answer. We are certainly anxious to get this issue—get Syria resolved. And the committee I serve on, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has taken—is taking action to try to increase U.S. leadership in that regard.

I would just maybe take issue on one of your statements. In the liberated areas, it's my understanding they're all not equal as far as the ability to get aid distributed. We have more confidence in some areas of the liberated communities than we do others, that international assistance can get to the people that really need it. Is that your—I see you're shaking your head. Isn't there this inconsistency in the liberated areas?

Ms. BITTAR. From what I saw—again, I traveled to Aleppo and I traveled to Idlib. From what I saw, there was a lack kind of across the board, but the system is in place. I think the structure is in place so that we can ensure proper aid delivery through the Assistance Coordination Unit.

The Assistance Coordination Unit is kind of like a capacity, a place where all the assessments of the situation on the ground, all of the networks on the ground kind of come, and where we can go to the structure and say: We have this aid that needs to go to a certain location in the liberated areas; can you help us facilitate it? And they can connect the aid or the NGOs to the right people on the ground so that the aid goes to, like, more difficult-to-reach areas. But as far as I saw on the ground, I wasn't able to see a vast difference between different cities that I visited.

Mr. CARDIN. Right. And the two areas you went to are—I know the two areas, but we've looked at the map and we've tried to fig-

ure out where we think we have networks that work, and it's a challenge. It's a challenge. Dr. Burgess.

Mr. BURGESS. Thank you, Chairman Cardin.

Ms. Mason, let me ask you a question. And this may seem so basic as to—be something that's not worth asking at a hearing like this, but the people in the camps, let's say specifically in the camps in Jordan, what do they do? What do they do all day? What's a day in the life like for someone in the camps?

Ms. MASON. Part of their day is getting the services that they need, lining up for food distribution, lining up for other distributions. We do have—there are—with partners there are schools for the children, not sufficient enough for all of them right now. And some families, for various reasons, are not sending their kids to the schools, but we do have schools. We do have what's called "child-friendly spaces," where they can go even when they're not learning academic subjects to provide some structure, some normalcy for them.

More and more we're trying, with limited resources, to have more camp-type meetings, structures where women can gather, men can gather, make their needs known. But the rest of what they do all day, as Assistant Secretary Richard mentioned, there is just all sorts of things going on in the camp—some good, some bad, some unfortunate. Kids are gathering, throwing stones. We've seen vandalism. We've seen a lot of manifestations of just the frustration, the mental illnesses, the lack of any structure or any hope at this point. So some of the activities in the camp, we're trying to put an end to some of those and put more structure in place.

Mr. BURGESS. Those who have been displaced, who have left another home within their home country, how do they keep tabs on their property or their former homes or possessions?

Ms. MASON. Yeah, that's a very good question. A lot of the refugees I talked to were still in contact, because many of them had families back home. A lot of them still had sons or other male relatives who were in detention, who were in prison, but others have family members. They mentioned mothers, sisters. A lot of them had older family members who just weren't able to make the difficult journey. A lot of them said: My mother is still in Syria. So they're in communication with them.

In addition, some of them are returning when possible, sometimes to check on their land. There are daily buses that go from Zaatari camp in Jordan, organized by the government. In some cases families are accompanying individual family members that want to go back and return. In some cases they're all going to check on property or to try to bring other family members back with them. So they do have ways.

Mr. BURGESS. So there's an expectation that at some point, when peace and order is restored, that they would be able to go to their original place of residence.

Ms. MASON. There's definitely a hope, a very strong hope. Everyone I talked to said, I want to go home. And of course that's what refugees say in the early part of a crisis anyway, but we heard this consistently, that they want to go home. Whether they'll go—if their home no longer exists they wouldn't go back to that same res-

idence, but I think most of them came from communities where they want to go back and rebuild those communities.

Mr. BURGESS. Those that had some means, do they have any mechanism of a bank to check or a debit card, or any way of accessing their cash that they may have had?

Ms. MASON. Back in Syria, probably not. But we and our partners in not all the locations—at many locations—are doing cash assistance, particularly for the most vulnerable. We're not able to get cash to everybody but for the most vulnerable we are providing cash assistance. And we're hoping to increase it.

And we're moving to a system of debit cards. I mean, it's a very effective form of giving assistance. There's almost zero overhead rate when you're giving cash. If you do it right with debit cards and such, there's very little chance of fraud. So they do have some access to that. In terms of their own means, their own cash that they may have brought, I think they're just using what they have and then it's dwindling.

Mr. BURGESS. Tell me this: You mentioned a figure of 60 to 70 deliveries a week. Was that in one specific camp?

Ms. MASON. That was in Zaatari, which is the only real refugee camp per se in Jordan. There are some very smaller what we call camps. They were originally built as transit centers and now they're limited.

Mr. BURGESS. So these are Syrian nationals who are housed in Jordan?

Ms. MASON. In the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, 60 to 70 babies born per week, yes.

Mr. BURGESS. And to what country are those children assigned citizenship?

Ms. MASON. That's a very good question. My organization also has a mandate for stateless individuals. It's not a well-known topic, so usually when I talk about statelessness people's eyes tend to glaze over. But you just put your hand on what it means.

If they can't register the births in Jordan—and sometimes they can and sometimes they can't—then at this point they could be viewed as stateless because they don't have documentation back in Syria yet. But at least for the ones in the camps, the birth itself is registered.

We're working with authorities to make sure that when this child needs documentation, that they'll have it. Then of course we'll have to see what exists back in Syria to record that documentation as well. In the Arab world there's something you're probably familiar with called the family booklet, and it's just important to make sure that these births are still registered and that they're listed on the family booklet.

Mr. BURGESS. Doctor, let me just ask you this: What about the medical care in these camps? Who is providing that? Would this be the host country of these doctors who have been displaced who are in the camps? How does this work?

Mr. GABAUDAN. In the camps—sorry, Congressman. In the camps mostly international nongovernmental organizations, but most of the refugees are not in camps. So in the—sorry, in Turkey it's the Turkish Red Crescent which is completely in charge of the camps.

In Jordan you have an international organization. So is the case in Iraq. For all the refugees who are in urban centers—

Mr. BURGESS. In Iraq?

Mr. GABAUDAN. In Northern Iraq, yes, you have about 150,000 refugees in the Kurdish regional government.

Mr. BURGESS. Man, their medical infrastructure in Northern Iraq was really spotty the last time I was there, which wasn't all that long ago. So they're providing that within Iraq?

Mr. GABAUDAN. They are providing for the urban to give access to their own facilities, but these are simple, as you know, and this is where they need assistance.

For the urban refugees in general, there is possibility to access services, but the capacity of these services has been over-stretched. And this is where this should be addressed I think more through the development lens.

In Lebanon it's very different because in Lebanon all health care is private. It's available but it's extremely expensive. What you have is international NGOs picking the tab for the refugees so that they can pay the bill in private medical practice. It's a very expensive venture, particularly that among the older population you have a lot of heavy need for tertiary attention.

Mr. BURGESS. Sure. Well, you mentioned professionals who were displaced, so if you have a professional family—a doctor, dentist, accountant—are they able to work when they get to the new location, whether it be in a camp or just resettling in a new country?

Mr. GABAUDAN. I don't have an exact answer. I would guess that in the camps they probably can work with some of the international nongovernmental organizations. In the countries they cannot work because they're not licensed.

Mr. BURGESS. I see. Thank you. I'll yield back.

Mr. CARDIN. I'm going to turn the gavel over to Mr. Hastings, Congressman Hastings. When you're complete you can adjourn the committee. I apologize. I have a 4:00 commitment. And I want to thank, again, our witnesses. And thank you all for your participation.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you very much, Senator. And thank you again for holding what I perceive as a very, very important hearing. And I hope that we have a follow-up to it, that I'll talk to you about. I'm not going to keep you all. I just am overwhelmed with sadness that these matters persist in the world, not just in that particular area. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe now has, I believe 57 countries, 57. Very recently, or in the last two months—I don't know how to describe them, but let's just call them disturbances—occurred in Sweden dealing with the fact that they had absorbed—and I'm proud of the fact that they did—a significant number of Iraq refugees. Some of the issues, as described at least in the media—and I have no first-hand information, but some of the issues dealt with the fact that—the usual inadequate housing, inadequate jobs, inadequate education, and medical attention in a country as forthcoming as that.

I guess my question is, Ms. Mason, do you get any information from other countries in the OSCE region specifically, leaving out Turkey and Jordan as a partner, saying, you know—I heard you talk about Germany accepting 5,000, but did this particular series

of events there and the events in France, not related to this in one sense of the word, did these kinds of uprisings cause other countries to say, I'm not so sure that we want to accept refugees?

Ms. MASON. Thank you very much for that question because, as you're aware, resettlement is one component of UNHCR's work. It's one of what we call the three durable solutions. It's very small solution.

Out of the 10 (million) or 11 million refugees around the world that we care for, there are only about 100,000 resettlement spaces available in any given year. So we're talking less than 1 percent of the world's refugees that can never be resettled. But we do view it as a critical form of protection. So we take very seriously the continued willingness and openness of countries to receive refugees.

I'm not familiar with the specific incident in Sweden, though I will say Sweden is one of our key partners in resettlement. Unlike the United States, which has a very lengthy process for admission, as the assistant secretary mentioned, Sweden is often able to take emergency cases very quickly, medical cases and others. So they have been a key partner of ours.

Other European countries don't participate too much in the resettlement system, because by virtue of geography they get a lot of spontaneous asylum seekers and they meet one of their international obligations to refugees by accepting asylum seekers who come in without any help by the U.N. through the international system.

Even though our job in resettlement is only to identify cases that are vulnerable and refer them to countries—and then it's up to the countries, through their own mechanisms, to take refugees in—we of course are very aware of and concerned by local integration prospects, security issues, anything that would help or hinder resettlement from happening. So we do take this very seriously.

I haven't as yet heard countries in the OSCE region or elsewhere, our resettlement partners stepping up and saying, you know, this has happened or that's happened; we don't want to take in refugees. What we do tend to hear from, like, in the U.S. is maybe one community, one group, one individual who maybe has a perspective where they're not as familiar with the resettlement system and all the benefits that others might be.

And that's where I would go back to what Dr. Burgess said earlier. We do agree that it's very important to keep local officials and communities very aware of the needs of refugees who are coming and why they're coming. Each state, including Texas, has a state refugee coordinator and a number of nongovernmental organizations that work in refugee resettlement. And they are very often keeping these local agencies, local officials informed of what's happening. And if they're not, I think they would welcome knowing who they could meet with in your district and how they can provide more information.

So to get back to the question, I haven't heard anything about this yet. We do at times—we do hear, and that's when we go back and try to remind them of the conditions that people are fleeing and try to make sure that resettlement occurs as far in advance and appropriately as possible so we can alleviate some of those concerns.

Mr. HASTINGS. Ms. Bittar and Dr. Gabaudan spoke about the nonprofit groups in Syria specifically that are not in the loop. What is your interaction, if any, with Ms. Bittar and her group?

And the same goes—since Dr. Gabaudan identified it first, for my ears at least—what does UNHCR do, and should you not be making attempts to have these particular groups involved since—for lack of a better way of putting it, when I was a child in Altamonte Springs I would have been able to deliver more than most outsiders because I had access to the people and I was one of them.

Ms. MASON. Absolutely. If you're referring specifically about inside Syria in terms of assistance—

Mr. HASTINGS. Yeah, inside Syria.

Ms. MASON. As mentioned, we're only one of a number of U.N. and other agencies that are working inside Syria. Because of legal restrictions the U.N. is not able to do cross-border assistance right now without a change, but we are doing inside Syria what we call cross-lines assistance—assistance going through Damascus up to the north and other places where there are concentrations of displaced persons that need help.

It's certainly not enough. I wouldn't pretend to say it's enough. But we are doing what we can. And for the actual distribution we are working with the Assistance Coordination Unit, and we're working with some NGOs. I'm not familiar with exact names of who we're dealing with, but we are working with them. We want to do more. We want to do a lot more. Part of it is capacity. Part of it is of course the security inside Syria.

Mr. HASTINGS. Two more quick questions. One to you, Dr. Gabaudan.

