

THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION,
CIVIL RIGHTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS
OF THE
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UNITED STATES SENATE
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CONTENTS

JANUARY 7, 2014, 2:29 P.M.

STATEMENTS OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

	Page
Cruz, Hon. Ted, a U.S. Senator from the State of Texas	4
Durbin, Hon. Dick, a U.S. Senator from the State of Illinois	1
prepared statement	53
Klobuchar, Hon. Amy, a U.S. Senator from the State of Minnesota	6
Leahy, Hon. Patrick J., a U.S. Senator from the State of Vermont,	
prepared statement	56
Whitehouse, Hon. Sheldon, a U.S. Senator from the State of Rhode Island	6

WITNESSES

Witness List	27
Groom, Molly, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Policy, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Washington, DC	12
prepared statement	44
Lindborg, Hon. Nancy E., Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance, U.S. Agency for International Development, Washington, DC	10
prepared statement	37
Richard, Hon. Anne C., Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC	7
prepared statement	28

MISCELLANEOUS SUBMISSIONS FOR THE RECORD

al Muqdad, Omar, Journalist and Syrian Refugee, statement	154
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), Washington, DC, statement	74
American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS), Rev. Aundreia Alexander, JD, Director, Office of Immigration and Refugee Services, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, statement	240
American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, statement	79
Amnesty International USA, New York, New York, statement	82
Ayoub, Christine, statement	92
Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Dr. Carolyn Y. Woo, President and Chief Executive Officer, Baltimore, Maryland, statement	103
Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), Washington, DC, statement	95
Center for Victims of Torture, The, (CVT), St. Paul, Minnesota, statement	111
Charbaji, Mohamad Eiad, Journalist, statement	145
Church World Service (CWS), New York, New York, statement	117
Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE USA), David Ray, Head of Policy and Advocacy, Atlanta, Georgia, statement	98
Episcopal Church, The, Deborah Stein, Director, Episcopal Migration Ministries, and Katie Conway, Immigration and Refugee Policy Analyst, New York, New York, statement	251
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, The, (ELCA), Chicago, Illinois, statement	118

IV

	Page
Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), Washington, DC, statement	125
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), Silver Spring, Maryland, and Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP), New York, New York, joint statement ...	197
Human Rights First, New York, New York, and Washington, DC, statement ..	207
Human Rights Initiative of North Texas, statement	253
Institute of International Education (IIE), Daniela Kaisth, Vice President, External Affairs and IIE Initiatives, New York, New York, statement	129
International Rescue Committee (IRC), Sharon Waxman, Vice President for Public Policy and Advocacy, Washington, DC, statement	225
KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights, Rockville, Maryland, statement	242
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), Baltimore, Maryland, statement	139
McCain, Hon. John, a U.S. Senator from the State of Arizona; Hon. Sheldon Whitehouse, a U.S. Senator from the State of Rhode Island; Hon. Kirsten E. Gillibrand, a U.S. Senator from the State of New York; Hon. Christopher A. Coons, a U.S. Senator from the State of Delaware; Hon. Richard Blumenthal, a U.S. Senator from the State of Connecticut; and Hon. Kelly A. Ayotte, a U.S. Senator from the State of New Hampshire; letter addressed to President Barack Obama, December 20, 2013	57
Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), Akron, Pennsylvania, statement	192
Mercy Corps, Andrea Koppel, Vice President, Global Engagement and Policy, Portland, Oregon, statement	218
Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), Washington, DC, and Los Angeles, California, statement	147
National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) World Relief, Washington, DC, statement	150
Okar, Ayman A., Syrian refugee, statement	248
Oxfam America, Noah Gottschalk, Senior Policy Advisor, Washington, DC, statement	157
Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), Washington, DC, statement	221
Refugee Council USA, Washington, DC, statement	162
Refugees International, Washington, DC, statement	179
Save the Children, Michael Klosson, Vice President, Policy and Humanitarian Response, Fairfield, Connecticut, statement	133
Syria Relief and Development (SRD), Overland Park, Kansas, and United Muslim Relief (UMR), Washington, DC, statement	187
Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS), Washington, DC, statement	170
Syrian Emergency Task Force, Washington, DC, statement	232
Syrian Human Rights Organization Swasia, Muhanad Al-Hasani, President, statement	233
United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Ted Chaiban, Director, Emergency Programs, statement	69
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Most Reverend Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp., Chairman, Committee on Migration, statement	59
Urang, Sally, RN, CNM, Volunteer in Jordan, statement—Redacted	143

THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

TUESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2014

UNITED STATES SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION, CIVIL RIGHTS,
AND HUMAN RIGHTS,
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:29 p.m., in Room SH-216, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. Dick Durbin, Chairman of the Subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senators Durbin, Whitehouse, Klobuchar, Cruz, and Graham.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DICK DURBIN, A U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF ILLINOIS

Chairman DURBIN. Good afternoon. This hearing of the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights will come to order. Today's hearing is entitled "The Syrian Refugee Crisis." We are pleased to have a large audience for today's hearing, particularly on such a challenging weather day—not as challenging as Illinois yesterday, but challenging nevertheless. It demonstrates the importance of this issue.

Thanks to those who are here in person and those who are following the hearing on Facebook and Twitter using the hashtag #syrianrefugees. There was so much interest in today's hearing, we have moved this to a larger room to accommodate everyone. If anyone could not get a seat in the hearing room, we have an overflow room, 226 Dirksen.

At the outset of the hearing, we are going to start with a brief video to provide some background and context. We are then going to have opening remarks—I am hoping that Senator Cruz will be joining us shortly—and then turn to our witnesses.

At this point let us roll the tape, show the video.

[Videotape played.]

Chairman DURBIN. I would like to thank the U.N. High Commission on Refugees for allowing us to use this video and for many of the posters that you see around the hearing room. I appreciate their outstanding work in helping Syrian refugees, and this video gives us some context of the importance and gravity of the issue that we are taking up today.

Today's hearing will focus on the plight of Syrian refugees fleeing the violent civil war in their home country. This is the world's worst ongoing humanitarian crisis and the worst refugee crisis

since the Rwandan genocide in 1994, and perhaps since World War II.

Last year, when I visited Kilis, a Syrian refugee camp in Turkey, I was especially struck by the plight of the children. It is no exaggeration to say that a generation of Syrian children is at risk. More than 11,000 children have been killed in the conflict, including hundreds who have been shot by snipers or summarily executed.

Let me add for a moment about this visit to this Turkish camp, and a word of gratitude to the Turkish Government. Ten thousand people were living in that camp, men, women, and children. Efforts were being made, superhuman efforts, to provide for them, for the basics, for food, for medicine, even for basic education. So I want to put my comments in that context. Many of those receiving countries who are receiving Syrian refugees are making extraordinary sacrifices on their own part to help.

There are 1.1 million Syrian refugee children, 70 percent under the age of 12, 60 percent not attending school. One in ten Syrian refugee children is working to support their families, including some as young as 7 years of age. Thousands are unaccompanied or separated from their parents. And we have heard troubling reports of boy refugees being recruited as combatants and girl refugees being forced into early marriage.

The onset of winter puts Syrian children at even greater risk, especially the hundreds of thousands living in temporary, often unheated, tents or shelters. Several children have already died from the cold, and, tragically, more are likely to follow.

The Assad regime and, to a lesser extent, some rebel groups have blocked humanitarian assistance in a deliberate effort to increase pressure on besieged children. Several children have already starved to death. One medical expert who examined underweight refugee children said, "We have a middle-income country that is transforming itself into something a lot more like Somalia." Aid workers report that signs are posted at regime checkpoints that say, "Kneel or starve." This is a deplorable war crime, and it must be stopped.

I am proud to say that the United States has provided \$1.3 billion in humanitarian assistance to aid Syrian refugees, leading the world. We have a moral obligation to assist Syrian refugees, but it is also in our national interest to find a path to stability in that region.

This humanitarian catastrophe has created grave challenges for neighboring countries—including many U.S. allies—that are hosting vast majorities of the refugees. These countries have saved the lives of untold numbers of Syrian refugees. We have to continue to support them.

Take a look at Lebanon, a country of 4.4 million people now hosting 860,000 Syrian refugees. This is more than 20 percent of the Lebanese population. It would be the equivalent of the United States facing the sudden influx of 60 million people. UNHCR projects that an additional 1 million could arrive in Lebanon this year. This has increased competition for limited job opportunities, raised food and housing costs for all, and created severe strains on schools, health care, and other social services. In fact, the number

of Syrian school-aged refugee children in Lebanon is soon likely to exceed the number of Lebanese school-aged children.

As the Syrian conflict grinds on, UNHCR has begun efforts to resettle especially vulnerable refugees in third countries, including 30,000 this Fiscal Year 2014.

For decades, the United States has received more refugees than any other country in the world, and the American people have greeted these refugees with open arms and hearts. But the United States only accepted 31 Syrian refugees in the last fiscal year, and the administration has said we are likely to accept a few hundred this fiscal year.

Two years ago, I asked the administration to grant temporary protected status to Syrians. As a result, the United States is providing a safe haven to hundreds of Syrian visitors who were in this country on a temporary basis.

But we also should accept more vulnerable Syrian refugees who have no way of getting to the United States. One issue that needs to be addressed is the overly broad prohibition in our immigration law that excludes any refugee who has provided any kind of support to any armed rebel group, even a group that we in the United States support. This would prevent a Syrian who gave a cigarette or a sandwich to a Free Syrian Army soldier from receiving refugee status in the United States, despite the fact that the United States is providing assistance to the Free Syrian Army.

At the same time, other countries must play a larger part in accepting Syrian refugees. For example, the Conservative government in the United Kingdom has said it will not accept a single one. And none of the Gulf Arab countries—Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and others—have committed to accept Syrian refugees. These countries need to step up as well and do their part.

You heard the statistics. But it is critical to recall that behind those numbers are real people. A number of those Syrian refugees are here today. I would like to take a moment to introduce a few of them who have been fortunate enough to find refuge in the United States.

Eiad Charbaji, please stand. Thank you, Eiad. Mr. Charbaji and his wife, Ola Malas—I hope I pronounced that correctly—are journalists from Damascus who took part in the nonviolent protest movement. Mr. Charbaji was arrested and tortured by the regime for publishing recordings of the regime's violent response to peaceful demonstrations. Ms. Malas' life was threatened, as was the life of the couple's 4-year-old daughter, Julie. The family fled from Syria in January 2012, and Mr. Charbaji came to the United States with the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program.

Amer Mahdi Doko, please stand. Thank you. Mr. Doko is from Darayya—I hope I pronounced it—a suburb of Damascus. He, his wife, and his baby now live in Virginia. Mr. Doko was imprisoned twice for opposing the Assad regime, once in 2003 and again in March 2012. After being released in 2012, he fled to Jordan. He came to the U.S. after he was admitted to a master's program at Georgetown. In August 2012, the Assad forces massacred hundreds of civilians in his hometown and arrested two of his brothers, who

are still, sadly, missing. Mr. Doko, who received asylum in 2013, is now working full-time and continuing his studies.

Omar Al Muqdad, please stand. Thank you. Mr. Al Muqdad, who is from Dara'a, worked as a journalist for over 9 years, publicizing human rights abuses by the regime. He was arrested seven times and was imprisoned for 2 years, between 2006 and 2008. When he refused to stop writing, the prison guards broke his hand. After his release from prison, he continued to work as a journalist. He participated in nonviolent political protests in Dara'a in March 2011 and publicized abuses by Syrian security forces. He fled to Turkey in April 2011 after he was pursued by the regime. He was resettled in the United States by Catholic Charities after receiving refugee status.

Mr. Al Muqdad has submitted a statement to the Subcommittee. I would like to read a portion of it. He said:

"I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank the American people for providing me refuge in the United States. Also, I would like to urge you to do all that you can to make U.S. resettlement available for more Syrian refugees. Obviously, the United States cannot resettle all of the hundreds of thousands of people who have fled from Syria. But there are many very vulnerable people who could be helped, including women with problem pregnancies, girls subject to forced marriages, orphans, elderly people, and sick people."

As this Syrian conflict enters its fourth year, it is clear that the refugee crisis is going to continue. While there may be differences about how to resolve the conflict, even within this panel, there should be no disagreement that it is a moral and national security imperative to do all we can to help alleviate the suffering of innocent Syrian refugees.

I look forward to our discussion about what steps Congress and the administration should take to address the crisis, and I now recognize the Ranking Member of this Subcommittee, Senator Cruz of Texas.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. TED CRUZ,
A U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF TEXAS**

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the witnesses who have come today to this hearing.

The refugee crisis in Syria is a humanitarian disaster, and I want to thank the Chairman for convening this hearing and for helping shine the light on what is happening.

I am the son of a refugee from Cuba who fled oppression, and to the refugees who have come here today, let me say welcome, and I think the United States should always be a clarion voice for freedom and a voice against the oppression of the innocent.

Given what is happening in Syria, the United States is rightly participating in the relief efforts there, and I think it is critical that our aid be dispensed in a way that is consistent with the vital national security interests of the United States and, in particular, with our allies in the region and maintaining stability in the region.

In the next few months, we are going to mark the third anniversary of the beginnings of the civil war in Syria, which, tragically,

grinds on with no foreseeable prospect of resolution in the future. And the humanitarian crisis continues to get worse by the day. Amnesty International estimates that some 2.3 million people have been displaced; 52 percent of them are children. One-third of Syria's population has been forced out of their homes. Jordan's population has increased by 9 percent, and Lebanon's population has increased by 19 percent.

This disaster demands the attention of the United States not only because Americans are and have been traditionally a generous people who have volunteered to step forward with assistance in humanitarian crises, but also because this crisis threatens the ability of some of our key allies, including Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel.

Given its fragile political situation, Lebanon is a particular concern. It would be tragic and dangerous if the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militia exploited the humanitarian crisis to gain control of the country. And we should be particularly concerned by recent reports that Hezbollah is smuggling long-range missile systems from Syria into Lebanon, where they could be used to target Israel.

It is also a serious concern that some of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorists who have infiltrated the Syrian opposition have also apparently infiltrated the refugee population or are using them as cover to move into host nations. This has obviously been a grave concern to many countries who have been asked to grant additional visas.

In addition, I am particularly concerned about the neglected plight of many Christian refugees both inside and outside of Syria. The reports of the ancient Christian communities that are targeted by extremist elements in the opposition that the regime forces cannot or will not protect are heart-breaking. And as we explore the visa issue, we should not neglect the tragic circumstance of Syrian Christians facing oppression.

For a long time, Chairman Durbin has worked hard to ensure that perpetrators of human rights abuses do not attain safe haven in the United States, and I thank the Chairman for his leadership on that issue, particularly through the Genocide Accountability Act and the Human Rights Enforcement Act, both of which have been made law.

While we have come a long way because of the Chairman's work, his intention highlights that challenges still remain to improve Federal law and to strengthen our immigration screening system at the front end, thereby ensuring that dangerous people are not allowed into this country in the first instance.

So not only do we have a humanitarian crisis, we have potentially a security crisis as well. I look forward to hearing the thoughts and learned judgment of the members of this panel on how we can approach these interrelated problems and hopefully on how we can make progress on alleviating both, and I welcome you.

Chairman DURBIN. Thanks, Senator Cruz.

Senator Klobuchar has asked for a brief opening statement, and I am going to offer the same courtesy to the other Members who are in attendance here today. Senator Klobuchar.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. AMY KLOBUCHAR,
A U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF MINNESOTA**

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Well, thank you so much, Senator Durbin, and thank you for holding this important hearing. The conflict in Syria remains one of the most crucial foreign policy challenges that we face, and addressing this refugee crisis caused by the war is essential to our stability in the region but, as we can see by the people who have joined us today, the refugees, essential to the people of Syria.

In April, I visited one of Syria's neighbors—actually, two of them, Jordan and Turkey, with Senator Graham and Senator Gillibrand and Senator Hoeven. And we had the opportunity to visit the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan right on the border there and to meet with a few of the 120,000 Syrians that were there. I will never forget this visit. I will never forget the one man who told us that the atrocities would “make stones cry.” And then each of the people that we met with went through what had happened to their families.

A young boy name Yurab was only 11 years old, but it felt like he had the weight of the world on his shoulders. His father had been shot and badly injured before escaping to Jordan, and so now it was up to this 11-year-old boy to make sure that the rest of his family was taken care of. Every day Yurab would stand in line for food and water, and every day he would carry what he could hold in his hands back to his family. At 11 years old, he had seen more suffering and injustice than most people will see in their entire lifetimes.

This is just one of millions of tragic stories that we heard from the men, women, and children who have had to flee their homes in Syria. My home State has always been a State of refugees. We have one of the largest Somali populations in the country, and we have the largest Hmong population in the country. We see these refugees, whether they be from Somalia or Liberia, as part of the fabric of our State and our culture, and we are much the richer for them.

So I am looking forward to hearing about resettlement efforts at this point. I am looking forward to hearing about where aid is going, something that Senator Graham and I encountered when we were there in terms of an issue, and other steps that are being taken to help Syrians that are in desperate need of assistance.

Thank you.

Chairman DURBIN. Thank you.

Senator Graham, Senator Whitehouse.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SHELDON WHITEHOUSE,
A U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND**

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Thank you, Senator Durbin. I will not take long. I just want to thank you for holding this hearing. I think it is an issue that merits our attention.

I think we have been in a hearing on this before, Ms. Richard. We have been a day late and a dollar short consistently with our response to the Syrian crisis. And as a result, we have always been behind the curve, and as a result, I think there has been unnecessary human suffering.

Like Senator Klobuchar, I have traveled to the area with a bipartisan delegation. I would like to put into the record a letter that Senator McCain and I, Senator Gillibrand, Senator Coons, Senator Blumenthal, and Senator Ayotte wrote to the President urging a fulsome and robust response to the crisis that has developed in Syria. And I hope we learn lessons from this because, frankly, we were warned all along the way, and despite the warnings from Members of Congress, from allies in the neighborhood, we remained always a day late and a dollar short. And I think it has been a very unfortunate episode.

Thank you, Chairman.

Chairman DURBIN. Without objection, the letter will be entered in the record.

[The letter appears as a submission for the record.]

Chairman DURBIN. The Committee, as a matter of standard practice, swears in the witnesses, and I ask the three to please stand and raise your right hand. Do you affirm the testimony you are about to give before the Subcommittee will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Ms. RICHARD. I do.

Ms. LINDBORG. I do.

Ms. GROOM. I do.

Chairman DURBIN. Thank you. Let the record reflect that the witnesses have answered in the affirmative.

Each witness is going to be given 5 minutes for an opening statement, and their written statements will be included in their entirety. Senator Leahy, the Chairman of the full Judiciary Committee, who has been a leader on refugee issues, has submitted a statement, and without objection, it will be placed in the record.

[The prepared statement of Chairman Leahy appears as a submission for the record.]

Chairman DURBIN. Our first witness, Anne Richard, currently serves as Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration. Prior to her appointment, Ms. Richard was vice president of government relations and advocacy for the International Rescue Committee, an international aid agency helping refugees internally displaced and other victims of conflict. During the Clinton administration, Ms. Richard served in a variety of capacities in the State Department and Peace Corps and the Office of Management and Budget. Prior to her Government service, Ms. Richard was part of the team that created the International Crisis Group. She has a B.S. in foreign service from the highly regarded Georgetown University and an M.A. in public policy studies from the University of Chicago.

Ms. Richard, thank you for joining us today.

STATEMENT OF HON. ANNE C. RICHARD, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF POPULATION, REFUGEES, AND MIGRATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. RICHARD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I would like to thank the other members, Ranking Member Cruz, Senator Klobuchar, and Senators Whitehouse and Graham, for coming out today. Senator Graham has sat through and chaired a similar hearing, so he is a diehard fan of ours, so we appreciate that—or

at least very interested in this subject, which we appreciate. So thank you for holding this hearing and bringing attention to the tragedy unfolding in the Middle East.

I am here today with colleagues from the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Department of Homeland Security. I am going to limit my remarks to the State Department's role in assisting refugees overseas. We are also going to talk about aid inside Syria. Nancy will take the lead on that. And then Molly Groom from DHS will talk about resettlement. But I am happy to take questions on any of these subjects because we are working very closely together on all of these things, and in the interest of time, I will keep my remarks more restricted.

You know that more than 2.3 million have crossed Syria's borders and, thus, are considered refugees. They have fled to all the neighboring countries, most of whom are struggling to help them.

We are incredibly grateful to these countries for letting them in, and we want them to keep their borders open and not push anyone back. In order for them to do so, these neighboring countries need our help. They need our help not just in delivering aid to the refugees, but they also need our help for their own poor citizens. And they need help for their own budgets, which are strained and overstretched by delivering services to these much larger populations.

The impact is that schools have moved to double shifts to accommodate Syrian children. Hospital beds are filled by Syrian patients. Rents have risen; wages have fallen as a result of the competition for housing and jobs. There are water shortages in Jordan and Lebanon. The drain on water resources is especially severe in Jordan. And helping the host community, in addition to the refugees themselves, is an accepted tenet of refugee work. We do this, for example, in remote parts of Chad where poor Chadians are given help alongside refugees from Darfur, and in this case, we need to do more in terms of helping them provide services—health care, clean water, extra schooling, in addition to items like food vouchers, household supplies, and blankets. This will involve more than just humanitarian agencies. We need and are getting help from the World Bank and our development agencies and our colleagues at USAID who work on longer-term development.

In talking about the situation of the refugees themselves, I think that was a very good video that we saw from UNHCR. I recently made my sixth visit to the region. My seventh is upcoming to Jordan this weekend. Right before Christmas I traveled to Erbil in northern Iraq. There I had the pleasure of wading through oceans of mud in cold temperatures to visit with refugee families and consult with local government officials.

The good news is that the U.N. agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and local charities have managed to house a lot of people in tents and keep them warm using an extra layer of tenting fabric, kerosene stoves, and lots and lots of blankets. Still, this is no place for children to grow up. I saw kids there running around in plastic flip-flops without socks. This is not a good environment for families.

And I have met with Syrian refugees in all of the other countries bordering Syria. In Lebanon, they continue to keep its borders mostly open, and it is now hosting the largest number of refugees

in the smallest country in the region. You have already mentioned its refugees make up 20 percent of the population in Lebanon on top of 400,000 Palestinians who have been there for decades.

More than a million refugees are split between Turkey and Jordan, and those are just the registered refugees. There are many more citizens from Syria living in both of those cities. Iraq and Egypt also have large populations of Syrians.

It is important to know—and I am so grateful that some of you have visited the camps, but most refugees do not live in the camps. In early December, my Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Simon Henshaw visited refugees in cities of southern Turkey, Kilis and Gaziantep, and there he saw the work of NGO's and municipal governments struggling to deal with an influx of refugees living in the cities and towns of Turkey.

Despite their efforts, most refugees were not getting services and were living in substandard conditions. For this reason, one of our top goals is to focus more attention on the plight of urban refugees and do everything we can to get aid to these families.

Other challenges that we talk about in the testimony are children. The U.N. High Commission for Refugees and UNICEF have come together. There is a press statement that came out today that Save the Children and World Vision were also involved in an initiative that we support called "No Lost Generation," trying to make sure that we keep these children inside and fleeing from Syria safe, healthy, educated, and away from danger. They need a future.

Another issue of great concern to all of us is protection of women and girls, and here we have, I know, a lot of bipartisan support. We also have support from Secretary Kerry, who has put together an initiative called "Safe from the Start," to make sure we protect women and girls in this crisis. We are also concerned about them surviving the winter.

Final remarks. I would like to say that on January 15th we will be in Kuwait for a pledging conference to reiterate American support for the humanitarian response. Of course, beyond that, our Secretary will be heading to the Geneva II conference to try to bring peace to this very troubled area. This is not the only crisis to which we are rushing humanitarian aid. South Sudan is suffering a political crisis that has displaced 190,000 of its citizens, with another 32,000 streaming across its borders. In the Central African Republic, UNHCR's latest update puts the number of displaced at 930,000. This is 20 percent of that country's population displaced, the same proportion as there are refugees in Lebanon.

This administration is addressing all of these crises and other crises at the same time with high levels of vigor and energy and dedication. The most senior members of the administration are fully engaged, including Ambassador Power, National Security Adviser Rice, and my boss, Secretary of State John Kerry. But their attention does not necessarily mean that these tough situations are easily solved, and we cannot do much without your support. Especially in the case of humanitarian endeavors, support for our budget and the budgets of all our diplomatic and foreign aid activities is very helpful.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Richard appears as a submission for the record.]

Chairman DURBIN. Thanks, Ms. Richard.

Nancy Lindborg serves as USAID Assistant Administrator for the Bureau of Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance, where she leads the efforts of more than 500 team members in 9 offices focused on crisis prevention, response, recovery, and transition. She has led DCHA teams in response to the ongoing Syrian crisis, the Sahel 2012 and Horn of Africa 2011 droughts, the Arab Spring, and numerous other global crises. She was back to her home base in Chicago a few months ago discussing the typhoon in the Philippines, so I know you have a very busy schedule.

Prior to joining USAID, she was president of Mercy Corps for 14 years, with a B.A. and M.A. in English literature from Stanford, an M.A. in public administration from the JFK School at Harvard.

Ms. Lindborg, I want to take this opportunity to thank you again for coming to Chicago and for all your good work.

Please proceed.

STATEMENT OF HON. NANCY E. LINDBORG, ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, BUREAU FOR DEMOCRACY, CONFLICT, AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. LINDBORG. Thank you very much, Chairman Durbin. Thanks, Ranking Member Cruz and other members of the Subcommittee. We really appreciate your having this hearing today to shine a light on this crisis and, most importantly, put a human face on it.

We have heard the staggering statistics, and the numbers are really hard to comprehend, and thank you, Senator Klobuchar, for the stories that you told.

Those in need in this crisis are equal to the entire State of New Jersey, and the displaced are as if the entire State of Massachusetts were out of their homes. And, most importantly, the 5 million children who are affected is equal to the children in the entire 25 largest school districts in this country. So that is all of New York, all of Los Angeles, you know, et cetera, et cetera, for 25 school districts. This is a generation of Syrian children who have been traumatized by bombs, many of them have lost their homes, their families, their friends. And, unfortunately, similar to Massachusetts and New Jersey, the region also faces one of the worst winters in the last 100 years, adding to the hardship of families out of their homes.

Working in partnership with the international community, the United States humanitarian response has reached millions. We have saved millions of lives. But we also know that the needs are escalating faster than any of our collective responses can manage to reach.

So I would like to cover three quick areas today.

First, a quick update on our very significant life-saving humanitarian response, which does include a focus on the most vulnerable, especially women and, very importantly, children who will steer the future course of this country and this Nation.

The United States has made a total contribution, as you noted, Senator Durbin, of \$1.3 billion, and we are reaching regularly about 4.2 million people in all 14 Governorates inside Syria as well as the 2 million refugees in neighboring countries. And we have doubled the number of our partners inside Syria, and we are working through all possible channels—the United Nations, NGO's, international groups, and local. We are reaching about 2.7 million people with medical care, and thanks to the many extraordinarily courageous doctors, nurses, and health workers who risk their lives every day inside Syria.

We are the single largest donor of emergency food aid, and thanks to the very flexible tools that allow us to provide vouchers and do local/regional purchase, we are able to feed about 4.2 million people inside Syria and 1.3 million refugees every day who depend upon that food.

Finally, all of our assistance takes into account the vulnerability particularly of women and children and women who experience gender-based violence. As Anne noted, we have an initiative called "Safe from the Start" that prioritizes this in all of our assistance.

Also as Anne noted, we are working very closely with the international community on the No Lost Generation strategy that looks at programs to help children inside and outside of Syria, and today is the start of a very major multi-partner media campaign to put a face on this crisis that has dragged on into its third year now.

So a few key challenges that I want to note. The first is that the insecurity of this war zone complicates every day the ability to deliver assistance. Roads are closing, hundreds of checkpoints make it very dangerous for aid workers to cross lines and to get into communities.

Most concerning, there is an estimated 250,000 people who have been completely and deliberately cutoff from humanitarian assistance for many months now in areas that are besieged by the regime, as you noted, in campaigns that are unconscionable, "Kneel or starve."

In October, the U.N. Security Council passed a Presidential statement that urges all parties of the conflict to facilitate immediate access. This statement lays down a very clear set of markers for the Syrian regime regarding the world's expectations that it will provide the access that it has long denied, and by taking these clear steps, the regime has the power to enable life-saving assistance to reach more than 200,000 people in need immediately.

Finally, resources remain a key constraint, and as we head to Kuwait next week for the donors conference, we are making a major push for all donors across the globe to step up to the plate to help with this escalating burden.

We have also within USAID reoriented our development activities in the neighboring states. We are working with our development and humanitarian resources and with our partners to help create a comprehensive response for the neighboring states that are straining to accommodate the needs of their own people in addition to the millions of new refugees, and we are seeing this convergence of the poorest communities hosting the largest number of refugees. So in Jordan, for example, where the domestic water supply is among the lowest in the world, USAID used \$20 million from

our Complex Crises Fund to help communities with that large refugee population. So our efforts are both to assist with the development needs of communities as well as contribute to the region's stability.

We know that humanitarian assistance is not the solution to this horrible crisis, and it absolutely cannot end the bloodshed. But it is saving countless lives every day. It is helping to protect the vulnerable from a very, very devastating conflict.

The United States remains committed to using every possible tool that we can to reach Syrians in need and to bring in our full diplomatic weight to help attain greater access.

So thank you for your time today and for the vital congressional support that makes our work possible, and we look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Lindborg appears as a submission for the record.]

Chairman DURBIN. Thanks, Ms. Lindborg.

We are now going to hear from Molly Groom, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Immigration and Border Security at the Department of Homeland Security. Ms. Groom is detailed to her current position from her permanent role as Chief of the Refugee and Asylum Law Division in the Office of Chief Counsel at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. She has worked in a variety of capacities on immigration law in the Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security. A graduate of Duke with an A.B. in English, a J.D., and her master's of social science from Case Western, received the National Security Law LLM from Georgetown University.

I came to know Ms. Groom when she was on detail with Senator Menendez to work on the bipartisan comprehensive immigration bill that the Senate considered this year—last year, I should say.

Ms. Groom, it is nice to see you again. The floor is yours. Do you want to push the button in front of you there?

STATEMENT OF MOLLY GROOM, ACTING DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, OFFICE OF POLICY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. GROOM. Yes, thank you so much, Chairman Durbin, and thank you, Ranking Member Cruz and the distinguished members of the Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to address the refugee resettlement and other humanitarian efforts that we are undertaking to address the crisis in Syria.

As you are all aware, the U.S. has a proud and longstanding tradition of offering protection, freedom, and opportunity to refugees from around the world who fear persecution. Refugee resettlement is a cornerstone of our national character and reflects our country's commitment to humanitarian ideals. It is this commitment which must be carried out in conjunction with our overarching commitment to protecting our national security.

DHS, along with the Department of State, is committed to ensuring that the U.S. continues to take a leading role in refugee resettlement and other humanitarian protections. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program serves a critical role in identifying individuals in

need of protection who do not present a risk to our national security and who are otherwise admissible to the U.S. as refugees.

It is DHS' U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services that is responsible for determining whether individuals meet the refugee definition. They do this by conducting individual in-depth interviews and considering the results of security checks, extensive security checks.

In 2005, USCIS created the Refugee Corps, a cadre of specially trained officers who travel overseas to adjudicate applications for refugee status. The officers receive extensive training which includes information about the specific populations they will be interviewing, including the likely types of claims that they will encounter, fraud trends or security issues, and detailed country-of-origin information. All refugee status determinations undergo 100 percent supervisory review before a final decision is reached.

Security checks are an integral part of the refugee resettlement process, and coordinating these checks is a shared responsibility between the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security. The refugee vetting process in place today employs robust security measures to protect against risks to our national security, and DHS would never approve a refugee applicant for travel until all required security checks are completed and cleared.

Refugee vetting happens at different stages of the process, and the procedures include initial biographic and biometric security checks against DHS holdings, FBI holdings, Department of Defense holding, State holdings, and intelligence community holdings, and those checks are performed again, the interagency checks, pre-departure—that is, before the refugee is scheduled to travel to the United States.

While no screening is infallible, we believe that our current refugee screening systems are more likely today to detect individuals with derogatory information should they apply.

DHS works early on with the Department of State to provide feedback on which refugee groups being considered for resettlement are likely to qualify and which may pose eligibility concerns. The broad definitions of terrorist activity and terrorist organizations under U.S. immigration law are often a hurdle to resettling otherwise eligible refugees who pose no security threat. Examples of these groups include the ethnic Burmese who provided food to an individual or Iraqis who paid ransoms for the release of family members.

Given the complexities of the crisis in Syria, we believe certain refugees fleeing the crisis may fall within the terrorism-related inadmissibility grounds as they are defined in the Immigration and Nationality Act. With the breadth of these grounds, the law also gives the Secretaries of State and Homeland Security, in consultation with the Attorney General, broad discretionary authority to issue exemptions when the circumstances might justify an exemption. DHS, DOS, and the Department of Justice engage in an inter-agency consultation process on the exercise of this exemption authority. This process is used to ensure that the terrorism-related inadmissibility grounds are applied in a way that protect our national security but also allow individuals who pose no threat to po-

tentially receive immigration benefits that they are otherwise eligible for.

If the Secretary of Homeland Security or the Secretary of State exercises the exemption authority, the Department of Homeland Security or the Department of State may then apply these exemptions on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the totality of the circumstances. Any individual who poses a threat to the safety or security of the U.S. would not be eligible for an exemption.

We are ever mindful that addressing humanitarian needs must be coupled with robust measures to protect national security, including the security screening of refugee applicants. With regard to the population fleeing Syria, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State have had a series of conversations with UNHCR on how best to address resettlement of Syrians and any potential exemption-related issues. With regard to possible new exemption authority, interagency consultations are ongoing.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify and for your interest in how we are approaching resettlement of refugees fleeing the crisis in Syria, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Groom appears as a submission for the record.]

Chairman DURBIN. Thanks, Ms. Groom.

UNHCR has begun efforts to resettle especially vulnerable refugees in third countries, including 30,000 in Fiscal Year 2014. I am struck by that number, that they are trying to resettle 30,000 and we are talking about an order of magnitude in the millions of refugees, but 30,000 is the UNHCR target number.

Now, the United States typically accepts more than half of resettlement refugees under this type of program. Ms. Richard, administration officials previously told the staff of our Subcommittee that the United States is likely to accept only a few hundred Syrian refugees in this fiscal year, which ends in October, October 1st. However, in your testimony today, you said, and I quote, "We expect to accept referrals for several thousands refugees in 2014."

Can you please clarify that?

Ms. RICHARD. Thank you for your question, and I get asked a lot about whether we will accept refugees in the United States, not just here in Washington but also when I travel overseas, because the neighboring countries would like us to, out of solidarity with them, bring in our share of refugees as well. And I explain to them that it is our tradition to do so. We have every intention of doing so. We are not at all opposed to bringing Syrian refugees to the United States.

The fact that we have not brought many so far is due to:

First, our hope, and now discarded, that this conflict would be over quickly and they would be able to go home quickly, and that has not been the case.

Second, we take refugees after they have been referred by the U.N. High Commission for Refugees, UNHCR, and so that process did not start at once, but instead started after a period of time.

And now our own process takes a little while. It is very deliberate and careful. It is designed to be that way to make sure that we only take bona fide refugees.

So we are working very quickly now to respond to referrals from UNHCR and to start that process of bringing in refugees. And so I think that UNHCR's desire to send 30,000 to new homes in other countries this year is ambitious, and I want to do everything we can to bring in as many as we can to the United States before the end of the fiscal year, but in all honesty, I do not think you will see big numbers until next fiscal year, the end of this calendar year.

Chairman DURBIN. And, of course, it is difficult to speak to our allies and friends and ask them to also bear the burden if we do not do it as well.

Ms. RICHARD. That is right. And the good thing is, I was able to say that we could be counted on to bring in refugees, in part because we have this tradition that has bipartisan support on the Hill of bringing refugees. Last year, we brought 70,000, and that was the closest we had come in 30 years to reaching our target level. We got 99.9 percent of the refugees we plan to bring in we brought in, so we have done a lot of things to make sure our process works quickly and well. But it is deliberately supposed to be designed that bona fide refugees come in and bad guys do not come in, and that process that Molly Groom has described very well of checking to make sure that we are only bringing bona fide refugees does take a little time.

Chairman DURBIN. So let us go to the bad guy issue and talk about it for a moment. I mentioned it at the outset because of concerns over what we have heard in terms of applying the rules as written, that if someone is seeking refugee status and they have somehow even supported an armed rebel group, which the United States is directly supporting, it could in some cases raise questions if not disqualify them.

The same questions have been raised about those who help groups under duress. It was a witness before this Committee or a case before this Committee of a Colombian nurse who, at the point of a gun, was providing medical assistance to a FARC injured rebel and was disqualified as a refugee because of her involvement, even though her actions were under duress.