You mention in your statement the zero-point distribution system that Turkey utilizes. I'm asking for information. Can you tell me a little bit more about how that works and whether or not it would help, then, a national community, or could it?

Mr. GABAUDAN. I think it does. Turkey does not want to do cross-border operation itself because that would be a violation of the sovereignty of Syrians. They have been quite clear on that. However, they do tolerate the passage of goods from Turkey to Syria by agencies who are in Syria. But the zero-point is really on the border, a place where Turkish trucks empties its goods into a Syrian truck and then the NGO can take these.

Mr. HASTINGS. Yeah. Right. OK.

Ms. Bittar, you ended your testimony—and I'll quote you, and you correct me if I'm wrong—you said the United States has to demonstrate strong resolve and serious commitment to helping solve the conflict in Syria, the root cause—you said other things before this—the root cause of the humanitarian disaster.

In your opinion, what specifically would you have the United States—and I don't mean you specifically but the organization and others that you work with, and you—what would you have the United States and the international community do to try to bring an end to the violence in Syria?

Ms. BITTAR. Definitely. I would say that it's a three-pronged approach.

First we would start with—the United States would start with exerting more political pressure in that we would cut off all—any

kind of support in that—even, like, with the lack of statements, for example, against Assad—against the Assad regime.

Second, we would also empower the Syrian Coalition, which is now in place, as well as the interim government, so that they can meet the needs of the people on the ground. And then there's also—we must be pressuring the Lebanese government to do what they can to ensure that Hezbollah troops do not travel into Syria to fight with the Assad regime.

The second prong we would say is to exert further military pressure in that the U.S. should be supplying arms, defensive arms, strategic arms, to the Supreme Military Council, the structure in place under General Commander Salim Idris, that works with the majority of the Free Syrian Army battalions on the ground, the good guys on the ground, those that align with the vision for a free Syria, that we share here in the U.S., so that we can help unify them, so that we can kind of elbow out the influence of the extremist groups on the ground so that they do not gain anymore popularity and do not continue to win the hearts and minds of the people.

And then, finally, we should support the civilian governance that is taking place. So we have the political track. We have the military track. And the political and the military track are aimed at changing Assad's calculations so that he sees that the international community will not let him continue what he's doing, because at this moment in time he's emboldened by Iran's support. He's emboldened by Hezbollah's support. So we must do something to force him to the table, force him to negotiate, or force a political settlement for Syria.

And at the same time, we should be supporting the civilian governance on the ground that I mentioned earlier. There are these civilian structures, democratically elected structures on the ground who need to be empowered so that the civilians are meeting the needs of the people rather than the military arm or the extremist elements inside Syria, so as to strengthen their legitimacy on the ground and also kind of help in the transition post-Assad.

So in regards to your question, sir, I would believe it's the three-pronged approach of political pressure, military pressure—which we haven't seen enough of by the international community—to force Assad to the table, and then finally, continue the support to the civilians governance so that the transition post-Assad is not as chaotic and does not spillover into the region.

Mr. HASTINGS. Well, one thing I wish that the media would pay more attention to is the long-standing direct involvement that the Russian government and the previous Soviet Union—and I often wonder, if we had made a deal with them to assure that they kept their warm-water port, whether or not some of this would be a little different at this time.

I'm not sure that I agree that military, even in the short term, is going to help. I'm so confused by it all. I'll give you an example. When I met with Bashar Assad, I already knew that Iran was supplying military materiel to Hezbollah. I specifically asked him, and he allowed—because I'd been in the region an awful lot but I had never had an opportunity to take that two-hour drive from Damascus to Lebanon through the Beqaa Valley. He granted it and as-

sured that we would be safe and all of that, and it was OK. And we met with Mr. Hariri on the other side when we got to Lebanon.

But I asked him specifically whether or not Iran used Syria as a transition point for military materiel to be distributed specially to Hezbollah, and of course he gave me a long story as to why that is not true and the international community has—later that same day I learned that as we were speaking he moved apparatus.

Now, he knew that I served on the Intelligence Committee and I would know that. All I'm saying is I'm not sure how you bring an abject liar to truth. I hope at some point—not from the standpoint of what Ms. Mason and Dr. Gabaudan do—and lord knows they don't have enough resources to do what they need to do anywhere, but I hope at some point the international community insists that people like Assad and others be brought to justice in a meaningful way. I don't know that it will ever stop this greed, this power-mongering, this continuing pattern of people not being able to resolve their differences. I don't see good things happening in Syria either way. That's just me.

I thank you all. You know so much.

Mr. BURGESS. One follow-up. Ms. Bittar, since you've broached the question, I'm going to ask it. OK, the last 10, 12 years you've seen the displacement of Mullah Omar in Afghanistan and the result there. You've seen the displacement of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the result there, the displacement of Hosni Mubarak and the result there, the displacement of Gaddafi in Libya and the result there. Are any of those models to which Syria aspires right now?

Ms. BITTAR. What I can tell you about the Syrian people is that—from my experience with them—I'm Syrian-American and I traveled back to Syria every summer since I was born. I was born here, though, in the United States. And my interactions with them on the ground, and as well as the narrative of the Syrian revolution, in that since day one what they were calling for is a democracy. What they were calling for is the right to elect their own government.

These people, we've lived together for hundreds of years—Muslims, Christians, Alawites, Shiites. We've all lived together for hundreds of years in Syria. Of course, throughout history you'll find disputes and things like that, but it's an ethnically diverse, religiously diverse country that's been able to thrive together.

And so its history kind of speaks to the cohesion and the bonds that exist between the people, as well as coupling that with the narrative of the revolution. Since day one the people are calling for freedom and democracy. They're calling for—you know, they weren't calling for—there were no sectarian slogans, nothing like that—calling for a Syria that represents all Syrian people.

And I believe, furthermore, the Syrian—the majority of the Muslim population is a very moderate Islam, again speaking to my experience with them on the ground. But the further that this situation goes and the lack of international community support has led to frustration of course with the international community and kind of pushed towards some extreme ideologies. But the core Syrian people, their beliefs and their values align with what we all be-



lieve, what we see here, in that they want a Syria that represents all Syrians, regardless of ethnicity, religion.

And I do believe—and I think when you talk to Syrians on the ground, that is what their dream and their wish for a future Syria is. But again, the longer that this takes, the longer that this problem goes on, there are more questions in the air. So the key is helping bring a solution now so that these—so that these groups and these ideals and these beliefs can really show and we can start taking the steps towards a post-Assad Syria, a Syria that all Syrians are asking for.

Mr. BURGESS. I find myself strangely aligned with Mr. Hastings. And perhaps that's because we've spent so much time together the past two days. But perhaps that's a good note on which to end. And I thank you for your tolerance and I'll yield back.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you very much.

And I certainly thank all of you. There's so much more. I hope we get a chance, some of us, to visit personally so that we can perhaps have a meeting about solutions and not just discuss the problems. You've enlightened us a great deal. And again I thank Chairman Cardin and our incredible staff for pulling this hearing together. And I thank you all, ladies and gentlemen, for being with us today.

I regret very much—and when I chaired the commission I tried to open a process where people who have to sit and listen would have an opportunity to ask questions or make statements themselves. Staff didn't like it. I still think it worked. It's boring as hell to come up here and not get a chance to say what you want to say. Somehow or another there's something incredibly wrong with the way we go about doing this, and I think that we could relax it a little bit and learn a great deal more from people sitting in this audience that have a whole lot of information that would be useful to this process. But these incredible witnesses have done a magnificent job, and I thank you all for being here. The hearing is closed.



# APPENDIX

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## PREPARED STATEMENTS

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. MICHAEL BURGESS, COMMISSIONER, COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Thank you Mr. Chairman for the recognition and for calling this hearing today.

In January of 2011, when Syrian protestors took to the streets demanding democracy and the ouster of dictator Bashar al-Assad, they were one of last countries to participate in what has been known as the Arab Spring. This revolutionary wave of demonstrations was a historic one as oppressive and totalitarian governments were toppled giving way to liberty, freedom and the rule of law.

However, a full two and a half years later, the civil war in Syria drags on and on with no end in sight. In fact, just this morning, United Nations' human rights office said that almost 93,000 people have been confirmed killed in the Syrian conflict, with half as much thought to be civilians.

Equally as alarming is that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees claims that as many as 5 million Syrians have been displaced within the country and 1.6 million had fled to neighboring countries to escape the carnage. This is beyond a humanitarian disaster. It should not be surprising that OSCE member states such as Jordan and Turkey have graciously opened their borders and taken in hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees. To be sure, as states that have sworn an oath to a peaceful approach to conflict management and post-conflict rehabilitation, these countries have exemplified the practice of OSCE members.

However, accepting these refugees has not come without consequence. An average of 8,000 Syrians are crossing the border into surrounding states each day, putting an increasing political and financial strain on the countries that have accepted them. Indeed, nations making up the Syria Regional Response Plan have requested almost \$3 billion, including Lebanon and Jordan that have requested a combined \$1.5 billion.

The world has responded. Nations such as the United Kingdom and Germany have given hundreds of millions of dollars. The United States has also had no such difficulty acting, giving more than \$500 million in humanitarian aid.

This war must end. And the United States, together with its international partners in the OSCE, will continue to pledge support towards the Syrian refugees who stood up the face of a tyrant and demanded their freedom.

Again, Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing. I also thank the witnesses for appearing here and am interested in their views as to what actions the United States needs to take going forward to end the refugee crises.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ANNE C. RICHARD, ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR  
POPULATION, REFUGEES AND MIGRATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE*Turkey*

*Current Situation:* Turkey currently is hosting more than 376,000 registered or soon to be registered refugees spread across eight provinces. In addition, tens of thousands of Syrians have sought refuge in Turkey without registering their presence with authorities, according to estimates provided by the Government of Turkey. About 150,000 refugees have arrived since the start of this year as violence in Syria has intensified. Roughly 200,000 refugees live in 17 camps near the border with Syria, while the rest are dispersed in cities and villages throughout the country. With no end in sight to the Syria conflict, Turkish officials and international relief organizations are bracing for up to a million Syrian refugees (UNHCR estimates) in Turkey by the end of 2013.

While Turkey is in the process of building or planning an additional seven camps, it is clear that camp capacity will be insufficient to absorb the increasing numbers of refugees in need of assistance. Initial urban registration efforts point to increasing numbers and needs. The majority of those coming to Turkey are fleeing violence in northern Syria, which includes the major cities of Aleppo, Raqqah, Idlib, and Hasakah. Given the high numbers of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in northern Syria and the continuing violence, significant additional refugee inflows to Turkey are likely.

*Progress Made:* It is worth recalling Chairman Cardin's words of praise in a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing last March about the generosity shown by the Turkish people and their government to the hundreds of thousands of Syrians who have fled to Turkey seeking safety for their families. The Turkish Government has expended more than \$700 million, and up to \$1 billion according to some estimates, to address the enormous needs of the refugee population. Communities across Turkey have opened their doors to Syrian families seeking shelter, food, and security. Turkey's response is virtually unprecedented in refugee crises.

The Government of Turkey maintains a temporary protection regime and an open border policy for refugees fleeing the violence in Syria and has invited and receives the guidance of UNHCR on refugee protection issues. The Turkish government has worked hard to keep Turkey's borders open to the many thousands of vulnerable individuals and families who have sought refuge in Turkey, and it has done so despite considerable financial, security, and political risks. Turkish authorities pride themselves on the ability to care for and provide protection to Syrian refugees, whom they refer to as "guests." In this capacity they have been gracious hosts, providing services in camps that have always met, and in many cases exceeded, international standards of humanitarian assistance. Turkey also makes available temporary residency to Syrian passport holders who have been in the country for more than six months, and has begun registration of undocumented urban refugees. This registration provides access to free medical care. Turkish authorities in refugee-hosting provinces have also reached out to NGOs to help respond to refugee needs.

According to UN reporting, authorities and relief organizations are combining their efforts to construct and furnish new schools for communities heavily impacted by the influx of students from refugee families. The Government of Turkey announced in January that free medical services would be provided for registered refugees living outside of camps, and this announcement was followed by a recent decision to provide free medication to Syrians as well. We applaud the Turkish Government's recent decision to allow accredited Syrian doctors to practice in clinics and hospitals with large numbers of refugee patients. Recognizing the trauma suffered by the victims of Syria's conflict, we are encouraged that the Turkish government has placed social workers in most refugee camps and plans to work with UNHCR, UNICEF and UNFPA to expand programs to address the trauma-related needs of the refugee population.