The point made by Senator Cruz is obvious and valid. We do not want anyone to come into the United States who will be a threat to our security. That is something I think we owe the American people, is the assurance we have done everything humanly possible to stop that from occurring.

So let me ask you at this point, Ms. Groom, as you reflect on this, can you update us on the status of exemptions that have been prepared for cases like those that I have described? And what is the timetable for a decision about a proposed exemption to the material support bar, which I think is an overarching description of what we have been describing?

Ms. GROOM. Thank you for the opportunity to talk about the TRIG grounds, as we call them, terrorism-related inadmissibility grounds, and the exemption process. As you note, the terrorism-related inadmissibility grounds are quite broad because of the defini-

tion of “terrorist organization” and because of the definition of “terrorist activity.” A terrorist organization includes any undesignated terrorist organization, which means any two members who use a firearm or other weapon with the intent to endanger. That is a terrorist organization if they engage in terrorist activity.

So the exemption process is the flexibility that is provided for in the law, and the interagency working group that I mentioned has exercised an exemption for those who provide medical care under duress. There is also an exemption for those who provide material support under duress. So those exemptions are already in place and may be useful with the population fleeing Syria.

I believe you were asking about something that we have been discussing for quite some time and whether or not there should be an exemption for insignificant amounts of material support. And with that exemption, it is on an accelerated track. We are nearing the finish line, and we are at the point of senior-level engagement, and we are going to bring this to a close in the interagency and it will be moving to the secretarial level for decisionmaking very shortly. So I hope to have good news on that front soon.

Chairman DURBIN. Thank you.

Ms. Lindborg, when I visited the refugee camp in Turkey, 10,000 people—and as I said, I thought it was an extraordinary effort by the Turkish Government to accommodate a large number of people, men, women, and children—we went into the classroom, and I am sure these children were completely beside themselves to figure out who we were or why we were there. They were Syrian children who were in a classroom being taught in Turkish and greeted by American visitors in English. I am sure that they were puzzled as to what life held for the next day.

But it raises a question that you have addressed here, the so-called lost generation. What are we going to do with these children as they lose their opportunity for a normal, regular education? What efforts, as you mentioned, are underway to try to avoid this?

Ms. LINDBORG. Well, there is a unified campaign and strategy under the heading of No Lost Generation that is looking at how do we pull together the resources from both our humanitarian accounts with our partners as well, both inside and outside Syria and in the neighboring countries, and how do we focus in on all the ways that we can help children both access education and be provided with the kind of safe spaces and opportunities that create a little more normalcy in their lives?

So, for example, in Lebanon, in addition to the assistance that we are providing through our humanitarian efforts, we are also with our development funds focusing in on education, because one of the big challenges is the number of Syrian children in Lebanon who need to be accommodated by an already overburdened school system. You already have double shifts in a lot of the schools in Lebanon.

So the focus is to create that comprehensive approach where we are able to bring in the development funds that help both the communities but also get kids into school, get kids into ways that they have more of a sense of future and hope.

Unfortunately, inside Syria, it is much more complicated because it is difficult to restore infrastructure when they are still under

aerial bombardment. So in those instances, it is more of a focus of the kind of psychological or safe spaces that we can help to provide those kids, and also just that they get clothing and food to eat.

Chairman DURBIN. Thanks.

Senator Cruz.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to each of the members of the panel today.

Assistant Secretary Richard, could you put the impact of the displaced Syrian refugees into historical perspective? What comparable events have we seen in the past? And what have been the consequences of those?

Ms. RICHARD. We have not seen anything like this in several decades, and, you know, the Rwandan genocide sent people fleeing from Rwanda, but it was a very short period of time in which they were on the move, and then there was a larger effort to address the situation after they had fled to Zaire, the modern-day Democratic Republic of Congo.

We saw widespread chaos in the Balkans in the mid-1990s that involved pulling together a lot of different parts of the United Nations, peacekeepers, diplomatic measures.

This is different in many ways in that one of the things that has happened—and this was referenced earlier—is we have seen a country lose about 35 years of development. In a sense, it is the suicide of Syria because the hospitals have been bombed, schools have been bombed, civilians have been killed by the tens of thousands. And when we talk about No Lost Generation, this ought to be the generation that will be the future of Syria. I do not know where the leaders are going to come from if they are not in school and if their families are torn apart and they are traumatized from what they have witnessed.

So this sets a horrible new standard, I think, in our historic annals in terms of the amount of mayhem and tragedy that can be spread in a couple years.

Senator CRUZ. And in terms of prior refugee crises, what efforts have been undertaken to alleviate those crises? And how successful would you characterize those efforts as having been?

Ms. RICHARD. I think today we see the fruits of some of the lessons learned in the past, because never before have I seen such an impressive group of U.N. agency heads, including a few Americans—Tony Lake runs UNICEF, and Ertharin Cousin from Chicago runs the World Food Program. So we have a lot of very good relations with the U.N. leadership there, and also we have some really good experience behind them. And also we have much more professional aid workers on the ground using more time-tested techniques to help people.

The problem is that it is such an overwhelming crisis that even though so many lives have been saved and so many people have gotten help in the places to which they have run, it is not enough. It requires more. This is why we are taking extraordinary measures like the Kuwait pledging conference, held for a second year soon, and trying to pull the world together, get new donors to the table, get never before degrees of coordination among all the players in the field to work together.

Senator CRUZ. And this is a question for anyone on the panel who would care to respond, but in your judgment, how would you assess the impact of this crisis on U.S. allies in the region and, in particular, Lebanon in terms of the stability and security?

Ms. RICHARD. I will start. I think it is having a devastating impact. It is undermining the stability of the region. It is no longer a Syria crisis; it is a regional crisis. And, you know, we have very close relationships in Jordan. Our embassy works very closely with the government there. They are very, very worried about their abilities to host this third wave of refugees because they have hosted Palestinians for decades, they have hosted Iraqi refugees, recently an uptick in refugees from Iraq coming into Jordan, and now they have opened their homes and cities and towns and schools to the Syrians.

The only place worse off than Jordan in terms of the concerns and the fears of the government officials with whom I meet is Lebanon, and Lebanon has just not got a society and a government organized to respond as robustly as some of the other countries. And so there has been increased tensions within that society. Even as they brought in more refugees than any other state, and even as they have been very generous in letting people come and kept their borders open, the tensions have built, and the internal sectarian tensions are also on the rise. And so we should all be very concerned about what this crisis means for the countries in the region.

Senator CRUZ. And let me again ask the panel, in your judgment, how serious a threat and how widespread are we seeing the infiltration and exploitation of refugees by Al-Qaeda and radical extremists?

Ms. RICHARD. I will answer that. It is not large numbers. Most refugee groups that you meet, most in the camps are civilians, families, law-abiding people who are just shattered by what is happening in Syria. The thing that we know, though, is it does not take a lot of evildoers to cause a lot of havoc. And so it is not a wide problem, but it is a real problem.

And so that is why I respect your concern that we do everything we can to avoid radicalization and also to make sure that borders are guarded carefully so that only legitimate refugees come across, which will be the—most of the people will be legitimate refugees, but also that bad element is kept out. And what I fear for, though, is I do not want Americans to equate refugees with terrorists and—they are not. And the refugees here today with us are journalists and scholars and, you know, family people. So that is—I guess I do not have to convince you if your parents were refugees, but I do think that sometimes Americans who have not personally met refugees are fearful. Once they meet refugees, usually they are convinced. Refugees themselves make the best Ambassadors to this program.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you very much.

Chairman DURBIN. Senator Klobuchar.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all of you, our witnesses.

The one thing that I thought was good that you talked about early on is that we focus a lot on the camps. Several of us, as you noted, have been there, but that, in fact, most of the refugees are

out in the countries in Jordan for the most part and other countries. And I understand nearly 520,000 refugees are in Jordan, increasing that country's population by 9 percent, over 750,000 in Lebanon, adding 20 percent.

When we visited Jordan last April, we met with the king, and he met with us for a significant period of time and talked about how the refugee situation was increasingly difficult for his country to handle.

To you, Secretary Richard, and then Administrator Lindborg, how do you assess the current stability of Jordan considering the massive refugee influx?

Ms. RICHARD. First, I would just like to say that Nancy Lindborg is from Minnesota. She is not from Illinois, okay? So we should just out her right there.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. I can tell by her last name.

Ms. LINDBORG. But I lived in Chicago for 4 years.

Ms. RICHARD. I lived there for 2 years.

So we are very concerned about Jordan, which is why we spend a lot of time visiting with our colleagues who work in Jordan, and also with the Ambassador here, and we have a very active embassy there led by Ambassador Stu Jones, and we have a lot of colleagues who are working in Jordan to work very carefully with the government, which is very aligned in their approach to the crisis to provide assistance. They know that our funding in the State Department Population, Refugees, and Migration Bureau that I lead goes through the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, goes through the International Organization for Migration—

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Is it true that—just speaking of the U.N. High Commission, I know when Senator Graham and I were there, we were really concerned that the aid goes through—when it comes from the United Nations, it only goes through the Assad regime. Is that correct?

Ms. RICHARD. No, that is not correct.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. So—

Ms. RICHARD. The Assad regime does not benefit from U.S. taxpayer support to—

Senator KLOBUCHAR. So the U.N. aid can go through the rebel groups?

Ms. RICHARD. What is true is that—and Nancy I can tell wants to pick up on this. What is true is that the U.N. agencies need the permission of the Assad regime to bring their staff in on visas and to set up their operations in Damascus, and then they try to get as far around Syria as they can get.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay, but that does mean that they have control over where the aid goes, and it makes it harder for it to go to certain regions. Is that right?

Ms. RICHARD. Yes.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. If you want to go back to the original question—

Ms. LINDBORG. Yes, to both, but just to finish on this, the constraints on providing assistance from a Damascus base are the core parts of this October statement that was released that has a very specific list that we are happy to send to you all, that says these are the things that we need for that assistance to be able to reach

people in need more effectively, and it is in particular the 200,000 who are in areas besieged by the Syrian regime as well as about 2 million people who are in conflict-affected areas. So we have a lot of concerns about the ability to reach everyone in need.

To your question about Jordan, I think that for both Jordan and, as Anne said, Lebanon as well, there is a lot of concern about the stability when you have that level of influx of refugees. In Jordan, we have put about \$1 billion of assistance through development aid to Jordan, both for budget support as well as into those communities that have the greatest refugee burden. There is a lot of concern about stressed infrastructure and about very scarce resources, and so we have put much of our development assistance focus on that.

We are also, as we provide humanitarian assistance, looking at ways that not only it benefits the refugee population but also the locals. So because of this flexibility that we have with some of our food aid assistance, we have done vouchers that enable the refugees to buy food in local stores. So it is a revenue benefit for the local merchants, which makes a huge difference in terms of community acceptance.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Ms. Groom, I was looking at the numbers from Southeast Asia, and I think we got 130,000 Southeast Asian refugees that came to the U.S. at the end of the Vietnam War. And many of them are in Minnesota, and also I would note you mentioned the Burmese, many of them are in Minnesota as well. And I am just concerned when I hear these numbers, hundreds that Senator Durbin was talking about, even though Assistant Secretary Richard talked about thousands, but I am very concerned about the numbers when I think that we should be making it easier, while still checking everything you need to check.

I know in the immigration bill there are actually some provisions that have passed the Senate that would make it easier to speed up some of these asylum applications. Would that be helpful?

Ms. GROOM. Yes, thank you so much for the question. As you note, in Senate bill 744 it does remove the 1-year filing deadline from asylum claims, and that is something we have seen. In the past year, 1,335 Syrians have applied for asylum. Now, while there is an exception for the 1-year filing deadline right now, if it were removed and the Senate bill were passed, it would make those claims move more quickly. And it seems to be the right result given the crisis there.

There are also some other changes to the refugee program that are contained in the bill that might be useful for resettling refugees, and then there are changes also to the expedited removal and the credible fear process.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. How many do you think we are going to be able to resettle in the U.S. in the coming year when there are 135,000, or whatever, that have applied?

Ms. GROOM. Well, I think Assistant Secretary Richard spoke to—the numbers will really probably—the referrals are starting, are going to start coming in very shortly, but then the process works, and it takes a bit of time. So we are going to start seeing arrivals not until the end of this year, likely.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. It just seems like such a long time, and I will just end with that, and just say to the refugees that are here with us today, the three that got here, Mr. Doko and Mr. Charbaji and Mr. Muqdad, how sorry I am about this. And on Christmas Eve, our church, like many churches in the U.S., everyone holds a candle, and we go around and sing "Silent Night." And I had been thinking of Syria for a number of weeks, I will be honest about that, and that was all I could think about when I stood there, was those refugees that, when we went and visited them, the rebels were doing much better. And we said, "Oh, we know this is going to improve for you by the end of this year. We know the situation is improving." And to me, it has only gotten worse.

And so that is why I am so much interested in this idea of the resettlement and working with our allies and leading so that other countries in Europe and other places will also bring in these refugees as we do not see an immediate end to this conflict. So I appreciate your efforts. Thank you.

Chairman DURBIN. Thanks, Senator Klobuchar.

I want to thank my colleague Senator Graham for his patience in waiting and especially for his dedication to Syria and the challenges it faces. Senator Graham.

Senator GRAHAM. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for, one, hosting this hearing. I think most Americans are concerned about a lot of things, and Syria is hard to get people's attention about, not because Americans are hard-hearted but the complicated world in which we live. So hearings like this are very important, and I want to compliment my Ranking Member here. I think he understands exactly what is going on.

Ms. Groom, in 2014, does Congress need to do anything pretty soon to make sure that we can achieve our fair share of the refugees in changing the laws? Do you have any proposals?

Ms. GROOM. I do not have any proposals to offer you today, but we have offered to work with the Senate—

Senator GRAHAM. Well, I guess what I am saying, I do not see a comprehensive immigration bill passing anytime soon, so when it comes to changes in our laws, exemptions, if you need something beyond the ability you have within the body that you work, please let us know, because I think a lot of us may have different views about immigration but would be willing to accommodate some legal changes if it would help expedite this process. So that is an opportunity for you.

Ms. GROOM. And I welcome that opportunity.

Ms. RICHARD. A couple of ideas right off the top of my head, never missing an opportunity. You know, we have this sort of tradeoff to make within our budget at the State Department. How much do we devote to bringing refugees to the U.S.? And how much do we devote to helping refugees overseas in the places where they live? We help far more overseas. And so it sounds like there is support here for bringing even more refugees to the United States beyond the 70,000 that we brought. But in order to do that, we would hate to undermine our overseas programs, and so we need support for both.

Senator GRAHAM. Well, let us talk about this. I think there is bipartisan support for trying to do a better job in terms of assimi-

lating non-terrorist refugees in the United States. I just think Senator Cruz represents what can happen when you take people from other countries. You know, our country benefits. And I am sure there are Democrats who were refugees, too, so we do not want to make this partisan.

[Laughter.]

Senator GRAHAM. But the bottom line is I think America has a pretty good track record of assimilating people.

Now, about the budget, the World Food Program, how much of their budget is allocated to Syria?

Ms. LINDBORG. Increasingly, a large percentage. I can——

Senator GRAHAM. Well, I just met with a lady in Rome. She says they are being overwhelmed.

Ms. LINDBORG. They are overwhelmed. We are the largest single donor, and it vacuums up all of our flexibility.

Senator GRAHAM. Her budget is being destroyed.

Ms. LINDBORG. As is our——

Senator GRAHAM. Every other refugee problem in the world is being displaced by Syria, so the World Food Program is being devastated by Syria.

Now, when it comes to appropriations, Ms. Richard, I am the Ranking Republican working with Senator Leahy. We tried to increase funding, and there is a limit to what we can do. But could you provide the Appropriations Committee and the Judiciary Committee with what you think would be a 2- or 3- year plan here? Could you see the war ending this year?

Ms. RICHARD. Regrettably, no.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you think Al-Qaeda is going to go to Geneva, too?

Ms. RICHARD. Well, I do not hang out a lot with Al-Qaeda, so——

Senator GRAHAM. I know, but I do not think they are going to be invited.

Ms. RICHARD. I think the chances for Geneva II making some modest successes are increasing just in these last few days, but I defer to Robert Ford on that.

Senator GRAHAM. Well, I hope you are right, but here is what I see——

Ms. RICHARD. But I think—I know where you and I agree is that this is not an easy crisis to end, to clean up.

Senator GRAHAM. What I am trying to lay out is that the worst is yet to come. Do you agree with that?

Ms. RICHARD. I hope that is not the case.

Senator GRAHAM. Hope is not my question. Do you agree that the worst is yet to come?

Ms. RICHARD. If I were not a hopeful person, I would not be in my job.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. Well, just from an analytical point of view, Ms. Lindborg, do you think the worst is yet to come?

Ms. LINDBORG. Well, we do know that this is the largest U.N. appeal in history, and it is more than two-thirds of the rest of the global appeals put together.

Senator GRAHAM. Well, do you think, Ms. Richard, that 2014 is dramatically better for Syria or worse in terms of the refugee——

Ms. RICHARD. What concerns me is the idea of donor fatigue taking hold. We have been trying to get more donations from other countries, and so if it continues the way it has—and I would be stupid to suggest it might not. If it continues that way, we have got to somehow enlist new donors to come and——

Senator GRAHAM. Well, do you think it would be wise for America to plan for the worst and hope for the best when it comes to Syria?

Ms. RICHARD. I agree that in dealing with a refugee crisis of this magnitude, we have to have contingency plans for some——

Senator GRAHAM. So let us put a scope on what——

Ms. RICHARD. Really scary scenarios.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. Let us start to talk about some of those scary scenarios that are not unrealistic. You were at the—and, you know, you do a good job. I do not mean to be combative here. At the hearing we had in Appropriations, didn't the Lebanese Ambassador say his country was saturated?

Ms. RICHARD. Absolutely. He had—UNHCR has provided the photos to show that there are Syrian refugees on every square turf in Lebanon.

Senator GRAHAM. He says basically they cannot take any more people. What is the likelihood in 2014 of Lebanon closing their borders to Syrian refugees?

Ms. RICHARD. I am going to try——

Senator GRAHAM. Would you agree that would be a bad situation——

Ms. RICHARD. To keep that from happening?

Senator GRAHAM. Yes, but, you know, trying—I am trying to plan for the worst case.

Ms. RICHARD. A worst-case scenario would be a lot more refugees streaming out of Syria. The amazing thing to me is that not more have. They clearly are trying to stay put.

Senator GRAHAM. I think the worst-case scenario would be if they had no place to go. So what is the likelihood of Lebanon and Jordan closing their borders, because their countries' sovereignty and security is at risk, to Syrian refugees in 2014?

Ms. RICHARD. We have seen that what is happening is that the borders have already been moved from being open in most cases to being managed.

Senator GRAHAM. Could you give me a plan? Let us assume the worst now. What would our response be as a world and as a nation if in 2014, God forbid, the Lebanese closed their border, the Jordanians closed their borders? You do not have to answer that question now, but I think we need to get really serious about this, because I think the worst is yet to come. And, God, I hope I am wrong. I hope I am wrong.

Ms. RICHARD. One of the things that is good is that the U.N. appeals assume, you know, more challenging scenarios and so—and build in those funding.

In terms of our being able to respond, I think that we have benefited from your work and Senator Leahy's work last year that provided——

Senator GRAHAM. But it really is inadequate over time, don't you think? That what we are doing today, if this continues, that the

Congress needs to seriously look at coming up with a funding plan for——

Ms. RICHARD. The reason it is inadequate is because we have not seen other countries step up, and we have other crises to deal with. And the other piece that I want to make sure I mention to you all today is that the Department of Health and Human Services helps refugees once they have arrived in the U.S. We provide the aid, thanks to you all, for the first 30 to 90 days. But after that, it is up to HHS to provide aid through the States. That has been underfunded.

Senator GRAHAM. I am giving you an opportunity here to tell us that maybe the worst is yet to come and prepare Members of Congress who are sympathetic with a bill you may send us. So if I were you, I would suggest to take this opportunity to sit down and write out what we may be facing as a Nation in terms of our obligations to stabilize the region. That is all I am asking.

Ms. LINDBORG. And we very much appreciate that. Just to your point, we keep passing the worst-case scenario. So we need to be thinking of that. There have already been extraordinary strains on the system. We keep coming up with new ways of addressing it, and we will continue to be faced with that pressure, and we would very much welcome the opportunity to work with you all further on envisioning what that might take.

We were able to do the response that we did in this last Fiscal Year because of the very important support that we received, especially from the Senate. So we thank you for that, and I think that the partnership into the future will be really, really important.

Chairman DURBIN. Thanks, Senator Graham.

I want to ask three last questions, and I will allow Senator Cruz if he would like to as well. We have not mentioned Egypt, which is receiving over 130,000 Syrian refugees. We read about Egypt every day and the political instability and violence in that nation. In Lebanon and Jordan, I have a different mind's image of what is going on on the ground. There is weakness, vulnerability, and worry.

But in Egypt, it looks like clear instability. And I would like to ask, Syrian refugees who fled to Egypt face challenges because of this political turmoil. Conditions for Syrian refugees who fled there appear to have deteriorated in recent months as their political environment has deteriorated in Egypt. Some Syrian refugees in Egypt have reportedly faced arbitrary detention and deportation back to Syria.

Ms. Richard, has the U.S. Government taken any steps to address the concerns that have been raised about the treatment of Syrian refugees in Egypt?

Ms. RICHARD. Yes, Senator. As you said, more than 130,000 Syrian refugees have been registered in Egypt. There is an additional 20,000 awaiting registration. Most are living in greater Cairo; significant numbers are also in Alexandria. And on July 8th, the interim Egyptian Government imposed restrictive entry procedures requiring Syrians to have a valid visa and prior security approval. Tensions have resulted in increasing hostility toward Syrians and Palestinians from Syria and have led to detention and deportations of refugees.

So the U.S. is providing funding to UNHCR and other U.N. agencies to address their needs, and UNHCR has appealed to Egyptian authorities to admit and protect all Syrians seeking refuge.

At this morning's State Department's staff meeting, we were joined by Assistant Secretary Anne Patterson, who until recently was our U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, so I know she is fully aware of this. And she was part of a conversation this morning about Syrian refugees.

Chairman DURBIN. Ms. Lindborg, there is a practical issue here on this No Lost Generation that gets down to something very basic, and that is the fact that babies are being born in these refugee settings. A recent UNHCR survey on birth registration revealed 781 Syrian newborns in Lebanon; 77 percent of them had no official birth certificate. They are technically stateless at this point. These numbers are a concern because, as UNHCR indicates, unregistered refugee children can face increased risk of exposure to violence, abuse, and exploitation. The numbers may be low when you consider the universe of refugees, due in part to the barriers at birth registry that refugee families encounter in Jordan and Lebanon, including complex registration procedures.

Has the U.S. Government taken any steps with UNHCR, NGO's, and host governments to address the issue of statelessness among Syrian refugee children? Either Ms. Lindborg, Ms. Richard, or Ms. Groom.

Ms. RICHARD. I will take that and get back to you on that. I know statelessness is one of the UNHCR's key mandates, fighting statelessness, and it is something we pay a lot of attention to globally. And I do not know the answer, so I will get back to you on that, Senator. Thank you.

[The information referred to appears as a submission for the record.]

Chairman DURBIN. So let us use this opportunity to give a shout-out, if we fail to, to private sector efforts to try to help in this refugee situation. I understand IKEA is trying to develop a new shelter. I do not know much more about it—

Ms. RICHARD. They have developed it. It is really nifty, as you would expect. But the IKEA Foundation helps refugee situations in other places, too, but their new shelter is something that can be folded up into a suitcase so that that way the home can travel with the refugees wherever they are.

Chairman DURBIN. It was reported only recently Lebanon started to allow these IKEA refugee housing units to be used to shelter Syrians for fear that housing too sturdy and protective would encourage them to stay indefinitely. I have always found that interesting. When I travel around the world and I visit with refugees, they are okay, but they are usually complaining a little bit—not enough foods, problems here, there, and the other place. And the administrators of many refugee settings have said, "We do not want them to get too comfortable. We want them to consider where their next move will be. Hopefully it is back home." Well, back home is out of the question now with Syria's circumstances here.

But could you address either this particular issue or that general concern of the administrators of refugee camps?

Ms. RICHARD. Well, I have had discussions about this with the Minister of Social Affairs in Lebanon, Abu Faour, and he—because I was trying to convince him to allow these IKEA shelters to be used by the refugees. And so I am very pleased that they have made this change in their policy.

What several governments in the region are concerned about is that they will host the refugees for a long, long time, and the reason they are concerned is because Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria were three of the five fields where Palestinian refugees live. And now Palestinian refugees are fleeing from Syria, which had been a very safe place for them to live, and primarily going to Lebanon.

And so I think we have to respect the government officials who are concerned about protracted refugee situations in this part of the world because they have firsthand experience with it, and that is partly why I feel we should support them and make it easier for them to host the refugees, even as we try to do everything we can to get the Syrian refugees home.

Chairman DURBIN. There has been a great deal of interest in today's hearing. The turnout evidences that, and dozens of organizations—I am going to read their names because some of them are doing extraordinarily good work. Catholic Relief Services and others have presented testimony, which will be part of the record. The Center for Victims of Torture, Church World Services, the Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Human Rights First, International Rescue Committee, joint statement of the Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project and HIAS, Human Rights Initiative of North Texas, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, Mercy Corps, Oxfam, Refugee Council USA, Refugees International, Save the Children, Syrian American Medical Society, UNICEF, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and World Relief, and without objection, we will place their statements in the record.

[The information referred to appears as a submission for the record.]

Chairman DURBIN. The record is going to be open for a week. You may get a few additional questions, and you promised me a few additional responses, and I appreciate what you had to say.

And I will say in closing here this was a pretty diverse political group sitting up here, and this is not always the type of topic that attracts anybody other than the Chairman and a Ranking Member. And it is an indication to me of something good and positive. We see a problem. We are a caring people. We want to do something about it. We want it to be thoughtful, as Senator Cruz says, not to endanger the United States in any way, but to do our part to deal with a worldwide problem, which he appreciates more than any of us could on this panel.

So those who have given up on this institution, I hope today's hearing is an indication that sometimes we kind of do move in the right direction, even if we have different starting places.

If there are no further comments from our panel, I want to thank the witnesses for attending, my colleagues for participating, and the hearing stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:54 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[Additional material submitted for the record follows.]

A P P E N D I X

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Witness List

Hearing before the
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights

On

“The Syrian Refugee Crisis”

Tuesday, January 7, 2014
Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 226
2:30 p.m.

The Honorable Anne C. Richard
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC

The Honorable Nancy E. Lindborg
Assistant Administrator
Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC

Molly Groom
Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary
Office of Policy
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC

**Testimony of Assistant Secretary Anne Richard
Before the Senate Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights
Hearing on the Syrian Refugee Crisis
January 7, 2014**

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Cruz, and distinguished Senators, thank you for holding this hearing and bringing attention to the tragedy unfolding in the Middle East. Thank you also for the opportunity to appear before your Subcommittee with my colleagues from USAID and the Department of Homeland Security and to update you on the steps we have taken in response to the Syria crisis. My part of this testimony will address the Department of State's response to the refugee crisis as well as our plans to bring Syrian refugees to the United States for resettlement.

Description of the Crisis

You already know the basic facts of the emergency, which I will briefly summarize: What began as popular protests in spring 2011 evolved into episodic battles between opposition and government forces in certain cities, and then further evolved into a brutal war with many fronts. The conflict has claimed more than 100,000 lives, destroyed buildings and industries, attracted radical foreign fighters, and severely divided Syrian society. For every one person who has been killed, six other people have been injured.

More than six million Syrians have fled their homes but are trying to survive inside Syria in other areas; another 2.3 million have crossed Syria's borders and thus are considered refugees.

When the refugees first crossed into neighboring countries, many were welcomed and benefited from extraordinary acts of generosity. In Jordan and Lebanon, early refugees lived with friends, relatives and host families. Even after camps and transit centers were instituted in Jordan, the Government allowed refugees to be "bailed out" by friends, relatives and sometimes caring strangers. However, as time has progressed and the number of refugees has increased, the welcome has started to wear thin in some places and antagonism toward refugees has grown in the region. At times, violence from the Syria conflict has spilled across borders into Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan and has aggravated already-heightened sectarian tensions in Lebanon.

The Government of Turkey estimates that it now hosts more than 700,000 Syrians; more than 200,000 of these refugees live in 21 camps. While photos of Syrian refugees in camps in Turkey or Jordan are often used to illustrate the refugee situation, most refugees in the region – more than 80 percent – do not live in camps and instead have found shelter in local communities and cities.

Refugees are living in more than 1,600 communities across Lebanon. One of these communities is the town of Aarsal in northeast Lebanon. Aarsal's 35,000 residents had already welcomed 19,000 refugees when, in mid-November, they suddenly received an additional 20,000 refugees

in less than one week who were fleeing new clashes in Syria. As we've seen in other communities in Lebanon, the recent influx into Aarsal has shifted the delicate demographic balance of the area, a phenomenon that threatens to further exacerbate social tensions. Aarsal could not absorb these new refugees into its existing stock of housing, so the Government of Lebanon authorized the United Nations to set up tents for some of the newest arrivals, thus creating Lebanon's first "formal tented settlement" for Syrian refugees.

The impact on many communities across the region is overwhelming. Schools have moved to double-shifts to accommodate Syrian children. Hospital beds are filled by Syrian patients. Rents have risen and wages have fallen as a result of the competition for housing and jobs. There are water shortages in Jordan and Lebanon. The drain on water resources is especially severe in Jordan due to its relative lack of water; the Government of Jordan is already struggling to cover subsidies for water for Jordanian citizens. The governments of these countries – as well as the Governments of Iraq and Turkey – are concerned that they must stretch the services they provide to their own citizens to reach the overwhelming numbers of vulnerable refugees living in their countries.

According to a World Bank/UN assessment, 170,000 Lebanese are being pushed into poverty by the Syria crisis. Lebanon will likely suffer cumulative economic losses of \$7.5 billion by the end of 2014 and a doubling of the unemployment rate to 20 percent. Lebanese government expenditures have increased \$1.1 billion due to the increased demand for public services, according to the World Bank/UN assessment. Turkey's government estimates it has spent more than \$2 billion on refugee response. And Jordan has experienced an up to 27 percent increase in the cost of food in the past year.

Challenges to Aid Delivery In Neighboring Countries

Need for Open Borders: We remain concerned that people could be trapped inside Syria, as at times, Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq have taken steps to control or slow the inflow of these refugees. We have asked all of the countries neighboring Syria to maintain "open border" policies so that those who need to flee can do so.

Arrival of Winter: This is already starting out to be a rough winter with bad flooding and farmers in Lebanon predicting the coldest in 100 years. The UN agencies and NGOs we fund are insulating tents, providing heaters and heating fuel, and distributing warmer clothes and plastic sheeting.

Services for Urban Refugees: Urban refugees are often invisible and dispersed among local people in poor communities. It can be difficult to identify them, particularly those who are most vulnerable. In Turkey, for example, more than 70 percent of Syrians are living outside camps, and many are unregistered. Most are without needed assistance and services, and their needs are mounting in the cold winter months as their stay away from home grows longer and longer.

Gender-Based Violence: We are very concerned by reports of gender-based violence (GBV) among refugees. At the State Department, we are working closely with humanitarian organizations to increase protection for vulnerable refugees by meeting their basic needs for

shelter, food, clothing, water and sanitation, and healthcare. We are supporting specialized programs aimed at preventing and responding to violence, including medical and counseling services for rape survivors, safe learning and healing spaces for children - particularly girls - and efforts to raise awareness about the risks of urgent issues like early marriage.

Refugee Children Not in School: There are over 1.1 million Syrian refugee children in the region, of whom 60 percent are not in school. Taking a lesson from the Iraqi refugee emergency, we are working with governments to avoid to the extent possible parallel service provision, and to find creative solutions to get as many children as possible back in school, whether in the formal education system or in community-based learning programs.

Responding to the Needs of Refugees and Host Communities

The State Department and USAID are major funders of the top humanitarian organizations responding to the crisis in Syria and the region, providing over \$1.3 billion in assistance to date. In an attachment to this testimony, I provide a summary of the multi-faceted response that has been mounted by UN agencies and NGOs working with U.S. support, including the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the World Food Program (WFP), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Together, these agencies and others are providing food, clean water, shelter, medical care and other basic essentials. They also go beyond these basic needs and seek to protect the most vulnerable members of Syrian society today – displaced children, at-risk women and girls, the elderly and the disabled – from threats as diverse as cold winters, unsafe play areas, poor sanitation, child marriage and violence against women and girls.

The United States Government and the wider international community must support the neighboring countries as they respond to the Syria crisis. Neighboring countries are providing asylum for refugees. They are also the logical place from which to send assistance into Syria. I was recently in Erbil in Northern Iraq at the start of the UN airlifts of assistance from Erbil to Qamishly. While the airlifts were successful, it would be even better – and certainly more cost-effective – for the UN and others to be able to truck aid in to Qamishly as had been promised by the Syrian regime several weeks ago in response to the PRST. In order to support their efforts, we not only provide assistance to help these countries but also encourage other donors, particularly wealthy governments that have not traditionally given to humanitarian agencies, to step up their contributions. But the victims of Syria's violence and their hosts need much more. The latest UN plan aims to do more to help neighboring countries by boosting the resilience of local communities to withstand the effects of taking in so many refugees. This requires continued efforts to ensure that relief operations and longer-term development projects are carried out at the same time and are well coordinated.

Lebanon continues to keep its borders mostly open and is now hosting the largest numbers of refugees in the smallest country in the region. Refugees from Syria now make up 20 percent of the population in Lebanon, on top of the 400,000 Palestinian refugees that Lebanon has hosted for decades. Lebanon has opened its hospitals, clinics, and schools to refugees and is struggling to cope with the strain on its public services. The U.S. government continues to support Lebanon through emergency response and longer-term development assistance. USAID is

working to improve the lives of Lebanese citizens and their communities by enhancing economic opportunity, increasing access to education, improving water and wastewater services, strengthening civil society and municipalities and protecting the environment. At the meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon held at the UN in September, Secretary Kerry announced plans to provide an additional \$30 million in direct assistance for growing needs in Lebanon's host communities.

Since 2012, the United States has provided \$300 million in bilateral budget support to the Government of Jordan, on top of our annual budget support, specifically to offset spending Jordan has devoted to hosting refugees from Syria. We have also provided over \$30 million to help alleviate strains on the water and education systems. USAID has built five new schools in northern Jordan and is expanding 67 existing schools. It is also supporting a water program focused on water collection, storage, conservation and the repair of water pipelines in communities in northern Jordan hosting a large number of refugees. New programs have also been launched to help community members, parents and schools cope with tensions between Syrians and Jordanians. WFP vouchers are used by refugees to buy food from merchants, thus providing another benefit directly to local people. The United States also provided a \$1.25 billion sovereign loan guarantee to help Jordan respond to external pressures, like the Syria crisis, while it continues its economic reform program.

The United States has provided more than \$96 million through international organizations and NGOs to support the Government of Turkey in its humanitarian response. Our assistance has funded tents, blankets, cash cards for food, cook stoves, schools, education supplies, teacher training, technical assistance and more. We have provided \$70 million for programs to help refugees in Iraq, and I was in Erbil in mid-December when UN relief flights began to operate between that Iraqi city and Quamishly in Northern Syria.

On December 16, the UN issued new funding appeals for 2014 totaling \$6.5 billion for 2014. The appeals will respond to the immediate humanitarian needs of those inside Syria and refugees in the region and look at ways the humanitarian community can address some immediate needs in the refugee-hosting communities to strengthen local service delivery and resilience. The UN has worked to make the appeals cost-efficient and high impact, as well to provide benchmarks to help donors track progress of the refugee response. We are reviewing the appeals now and discussing with partners and other donors the best ways to support these efforts.

As we try to meet immediate basic needs for those fleeing the conflict, we must also work toward more lasting solutions to their plight.

The U.S. Worldwide Refugee Admissions Program

The United States continues to lead the world in refugee resettlement, resettling more than 75 percent of refugees referred by UNHCR to resettlement countries in 2012, and we fully expect to be able to bring Syrian refugees to America as part of this program. Before discussing our specific plans, it is worth a look back at our recent record in resettling refugees, especially given the Judiciary Committee's responsibilities related to authorizing this program

After two years of relatively low numbers of refugee arrivals, our refugee admissions increased significantly this past fiscal year and we can report that the program is on sound footing.