*Challenges:* The challenges facing Turkey are far too great for any one country, even one as committed to the issue and as financially capable as Turkey, to fully provide for the magnitude of needs. Projections that the refugee population will likely grow to a million by year's end mean that Turkish officials, local communities, and the international humanitarian community are hard-pressed to keep pace with expanding humanitarian needs. Many of our operational partners are struggling with limited resources, while trying to plan for "worst-case" contingencies such as a sudden massive surge of new refugees far beyond what has been projected.

Plans calling for refugee camps to reach a combined capacity of 300,000 necessitate considerable resources for construction of new camps and expansion of serv-

ices to them. Surveys of new refugees indicate that many had been displaced internally in Syria for months and their personal resources were often exhausted by the time they reached refuge in Turkey. In other words, increasingly impoverished refugees are arriving in Turkish border areas. Refugees not accommodated in camps often face considerable challenges in finding and maintaining adequate shelter and providing for other basic needs. Anecdotal accounts of child labor by particularly desperate refugees are increasing; begging by women and children leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Exacerbating the situation in host communities is the fact that some Turkish households have lost more than half their annual income as a result of lost commerce with Syria.

Despite offers by some Turkish communities to enroll refugee students in local schools and the generous support of some governorates and municipalities to establish schools with Syrian teachers, many Syrian children reportedly remain unable to attend because they face language barriers, because schools have reached their maximum capacity, or because they lack the necessary documentation to register. Parents are often reluctant to send children to schools where the curriculum is taught in another language or where attendance may not lead to credit necessary for transferring back into the Syrian school system when refugees return. UNICEF reports that fewer than 23 percent of Syrian children in Turkey are enrolled in school.

The security situation is adding to the challenges already faced by Turkey in caring for such a large population. The recent bombings that took place in Reyhanli left over 50 dead and were the deadliest in Turkey in over a decade. Reyhanli, a city on the border with Syria, has sheltered thousands of Syrian refugees. The attack, which has been linked to Government of Syria agents, prompted backlash by the Turkish community against Syrian refugees and against the Turkish government's deeply pro-opposition stance. Many Syrian refugees, fearing for their safety, fled from Reyhanli in the wake of the attack. Some even returned to Syria. While not a daily occurrence, regular skirmishes involving fire between Turkish security forces and Syrians have occurred along the border. There have also been several incidents involving clashes between Syrian refugees and Turkish authorities in camps although order and calm have always been quickly restored. The Syrian regime's bombings of IDP camps and other rebel strongholds in Syria have occurred in close proximity to the Turkish border. Meanwhile, a wave of protests against the Prime Minister is unfolding across the country, adding a new layer of uncertainty and concern among the public.

*Strategies and Plans:* The U.S. government is providing over \$43 million in humanitarian assistance for Syrian refugees in Turkey, including nearly \$37 million from the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). Through funding to UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA, IOM, IFRC, WFP, and several NGOs, the U.S. Government has strongly supported the Turkish relief effort. In coming weeks we will look at making an additional contribution in response to the growing needs of refugees and host communities.

The updated UN appeal for Turkey has grown to a cumulative total of \$372.3 million. This combined appeal reflects the coordinated intentions of the major international organizations in Turkey and was closely coordinated with the Government of Turkey. It contains several key elements designed to address some of the most pressing needs of Syrians in Turkey. UNHCR, for example, will provide additional shelter support (tents and containers), cooking utensils, blankets and communal water and sanitation facilities for the camps as well as emergency shelter assistance and blankets for the urban populations. Multiple organizations plan to continue reaching out to vulnerable urban refugees to help the Turkish government identify them and better understand their needs. WFP is prepared to expand funding of its electronic food card program to include refugees living in Turkish communities if the Government of Turkey requests food assistance outside of camps. UN programs will also provide support to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and will enhance child protection. UNHCR and UNFPA plan to work with the Turkish Government to examine issues surrounding sexual abuse.

UN support to health facilities, and UN provision of mobile health clinics in urban areas and container clinics in camps will bolster the health sector. WHO will support the coordination and training of Syrian doctors in Turkey as well as provide emergency medication in the camp and urban settings. We are also supporting NGOs to build capacity in Syrian clinics. UNICEF and other partners plan to assist educational systems by refurbishing more schools, providing more prefabricated classrooms and teacher trainings, and supporting recruitment of more educators. Meanwhile, our NGO programming already helps to create child friendly spaces, provide psychological support to children, and address urgent psychosocial needs among vulnerable refugees.

Turkey has proven to be a strong partner as we work to meet the needs of an ever increasing population of Syrian refugees. Like any country facing such a pronounced influx of people, Turkey needs support in order to continue addressing these needs, prepare for contingencies, and prevent the conflict from adversely affecting its own security. We are prepared to continue doing whatever we can to help Turkey face these serious challenges.

#### *Jordan*

*Current Situation:* 473,000 Syrian refugees have fled to Jordan, an increase of nearly 200 percent since January 2013. The massive influx during the first half of the year has far outpaced projections, indicating that Jordan may be coping with as many as one million Syrian refugees by the end of this year. Currently about three-quarters of the refugees live in Jordanian towns and villages, while one-quarter live in camps.

With northern Jordanian communities increasingly overwhelmed by the refugee influx and even greater numbers anticipated in coming months, Jordanian authorities are placing a higher priority on steering new arrivals to designated refugee camps that are expected to shelter as many as 300,000 refugees by year's end. Two camps currently host Syrian refugees: Za'atri camp, which is nearing capacity with 110,000 occupants; and the Emirati Jordanian Camp that opened in April with an initial capacity of 5,000 but a potential long-term capacity of 30,000 or more. The Government of Jordan and UNHCR are constructing a third camp, Azraq, with an eventual capacity of 130,000 occupants. In addition to Syrian nationals, about 6,700 Palestinian refugees who lived for decades in Syria have fled to Jordan, and are expected to number about 10,000 by December.

*Progress Made:* The Government and people of Jordan have strived to cope with the unprecedented refugee influx with hospitality and tolerance. The government has significantly expanded the number of registration centers in urban areas, including in Amman, to help refugees register their presence and more easily access assistance programs. The Government of Jordan pays for water and sanitation services for refugees living in host communities and permits refugee families to utilize public health services side-by-side with Jordanian citizens. Vaccinations and maternity care are provided free of charge. More than 200,000 refugees receive food aid with UN support, and 40,000 receive regular, direct cash assistance payments.

The government is working with UNHCR to reorganize Za'atri camp in order to improve security and living standards, including by transitioning residents from tents to prefabricated shelters. In reaction to concerns about a measles outbreak, authorities and relief workers have vaccinated 90 percent of Za'atri's occupants. The humanitarian operation that provides services to Za'atri is impressive in its scale: some 3.4 million liters of water are trucked to the camp daily; some 220,000 blankets and more than 300,000 mattresses and sleeping mats have been distributed in the camp since January.

The Jordanian government's willingness to be flexible and innovative in response to the humanitarian emergency is impressive. In January, the Government of Jordan established a Syrian Refugee Camp Department to help officials focus on camp security and assistance needs. Officials are in the process of finalizing national guidelines for more consistent handling of child protection cases and gender-based violence. During the past half-year, authorities have given UNHCR greater access to border areas and have allowed a 50 percent increase in the number of international humanitarian organizations authorized to work in the country.

*Challenges:* There are troubling signs that the Jordanians' impressive hospitality is wearing thin under the relentless pressure of ever-rising refugee numbers. UNHCR and UNRWA have expressed concern over reports that border guards have denied entry to Syrians and Palestinians seeking refuge. The Jordanian Parliament earlier this year called for tighter restrictions on the entry of refugees into the country. A local newspaper survey reported that nearly three of every four Jordanians favored closing the border. Jordanian policies restrict the ability of refugees to find legal employment, increasing their vulnerability. Water shortages looming in the hot season and scheduled increases in electricity tariffs may produce added social tensions. Support to northern Jordan is a priority, as large numbers of Syrian refugees have settled into some of Jordan's poorest rural communities, triggering higher prices for rent and food for refugees and residents alike.

Health workers report that health clinics and hospitals are overwhelmed by patients, particularly in northern Jordan. A considerable number of patients arrive suffering from life-threatening wounds related to the conflict and requiring emergency attention and prolonged recovery and rehabilitation. Shelter experts report that they are finding more Syrians living in crowded, disrepaired, substandard

housing because it is the only shelter refugees can afford due to the higher rents caused by the tight housing market.

Due in part to its sheer size, conditions in Za'atri camp have been difficult to improve despite efforts by the Government and UNHCR. The camp is seriously overcrowded and suffers from rampant vandalism, security incidents, and civil unrest on an almost daily basis. Plans to install better lighting in the camp to improve security at night have been delayed because of concerns that elements in the camp would vandalize light fixtures. Large numbers of refugees have left Za'atri camp to strike out on their own in search of better conditions elsewhere in Jordan; relief workers warn that better monitoring is required to ensure that these highly vulnerable individuals are not becoming victimized by exploitation and trafficking networks.

In short, there is a pervasive sense in Jordan that all parts of the humanitarian community are doing more and have committed more resources, yet are falling behind the pace of events and the burgeoning humanitarian needs.

*Strategies and Plans:* The U.S. government is providing more than \$101 million to support humanitarian operations for refugees from Syria in Jordan since the crisis began. We will look closely at increasing our contribution in coming weeks, in response to the expanding needs and the revised UN appeal released last week. The UN's revised appeal calls for a cumulative total of \$976 million to address protection and assistance needs in Jordan alone. The UN appeal seeks to ramp up assistance not only to the country's current and future refugees, but also to a half-million Jordanian residents in hard-hit host communities. We agree that is the right approach.

Our number one priority in Jordan is to maintain open borders so that traumatized victims of the Syrian conflict can reach safety. To encourage keeping the borders open for refugees, the international community must continue to work closely with the Government of Jordan to support the massive relief operation underway, help pay for the expensive but absolutely necessary expansion of refugee camps to accommodate ever-more refugee arrivals, and direct more services to refugees and the local Jordanian communities struggling to absorb them. In the second half of 2013, PRM will place a priority on supporting stronger programs in Jordan to register Syrian refugees so that they can access basic services, construction of new and expanded refugee camps, services that benefit Jordanian communities impacted by the refugee influx, health care for life-saving activities, and protection programs that target the needs of women and children. We also will encourage our operational partners in Jordan to put more contingency plans in place given the risk of further deterioration inside Syria.

We are working closely with our interagency colleagues to implement a whole-of-government approach to boost support to host governments and communities in the region, including more bilateral economic and development aid to help maintain and expand public services for all populations. USAID/Jordan is already providing assistance to Jordanian host communities. In addition to a \$200 million cash transfer to the Government of Jordan to help alleviate budget pressures caused by the influx of Syrian refugees, USAID has also identified additional sources of funding and adapted other bilateral projects to support essential services in water, education, and health, and added support for vulnerable populations in response to the impacts of the Syrian crisis. Our focus on areas heavily affected by the Syrian refugee influx includes programs for health and education, as well as capacity-building for affected municipalities. We have also urged the United Nations to allow local people to benefit from assistance programs in order to ease local tensions.

We are encouraged that the updated UN appeal emphasizes the need for improved refugee shelters and will strengthen refugee registration programs to more effectively identify survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and other traumas. UN and NGO agencies will seek to bolster Jordan's education system by adding pre-fabricated classrooms, teacher training, and financial support so that refugee students can receive the less visible help many of them need, such as psycho-social programs and skills training in vocational education activities.

We will continue to pay special attention to the need for dramatic improvements to security in Za'atri camp. We are working with the Government of Jordan on ideas to improve security in the camp, which we hope to be able to discuss in the near future.

#### *Lebanon*

*Current Situation:* Lebanon is facing a significant crisis as the Syrian conflict encroaches further into Lebanese affairs. Attacks from Syria targeting Lebanese towns and villages in the Bekaa and north have become a daily reality. Forces of the Syrian regime regularly violate Lebanese territory. Tripoli's Sunni and Alawite communities are engaging in escalating street battles, and Beirut and Sidon are on edge



as sectarian and political tensions flare. Hizballah's increasing involvement in Syria, including sending its fighters to assault Syrians on behalf of the Asad regime, is threatening Lebanese stability, exacerbating sectarian tensions, and is contrary to the Government of Lebanon's stated policy of disassociation from the Syrian conflict.

Lebanon hosts more than 513,000 Syrian refugees, more than half of whom have arrived in the past five months. Thousands of Lebanese migrant workers who have worked on Syrian farms for years have lost their livelihoods and been forced to return home. More than 57,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria have fled to Lebanon. As the overwhelming needs of these vulnerable populations continue to grow, Lebanon is at risk of being torn apart at its sectarian seams.

*Review of Humanitarian Efforts:* Despite these challenges, Lebanon has consistently maintained an open border to all those fleeing the violence and is working closely with UN agencies and NGO partners to provide assistance to those in need. The Ministry of Social Affairs has activated its large network of Social Development Centers to disseminate information on available services to the refugee community. Lebanon has enrolled 30,000 Syrian refugee children in nearly 1,000 public schools. And refugees are receiving medical care at public hospitals and clinics around the country.

Registration is a key protection strategy to identify the most vulnerable and to ensure access to appropriate services. We commend UNHCR's herculean effort to scale up its registration capacity, which has cut the waiting time for new arrivals to less than 30 days. The World Food Program is delivering food assistance to some 220,000 persons, and UNHCR and implementing partners have distributed thousands of blankets, mattresses, and hygiene kits to those in need. The World Health Organization (WHO) has supported the Lebanese Ministry of Health to conduct a measles vaccination campaign for 460,000 Syrian and Lebanese children.

*Concerns/Challenges:* The Government of Lebanon's caretaker status has prevented any major policy decisions in terms of the refugee response. Due to lack of funding, the government's High Relief Commission was forced to suspend funding of secondary health care for Syrian refugees in July 2012. The Government has worked closely with the UN and NGO partners to identify needs and to coordinate the overall humanitarian response, but the overwhelming volume of needs will require a strategic, targeted approach to focus on the most vulnerable cases.

Shelter is a particular challenge in Lebanon, as the Government of Lebanon has expressly avoided establishing camps for Syrian refugees. Nearly all of the 513,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon reside in host communities, renting apartments and spare rooms or sharing space with a Lebanese family. The massive inflows to host communities in recent months have resulted in a dwindling number of buildings available for rehabilitation. Meanwhile, the potential for collective shelters is limited. Partners have agreed on the need to establish transit sites to accommodate new arrivals, but await the government's final approval for this approach given political sensitivities to refugee camps in Lebanese society. A disturbing new trend is the development of over 200 informal tented settlements throughout the Bekaa valley and northern Lebanon. These improvised shelters are often sub-standard, with limited or no sanitation facilities and located in areas prone to flooding and at risk of fire. UNHCR and other partners have prioritized the provision of assistance to these vulnerable communities to avoid the outbreak of communicable diseases and to improve shelter quality before next winter.

More than 57,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria have fled fighting in the Damascus area and have moved into overcrowded existing Palestinian camps with poor living conditions. Tensions already run high in these camps, which were overcrowded, volatile, and in disrepair before the arrival of Palestinian refugees from Syria that increased the overall Palestinian population in country by approximately 20 percent. U.S. support to UNRWA in Lebanon provides needed assistance to this population, including cash assistance, relief supplies, education, and medical care.

*Priorities/Strategies/Plans:* The U.S. Government is providing more than \$88 million to support humanitarian operations in Lebanon for refugees fleeing the violence in Syria. The UN has requested \$1.2 billion in the revised appeal to support humanitarian assistance programs in Lebanon. Needs have consistently outstripped response capacity, and the projected toll of hosting up to one million Syrian refugees by the end of 2013 point to the need for broader economic and development support from the international community. The Government of Lebanon has identified an additional \$450 million needed to support national institutions, including the Ministries of Health, Education, and Social Affairs.

Prepositioning of humanitarian supplies will be crucial to enabling a flexible, rapid response that is prepared for a massive influx of Syrian refugees from the Damascus area, should violence significantly increase. The UN has prioritized \$17.5 million in the revised appeal to prepare shelter stocks for up to 100,000 people, as

well as \$21.8 million for basic essentials such as mattresses, hygiene kits, clothing, heaters, and other items that a sudden influx of refugees will require. The United States commends this focus on preparedness, and will support these efforts through ongoing financial contributions to humanitarian partners and identifying ways to target bilateral assistance to address Lebanon's most urgent needs as it continues to respond to this crisis.

USAID, through its current programming, has intensified efforts to support Lebanese communities most heavily affected by the Syrian crisis through activities that address three key challenges: local service delivery; conflict mitigation; and income generation/livelihoods. From education to water to agriculture and local governance, many of these activities improve service delivery, expand economic and educational opportunities, and support youth to encourage their participation in resolving community concerns.

### *Iraq*

*Current Situation:* Some 157,000 Syrian refugees have fled to Iraq, an increase of at least 89,000 since the start of the year. During the first half of the year, 600–800 Syrians arrived daily. The UN projects that the number of refugees may double to 350,000 by the end of 2013. About 65 percent of registered refugees are in mostly urban settings, while 35 percent live in three camps.

The vast majority of refugees fled into Iraq's Kurdish Region, where many have ethnic and familial ties. Set up by the Kurdistan Regional Government, Domiz camp accommodates approximately 50,000 persons. Another 3,200 refugees reside in two camps established by the Government of Iraq in Anbar province at al-Qa'im. An additional camp is under construction in Erbil province and will eventually accommodate 12,000 refugees. Many Syrian refugees have returned to Syria in recent weeks to check on property, visit family, or to settle back into localities where security has improved.

*Progress Made:* National and local authorities in the Kurdish Region responded generously to the refugee influx and moved quickly to establish services with support from the international community. The Kurdish community launched a fundraising drive to provide food and other emergency supplies to the Syrian Kurdish refugees flooding into the Kurdish Region. While more remains to be done, the Kurdistan Regional Government worked hard to facilitate relief efforts by UNHCR and other UN humanitarian agencies working in Domiz refugee camp. The Council of Ministers of the central government recently approved a \$5.2 million transfer to the Kurdistan Regional Government to support services such as water, electricity and road construction.

Some 40,000 refugees received supplies to insulate their shelters against winter weather. WFP has operated a school feeding program for refugee children during the past year and established a U.S. Government-funded food voucher program covering approximately 48,000 refugees in Domiz camp. WFP also does monthly food distributions in the al-Qa'im camps. The refugee camps offer free primary health services, including for reproductive and mental health. UNHCR recently launched a new working group to coordinate responses for Syrian refugees in urban areas of the Independent Kurdish Region. UNHCR is beginning to distribute cash assistance of \$200–\$800 (dependent on family size) to extremely vulnerable refugees in Erbil, Dohuk, and Sulimaniyah.

*Challenges:* Border closures are a primary concern. The Government of Iraq closed the al-Qa'im border crossing into Anbar province in October 2012—except for urgent medical cases—citing security concerns about potential infiltration by extremists. Entreaties from the U.S. Government and others to balance legitimate security concerns with the humanitarian imperative to provide refuge to those fleeing violence, including offers to assist with border screening procedures, have not succeeded in convincing Iraqi authorities. At the end of March, Rabiya border crossing was also closed. On May 19, the Kurdistan Regional Government closed Fishkabout border, the main crossing point into northern Iraq, reportedly due to political tensions between Kurdish groups.

Serious overcrowding in Domiz camp is another emerging challenge. While authorities and humanitarian agencies managed to meet the most important needs of the first waves of refugees, continued inflows have raised tensions among camp residents and have produced sanitation problems that expose camp residents to disease. Increased rates of hepatitis and diarrheal disease among children have been reported. Nearly 1,000 families in Domiz live in makeshift shelters because the camp has no more land formally allocated to erect tents within the camp's current boundaries. Some 3,500 families are cohabitating in tents with other families for that reason. Additional land has been allocated for new sections, but construction has been slow. In anticipation of continued influxes, UN officials worked with local Kurdish

officials to identify suitable land in Sulimaniyah for additional camps, but construction is delayed until after the harvest. Education concerns in the camp also need attention. Despite the opening of a third school in April, less than 40 percent of school-age children in Domiz are enrolled.

The combination of substandard conditions in Domiz camp and restrictions imposed on refugees' freedom of movement in areas beyond the Independent Kurdish Region are believed to be among several factors that have prompted more than 11,000 Syrian refugees to return to Syria despite the dangers there. While services inside the al-Qa'im camps in Anbar generally meet basic needs, refugees are required to stay inside camps, which limits their ability to engage in economic activities to support themselves and prevents them from visiting relatives in the area. Refugees are increasingly opting to return to Syria out of frustration with the lack of freedom of movement. Relief agencies report anecdotally that camp schools are experiencing high dropout rates because of child labor and early marriages propelled by economic and social stresses facing refugee households.

More information is needed about the living conditions of the more than 100,000 registered refugees living in Iraqi host communities, as well as those who have not been registered. The Kurdistan Regional Government stopped issuing residency permits to refugees in May 2013, making it harder for refugees living in the Kurdistan Region to access local public services such as health centers and schools.

*Strategies and Plans:* The U.S. Government will continue to encourage Iraqi authorities to maintain open borders between Iraq and Syria. It is critical that persons seeking to flee the horrific violence in Syria are able to do so. We will also continue to press the Kurdistan Regional Government to approve additional land in suitable locations to keep pace with the refugee influx that is almost certain to continue in the second half of this year and to allow our humanitarian partners to assist refugees regardless of where they reside. The aggregate UN appeal for the refugee emergency in Iraq is \$310.8 million. The U.S. Government is providing nearly \$19 million to refugee relief operations in Iraq thus far, in addition to PRM's general regional contributions, and will announce additional support in the near future. Separately, we have also offered our assistance to the Government of Iraq to improve its border security, including to address a possible spillover of chemical weapons.

We are pleased that the newly updated UN appeal includes a stronger emphasis on efforts to support the heavily impacted local communities that shelter Syrian refugees. The UN strategy would provide support not only to Syrian refugees but also to some 50,000 Iraqi citizens living in areas with large refugee concentrations. The appeal proposes to provide more medicines, equipment, and training to local Iraqi health clinics; rehabilitation of local schools that Syrian refugees used as temporary shelters; and cash assistance to refugee families so that they can purchase essential supplies directly from local merchants. We strongly encourage authorities in Iraq to work closely with humanitarian agencies to reach the most vulnerable people—both Syrian and Iraqi—living in those host communities.

### *Egypt*

*Current Situation:* The humanitarian impact of the conflict in Syria has spilled into North Africa. UNHCR had registered 59,885 Syrians with 19,382 still awaiting registration as of June 9. These numbers represent a near doubling of the Syrian refugee population in the past two months. UNHCR predicts that up to 500,000 Syrians (registered and non-registered) could be present in Egypt by the end of 2013.

Syrians are relocating to Egypt rather than to adjacent countries for a range of reasons: pre-existing familial or community connections, the relatively high costs of living in neighboring countries, perceptions of fewer security risks and better employment opportunities in Egypt, and an opportunity to live with fewer restrictions. Until June 2012, Syrians arriving in Egypt were primarily middle- to upper-middle class families with sufficient resources to reside in affluent areas of the capital or other cities. Although Cairo, Alexandria and Damietta are the primary locations hosting Syrians, a growing number have relocated to poorer neighborhoods of Greater Cairo because it is more affordable for families with limited resources. It is anticipated that refugee arrivals will continue to increase as the school year in Syria comes to an end.

*Progress Made:* The Government of Egypt, civil society, and charitable organizations have responded generously to the needs of Syrian refugees. The Egyptian government grants Syrians a visa-free entry followed by a renewable three-month residency, as well as access to public schools and hospitals. After this period, Syrians are expected to regularize their stay by extending their residency permits every six months. Syrians with children enrolled in school can obtain one-year residency permits. Syrians registered with UNHCR are able to obtain six-month renewable residency permits on their UNHCR refugee card.