- In 2013 we met the President's authorized refugee admissions ceiling – which for FY 2013 was 70,000 – for the first time since the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980, with refugee arrivals representing 65 different nationalities. Priorities include specific groups of concern, such as Iraqis, Bhutanese, Burmese, and Congolese as well as individual referrals by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), designated NGOs and U.S. Embassies.
- We also were able to bring a quarter of the 70,000 refugees to the United States every three months, which provided a more predictable and consistent flow of refugee arrivals throughout the year. This helped our local resettlement agency partners and receiving communities better manage staffing and resources for refugee reception and support.
- We also increased slightly (from \$1,875 to \$1,925 per capita) the amount of funding provided to our partner agencies to help refugees restart their lives. This is the third time we have increased this funding in the past four years. We do not want to let this funding lag behind while the cost of living increases.
- We took important steps to facilitate the arrival of Iraqi refugees in America by increasing refugee processing staff in Baghdad and establishing a transit mechanism to move Iraqi refugees out of war-torn Syria.
- Senior PRM officials and staff of our admissions office traveled frequently to towns and cities across America to meet with refugees, voluntary agencies, elected officials, employers, and other community leaders to ensure that refugees receive a warm welcome in the places they are resettled.

All of this was accomplished through excellent coordination with the Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services and the dedicated work of thousands of people overseas and across the United States who make the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program possible. Local community involvement is a core component of the U.S. refugee resettlement program, and it has played a critical role in helping refugees integrate into our society and rebuild their lives.

We continue to work closely with the Department of Homeland Security and the law enforcement/intelligence community to ensure that refugees entering the United States through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program do not pose a threat to our security. Refugee applicants are subject to more security checks than any other category of traveler to the United States.

For FY 2014, and after consultations with designated members of the Judiciary Committee, the President once again authorized the admission of up to 70,000 refugees. We anticipate continued strong arrivals of Iraqi, Burmese, and Bhutanese refugees. From Africa, we will see continued arrivals of Somali refugees, and expect a steady increase in Congolese refugee arrivals during

this fiscal year and in future years as UNHCR increases its referrals of Congolese. UNHCR plans to refer 50,000 Congolese to all resettlement countries over the next five to seven years.

Syrian Refugee Resettlement

All of this is background for our discussion of how the United States is prepared to respond to calls for the resettlement of Syrian refugees. UNHCR has announced that by the end of 2014 it intends to refer up to 30,000 Syrians to resettlement countries for either temporary or permanent resettlement. We expect to accept referrals for several thousand Syrian refugees in 2014. Another 16 other countries have pledged to take part as well and we will encourage them and others to do even more.

Some have asked me why the United States has resettled so few Syrians to date. In fact, it is not unusual for third-country resettlement to play only a limited role in the early years of a conflict. Most of the refugees that the United States has admitted in recent years have been caught up in protracted refugee situations for five, ten or even twenty years. UNHCR has determined, however, that many of the most vulnerable among the Syrian refugees are unlikely to be in a position to return home anytime soon and for this reason resettlement should be part of the international response to the Syrian crisis. We also want to show solidarity with refugee-hosting countries in the region. In my travels to the region, government officials from neighboring countries have made clear that they would like to see other countries share the task of hosting refugees.

So far, UNHCR has largely focused its efforts on referrals of Syrians for temporary resettlement via a "Humanitarian Admissions Program." To date, Germany, Austria and France have agreed to participate in this program. Germany has pledged 10,000 spaces, and Austria and France have each offered 500 spaces.

UNHCR has also recently referred about 1,000 Syrian refugees for permanent resettlement, to several other countries including Sweden, Switzerland and Norway. They asked for referrals (and some arrivals) by the end of 2013. UNHCR is training and placing additional staff in the region in order to refer more refugees. We will work with UNHCR to identify those Syrian refugees who are among the most vulnerable and refer them for resettlement. Vulnerable refugees would likely include women and girls at risk, survivors of violence and torture, those with medical needs or disabilities, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender refugees at risk and refugees in need of family reunification. Syrians being considered for U.S. refugee resettlement will, of course, undergo intensive security screening – the same screening carried out for all refugees seeking to resettle in the United States.

Conclusion

Looking ahead, many of the nations concerned about the situation in Syria will come together in January. Kuwait again plans to co-host a pledging conference with the United Nations scheduled for January 15, 2014. With your support, the United States should again be in a position to serve as a leading donor and voice to spur on giving from other countries. Support from the United

States and many other governments will be critical to maintaining stability and hospitality in the region.

And, a week later, on January 22, the Geneva II peace conference is scheduled to take place in Switzerland. All of us involved in humanitarian activities in the region hope that this conference will help return peace and stability to Syria.

In closing, let me thank you again for holding this hearing and acknowledge that that the challenges presented by the crisis in Syria and in the region are immense. Nonetheless, we are committed to do everything in our power to live up to our values and to meet the needs of the many Syrians in jeopardy, as well as the needs of others among the world's most vulnerable people.

Thank you.

**What the International Community has Accomplished
Highlights of Aid Deliveries**

Food: The U.S. government supports food assistance efforts currently reaching more than 1.3 million Syrian refugees in five neighboring countries (over 90% of whom receive food vouchers).

Vaccinations: Vaccination campaigns for measles, rubella, and polio have been organized by WHO and UNICEF and supported by those agencies and UNHCR. Vaccinations campaigns carried out for refugees and locals have reached 3.8 million refugees and local children in Turkey and Jordan. In Lebanon, the first of a series of nationwide polio vaccination campaigns in early November reached 580,770 children under the age of five, resulting in a 98.4 per cent coverage rate nationwide. The total included 8,400 children vaccinated at five border entry points, and 25,500 Palestinian children vaccinated through UNRWA. U.S. government-supported programs aim to help refugees and also improve the ability of local health services to meet local residents' needs.

Education: The U.S. government supports programs to enhance refugee children's access to schools, including learning programs that help youth who have fallen behind in their studies to catch up and enroll at local schools at appropriate grade levels.

Palestinian refugees inside Syria: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) continues its efforts to provide support to Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, including those who have fled the fighting that has enveloped and consumed Palestinian neighborhoods in Syria.

Shelter: Innovative programs in Jordan and Lebanon helps property owners in local communities upgrade unfinished structures into suitable refugee housing, in exchange for free rent to refugees.

Child Protection: Special recreation, educational, and mental health activities have reached 100,000 Syrian children in Jordan and Lebanon.

Gender-based Violence: The U.S. government supports programs to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence. This includes enhancing the capacity of local service providers to assist refugees to benefit from their services and to manage the individual cases of refugees.

Safety: A U.S. government project in the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) supports the Jordanian government's efforts to improve security in the Za'atri refugee camp. It helps Jordanian police to train approximately 600 Syrian refugee

residents over six months to act as a safety presence and deterrent to crime in the camp, and to report major issues to police.

Nancy Lindborg
Assistant Administrator for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance
U.S. Agency for International Development

Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights
January 7, 2014

"The Syrian Refugee Crisis"

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Cruz, and Members of the Subcommittee; thank you for inviting me to testify on the ongoing U.S. response to Syria's humanitarian crisis and for your interest in this critical issue.

Introduction

As we celebrate the start of 2014, and a new year, the Syrian people find themselves in their third year of an escalating war. In just the last year, the number of people displaced inside Syria has quadrupled from 1.5 million to more than 6.5 million. More Syrians are now internally displaced from their homes than anywhere else in the world. An additional 2.3 million Syrians have fled to neighboring countries in search of safety. More than 9.3 million people—over 40 percent of Syria's population—are now in need of humanitarian assistance.

Behind each of these numbers is a name. In my own visits to the region, I have heard firsthand the heartbreaking stories of lives destroyed; of women who have endured rape and violence; of families separated; and of a generation of Syrian children who have not been able to attend school for two years now, many of them traumatized by daily bombings and subject to the recruitment efforts of extremists.

We know that even tougher months lie ahead as the Middle East faces one of the worst winters in 100 years. And the latest United Nations appeal for Syria and the region was just released at \$6.5 billion—more than four times what it was a year ago. This appeal marks the largest-ever request for a single humanitarian emergency and nearly half of the United Nations' global humanitarian request.

Working in partnership with the international community, the U.S. humanitarian response has reached millions of people with life-saving medical assistance, food aid, relief supplies, and vital protection programs. Yet, the needs continue to escalate faster than the international community can respond.

Today, I'd like to cover three key areas for you: first, to directly address the challenges that continue to inhibit our ability to meet the full scope of humanitarian need; second, a brief update on the significant, life-saving U.S. government humanitarian response, including an important focus on women and children who are especially vulnerable. With more than 4 million children in Syria at risk and 2.25 million out of school, many for

more than two years now, we have a humanitarian and protection challenge as well as the risk of losing a generation of Syrians to hopelessness in an already volatile region. Finally, a quick review of how we have reoriented our U.S. development programs to support a comprehensive response to the growing burden of refugees in neighboring states.

Key Challenges

With so many people in need, the humanitarian response has been constrained by the challenges of insecurity, blocked access, and insufficient resources. Despite a massive mobilization of assistance and funding, international aid has not reached some 2.5 million people inside Syria. The intense insecurity of a war zone complicates efforts every day. Roads closed due to fighting and hundreds of checkpoints make aid delivery across conflict lines dangerous, complicated, and unreliable.

Most concerning, an estimated 250,000 people have been completely and deliberately cut off from humanitarian assistance for many months, the majority of whom are in areas besieged by the regime in an unconscionable campaign of starvation.

In October, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted a Presidential Statement urging all parties to the conflict to facilitate immediate humanitarian access—across both borders and conflict lines. This statement is the first and most significant demonstration of global political will to ensure humanitarian assistance reaches those who need it most. It lays down clear markers for the Syrian regime regarding the world's expectations that it will provide the immediate and unfettered access it has long denied, including the call to:

1. Immediately demilitarize medical facilities, schools and water stations;
2. Approve access for additional domestic and international NGOs;
3. Grant visas to ease and expedite the operationalization of humanitarian hubs and the movement of humanitarian personnel;
4. Accelerate the entry of humanitarian goods and equipment, and;
5. Facilitate humanitarian workers' immediate and unfettered access to people in need.

The Syrian regime has the power to enable life-saving assistance to reach more than 200,000 people in need—and all international pressure must be applied toward this end. We have seen slight shifts in rhetoric that have signaled regime approval for new humanitarian hubs for the United Nation, increased visa approvals for international staff, and several approved flights from Iraq. But these remain for the most part rhetorical shifts, with little additional, substantial access on the ground and a continued assault on civilians.

My colleague Anne Richard and I traveled to Geneva several weeks ago for a high-level meeting of the 22 core countries working to push forward implementation of the Security Council's Presidential Statement and increase humanitarian access. This process, led by

the United Nations, is focused on applying full diplomatic pressure to improve humanitarian access. The United Nations' Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator provides regular public reports on the status of this process.

Finally, resources remain a key constraint as we enter a third year of what is now a regional crisis with global implications. A donor's conference is scheduled for January 15th in Kuwait, and we are working to urge all donors to give generously, including those that do not typically respond to these appeals.

The U.S. Humanitarian Response

Amidst these significant constraints, as the Syria crisis has escalated, the United States has accelerated our humanitarian response with a contribution of more than \$1.3 billion in humanitarian aid since the conflict began. Our assistance has helped meet the urgent needs of 4.2 million people across all 14 governorates inside Syria as well as the more than two million refugees in neighboring countries.

To reach the greatest numbers of people in need, the U.S. government is working through all possible channels—the United Nations, international non-governmental organizations, and local Syrian organizations—to provide life-saving supplies and services. Since this time last year, we have scaled up the number of our partners inside Syria from 12 to 26.

U.S. humanitarian assistance in Syria is focused on four key areas: emergency medical care, food assistance, the provision of much-needed relief supplies, and the protection of vulnerable populations—particularly women and children.

Medical Care

In response to the brutal conflict, a key component of our humanitarian response for the last two years has been life-saving medical care, which currently reaches more than 2.7 million people inside Syria. Nearly one million patients have been treated at the 260 U.S. supported hospitals, field clinics, and medical facilities across the country. These field hospitals and makeshift clinics have performed more than 190,000 surgeries. Last spring, with the onset of warmer weather, we worked with partners to establish an early warning system for communicable diseases. This system enables early detection and fast response in areas where the medical system has collapsed to prevent devastating consequences. And recognizing the need for additional medical staff capable of saving lives, we have trained more than 1,500 Syrian volunteers to provide emergency first-aid care.

The doctors, nurses, and volunteer health workers on the front lines of these efforts are true humanitarian heroes, risking their lives daily to help others, as the regime has continually targeted health workers.

We are deeply concerned by Syria's 17 confirmed cases of polio—a potentially deadly and crippling disease eradicated in the country more than a decade ago—and the chance that it could spread along with other infectious diseases. The United Nations is leading the largest-ever polio vaccination campaign in the region aimed at immunizing

approximately 20 million children across the Middle East, including 2.2 million inside Syria, and the United States is in full support.

Food Assistance

The United States is the single-largest donor of emergency food aid for the Syria crisis, supporting the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) and other international humanitarian organizations and NGOs to feed 4.2 million people inside Syria and 1.3 million refugees in neighboring countries.

Widespread displacement, reductions in agricultural production, disruption of markets and transportation, elimination of bread subsidies, damage to infrastructure—including mills and bakeries—and loss of livelihoods are contributing to unprecedented food insecurity in Syria. In response to this complex crisis, USAID draws on its full array of flexible mechanisms to deliver emergency food, including family rations in all 14 governorates in Syria, supplementary nutritional food for children, flour-to-bakeries programs, food vouchers for refugees in neighboring countries, and meal-replacement bars for new refugee arrivals.

WFP assistance to Syrian refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, with support from the United States and other donors, consists primarily of a food voucher system, with hot meals, dry rations, and emergency food bars provided where necessary. This system enables Syrian refugees to use electronic voucher cards to shop for fresh food items at participating local markets, including more than 60 stores in Jordan alone. With direct benefits for the local economy of neighboring countries, the voucher system helps reduce the burden on our allies in the region. In Turkey, for example, the WFP food voucher program has injected nearly \$40 million into the Turkish economy since October 2012.

Relief Supplies

The majority of Syrians are forced to flee with no more than the clothes on their backs. With severe winter weather forecasts for the region, we began preparing winter relief efforts last summer. In addition to providing basic relief supplies—communal cooking kits, water jugs, hygiene kits, and plastic sheeting—we have mobilized to provide specialized supplies to help Syrians cope with the harsh weather: thermal blankets, floor coverings, water heaters, and warm clothing, including winter coats, scarves, hats, socks and boots. We have increased the number of partners providing winter relief from six last year to 16, and they are also improving infrastructure in camp and non-camp areas to provide adequate shelter.

Protection

All U.S. humanitarian assistance programs seek to reach the most vulnerable populations—women, children, persons with disabilities, and the elderly—who are least able to survive the brutalities of conflict and deprivation.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is of particular concern. U.S. medical support includes psychosocial services through women's health centers, mobile clinics, outreach teams,

and home-based support for GBV survivors. The new \$10 million State-USAID global initiative Safe from the Start aims to elevate our focus on GBV from the very onset of an emergency. In Syria, that means we prioritize and incorporate protection for women and girls into all programs.

The U.S. government's protection strategy for children concentrates specifically on key areas of concern, including physical and sexual violence, psychosocial well-being, and child separation. Our programs focus on identifying children at risk and offering safe, stable, and nurturing environments for children to play, learn, and maintain some semblance of normal life. We have witnessed only a small increase in the percentage of Syrian girls marrying under the age of 18 since the start of the conflict, with only four percent of families turning to child marriage in response to sexual violence, but these concerns are on our radar. We also know that, despite the scale and recurrent nature of displacement in country, the numbers of children separated from their families is relatively low. We are supporting efforts to monitor these trends so we can address risk factors through our prevention efforts.

No Lost Generation

We have special concern for Syria's children, who have experienced the trauma of war and had their lives upended, often losing their homes, family members, and friends. The majority of them have been out of school for two years and become more vulnerable with each classroom destroyed. This is a region that can ill afford to lose a generation to despair; rather, it needs children who can help drive forward a future of peace, not continual spirals of conflict.

The U.S. government is working closely with the international community to support a "No Lost Generation" strategy throughout the region with the goal of helping Syrian children access education and some sense of normalcy through both our humanitarian and development efforts.

Development Assistance to Host Communities in Neighboring Countries

The more than two million Syrians now living in neighboring countries threaten the stability of an already fragile region. And as this crisis enters its third year, the warm welcome first extended to those fleeing the violence is running thin. Host countries and communities find themselves strained and under pressure to accommodate the needs of their own people in addition to millions of new refugees.

U.S. assistance for host communities was a major focus of my travel last August to Lebanon and Jordan, where in some cases Syrian refugees now outnumber local populations in villages already struggling with scarce resources and poor infrastructure. In both countries, we see that the greatest concentration of refugees overlaps with the poorest communities, and tensions between locals and refugees over resources are prevalent. In addition to providing humanitarian assistance to these countries, we have reoriented part of our development assistance to focus on key infrastructure, health, and education programming as well as the provision of essential services at the local level.

In Lebanon, where Syrians now make up more than 20 percent of the total population, the spillover effects of the crisis appear most acute. Our assistance is focused on water and education as well as a value-chain development program to advance agriculture in heavily affected areas like the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon's northeast. In addition to \$254 million in humanitarian assistance for Syrian refugees and their host communities in Lebanon, the United States is working with Lebanon to identify additional ways we can help address deteriorating economic conditions and gaps in the delivery of important services, particularly in the health and education sectors.

In Jordan, where domestic water supply is among the lowest in the world, USAID is providing \$20 million through our Complex Crises Fund (CCF) to help communities with a large refugee population improve water efficiency, allowing them to provide water for their livestock and sustain their livelihoods. Last summer, we launched a multi-year \$21 million Community Engagement Project that works closely with communities to identify their most pressing challenges and meet growing needs: school infrastructure, public parks preservation, lighting, medical equipment, and youth clubs. In addition to our longstanding support for health, education, water, democracy, and economic development, we are providing support for host communities specifically to help reduce early marriage, human trafficking, child labor, and gender-based violence as well as \$300 million in extra budget support to offset Jordan's spending on services for refugees over the last two years.

By helping these communities cope, these programs are essential to the Government of both Jordan and Lebanon's ability to keep their borders open to Syrians in need.

A report issued by the United Nations last summer found that Syria has lost 35 years of development as a result of two years of conflict. This crisis is also now affecting the development of the wider region, necessitating that donors bring their relief and development assistance together for the most effective response. We are partnering with host governments and the international donor community to prioritize development assistance needs, including in Jordan where the Government of Jordan, along with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), is developing a Host Community Coordination Platform to coordinate direct humanitarian and development support to host communities.

At the request of the Government of Lebanon, the World Bank released a 'roadmap' which identifies priority assistance areas to help Lebanon manage the shock of the influx of Syrians and develop the public service infrastructure needed to sustain such dramatic increases in its population. The additional \$30 million in direct assistance and development support for Lebanon's host communities, announced by Secretary Kerry at the United Nations' International Support Group for Lebanon this fall, will allow for a relatively quick, high-impact response to needs laid out in the roadmap as well as in the United Nations' Regional Response Plan for the Syrian crisis. These assessments and partnerships are essential to paving an effective way forward and addressing the effects of a crisis unlikely to end soon.

Conclusion

Humanitarian assistance is not the solution to the horrific crisis in the Middle East, nor can it end the bloodshed. But it is saving countless lives and helping to protect the most vulnerable from this devastating conflict. The U.S. government remains committed to using every possible tool and avenue to reach those who need our help at this critical time—and to bringing our full diplomatic weight to bear to attain the access we need to do so.

Thank you for your time today and for the vital Congressional support that makes our life-saving work possible. I look forward to your questions.



WRITTEN TESTIMONY

**Molly Groom
Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary
United States Department of Homeland Security
Office of Policy
Office of Immigration and Border Security**

Hearing on:

The Syrian Refugee Crisis

Before:

**United States Senate Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights**

**January 7, 2014
Washington, DC**

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Cruz, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing on the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to resettle eligible refugees consistent with our country's immigration laws. As you are aware, the United States has a proud and long-standing tradition of offering protection, freedom, and opportunity to refugees from around the world who fear persecution and often find themselves in uncertain or dangerous conditions of temporary asylum. Refugee resettlement is a cornerstone of our national character and reflects our country's commitment to humanitarian ideals. DHS, along with the Department of State (DOS), is committed to ensuring that the United States continues to take a leading role in refugee resettlement and other humanitarian protections. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) serves a critical role in that mission, identifying eligible individuals in need of international protection who do not present a risk to our national security and are otherwise admissible to the United States as refugees.

Administering our Refugee Resettlement Program

While DOS coordinates and manages the USRAP, DHS plays an important consultative role in determining which individuals or groups from among the millions of refugees worldwide will be considered for U.S. resettlement. Specifically, the Department of State, in consultation with DHS, establishes processing priorities each year to determine which of the world's refugees are of special humanitarian concern to the United States. Priorities have included referrals by the U.S. Embassy, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or designated NGOs, and specific nationality groups of concern, such as Iraqi or Burmese individuals. Additionally, DHS provides feedback on which groups are likely to qualify for refugee status or

may have eligibility concerns. DHS's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is responsible for determining whether individuals meet the refugee definition as defined by U.S. law, by conducting individual in-depth interviews. Pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA), all refugee adjudicators must complete specialized training described below.

In 2005, USCIS created the Refugee Corps, which is a cadre of specially-trained USCIS officers who travel overseas to where refugees reside and are responsible for adjudicating applications for refugee status. USCIS also posts a small number of officers at embassies overseas who conduct refugee interviews among other duties. Over the years, USCIS has supported an increasingly diverse refugee admissions program, working in over 60 countries. As USCIS recognizes that well-trained officers are critical to protecting the integrity of the refugee resettlement process, all officers who process refugee cases are well-trained on the basics of refugee processing and admissibility, as well as specialized training that includes comprehensive instruction on all aspects of refugee adjudications, including refugee law, grounds of inadmissibility, fraud detection and prevention, security protocols, interviewing techniques, credibility analysis, and country conditions research. These officers also participate in pre-departure training, which includes information about the specific population they will be interviewing, including the types of claims they are likely to encounter, fraud trends or security issues, and detailed country of origin information.

USCIS officers conduct in-depth interviews of every principal refugee applicant to fully explore the refugee claim and identify any possible grounds of inadmissibility. The officer assesses the credibility of the applicant and evaluates whether the applicant's testimony is internally consistent and consistent with known country conditions. In addition, all refugee

status determinations made by interviewing officers undergo supervisory review before a final decision is reached. USCIS Refugee Affairs Division policy requires officers to submit certain categories of sensitive cases—including certain national security-related cases—to Refugee Affairs Division Headquarters to obtain concurrence prior to the issuance of a decision. This allows Headquarters staff to conduct additional research, liaise with law enforcement or intelligence agencies, or consult with an outside expert before finalizing the decision.

Security checks are an integral part of this process and coordinating these checks is a shared responsibility between DOS and DHS. The refugee vetting process in place today employs robust security measures to protect against risks to our national security. DHS does not approve a refugee applicant for travel until all required security checks are completed and cleared.

Refugee vetting happens at several different stages of the process and procedures include initial biographic and biometric security checks against DHS, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Defense, DOS, and intelligence community holdings, as well as pre-departure checks conducted before a refugee applicant is scheduled to travel to the United States. These pre-departure checks are intended to identify any new derogatory information which may arise between the initial vetting of the applicant and the eventual time of travel. Pre-departure checks currently include a second round of Interagency Checks (IAC), additional vetting conducted by DHS colleagues at U.S. Customs and Border Protection's National Targeting Center-Passenger, and Secure Flight screening conducted by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

Following the May 2011 arrest of Mohanad Hammadi and Waad Ramadan Alwan in Kentucky, DHS and DOS have worked closely with the Intelligence and Law Enforcement communities to enhance our screening regime for refugee resettlement applicants. While the

exact details of these new checks are classified, we are prepared to provide a classified briefing to members should there be interest in this information. While no screening is infallible, we believe that current screening systems to vet refugee applicants are more likely today to detect individuals with derogatory information should they apply.

Terrorist-Related Inadmissibility Grounds (TRIG)

The broad definitions of “terrorist activity” and “terrorist organization” under U.S. immigration law are often a barrier to resettling otherwise eligible refugees. Section 212(a)(3)(B) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) renders foreign nationals who provide material support to individuals or organizations that engage in terrorist activity, as that term is broadly defined, inadmissible to and removable from the United States. Material support, as defined for INA purposes, is commonly encountered in refugee populations and can be a product of routine interactions. The INA’s framework relating to terrorist activity and the provision of material support to terrorists or terrorist organizations provide an enforcement tool to deny benefits to those who have provided material support to terrorists. Notably, there are no exceptions in the INA’s definitions for activity that is part of a routine transaction, nor are the purpose and goals of a particular organization an exception to its meeting the definition of a “terrorist organization.”

The Secretary of State and the Secretary of Homeland Security have discretion under section 212(d)(3)(B) of the INA to exempt some individuals and groups from the application of these broad definitions when the circumstances justify such an exemption. DHS, DOS, and the Department of Justice (DOJ), engage in an interagency consultation process on the exercise of this exemption authority. This process is used to ensure that the terrorism-related inadmissibility

ground provisions are applied in a way that meets our national security objectives while also opening the possibility that individuals who do not pose a security threat may receive appropriate relief or benefits when otherwise eligible.

To ensure that only the appropriate recipients benefit from Secretarial exemptions, the process allows DHS and DOS, in consultation with DOJ, to first identify the groups or activity, relevant to pending cases, which should be considered for an exemption. Various factors, including national security, humanitarian, and foreign policy concerns, must be weighed carefully before a decision is made to issue an exemption which would allow an adjudicator to consider applying the exemption on a case-by-case basis. Tier I and Tier II terrorist organizations, which are designated by DOS, are not eligible for exemptions. For each group identified for a possible exemption, a thorough search of intelligence resources is conducted, in order to identify any derogatory information. The interagency group reviews these and other available materials and discusses whether an exemption would be appropriate, and if so, what the scope of that exemption should be. The interagency group may draft a carefully scoped proposed exemption, which is reviewed at high levels in each agency as part of the consultation process. If the Secretary of Homeland Security or State exercises this exemption authority, DHS or DOS are then permitted to apply the exemption on a case by case basis, taking into consideration the totality of circumstances of the case.

To date, the exemptions issued have resulted in the adjudication of applications for over 16,000 refugees, asylees, and others. Nearly 12,000 of those exemptions were granted to refugees. Some of the recipients have assisted the U.S. Mission in Iraq, and some have been victims of regimes widely condemned as tyrannical. Exemptions have also been authorized for individuals who only engaged in certain activities under duress—such as paying a ransom for a

kidnapped family member—where the alternative may have been the death of a loved one or their own death. Exemptions have also been granted for providing medical care, and for individuals associated with groups such as those who participated in the 1991 Iraqi uprisings.

In recent years, USCIS has placed many cases of individuals on hold who may be barred by TRIG and yet do not pose a risk to national security in order to allow exemptions to be considered by the interagency. Approximately 3,100 cases, including refugee, asylum, and adjustment applications, remain on hold due to potential TRIG bars. DHS and our interagency partners continue to consider various exemptions and appropriate strategies to review the cases on hold at USCIS, in order to release them for adjudication. However, the robust process for completing interagency consultation on exemptions means DHS, DOS, and DOJ must devote a significant investment of time and resources.

Current Situation Regarding Syrians

We are ever mindful that addressing humanitarian needs must be coupled with robust security screening of refugee applicants. With regards to the population fleeing Syria, USCIS and DOS have had a series of conversations with UNHCR about the case profiles that they are encountering, and which types of cases would be most suitable for referral to the United States. DHS and DOS have recommended a three-fold referral framework to best address potential TRIG issues: (1) identify cases of particularly vulnerable refugees who do not appear to present TRIG issues; (2) identify cases where existing TRIG exemption authority may apply (e.g., material support provided under duress, medical services); and (3) consider sympathetic cases where new TRIG exemption authority might be required. With regard to possible new exemption authority, interagency consultations are ongoing. DHS is committed to both

preventing terrorists who may pose a threat to the United States from coming here, and honoring our tradition of protecting deserving individuals who do not pose a threat to our security.

As for those Syrians already present in the United States, former DHS Secretary Napolitano, pursuant to section 244 of the *Immigration and Nationality Act*, designated Syria for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for an 18-month period from March 29, 2012 through September 30, 2013. On June 17, 2013, Secretary Napolitano redesignated Syria for TPS and extended the designation from October 1, 2013 through March 31, 2015. The extension allows currently eligible Syrian TPS beneficiaries, who continue to meet the terms and conditions for TPS, to remain in the United States and to retain that status through March 31, 2015. The redesignation also expands the original designation to allow Syrians who have continuously resided in the United States as of June 17, 2013 to apply for TPS. In addition to demonstrating continuous residence in the United States since June 17, 2013 and meeting other eligibility criteria, initial applicants for TPS under this redesignation must demonstrate that they have been continuously physically present in the United States since October 1, 2013, the effective date of the redesignation of Syria, before USCIS can grant them TPS. During the period in which TPS is in effect, Syrians granted TPS who continue to meet the requirements for TPS status are eligible to obtain work authorization, may be granted travel authorization, as a matter of discretion, and cannot be removed from the United States unless and until their TPS is withdrawn.

USCIS has received an increasing number of requests for parole for Syrian nationals fleeing the conflict, particularly those who have family members in the United States. USCIS considers these requests on a case-by-case basis consistent with existing policy and procedure. Using these existing programs, resources, and infrastructure outlined above, DHS has been able

to respond to the needs of a number of Syrian nationals seeking permanent and temporary protection.

Additionally, DHS Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) regularly engages with the Syrian American and Syrian immigrant communities, as part of its engagement with diverse communities across the country, including many affected by refugee emergencies. CRCL conducts quarterly roundtable meetings in fourteen metropolitan areas across the United States. Other DHS entities' regional leadership also participate in these meetings, including representatives from USCIS, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and TSA. Key leaders and officials of Syrian-American organizations regularly participate in CRCL's quarterly community engagement meetings as well as other engagement and outreach events.

Other DHS offices and components also regularly engage with Syrian American organizations. For example, USCIS has held a number of public outreach sessions on TPS, and its website features specific information on TPS for Syria. ICE has conducted Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) related outreach events that reach, among others, student populations with strong Syria-specific equities. ICE has also extended employment authorization for Syrian F-1 students who have been in the U.S. since April 3, 2012 experiencing severe economic hardship. The Department is currently planning for broader Syria-specific engagement with communities with equities in the region.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer your questions.

Assistant Majority Leader Dick Durbin

Chairman, Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights

"The Syrian Refugee Crisis"

January 7, 2014

Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery

Today's hearing will focus on the plight of Syrian refugees fleeing the violent civil war in their home country. This is the world's worst ongoing humanitarian crisis and the worst refugee crisis since the Rwandan genocide in 1994, and perhaps since World War II.

Last year, when I visited Kilis, a Syrian refugee camp in Turkey, I was especially struck by the plight of the children I met. It is no exaggeration to say that a generation of Syrian children is at risk. More than 11,000 children have been killed in the conflict, including hundreds who have been shot by snipers or summarily executed. There are 1.1 million Syrian refugee children, 70 percent under the age of 12. Sixty percent of these children are not attending school. One in ten Syrian refugee children are working to support their families, including some as young as seven years old. Thousands of children are unaccompanied or separated from their parents. And we have heard troubling reports of boy refugees being recruited as combatants and girl refugees being forced into early marriages.

The onset of winter puts Syrian children at even greater risk, especially the hundreds of thousands who are living in temporary, often unheated, tents or other shelters. Several children have already died from the cold, and, tragically, more are likely to follow.

The Assad regime and, to a lesser extent, some rebel groups have blocked humanitarian assistance in a deliberate effort to increase pressure on besieged civilians. Several children have already starved to death. One medical expert who examined underweight refugee children said, "We have a middle income country that is transforming itself into something a lot more like Somalia." Aid workers report that signs are posted at regime checkpoints that say, "kneel or starve." This is a deplorable war crime and it must be stopped.

I am proud to say that the United States has already provided \$1.3 billion in humanitarian assistance to aid Syrian refugees, making our country by far the largest donor. We have a moral obligation to assist Syrian refugees, but it is also in our national interest to maintain stability in this critical region.

This humanitarian catastrophe has created grave challenges for neighboring countries – including close U.S. allies – that are hosting the vast majority of the refugees. These countries have saved the lives of untold numbers of Syrians. We must do everything we can to support their efforts.

Look at Lebanon, a country of 4.4 million that is now hosting more than 860,000 Syrian refugees. This is more than 20 percent of the Lebanese population – the equivalent of the United States facing the sudden influx of 60 million Canadians. UNHCR projects that an additional one million refugees could arrive in Lebanon in 2014. This has increased competition for limited job opportunities, raised food and housing costs, and created severe strains on schools, health care, and other social

services. In fact, the number of Syrian school-aged refugee children in Lebanon is soon likely to exceed the number of Lebanese school-aged children.

As the Syrian conflict grinds on, UNHCR has begun efforts to resettle especially vulnerable refugees in third countries, including 30,000 in Fiscal Year 2014.

For decades, the United States has received more refugees than any other country in the world, and the American people have greeted these refugees with open arms and hearts. But the United States only accepted 31 Syrian refugees in Fiscal Year 2013, and the Administration has said we are likely to accept only a few hundred Syrians in Fiscal Year 2014.

Two years ago, I asked the Administration to grant temporary protected status to Syrians. As a result, the United States is providing safe haven to hundreds of Syrian visitors who were in the country on temporary visas.

But we also should accept more vulnerable Syrian refugees who have no way of getting to the United States. One issue that needs to be addressed is the overly broad prohibition in our immigration law that excludes any refugee who has provided any kind of support to any armed rebel group, even a group supported by the United States. This would prevent a Syrian who gave a cigarette or a sandwich to a Free Syrian Army soldier from receiving refugee status, despite the fact that the United States is providing assistance to the FSA.

At the same time, other countries must play a larger part in accepting Syrian refugees. For example, the Conservative government in the United Kingdom has said it will not accept a single Syrian refugee. And none of the Gulf Arab countries – such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar – have committed to accept Syrian refugees. These countries should step up and do their part.

Earlier, you heard the statistics. But it's critical to recall that behind those numbers are individuals. A number of Syrian refugees join us today. I'd like to take a moment to introduce a few of those who have been fortunate enough to find refuge in the United States.

Eiad Charbaji, please stand to be recognized. Mr. Charbaji and his wife Ola Malas are journalists from Damascus who took part in the nonviolent protest movement. Mr. Charbaji was arrested and tortured by the regime for publishing recordings of the regime's violent response to peaceful demonstrations. Ms. Malas's life was threatened, as was the life of the couple's 4-year-old daughter Julie. The family fled from Syria in January 2012 and Mr. Charbaji then came to the United States with the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program.

Amer Mahdi Doko, please stand to be recognized. Mr. Doko is from Darayya, a suburb of Damascus. He, his wife, and his baby girl now live in Virginia. Mr. Doko was imprisoned twice for his opposition to the Assad regime, once in 2003 and again in March 2012. After being released from prison in 2012, he fled to Jordan. He came to the U.S. after he was admitted to a Masters' program at Georgetown University. In August 2012, the Assad forces massacred hundreds of civilians in his hometown and arrested two of his brothers, who are still missing. Mr. Doko, who received asylum in 2013, is now working full-time and continuing his full-time studies at Georgetown.

Omar Al Muqdad, please stand to be recognized. Mr. Al Muqdad, who is from Dara'a, worked as a journalist for over nine years, publicizing human-rights abuses by the regime. He was arrested seven times and was imprisoned for two years, between 2006 and 2008. When he refused to stop writing, the prison guards broke his hand. After his release from prison, he continued working as a

journalist. He participated in nonviolent political protests in Dara'a in March 2011, and publicized abuses by Syrian security forces. He fled to Turkey in April 2011 after he was pursued by the regime. He was resettled in the United States by Catholic Charities after receiving refugee status.

Mr. Al Muqdad has submitted a statement to the Subcommittee. I would like to read a portion of it:

"I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank the American people for providing me refuge in the United States. Also, I would like to urge you to do all that you can to make U.S. resettlement available for more Syrian refugees. Obviously, the U.S. cannot resettle all of the hundreds of thousands of people who have fled from Syria. But there are many very vulnerable people who could be helped, including women with problem pregnancies, girls subject to forced marriages, orphans, elderly people, and sick people."

As the Syrian conflict enters its fourth year, it is clear that the refugee crisis is likely to continue for some time. While there may be differences about how to resolve the conflict, there should be no disagreement that it is a moral and national security imperative to do all we can to help alleviate the suffering of innocent Syrian refugees. I look forward to our discussion about what steps Congress and the Administration should take to address this crisis.

**Chairman Patrick Leahy
Hearing On The Syrian Refugee Crisis,
Senate Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights
January 7, 2014**

I would like to thank Senator Durbin for holding this important hearing. I recently chaired a related hearing in the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on the Department of State and Foreign Operations along with ranking member Senator Graham. We heard sobering testimony from representatives of the State Department, including Assistant Secretary Richards who is with us again today, and the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. That testimony underscored the dire situation that Syrian refugees are facing and I am pleased that funding for relief aid for Syrian refugees is a priority in the State Department and Foreign Operations appropriations bill. I want to thank our witnesses for being here today to discuss what more the United States can be doing to help respond to this humanitarian catastrophe.

The number of displaced Syrians, particularly women and children, is staggering and will continue to grow. The world is very grateful to Syria's neighbors, who have opened their arms to hundreds of thousands of refugees. But we must also work here in the United States to fulfill our commitments to the Syrian people. I am proud that the U.S. has provided over \$1.3 billion in humanitarian aid since the beginning of the crisis, and has opened its doors to 90 Syrian refugees thus far, but we can—and must—do more.

One considerable hurdle to our refugee assistance efforts are the overbroad "Terrorism-Related Inadmissibility Grounds" - or TRIG bars - found in existing immigration law, as well as the Department of Homeland Security's current interpretation of "material support" to include even "*de minimus*" support. That interpretation has led to perverse outcomes including barring otherwise-eligible refugees because they have sold flowers or other commercial goods to customers who happen to be affiliated with a banned group. We are seeing this same problem play out again among Syrian refugees and it is time the administration took action to end it.

For years, I have been urging the Department of Homeland Security to refine its definition of "material support" to exclude to *de minimus* actions such as routine commercial and social transactions. I have written letters to the President and to former Secretary Napolitano. I have raised the issue with now Secretary Johnson. I understand that there is ongoing work to address this problem and I very much hope that we are on the brink of a resolution here. We are capable of both keeping dangerous individuals from coming to the United States, and honoring our proud tradition of offering protection to the world's most vulnerable populations.

Innocent refugees and asylum seekers from around the world have waited long enough and now the lives of thousands of Syrians people lay in the balance. The time to act is now.

#

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 20, 2013

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write today to express our ongoing concern for the humanitarian and protracted refugee crisis caused by the conflict in Syria.

Earlier this year, we travelled to the region as a bipartisan congressional delegation and visited with refugees in Za'atari Camp in Jordan. We heard firsthand from refugees about the hardship and challenges families are facing as a result of the crisis. We also heard from our allies and partners in the region about the effect the conflict is having on their domestic security and regional stability. We believe U.S. efforts to address the suffering and bring the conflict to an end are a priority in their own right and a core national security interest.

This is the largest and most complex humanitarian crisis in the world today, and we are proud that the United States is leading the world in providing more than \$1.3 billion for humanitarian activities both inside Syria and in neighboring countries. However, as the influx of refugees into host countries continues at an alarming rate, and with the onset of winter, we need to do more to meet urgent humanitarian needs. On December 16, 2013, the United Nations released an appeal for \$6.5 billion in assistance for 2014, which marks the largest single request for a humanitarian emergency. This appeal exceeds two previous United Nations emergency appeals, which identified a total of \$4.4 billion in humanitarian needs, which are less than 64% funded.

More than two years of fighting have forced millions of Syrians to flee from their homes resulting in approximately 6.5 million internally displaced Syrians. In addition, approximately 2.2 million registered Syrians have fled to neighboring countries, of which the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees reports that about 1 million Syrian refugees are children.

The humanitarian crisis is quickly shifting from being a consequence of the Syrian conflict to being a potential driver of conflict itself which threatens regional stability. Host countries in the region, including Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt are accepting a staggering number of refugees at considerable cost and political risk. Each host country has its own unique set of challenges, and is struggling to meet the basic needs of newly arriving refugees.

Millions of Syrian refugees -- expected to reach over 3 million by the end of the year-- put a strain on already over-burdened public services in host countries including clean water, sanitation, schools, and hospitals. Limited access to healthcare and outbreaks of communicable diseases like polio, measles and typhoid in Syria, have triggered emergency vaccination efforts in neighboring countries and within refugee communities. In addition, rising sectarian and other internal tensions and cross border clashes are creating additional security threats that could also have implications for regional security.

In addition, new challenges are emerging as refugees who have resided in host countries for an extended period of time are running out of savings and have no legal authority to work. Simmering political tensions have led to crack downs on illegal employment and increased detention and deportation. And, in some cases, limited resources are forcing aid agencies to restrict aid, causing frustration and anger among those excluded.

As the former Commander, US Central Command, General James N. Mattis stated so eloquently during a hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee earlier this year, "If we seek to influence events, we must listen to partner concerns and continue to demonstrate our support through tangible actions." General Mattis rightly assessed that "[p]erhaps the greatest risk to U.S. interests in the region is a perceived lack of an enduring U.S. commitment to collective interests and the security of our regional partners."

To address a crisis of this magnitude, it is essential for the U.S. to work closely with allies in the region and partners around the world, and to ensure that the efforts across the U.S. government are well-coordinated and make the most of limited resources. Accordingly, we respectfully request information on how each federal agency is currently contributing to the humanitarian response and the activities your Administration is undertaking to facilitate interagency coordination to ensure a unity of effort across the U.S. government. We would also like to know how the effectiveness of the U.S. response is being evaluated and what process has been devised for contingency planning.

We thank you again for your attention to this important matter and look forward to your response.

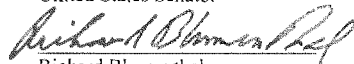
Sincerely,



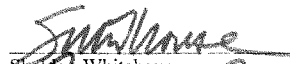
John McCain
United States Senator



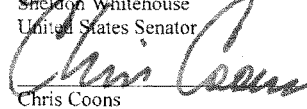
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



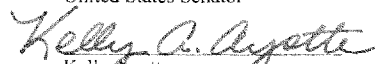
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Chris Coons
United States Senator



Kelly Ayotte
United States Senator



Written Testimony

of

Most Reverend Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp.

Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Seattle, WA

Chairman, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Migration

For a Hearing Before the Senate Judiciary Committee's

Subcommittee on The Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights

"The Ongoing Syrian Refugee Crisis"

2:30 p.m., Tuesday, January 7, 2014

Room 216 Hart Senate Office Building

I am Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of Seattle, WA, and chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Migration. I provide this written statement today on behalf of the Committee on Migration to give the Catholic Church's perspective about the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis.

I would like to thank Chairman Richard Durbin (D-IL), Ranking Member Ted Cruz (R-TX), and subcommittee members for the opportunity to comment on the crisis. A USCCB delegation travelled to the region in October 2012 and completed a report titled, "Mission to the Middle East: Report of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on Syrian Refugees" (Catholic Syria Report 2012). While our mission to the region was over a year ago, many of the humanitarian challenges of the conflict—and the suffering of its victims—have persisted and increased, without a corresponding humanitarian response from the international community.

Mr. Chairman, I ask that the report of that trip be included in the hearing record. In this current statement, I will integrate and update our observations and recommendations from that report.

Catholics and all Christians are reminded this time of year when celebrating the birth of Jesus, that one of Jesus' first experiences as an infant was to flee for his life from King Herod with his family to Egypt. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were refugees in the Middle East and faced some of the same fear, uncertainty, and dislocation as the millions of Syrians imperiled by this crisis face today. The situation is especially urgent given the unprecedented size, complexity, and rate of growth of the displaced population. There were 550,000 Syrian refugees in the region when we visited in October 2012. After little more than a year, the number of Syrian refugees has grown to 2.3 million, including 1.1 million children, 75% of whom are less than 12 years old.

Mr. Chairman, in my testimony today the U.S. Catholic bishops recommend that Congress:

- Work with other governments to obtain a ceasefire in Syria, initiate serious negotiations, increase impartial humanitarian assistance, and give safe passage of that assistance, especially for internally displaced people (IDPs), and encourage efforts to build an inclusive society in Syria that protects the rights of all its citizens, including Christians and other minorities.
- Encourage host countries in the region to maintain border and migration enforcement policies and practices that enable people to safely flee from Syria and find humane protection and care without improper rejection at the border, deportation, or arbitrary detention in poor conditions.
- Provide more U.S. support and encourage more international support for refugees in the region, especially children, for their basic necessities of life, immediate protection, primary and secondary education, and systems that lay the groundwork for all durable solutions; and provide host countries additional housing, food, water, sanitation, health, education, and transportation infrastructure to allow them to host such large numbers of refugees.
- Meaningfully increase U.S. resettlement through an emergency order to at least 15,000 Syrians for FY2014 and urge all other resettlement nations to increase resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees to 15,000, including unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs), women with children, minority groups, those with serious health concerns, the elderly and those in immediate danger, thereby protecting them and sharing the host countries' burden.

- Increase U.S. resettlement and urge other nations to increase resettlement of other vulnerable refugees in the region to protect them and share the burden with host countries.
- Urge the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in consultation with the Department of State (DOS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ), to expeditiously remove unjust impediments to U.S. resettlement by implementing discretionary authority to grant exemptions from overly broad terrorism related inadmissibility grounds (TRIG) of U.S. immigration law.

I. Catholic Social Teaching

The Catholic Church is a migrant and refugee church. The Catholic Church in the United States, for example, is made up of more than 58 ethnic groups from throughout the world, including Asia, Africa, the Near East, the Middle East, and Latin America. I myself am from Latin America.

We have a long history of involvement in refugee and child protection, both in the advocacy arena and in welcoming and integrating waves of immigrants and refugees who have helped build our nation as one that embraces ethnic diversity while sharing common values. Migration and Refugee Services of USCCB (USCCB/MRS) is the largest U.S. refugee resettlement agency, resettling one million of the three million refugees who have come to our country since 1975, and is a national leader in caring for unaccompanied refugee and migrant children. We work with over 100 Catholic Charities across the country to welcome and serve refugees and unaccompanied alien children.

The U.S. Catholic Church also relates closely with the Catholic Church in countries throughout the world, where our worldwide Catholic communion serves the needs of the most marginalized regardless of nationality or religious affiliation. We serve many refugees, internally displaced persons, and host nations straining under the large influx of people fleeing persecution and war. The Church's deep experience in combating poverty and forced migration and their root causes in the Middle East also includes the work of, among others, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the official overseas relief and development agency of the U.S. Catholic bishops, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), of which USCCB is the largest member, Caritas International, Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), and the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA).

The Catholic Church's work of assisting all migrants everywhere stems from the belief that every person is created in God's image. In the Old Testament, God calls upon his people to care for the alien because of their own experience as aliens: "So, you, too, must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:17-19). In the New Testament, the image of the migrant is seen in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. In his own life and work, Jesus identified himself with newcomers and with other marginalized persons in a special way: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt. 25:35). Jesus himself was an itinerant preacher without a home of his own, and as noted above, a refugee fleeing to Egypt to avoid persecution and death (Mt. 2:15).

In modern times, popes over the last 100 years have developed the Church's teaching on migration, teaching that has been frequently applied by subsequent popes and church leaders. Pope Pius XII reaffirmed the Catholic Church's commitment to caring for pilgrims, aliens, exiles, refugees, and migrants of every kind, affirming that all peoples have the right to conditions worthy of human life and, if these conditions are not present, the right to migrate.¹ In our joint pastoral letter, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope, A Pastoral Letter Concerning*

¹ Pope Pius XII, *Exsul Familia* (On the Spiritual Care of Migrants), September, 1952.

Migration," January 23, 2003, the U.S. and Mexican Catholic bishops call for nations to work toward a "globalization of solidarity." "It is now time to harmonize policies on the movement of people, particularly in a way that respects the human dignity of the migrant and recognizes the social consequences of globalization" No. 57. Further, "[r]efugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection. Those who flee wars and persecution should be protected by the global community. This requires, at a minimum, that migrants have a right to claim refugee status without incarceration and to have their claims fully considered by a competent authority" No. 37; and that asylum seekers and refugees should "have access to appropriate due process protections consistent with international law" No. 99. Also, "[b]ecause of their heightened vulnerability, unaccompanied minors require special consideration and care" No. 82.

Recently, Pope Francis defended the rights of refugees and migrants, traveling to Lampedusa, Italy, to call for their protection. He decried the "globalization of indifference" and the "throwaway culture" that leads to the disregard of those fleeing persecution in order to seek a better life.

II. Overview of the Ongoing Syrian Refugee Crisis

"War is like fire. A fire eats everything before it. So does war. There is no peace anywhere," says a Syrian Christian refugee woman in Lebanon served by CNEWA, a Catholic aid group.

The Syrian refugee crisis deserves the full attention and mobilization of the international community. Since the recent USCCB trip to the region, the armed conflict has escalated across Syria. It threatens ongoing large-scale destruction, human suffering, and death inside the country and destabilization of the whole region. The size, scope, rapid growth and complexity of Syria's forced migration are reasons for deep concern. With the brutal conflict and ever-growing forced migration, there is a serious lack of shelter, food, water, sanitation, education, health care, and protection inside Syria and in neighboring countries that host Syrian refugees.

The conflict has reportedly caused over 130,000 deaths, more than 40,000 of them civilian.² Some 40% of Syrians have been forced from their homes, including 6.5 million internally displaced people (IDPs), with some 9.3 million of all Syrians being in dire need of humanitarian help.³ The U.S. Department of State (U.S. DOS) warns that 2.5 million people are in isolated locations within Syria, including 250,000 reportedly under siege who have no access to humanitarian aid. The U.S. DOS also reports that some 2.3 million children within Syria are not able to attend school.⁴

The Syrian Christian woman quoted above is among the 2.3 million Syrian refugees forced to flee their country, with 850,000 seeking refuge in Lebanon, 565,000 in Jordan, 550,000 in Turkey, 200,000 in Iraq, 130,000 in Egypt,⁵ and 31,000 in 90 countries outside the region where they have

² Stephen Kalin, "Anti-Assad Monitoring Group Says Syrian Death Toll Passes 130,433," *Reuters*, December 31, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/31/us-syria-crisis-toll-idUSBRE9BU0FA20131231>. Three weeks before, the U.S. DOS put the death toll at over 100,000. Assistant Secretary of State Anne Richard, Testimony before the State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Subcommittee of Senate Appropriations Committee hearing regarding "Assistance for Jordan and Lebanon," December 10, 2013.

³ Syria Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #4, FY 2014, December 5, 2013, available at: http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/syria_ce_fs04_12-05-2013.pdf

⁴ Assistant Secretary of State Anne Richard, Testimony before the State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Subcommittee of Senate Appropriations Committee hearing regarding "Assistance for Jordan and Lebanon," December 10, 2013.

⁵ Syria Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #4, FY 2014, December 5, 2013, available at: http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/syria_ce_fs04_12-05-2013.pdf

fled and sought asylum.⁶ Besides the recent fourfold increase of Syrian refugees to neighboring countries, those countries already have hosted large refugee populations, including over 480,000 Iraqis, with 61,000 of them UNHCR registered refugees.⁷ There are also vulnerable African refugees in Egypt, including some 120,000 in Cairo, over 2000 in Salloum Refugee Camp, and trafficked and tortured Eritreans on the Sinai peninsula.⁸

Lebanon reports that 30% of its population is made up of Syrian refugees;⁹ and Jordan reports 10%.¹⁰ Although very high, those numbers alone do not capture the challenge for host nations and communities. Lebanon reports that its recent 30% population growth from Syrians is equivalent to the nation's projected growth and expanded infrastructure needs for 2050. Or to use a local community example, in Aarsal, Lebanon, the city of 35,000 has already welcomed 39,000 Syrian refugees, including 20,000 in November 2013 alone.¹¹

An enormous additional humanitarian and refugee protection challenge arises because 75% of Syrian refugees in the region are so-called urban refugees who reside outside of camps, seeking refuge in widely dispersed local communities.¹² In Jordan, Syrian refugees live in 390 locations and in Lebanon, in 1650 communities.¹³

Some 75% of the Syrian refugees are women and children. Many, especially women and girls, face serious problems with gender-based and sexual violence in Syria and in the host countries. UNHCR reports that 1.1 million of the refugees are children, with 75% of them less than 12 years old.¹⁴ Some 60% do not attend school, including 80% in Lebanon and more than 50% in Jordan.¹⁵ UNHCR has so far identified 3760 unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) among the refugees in Lebanon and Jordan.¹⁶ These are children alone in the world whose parents have died or who have been separated from their parents.

We turn last to the vulnerability of some Syrian minority groups. While 75% of people in Syria¹⁷ and 90% of registered refugees fleeing from Syria are Sunni Muslims,¹⁸ there are also several

⁶ Ewen MacLeod, UNHCR Representative to Lebanon, Written Testimony before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs hearing "Assistance for Jordan and Lebanon," December 10, 2013.

⁷ 2013 UNHCR Country Operations Profiles—Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e486566&submit=GO> (Jordan); <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e486676&submit=GO> (Lebanon); <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e0fa75&submit=GO> (Jordan); <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e48e0fa7f&submit=GO> (Turkey).

⁸ For more details, see USCCB, *Mission to the Middle East: Report of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' on Syrian Refugees*, October 2012, pp. 7-9.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Honorable Alia Bouran, Jordanian Ambassador to the United States, Testimony at Hearing of the State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Subcommittee on "Assistance for Jordan and Lebanon," December 10, 2013.

¹¹ Assistant Secretary of State Anne Richard, Testimony, December 10, 2013.

¹² Jordan has four refugee camps: Za'atari camp, the Emirati Jordanian camp, Cyber City, and Azraq, a new camp. Za'atari refugee camp houses 120,000 Syrian refugees, making it the fourth largest city in Jordan and the fourth largest refugee camp in the world. Turkey runs 21 refugee camps mostly in the south of the country, while Lebanon has no formal camps, although there are informal camps in areas of large influx, such as Aarsal. Egypt has no camps. Urban refugees there live primarily in Cairo, Alexandria, and Damietta. USCIRF, *Factsheet Syria*, July 2013, pp. 3-7 (available at www.uscifr.gov).

¹³ Honorable Antoine Chedid, Lebanese Ambassador to the United States, Testimony at Hearing of the State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Subcommittee on "Assistance for Jordan and Lebanon," December 10, 2013. The 390 locations for Jordan were on a chart that UNHCR prepared for the hearing.

¹⁴ UNHCR, *The Future of Syria: Children in Crisis*, December 2013, p. 9.

¹⁵ Assistant Secretary Anne Richard, Testimony, December 10, 2013.

¹⁶ UNHCR, *The Future of Syria: Children in Crisis*, December 2013, p. 9 (2440 URMs in Lebanon, 1320 in Jordan).

¹⁷ USCIRF, *Special Report Protecting and Promoting Religious Freedom in Syria*, April 2013, p. 1 (available at www.uscifr.gov).

minority groups, including Christians, who are at risk both within Syria and in neighboring host countries. Christians make up some 10% of the Syrian population, totaling about 2.2 million.¹⁹ These are among the most ancient and venerable Christian communities in the world that have a history of peaceful coexistence with their Muslim neighbors. They long to remain in Syria.

These Syrian Christians report fleeing generalized violence. One Syrian Catholic leader reported that some 50,000 Christians in Homs were obliged to flee in March 2013 when the opposition forces took up positions in a Christian neighborhood and the Syrian government bombed the Christian section of the city.²⁰ Christians also report being targeted. The same leader described priests in Syria who were recently kidnapped for ransom by opposition groups who thought Christians were wealthy. During USCCB's trip to Lebanon, another Christian described how opposition forces in Syria threatened Christians to leave within 24 hours or be killed.

III. Recommendations

We commend the peoples and governments of the refugee host countries for their generous welcome of their Syrian brothers and sisters. We commend the donor countries led by the United States, UN agencies led by UNHCR, NGOs, and other humanitarian actors. Yet with the escalating brutality of the conflict in Syria and the thousands of Syrians fleeing every week, an even greater effort is needed. Mr. Chairman, we have three sets of recommendations for Congress.

A. Pursue peace in Syria and safe access for humanitarian aid and workers.

During a public appearance on August 25, 2013, Pope Francis denounced and called for an end to the "multiplication of massacres and atrocious acts" in Syria. Later, Pope Francis urged "the international community to make every effort to promote clear proposals for peace without further delay, a peace based on dialogue and negotiation, for the good of the entire Syrian people. May no effort be spared in guaranteeing humanitarian assistance to those wounded by this terrible conflict, in particular those forced to flee and the many refugees in nearby countries." We lament and are grateful for the loving sacrifice of those seeking peace and providing humanitarian help for Syria, including 45 humanitarian workers who have been killed, 12 abducted, and 9 gone missing.²¹

Mr. Chairman, we urge Congress to

- Work with other governments to obtain a ceasefire, initiate serious peace negotiations, provide increased impartial humanitarian assistance and allow safe passage for this assistance within Syria, especially for internally displaced people (IDPs), and encourage efforts to build an inclusive society in Syria that protects the rights of all its citizens, including Christians and other minorities, and enables them to remain in their homeland

B. Support host countries to maintain generous protection and humanitarian care for refugees, especially children.

Given the huge influx of refugees, international support and special vigilance is needed to maintain border and migration enforcement and asylum policies that safeguard refugee protection and

¹⁹ USCIRF, Fact Sheet Syria; Syria's Refugee Crisis and its Implications, July 2013, p. 1 (available at www.uscifr.gov).

¹⁹ USCIRF, *Special Report: Protecting and Promoting Religious Freedom in Syria*, April 2013, p. 1 (available at www.uscifr.gov).

²⁰ "Embattled Syrians hope Argentine pope can broker peace," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 21, 2013.

²¹ Ibid.

related humanitarian care for Syrians and also for Palestinians, Iraqis, and other refugees. In Lebanon, there is a commendable policy that grants Syrian refugees who arrive with identity papers with one-year renewable visas, but reports are disturbing about the government practice of sometimes subjecting Syrians and others seeking refuge without documents to deportation and arbitrary detention under poor conditions. In Jordan, the recent decision to provide Syrians with one-year instead of six-month residency cards is commendable (a recommendation that we made a year ago). However, the government practice of confiscating and keeping Syrians' documents and the reported border practices of restricting refugees' entries according to a daily quota or nationality limitation or for lacking identity documents are disturbing.²² In Turkey, welcoming 550,000 Syrian refugees is a huge and generous undertaking, but the reported 6-week delays are problematic for Syrian refugees waiting in dangerous makeshift camps on the Syrian side of the border for Turkey's permission to cross over.

Beyond maintaining protection at the border, there are enormous political and logistical challenges involved in protecting and serving the 75% of Syrians who are urban refugees. When refugees reside in camps, the international community generally partners with host nations to create the camps' infrastructure and service delivery system parallel to that of local communities, with refugees and communities remaining insulated from one another. With urban refugees, the international community partners with the host country and local communities to expand local infrastructure and services and facilitates face-to-face hospitality, problem solving, conflict resolution, and collaboration between the local communities and refugees.

Lack of housing continues to be a chronic issue for Syrian urban refugees. Some fortunately still live with host families or friends. Others who lived in apartments have already spent down what savings they had, and with few jobs, have no money for rent. They, as well as new arrivals, are forced to find shelter in abandoned or unfinished buildings or to create settlements of makeshift tents provided by NGOs. In Lebanon, local police have sometimes torn down such makeshift settlements without explanation.

During winter, the 1.1 million refugee children are especially vulnerable to the lack of shelter, and also of food, water, sanitation, education, and health care. Girls, especially, are at risk of gender-based violence, and there are reported incidences of forced marriages. There are also reported problems with access to birth registration for newborn refugees in both Lebanon and Jordan, putting the infants at risk of statelessness. We also learned of many teenagers, ages 13 to 17 years old, who have no access to school and are being pressured or feel compelled to return to Syria to fight. Many children also work instead of attending school so that their families can survive.

Mr. Chairman, regarding the neighboring countries who host Syrian refugees, we urge Congress to

- Encourage host countries in the region to maintain border and migration enforcement policies and practices that enable Syrians and other refugee groups (such as Palestinians and Iraqis) to safely flee from Syria and find humane protection and care without improper rejection at the border, deportation, or arbitrary detention in poor conditions. And
 - Work with Jordan to retrieve and redistribute identification papers to Syrians who had them confiscated by Jordanian officials and institute alternative procedures instead of confiscating these important documents, such as copying them.

²² Human Rights First has documented risks to refugee protection in the region, including Jordanian border enforcement. See *Refugees at Risk: The Syrian Refugee Crisis and U.S. Leadership*, Human Rights First, November 2013.

- Provide more U.S. support and encourage more international support for refugees in the region, especially children, for their basic necessities of life, immediate protection, primary and secondary education, and systems that lay the groundwork for durable solutions; and provide host countries additional housing, food, water, sanitation, health, education, and transportation infrastructure to allow them to host these large numbers of refugees; and
 - Support host countries and local communities to address the challenges implicit for urban refugees by creating community based mechanisms for communication, problem solving, dispute resolution, and collaboration between locals, refugees, and humanitarian providers.
 - Provide access to education and psycho-social support for children at risk of being recruited to fight in Syria and for kids at risk of gender-based and sexual violence.
 - Provide alternative financial support for families whose children are now forced to work for the sake of family survival.
 - Assure proper registration of all Syrian refugee children born in the region.

C. Increase U.S. refugee resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees, including Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URMs), and encourage other nations to do so.

The United States often demonstrates solidarity with refugees and host countries in far-away crises like Syria's by providing strategic refugee resettlement for the most vulnerable refugees. It is strategic for the most vulnerable refugees because removing them from danger keeps their vulnerable situation from becoming catastrophic. It is strategic for host nations because it often removes vulnerable people who otherwise cause a disproportionate drain on the host's already strained resources. It is strategic for the overall crisis because it shares the burden and spurs other nations to act—either to provide aid or to agree to do resettlement or another durable solution. The U.S. generally resettles as many refugees as all other resettlement countries combined.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops urges the United States to make strategic use of resettlement for the most vulnerable Syrian refugees. UNHCR calls for 30,000 Syrians to be resettled in 2014. Among the most vulnerable are unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) whose parents have died or who are separated from their parents. There is a great risk that many other URMs, as urban refugees, will not be identified at all and their needs will go unnoticed by the overwhelmed host government and international staff. There is a strong need for community-based systems to identify vulnerable refugees, especially unaccompanied children, to screen them, to provide protection and care, and to prepare for resettlement or whatever durable solutions is in each child's best interest. URMs should receive "best interest determinations" (BIDs) and ongoing case management.

Mr. Chairman, I must also call attention to the plight of religious minorities in Syria, particularly Christians. Among other destinations, Syrian Christians have fled within Syria; others have fled to Zahle, a city of some 320,000 nestled in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon; others to Turkey. Most Christians do not undertake refugee registration because they fear that UNHCR will hand over their information to the Syrian government. Acting on fear has a price, since the protection and assistance from host governments, UNHCR, and implementing partners often depends on a refugee being registered. Nonetheless, Christians express fear, both of reprisals by the Syrian government for leaving Syria, and also fear some sectors of the opposition, such as the radical sects from outside of Syria who are now part of the conflict. They are truly caught in the middle of the conflict.

Before turning to recommendations, a major hurdle to U.S. resettlement of Syrians is the set of overly broad U.S. immigration law provisions that bar entry to the United States for being involved with terrorist activities, so-called TRIG provisions. The TRIG provisions have a laudable goal, but they have been written and applied in such an overly broad way that they have delayed or barred admission of many deserving refugees who have no connection to terrorism. If a country has an armed, nongovernmental opposition group fighting against the government, that group is deemed to be involved in "terrorist activities." It does not matter if the opposition includes noble freedom fighters supported by the U.S. government to fight against a brutal regime that the U.S. condemns. If someone is a member, solicits funds or provides material support for the armed opposition group, or has a parent or spouse so involved, that person is barred from entering the United States. It does not matter if the person never violated any rules of war or criminal laws or has a nonmilitary role such as providing humanitarian assistance or healthcare. It does not matter that the person poses no danger or threat to our country.

In Syria's refugee crisis, there are armed opposition groups fighting against a government that the UN has condemned for committing crimes against humanity. The opposition groups include some who received nonmilitary aid from the U.S. government. Because of these and other aspects of the Syrian crisis, the overly broad and unfair application of the TRIG provisions poses a serious impediment for the resettlement of Syrians unless the Administration uses its exemption powers.

Mr. Chairman, to facilitate increased resettlement, especially for URM, we urge Congress to

- Meaningfully increase U.S. resettlement, through an emergency order, to at least 15,000 Syrians for FY2014 and urge all other resettlement nations to increase resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees to 15,000, including unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs), women with children, minority groups, those with serious health concerns, the elderly and those in immediate danger, thereby protecting them and sharing the host countries' burden.
 - Increasing the nongovernmental and community capacity to identify and screen the most vulnerable urban refugees, including URM, to meet their immediate protection and humanitarian needs, and to prepare for their durable solutions;
 - Increasing UNHCR's capacity for refugee status determination, resettlement, and BIDs; and for U.S. Resettlement Support Centers' refugee and URM processing capacity;
 - Facilitating Best Interest Determinations (BIDs) for the 3760 unaccompanied refugee minors identified in Jordan and Lebanon and for all URM identified in the region, and use BIDs to pursue their short-term protection and durable solutions;
 - Developing community-based mechanisms to identify, protect and serve Christian and other minority group refugees who do not register because they fear reprisals;
 - Increasing DHS' capacity to do circuit rides to the region to interview Syrian and other refugees for potential resettlement;
 - Allowing Syrians with noncurrent visa petitions to receive refugee interviews (this was one of the successful strategies to increase Iraqi resettlement).
 - Encouraging DHS, other security screening agencies, and the White House to allocate sufficient staff and to work collaboratively to increase the number of security checks that can be expedited thereby speeding up the process for refugees facing significant risks.
- Increase U.S. resettlement and urge other nations to increase resettlement of other vulnerable refugees in the region, thereby sharing the burden with host countries.

- Urge neighboring countries to receive Iraqi refugees from Syria and continue expediting the resettlement cases of Iraqis referred for U.S. consideration.
- Work with Egypt to halt trafficking and torture of Eritrean refugees in the Sinai.
- Consider for resettlement the vulnerable African refugees in Cairo who are unable to integrate and remain at risk of harassment and attack, and the African refugees in Salloum Refugee Camp who were displaced from Libya and now cannot return either to Libya or their home countries, and other African refugees in the region.
- Urge DHS, in consultation with DOS and DOJ, to proactively and expeditiously remove unjust impediments to U.S. resettlement by implementing discretionary authority to grant exemptions from TRIG provisions of U.S. immigration law and by judiciously interpreting the meaning of the “material support” bar.
 - Allow case-by-case exemptions to be issued for applicants (such as humanitarian and healthcare workers) who provided nonviolent assistance to an armed opposition group, who have passed all required security and background checks, who meet the refugee definition, who are not otherwise barred, and who did not knowingly support activities that targeted noncombatants or U.S. interests (by statute, such exemptions are not available to anyone who participated in or provided material support to a group designated or listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S. government).
 - Allow case-by-case exemptions to be granted to former combatants who otherwise meet the refugee definition, who are not subject to any other bars, who have passed all applicable security and background checks, who establish that they pose no threat to the safety or security of the United States, and who either (1) were children at the time or (2) did not participate in, or knowingly provide material support to, activities that targeted noncombatants or U.S. interests.
 - Complete a long-pending review of its legal interpretation of the term “material support.” The application of the “material support” bar to minimal donations and to routine commercial transactions with members of armed groups greatly inflates the number of cases unjustly affected by this law.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to share our observations and recommendations.

Mr. Chairman, as UNHCR High Commissioner Antonio Guterres has stated, the Syrian humanitarian crisis is among the worst refugee crises on record. Millions of innocent persons have been impacted by this conflict, which seems to have no end in sight. The international community can no longer stand by and witness this ongoing death and suffering. I urge you to adopt our recommendations. The U.S. Catholic bishops and our affiliated agencies stand ready to assist you in this effort.

I close with Pope Francis’ recent reflection to Catholic aid groups assisting with the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis. He observed that Christians are called to help the people of Syria because “where there is suffering, Christ is present. We cannot turn our back on situations of great suffering. The weapons must be silenced.”

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD FROM TED CHAIBAN
DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY PROGRAMS
UNICEF**

**BEFORE THE
SENATE JUDICIARY SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE
CONSTITUTION, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

WASHINGTON, D.C.

JANUARY 07, 2014

WRITTEN STATEMENT ON THE SYRIA CRISIS
UNICEF

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights, thank you for focusing your attention on the unfolding tragedy in Syria, and in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey, and for providing UNICEF with the opportunity to share our perspective on this devastating situation.

The crisis in Syria is a children's crisis. Five and a half million children are affected by the conflict, including some four million children in Syria alone and more than one million child refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey. The numbers speak for themselves. These are not simply statistics. These numbers represent the individual lives of children.

Inside Syria, basic social services have been severely undermined by the conflict, and millions of children are feeling the impact. Nearly 5,000 schools are no longer functioning, having been damaged, destroyed or used as shelters for internally displaced families; and as a result, nearly 2.3 million children are out of school or attending school irregularly. More than 6 million people affected by the crisis are in need of emergency food assistance, and there are growing concerns that malnutrition rates will rise among children and women. More than 250,000 children under the age of five may be at risk of under-nutrition. The collapsing health care and water systems are exposing children to infectious diseases. Seventeen polio cases are now confirmed in Syria, representing the first outbreak in 14 years. Polio has been declared a public health emergency.

In neighboring countries affected by the crisis, UNICEF estimates that the number of child refugees increased tenfold in 2013 alone. Right now, there are nearly half a million Syrian refugee children under the age of five living in camps, tented settlements and host communities. More than sixty per cent of refugee children are not currently attending school. In Jordan, more girls are marrying at a young age; children are more likely to be exposed to violence; and one in 10 children has been sent to work. In addition to malnutrition, refugees face persistent threats of disease, such as measles, polio and diarrhea. Harsh weather conditions, including severe winter weather, can pose additional challenges for refugees

living in makeshift settlements, including increased risk of disease. Refugee children are especially susceptible to illnesses that spread easily in overcrowded settings, including acute respiratory infections.

UNICEF has maintained a presence in the Middle East for decades, and we have significantly increased our resources on the ground. We have continued to provide life-saving assistance to affected children, even as the crisis has escalated. But the operating environment is complex, not only for UNICEF, but for our partner humanitarian organizations working on the ground: fighting continues throughout Syria, the opposition is more and more fragmented, and sectarian violence is on the rise. Although we are seeing some improvements on the administrative and bureaucratic fronts, such as the additional approval of visas, no progress has been made on the protection of civilians. The ongoing air-offensive in Aleppo demonstrates this every day. Indiscriminate attacks there have killed 517 people, including 151 children, since December 15th. Throughout the country, schools and hospitals have yet to be demilitarized. Access remains limited in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, where an estimated two and a half million people are located. Parts of the country remain completely sealed-off. Organizations have to negotiate with armed groups and local authorities to gain access for each convoy delivering humanitarian assistance. Ever increasing insecurity continues to complicate the movements of humanitarian actors.

Despite these challenges, in 2013, UNICEF delivered critical assistance to affected children. Ten million people are now benefitting from access to safe drinking water throughout Syria. The largest-ever consolidated immunization response in the Middle East is currently underway to stop the polio outbreak. To date, more than two million children have been immunized in Syria and 24 million children in neighboring countries. In Syria, UNICEF provided education materials to more than one million children so that these children can resume learning in schools and at home. To support children's survival during the harsh winter months, UNICEF will reach two million children with a package of emergency supplies and assistance, including warm clothing and bedding, access to health care, warm and dry shelter, hot food, and warm learning spaces. These results and targets, and UNICEF's ability to stay, deliver and scale up its operations to meet the growing needs of Syrian children, were made possible by our donors, and in particular, the continued generosity of the United States.

As the conflict enters its fourth year, we must look beyond life-saving interventions. The economic and social collapse of Syria has resulted in a reversal of educational achievement through accumulated loss

of school years and the collapse of education systems. The sub-regional ramifications are vast as the strain on local resources, including schools, affect children in host communities. Inside Syria, intensifying violence, large population displacement, the killing and flight of teachers and the destruction and misuse of schools have all made learning more difficult for children. Many parents report that they have no option but to keep their children at home rather than risk sending them to school. In neighboring countries different language and dialect, different curricula, limited or no learning spaces, physical safety, poverty, and community tensions are keeping children away from classes. Meanwhile, children and teachers from host communities are faced with over-crowded classrooms and increased pressure on education systems.