UNHCR has a well-established refugee program in Egypt that already offered protection and assistance to some 48,000 asylum-seekers and refugees from other countries in the region. UNHCR and other international humanitarian agencies are working to extend their coverage into new areas in order to reach the growing Syrian population dispersed throughout Egypt.

*Challenges:* Despite the warm welcome Egyptians have provided to Syrian refugees, it will become more difficult to sustain the level of assistance as numbers mount. Since the 2011 revolution in Egypt, the uncertain political and economic situation creates challenges for Egyptian as well as refugees. Although Syrian refugees are keen to work, Egyptian unemployment rates are high and work permits are difficult to obtain for refugees and other foreigners. Housing is expensive for refugees with limited resources. As refugee families' resources continue to diminish, many will struggle to sustain their current living arrangements.

Although Egyptian authorities have granted Syrians access to public health care, the existing system is already overburdened and additional support is required in areas of primary, maternal, and child health care as well as for life-saving health interventions. Education is also a concern. While the Government of Egypt has provided access to public schools at the primary and secondary levels, enrollment and integration of Syrian children is complicated. Public schools have limited openings for additional students, and private schools are too expensive for many refugee households. Sexual harassment is a concern for school-age girls who report to UNHCR that they are harassed on the way to school and inside school buildings.

As the flow of new Syrian refugees continues, the main challenge for UNHCR and its operational partners will be the provision of regular services and outreach to Syrians who have dispersed to remote areas of Egypt outside the scope of existing humanitarian operations.

*Strategies and Plans:* The aggregate UN appeal for the refugee emergency in Egypt is \$66.7 million. The U.S. Government is providing \$2.1 million to support refugee programs in Egypt, including \$1.7 million from PRM. We will look closely at augmenting that amount in the near future. A strong and sustained humanitarian response will be essential as the number of Syrian arrivals continues to grow and those already in Egypt deplete their savings and become less able to support their families. It will be important to sustain steps already taken to expedite refugee registration and conduct regular assessments of their needs so that UNHCR and its operational partners can continue to design flexible programs responsive to their needs. The Government of Egypt, UNHCR, other UN agencies, IOM, and NGOs will need to coordinate closely to ensure that humanitarian programs are as comprehensive and inclusive as possible.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MICHEL GABAUDAN, PRESIDENT, REFUGEES  
INTERNATIONAL

Mr. Chairman and members of the Helsinki Commission of the United States Congress, thank you for the invitation to testify today on the situation of Syrian refugees and the impact on the countries hosting them. Refugees International (RI) appreciates the Commission's interest in what is arguably the most important humanitarian and political crisis of the day. We are pleased to have this opportunity to speak with you about the larger situation and ways to address it.

Refugees International is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that advocates for lifesaving assistance and protection for displaced people and refugees in some of the most difficult parts of the world. Based here in Washington, we conduct 10 to 15 field missions a year to places like Colombia, DR Congo, Myanmar, and South Sudan, on behalf of the most vulnerable communities, particularly those displaced from their homes and needing lifesaving assistance. Notably, Refugees International does not accept government or United Nations funding, which allows our advocacy to be impartial and independent.

Over the course of the past year-and-a-half, RI twice visited each refugee-hosting country bordering Syria, crossing into northern Syria during our most recent trip in March. On that same trip, we spent considerable time in northern Iraq, administered by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), and along the southern border of Turkey.

Since the initial uprising in Syria in March 2011, the number of displaced Syrians has reached staggering proportions: 1.5 million are refugees in the region, almost 7 million inside Syria need humanitarian assistance, and more than 4 million of the latter are internally displaced. Two significant diplomatic interventions have not resulted in a peace plan, a cease-fire, or even sustained humanitarian access to areas where the fiercest fighting is taking place. To date, every effort to bring the Syrian government together with the opposition for constructive discussion has been fruitless. And while the world attempts to help resolve the crisis in Syria, Syrians themselves continue to face insecurity inside Syria, and countries receiving large numbers of Syrians fleeing the war are straining under the pressure. The prospect of spillover violence in these countries is emerging as a central security concern.

Refugees International has been following the development of the Syrian crisis since its beginning, and was among the first non-governmental organizations on the ground in Lebanon at a time when Syrians began to arrive in that country in large numbers and the UN was unable to access many communities hosting the refugees. Our earliest advocacy focused on pushing the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to expeditiously expand its area of operations and to encourage the U.S. government and other donors to deepen their engagement with local government and community leaders to support refugees in need. The latter recommendation was included in the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs report accompanying the Fiscal Year 2013 spending bill. In that report, the Committee expressed that it: "understands that effective expansion of relief efforts in the region associated with the unrest in Syria will require increased partnerships with local, nongovernmental organizations and community-based organization. The Committee encourages the Department of State to further diversify these partnerships."

The number of refugees we saw flowing out of Syria at the time of that recommendation was modest. Unfortunately, the U.S. agencies responsible for building effective partnerships at the grassroots level did not use the time they had to build these relationships. Now with the pace of displacement increasing considerably, we regret to report that those agencies are only beginning to adapt their approach to partnership to effectively support refugees and host communities. Time has been lost, making it now more urgent that the State Department and USAID rapidly update their approach to responding to regional humanitarian crises to include different partners such as local government and community-based organizations. The United Nations, its partners, and local organizations in all the refugee receiving countries—Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey—work diligently every day to meet the survival needs of the refugees and offer safe spaces, but the sheer numbers are overwhelming their capacity to respond adequately. Likewise, inside Syria, restrictions by the Syrian regime and the general insecurity prevent the UN, its partners, and local humanitarian actors from reaching most of the people in need.

Understanding that a political solution to the crisis will be slow in arriving, RI continues to evaluate the humanitarian response region-wide with the intent of ensuring those who can be reached by humanitarian assistance receive it in a timely and responsible fashion. While each country hosting Syrian refugees has challenges unique to its own social and political situation, there are some commonalities across

the region. First and foremost, as is the case with many humanitarian responses that involve the international community, funding for the response has not kept up with demand. Last week the United Nations released its new requests for funds to help Syrians: \$2.9 billion for refugees, and \$1.5 billion for those inside. These are the largest humanitarian appeals in the UN's history—an indication of the scope of the crisis. To date, both appeals are less than 30% funded.

In addition to the need for funds, each neighboring country must make ongoing decisions about whether to keep its borders open. These decisions are affected by the numbers of refugees arriving, their relationship with the host community, possible spillover of the conflict that drove them out, and the host government's ability to provide support, usually in conjunction with the UN system. In the past year and-a-half, RI visited Syrian refugees both inside and outside of camps across the region. We saw concerns as straightforward as shortages of shelter, and as complex as a lack of services for women who have survived sexual violence. The world has witnessed an incredibly generous response by Syria's neighbors regarding open borders, but all of these countries have repeatedly indicated that there is a limit to how much more they can provide without significant assistance from the rest of the world.

While the situation for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon has remained quite visible in the media and in policy circles, Turkey and Iraq have captured less international attention. Jordan and Lebanon host the largest numbers of Syrians and the ongoing efforts to support those countries are well-deserved and absolutely necessary. Turkey has relaxed its initial inclination to keep the international community at arm's length and requested assistance, and Iraq is facing a very real crisis in providing for Syrian arrivals. U.S. and the broader international community's support for Syrian refugees fleeing into Iraqi Kurdistan has been complicated by the political tension between Baghdad and Erbil. With more than 95 percent of Syrian refugees in Iraq residing in the Kurdish region, and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) being the main funder for sustaining refugees even as oil payments have been cut by Baghdad, it is imperative that the U.S. and donor countries better coordinate support with the KRG.

Both Turkey and Iraq present unique challenges to the current model of supporting refugees through the UN and its partner agencies. The added attention that the Helsinki Commission has been able to bring to the question of how best to respond to Syrian refugees in different political contexts is welcomed just one week after the UN released its largest humanitarian appeal in history.

#### *Turkey*

During RI's most recent visit in March, officials of the Turkish government regularly concluded meetings with the same statement: Turkey needs help if it is going to maintain and expand its response to the Syrian refugees. Turkey is not officially listed as an international donor country providing financial assistance to the Syrian refugee response, but if all of the benefits and services that Turkey provides for Syrian were to be monetized, it would immediately rise to the top of list of worldwide donors. The Turkish government estimates that it has spent \$1 billion on its response to Syrians. This includes administration and support to 17 government-run camps for Syrian refugees in Turkey—five of which are very high quality container camps and the others very good tent camps. There are also new camps and new expansions to existing camps underway in Turkey. On average, these camps each cost more than \$2 million monthly to operate, or nearly half a billion dollars a year.

In addition to the camps, which host some 200,000 Syrian refugees, Turkey also has initiated limited health services and very limited educational support for some non-camp or urban refugee populations. In the near-term the government, in collaboration with UNHCR, is expected to put into operation more than 10 mobile registration units that will allow greater numbers of non-camp refugees to register for health services. Notably, the government of Turkey has also been able to support the provision of aid into Syria through its zero-point distribution system. Zero-point distribution is the term used to refer to the process by which Turkish agencies transfer aid at the border to Syrians who then distribute the food and medical supplies to displaced people and others in need inside the northern areas of Syria. At the outset of the crisis, Turkey declined international support believing that it would be able to provide adequate assistance to people in need for a short period of time. However, as the conflict dragged on and the number of refugees grew rapidly, the level of assistance required also increased. For almost a year now, Turkey's government has requested additional financial assistance from the international community to share some of the burden of providing for a large refugee population.

Such support will be crucial to Turkey's ability not only to maintain the established camps, but also to develop a comprehensive response to those Syrians not in

the camps. While the quality of the government-run refugee camps is quite high, it stands in stark relief to the nearly complete lack of services for those who cannot be accommodated in those camps, and whom Turkey's government has only recently begun to recognize. The UNHCR is allowed only a very limited role in Turkey, and NGOs—both local and international—struggle to register with the government in order to have their programs officially sanctioned. As a result, the main service for non-camp Syrians in Turkey at the moment is registration of guest status. Registration with either a host government or the United Nations is an important component of refugee protection, but outside of the Turkish camps it is offered only in a few select urban areas with the largest Syrian populations, leaving significant numbers of Syrians without even this most basic form of protection.

Refugees International strongly encourages the U.S. government to offer direct, bilateral financial support to Turkey equal to the amount necessary to operate the refugee camps for one month, or roughly \$60 million. While this sum is a modest contribution to the Turkish refugee response, it is a meaningful symbol of solidarity with the Syrian refugees and the Turkish communities that play host to the victims of this conflict. While Turkey may not be a "usual" recipient of U.S. economic aid, the unique situation it is in right now merits reconsideration of direct assistance. A month's worth of operating expenses for the camps would also allow Turkey to dedicate more of its own resources to services for Syrians outside of camps, could encourage Turkey to keep its borders open to those fleeing Syria, and would acknowledge to the rest of the world that Turkey is doing an excellent job in responding to the needs of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees. Supporting Turkey in its work is not simply an expression of good will; it is a very real way to offer aid to more Syrians seeking refuge. Besides those in Turkey, Syrians inside Syria will also benefit from Turkey being able to use more of its resources pushing aid across the border through zero-point distribution efforts, which it has been carrying out effectively for some time now. Given the absence of predictable access inside Syria by the UN and by other donor countries, we need to take advantage of any entry points into Syria for humanitarian assistance, even those that are unorthodox.

To further address possibilities for getting aid into Syria, RI also examined the network of Syrian and Syrian-run groups that are operating from Turkey near the Syrian border. Some of these groups are formal NGOs registered in other countries, and some are simply an individual or collection of people with connections inside Syria and a lot of courage. Cross-border aid is happening from every neighboring country of Syria, and Turkey is no exception. Syrian refugees and expatriates enter Syria daily to deliver food and medical supplies to local civil committees for distribution to their communities. The same organizations also provide other types of aid in the service of Syrians and their future civil society: they bring NGO workers into Turkey to train them in capacity-building, humanitarian principles, and documentation; they escort groups of volunteers who do field surgery inside Syria; they extract the wounded who need urgent care and get them to the border; and they provide a constant stream of information back and forth about what is happening on the ground that journalists and authorities don't see. In speaking with these groups, it became apparent that as a whole they have extensive access to Syria's interior that the multilateral agencies and INGOs simply do not have right now.