The situation in Syria is also a protection crisis, and children are paying the heaviest price. Exposed to the horrors of war, many children have witnessed unspeakable cruelties and are suffering psychological distress. In general, the psychosocial wellbeing of girls and boys has deteriorated. The targeting of civilian-populated areas and the lack of precautionary measures taken by all parties to the conflict have led to a high number of children killed or maimed. Home environments, and caregivers' behavior towards children, have changed drastically, especially with so many families keeping children at home. More children are also working outside of the home, and there are strong indications of an increase in the worst forms of child labor. While crossing borders has offered the children of Syria protection from the worst of the violence, these refugee children remain at risk. Many children arrive in host countries traumatized by the events they have experienced and face additional protection concerns in their new environments. In refugee camps in Jordan, violence against children at home and in schools is widespread as an acceptable disciplinary practice. Boredom and aggressive behavior is common, especially among boys and youth, and may heighten the risk of recruitment by armed groups. Meanwhile, as Syrian refugee families use up their savings, many are forced to send their children to work in dangerous jobs. In Turkey, children in both camp and non-camp settings continue to be vulnerable to exploitation, family separation, child labor, forced and child marriage, violence and abuse. There are also pressures for children, particularly boys, to return to Syria to fight. To safeguard the lives and future of these children, we continue to advocate for unconditional humanitarian access to besieged communities and remote areas inside Syria, and call on all parties to the conflict to immediately demilitarize schools and cease all recruitment of children by armed groups.

Essentially, an entire generation of children is being shaped by violence, displacement, and persistent lack of opportunities; an entire generation that could be lost forever. A tragedy of this scale would have profound long-term consequences for Syria, the Middle East, and the world. This situation goes beyond sheer numbers, and the implications for Syria and its eventual post-conflict recovery are profound. Without education and protection, without support for the social cohesion of communities, the children of Syria are at risk of losing hope, of accepting violence as normal, of replicating that violence, and of undermining their own futures, the future of their nation, and the stability of the region.

We still have time to prevent a lost generation. The children of Syria can build a better future for themselves, their families, and their societies. They can do this with assistance that protects them from violence, abuse, and exploitation; with education that fosters their development and resilience; and with support that heals the hidden wounds of a merciless war. To this effect, in October, UNICEF and its partners launched the No Lost Generation strategy, which focuses on the education and protection needs of children. Considering the longer-term impact of the crisis, a key objective is to highlight the positive and critical role that youth can play in promoting tolerance, peacebuilding and reconciliation. Today, UNICEF, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Save the Children, World Vision and other partners are launching a public campaign to present this strategy to the world. Our aim is to use the power of social media to increase the public's awareness of everything that is at stake in Syria, and to engage a legion of champions to prevent a lost generation.

We must act now. And we must act with urgency, and in a coordinated global effort to champion the children of Syria and support neighboring countries affected by the crisis. As the third anniversary of the conflict approaches, the children of Syria need advocates and champions such as yourselves, more than ever. The success of the No Lost Generation strategy will depend on the joint effort of global partners, sustained regional engagement on behalf of all children affected by the crisis, and renewed public support for those impacted by this tragedy.

Thank you for inviting UNICEF to share its views at this important hearing.



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Statement for the Record
 On behalf of
 The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
 Before
 The US Senate Judiciary Committee
 Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) appreciates the opportunity to provide a statement for the record concerning the January 7, 2014, hearing scheduled by Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights. The hearing is titled: *"The Syrian Refugee Crisis."*

ADC is the largest grassroots Arab American civil rights and civil liberties organization; it is non-profit, non-sectarian, and non-partisan, with members in every State of the United States. As the largest Arab-American organization, ADC is especially concerned for the welfare and human rights of the innocent civilians who are affected by the conflict in Syria.

ADC's legal department regularly provides pro bono legal advice to Syrian nationals, seeking information about refugee status, temporary protected status and asylum, is a large part of ADC's pro bono legal practice. In early 2012, ADC filed a formal petition with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) requesting that TPS be granted to Syrian nationals present in the US, and worked with the Syrian community to obtain approval of the petition, followed by a re-designation and renewal of TPS in June of 2013. ADC has filed multiple TPS and asylum applications and continues to advocate on behalf of Syrian nationals in the U.S., working closely with the appropriate government agencies, as well as with the White House.

Background

The Syrian refugee crisis is a matter of pressing concern.¹ The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has called this the worst refugee crisis since the Rwandan genocide.² According to UNHCR data, over 2.3 million Syrians refugees³ have been forced to flee Syria since the beginning of the conflict in 2011.⁴ An additional 4 million

¹ See 2014 UNHCR country operations profile-Syrian Arab Republic. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486a76.html> (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)

² UNHCR Mid-Year Trends 2013 Report <http://unhcr.org/52af08d26.html> (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)

³ Refugees: According to UNHCR, "refugees" include individuals recognized under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, individuals recognized under the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, those recognized in accordance with the UNHCR Statute, individuals granted complementary forms of protection, and those enjoying temporary protection. The refugee category also includes those in refugee like situations.

⁴ There are currently 2,301,641 Registered Syrian Refugees according to the Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)



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Syrians are internally displaced⁵ in Syria and UNHCR expects the number of Syrian refugees to increase to over 4 million by the end of 2014. Over one million Syrian refugees are children; over 425,000 are under the age of five.⁶ Syrian refugees are even more vulnerable now due to freezing temperatures.⁷ Furthermore, the re-emergence of polio is a global public health emergency that must be contained.⁸ The inter-agency Syria Regional Response Plan is appealing for \$4.2 billion to cover the needs of 4.1 million refugees fleeing Syria and 2.7 million people in host communities in the region in 2014.⁹

ADC is also concerned about persons fleeing Syria who may not meet the legal definition of refugee under section 101(a) (42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and the United Nations Refugee Convention. Given the violent and widespread nature of the conflict in Syria, all persons fleeing Syria would have well founded reasons for thinking that their lives would be in danger if they returned to Syria, whether or not they are able to demonstrate particularized persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group or political opinion. Thus, all Syrians should be afforded complementary¹⁰ and temporary¹¹ refugee protections of asylum status and non-refoulement.

Zaatari Refugee Camp

The large influx of Syrian refugees into Jordan and Lebanon has put great pressure on these economies, making the refugee camps especially insecure and susceptible to theft and violence.¹² Jordan is currently hosting over 576,000 Syrian refugees, and Lebanon is hosting over 858,000.¹³ Jordan's Zaatari refugee camp is particularly

⁵ Internally Displaced persons are individuals or groups of individuals who have been forced to leave their homes or places of habitual residence in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or man-made disasters—but who have not crossed an international border. For the purposes of UNHCR's statistics, this population only includes conflict generated IDPS to whom the Office extends protection and or assistance.

⁶ UNHCR, Urgent call for massive investment to prevent lost generation of Syrian children. <http://www.unhcr.org/52cba9099.html> (Last Accessed: January 7, 2014)

⁷ Syrian refugee families vulnerable as largest winter storm in years hits Lebanon. <http://www.worldvision.org.nz/news/news-articles/syrian-refugee-families-vulnerable-as-largest-winter-storm-in-years-hits-lebanon.aspx#UscantRDuGe> (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)

⁸ <http://www.unhcr.org/syriarp6/docs/Syria-rp6-full-report.pdf> (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)

⁹ 20012 Syria Regional Response Plan. <http://www.unhcr.org/syriarp6/> (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)

¹⁰ 'Complementary' protection refers to protection provided under national, regional, or international law to persons who do not qualify for protection under refugee law instruments but are in need of international protection because they are at risk of serious harm. <http://www.unhcr.org/52af08d26.html> (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)

¹¹ 'Temporary' protection refers to arrangements developed to offer protection of a temporary nature, either until the situation in the country of origin improves and allows for a safe and dignified return or until individual refugee or complementary protection status determination can be carried out. <http://www.unhcr.org/52af08d26.html> (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)

¹² <http://www.unhcr.org/FutureOfSyria/isolated-and-insecure.html#mischief-in-zaatari-camp> (Last Accessed: January 7, 2014)

¹³ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> (Last Accessed: January 7, 2014)



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crowded and strained for resources; running the camp costs over \$500,000 per day.¹⁴ With more than 124,000 refugees,¹⁵ the Zaatari camp is Jordan's fifth largest city since the middle of last year.¹⁶ Over half of the refugees in Zaatari are children under 18 years old.¹⁷ Child gangs are a major problem in these camps. According to UNHCR, the volatile environment in these camps in Jordan and Lebanon causes many young boys to leave the camps and return to Syria to join armed groups.¹⁸ UNHCR's Zaatari camp manager described the boys in the camp as "premature adult men who have dreams about fighting, especially now with the war so present in their lives."¹⁹ One boy reported that children are sent to Zaatari, trained to fight in the camp, and then sent back to Syria.²⁰ To address this troubling situation, the UNHCR and UNICEF have developed a Joint Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Child Recruitment in Jordan.²¹ Additionally, UNICEF, HNHCR, Save the Children, World Vision and other partners joined together to develop a US \$1 billion dollar "Lost Generation" strategy to protect the future of these vulnerable Syrian children.²²

The task of saving the Syrian children should not be left solely to the efforts of NGOs. The US should provide more support to these camps and help facilitate these efforts by NGOs to stabilize the camp environment so that humanitarian conditions improve and child recruitment abates. As the UNHCR High Commissioner António Guterres said, "The future for these children is slipping away, but there is still a chance to save them. The world must answer this crisis with immediate, massive, and international support."²³

Palestinian Refugees from Syria

Palestinian refugees have been disproportionately affected by the conflict in Syria.²⁴ More than half of the 540,000 Palestine refugees in Syria have been forced from their homes due to the conflict. The 20,000 Palestinian refugees in Yarmouk are particularly vulnerable. 15 of these refugees have died from hunger since

¹⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/nov/18/jordan-zaatari-refugee-camp-syria-shops> (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)

¹⁵ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/settlement.php?id=176&country=107®ion=77> (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)

¹⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/nov/18/jordan-zaatari-refugee-camp-syria-shops> (Last Accessed: January 7, 2014)

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ <http://unhcr.org/FutureOfSyria/isolated-and-insecure.html#mischief-in-zaatari-camp> (Last Accessed: January 7, 2014)

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

²² <http://www.unhcr.org/52cba9099.html> (Last Accessed January 7, 2014)

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Palestinians trapped in Syria war denied aid, stalked by starvation. <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/palestinians-trapped-syria-war-denied-aid-stalked-starvation> (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)



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September.²⁵ UNRWA Commissioner warned last month that, “humanitarian conditions in the besieged refugee camp of Yarmouk are worsening dramatically and we are currently unable to help those trapped inside.” UNRWA has recently developed its 2014 Syria Regional Crisis Response Plan.²⁶ Over the next year, UNRWA will provide urgent humanitarian assistance to up to 440,000 Palestine refugees affected by conflict in Syria, 100,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) in Lebanon, and 20,000 PRS in Jordan, and 1,200 PRS in Gaza. Under the plan, UNRWA needs \$417.4 million to respond adequately to the crisis, \$310 of which will support humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees inside Syria. The United States should take steps to help both the Syrian refugees, but also the Palestinian refugees who are trapped in Syria and supported by UNRWA.

Action Requested

ADC urges the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights to explore all possible measures to better address the Syrian refugee crises. While the United States has offered TPS for Syrian nationals in the US, less than 3,000 people have been eligible for this protection under Department of Homeland Security guidelines.²⁷ Further, the last TPS registration period for Syrian nationals ended on December 16, 2013.²⁸ An immediate step can be taken by extending the TPS registration for Syria. DHS can also work with the community in the US to offer opportunities to apply for asylum, and other benefits that would provide relief for Syrian nationals currently in the U.S.

UNHCR is seeking to resettle about 40,000 particularly vulnerable refugees in 2014.²⁹ The United States is uniquely situated with the ability to accept vulnerable refugees, and usually accepts half of these resettled refugees. However, during the first half of 2013, the United States was 10th in the World in refugee-hosting countries according to UNHCR estimates, behind even China.³⁰ The U.S. can taking proactive steps to address the refugee crisis, by accepting more refugees, and providing further support to those in need. Taking these measures would bolster America’s image as a world leader and as a defender and advocate of human rights.

Conclusion

The Syrian Refugee crisis is a matter that demands urgent action. Syrian refugees are now most vulnerable due to winter storms and freezing temperatures. The refugee camps all already pushed to their limits, yet UNHCR

²⁵ http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5i2puDINkgXaPU_67P7OzZ3jh9gHA?docId=fdc08e7b-575f-494f-ae62-88c4c8ca91c (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)

²⁶ UNRWA 2014 Syria Response Plan <http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/unrwa-launches-2014-syria-response-plan> (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)

²⁷ <http://www.agfusa.org/blog/entry/sen-durbin-to-convince-much-needed-hearing-on-the-syrian-refugee-crisis/> (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)

²⁸ <http://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status-deferred-enforced-departure/tps-designated-country-syria/temporary-protected-status-designated-country-syria> (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)

²⁹ <http://www.durbin.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=5edd68b8-cf9f-4788-9084-9e2e17904afe> (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)

³⁰ UNHCR Mid-Year Trends 2013 Report. <http://unhcr.org/52af08d26.html> (Last Accessed: January 6, 2014)

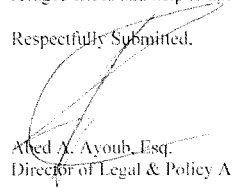


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expects the number of Syrian Refugees too almost double by the end of the year. Supporting the world's most vulnerable refugees should be a matter that garners bipartisan support.

ADC calls on Congress and the Obama Administration to swiftly take all available steps to respond to Syrian refugee crises and help to ameliorate the suffering of thousands of innocent civilians.

Respectfully Submitted,


Ahmed A. Ayoub, Esq.
Director of Legal & Policy Affairs



American Friends
Service Committee

**Statement for the record by the American Friends Service Committee
Senate Hearing on Syrian Refugees**

January 7, 2014

We grieve the senseless loss of life, unprecedented displacement of people, and destruction of homes and infrastructure in Syria, and believe there is a positive role the U.S. government can play to help resolve the crisis through cooperative and constructive diplomatic solutions. It is urgent that steps be taken to ensure that Syrians who have been displaced do not join the Iraqis and Palestinians as another long-term refugee population in the region.

Unfortunately, most current efforts to end the violence have focused on the armed parties to the conflict at the expense of unarmed civil society. This must change. Armed actors are not the only parties present and working in Syria. Civil society movements, community groups, and non-governmental organizations are all also engaged in creative actions that are addressing the needs of the many and changing the way we understand international politics on the ground.

AFSC and our partner, Responding to Conflict, work with a network of Syrians that is united by a common belief in the power of nonviolence to bring about an inclusive community. It is a group that includes people who oppose the regime and those who support it. Through local initiatives, they are working for a Syrian society in which all Syrians can co-exist safely and peacefully.

Already, they are mediating for the return of people kidnapped locally to their families. For displaced people and those who are now refugees in other countries, they are documenting property titles. They are also working with teachers to encourage schools to be inclusive of children of different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

The network's members are aware that the roots of the conflict are deep, with previous land allocation practices by the state along ethnic lines influencing how the national conflict is expressed in different communities.

They are aware, too, that every time a traditional leader tries to assume a mediation role and fails, his or her authority is undermined. They are aware as well that new media can help increase communication across dividing lines, and also fuel prejudices. Despite these challenges, they are persisting in their efforts to maintain and repair the social relations necessary to the future establishment of peace in Syria.

Taking this into consideration, the U.S. government should exert its influence on all parties to the conflict in order to get them to agree to a ceasefire and an end to violence, promote a de-escalation of tensions, and support ongoing bilateral and multilateral diplomatic efforts.

We call on the U.S. government to support a ceasefire as a vital first step toward diplomacy.

Both the opposition forces and the government have been responsible for atrocities, and we deplore all such acts. The escalating loss of life (by the United Nations' count, at least 100,000 men, women, and children since March 2011) and use of cluster bombs that magnify the deaths and destruction make it imperative that a ceasefire begin immediately.

Pending an overall permanent ceasefire, we support all efforts to introduce localized or short-term ceasefires. Ceasefires are a vital first step toward diplomacy.

The international community, including the U.S., should give its full support to bilateral and multilateral efforts to pursue diplomatic channels for dialogue that supports alternatives to military action.

We are encouraged by efforts of international actors, including Russia, to develop creative solutions and alternatives in the face of military action. We urge the Syrian government to accept proposals that help de-escalate the conflict and help avoid military action.

We welcome the Obama Administration's willingness to fully examine and explore creative solutions and alternatives to military action, and provide assistance that supports implementation of nonviolent alternatives.

We urge the U.S. to provide full support to the efforts of Lakhdar Brahimi, the joint U.N./Arab League envoy, and to press for the rapid convening of a Geneva II conference. For those conferences to be meaningful, they must include Iran in the search for a political settlement.

Political settlement by Syrians, for Syrians

Syria is a richly diverse and complex society. Finding solutions that include all Syrians and foster reconciliation will not be easy. But all Syrians, including ethnic and religious minorities, refugees (Iraqi and Palestinians), and those who have served the regime, must be included to ensure a peaceful future for Syria.

The U.S. should seek a transition that builds on existing institutions, rather than one that replaces them and/or alienates those people who have served the government or the army. Neither the interests of the U.S. nor the interests of the peoples of the region will be served by the collapse of the Syrian state and the resulting political vacuum.

The U.S. should continue to lead in funding, and other governments should respond to the U.N.'s call for humanitarian relief funding for displaced Syrians. As we write, the U.N. is seeking to funds to answer the largest single appeal in its history for one crisis, \$6 billion to address the humanitarian crisis for 2014.

Context of the crisis

Syria is a humanitarian catastrophe, with elements far beyond a war and occupation. The Syria conflict has caused more than 100,000 deaths (including deaths of more than 10,000 children) and unprecedented displacement, and has devastated the infrastructure of the country. If the war does come to an end in the next two to three years, UNRWA estimates that the transition to something approaching the pre-war economy, with a 5 percent per annum growth rate, will take up to 30 years. During that time, the shattered country is likely to have severe internal security problems, including multiple ungoverned and ungovernable spaces.

The refugee and displacement crisis is a regional and international issue with no military solution. Foreign military interventions as well as the provision of weapons and training have exacerbated the humanitarian catastrophe. A comprehensive regional political solution is essential for a future of peace in Syria, the region, and the U.S.

More than 6 million Syrians have been displaced by the war and occupation; more than 2 million have left the country seeking safety. Less than a decade after 5 million Iraqis were displaced by war and occupation, the addition of Syrian refugees now represents the largest refugee flow in the Middle East since the establishment of Israel and the forced displacement of Palestinians in 1948. Like the earlier Iraqi refugee crisis, the people and governments of the region are responding to this new crisis through the experience of an unresolved Palestinian refugee population that has grown over 65 years of exile and remains a source of regional unrest.

The path to peace in Syria must include creating conditions for the safe and voluntary return of Syrian displaced, including those displaced internally and refugees outside the country. Syrians must lift up the voices of their full population, including ethnic and religious minorities, refugees (Iraqi and Palestinians) and those who have served the regime, to ensure that none is privileged over the other, and that no component of Syrian society is targeted for retaliation.

Humanitarian necessity dictates significant refugee resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees to other countries. Security, legal support, and economic opportunities are not widely available in Syria. Poor living conditions, as well as a lack of legal status and economic opportunities within host countries, are further traumatizing Syrians. Pressure to grant asylum to Syrian refugees will continue to grow as Lebanon and Jordan—in particular—feel the strain of supporting more than 2 million refugees. The U.S. should lead by example. It should increase the number of refugees it accepts and provide substantial assistance to humanitarian agencies helping refugees. The U.S. also should provide direct financial support to the countries hosting the largest number of refugees.



The Syrian Refugee Crisis

Hearing Before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights

**Submitted by Amnesty International USA
January 7, 2014**

Amnesty International USA is pleased to submit testimony for this important and timely hearing. Amnesty International's testimony focuses on the scope of the Syrian refugee crisis and our recommendations for addressing specific challenges. There are concrete actions that the United States and other countries can take now to help improve the lives of refugees and aid neighboring countries that are taking on the greatest burdens.

To date, the international community has failed to address the full scope of the crisis. However, it is important that we also emphasize that there are ways to ameliorate the refugee crisis if only the international community finds the will to take action. Some of these steps require financial support, but in some cases, small, easy steps can significantly and positively affect the lives of many refugees.

THE REFUGEE CRISIS: A SNAPSHOT

In the space of 12 months, 1.8 million people fled the armed conflict in Syria. By September 2013, the terrible milestone of two million refugees had been reached as men, women and children continued to pour out of the country. As of December 9, the number stood at over 2.3 million registered refugees, 52 percent of whom are children. In addition, at least 4.25 million people are displaced inside the country. In total, more than 6.5 million people have been forced to leave their homes in Syria, nearly a third of the country's population.

Five countries neighboring Syria -- Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt -- host 97% of the refugees. In Jordan and Lebanon, refugees from Syria have added 9 percent and 19 percent to the countries' populations, respectively.

THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

Given the enormous scale of the refugee crisis, the international community has fallen far short of what is necessary to support refugees from Syria or the host countries. The UN humanitarian appeal for refugees from Syria in the region remained less than 50% funded for most of 2013. As of December 2013, it was only 64% funded. Five neighboring countries are hosting nearly the entire refugee community. Instead of helping these countries, many countries who can and should help are instead building obstacles.

Fortress Europe

The EU's border control policies in particular are increasingly detrimental to the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. Border control measures introduced over recent years, including the externalization of immigration functions and the building of fences, have failed to take account of the impact on the rights of those seeking to enter the EU. While the EU has the right to control its borders, the manner in which it does so cannot result in human rights violations – yet that is exactly what is happening.

To make it to the EU, refugees from Syria have to breach "Fortress Europe," the collective set of policies and practices that the EU and its member states employ to keep refugees, asylum-seekers and irregular migrants out of their territories.

Only 10 EU member states offered have resettlement or humanitarian admission places to refugees from Syria. Germany is by far the most generous – pledging to take 10,000 refugees or 80 percent of total EU pledges. Excluding Germany, the remaining 27 EU member states have offered to take a mere 2,340 refugees from Syria. France offered just 500 places or 0.02 percent of the total number of people who have fled Syria. Spain agreed to take just 30 or 0.001 percent of refugees from Syria. Eighteen EU member states – including the UK and Italy – offered no places at all.

It is nearly impossible for refugees or asylum-seekers to reach Europe lawfully. As a result, they are forced into arduous journeys, risking their lives on boats or across land, to seek safety and protection in Europe. Many have undertaken boat journeys from Libya or Egypt to Italy or from Turkey across the Aegean Sea to Greece. Others have tried to cross the land border from Turkey to the Evros region in Greece or to make it from Turkey to Bulgaria by land.

Research by Amnesty International has found that refugees attempting to enter the EU in these ways are met with human rights violations. In two of the main gateways to the EU, Bulgaria and Greece, refugees from Syria face deplorable treatment. This harsh treatment can include detention for weeks in poor conditions in Bulgaria and life threatening push-back operations in the case of Greece. Finally, many refugees from Syria have died while attempting dangerous boat journeys to reach Italy.

The US: Strong on Aid, Short on Resettlement

The US is one of the few countries who Amnesty International understands has fulfilled its pledge in humanitarian aid, and for that it should be commended. But the US too can do more in opening its doors to Syrian refugees. In FY 2013, the US accepted only 36 Syrian refugees for resettlement. In FY 2012, that number was even lower – 30 refugees resettled. In FY 2011, that number was only 29.

Ending Forcible Returns

In addition, the US is a rare country to have had a policy of forcible returns of Syrians. In 2011, 71 Syrians were forcibly removed from the US, although it is believed that they were removed to third countries. The US Department of Homeland Security's 2013 re-designation of Temporary Protected Status for Syria was welcome and warranted. We would welcome clarification as to whether this re-designation of TPS prevents the forcible return of Syrian refugees in the future. The UK, Norway, Germany, Finland, Denmark and other EU nations all have ended forcible

returns of Syrians. This past September, Sweden took the step of granting permanent residency status to persons from Syria seeking asylum on Swedish territory.

No individual should be forcibly returned to Syria or to a refugee camp. There is no safe place in Syria, given the scale of the violence, bloodshed and human rights abuses in the country. International law prohibits the forcible return of anyone to a country where they risk serious human rights abuses. Known as non-refoulement, this principle applies to situations of generalized violence due to armed conflict, such as in the case of Syria.

Amnesty International is also calling on the international community to ensure there is adequate and sustained funding for humanitarian appeals for Syria, and to support the main host countries to enable them to keep their borders open and provide adequate protection and assistance to refugees. Amnesty International is also calling for an urgent and significant increase in the number of places available for resettlement and humanitarian admission to refugees from Syria, over and above existing resettlement quotas.

Furthermore, the organization calls on all states to keep their borders open to those fleeing the conflict in Syria – as well as to other refugees – and to ensure that those trying to reach their borders are treated with dignity.

THE LIVES OF SYRIAN REFUGEES: THE EXAMPLE OF ZA'ATRI CAMP IN JORDAN

Amnesty International has met with hundreds of refugees, from all of the governorates of Syria, who have fled to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt, as well as to other countries in Europe. Each and every refugee has a unique story of suffering and survival.

Many of the first to leave Syria were fleeing persecution for being actual or suspected opponents of the government of Bashar al-Assad. Many had been detained, tortured and otherwise ill-treated or were the family members of such people. From mid-2012 on, the numbers of people fleeing then soared as the crackdown on dissident voices in Syria developed into an armed conflict that spread across the country. Many have had family members killed, sometimes right in front of them. Livelihoods, homes, and whole neighborhoods have been devastated, leaving millions with no option but to flee.

Refugee Needs

Twelve kilometers south of the border with Syria lies the Za'atri refugee camp in Jordan. Over 130,000 refugees who have fled the conflict in Syria live here in a 7 km-wide stretch on this otherwise lifeless desert plain. The camp is a mix of makeshift emergency tents and mobile homes or "caravans." Having escaped the violence inside Syria, refugees face a variety of new risks in poorly resourced refugee camps and other settlements. Refugees have told Amnesty International researchers of hardships, such as inadequate food, water, and toilets.

Education

One priority that was repeatedly heard from parents was the need for adequate education for their children. In some camps, formal education is provided. For example, in the Za'atri camp in Jordan, according to UN statistics, more than 10,000 children are registered to attend.¹ However, this represents only around half the children eligible for school, and some 76 percent of girls and

80 percent of boys do not attend classes. Parents and children told Amnesty International that this is because the children are disinterested, bored or traumatized, that they are scared and do not want to go far from their homes, or that the curriculum is not adequate. Some would rather wait until they can go home to Syria. Others cannot attend because they have to undertake tasks such as collecting water. In Za'atri camp, Amnesty International met children as young as 12 who were working to support their families.

Health Care

A second concern in the refugee camps is health care. Again at the Za'atri camp, primary health care is provided and there are three field hospitals, as well as a pediatric hospital, with treatment free of charge. Cases that cannot be dealt with in the camp are referred to hospitals outside where possible. While refugees told Amnesty International that they were in general able to access the health facilities, those with limited mobility found it harder. Some refugees said that their medical examinations were cursory and that they were often sent away with only painkillers, rather than being thoroughly examined and treated. In emergencies or in cases where the sick are unable to reach the hospitals, refugees said that they had to wait hours for one of the three ambulances in the camp to reach them. With around 10 babies born a day in Za'atri camp, doctors in the camp told Amnesty International that there is a lack of adequate neo-natal equipment and services for newborns.

Food and Water

Dry food packages are distributed fortnightly. Water is available at various water points across the camp, although many refugees and several doctors whom Amnesty International spoke with believe the water to not be of good quality and to be causing diarrhea. Some women told Amnesty International that they believed poor conditions including poor sanitation and drinking water in the camp are resulting in their children frequently having diarrhea. One UN agency representative said that the water was of the same quality as the tap water in the rest of Jordan, although that water is not generally drunk by the Jordanian population. Other humanitarian agency workers said that while the water brought into the camp should be of high enough quality when put into the tankers, there were cases of it becoming contaminated because of dirt in the tankers.

Safety

Insecurity in the camps is of also great concern. Again using the Za'atri camp as an example, many refugees told Amnesty International researchers there were high levels of criminality in the camp and spoke about general impunity for criminals. According to the UN, serious security incidents in Za'atri rose alarmingly during the first quarter of 2013.

One of the greatest gaps at present are the safety and security conditions for both humanitarian workers and refugees. In Za'atri camp, as stated in a report by UNHCR that outlines some of the challenges as well as planned means to confront them, "powerful individuals and organized gangs have imposed their will on sections of the camp, diverting assistance and engaging in criminal activities." There is "an insecure living environment, in which vulnerable groups may face serious protection risks, including rent-seeking behavior and sexual exploitation and abuse, without recourse to the Jordanian justice system. A culture of impunity reigns."ⁱⁱ

Gender-Based Violence against Female Syrian Refugees

Syrian women and girls are at particular risk as refugees, both in the dangerous journeys that they are forced to endure to access refugee camps and inside the refugee camps themselves. Women refugees in Za'atri told Amnesty International that they faced rape and other sexual violence on a regular basis.

The point to emphasize is that these particular issues can be ameliorated if the international community is willing to take action. At the Za'atri camp, many Syrian refugee women told Amnesty International that the communal toilets are unlit and that they feel unsafe going to use them, due in large part to fears of sexual violence and harassment. In addition, in some camp areas announcements were made (by men) for women not to go to the toilets after 10pm. As a result, many women avoid the toilets, especially at night. Many women in Za'atri camp told Amnesty International that having to frequently restrain themselves from urinating is leading them to develop urinary tract infections, an observation supported by three doctors in Za'atri whom the organization talked with.

Where families can, they sometimes build their own toilet, which is causing other problems including unsanitary conditions in and around the tents. Women fear sexual harassment when moving around the camp and there are reports of incidents of sexual violence. A Jordanian organization providing psychosocial services in Za'atri camp told Amnesty International that on average they receive three to five women and girls per month reporting some form of sexual or gender-based violence. Amnesty International is pressing Jordanian officials to ensure women and girls safe access to toilets and wash facilities at the camp. Enabling safe access could significantly change daily life for these women.

Several female refugees also told Amnesty International that Jordanian men often visited the camp looking for "brides." The organization is concerned that in some cases, when brides are young, there may be a perception that as refugees they have an inferior status, ensuing marriages, some of which may be temporary, can place the women at risk of exploitation.ⁱⁱⁱ

Early marriages in the camp are quite common. While early marriages were practiced in Syria prior to the outbreak of conflict, and are considered legal in some circumstances in Syria for girls as young as 13, the lack of security and privacy may be driving families to consider such marriages more often. Under international law and standards, all marriages must be entered into with the full and genuine consent of both parties.

Women also face additional obstacles to accessing services in the camp. For women who are the heads of their household and/or the sole or primary caregivers of children or ill or injured family members, it is more difficult to access information and travel to relevant service providers. According to UNHCR, refugee committees are being created on which female representation is mandatory. In addition, a safety audit is being conducted by the Gender-Based Violence Field Working Group in Za'atri. It is hoped that these steps will facilitate awareness of challenges facing women and girls and that an ensuing action plan will help address the issue of early marriage.

HOSTING REFUGEES: THE CHALLENGE FOR NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES

The five main host countries for refugees from Syria are Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt. Lebanon and Jordan host the largest number of refugees, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of their own populations.

Lebanon currently hosts more than 835,735 refugees from Syria as of December 5, 2013, and Jordan hosts over 566,303 refugees from Syria as of December 9. In March 2013, the Lebanese government had estimated the actual number of Syrians in the country to be one million.

In Jordan around one-third of the refugee population live in six refugee camps. Most live in Za'atari, the second largest refugee camp in the world with a population of 117,000 people. The rest live in towns and cities, mostly in northern governorates bordering Syria and in the capital Amman. There are no official refugee camps in Lebanon, except long-standing Palestinian refugee camps. Refugees from Syria live in towns and cities, including in makeshift informal camps, throughout the country.

Jordan and Lebanon: Resource Strain

The infrastructure of Jordan is overburdened with increased demand for water, electricity, housing, schools, health care, and food. Even without a refugee crisis, Jordan must import much of its energy, water and grain.

It would reportedly cost Jordan USD \$706 million annually to meet the increased demand for water. Some residential areas are struggling to accommodate particularly large refugee populations. Frustrations among many sectors of the population have grown, as rents increase and there is increased competition for jobs.

In Lebanon, the number of refugees has put a strain on already limited resources. The conflict in Syria has a significant impact on the political and security environment, with upsurges in violence in areas of Lebanon bordering Syria. These include Aarsal in northeast Lebanon in November 2013, and in Tripoli in north Lebanon in November and December 2013, the latter of which resulted in at least 10 people dead and 49 injured.

Jordan and Lebanon: Denial of Entry to Some Refugees

Despite the challenges they face, Jordan and Lebanon have broadly maintained an "open-border" policy, continuing to allow refugees from Syria to enter. Both countries have generally demonstrated favorable policies towards refugees, which are appreciated and acknowledged by UNHCR and the wider international community.

However, both countries have reportedly prevented some categories of people fleeing the conflict in Syria from entering their territories. This would constitute a violation of international law. In Lebanon, tighter border controls have been reported since August 2013, with Palestinian refugees living in Syria and seeking to flee the conflict being denied entry.

In Jordan, several categories of individuals are generally being denied entry into the country. These include Palestinian and Iraqi refugees from Syria - a policy that the Jordanian authorities confirmed to Amnesty International in June 2013. In addition, according to information received from national and international NGOs, people without identity documents and unaccompanied men who cannot prove they have family ties in Jordan are also generally denied entry. Families

with young children have also been denied entry. There have been instances of Syrian and Palestinian refugees being forcibly returned from Jordan to Syria, in violation of international law.

Turkey

Turkey is also hosting a large number of refugees from Syria, with 536,765 refugees registered as of December 5, 2013. More than 200,000 of them are being accommodated in state-run refugee camps. The government has estimated the total number of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey to be 700,000.

Turkey has received very little international support and has borne nearly all of the costs of its response to the refugee crisis, amounting to some US\$2 billion by September 2013. In the second half of 2012, Turkey refused entry to thousands of refugees from Syria, particularly those without a passport or an urgent medical need. According to unofficial statements from Turkish officials, this was due to the fact that refugee camps were full. Since that time Turkey has continued to deny entry at official border posts to many Syrian refugees who do not possess a passport or who do not have an urgent medical need, despite professing to continue an open door policy to Syrian refugees. In March 2013, up to 600 Syrian refugees were reportedly returned from Turkey to Syria. Amnesty International has since received multiple reports of additional, smaller scale forcible returns of refugees to Syria as a punishment for criminal conduct or misdemeanors allegedly committed by them.

Iraq

In Iraq, there were 207,053 refugees from Syria registered as of December 4, 2013, the vast majority of them in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. More than 60,000 arrived in mid-August 2013 via unofficial border crossings. However, according to agencies and NGOs operating in the region, the unofficial border has since been closed again, and the official border with Syria at al-Qaim is also closed. The Kurdish Regional Government and the local population have maintained a generally positive policy and attitude towards the refugees, who are predominantly Kurdish. In recent months, however, there have been changes that restrict refugees' access to residency permits and freedom of movement, which limit their ability to work and to access services.

Amnesty International received reports of some non-Kurdish Syrians being refused entry to Iraqi Kurdistan and of individuals, including Arabs, being forcibly returned to Syria. Several thousand refugees from Syria reside in al-Qaim camp, in Anbar province, where freedom of movement is very tightly controlled.

Egypt

In Egypt, there were 129,174 registered refugees as of December 8, 2013, but the government estimates the actual number at 300,000. Egypt maintained an open door policy to refugees from Syria until mid 2013. However, on July 8, 2013, stricter entry requirements were imposed on Syrian nationals entering Egypt, requiring them to obtain entry visas prior to arrival. Because of these new rules, on July 8, 2013, some 259 individuals were reportedly sent back from Cairo to Syria, Lebanon, and other countries.^{iv}

Since the summer of 2013, more than 1,500 Syrian and Palestinian refugees (from Syria) – including children, women and men – have been arrested after attempting to reach Europe from

Egypt by boat. They were arbitrarily detained in police stations across Egypt's Mediterranean coast. Hundreds of them are believed to have been deported, some of whom were reportedly returned to Syria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the conflict in Syria continues unabated, international solidarity and support for refugees will become all the more crucial. Resettlement and humanitarian admission should become an increasingly important part of the international response.

Amnesty International urges the international community, including the US, EU member states, and Gulf states, to:

- Share responsibility for refugees from Syria more equally, in particular through significantly increasing the number of resettlement and humanitarian admission places, over and above annual resettlement quotas;
- Ensure that the UN humanitarian appeals for Syria are fully and sustainably funded;
- Support countries faced with large influxes of refugees from Syria to enable them to cope with the pressure on their infrastructure and provide essential services to refugees, including physical security taking into account the heightened risk for gender-based violence faced by women and girls, adequate health care, housing, and food;
- Automatically provide all people fleeing Syria, including Palestinian refugees who were resident in Syria, with a status giving them international protection, and end any practice of forcible returns;
- Facilitate family reunification for refugees from Syria including by applying flexible criteria to take into account the nature and needs of different families.

We also would want the US to use its influence with EU member states to:

- Strengthen search and rescue capacity in the Mediterranean to identify boats in distress and assist those on board;
- Ensure that those rescued are treated with dignity and that their human rights – including the right to seek asylum – are fully respected;
- Ensure the end of unlawful push-back operations that deny refugees and migrants their rights, particularly on the Greece/Turkish border.

We also ask that the US use its influence with Syria's neighboring countries (in particular Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt) to:

- Keep their borders open to all persons fleeing the conflict in Syria, without discrimination, and ensure full access to their territories and to safety;

-- Ensure that no persons fleeing Syria are forcibly removed to Syria, in any manner whatsoever, including through removal, rejection at the border, expulsion or deportation;

-- Refrain from arbitrarily detaining refugees from Syria and ensure that no refugees are subjected to restrictions that violate their right to freedom of movement; this should apply to all refugees from Syria without distinction;

-- Ensure that refugees from Syria have access to adequate services and sanitary and other facilities essential for exercising their rights, in particular the rights to adequate shelter, food, health care, water and sanitation, education, and freedom from gender-based violence;

-- Ensure respect for family unity and where needed, special protection for children, and take measures to reduce discrimination and violence against women;

-- Bring an immediate end to the policy of retaining the identity documents of refugees arriving from Syria and ensure that the exercise to return documentation takes place, and is completed, as soon as possible;

-- Ensure that procedures are put in place to register children born in Jordan to refugees from Syria and marriages of refugees from Syria who do not possess the appropriate identity documents and may have very limited financial resources;

-- Ensure that the role of the sheikh or similar functionary or body being established to register marriages and other family matters in Za'atri camp in Jordan follows procedures that accommodate the special needs of the refugees, in particular to facilitate the registration of marriages and births of refugees who do not possess their official documentation and may have very limited financial resources, and ensure that all marriages are entered into with the full and genuine consent of both parties;

-- In co-ordination with UNHCR, ensure the safety and security of Za'atri camp in Jordan and its residents, including through provision of an adequate number of law enforcement officers who have received appropriate training in policing refugee camps in a manner that fully respects the human rights of refugees and ensures everyone's, particularly women's and girls', safe access at all times to sanitary and other facilities.

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PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHRISTINE AYOUN

I personally used to work with a group of young people active in humanitarian support for displaced families and families of martyrs.

I totally stopped , working and supporting my friends after my sister got detained. I had a fake Facebook profile I closed it and was very scared.

I created a secret group on FB for my sister's close friends to support my family, we didn't go public at all with her detention because the colonel, head of air force, where she was detained, threatened us that if we talk about the detention he will torture her more and we won't see her ever again..

After she was set free and left Syria, I helped again in gathering food and clothes for the same cause with the same people I worked with before. Most of the group got detained.. I was working undercover and was very careful coz I worked without the knowledge of my husband.. Back in this time, my husband didn't support any kind of work to support the revolution because it is too risky and I have two kids.. After most of them got detained and never knew anything about them, I decided to stop.

Also very close friends of mine got detained, the owner of the company I used to work with is one of them. He had to leave Syria with his whole family, wife, kids, mom, dad and sister too.. Because whenever someone is detained in Syria, his whole family is in risk of getting detained and tortured even if they are not activist.

In Damascus, I live beside a branch of the Air Force in Kassaa area. Very in tense area and all government soldiers, armed and most of the time with civil close..

I witnessed with my kids many bombings in Damascus and specifically in my area, when "terrorist" bombed the Air Force branch beside our house.. The whole building shacked and all glass from our upper stores neighbors fell into our backyard and

our home was slightly damaged. My kids cried for the whole day and didn't sleep for week because of the firing sounds and mortars. We stayed at our home for almost a week, I didn't dare to take them anywhere really concerned about their safety. My husband had to leave the house risking his live everyday in order to get us the basic needs, for us and for his old parents.

When I arrived to the United States, alone with two kids, it took almost six months for my kids to stop being scared when they hear the voice of an airplane passing over the house, as for me, I still have my the scary moment whenever I hear that voice, it always flash back the sounds and the news afterwords..

My older son, 6 years now, used to draw tanks and guns and fires on the school board whenever he wants to tell his friends about his country.. Flashing back accidents happened when we were in Syria when once the school bus returned because of a massacre took place in his school area and they were off for a week and then they had to change the school area to a "safer" and closer place by renting an old building in Damascus Suburbs until the school year has come to an end, needless to mention that I only sent him few days to school because I was very concerned about his safety. Also once someone put fire on the street right in front of our car when we were going back home, and the army barrier solders went crazy of course.. I had the kids with me in the car and they were very scared specially when i asked them to go down under the seats.. i was frightened because I didn't know if we will make it or not.. I didn't go to my parents' place for months because it is very dangerous and fire shots are very common to break the window or cabinets inside the house, luckily no one was hurt.. But it was always very close.

In August 2012, me and my husband decided to let the kids take a break and come to the United States for a while, we can see my new born nephew and take a brake from everything happening in Syria hoping things will get better and we will return

home soon. With things escalating there, we decided to apply for asylum, me and the kids here, because I don't want to stay in the United States illegally, and my husband will stay in syria to take care of his old parents. I applied for the TPS and they granted me the work permit till the end of September, then, they denied my application.

I applied for asylum on September 2012 and i got referred to the court; needless to mention that the officer was very rude with my kids during the interview.

my parents applied too and they were referred to the court too.

we've been waiting since, my dad, mom, me and my two kids hoping to be granted a status soon.

**Statement for the Record of Sanja Bebic, Director of Refugee and Immigrant Integration
Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL)**

**Submitted to
Senate Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights**

**Hearing on “The Syrian Refugee Crisis”
January 7, 2014**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee:

I am Sanja Bebic, Director of Refugee and Immigrant Integration at the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), a private, nonprofit organization, dedicated to the study of language and culture in order to improve communication and address educational, cultural, and social concerns.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a statement on behalf of CAL regarding the Syrian refugee crisis. CAL applauds the Committee’s attention to this critical issue and the U.S. government’s consideration of an initiative to resettle Syrian refugees to the United States. Since 1975, CAL has worked in refugee and immigrant integration and understands the critical importance of providing resettlement in the United States as a durable solution for refugees.

In this testimony, I will first provide a brief overview of CAL’s experience in refugee work. Secondly, I will share with you observations made through CAL’s work with refugees, service providers, and community members on the positive ways U.S. resettlement impacts the lives of refugees, or as one former refugee from Burundi put it, provides “a second chance at life.”¹

I. CAL’s Experience in Refugee Work

In 1975, after the fall of the governments of South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, hundreds of thousands of refugees fled their countries for asylum in neighboring countries. The United States responded to the crisis with an unprecedented refugee resettlement program and by the end of the year, 150,000 refugees, mostly Vietnamese, were brought to this country.² This same year marked CAL’s entry into refugee education, when it joined federal, state, and local actors to provide these refugees the opportunity and the tools to pursue peaceful and productive lives in their new communities.

For over 35 years CAL has led national efforts to meet the educational and social needs of America’s refugee and immigrant newcomers by helping to orient them to U.S. society and American culture. CAL, through the establishment of what is now known as the Cultural Orientation Resource (COR) Center, provides U.S. service providers with information about the backgrounds of refugee groups, their English language and orientation needs, and the best ways

¹ Center for Applied Linguistics. (2013). *Faces of Resettlement*. Retrieved from <http://www.culturalorientation.net/learning/learning-videos/faces-of-resettlement>

² Costello, A., & Bebic, S. (2006). *Cultural orientation for refugees* (Online Digest). Retrieved from the COR Center website: http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/digest_pdfs/CORdigest.pdf

to meet those needs. Today, through the work of its Refugee and Immigrant Integration program area, CAL supports the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program through curriculum and materials development, the training of trainers, the collection and analysis of resettlement data, and the forging of linkages between overseas and domestic resettlement. In addition, CAL has developed training materials on multicultural awareness and other resources to facilitate refugee and immigrant inclusion in communities throughout the country. As a result of this work, CAL has witnessed the success refugees achieve in towns and cities all across the United States when given a chance to live their lives free from the fear of persecution.

II. The Critical Importance of U.S. Resettlement to Refugees and Their New Communities

As part of its work, CAL conducts interviews and focus group discussions with service providers, community members, and refugees to learn about refugee resettlement experiences in the United States. The following are recurring themes on why providing resettlement in the United States to refugees is of critical importance, and why it is a vital long-term solution to the humanitarian crisis faced by Syrian refugees.

- **U.S. resettlement provides safety**

"We have to leave our country even though we love our country. [W]e have no choice. You will be killed or in the prison if you don't leave." --Former refugee from Burma³

"Life is not that easy [in the United States], but at least you can feel safe. You can go to your work and come back safe. It's a big blessing." --Former refugee from Iraq⁴

Since 1975, the United States has been a safe haven for over 3 million refugees from over 60 countries. When repatriation to their country of origin, or integration into the country they first sought asylum in, is not an option for refugees, resettlement to a third country remains as the only durable solution. Less than 1 percent of the world's refugees have a chance for resettlement and the United States welcomes the largest number of refugees for resettlement worldwide.

- **U.S. resettlement provides hope for the future**

"Here, I can fulfill my dreams as a mother and give [my children] a good future which we weren't able to have back home." --Former refugee from Iraq⁵

"[W]e thought that life would be better in America. We thought it would be better, not just for us, but for our kids, too." --Former refugee from Bhutan⁶

³ Center for Applied Linguistics. (2013). *Faces of Resettlement*. Retrieved from <http://www.culturalorientation.net/learning/learning-videos/faces-of-resettlement>

⁴ Center for Applied Linguistics. (2013). *Welcome to the United States: A guidebook for refugees* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State. Retrieved from

http://www.culturalorientation.net/content/download/2185/12569/version/1/file/2012-English-Welcome_Guide.pdf

⁵ *Faces of Resettlement*.

In FY 2013 the United States resettled close to 70,000 refugees.⁷ Through the joint cooperation of federal⁸ and state entities, national and local resettlement agencies, and other organizations and private citizens, resettlement helped refugees find housing and jobs, access educational and medical services, and attain other services to support early self-sufficiency. Even while these services are being offered, refugees are striving to explore paths to economic security, social involvement, and civic engagement. Refugees are aware that the United States is offering them opportunities that were not available to them previously, and they are eager to improve their circumstances and the community at large.

- **U.S. resettlement enriches U.S. communities**

"Since we came [to the United States], we consider this place our new home. We wanted to integrate right away and be contributing members of this community from day one. We started working right away and paying taxes like everyone else."--Former refugee from Burundi⁹

"Refugees add a great deal to our community. They add a rich diversity that would not be here. Refugees are grateful; they're grateful people and they want to contribute back to the community." -- Receiving community member who works with refugees¹⁰

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program provides refugees the chance to build a new life for themselves and their families in the United States. At the same time, refugees are giving back to their local economies and communities. Refugees are our neighbors, our co-workers, and our children's classmates. They own homes and small businesses and pay taxes, and many will eventually become U.S. citizens, following in the footsteps of many refugees before them. Refugees also possess linguistic skills and cultural knowledge that can be shared with their new neighbors as well as used to strengthen the United States and its place in an increasingly intercultural and interdependent global community.

III. Conclusion

CAL supports the resettlement of Syrian refugees to the United States as a durable solution to the humanitarian crisis in the region. With the mounting humanitarian crisis faced by Syrian refugees, the United States should act quickly and join other countries in offering resettlement to the most vulnerable. Like the millions of refugees the United States has assisted, and continues to assist, this group is in need of a permanent safe haven.

⁶ Center for Applied Linguistics. (2013). *Welcome to the United States: A guidebook for refugees* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State. Retrieved from http://www.culturalorientation.net/content/download/2185/12569/version/1/file/2012-English-Welcome_Guide.pdf

⁷ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Office of Admissions, Refugee Processing Center. (2013). *Summary of Refugee Admissions as of 31-December-2013*.

⁸ The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program maintains bipartisan backing in Congress.

⁹ Center for Applied Linguistics. 2013. *Faces of Resettlement*. Retrieved from <http://www.culturalorientation.net/learning/learning-videos/faces-of-resettlement>

¹⁰ *Faces of Resettlement*.



Written Statement for the Record

David Ray, Head of Policy and Advocacy

CARE USA

The Syrian Refugee Crisis

Senate Judiciary Committee

Subcommittee on Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights

January 7, 2014

Thank you Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Cruz, and fellow Judiciary Committee members for holding this timely and important hearing and allowing CARE to provide testimony. As we ring in 2014, we also mark the third year of the conflict in Syria which has claimed the lives of over 100,000 people, forcing nearly nine million people from their homes, including over two million refugees in neighboring countries of Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt, and Iraq.

The scale of need is staggering, the U.N requested \$6.5 billion in 2014 to support the 9.3 conflict-affected people inside Syria and 6.8 million affected individuals outside Syria, including 4.1 million refugees in neighboring

countries and 2.7 million host community members. CARE commends the generosity of the United States – providing over \$1.3 billion in humanitarian funding toward the Syria humanitarian response over the past two years. We cannot let up on our support and need to continue and increase this effort to meet the unprecedented needs of the Syria protracted crisis.

The nearly three years of conflict has caused appalling suffering to Syria and its people, with nearly half of the countries residents displaced, schools turning into shelters, and hospitals into targets. In a formerly middle-income nation, limited food supplies are causing children to go hungry, and violence has caused millions to flee or to become trapped in besieged areas out of the reach of humanitarian aid.

Neighboring countries are not immune to the consequences of the crisis. In Jordan alone, the refugee influx has risen from 1,000 in September 2011 to over 560,000 at the end of 2013. Regionally, the number of refugees has surpassed two million, a figure unmatched since the post-genocide exodus from Rwanda, and numbers are still rising. In host countries overstretched medical services, limited employment opportunities, and the daily struggle for food and shelter have amplified the already distressing conditions of women and girls, men and boys, who have escaped the conflict. The inability of refugees to generate livelihoods and begin to rebuild their lives has deepened their perceived sense of powerlessness. Heightened border restrictions in the region, the constant call for support from host governments, and disquieting community tensions across the region, all indicate the multiple thresholds have been surpassed.

Jordan's Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) has recently drafted a National Resilience Plan for 2014-2016 to provide a blueprint for priority responses to mitigate the impact of the Syria Crisis on Jordan and Jordanian hosting communities.

The protracted nature of this crisis demands a comprehensive response, with support for emergency life-saving humanitarian assistance, along with

support for longer-term development efforts working toward durable solutions. We must also increase support to host country governments to boost public sector capacity in response to the massive refugee influx. This involves stepping up engagement of development actors in support of core sectors, such as education and healthcare, with the aim to increase access for refugee and host communities and fulfill their basic needs and rights.

To address the Syrian refugee crisis, CARE calls on continued and increased support from the U.S. government for:

- **Resilience and Livelihood strategies and programs for refugees and host communities** aimed to build resilience of affected communities, recognizing their imminent need to recover from significant loss of asset and livelihood, cope with rising living expenses and regain a sense of dignity through economic security. Empowering both displaced and vulnerable host communities with livelihood opportunities and self-sufficiency is likely to engender positive social and psychological effects, mitigate protection risks such as abuse and exploitation, and contribute to local development and economy.
- **Programs addressing specific protection concerns of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees of the Syria crisis, including those arising from gender, age, disability and nationality.** Women and men, girls and boys have specific needs and vulnerabilities requiring a tailored response. Conditions under the growing refugee crisis are particularly challenging for many women and girls. With accrued risks for women, many who experience displacement without their husbands in absence of a male family member, they are exposed to greater difficulties in securing stable accommodation and more vulnerable to financial shocks and gender-based violence. CARE urges strong support for programs to ensure women and girls have access and opportunities to programs and avoid their second victimization, mitigating risk of gender-based violence and exploitation. Palestinians,

Iraqis, and other non-Syrian nationals also face unique needs which the current response does not adequately address.

For our part, CARE has been responding to the financial and material needs of Syrian refugees since April 2012. We have provided emergency cash to thousands of Syrian households, with grants to cover urgent emergencies, such as rent and food. CARE also refers refugees to local organizations that provide medical care, often at low or no cost, and educational establishments which can accommodate school age children, as we believe that the right to education is vital even in times of conflict.

To date, 190,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan have received assistance from CARE, with almost 30% of these beneficiaries female head of household, who often have greater difficulties in accessing services, securing accommodation, or providing for their families.

In this protracted crisis, CARE recommends that the U.S. government and fellow donors continue to assist Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities with cash assistance to cover the continuing unmet, emergency needs of vulnerable families, specifically female heads of households. We encourage host governments in the region and donors to invest greater resources towards livelihood support and, in particular, vocational training which can provide transferable skills to recipients.

CARE encourages donors to urgently integrate a long-term approach with durable solutions, in their response to the refugee crisis. CARE welcomes the efforts made in Jordan and Lebanon to establish coordination platforms to mobilize development support for host government and community needs. As the draft plans from these platforms emerge, it will be essential to ensure an integrated comprehensive approach across development support to the host governments and hosting communities and humanitarian programs which support the refugee population. Efforts to support the resilience of host and refugee populations can be mutually reinforcing if deliberate steps are taken towards this in sectors like education and livelihoods. Such an

approach could also help with promoting social cohesion and conflict mitigation. But these opportunities could be missed if development and humanitarian programs are framed and implemented in siloes. The UN is also developing a 'Comprehensive Regional Strategy' for aid both inside Syria and in neighboring countries hosting the refugees. If effectively framed and based on meaningful input from all actors – host governments, donors, NGOs and affected communities – this Strategy could provide the comprehensive picture we need to inform funding and programming decisions. As donors consider options like Multi-Donor Trust Funds (MDTF) to channel development aid, lessons should be learned from similar mechanisms in South Sudan and Afghanistan. Those past experiences offer good practices that could be adopted in the Syrian refugee response, such as models for effective joint programs between host government institutions and operational NGOs like the National Solidarity Program in Afghanistan. But also potential risks - for example bureaucratic delays with the MDTF in South Sudan, coinciding with cuts in humanitarian funding to NGOs, resulted in serious gaps in frontline health services on the ground. Donors like the US government have an important role to play in ensuring an appropriate mix in agencies and coherence across the different funding mechanisms/channels they support.

Responding to the significant losses refugees are facing is paramount to preserve their dignity. Enhancing refugees' conditions during displacement however is not a substitute to peace and an end to the conflict. Displacement will remain a time of mourning for many who love their country, seek stability and a chance to return home. CARE stresses the need for durable solutions to be embraced. As a humanitarian, impartial and neutral organization, CARE calls on all stakeholders to put an immediate halt to the conflict. In the meantime, we must provide adequate levels of humanitarian relief and development support to meet the massive scope of this crisis that has resulted in the U.N. issuing its largest global humanitarian appeal to date in 2014.



Statement of

Dr. Carolyn Y. Woo

**President and CEO
Catholic Relief Services**

before

**Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on
the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights:
“The Syrian Refugee Crisis”**

January 7, 2013

"Too many lives have been shattered in recent times by the conflict in Syria, fueling hatred and vengeance. Let us continue to ask the Lord to spare the beloved Syrian people further suffering, and to enable the parties in conflict to put an end to all violence and guarantee access to humanitarian aid."

Pope Francis' Christmas day message *Urbi et Orbi*

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Cruz, thank you for hosting this important hearing to call attention to the plight of so many Syrian people. Despite the darkness of the tragedy, there is light in the generous hospitality of Syria's neighbors and the response of the international community. As the world's leader in humanitarian response and refugee resettlement, at the beginning of a new year it is fitting that the US Government and civil society ask ourselves what we are doing and what more we can do.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is privileged to serve over 350,000 beneficiaries in response to the Syrian conflict, programming over \$45 million worth of funds. About one-quarter of those funds are from US government agencies and another quarter from private US individuals and foundations. The rest are from international sources.

CRS is the international relief and development agency of the Catholic community in the United States. We provide assistance based on need, not creed. Since CRS' inception seventy years ago, our model has always been to work with local partners. Often our partners are local Catholic social service agencies—frequently called "Caritas"—as well as dioceses, parishes, clinics, and other institutions. With decades of experience in the Middle East and a wide array of trusted, highly-skilled partners, CRS provides life-saving support to thousands of displaced Syrians in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt. Our partners are seen as credible actors by all vulnerable groups, regardless of ethnicity or religion.

For example, Caritas Jordan's vast health care network has facilitated significant medical assistance to both Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Syrian mothers and their newborns receive care including Cesarean operations, natural deliveries, diapers, medicine and nutritional supplements. Caritas Jordan is meeting the needs of hundreds of thousands of refugees across the country. But needs continue to increase throughout the region.

The situation remains critical for over nine million Syrians – more than 2.3 million of whom are refugees. The communities hosting them in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt are also strained by the increased demand for housing, food, education and medical services. **The international community must scale up its humanitarian response, and it should also commit non-emergency resources for the medium to longer-term.** Even if the violence in Syria were to end tomorrow, refugees would not be able to return immediately. Much of the public infrastructure has been destroyed and will require rebuilding. The United States government must take up our traditional role in leading the charge to support refugees, while also encouraging development and bilateral donors and private sector actors to commit their support.

The plight of Syrian refugees

Syrian refugees talk of their despair, along with their dignity and identity. The material lives of many were not so different from ours just a few years ago, when Syria welcomed many Iraqi refugees. Take the story of Zahaya.

Zahaya, 21, fled Syria with her husband, Karim and their one year old son. Zahaya's mother first fled to Lebanon, but sought to return to Syria when she couldn't afford chemotherapy to treat her cancer. The bus she traveled on was struck by a bomb. No one survived. Even now, Zahaya struggles to talk about it.

Around that time, Zahaya's neighborhood began to shake from bombings at night. Community members decided to sleep outside to keep safe. One night in April, upon waking, Zahaya and Karim walked back to their home only to find that it had been destroyed by the bombing. "We knew it was time to leave," she said.

The family tried to go to Turkey, because it was close by, "but even that was too dangerous with bombings and insecurity." So they made their way to Lebanon. Zahaya, Karim and their son took several buses and attempted to cross at three different places. They were turned away each time because they lacked any proof of identity, all of which were destroyed in their home. "No [photo] albums?" they were asked when prompted to prove that Zahaya was in fact the mother of her son.

The family finally crossed the border and is now based in the Bekaa valley in Lebanon. Zahaya says, "It is very difficult to live here in a tent. We live here because we have no money to pay for rent. We have no shower or bath here. We have no running water or electricity. As a mother, it is difficult to manage my family here." They have been living in a tent in Lebanon since June.

Among these refugees are particularly vulnerable populations, including women, children, secondarily displaced and minorities. A majority of refugees are women and children - around 70%. More than one million are children. Some have fled without even shoes on their feet. Indeed, most arrive without anything, which makes them more vulnerable to human trafficking and other forms of violence. The UN has identified nearly 4,000 unaccompanied refugee minors in Jordan and Lebanon. These children require close case monitoring for their particular vulnerability.

Minorities – especially religious minorities - find themselves particularly cautious. Religious minorities have typically played a moderating role in the politics of the Middle East, but many who appreciated the protection of the Assad regime fear retribution.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the plight of Iraqi refugees caught up in the Syrian conflict. Syria had hosted more Iraqi refugees than any other country – more than one million. A significant portion of these Iraqis have been displaced yet again. With already depleted savings, these are among the most vulnerable populations we must continue to serve.

All these especially vulnerable refugees, as identified by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, should be processed as quickly as possible for resettlement. While the vast majority of refugees in need will never have the option of resettlement, resettlement will be the best long-term solution for many.

The critical needs of Syrian refugees

The staggering humanitarian needs in the region are well-known: the UN put forth its largest humanitarian appeal ever in December, with \$6.5 billion requested for 2014 for the Syria response alone. International humanitarian agencies have scaled up to respond to this need, but have not kept pace with the refugee flows.

Host countries surrounding Syria have been remarkably open to receiving refugees. The rapid influx of significant populations would strain any host country: close to 900,000 in Lebanon; more than half a million in Jordan and Turkey; more than 200,000 in Iraq and over 100,000 in Egypt. The Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan is now its fourth largest city. Most Syrian refugees however – estimates include around 75% – are urban refugees. Because they blend in with the local populations, they increase significantly the demands on host country institutions and economies: for housing, food, and other basic necessities. In Lebanon, for example, some refugees pay to live in Lebanese families' yards and access their water. CRS has witnessed three families – 21 people – living together in a two room apartment. As the governments of Jordan and Lebanon have attested to the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs, their hospitality is being stretched.

Through direct implementation in Egypt and support to Caritas and other local partners in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, CRS is helping to meet the basic needs of refugees. We and our partners are assisting refugees living outside camps, across all sectors of emergency response. As the refugees and war-affected struggle through their third harsh winter, CRS, like many humanitarian agencies, is currently focused on the provision of winterization materials such as stoves, cooking and heating fuel, extra tarps, and blankets. Where these items are available in local markets, CRS supports cash and voucher programs for people to directly purchase what they need. This helps to keep shop owners in business and to inject cash into the local economy. Many of CRS' programs, including immediate assistance to refugees outside of the camps in Northern Iraq, medical care for refugees in Jordan and ensuring access to education for refugee children in Egypt, Turkey and Jordan, can be scaled up to meet growing needs and to make use of local partner capacity and infrastructure.

Capacity building

CRS' efforts in the region are to build local capacity and to help partners to scale up. Partners in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq will continue to increase staff this year. CRS' capacity-building focuses on improving program monitoring and evaluation, adherence to humanitarian standards, compliance and financial management, human resources, and technical assistance. These partnerships help to maximize each aid dollar's effectiveness. In addition, they contribute to a stronger network of local professionals.

Livelihoods

With the crisis now in its third year, refugees need help re-establishing livelihoods for their dignity and to avoid continued reliance upon aid. CRS' efforts to support livelihoods in Jordan through vocational training could be scaled up. CRS Egypt received over \$300,000 from the Bureau of Population and Migration for a one-year project to support Syrian refugees to increase self-reliance through business training and small enterprise start-up grants. These types of programs will help refugees to cope in the medium term and should be scaled up throughout the region.

Education

CRS and our partners have chosen to focus on the educational needs of refugee children throughout the region. Whether formal, non-formal or informal, schools help children to maintain some level of normalcy and to continue their development. They also serve to protect them from trafficking or other potential abuses. CRS Egypt's education program for Syrian children has been scaled-up to 25,000 beneficiaries with a budget of \$2.6 million from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. By next year, CRS anticipates expanding to as many as 60,000 children and improving the quality of education.

In 2014, CRS will provide formal education support to thousands of refugee students in Turkey. Activities include the establishment of new schools, training of Syrian teachers on the Syrian curriculum, pedagogical methods, psychosocial activities and provision of school supplies and textbooks.

Although theoretically refugee children have access to the education systems in other host countries, frequently, those systems are overwhelmed and use a more demanding curriculum. Caritas Jordan has signed a new agreement with all Catholic schools in Jordan to increase matriculation and meet some of this demand.

Peacebuilding and psycho-social support

Finally, the psychological effects of three years of war are growing and impacting not only individuals, but the family unit. Yet there is very limited help available for children and adults to address their feelings of fear, anger, and desolation and to develop positive coping mechanisms. Since February 2013, CRS has worked with the International Blue Crescent to improve the well-being and trauma recovery for 2,600 non-camp Syrian refugee children living in two Turkish border cities through psychosocial activities in child friendly spaces.

CRS has recently produced films on trauma resiliency and peacebuilding, which are to be used to generate discussion and work through emotions around trauma. They will also begin the discussion around reconciliation. Over 70 staff from Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt were trained on the creation and use of multiple techniques to be used with the films to engage children and encourage them to talk about their struggles. As the United States' own history with conflict illustrates, often the least visible wounds take the longest to heal.

CRS has experience with peacebuilding programs in southern Lebanon and inter-religious tolerance programs in Egypt. These kinds of programs will be critical to healing in Syria once the conflict ends, but are also necessary now as tensions escalate between host communities and refugees.

Humanitarian Access within Syria

In addition to the challenges facing host countries and communities, humanitarian access within Syria remains a challenge. More than 45 humanitarian workers in Syria have been killed; and some 250,000 Syrians are without access to aid, according to the UN. The international community must do all it can to ensure humanitarian access throughout Syria itself. Even the perception of the politicization of aid threatens the safety of humanitarian workers and beneficiaries. And it emboldens the Syrian government to deny aid in some areas. Donors and implementers must be particularly careful to ensure that aid is impartial and neutral. The UN Security Council's Presidential Statement on Access in all areas of Syria is a welcome first step to improve humanitarian access but more must be done.

Reason for hope

The Syrian people are proud. In conversation, refugees demonstrate deep concern about the image of their country around the world. They want people to know they are moderate, educated, cultured. There is a strong Syrian national identity. Efforts to build upon that identity so that it may supercede religious identity defined by extremists may be critical to avoiding a Balkanization of this nation, once proud as the stable nation in the region.

The Syrian people and their host communities are resilient. Take, for example, Tahane.

Tahane, 25, fled Homs in late 2012 when the city came under siege by indiscriminate bombing. She arrived to Zarqa in Jordan with no food, shelter, nor livelihood. She turned to Caritas Jordan. "I arrived at Caritas Jordan needing help. But, when I was at the social center, I realized there were people around me who needed even more than I did," she says.

Tahane lost all that she had built when her house was destroyed by bombs. Thankfully, she and her family survived. "We were all hiding in my basement and we could hear the planes above us and feel the shaking from the bombs. We grabbed our things and just ran," she says. "I can't explain what it felt like in that moment. We just wanted to make sure the kids were okay. We ran out onto the street and waved the first car to get in and leave the city. There were many cars passing and carrying the injured...we went in one of those cars to Damascus."

Within a few months of her arrival to Jordan, Tahane joined Caritas' legion of volunteers. She is now part of a three person Syrian team which reaches out to Syrians living in some of the most difficult, inhumane conditions. She meets them wherever they are staying – in tents, as squatters, in crowded apartments with other families. When Tahane meets them for the first time, her purpose is to let them know that help is available to them, that they are not alone. "When we show up and they see we are Syrian, they are relieved. They hear our voices, they connect to our stories. We tell them we understand, that we went through this, too," Tahane says.

“My volunteering here with Caritas helps me to adapt, to not to forget what I’ve left behind. When I’m helping others, I know I’m helping myself. I might be unable to help Syrians within Syria. But when I am helping a Syrian family here, I am helping Syria in one way or another.”

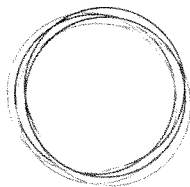
“What gives me great joy is when I see these families the first time they enter the Caritas Jordan center. They know no one. Then they see me, they see our Syrian volunteer team, they know us and they feel instantly secure.”

Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Cruz, based on our experience, CRS humbly offers the following recommendations.

Recommendations

- **Find a political solution to end the violence.** Syria urgently needs a political solution to end the fighting and create a future for all Syrians. The Geneva II conference later this month is an important opportunity to move towards a political solution. All efforts and channels should be considered to end the violence, restore stability in the region, and encourage the building of an inclusive society in Syria that protects the rights of all its citizens, including vulnerable populations such as religious minorities and women. A military response would cost many times the humanitarian response.
- **Support and encourage neighboring countries’ hospitality through humanitarian, development and bilateral aid.** The US must continue to do all it can to meet humanitarian needs. As part of this aid, the US government and other donors should expand psycho-social support and peacebuilding efforts for the long-term restoration of the fabric of Syrian society. Even when the conflict ends, the humanitarian need will be serious for years to come. The US should also support local institutions such as the hospitals and schools that are welcoming refugees. Longer-term funding for improving strained infrastructure and expanding the capacity of host country systems provides a critical complement to humanitarian funding. Bilateral assistance will help to encourage neighboring countries to keep their borders open.
- **Develop a longer-term regional strategy to respond to refugee needs,** including a contingency plan. The destruction in Syria is such that even should the political violence be resolved soon, refugees are unlikely to immediately return to Syria. A longer-term strategy should include coordination with other donors, especially Gulf States. It should also consider how the US and other donor governments might respond if the spillover continues to increase.
- **Avoid politicization of aid within Syria and ensure humanitarian access.** The agenda at the Geneva II conference should include actionable strategies to implement the UN Security Council’s Presidential Statement on Access in all areas of Syria.
- **Extend the duration of humanitarian awards.** Current humanitarian funding tends to last 3-6 months. Longer-term awards will help agencies plan their responses and increase efficiency. Efforts by the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance to expand funding for at least a year have proven very helpful. This timeframe should be adopted as a minimum by other agencies as well.

- **Increase resettlement of Syrian refugees into the United States.** The security situation in Syria means that some families will never return home. Host countries in the region are already struggling to meet needs. The US should do our part to help resettle especially the most vulnerable refugees, including unaccompanied minors.



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

**Statement Submitted by the Center for Victims of Torture to the
Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the
Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights**

The Syrian Refugee Crisis
January 7, 2014

Introduction

The Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) commends Chairman Durbin (D-IL) and Ranking Member Cruz (R-TX) for holding this important hearing on the Syrian Refugee Crisis. CVT's mission is to heal the wounds of torture on individuals, their families and their communities, and to stop torture worldwide. Since 1985, CVT has provided direct rehabilitation services to more than 25,000 survivors of torture and severe war atrocities in the United States, Africa and the Middle East. The model of care we utilize in our international direct service programs delivers high quality mental health, physiotherapy and social services while building local capacity to carry out those services through intensive training of local service providers.

Syrian refugees throughout the region are living in precarious situations without a clear end in sight. Millions of Syrian civilians – men, women and children – have been tortured, imprisoned, raped, and/or shot at while fleeing from the escalating conflict. They have personally witnessed brutal treatment, including the massacre of entire families and the destruction of homes and neighborhoods. As the political and sectarian violence facing Syria intensifies, the need to address refugees' psychological distress becomes ever more urgent.

CVT has operated a clinic in Amman, Jordan serving Iraq refugees since 2008. In March 2012, CVT expanded its Jordan program and began extending rehabilitative care to Syrian survivors of torture and severe war atrocities. More recently, given the high levels of needs amongst Syrian refugees in Zarqa, CVT established a second clinic in that community. In 2014, CVT will provide direct services to an estimated 1,000 clients in Jordan, approximately 70% of who are Syrians and 30% are Iraqi. Funding from the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, and the Open Society Foundations Arab Regional Office contribute to making CVT's life-saving work in Jordan possible.

As part of the broader humanitarian response for Syrian refugees in the Middle East and North Africa, CVT urges the U.S. government to expand its support for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) programming, including by increasing access to specialized rehabilitation services for survivors

of torture. Likewise, CVT encourages Congress to bolster the capacity and geographic reach of torture survivor rehabilitation programs domestically as part of any efforts to resettle Syrian refugees to the United States.

The Right to Rehabilitation for Survivors of Torture

Article 14 of the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) provides survivors of torture the right to obtain redress and establishes “an enforceable right to fair and adequate compensation including the means for as full rehabilitation as possible.”¹ The UN Committee Against Torture has emphasized that such rehabilitation “refers to the need to restore and repair the harm suffered by a victim whose life situation, including dignity, health and self-sufficiency may never be fully recovered as a result of the pervasive effect of torture.”² As torture and other human rights violations instill fear and silence individuals and their communities, the rehabilitation process assists survivors in understanding their traumatic experiences, reconciling those traumas within the context of their own life narrative, and regaining their voice. Thus, through re-empowering survivors, rehabilitation services play a vital role in repairing family relationships, fostering safer communities, and supporting efforts to facilitate lasting peace and security, including by helping to lay a foundation for accountability and transitional justice initiatives.

Urban Refugees in Jordan: Needs Far Exceed Capacity

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports there are over 2.3 million Syrian refugees registered or awaiting registration in the Middle East and North Africa, with estimates of the total refugee population much higher.³ Most of the refugees are in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, where living conditions are very difficult due to a lack of resources and the harsh environment. There are approximately 569,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan, of which approximately 75% are living in the communities and 25% in the camps.⁴ Half of Syrian refugees in Jordan are children under the age of 18 years old.

The needs far exceed the capacity of CVT and other humanitarian aid providers in the region. For example, without doing any public outreach, which is the typical approach, CVT has a waiting list of potential clients of more than 500, the vast majority coming from Syria. Up to 50 Syrian refugees a day come to CVT’s clinics with requests for psychosocial and mental health care for themselves, their children, and other severely distressed family members. This phenomenon of walk-in clients is unprecedented in CVT programs, which attests to the urgency and scale of the trauma treatment needs among this population.

CVT has observed several trends in Syrians seeking our services, contributing to an even greater need for mental health and psychosocial services (MHPSS). For example, prior to July 2013, the main reason clients reported for their migration into Jordan was threat of violence to self or relatives and indiscriminant bombing (general war-related trauma). By contrast, CVT clients are now reporting that their primary reason for fleeing Syria is related to first-hand torture or indirect experiences of torture in which family members or neighbors have been targeted.