The INGOs will always be a main responder in humanitarian crises—they have the experience, the know-how, and the resources to provide an effective response. They generally work with local partners in-country and provide them with support and experience. But Bashar al-Assad's government places restrictions on movement and provision of aid in many areas of Syria. As a result, local groups with more direct access to vulnerable populations in non-government controlled areas of Syria are a means—possibly the only means right now—of providing a larger humanitarian response inside the country. But they are underfunded, understaffed, and undertrained in international humanitarian principles. U.S. government agencies working in the region are aware of and connected to many of these organizations as part of efforts to nurture a democratic civil society in the future Syria. However, rather than waiting for that time, the U.S. should be actively engaging with the groups that wish to do humanitarian aid now. The U.S. should be training, equipping and mentoring them so that when the time comes for them to work with the vulnerable populations in a peaceful Syria, they have the experience and collaborations that make their work immediately effective.

#### *Iraq*

Refugees International first visited northern Iraq in October 2012. The number of Syrian refugees had just begun to grow at the rapid pace we see today—roughly 500 new arrivals every day. The vast majority of Syrian refugees crossed into Iraqi Kurdistan. A smaller number entered through the border crossing at al-Qa'im in

Anbar province which at the time was still open on a limited basis. It has since been closed. In total, roughly 6,000 refugees crossed into Anbar and took up residence in the modest sized al-Qaim camp.

At that time, the KRG authorities were doing their best to respond to the needs of the Syrian refugees. However, as hundreds of new refugees entered Domiz camp on a daily basis, it was evident that the existing camp would soon reach its capacity and most new arrivals, irrespective of their ability to provide for themselves, would be forced to seek shelter and assistance in Erbil and other cities and towns throughout the region. From the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis, Iraq did not garner the international attention that countries like Jordan and Lebanon did. The weak levels of financial support reflect this neglect. The United Nations humanitarian appeal has always included requests to support its work in Iraq, but donations specifically for the country have been sparse, and donations for regional work were not often directed to Iraq. This means that although the UN is present in Iraq, it has very little funding for its work. Few international NGOs arrived to support the refugee response in Iraq in the early stages, and those who did were unable to marshal much of their own funding.

According to the most current UN funding data, Iraq has received only \$43 million since the beginning of the Syrian crisis began—less than 15 percent of the recently updated appeal. Only Egypt has fared as badly as Iraq in garnering financial burden sharing. On RI's first visit to the KRG, winter was approaching and none of the aid agencies had resources to prepare for the cold and wet weather that would arrive. There were shortages of fuel, warm clothing, and medicines to address cold weather illnesses. Weak international financial support resulted in a very slow roll out of winterization projects, to the extent that when RI visited the camp again in April 2013, international agencies were still attempting to complete projects.

Now, the arrival of summer is bringing new challenges. Camp residents in particular are worried about clean water, protection from the heat, and especially the lack of sanitation that will bring new diseases. Over the past couple of months, cases of hepatitis-A and diarrhea have increased in the camp, and the continuing flow of new arrivals has further exacerbated the problem of overcrowding. It appears refugees in Domiz camp will relive last winter's nightmare of late seasonal assistance during the scorching summer of northern Iraq with potentially more disastrous ramifications this time.

Over the past year, Domiz has grown from a somewhat overburdened camp with insufficient assistance programs in place to a dangerously overcrowded community with decreasing order and regulation. In April, camp authorities stopped distributing tents because the camp had no space and inadequate infrastructure. Nevertheless, Syrians arrived every day and pitched their own tents wherever they could find space, or moved in with friends and relatives. A camp originally designed for 10,000 people is now home to more than 35,000, many of whom have no access to clean water, sanitation services, or waste removal.

Refugees in the main cities of northern Iraq are not faring much better. Though they officially have the same rights as Iraqis to access public services such as food assistance, public school enrolment, and medical care, the reality is that the social safety net is inadequately funded for Iraqis and leaves citizens and Syrian refugees alike without assistance. Syrian refugees are generally allowed to work without much objection, but jobs are difficult to find, just as they are for Iraqis, and Syrians are paid less for the same work. There is sometimes an initial food distribution that comes with registration, but no regular assistance to speak of. Moreover, as the number of Syrians seeking to register grows, the wait time for formal recognition by UNHCR has increased—thus prolonging the period of time before newly arrived refugees are eligible to receive the limited services available.

Most urban Syrian refugee children are not enrolled in school because elementary education is in Kurdish. There are a few private Arabic language schools, but they are expensive and not centrally located. The UNHCR has offered minimal cash assistance in the urban areas, but the KRG is not equipped to fill in the gap.

The government, the UN, and the NGOs in northern Iraq need support for summer preparations immediately, and in the urban areas this will include cash assistance programming to help people pay rent and utility bills. There are a number of local Iraqi NGOs in the KRG run by people who are experienced in humanitarian aid provision and standards. But most of these organizations struggle for funding, even those that have partnerships with the international NGOs present in northern Iraq. While the UN recently released ERF funds for NGOs working with Syrian refugees in Iraq, PRM's request for proposals from INGOs and local NGOs does not extend to this area of programs. The regional RFP as it pertains to Iraq is for work with Iraqi IDPs and returnees only, and this overlooks more than 100,000 people in need of humanitarian assistance.



A complicating factor in providing adequate assistance to refugees currently being supported largely by the KRG is the obligation for most humanitarian funding to be approved by Baghdad. Officials in Baghdad appear to have taken the position that because the refugees in northern Iraq are Kurds, they are the sole responsibility of the KRG. While the KRG does not formally dispute this idea, it does object to not receiving a budget distribution that accounts for support to an extra 100,000 or more people. It is unlikely at this point that the government in Baghdad would be willing to provide extra support for Syrian refugees in the KRG. Thus, innovative thinking on how the international community and particularly the U.S. can ensure adequate financial support for the humanitarian response in Iraq is essential to improving the conditions in which Syrian refugees currently live. As in Turkey, the good will and generous provision of aid for Syrians by the regional government is unsustainable. As the number of refugees continues to grow and threatens to outstrip the resources available to assist them, there is real concern that relations with the host communities may become more strained.

#### *Lebanon and Jordan*

Lebanon and Jordan have received the largest number of Syrian refugees in the region: combined, the two countries host almost 800,000 officially registered refugees. To date, Lebanon and Jordan have received nearly 80 percent (or \$652 million) of the multilateral funds given in support of the Syrian Regional Response Plan. Nevertheless, the financing shortfall between what Lebanon and Jordan have received and what humanitarian agencies have estimated as the true need in these countries is over \$1.5 billion, representing 72 percent of the plan's overall funding gap.

By percentage of population, Lebanon is the country most impacted by Syrian refugees: roughly 10 percent of the 4.5 million people now living in Lebanon are Syrian refugees. In a context of the country's precariously balanced sectarian domestic politics, Lebanon is also suffering a spillover of tensions from the Syrian conflict. To date, the national peace has held. However, over the past month, Hezbollah has assumed both a more assertive and more public role in Syria's conflict. Tensions in northern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley, where the majority of Syrians reside, are becoming increasingly apparent, and challenges in providing adequate shelter and health care in particular for Syrian refugees persist.

Nonetheless, the Lebanese government has kept its border with Syria open in spite of significant strains on its ability to care for the expanding Syrian population in addition to its own nationals. As a result, the refugees are mixed into Lebanese communities and can be difficult to identify, document, and assist. The refugee response in Lebanon began as a cautious and geographically limited operation and grew into a countrywide humanitarian response that is now unique among Syria's neighbors for not having opened camps for the refugees. In Jordan, the main refugee camp, Zaatari, has swelled to almost 150,000 residents. After 11 months of operations, the camp continues to suffer from a lack of coherent administration that can keep up with the huge number of daily arrivals. Camp security has deteriorated greatly over the past several months and visits to the camps by international visitors, which were once routine, are now off limit to many.

The number of Syrian refugees residing outside of camps in Jordanian cities and towns is nearly double that of those living in Zaatari. Refugee service providers are hard-pressed to meet the needs of these non-camp refugees. Two new camps have been established in response to the constant increase. In March of this year, President Obama announced a second supplementary aid package of \$200 million for Jordan to help the kingdom cope with the influx of refugees fleeing the deadly violence in Syria. A year earlier, the U.S. government provided Jordan \$100 million in additional budget support to address the situation. Services for non-camp refugees in Jordan struggle to keep up with Syrian refugees' needs, and funding from the U.S. government specifically for NGOs working with Syrians has been quite limited in the past two years.

#### *Syria*

The U.S. government has been contributing aid to the humanitarian crisis in Syria through the multilateral system and through some specific bilateral support, particularly for Jordan. RI appreciates and supports these efforts, and is pleased that the U.S. is one of the largest funders of humanitarian aid to the Syrian people at \$500 million. However, the size of the UN's most recent humanitarian appeal for Syria—\$5 billion—is an indication of the breadth and depth of the crisis. Refugees International has been—and will continue to be—both a critic and supporter of the UNHCR. But on this particular occasion, we agree with the High Commissioner António Guterres when he says, "Syria as a civilization is unravelling. The funds

we are appealing for are a matter of survival for suffering Syrians and they are essential for the neighboring countries hosting refugees.”

Further assistance—including inside of Syria—is possible through collaboration with the Syrian groups that have wide access to the interior of the country, and that are eager to partner with the U.S. government to make this happen. Multilateral funding will always matter in a humanitarian crisis, but with the restrictions in place for those agencies inside of Syria, the U.S. must immediately expand the aid that pushes into Syria. Cross-border aid is flowing into Syria from all the bordering countries, and in each of those countries there is a network of Syrian individuals and small organizations creatively and expeditiously shuttling much needed humanitarian supplies into communities throughout Syria.

The Office of Transitional Initiatives (OTI) in USAID and Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) in the Department of State have been working on the ground in neighboring countries for more than a year to make contact with groups that seek to participate politically in the post-Assad governance of Syria. However, USAID’s Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), which is responsible for getting humanitarian aid into Syria, has been slow to engage with Syrian actors that want to help deliver humanitarian assistance.

RI strongly encourages OFDA to begin to seek out Syrian organizations that can deliver effectively assistance to people in need inside Syria and work hard to partner with these emerging humanitarian actors to get more aid inside Syria. It is likely that some training and capacity building will be necessary, and several Syrian organizations will be better suited to being subcontractors working in collaboration with larger more established international NGOs. Nevertheless, it is vital that they become a part of the platform through which the U.S. and EU deliver assistance.

Beginning now to engage with these dynamic new humanitarian actors is an important step in meeting the most urgent existing needs. Building relationships with Syrian humanitarians will also be helpful for the country’s future success. Even after the conflict in Syria ends, millions of people will need humanitarian assistance for some time. If there are a number of trained, motivated, and well-funded organizations that have learned to deliver assistance to the international standard, these nascent Syrian NGOs will be able support the longer-term recovery. Gaining experience in aid provision takes time and hands-on learning, and the sooner U.S. agencies and international NGOs begin the process of improving the quality of these NGOs’ work, the sooner the U.S. can, through them, offer more to those who cannot flee.

RI strongly endorses the idea of creating a small program administered by the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance to engage Syrian NGOs, build their capacity to deliver humanitarian aid to international standards, and provide these organizations with small grants for them to begin to deliver assistance as U.S. implementing partners.

Likewise, new thinking about the purpose and appropriateness of bilateral aid is in order. Well-timed and well-defined budget support to countries hosting Syrian refugees can save lives by allowing host countries to keep their borders open and provide lifesaving services to refugees, while encouraging their national populations to be welcoming and to see the refugees as benefits to society. For Syrian refugees, this is a particularly good investment as the huge majority of them continually express the desire to return to Syria as soon as it is safe. While we wait for this to happen, we can be helping refugees prepare for the transition to come.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JANA MASON, SENIOR ADVISER FOR GOVERNMENT  
RELATIONS, UNHCR WASHINGTON REGIONAL OFFICE

Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission, I would like to express my appreciation for the opportunity to appear before you today to offer the perspectives and concerns of the UN Refugee Agency regarding the humanitarian situation of displaced Syrians. From June 2 to June 11, 2013, I traveled throughout Jordan and Lebanon where I witnessed the staggering human consequences of the Syrian conflict. My testimony today will focus on some of the protection and assistance challenges and will also highlight the impact on host communities that are generously hosting Syrian refugees and yet are reaching a breaking point.