¹ <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/39/a39r046.htm>.

² <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/GC3.htm>.

³ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

⁴ <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107>.

Access to housing, employment and education in Jordan has become increasingly challenging. Women and children are disproportionately represented as clients of CVT. These women are often heads-of-household, having left husbands and sons in Syria or having become newly widowed due to war violence. Although most women access cheap, over-crowded housing in Jordan by staying with family members or friends, an increase in the number of women living alone with their children has been reported. CVT clients report additional stresses related to the extreme under-employment of Syrian refugees living in local communities and the daily harassment experienced by both children and adults. In addition to the more common types of social services provided to Syrian refugees (such as referrals for medical services, financial assistance, and food and non-food assistance), CVT has received numerous requests for assistance with school placement as many Syrian refugee children are refused admission to local Jordanian schools due to general overcrowding of classrooms (there are reports of up to 60 students in a single classroom).

In the Jordanian context, an important dynamic to understand is that funders of humanitarian services are dealing with two different populations: Iraqi refugees and Syrian refugees. As an organization that serves both populations, CVT has observed Iraqi refugees feeling forgotten and “stuck”—many do not have the ability to return to Iraq or have fled during the recent wave of sectarian violence and instability. Resettlement to a third country is unlikely and those who attempt to remain in Jordan are facing growing intolerance and threats of detention and deportation. All of these factors add to the growing tension in Jordan, which some describe as precarious island of relative stability, surrounded by multiple conflicts and instability on all sides. This situation is especially worrisome as the country struggles with high rates of inflation, increases in the price of gas, water shortages and various economic challenges.

Recommendation 1: Mental health programming, including specialized torture survivor rehabilitation services, should be consistently included as part of the overall U.S. government strategy on humanitarian responses, and especially as part of its response to the Syrian refugee crises.

Globally there are very few—and depending on the situation, often no—resources available to address the tremendous mental health needs of refugee survivors of torture and war atrocities, despite their widespread and complex needs. The need in post conflict settings is apparent and widely understood: rates of mental disorders, particularly depression and PTSD, increase substantially in emergencies.⁵ In August 2013, the World Health Organization (WHO) released new clinical guidelines for health care workers treating the mental health needs of people who have experienced trauma and loss.⁶ These guidelines reinforce the importance of including mental health care in humanitarian responses post-crisis and are an important step in advancing access to mental health care in places of great need across the globe.

While basic necessities, such as food, shelter, and medical care, cannot be ignored, MHPSS services must be a higher priority. Without appropriate and timely interventions, some refugees may develop chronic mental health problems, leading them to struggle with all the challenges other refugees face but also

⁵ Steel Z et al. Association of torture and other potentially traumatic events with mental health outcomes among populations exposed to mass conflict and displacement. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 2009, 302:537-549.

⁶ http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2013/trauma_mental_health_20130806/en/.

doing so while suffering deep despair, anxiety, and depression. For some, this psychological pain can be debilitating, hindering their ability to function or provide for themselves or their children. MHPSS services also play an important role in accessing basic needs from the beginning. Many survivors of torture and war trauma are unable to access basic life-saving services, such as food, shelter, and medical care, due to the mental health symptoms they are experiencing. Mental health care itself can be lifesaving, but integration of MHPSS care into humanitarian response also supports other life-saving efforts. Given current funding limitations, CVT and other organizations providing MHPSS services to Syrian refugees are only able to address a small fraction of the overwhelming need. There are several steps the U.S. Congress can take in furtherance of this recommendation:

- Reauthorize the Torture Victims Relief Act in 2014:

Over a decade ago, Congress passed the first *Torture Victims Relief Act* (TVRA) (PL 105–320—OCT. 30, 1998) with strong bipartisan support, authorizing funding to support programs domestically and overseas that carry out projects or activities specifically designed to treat victims for the physical and psychological effects of torture. CVT urges Congress to reauthorize this important piece of legislation in 2014.

- Increase U.S. contributions to the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture

The United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (the Fund) is a highly effective grant making entity that supports over 230 projects in more than 70 countries. Each year, these programs help tens of thousands of survivors heal from their deep wounds and rebuild their lives through providing psychological, medical and social assistance, legal aid and financial support. The U.S. Department of State budget justifications have explained, “[The Fund] supports the U.S. foreign policy goal of promoting democracy and human rights...U.S. contributions underscore our commitment to the rights of the individual and to the essential importance of protecting these rights.”⁷

In recent years, worldwide contributions to the Fund have decreased by 30%, impacting the number and size of grants awarded to organizations that offer medical, psychological and social assistance, as well as legal aid and financial support to torture survivors and their family members.⁸ U.S. support for the fund grew steadily between 1993 and 2009, reaching its peak of \$7.1 million for Fiscal Years 2009 and 2010, and then dropped to \$5.7 million in FY 2011 and to \$5.5 million in FY 2013. CVT encourages the U.S. government to return its contributions to, at least, 2009 and 2010 levels for FY 2015 and the remainder of FY 2014.

- Provide funding to MHPSS programs for Syrian refugees through the U.S. State Department and USAID

The Victims of Torture Fund through USAID and programming funded by PRM and other U.S. State Department Bureaus support torture survivor centers and international NGOs in assisting the rehabilitation of individuals, families, and community members who suffer from the physical and psychological effects of torture. USAID projects operate in countries where torture has been widespread or systematic—with effects reaching into all or most communities and regions—and seek to build local

⁷ U.S. Department of State, Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, FY 2002, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/3961.pdf>.

⁸ http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Torture/UNVFVT/A-68-282_en.pdf.

capacity to deliver services to survivors of torture and their families. Beyond that, these projects strive to build networks and coalitions to meet the diverse practical, psychological, and social needs of people and communities affected by conflict and torture. CVT urges Congress to expand its financial support of these vital initiatives.

Recommendation 2: Mental health programming provided as part of emergency responses should be implemented according to guidelines established by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Humanitarian Affairs.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) MHPSS reference group established mental health and psychosocial support guidelines for humanitarian settings in 2007. These guidelines call for MHPSS services to be evidence-based, coordinated, and implemented in the most ethical and appropriate way possible. Included in the guidelines is the recommendation for creating a continuum of care, starting at broad integration of MHPSS into basic humanitarian response, and building towards specialized support services provided by professionals, such as CVT.⁹

By supporting MHPSS efforts that follow these guidelines, the United States can ensure that quality, sustainable, and integrated MHPSS services are provided to Syrian survivors who need it most.

Recommendation 3: The United States should increase its investment in domestic torture survivor rehabilitation programs funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) with the goal of ensuring that all Syrians refugees resettled to the United States have access to specialized trauma healing services.

As the United States prepares to resettle vulnerable refugee populations, such as Syrians or Congolese, who have experienced severe trauma, including torture, sexual and gender-based violations and other gross human rights violations, Congress should invest in their successful transition and integration by ensuring they have access to specialized rehabilitation services. These programs have a proven track record of assisting torture survivors in gaining control of their lives, building confidence in their futures, reuniting with family members, improving their connectedness to the communities they live in, and reducing the incidence of serious health problems and dependence on emergency medical care. These specialized services improve their social and economic functions while promoting self-sufficiency and integration.

In FY 2013, Congress appropriated \$11.088 million to fund a total of 28 non-profit organizations in 18 states¹⁰ and the District of Columbia to provide direct medical, psychological, social, and legal services to persons who have been tortured and their family members. Specialized programs also conduct outreach and training for community service providers that have access to or work with torture survivors. Although demand for these programs has increased, ORR funding has remained stagnant, leaving current programs either at or over capacity, with most managing extended wait lists. Further, the

⁹ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2007). IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings. Geneva: IASC.

¹⁰ ORR funds programs in the following states: Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, and Washington.

geographic limitations of specialized programs means that a high percentage of refugee arrivals are going to states without any torture survivor rehabilitation programs. CVT recommends an annual Congressional appropriation of at least \$16 million to the ORR Torture Victim Fund.



**CWS statement to the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, pertaining to its Hearing on *The Syrian Refugee Crisis*
Tuesday, January 7, 2014**

Church World Service (CWS), a 67-year old humanitarian organization, thanks the committee for holding this hearing and recognizing the urgent need to respond to the refugee and internal displacement crisis in and around Syria. We urge Congress to provide robust humanitarian assistance, lay the groundwork for pursuing durable solutions for those displaced, and ensure that response agencies are able to work according to the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, and humanity.

The conflict in Syria has caused the worst humanitarian crisis in twenty years. Approximately 6.5 million people have been uprooted and 4.25 million have been internally displaced. Roughly three-quarters of those displaced are women and children. Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt currently host more than 2.26 million registered Syrian refugees and thousands more who are not registered. While these countries are already overwhelmed with massive numbers of refugees, it is imperative that each neighboring country keep its borders open to ensure those fleeing violence and persecution can access protection. Other governments – including the United States – similarly must do their part to provide humanitarian and development funding, offer sanctuary for refugees and asylum seekers from the region, and work together to coordinate diplomatic efforts to address this urgent humanitarian crisis.

Specifically, CWS urges the United States to:

1. Continue to generously support currently underfunded United Nations and NGO appeals for assisting Syrian refugees and internally displaced Syrians, while maintaining sufficient attention and support to other humanitarian crises. We applaud the U.S.'s leadership in funding the humanitarian response.
2. Continue to liaise closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, NGOs, and related agencies, ensuring that principled humanitarian action is center of the U.S. Government response to this crisis.
3. Provide appropriate supports to host governments to strengthen infrastructure and public services, build the capacity of local service providers, and help mitigate tensions between refugees and host communities.
4. Continue to welcome refugees and asylum seekers impacted by the Syrian conflict and ensure access to resettlement by the most vulnerable Syrian refugees, including women-at-risk and LGBTI individuals, as well as those from other countries who were previously seeking refuge in Syria.
5. Ensure the protection of refugees and internally displaced people is prioritized within the diplomacy that the United States undertakes around the crisis, with special attention to women and girls, children in adversity, and other highly vulnerable populations, including by holding other countries accountable to their protection obligations.

The United States has a rich history of opening its doors to those fleeing violence and persecution and supporting other nations in times of need. We urge the Senate to take action to support those fleeing violence and seeking protection. As a country of wealth and stability, we have a responsibility to be good partners to other countries who find humanitarian crises at their doorstep. And as people of good conscience, we must find a way to put our well wishes into action to see improvements in the lives of our Syrian brothers and sisters.

CWS appreciates the committee's attention to these important humanitarian issues, and we urge all members of the Senate to champion the implementation of these recommended actions.

Statement for the Record of The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Submitted to

Senate Judiciary Committee

Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights

Hearing on

“The Syrian Refugee Crisis”

January 7, 2014

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) thanks the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights for calling the January 7th hearing which examines the scope of the humanitarian crisis in Syria. The ELCA is a member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), a global communion of 142 churches in the Lutheran tradition, representing over 70 million Christians in 79 countries.¹ Our church firmly believes that the plight of Syrian refugees and of Syrians still residing in-country, should be addressed with expediency and with priority consideration given to how the U.S. can best assist the most vulnerable.

At the height of World War II, Lutherans made up almost 20% of the refugee population fleeing to the U.S. This experience compels the ELCA to ask today that the Subcommittee consider taking additional measures and make the appropriate additional resources available so that the immediate needs of Syrian refugees can be met. As the Subcommittee deliberates on how best to address the protracted and burgeoning Syrian refugee crisis, the most vulnerable Syrian refugees should be resettled in the U.S. and efforts should be made in continued partnership with the international community to take those diplomatic steps necessary to help Syria reach a peaceful resolution to its current crisis.

Given our service experience in the region² and as a significant partner in the U.S. resettlement program, the ELCA welcomes the opportunity to offer a statement for the Subcommittee's hearing and encourage the Subcommittee to consider the following as it deliberates further on the best humanitarian responses to the mounting crisis in Syria and its neighbors:

Increased Financial Support to the Region is Necessary to Meet the Basic Short-term Needs of Syrian Refugees

Syria's civil war has exacerbated a refugee crisis already extant in the Middle East. Not only are Syrian nationals pouring into neighboring countries, but refugees who fled to Syria from places such as Iraq find themselves once again fleeing for their lives, but often not permitted to cross international borders. The compounding effect is that in countries like Jordan, which has long been a beacon of welcome for the region's refugees, meeting the basic needs of every arriving Syrian refugee is impossible.³ And while in theory neighboring countries like Jordan and Turkey are committed to protecting refugees seeking safety, in practice, limited resources and a lack of encouragement by the international community, has meant that

¹ The ELCA, as a member of the LWF, has a long history of service and humanitarian assistance in the Middle East. For the past century and a half, Lutherans have engaged in mission activities of many kinds in the Middle East, but particularly in areas of social service, such as education, health care and assistance to refugees. The work of the ELCA has largely focused on Palestine, but we also have strong relationships in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. The ELCA's engagement with the region is informed primarily through relationships with Christian churches and agencies. We have followed closely the initial optimism and increasing disappointment many of our companions have expressed regarding the ostensible Arab Spring. We know our Arab Christian companions to be deeply committed to their home countries and to the rebuilding of relationships with all of their neighbors.

² Lutheran churches, through the LWF have more than sixty years of experience assisting refugees in the Middle East, starting with efforts to meet the humanitarian needs of Palestinians displaced as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.

³ The LWF has a strong presence in Jordan and has established collaborative relationships with UNHCR and the Jordanian government and has been active in the preparation processes of the UNHCR Syria Regional Response Plan (RRP). Through LWF, the ELCA has significantly contributed to meeting the emergency needs of Syrian refugees in camps and host communities in Jordan, which is becoming more and more difficult as the civil war continues and as more and more refugees flee every day. Assistance is provided to all in need on a non-discriminatory basis, as is the case with all ELCA and LWF humanitarian service work.

many refugees attempting to cross international boundaries are denied access and are left waiting entry at the border or are sent back to the Syrian interior, where humanitarian assistance is difficult to obtain⁴.

Without increased financial support to Syria's neighbors, the refugee crisis in the region, already at boiling point, will undoubtedly breed unrest, putting at risk any tenuous peace in place. In both camp and urban refugee settings, countries of first asylum have a difficult time housing and feeding Syrian refugees and are, thus, tacitly encouraged to deny entry at borders. Short-term needs as basic as water, food, and housing are more and more difficult to meet, putting at risk programs aimed at longer-term stabilization. As the crisis wears on, other needs arise, including issues related to education, health and hygiene, and mental health.

In urban centers like Cairo, waves of Syrian refugees made it difficult for refugee service centers such as St. Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS)⁵ to serve and support the refugees they are called to serve. Egypt has since imposed visa restrictions for Syrian nationals, which makes it nearly impossible for Syrians to continue to seek refuge there.

Lutherans intend to continue our efforts to support refugees in the Middle East and *urge Congress to further appropriate resources in order to keep up with the growing basic food and housing needs of refugees living in either camp or urban settings*. An increase in financial support -- as a sign of helping to shoulder the burden of the refugee crisis -- is necessary in order that Syria's neighbors meet the basic needs of refugees. Increased support will not only protect Syrian refugees, but will encourage Syria's neighbors to live in to their international protection obligations. Increased financial support could help quell the potential for unrest in both camp and urban refugee settings by enabling host countries to meet the basic needs of the Syrian refugees who continue to flood into their borders.

The U.S. Must Help to Open All Parts of Syria for Humanitarian Access

In addition to our efforts to address the needs of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries, the ELCA has in recent years developed a strong relationship with the Syriac Orthodox Church and is actively supporting that church's efforts to address the needs of internally displaced and distressed persons (IDPs or IDDPs) within Syria. The Syriac Orthodox effort had included providing housing for families in the Damascus and Aleppo districts, as well as medicine, minor surgical services, and powdered milk supplies. However, these efforts are hampered not only by a lack of resources, but by the inaccessibility of much of the country. Without the help of the U.S. and the international community in opening up all of Syria for the purposes of humanitarian aid, there is far too little hope for many in Syria, who face dire conditions.

The ELCA is particularly concerned about how sectarian tensions are contributing to a lack of access to humanitarian relief and assistance. There is specific concern in regard to Syria's Alawite and Christian communities, who are reported to be targeted by majority Sunni populations. Sectarian tensions increase the difficulty that humanitarian workers face in accessing the very populations who most require assistance.

⁴ Amnesty International, *An International Failure: The Syrian Refugee Crisis*, December 13, 2013, available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ACT34/001/2013/en/8a376b76-d031-48a6-9588-ed9ace651d52/act340012013en.pdf>

⁵ In Cairo, the ELCA is the primary supporter of St. Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS), a central agency serving the needs of various refugee communities, including Iraqis and, more recently, Syrians. StARS is associated with RLAP, the Refugee Legal Assistance Project, which initiates intake procedures for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Funded in part by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), StARS is an important source of on-the-ground information and perspective for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government agencies alike. The ELCA has also supported, through the ACT Alliance, ecumenical efforts to address the needs of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries.

Within Syria, foreign fighters associated with various militant Islamist revival groups have complicated the sectarian landscape. Neither rebels, nor foreign fighters, nor the regime have a monopoly on extremism or atrocities. Within this climate, traditionally Christian towns and villages have been targeted.

Any effort to ease the refugee situation in neighboring countries should take in to consideration measures that can alleviate the dire conditions of IDPs and IDDPs. Such measures require that the U.S. help the international community to open all parts of Syria for humanitarian access. NGO and church partners are prepared to further carry out these important humanitarian aims should additional resources be made available and should Syria be opened so that humanitarian help can reach those who need it.

All Vulnerable Syrian Refugees Should Have Access to the U.S. Resettlement Program

We are extremely grateful that the U.S. Government is concerned about the refugee crisis emanating from the Syrian civil war and has responded with extraordinary levels of financial assistance through UNHCR for this purpose. Along with other elements of the civil war, the refugee crisis could serve as a destabilizing influence on the region. While governments around the world must respond to the human suffering in various refugee contexts, we believe that they must also identify and address the causes of the conflict perpetuating the refugee crisis. It is not enough to simply address the glaring humanitarian needs of refugees and IDPs/IDDPs, as we suggested above. Along with other elements in the context of the civil war, the refugee crisis could exacerbate any of the region's tenuous stability and serve as a destabilizing influence in the entire region.

The ELCA urges the Subcommittee to consider the following when determining how best to address the Syrian refugee crisis:

A. *Geneva II.* We are grateful that the U.S. Government is energetically supporting the Geneva II negotiations process and urge it to continue to do so. All affected parties must be constructively engaged in dialogue. The Syria crisis is informed by forces and movements beyond Syria; the outcomes will also have far-reaching implications. It is in the interests of the United States to resolve the conflict in Syria rather than address only the secondary effects of the conflict. *Therefore, the ELCA hopes that the U.S. Government will continue to support diplomatic measures that serve to help end the Syrian conflict.*

B. *Sectarian Violence.* The present situation within Syria and the prospects for peaceful resolution are profoundly implicated by ongoing sectarian-identified violence. While it is important to not reduce all violence to sectarian causes, the dynamic cannot be ignored. The effects of sectarian tensions are felt within the refugee reality, especially when certain groups cannot seek assistance through normal channels (access to which is often informally controlled by demographically dominant groups).

Sectarian violence is a feature not only of the Syrian civil war, but colors the realities of service provision among refugee populations. As is the concern of access to humanitarian assistance in-country, so too do we harbor specific concern for the Alawite and Christian communities' ability to access normal means for humanitarian assistance and to access refugee camps such as Za'atari. Targeting by the Sunni majority is a real and growing concern. Thus, for example, Christian refugees in Jordan have largely found themselves in urban environments rather than in refugee camps. Because they fear being further targeted in countries of first asylum, Alawite and Christian refugees in particular have been unable to easily access refugee service centers where refugee processing takes place. This obviously hinders their ability to access the resettlement program and dramatically diminishes their chances for third country resettlement.

When working with the international community, the ELCA asks the U.S. Government be mindful to the many and varied levels of inaccessibility rife within contexts of sectarian violence and persecution, most especially the Alawite and Christian communities who seem to be specifically targeted.

C. The Special Needs of Christian Communities in this Context. The question of refugee resettlement is difficult for many Arab and Middle Eastern Christian communities. Throughout the region, Christians have seen diminishing percentages of overall population figures, diminishing their influence on their civil society structures. In some cases, as in some manifestations of the Arab Spring, this has led to increasingly difficult circumstances for Christian communities unable to influence events in their locales. Some Christians—most notably in Egypt and Syria—have suffered targeted violence against their communities. It is inappropriate to apply the term “persecution” to all Christians in either country, though some have most certainly had harrowing experiences. Nevertheless, Arab and Middle Eastern church leaders have deep concerns about the opportunity for resettlement. Since many individual Christians’ experiences would qualify them for resettlement consideration, Christian leaders are concerned about the rapid disappearance of Christian populations in the region. This was the experience of Christian churches in Iraq and too easily could become the experience especially of churches in Syria. Church leaders are caught in the difficult position of publicly counseling steadfast presence in the home country while acknowledging the profound pain and terror experienced by many families.

A June 2013 conference sponsored by the Middle East Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches, which gathered several major Christian leaders from throughout the region, sought to promote Christian presence and witness of Arab Christians within the region and expressed concern about humanitarian efforts contributing further to the present reality of Arab Christian diasporas. *While resettlement is a recognized option, the international community, including the U.S. Government, should be cognizant of the potential unintended consequences of this generous act.*

With the above considerations in mind, *the ELCA believes that the degree of violence within Syria makes necessary the use of resettlement as a humanitarian tool for the most vulnerable.* As a refugee faith community we have experienced the anguish of fleeing from home knowing that return will not be a viable option for perhaps years to come. Although not an option that the ELCA readily recommends, the ELCA hopes that the U.S. Government will make accommodations in the U.S. resettlement program to welcome all vulnerable Syrians, regardless of religious affiliation, into U.S. communities. Given the protracted nature of Syria’s civil war and the difficulties that refugees face in camps and urban settings in countries of first asylum, this is not an unreasonable request.

For the most vulnerable Syrians, resettlement to a third country is the only durable solution. Europe, Australia, and Canada have pledged to accept 15,244 Syrian refugees⁶; the U.S. has historically welcomed more refugees than all the other 27 resettlement countries combined. *The U.S., then, has both a moral obligation to individual refugees and to the international community to begin immediately accepting Syrian refugees into the U.S. refugee resettlement program.* Resettlement will not only serve the individuals resettled in the U.S. but will help Syria’s neighbors in meeting the growing needs of the Syrian refugees residing in countries of first asylum.

In FY2013, only 36 Syrian refugees were admitted to the U.S. In FY2014, the U.S. has committed to resettling 34,000 refugees from the Near East and South Asia. This number includes Syrian refugees and

⁶ Amnesty International, *An International Failure: The Syrian Refugee Crisis*, December 13, 2013, p. 1, available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ACT34/001/2013/en/8a376b76-d031-48a6-9588-ed9aee651d52/act340012013en.pdf>

is an increase of a mere 3,000 over the FY2013 refugee admissions ceiling.⁷ The Syrian refugee crisis will only abate if the U.S. increases the number of Syrians it resettles, particularly the most vulnerable.

The ELCA believes that *supplementary resources need to be made available for Syrian refugees so that additional Syrian arrivals into the U.S. do not disrupt the regional allocations as outlined in the FY2014 Presidential Memorandum for Refugee Admissions*. The ELCA is the largest church partner of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), the second largest resettlement partner of the Department of State, with a vast network of refugee resettlement service partners throughout the U.S. As such, and as a church with strong immigrant and refugee roots, we know, from that grounded experience, that Lutheran congregations and members stand ready to welcome Syrian refugees this fiscal year. *Syrian refugees should be welcomed in addition to the 70,000 already allocated for arrival in FY2014.*

Recommendations

As the Subcommittee considers how best the U.S. can help protect and support vulnerable Syrian refugees, the ELCA recommends the following:

- **The U.S. Government should increase its financial support to the region as a necessary to means to meet the basic short-term needs of Syrian refugees.** The ELCA recommends that the U.S. government further appropriate resources in order to keep up with the growing basic food and housing needs of refugees living in either camp or urban settings. An increase in financial support to help Syria's neighbors meet the basic needs of its refugees is necessary. The U.S. should also encourage its international partners to increase support for refugee-hosting countries through development assistance, bilateral aid, and increased funding of U.N. humanitarian appeals.
- **The U.S. must help the international community to open all parts of Syria for humanitarian access.** Any effort to ease the refugee situation in neighboring countries should take in to consideration measures that can alleviate the dire conditions of IDPs and IDDPs. Such measures require that the U.S. help the international community to open all parts of Syria for humanitarian access. NGO and church partners are prepared to further carry out these important humanitarian aims should additional resources be made available and should Syria be opened so that humanitarian help can reach those who need it.
- **All vulnerable Syrian refugees should have access to the U.S. Resettlement Program.** Supplementary resources need to be made available for Syrian refugees so that additional Syrian arrivals into the U.S. do not disrupt the regional allocations as outlined in the FY2014 Presidential Memorandum for Refugee Admissions. Syrian refugees should be welcomed in addition to the 70,000 already allocated for arrival in FY2014.

The ELCA would like to thank the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights and Senator Dick Durbin, Assistant Majority Leader and Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee, in particular, for your concern about Syrian refugees and your willingness to take the time to host this important hearing.

The ELCA supports the generous assistance of the U.S. government to date and encourages continued – and increased – support for Syrian refugees, IDPs and IDDPs and for a continued commitment to the diplomatic way forward for peace.

As always and as aforementioned, the ELCA, along with our Lutheran partners worldwide, plan to continue to assist as we are able to serve our neighbor in need. It is our hope that, as the Subcommittee continues to deliberate, that the U.S. Government will prioritize this significant humanitarian situation

⁷ Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2014, p. 1, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/219137.pdf>

and make every reasonable effort to ensure that the most vulnerable Syrian refugees are identified and served in order to alleviate, to some degree, the magnitude of the refugee crisis being experienced by Syria's neighbors; this while ensuring that resettlement does not diminish Syria's ethnic and religious communities the opportunity to fully repatriate and flourish once peace comes.



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The Urgent Need for a Humanitarian Framework to Address the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Public Witness Testimony, Submitted to the
Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights
January 6, 2014

The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) shares the concerns of this committee and the world community about the devastation that the Syrian civil war has wrought on the people of Syria and on the surrounding countries. Since 1943, FCNL has lobbied Congress to prevent war, protect vulnerable populations, and support effective, principled policies to help build a more peaceful world.

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) has worked to protect refugees in the Middle East and the regions around the world for more than a century. In 1949, the United Nations asked the American Friends Service Committee – a sister organization - to organize relief efforts for Palestinian refugees. Today, AFSC continues to support peacebuilding efforts throughout the Middle East, including in today's war-torn Syria, by partnering with Syrian civil society groups seeking nonviolent solutions to the conflict.

As the oldest registered ecumenical lobby in Washington, D.C., we are led by our faith to advocate for systemic changes that address the root causes of deadly conflict. So long as the Syrian civil war rages on and the international community continues to fuel the violence rather than unite for a political solution, the Syrian refugee crisis will continue to inflame the region.

Therefore, we urge Congress to vigorously support the Geneva II talks, commencing on January 22, **to devise a political transition that would give millions of Syrian refugees a reason to go home, and the safety to do so.** The Geneva II talks offer an opportunity to secure an agreement between the internal warring factions as well as Russia, the United States, Iran, the Gulf countries and other external parties that possess influence to end a proxy war now fought through Syrian lives.

At the same time, there is also an **urgent need for the United States to seek Russian and international support for a humanitarian framework agreement** to more immediately address the Syrian refugee crisis and other ongoing humanitarian catastrophes of the Syrian conflict. Like the agreement to eradicate Syria's chemical arsenal, a separate political track would be essential for devising a successful humanitarian framework agreement.

The Ever-Escalating Syrian Refugee Crisis

Without an increased and sustained commitment to address the Syrian refugee crisis, it is likely to accelerate exponentially.

To put the crisis in perspective, since the onset of the Syrian civil war, more than 2.3 million Syrians – nearly ten percent of the population – have fled to neighboring countries, the rates of which have multiplied eight times in the last year. Thousands of Syrians continue to leave on a daily basis. In the context of the United States, this exodus would be proportional to the entire population of New York State and Illinois taking refuge internationally. Over 1.1 million Syrian refugees are children, 740,000 of whom are under the age of 11, which is about twice the number of Quakers in the world.

Running for their lives, refugees have flooded the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. The population of Lebanon has increased by more than 25%, equivalent to the population of Tel Aviv twice over. Camp Zaatari, the largest Syrian refugee camp in Jordan, has reached a population equivalent to the country's fourth largest city. The overwhelming influx of refugees has placed enormous pressure on local infrastructure and economies in host communities, and fanned the flames of sectarian resentment. The far-reaching effect of the Syrian conflict threatens the long-term stability of the Middle East.

The U.S. Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

We urge the Administration and Congress to increase its diplomatic and financial resources directed toward the Syrian refugee crisis and end U.S. support for armed groups that has only fueled greater violence and displacement in Syria.

We applaud the United States government for providing more humanitarian aid toward the Syrian refugee crisis than other state actors. However, the United States and the international community writ large have hardly begun to demonstrate the diplomatic and financial commitments necessary to resolve the Syrian crisis, including the refugee crisis.

FCNL urges the Administration and Congress to expand its important humanitarian aid efforts to meet the ever-growing need of those impacted by the Syrian crisis in the following ways:

1) Increase Volume and Flexibility for Humanitarian Aid to Syria:

The U.S. has a small window of opportunity to prevent the Syrian crisis from further destabilizing the region by allocating greater resources for humanitarian assistance and conflict mitigation funding to address tensions between host communities and the more than 2 million refugees that have fled Syria, including the approximately 70% of displaced that are not living in refugee camps. This should start by funding the International Disaster Assistance account at \$1.6 billion in the FY14 SFOPs bill.

We also echo calls from various humanitarian organizations providing relief to Syrian refugees in recommending that Congress increase its overall investments in flexible, non-earmarked crisis response, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding funding given the protracted nature of this crisis. U.S. funds should have built-in flexibility to respond to emerging and unforeseen emergency needs, and programs should be designed to bridge immediate humanitarian needs with longer-term development strategies, implemented in a conflict-sensitive manner.

Recommendation: We urge the full funding of the Complex Foreign Crises Fund in the FY2014 State & Foreign Operations Appropriations bill, and preservation of the flexible, global structure of the 40 million dollars reserved for global enduring operations within it. We furthermore urge that the 200 million earmarked for Jordan within this account focuses on decentralized investments to host communities and municipal governments that are bearing the brunt of the impact of the refugee flows on already limited resources and social services.

2) Resettle 20,000 Refugees:

The United States government has announced plans to resettle up to 2,000 Syrian refugees in 2014. While this is a welcome increase from the mere ninety Syrian refugees that have been resettled in the United States so far, it is far from an adequate response to the greatest humanitarian crisis of our time. Just as the United States welcomed more than 120,000 refugees in the wake of the Vietnam War, so should this nation of immigrants open its doors to far greater numbers of Syrians as this crisis continues to unfold.

Recommendation: We urge the United States to resettle half of the approximately 40,000 refugees that UNHCR has indicated are particularly vulnerable, a burden that the United States has accepted in response to past resettlement requests.

Support a Robust, Integrated Response to the Syrian Conflict

Ultimately, only a political settlement can end the violence in Syria and prevent the Syrian refugee crisis from continuing to escalate. The Geneva II negotiations offers a promising next step to devise a roadmap to end the bloodletting in Syria and accordingly end the refugee crisis that has impacted millions throughout the region.

We commend the White House for its renewed investment in the Geneva II negotiation process to reach a political solution to the crisis, and urge this committee and every member of Congress to speak out in support of these efforts to secure a negotiated settlement to the Syrian civil war.

Recommendation: We urge this committee to publicly support comprehensive Geneva II talks to bring about an end to the conflict and the root cause for the escalation of the Syrian refugee crisis.

A Humanitarian Framework Agreement that would Address the Syrian Refugee Crisis

There is already bipartisan support for the United States to prioritize efforts that could secure a humanitarian framework agreement for Syria. Last month, Democratic Representatives Jim McGovern (D-MA), William Keating (D-MA) joined the Republican Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Representative Ed Royce (R-CA) in sending a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry urging the Administration to negotiate an agreement for humanitarian access in Syria.

These congressional leaders emphasize that "the humanitarian crisis demands urgent U.S. leadership that we believe can be immediately successful and save lives." However, a humanitarian framework agreement could be expanded or a separate framework agreement pursued to specifically address the Syrian refugee crisis.

Crafting a humanitarian framework agreement to address the Syrian refugee crisis would require working closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other U.N. bodies. A framework agreement with enough high-profile political commitment could be

successful in ensuring that the international community fulfills its pledges for humanitarian aid for Syria and commitments to resettle greater numbers of Syrian refugees.

A humanitarian framework agreement would outline the responsibilities for all the countries that pledge funding for the Syrian refugee crisis at the Second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria scheduled for January 15, 2014. This year the United Nations is appealing for \$2.3 billion for activities within Syria and \$4.2 billion to address the needs of refugees.

A framework agreement with deadlines set throughout the year would ensure that unlike last year when the international community fell short of honoring its obligations to provide aid and protection for Syrian refugees, all pledges for funding and resettlement are met.

Dr. Ake Sellstrom, who heads the U.N. Weapons Inspection team in Syria, recently pointed out that if the international community can gain his access to even the most sensitive parts of Syria, it should also be able to do the same for urgently needed humanitarian aid.

It will be necessary to engage Russia, the other members of the U.N. Security Council, and other states at the highest-level to secure buy-in for a humanitarian framework agreement and to use U.S. diplomatic leverage with various heads of state to ensure that they meet their obligations.

The success a humanitarian framework agreement will depend on buy-in from all the states involved so that if necessary, they will use their leverage with other countries to ensure that the resettlement and aid pledges are fulfilled. A successful implementation would help save Syrian lives, and be a triumph for advancing regional and global peace and security efforts.

Finally, like the agreement reached on Syria's chemical weapons, it will be seen by many as impossible to accomplish. Unfortunately, in the absence of such a high-profile humanitarian framework agreement, we will likely see far-reaching commitments made at the International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria in Kuwait next week, with little follow through.

A humanitarian framework agreement would address one piece of the Syrian crisis which the United Nations has warned poses the greatest risk for international security since World War II.

Recommendation: The United States should seek Russian and international support to devise a humanitarian framework agreement that pledges humanitarian aid contributions and follows through on the international community's commitment to resettle Syrian refugees.

INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

The Syrian Refugee Crisis

Hearing Before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the
Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights

Statement for the Record from the Institute of International Education (IIE) January 7, 2014

Submitted by

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Syria's University Professors and Students Need Help

In the midst of all the human tragedies unfolding as a result of the Syrian civil war, there is an unprecedented and grave education emergency. Almost from the onset of war, schools and universities have been bombed, students have been forced into military service by all sides, and professors have been targeted for violence. Therefore, the Institute of International Education (IIE) urges the Subcommittee to consider making education a higher priority in relief efforts as it addresses the scope of the humanitarian crisis the world faces in Syria.

We note that in its most recent report, the Subcommittee on Appropriations for the Department of State and Foreign Operations included section 7032(c) authority to use appropriated funds to "rescue scholars from countries denying freedom of expression" and that these rescued scholars would be encouraged to return home when conditions permit. We fully support such an approach as outlined further below.

We also note that there is precedent for this in the case of Iraq. With support from the Congress, the Department of State, and private donors, the Institute's Scholar Rescue Fund was able to save a critical mass of more than 265 Iraqi scholars over the past several years, a majority of whom have already returned to their country and are continuing productive academic leadership and work. Some Iraqi scholars, like Syrian scholars today, were Fulbright or Humphrey alumni whose US affiliation put them under particular threat. IIE's educational rescue programs are a key way not only to protect these individuals but also to counter Al Qaeda-linked extremism and to help ensure that the country will have the human capital needed to rebuild.

Data on the Scope of the Humanitarian Crisis in Education

It is right in a crisis to focus assistance on meeting the most urgent needs – providing food, water, and shelter to save lives, especially among the most vulnerable women and children. However, we must also recognize that one feature of the humanitarian disaster in Syria is the collapse of higher education, with Syrian faculty and students displaced both inside and outside the country and unable to continue their academic work and education.

According to a recent report by the University of California Davis Human Rights Initiative and the Institute of International Education's Scholar Rescue Fund (IIE-SRF), "the collapsing nature of higher education inside Syria

and the attendant internal and external displacement of faculty and students is a generally unacknowledged and unmet component of the larger civilian Syrian humanitarian disaster.”¹

These findings are corroborated by the data gathered by the Institute over two years of implementing emergency assistance programs for Syrian scholars and students. IIE’s Scholar Rescue Fund, which provides fellowships for threatened academics from any field and any country, has considered hundreds of applications from Syrian scholars and since the beginning of the conflict has issued more than 40 yearlong life and career saving fellowships to highly threatened, senior Syrian scholars.