UNHCR currently has three offices inside Syria and 13 in the four neighboring countries that have received the majority of Syrian refugees: Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt and Iraq. We currently have over 2,000 staff working in the region. We lead and coordinate the response to the Syrian refugee situation in the host countries, working closely with host governments and with more than 100 UN and NGO partners. The two largest of these are the World Food Program, which supplies food rations and vouchers to the refugees, and UNICEF, which provides child protection services, education, and water and sanitation.

Inside Syria, UNHCR has been present since the early 1990s, initially to support the Iraqi and other refugees that Syria has generously hosted for many years. Since mid-2011, when the crisis took a distinctly violent turn and started producing significant internal displacement, we have also been assisting Syrians uprooted inside the country with relief items and shelter assistance. We provide help wherever we are able to access people in need with a minimum guarantee of security. Unlike in refugee situations, there is no single agency with a mandate to protect internally displaced persons. Our assistance to Syrians who have fled inside their own country has therefore been part of a collective UN and NGO response effort led by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

UNHCR has seen a staggering increase in the numbers of refugees crossing into Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt since the beginning of 2013. Civilians are crossing borders in record numbers because of increased fighting and as control of towns and villages have changed hands frequently. More and more civilians are crossing borders after having already been internally displaced; I learned on this trip that as the violence spreads some Syrian families are forced to relocate two or three times inside the country before finally crossing a border. Fleeing to neighboring countries is often a last minute decision, when lives are imminently at risk. As a consequence, refugees are fleeing with the bare minimum and have few resources at their disposal. It's also important to note that three quarters of the refugees are women and children, and in Jordan alone, nearly one in five refugees is under the age of four. The children pay the hardest price of all, with millions of young lives shattered by this conflict, and the future generation of an entire country marked by violence and trauma for many years to come. The refugee situation has escalated rapidly over the past six months, particularly when compared to the previous 20 months of the conflict. One million of the 1.6 million Syria refugees across the region today fled the country in the last six months alone. During the first five months of 2013, an average of 8,000 Syrians crossed into Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt every day. These numbers are staggering and have put enormous strain on the humanitarian community.

As of today, Lebanon hosts more than 520,000 Syrian refugees who are registered or pending registration with UNHCR. This number represents an 11% increase in Lebanon's population of 4.2 million. There are no official refugee camps in Lebanon, although some of the refugees live in informal camp-like settlements. Most are in urban areas in a wide arrange of accommodation—often barely livable. Neighboring Jordan is currently home to more than 475,000 Syrian refugees registered or pending registration. About 120,000 of these individuals live in Za'atri refugee camp, which sprang up from the desert and now comprises Jordan's fifth largest city. Turkey hosts more than 380,000 Syrians refugees, most of them in 18 camps along the border that are run by the Turkish government. Iraq is home to nearly 160,000 Syrian refugees, of which 40,000 are housed in the overcrowded Domiz camp in the Kurdistan Region; nearly half the families there share tents due to lack of land. In Egypt, nearly 80,000 Syrian refugees are in urban areas. As dramatic as these numbers are, they likely undercount the actual situation. Many Syrians do not come forward for registration because they fear reprisals back home, or in some cases because they do not yet need assistance. Potentially hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees throughout the region are not counted in official statistics.

The December 2012 Regional Response Plan (RRP) issued by UNHCR and our partners was based on projections of 1.1 million Syrians through June of this year. That figure was reached in March and by June had been far exceeded; yet, it was the funding appeal on which contributions by donor governments were based. At the end of last week, an updated RRP was issued, based on an anticipated 3.45 million Syrian refugees by the end of this year. This updated regional response plan for Syrian refugees totals \$2.9 billion. The governments of Lebanon and Jordan are also appealing for funds, asking for \$449 million and \$380 million, respectively. The humanitarian appeal for inside Syria, which was also released last week and is known as the SHARP, is for \$1.4 billion. This adds up to more than \$5 billion, including the appeals by host governments, and represents the largest humanitarian appeal in history. With more than \$1 billion received so far in 2013, a further \$4 billion is needed to meet the basic protection and assistance needs of Syrian refugees and internally displaced Syrians for the remainder of this year.

Statistics and data help us understand the scope of the refugee crisis, but cannot begin to capture the sense among refugees and host communities that they are being overwhelmed by an increasingly bloody conflict with no end in sight.

*Key Messages from UNHCR*

1. *Open borders.* UNHCR is calling upon all governments in the region to keep their borders open—or in some cases to fully re-open borders to provide access to their territory for all those in need of international assistance. We are particularly grateful for the commitment offered by neighboring governments to protect Syrian refugees. By taking in thousands of new refugees every day, the countries on the front line of this crisis are saving lives and supporting families and communities. Very importantly, they're also helping Syrians prepare for an eventual return to their homeland, which all of the Syrians I met are hoping for.

2. *Need for safe shelter.* The mass influx of refugees has overwhelmed camps across the region, leading to overcrowding and numerous concerns. As summer approaches, communicable and waterborne diseases become a major concern. However, while the media has largely focused on refugees in camps, the vast majority, 77% of Syrian refugees, live in urban settings where they face particular challenges. High rental costs (often for substandard or even unlivable units), lack of job opportunities, and rapidly dwindling resources are making life increasingly difficult for urban refugees throughout the region, often forcing families to turn to negative coping mechanisms such as child labor, early marriage, and other forms of exploitation to make ends meet. Financial assistance has been consistently flagged as a critical need and top priority for non-camp refugees to meet the growing cost of living, ensure protection and prevent families from slipping into destitution.

3. *Regional stability and the need to support host countries financially and politically.* Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt have welcomed over 1.6 million refugees across their borders since the beginning of the conflict, but ever growing numbers are putting increased stress on already strained public resources, as well as on host families. If additional support is not forthcoming, acceptance by host communities towards refugees may soon diminish, threatening to further destabilize this already fragile region. I heard about this over and over during my trip. I was told that host communities were initially welcoming to the refugees, with many landlords deferring rent and neighbors providing assistance. Recently, however, the tide has clearly turned and tensions with host communities are growing—leading to the threat of violence and instability.

*Jordan*

The majority of 475,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan live in urban areas throughout the country, with 120,000 currently residing in Za'atri camp near the northern city of Mafraq. The rising numbers have strained host communities' ability to absorb newcomers. As a result, the Government of Jordan requires that Syrians entering the country receive assistance in camps. Despite this directive, many refugees continue to seek safety among the Jordanian population.

UNHCR and partner organizations are working around the clock to provide shelter and life-saving assistance in camps (Za'atri and two smaller camps originally used as transit facilities). This assistance is key not only to respond to the overall refugee influx but also to maintain protection space for Syrians within Jordan itself. UNHCR is currently working with the Government and partner agencies to establish a second major camp, Azraq, also in northern Jordan, which is intended to house up to 130,000 refugees. The opening date is dependent on completion of infrastructure, including water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.

In addition to camp-based activities, support to refugees in urban communities and to those communities themselves is critical. Jordan currently faces significant

challenges in providing for the needs of its own population. For example, Jordan is the world's fourth most water-insecure country. Yet, Za'atri camp alone requires 925,000 gallons of water every day. Syrians have access to food, fuel, health and education services that are subsidized by the Jordanian government, incurring a significant cost to the national budget. Jordan is also facing a very difficult economic situation, aggravated by dwindling revenues from trade, tourism and foreign investment due to the Syria crisis. The country has also had to agree to a tight adjustment policy with the International Monetary Fund, including the removal of government subsidies, which in the past have resulted in violent street protests. Its limited energy and water resources, social service infrastructure and public security forces are dramatically overstretched. Like Lebanon, Jordan also needs massive support to deal with the humanitarian tragedy caused by the conflict next door. Bolstering infrastructure and enhancing the living standards for all host community residents will benefit not only Syrian refugees but the region as a whole. Our 2013 priorities in Jordan include registration and documentation of all new arriving refugees; ensuring life-saving assistance such as establishing camp infrastructure, providing non-food items to those in need, and access to health care, food assistance, and clean water. Other protection activities such as preventing and responding to sexual and gender based violence are also critical.

Education is another key priority because it provides children with a sense of stability and normalcy, in addition to a solid academic foundation for the future. Given that 54% of the Syrian refugee population in Jordan is under the age of 18, demands on the public and camp educational systems are enormous. Approximately 10,000 children are currently registered for formal education at Za'atri, although those numbers far exceed daily attendance. Among urban refugees, over 32,000 children receive formal education in Jordanian public schools. Others, however, do not attend because of challenges that include lack of transportation and the fact that children often work to provide income for their families.

Three significant risks and challenges face the refugee population in Jordan over the next six months. First, additional large-scale population movement is likely, either into or out of Syria, with its accompanying logistical complexities. Second, growing intolerance toward Syrian refugees in Jordanian society threatens to provoke backlash, such as restriction of services, sealed borders, or even community violence. One refugee family I met said they rarely venture outside their rented apartment due to the growing inhospitality. To mitigate this troubling sentiment, support to host communities has been increased and is a key component of the newest Regional Response Plan. UNHCR has constructed and is in the final stages of equipping a new registration site for urban refugees. Finally, refugees living in overcrowded camp conditions are especially vulnerable to disease outbreak along with other concerns. In Za'atri, for example, the harsh conditions and limited services have created serious tensions among the refugees themselves and have led to significant mental health conditions in both adults and children.

UNHCR is grateful for Jordan's unwavering support for refugees throughout the past decades, during which it has offered a home to Palestinian, Iraqi, and now Syrian refugees. It is vital that this generous policy of keeping borders open is supported by the international community. Jordan is clearly feeling the impact of the Syrian war and, without adequate assistance, may no longer be able to provide a safety valve for Syrians fleeing for their lives.

### *Lebanon*

As the Commission is aware, the political and security situation in Lebanon is extremely precarious. There are reports of more spillover incidents along the border, with rockets fired from Syria continuing to strike Bekaa and the North, as well as prolonged unrest in Tripoli. The situation is exacerbated by Hezbollah engagement inside Syria. We have also begun to hear troubling reports of harassment against refugees and threats made against aid workers. On my recent trip, the heightened security concerns in the North were particularly palpable.

Despite this situation, Lebanon hosts well over half a million Syrian refugees—the highest number in the region. This is in addition to the half a million Syrians residing in Lebanon before the crisis. Given Lebanon's small size and weak government, the proportional impact is huge. Current end of year projections put the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon at over one million, which constitute 25% of the country's population.

The refugee influx has put immense pressure on the small country's limited resources and compounded the current social and economic challenges. As in Jordan, host communities are increasingly apprehensive about the ability to absorb more refugees; however, this phenomenon is even more dangerous in Lebanon given the complex sectarian divisions. For example, on my recent visit to Lebanon we learned

that the funerals of Hezbollah fighters killed in Syria are occasions for shots to be fired over Syrian refugee settlements. UNHCR and its partners are actively working inside Lebanon to address and mitigate these growing concerns, but the ability of humanitarian agencies to achieve access in this area is clearly limited.

UNHCR is registering 2,500 people a day in Lebanon and, as is the case elsewhere, with the assistance of partners, also provides emergency and basic assistance to those waiting to register. Despite the overwhelming volume of arrivals, the Lebanese government has not faltered in its commitment to keep its borders open to Syrian refugees. It is therefore vital that Lebanon receives international support to continue this generous policy.

Because there are no formal camps in Lebanon, the Syrian refugees spread over Lebanon live in a wide range of shelters, many of which I saw on my trip. Some refugees, as in Jordan, are living with relatives, while others rent apartments at prices that are increasingly on the rise. Others reside in unfinished buildings, which, interestingly, are seemingly everywhere in Lebanon but are nonetheless owned and require rent payments. UNHCR and our partners often provide “sealing off kits” to make the buildings more inhabitable. In other cases, UNHCR and our partners sign contracts with host families for the rehabilitation of their houses in return for hosting refugees. Approximately 2,000 refugees currently benefit from these contracts, which also assist the local community. Some refugees, including those deemed to be particularly vulnerable, are provided with what we and our partners call “shelter boxes,” which are essentially one-room wooden buildings. Increasingly, however, refugees are residing in “collective centers” in buildings such as unused schools, while others have established what is referred to as “tented settlements”—in essence shanty towns comprised of wood or tin or any materials the refugees can purchase or scrounge. There are currently about 250 tented settlements in Lebanon, some of which existed prior to the crisis and were inhabited by Syrian migrant workers that have been joined by the new influx. These settlements are among the most difficult and depressing. UNCHR is trying its best to improve the standard of living in these locations, although as summer sets in the incidence of water related diseases becomes a pressing concern.

While visiting with Syrian refugees in Lebanon, I often heard concerns about their children’s education. Although 100,000 of the refugees are children of primary school age, only 30,000 are enrolled in Lebanese public schools. Others do not attend because of transportation problems or because the curriculum is difficult, as it is taught in English and French, whereas Syrian schools are only taught in Arabic. In some cases, Syrian families do not wish to send their kids to school because the Lebanese classes are co-ed. Other children are simply too traumatized to leave their parents’ side to attend school. Whatever the reason, many school-aged children have now been out of school for over two years, with obvious implications for these kids and for the future of Syria.

When children do attend school, they often require support, such as remedial classes to help them adapt and continue attending school. I visited a center that provided such services, along with fun activities and nourishing snacks to supplement what is often an insufficient diet. Most importantly, however, these programs provide a safe place and help foster a sense of normalcy. Many more such programs are needed.

Unfortunately, child labor is on the rise as families struggle to pay rent and manage the rising cost of living. In a recent week, agencies identified 15 cases of boys between the ages of 12 and 15 who are working up to 11 hours a day, seven days a week. Most of these children—all of whom attended school back in Syria—are working as cleaners in restaurants and receive substandard monthly wages. Their families reported that the income they generate helps them cover the families’ monthly expenses. The families were referred for rent support and the parents counseled on the need to enroll their children in schools or remedial classes. Funding for education remains limited, putting on hold programs to help families get their children back to school, increase psycho-social support for traumatized children, and put in place outreach plans to identify at-risk children.

#### *Turkey*

In Turkey, UNHCR is working closely with the Turkish Government to assist and protect Syrian refugees. Unlike in the other host countries, however, the government in Turkey has taken the lead on the refugee response and runs 18 camps where refugees can access food, medical attention, education and vocational training, among other services. Recognizing that about half of the 380,000 Syrian refugees in Turkey live outside of camps, and that the ever-increasing numbers have overwhelmed host community resources, the Turkish government and UNHCR are putting more emphasis on reaching and supporting urban refugees. At planned co-

ordination centers, UNHCR will be able to register and provide documentation to more refugees who have settled throughout the country. The centers will also provide protection counseling and support, including for children.

It is worth noting that Turkey, more than other country in the region, has welcomed non-Syrian refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria as well. These non-Syrian refugees include Iraqis and Palestinians who had sought refuge in Syria over the past decade. It is critical that Turkey be encouraged and supported to maintain its commitment to open borders to support the seemingly endless flow of refugees seeking safety and protection. A shortage of space in the camps continues to be a major challenge for the authorities, with almost all of the 18 camps hosting more than their capacity, and continued pressure to take in new arrivals. Local authorities underline the fact that because of space constraints in the camps, the admission of new arrivals from the border is based, in part, on the number of spaces available. The Turkish government reports that it continues to provide humanitarian assistance to those waiting across the borders.

Turkey has assumed the bulk of responsibility for assisting and protecting the refugee and has spent significant funds in doing so. International support is necessary for this to remain sustainable.

#### *Iraq*

The vast majority of the 159,000 Syrian refugees in Iraq reside in the Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah governates in the Kurdistan Region of northern Iraq. An estimated total of 350,000 could cross the border before the end of the year. The majority of refugees enter Iraq through the Kurdistan Region, with 40% of them seeking shelter in two camps while the remainder lives in towns and villages, often in substandard housing. UNHCR's and its partners' main activities in Iraq focus on registering and protecting refugees, advocating for open borders, distributing life-saving items, providing essential services and counseling, as well as preventing and responding to sexual gender based violence.

UNHCR continues to urge the Iraqi government to ensure that all borders remain open for Syrian civilians who need to flee the country. Since October 2012, the border at Al Qa'im in Anbar Governate has been closed to all but a few individuals allowed to cross for emergency medical care or family reunification. In addition, the closure of the border between the Kurdistan region and Syria since May 19 of this year, in both directions, has prevented refugees from crossing into Iraq.

The two Syrian refugee camps in Iraq are established in Al Qaim and Domiz. Domiz hosts over 40,000 refugees and is critically overcrowded, with some 3,500 families obliged to share tents with other families because there is no space to construct new tents. In some cases, more than 15 refugees are living in tents designed for 5 people. Congestion and warmer temperatures are increasing the risks of disease and tensions between camp residents. The number of children under five years of age suffering from diarrhea has doubled since February. UNHCR continues to appeal for new land for additional camps.

Urban refugees in Iraq are experiencing increasing poverty due to long periods of unemployment and lack of access to services. Tensions are rising within the refugee community as a result of the lack of freedom of movement, particularly for urban refugees who have no documentation. The soaring summer temperatures also pose challenges for urban refugees, many of whom cannot afford rising electricity expenses. Some urban refugees have expressed general fear of becoming victims of the unstable security situation in their host cities.

Some refugees living in Al Qa'im refugee camp have begun returning to Syria—a result of both push and pull factors including frustration over living conditions, limited freedom of movement, and no access to the labor market or other sources of income.

#### *Egypt*

Approximately 80,000 Syrian refugees have sought shelter in Egypt since the beginning of the conflict. The majority come from Homs or Aleppo, drawn to Egypt through family or community ties. It is likely that number of refugees will significantly increase by year's end, in part because some refugees currently in Lebanon or Jordan perceive better living conditions and economic opportunities in Egypt. Because there are no camps in Egypt, the refugees have found housing in Cairo neighborhoods and other urban areas. UNHCR operates a registration center in Cairo and mobile centers in Alexandria and Damietta that provide protection services for refugees throughout the country. The potential for secondary movement to Egypt from Lebanon and Jordan is considered significant as refugees seek countries that are more affordable for them to live with their families.

The conflict in Syria has placed an unbearable strain on the population of Syria. Over 1.6 million Syrian refugees are now hosted across five countries. By the end of the year it is estimated that half of the population of Syria will be in need of aid. This includes an anticipated 3.45 million Syrian refugees and 6.8 million Syrians inside the country, many of whom will be displaced from their homes. Neighboring governments and their populations have been extremely generous in welcoming and assisting the refugees. Yet, the overwhelming message from my recent trip is that this welcome is now under severe strain as the Syrian conflict continues, the refugees keep arriving, and resources are increasingly stretched. If our goal is to encourage the host countries to keep their borders open and continue allowing refugees to access basic services, then we as an international community must do more to assist these governments and their local communities. While we must certainly be smart in how resources are used and prioritized, the reality is that significant additional resources will be needed for this year and likely beyond. New donors, including the private sector, must be mobilized, and development agencies must work hand-in-hand with the humanitarian organizations. The experiences of the refugees in the neighboring countries may well determine what a future Syria looks like, and the welfare of the host countries will determine the future stability and prosperity of the entire region.



## PREPARED STATEMENT OF YASSAR BITTAR, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS AND ADVOCACY ASSOCIATE, COALITION FOR A DEMOCRATIC SYRIA

Chairman Cardin and Members of the Commission, thank you for inviting me to testify on behalf of the Coalition for a Democratic Syria's work on Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons.

What began in March 2011 as a peaceful revolution in Syria, with hundreds of thousands taking to the streets calling for freedom and democracy in the face of bullets and tanks, has evolved into what President of Oxfam America, Ray Offenheiser describes as a humanitarian catastrophe of "Darfur-level insanity . . . if not worse." Furthermore, just last week, the UN made yet another aid appeal of \$5 billion, it's largest ever, maintaining that nearly half of the country's population will need aid.

My comments today will focus on the Coalition's work for the 1.6 million Syrian refugees and 4.25 million IDPs, many of whom have been displaced multiple times. I will then relay observations from my recent trips into Syria, during which I took a closer look into the depth and complexity of the humanitarian crisis on the ground.

CDS represents the Syrian American community advocacy in support of the Syrian revolution. Our generous constituency throughout the country has been the driving force in our work for refugees and IDPs.

According to data compiled by the American Relief Coalition for Syria, the Syrian American community contributed \$45 million in humanitarian aid in 2012; this number is projected to double in 2013. The networks of these organizations are able to reach areas under extremely difficult circumstances, at times when access by the UN is very limited or altogether lacking.

The international community's efforts in addressing the humanitarian crisis in Syria have somewhat improved in recent months, through the introduction of cross-line and cross-border aid deliveries by international NGO's albeit on a scale that does not measure up to the massive needs. I saw small examples firsthand in the IDP camps inside Syria. During my first trip, I saw very little presence of UN agency work; rather the tents were donated by non-profit organizations willing to cross the border. While on the border, two tents caught fire as families used candles to keep warm, killing 7 children; these children survived the landing of a mortar shell in their kitchen only to be killed by their supposed source of refuge. During my second trip, two months later, several UNHCR tents were set up throughout these camps as the number of IDPs at the border approximately doubled to reach 60,000 people.

Unfortunately, other needs such as food and sanitation are in desperate condition. Refugees are forced to purchase their own food from local villages as their daily allocation of one loaf of bread, a tub of butter and jam, and one water bottle is often not sufficient. My experience as I traveled further into Syria was even more heart-breaking. As I traveled two hours into the country, I saw a physically beautiful Syria as a backdrop to the reality that the Assad regime has forced upon the people. We drove by homes that have been brought to the ground, places of worship that were destroyed and buildings that had been leveled. I saw families living in remnants of ancient buildings, and structures that once housed livestock.

After arriving at the city of Kafrenbal, I made my way to the statistics bureau of the local civilian council, a body formed by activists to meet the needs of the population in the absence of government services. As I was visiting the school that housed displaced children, an attack helicopter flew over our heads, and the children reassured me, saying, "If we are meant to die, it is God's will. Don't be scared." According to the head of the humanitarian bureau of the local council, the aid that we delivered had been the first delivery in at least one month; he delivered food baskets to women who accepted them with tears streaming down their faces. That night, we faced six hours of non-stop shelling by regime forces; the following day, we escaped to Turkey.

On the Turkish side of the border, we stayed in the border town of Rehanlye, whose population has doubled since the beginning of the crisis, to reach 80,000 people. According to USAID, Turkey is home to approximately 351,000 registered Syrian refugees; of them, 100,000 Syrians reside in non-camp settings. The total amount of aid spent in Turkey has reached \$1.5 billion with the Turkish government providing over \$600 million.

Although I was not given access to the Turkish refugee camps, I visited several Syrian families living amongst the urban population. I saw very difficult living conditions for families paying up to 700 Turkish pounds in rent; a family of 6 was living in a shed without running water or electricity. Another family of 7 was living on the rooftop of a building with a makeshift roof for coverage.

The number of refugees and IDPs is at a scale in which, according to assessments from the ground, there is little room for error on behalf of the international community. These numbers will only increase as the situation on the ground is deteriorating by the day. Just last week, in the city of Qusayr, thousands of civilians were forced to flee to neighboring villages as Assad forces, backed by Iranian and Hezbollah militias, placed a vicious siege on the city of 25,000 people.

Although positive steps in aid delivery have been made, a disconnect remains in ensuring proper and efficient aid delivery on behalf of the international community. We believe it is important to partner with the Assistance Coordination Unit of the internationally recognized Syrian Coalition (ACU), the provincial councils in the liberated areas, as well as the Syrian NGOs that have proven to deliver to disaster stricken areas.

More importantly, the U.S. has to demonstrate strong resolve and serious commitment to helping solve the conflict in Syria—the root cause of the humanitarian disaster. Absence of U.S.-led international action has permitted the crisis to fester and reach its current tragic proportions, and continued inaction will only exacerbate it. Without addressing the root cause of the problem, the illegitimate Assad regime, the staggering numbers of IDPs and relentless exodus of refugees will continue to overwhelm the humanitarian response and destabilize OSCE member Turkey, OSCE partner Jordan, and all of Syria's neighbors.

Thank you very much.





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