We have seen a similar need for assistance among Syrian university students. In 2013, IIE’s Syria Consortium for Higher Education in Crisis gathered 40 universities around the world to offer 150 scholarships to Syrian university students. Approximately 3,000 students expressed interest in these opportunities, and 70 Syrian students arrived on US campuses this fall at universities led by Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) and also including colleges such as Monmouth and Bryn Mawr. In addition to making it possible for these students to continue their university education, this programming has the ancillary benefit of training future leaders, promoting cultural understanding, and forging new relationships between Americans and Syrians that will reap benefits once the conflict ends and the US and Syria are able to re-define their political, economic, and cultural relations.

This fall, IIE’s original Consortium partners of IIT, Jusoer, and the US Department of State welcomed new partners in the efforts, including Kaplan Test Prep International and the Portugal-based Global Platform for Syrian Students. University members are now approaching 100. With a goal of 600 scholarships, approximately 400 have already been committed, including about half in the Middle East region.

In December 2013, IIE invited displaced Syrian students to complete a survey as the first step towards accessing Consortium opportunities. In less than one month, nearly 4,000 individuals completed the survey, including both graduate and undergraduate students displaced from their university education. The survey also includes over 300 individuals who describe themselves as established scholars.

Institute of International Education’s Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Education Unfolding in Syria

With private funds and thanks to a recent cooperative agreement for \$250,000 with the US Department of State, the Institute of International Education has been implementing emergency assistance programs on several fronts to help.

1. IIE’s Scholar Rescue Fund

With private funds, IIE-SRF has over the past two years found visiting scholar positions for more than 40 Syrian scholars at dozens of safe-haven universities in six countries. These include some of the top universities in North America and Europe, such as Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, Michigan State, Cambridge, and University of Amsterdam.

Syrian scholars who need rescue come from a diversity of religious and ethnic backgrounds and are selected through a process that includes careful vetting. Fields represented to date include many critical to Syria’s future prosperity and civil society: biology; physics; environmental science; engineering; neuroscience; political science; archaeology; economics; sociology; law; literature; philosophy; Islamic studies; theater; and the visual arts. At host

¹ “Unaccounted and Unacknowledged: Syria’s Refugee University Students and Academics in Jordan,” a joint project of the UC Davis Human Rights Initiative and the Institute of International Education. Keith David Watenpaugh and Adrienne L. Fricke with Tara Siegel. May, 2013.

universities, they are safely pursuing their academic work and continuing to contribute to Syrian education through contacts with students in Syria and by working on projects critical to Syria's future, such as identifying archeological sites under threat.

In 2014, the cooperative agreement with the US Department of State will enable IIE-SRF to rescue additional Syrian scholars and place them safely at US host universities. Additional funds from private sources, including Carnegie Corporation of New York, will enable IIE-SRF to rescue approximately 30 more Syrian scholars. Given current applications, however, the need is projected to be at least twice the number of scholars IIE-SRF is able to support.

2. IIE's Syria Consortium for Higher Education Students in Crisis

In 2014, IIE's Syria Consortium is hoping to place approximately 600 Syrian students in scholarships contributed by its university members. Approximately 400 full or partial scholarships have been committed so far in the United States, Portugal, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey.

Funds from the US Department of State as well as Carnegie Corporation of New York will help IIE facilitate placements by matching applicants with opportunities and providing grants to supplement partial scholarships. Thanks to Kaplan Test Prep International, IIE will also provide access to free, on-line test prep courses to 500 Syrian students.

While IIE hopes to be able to help over 1,000 Syrian students with scholarships and on-line courses in 2014, we recognize the need is several times that number from the applications received for current opportunities.

3. Ideas for In-Region Education

In addition to fellowships and scholarships for professors and students, IIE is also exploring the feasibility of establishing in-region education programs in which Syrian scholars teach displaced students in or near refugee camps. This would help meet the needs of displaced students who lack the documentation, resources, and/or English language abilities to take advantage of scholarship opportunities.

For example, threatened Syrian scholars might be given "teaching fellowships" to set up intensive two- to three-week university courses in fields of most interest to Syrian students, such as math, engineering, and English. These courses could be conducted in English or Arabic, and Syrian students would receive some type of certification of completion.

The Urgent Need for Large-Scale Response

Recognizing that these efforts are not enough and that Syrian scholars and students represent a critical part of the human capital needed to re-build Syria and to re-define its relationship with the United States and other nations, we urge the Subcommittee to consider supporting a special, larger-scale program of response as a counter to potential radicalization.

Learning from IIE-SRF's Iraq Scholar Rescue Project, which saved a critical mass of over 265 of Iraq's most senior, most threatened academics, a large-scale effort to save Syrian scholars could involve grants in the region to facilitate the earliest possible return to Syria, distance education programs to keep scholars teaching Syrian students inside and outside Syria, and, when conditions allow, special efforts to repatriate scholars.

With additional funding, partners, and university members, we could scale-up IIE's Syria Consortium to better meet the needs of thousands of applicants. For example, IIE could implement a special program in Turkey to enable the many displaced Syrian university students there to complete their education at Turkish institutions. Another idea is to provide Syrian students with scholarships for English language study, either at institutions within the region or on-line.

The Institute welcomes additional ideas, partnerships, and the participation of other NGOs to address this education emergency. Professors and university students are an essential component of Syria's social fabric, and they represent its post-conflict future, which will rely on well-trained leaders and experts who are prepared to build a stable, democratic, and thriving state that can become a productive member of the global community. The humanitarian response in Syria ought, therefore, to include special measures to protect their lives and preserve their knowledge.

About the Institute of International Education

The Institute of International Education, a private not-for-profit organization founded in 1919, is a world leader in the international exchange of people and ideas. IIE designs and implements over 250 programs of study and training for students, educators, young professionals and trainees from all sectors with funding from government and private sources. These include the Fulbright Program, administered on behalf of the US Department of State. IIE has a network of 19 international offices and affiliates around the world and more than 1,200 college and university members. More than 60 Fulbright alumni, IIE alumni, IIE trustees and advisers have received Nobel Prizes. www.iie.org

About IIE's Scholar Rescue Fund

IIE's Scholar Rescue Fund (IIE-SRF) provides fellowships for scholars whose lives and work are threatened in their home countries. These fellowships permit professors, researchers, and public intellectuals to find temporary refuge at universities, colleges, and research centers anywhere in the world, enabling them to pursue their academic work in safety and to continue to share their knowledge with students, colleagues, and the broader campus community. In its first 10 years, IIE-SRF has provided fellowships to over 525 remarkable scholars from 50 countries, including leading an effort of historic proportion to save the intellectual capital of Iraq. Thanks to a public-private partnership, the Iraq Scholar Rescue Project has saved the lives and work of more than 265 of Iraq's most senior and threatened academics in a wide range of academic disciplines through temporary academic positions at universities, colleges and other institutions of higher learning in the Middle East and North African regions. www.scholarrescuefund.org



Testimony on the Syrian Refugee Crisis for the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the
Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights

January 7, 2013

Michael Klosson, Vice President, Policy and Humanitarian Response
Save the Children

I want to thank Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Cruz for organizing today's hearing on the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis. Despite the staggering human toll of the Syrian conflict, it has so far failed to galvanize the sustained international attention required to resolve it. Although Congress and the Administration have mobilized leadership and significant funding to address this challenge, more is necessary to spare millions of children and families from further suffering.

This testimony will identify several recommendations for Congress and the Administration to address the needs of Syrian refugee children and their families. First, it will discuss the need to support child protection activities to help refugee children recover from the psychological and emotional distress they have experienced. Second, it will discuss the value of investing in education to ensure that refugee children have access to safe learning environments in which to thrive. Third, it will discuss the importance of working to end the conflict as expeditiously as possible, thus stopping the refugee flow and the suffering of children.

While focusing on the needs of Syrian refugee children and their families is critical, it is also important to address the needs of those who remain in Syria. For that reason, this testimony will conclude with recommended policy positions for the United States to champion at the upcoming United Nations conference in Geneva on the Syrian conflict in order to better protect the children of Syria. Specifically, we ask that the United States use its influence to urge all parties to the conflict to agree not to prevent lifesaving aid from reaching children, not to target or allow military use of schools or health facilities, and not to use explosive weapons in populated areas.

Background

Save the Children has worked in the Middle East for decades to advance our mission as a nonprofit, child-focused agency working to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives. Today, we are working with communities, host governments and UN agencies to ensure that all vulnerable groups affected

by the Syrian conflict get the assistance and protection they need. We are providing support to refugees and host communities, as well as non-Syrians fleeing the country, such as Palestinians and Iraqis. To date, we have provided lifesaving assistance such as shelter, food and protection to nearly 840,000 people in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Syria – over half a million of whom are children.

On the threshold of its fourth year, since March 2011, the conflict in Syria continues to destroy lives and cast a shadow over the region's future. Over a third of the population in Syria has been forced to leave their homes, and more than 2.3 million have sought protection in neighboring countries. On average, 5,000 people flee Syria every single day. The resulting humanitarian consequences are extraordinary, and the costs to children are incalculable. Since the beginning of the conflict, children have been the forgotten victims of Syria's horrific war. Today, over 5 million children are in need of assistance, including over 1 million children who have sought refuge in neighboring countries. These children are at risk of becoming a "lost generation," and must not be ignored.

In light of this, Save the Children, together with UNICEF, UNCHR, World Vision and other partners today launched the "No Lost Generation" campaign to help address the enormous humanitarian needs of children in the region. With this campaign, we are calling on the international community to provide \$1 billion to help rescue a generation of Syrian children from lives of despair and broken futures. We seek to accelerate donor and public support for programs that help Syrian children gain access to quality education, protect them from violence and abuse, provide counseling and psychological support, and meet other critical needs.

Many donor governments, including the United States, have been generous in providing financial support to help Syrian refugees; however, more is needed as the crisis continues to escalate. Last month, the UN launched an unprecedented appeal for \$6.5 billion in 2014 to assist millions of people affected by Syria's conflict – the largest humanitarian appeal ever. This appeal includes \$4.2 billion to meet the humanitarian needs of a projected total of 4.1 million refugees and 2.7 million people living in host communities.

As difficult as daily life is for millions in the region, the situation is not hopeless, and international assistance is making a difference. During a mid-September visit to Jordan, I met with refugees in Za'atari Camp as well as in host communities in Amman, and spoke with Save the Children colleagues as well as U.S. and UN officials working on these issues. The Syrian children and youth I spoke with were engaged and energized, and spoke about how international support was helping them acquire skills and deal with their circumstances. One ten-year-old girl, who had been living with her mother and siblings in east Amman for over a year, told me she dreamed of becoming a doctor to help people close to her – no surprise since her father was missing and her brother's hands were so severely beaten he could not work. Other children in our programs drew pictures of their former neighborhoods and spoke about wanting to go home. I was left with the conviction that we all must do more to alleviate their suffering.

Child Protection

Every day in Syria's brutal war, children are being killed or injured. They are also witnessing and experiencing atrocities that no one – much less a child – should ever see. One study of Syrian refugee children in Turkey found that two-thirds of children interviewed had been in a distressing situation where they felt they were in grave danger. One child in three experienced battery including being shot at, kicked, or hit. And 75% of children interviewed had experienced the death of at least one loved one.

The resulting trauma is profound. Parents tell us that their children have been left with a persistent and pervasive feeling of fear. When children are asked to express themselves through drawing, they often fill the pages with violent images of explosions, bloodshed and the scenes of war. Many are also showing significant signs of emotional distress including bed-wetting, nightmares, and fear of loud noises.

One sixteen-year-old boy whom we'll call Wael, a resident of Za-atari camp in Jordan, spoke to Save the Children staff about the trauma he experienced in Syria. Wael was arrested and forced with many other children into a small, cramped cell without running water or basic sanitation. During this time, Wael witnessed the torture and death of a six-year-old boy. According to Wael,

[T]his six-year-old boy was tortured more than anyone else in that room. He wasn't given food or water for three days, and he was so weak he used to faint all the time. He was beaten regularly.... He only survived for three days and then he simply died.... When you see women and children scream and die, it has an effect. Each and every Syrian has been devastated mentally by this war.

Stories like Wael's are all too common. Even when Syrian children escape from the violence, the trauma does not end for them. Not only must children cope with their horrific experiences, but they are also at risk of being recruited as soldiers or laborers, forced into early marriage, or separated from their families. To help address the suffering of Syrian children and their families, the U.S. government and other donors should scale up programs that protect children from and mitigate the effects of exploitation, abuse, and violence. To this end, we urge the U.S. government and other donors to ensure that:

- All Syrian refugee children have access to the psychosocial support they need;
- Mechanisms for identification and referral of children at risk/survivors of protection violations are strengthened;
- Children who have been separated from their families and/or who are on the move have access to family tracing services as well as alternative care;
- Children are not recruited/re-recruited into armed conflict;
- Birth registration for refugee children is guaranteed to avoid statelessness;

- Community based child protection mechanisms are established to identify, report, and raise awareness about child protection risks; and
- Programs to prevent child labor and child marriage are put in place.

Education

Education is a critical stabilizing force in the lives of children affected by conflict. It can give children hope, provide physical and psychosocial protection, and send children the message that the world has not given up on their future. Tragically, many Syrian refugee children face huge barriers to continuing their education. Without more investment in education, we risk losing an entire generation – the very people who will eventually be called on to help Syria recover.

Today, two-thirds of Syrian refugee children are out of school. That amounts to more than half-a-million refugee children; inside Syria out of 4.8 million children of school age, 2.2 million are not in school, and the numbers are rising daily. While host countries are working to expand their national education systems, accommodating the large influx of new Syrian refugee students into the existing public school system has proven to be nearly impossible with existing resources. Lebanon and Jordan are particularly strained – one in every four children in Lebanon today is from Syria. In Jordan, this figure is nearly one in ten. These numbers are expected to increase dramatically over the next year. Even when Syrian refugee children are able to enroll in public school, they face many challenges including isolation, differences in curriculum, and unfamiliar language. All of these factors contribute to high dropout rates.

One 17-year-old Syrian refugee living in East Amman, Jordan, whom we'll call Walaa, told Save the Children about her experience fleeing the violence in Syria.

We left our schools, our education, our friends and we lost everything.... There is no school for us anymore, as our parents can't work here, because many Syrians are not allowed. We are not children anymore; we are old people in children's bodies.... Early marriage is happening more and more and girls are no longer able to continue their schooling.... It feels like a nightmare that I cannot wake up from.... A child deserves the right to live and a future, do they not?

Save the Children's experience working in other conflict settings has shown that the longer children remain out of school, the less likely they are to ever go back. Save the Children is carrying out a massive "back to school" operation in Lebanon and Jordan targeting Syrian refugee children and youth in camps and host communities to ensure that children have access to learning opportunities. We run youth-friendly spaces and alternative learning programs, providing adolescent and youth with informal education in Za'atari refugee camp and host communities in Jordan and Lebanon. We also provide children with school bags, uniforms and other essential school materials and pay school fees.

Long-term plans must be developed immediately to educate Syrian refugee children so that they can reach their full potential and have hope for a better future. In furtherance of this

objective, the U.S. government and other donors should do the following:

- Support programs that provide Syrian refugee children with access to education, whether at school or through learning programs. Only one third of refugee children currently have such access;
- Support host country efforts to expand educational infrastructure to accommodate refugee children including hiring more teachers and providing materials and resources for additional teaching shifts;
- Invest in programming that helps both refugee and local children from the host country to learn together; and
- Support vocational training programs and non-formal learning centers.

Protect Children through Diplomatic Action

Ultimately, ending the conflict in Syria is the only way to end the refugee flow and build a better future for Syria's children. Children and their families will continue to suffer until a political solution is found. Decisive action by the international community is needed now to facilitate a peaceful end to the violence.

Until a political solution is found, many vulnerable Syrian children and families will continue to escape the conflict and seek sanctuary in neighboring countries. As such, we must support countries hosting refugees to ensure they have the support they need to keep their borders open. Across the region, almost 80% of Syria's refugees do not live in camps, but instead live with family or friends or in informal settlements. Special attention must be paid to these host communities to help them deal with the refugee influx and its resulting strain on community resources.

The Syrian Government and opposition will be coming to an international conference convened by the United Nations in January in Geneva, with attendance by other major governments including the United States. This is a real opportunity to prompt action to better protect the children of Syria both in the near and longer term. We propose that the conference result in three specific measures that will provide immediate protection for the children of Syria, and look to leadership by the United States to use its influence to champion this three point initiative:

- First, all parties to the conflict should agree not to prevent life-saving aid from reaching children. Without humanitarian access and a sufficient response to all those in need, we will fail an entire generation.
- Second, all parties to the conflict should agree not to target or allow military use of schools or health facilities. Since the conflict started, nearly 1 in 5 schools inside Syria have been damaged, destroyed, used by the military, or turned into shelters. Putting schools out of use in this way not only makes schools unusable or unsafe, but also can

make children fearful of going back to school when the conflict ends. Health facilities have also been targeted, putting children at risk.

- Third, all parties to the conflict should agree not to use explosive weapons in populated areas. To date, the primary cause of death of children in the Syrian conflict has been explosive weapons, killing over 70% of children whose cause of death was recorded. We must put a stop to the killing and maiming of children. All parties to conflict should refrain from the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas to ensure that civilians – in particular children – are protected against death, injury and psychological harm.

* * *

We thank the subcommittee for its leadership in addressing the Syrian refugee crisis. As the needs in the region continue to escalate, so too must our humanitarian commitment. We sincerely appreciate your attention to these important issues, and look to both the Administration and Congress to marshal the necessary support, including in upcoming appropriations legislation, to reduce the suffering and improve the outlook for the children and families of Syria. This is not only the right approach required by the scale of human suffering and America's long standing tradition of helping those in need, but also the smart approach for advancing U.S. interests in the region.



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

LIRS Statement for Hearing: “The Syrian Refugee Crisis”

Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights

January 7, 2014 -- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), the national organization established by Lutheran churches in the United States to serve uprooted people, welcomes the Senate Judiciary Committee’s attention to steps Congress and the Administration can take to address the plight of Syrian refugees fleeing the violent civil war in their home country. Started by Lutheran congregations in 1939, LIRS walks with migrants and refugees through ministries of service and justice, transforming U.S. communities by ensuring that newcomers are not only self-sufficient but also become connected and contributing members of their adopted communities in the United States. Working with and through partners across the country, LIRS resettles refugees, reunites children with their families or provides loving homes for them, conducts policy advocacy, and pursues humanitarian alternatives to the immigration detention system.

Over the past 75 years, LIRS has welcomed almost 400,000 refugees to the United States on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Today LIRS partners with 20 affiliate sites across the country, primarily Lutheran social ministry organizations, to welcome arriving refugees into American communities.

“Sadly, the Syrian refugee population includes severely vulnerable individuals: women and girls at risk, survivors of torture and violence, and persons with serious medical needs or disabilities,” said Linda Hartke, LIRS President and CEO. “LIRS and our national network stand ready to do what it takes to welcome into U.S. communities the most vulnerable Syrian refugees who cannot return home or integrate in the countries currently hosting them.”

Resettlement is considered a durable solution and a last resort for only a small fraction of the world’s most vulnerable refugees. LIRS is proud to be one of nine agencies that partners with the federal government, particularly the Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) and the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to be a part of this solution.

As the conflict in Syria continues to worsen, more than 2.3 million refugees, half of whom are children, have been forced to flee to neighboring countries. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is seeking to resettle approximately 40,000 particularly vulnerable Syrian refugees in FY 2014.

To date, few Syrians have been resettled in the United States. In FY 2013, the United States brought 69,930 refugees from around the globe to safety, a number closer to the annual Presidential determination than any year since 1980. This population included Iraqis, Burmese, Bhutanese, Somali and Cuban refugees. Refugees were welcomed into 186 communities in 49 states.



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

The U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program offers refugees safe haven and a chance at a new life, while also bringing tangible benefits to the communities that welcome them. Having endured incredible hardship and unimaginable horrors in their home countries, refugees often spend years exiled in host countries once they flee, awaiting the opportunity to rebuild their lives. Once they are resettled, refugees routinely become engaged and productive community members, contributing economically, socially, and spiritually to our communities. The support of welcoming communities, congregations, volunteers, employers, schools, foster families and others makes resettlement a successful public-private partnership. The federal government, particularly PRM and ORR, and state governments also play a vital role.

The United States should commit to resettling a higher number of vulnerable Syrian refugees. However, for such a commitment to be successful, greater attention must be paid to the processes of admission to the United States and the welcome available to refugees once they arrive.

Increased Funding Needs and Necessary Resettlement Reforms

While private support plays an important role in the reception and integration of refugees, federal resources are critical to ensure refugees receive essential services. Refugee populations arriving to the United States have changed significantly since the formal establishment of the resettlement program in the Refugee Act of 1980. Today's refugee population is much more diverse and vulnerable than it was more than three decades ago. Services also lack flexibility to be responsive to the diverse strengths and needs of refugees arriving today. Because funding has not kept up with these changes in ORR's mandate and diversifying client needs, ORR has strained to provide sufficient support and services to all of the populations under its care.

Resources available to refugee families and adults through ORR have remained stagnant for many years. To ensure that Syrian refugees resettled in the United States would receive the help they need to locate housing, receive medical attention and employment assistance, among other services, and to promote self-sufficiency and long-term integration this funding must be increased. Additionally, an unexpected surge in unaccompanied migrant children, who arrive at U.S. borders alone and vulnerable, has put additional strain on ORR's thin resources. Additional resources for ORR are desperately needed to provide quality care for not only arriving Syrian refugees, but also each and every individual escaping persecution to safety and dignity in the United States.

Reforms to Terrorism-Related Inadmissibility Grounds

In 2001, Congress enacted legislation that significantly broadened the definition of "terrorist activity." Because the definition is overly broad, it encompassed some activities that had no real-life connection to terrorism. For many refugees and asylum seekers, the very circumstances that form the basis of their claim of persecution are interpreted in a way that denies them entry into the U.S. Refugees and asylum seekers who are coerced into supporting "terrorist activity" or who have acted under duress may be denied protection by the U.S. government regardless of whether or not the "support" was voluntary.



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Many vulnerable Syrian refugees who pose no threat to national security face denial of protection and resettlement in the United States due to unintended consequences of the overly-broad application of the “material support to terrorist organizations” bar (and related bars) to admission. Indeed, current law threatens to exclude any Syrians who fought with any armed opposition group in Syria (regardless of whether or not the individual applicant was involved in any violations of international humanitarian law or other crimes), anyone who provided “material support” to any opposition force or opposition fighter, anyone who solicited funds or members for such a force, and even anyone whose spouse or parent is found to have done these things.

These bars are duplicative and carry severe consequences. Refugees and asylees are additionally required to pass intense security screenings and background checks as part of the admission process. People who commit war crimes, crimes against humanity, or who persecute others are inadmissible to the United States under other provisions of our immigration laws. However, overly broad “terrorism” bars prevent the ability of the United States to provide welcome to bona fide refugees seeking safety.

LIRS Recommendations

LIRS’s expertise, experience, and compassion drawn from decades of welcoming vulnerable newcomers inform our advocacy for just, humane treatment of people who seek protection in the United States and inspire the following recommendations.

To address current resettlement needs facing refugees, including the Syrian refugee crisis, and improve welcome for refugees in the United States, LIRS makes the following recommendations to Congress:

- **Ensure robust funding** of DOS’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration and HHS’s Office of Refugee Resettlement to better protect and assist refugees overseas and those resettled to the United States.
- **Enact pending legislation to strengthen refugee protections and resettlement**, including the Refugee Protection Act of 2013 (H.R. 1365/S. 645), the Domestic Refugee Resettlement Reform and Modernization Act (H.R. 1784/S. 883), and the Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act (H.R. 651). Many of these reforms were also included in the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013 (S. 744).
- **Amend problematic anti-terrorism provisions** that define “material support” too broadly. Such reforms are included in the Refugee Protection Act of 2013 (H.R. 1365/S. 645).

Additionally, LIRS makes the following recommendations to the Departments of Homeland Security, State and Justice:

- Implement discretionary authority to grant exemptions from provisions of U.S. immigration law that treat any rebellion against any established government as “terrorist activity” and any assistance to such a rebellion as “material support” to terrorism.
- DHS should also complete a long-pending review of its legal interpretation of the term “material support.” The current application of the “material support” bar is greatly inflating



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

the number of individuals and families unjustly affected by this provision of the immigration law.

Finally, LIRS is a member of Refugee Council USA and endorses the recommendations of the Council.

If you have any questions about this statement, please contact Brittney Nystrom, LIRS Director for Advocacy at bnystrom@lirs.org or 202.626.7943.



Personal Testimony

United States Senate

Committee on the Judiciary: Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights

"The Syrian Refugee Crisis"

January 7, 2014

Sally Urang, RN, CNM

Provided by Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS)

SAMS presents this personal testimony for the public record from a volunteer RN, Sally Urang, who participated in a 2-week medical mission where she worked providing medical and psychosocial care to refugees in Jordan.

To whom it may concern:

I am sorry to not be able to deliver this statement in person to the subcommittee.

I am an American nurse-midwife, Arabic-speaking, who recently went to Jordan through the generosity of the Syrian American Medical Society on a two-week medical mission with a midwife friend and colleague.

Although we were unable to work in the Za'atari camp due to very recent changes in the rules by the Jordanian government, we were able to work in two sites giving care to Syrian refugees, one in Amman and one in Irbid.

The situation for Syrian refugees is beyond dire. In our rounds with the SAMS Social Work team we encountered children who had not slept for more than an hour at a time for more than a year. We met a five year old boy from Homs who had seen his father slaughtered in front of him, whose constant, living nightmares were only palliated by his nonstop recitation of the first verse of the Quran.

We visited a patient in a hospital, a mother of three and a nurse, who was taken by the Syrian regime from the hospital in Damascus where she worked and beaten on the head and spine and left for dead. She is now a paraplegic.

The evil that is being visited upon innocent people in Syria is unspeakable.

I ask the subcommittee to consider immediately restoring aid to the humanitarian efforts underway on behalf of Syrian refugees and those Syrian citizens unfortunate enough to still be living in Syria. If we turn our backs on them, who will stand up for them?

Syria is a lovely country that I have had the pleasure of visiting three times in the recent past. They have been subject to unspeakable torment for almost three years.

Sincerely,
Sally Urang, RN, CNM

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

My name is Mohamad Eiad Charbaji. I was born in Damascus in 1977. I'm a journalist specializing in youth issues. When I was in Syria I ran a news organization called "Shabablk," which included magazine, a publishing house and a production company.

At the beginning of the revolution, in March 2011, I participated in demonstrations against the Syrian regime in Damascus and its countryside. I was recording the peaceful demonstrations and the regime's violent response. I then transferred my photos and video recordings to the media and post it on my Facebook page, which has 50,000 followers. I was exposed to a lot of harassment and threats because of this work. Later in 2011, two of my brothers were arrested, and eventually I was also arrested. I was arrested in June 2011 after I worked with other intellectuals, artists, and journalists to organize a demonstration in Midan, Damascus. The regime attacked us and arrested me and my colleagues. After torturing us, they released us a week later because of the media and public pressure.

In December 2011, I wrote an article on my Facebook page describing how the Syrian intelligences was involved in a bombing that took a place in Damascus that month. As a result of this post, I was again persecuted by the security forces. They attacked my office, my house, and my parents' house where they arrested my older brother (Mahmoud Charbaji) on 30 of December 2011. I had been hiding at my friend's house the whole time. I had to flee on foot to Jordan in mid-January 2012. Later that same month, I came to the United States after receiving an invitation from the U.S. Department of State under the [International Visitor Leadership Program](#). I eventually gained asylum in the U.S.

My difficulties were not over after gaining asylum. The U.S. asylum program's regulations and services make it more difficult for someone to live than other countries', especially European countries, programs. The U.S. government programs and the social services for refugees are very limited. The U.S government doesn't provide the basic necessities for life. For example, they provide health insurance for only a maximum of 8 months, and rarely provide a housing subsidy. They don't provide food stamps if you have more than \$2000 in

your bank account, but this doesn't make sense because a refugee family coming to the United States will likely have saved this amount of money to survive until someone can find work. This savings must often last for many months because of how difficult it is for refugees to find work, but it will be quickly depleted if it must be spent to feed one's family.

It is probably obvious that many refugees who just arrived in the U.S. don't speak much English, so even if they can get work authorization, which often takes many months, a refugee is obliged to work day and night in the worst conditions and at very low wages in order to be able to provide for his family.

Overall, the system does not provide a good start to the refugees' relationship with the United States. It does not make refugees feel welcome, and does not make it easy for them to start new lives. It often does not provide what many people expect, especially compared with similar systems in Europe. The system could be improved if there was more understanding of the problems refugees face, both physically and psychologically.

As a refugee, I believe that refugees who are running from wars and instability need more support and understanding, and more programs and resources to help them build new lives for themselves and their families.



**MUSLIM PUBLIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL
STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**

Hearing: The Syrian Refugee Crisis

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION, CIVIL RIGHTS and HUMAN RIGHTS**

UNITED STATES SENATE

JANUARY 07, 2014

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Cruz and members of the Subcommittee: We are honored to submit this statement for the record on behalf of the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) regarding today's hearing on the Syrian refugee crisis. We commend the leadership of the members of the Committee for holding today's hearing, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis."

MPAC is a faith based American institution working for the integration of Muslims into American pluralism. To that end, we actively strive to affect policy reforms that uphold core American values and preserve constitutionally protected freedoms of all Americans. We have done extensive work on the Syrian revolution, the refugee crisis and the humanitarian implications as a result of the ongoing conflict. There are real and substantive issues with the Syrian refugee crisis, the worst since the 1994 Rwandan crisis. As such, we urge Congress to follow your leadership and take increased measures to learn and understand the Syrian refugee crisis and ensure the ideals of the responsibility to protect the lives of innocent people as they seek refuge from a deadly conflict.



We thank you for holding this critical hearing on the Syrian refugee crisis. The hearing will address the plight of Syrian refugees fleeing the violent conflict in their home country.

Approximately 2.3 million Syrian refugees have fled the country since the outbreak of the war, and the number of refugees is projected to reach 3.5 million by the end of the year. Of the refugees, three-quarters are women and children, including 1.1 million children.

The U.N. High Commissioner on Refugees has stated this is the worst refugee crisis since the Rwandan genocide in 1994. This timely and important hearing will explore prospects for the United States accepting Syrian refugees. UNHCR is seeking to resettle approximately 40,000 vulnerable refugees this year. Typically, the U.S. accepts about half of resettled refugees. This hearing will also explore additional steps Congress and the Administration should take to address the Syrian refugee crisis.

The international community, led by the United States needs to step up and protect the civilians, who are needlessly suffering under the harsh conditions of al-Assad's brutal regime.

The Syrian refugee crisis must be addressed with a focus on humanitarian needs.

The question we must now ask ourselves is: How does the U.S. address current needs facing Syrian refugees while implementing a sustainable humanitarian response? The U.S. may be moving slowly on intervening in Syria because of the implications any action might cause. However, as the death toll has indicated, time is not on our side. The plight of the Syrian people must continue to be a priority for the U.S.



While the United States continues to be the biggest donor in humanitarian relief efforts in regards to the Syrian conflict, addressing the needs of Syrian refugees needs to be a priority for the U.S. and international community.

The U.S. has a generous track record when it comes to refugee resettlement. According to Rep. Adam Schiff (D- CA), “about six months ago [I] organized a letter to the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security to grant humanitarian parole to about 6,000 Syrians who are trying to be reunited with their families here in the United States.” The representative still has yet to hear a response. More needs to be done.

Conclusion

History has shown us the past efforts led by the highest levels of government have been pivotal in implementing a refugee resettlement program. We are at a moment in history when innocent lives are depending on the principles of our nation – human dignity, mercy and justice. Further, Congress must allocate and prioritize federal funding for increasing the number of Syrian refugees to the U.S.

MPAC is heartened by the Subcommittee’s leadership in holding this hearing and we are grateful for the opportunity to present our thoughts on the Syrian refugee crisis.

Thank you again for this opportunity to express the views of the Muslim Public Affairs Council. We welcome the opportunity for further dialogue and discussion about this important issue.



**Statement for the Hearing on the Syrian Refugee Crisis before the Judiciary Subcommittee on
the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights**

January 7th, 2014

The conflict in Syria has created one of the world's most pressing humanitarian situations in decades and has become a serious threat to peace and security in the region. Since 2011, more than 100,000 people have been killed¹ as a result of the conflict and more than six million people have been internally displaced or have fled as refugees to a neighboring country including Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, and Turkey, among other states.

There are approximately 2.1 million Syrian refugees who have registered or are waiting to be registered as refugees.² Half of the refugees in the region are children, below the age of 18.³ Those in displacement camps face overcrowding, inadequate access to basic services, rising rent and food prices and high levels of competition for limited job opportunities. Many refugees live in urban areas outside of the camps with little to no savings, often dwelling in makeshift shelters without access to running water and heat. Another 4.25 million IDPs within Syria have been displaced several times. The armed conflict has destroyed infrastructure, disrupted livelihoods, and cut off essential services, severely impacting access to food, water, housing, healthcare and education. The International Committee of the Red Cross estimates that dozens are dying every day due to limited access to health care and shortages in medical supplies.⁴ An estimated three quarters of the population of Syria will be in need of humanitarian assistance, and needs in Syria and for Syrian refugees will escalate as the conflict continues.

The war and the refugee crisis have had significant effects on Syria's neighbors in many ways. Jordan and Turkey each host more than 550,000 Syrian refugees. Zaatari, the largest camp for Syrian refugees in Jordan, has become the fourth largest city in Jordan. Jordan subsidizes bread, water, electricity, and household gas as a means of protection for Syrian refugees and these subsidized items to Syrian refugees have incurred considerable costs to the government.⁵ In addition to the thousands who are struggling to survive the dire winter conditions in the Zaatari camp, an unprecedented number of vulnerable refugees, including many with severe health conditions, leave the camp to various poor parts of Amman to seek help and escape the difficult conditions in the camp. When they do, they face many challenges and limited support. Since the first arrivals of Syrian refugees in late April 2011, Turkey has spent at least \$2 billion to protect and assist

¹UN News Service, *Syria: Head of independent UN panel appeals to Member States to end relentless carnage*, 29 July 2013, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/51f7786559.html>.

² For regularly updated figures on registration of Syrians, see: Syria Regional Refugee Response Information Sharing Portal, at <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees>.

³ UN High Commissioner for Refugees and UNICEF, *Joint Press Release, A million refugee children mark shameful milestone in Syria crisis*, 23 August 2013, <http://www.unhcr.org/521628cf9.html>.

⁴ In March 2013, ICRC warned that dozens of Syrians are dying every day due to limited access to health care and shortages of essential medical supplies; ICRC, *Syria: Timely access to health-care services a matter of life or death*, 1 March 2013, <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/update/2013/03-01-syria-health-care.htm>.

⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Countries Hosting Syrian Refugees: Solidarity and Burden-Sharing, Background papers for the High Level Segment," September 2013, <http://www.unhcr.org/525fe3e59.html>.

refugees.⁶ The presence of refugees has strained education, health care, and other services in these host countries. As such, tension between the refugee and host communities has been significant in the host countries. In a recent Senate Appropriations Committee hearing on assistance to Lebanon and Jordan, Lebanese Ambassador Antoine Chedid warned that the Syrian refugee crisis in his country “threatens to unravel the country, economically, politically, and socially.”⁷

There are also many psychological, relational and spiritual aspects of the conflict as well. Women and girls both within Syria and in refugee receiving countries have reported pervasive levels of gender based violence (GBV). The threat and use of sexual violence has been used to instill terror inside Syria and many refugees have cited the fear of sexual violence as a primary reason for fleeing from Syria. As refugees, Syrian women and girls report increased domestic violence, early/forced marriage, and sexual exploitation and abuse. The lack of information about and access to vital services and support in these settings pose acute protection concerns for Syrian refugees, particularly for women and children. Recent reports coming out of Jordan from UN Women indicate eighty-three percent of survivors of gender-based violence are not aware of any available services in their community.⁸

The UN launched an unprecedented appeal for \$6.5 billion in 2014 to assist millions of people affected by Syria’s conflict— the largest humanitarian appeal ever.⁹ The UN’s two main appeals are the OCHA-led Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) for people inside Syria and the UNHCR-led Regional Response Plan 6 (RRP) which focuses on refugees from Syria in neighboring countries. These would direct \$2.3 billion to help 9 million people inside Syria and \$4.2 billion to assist 4 million Syrian refugees in neighboring countries. The UN estimates that nearly three-quarters of Syrians will need humanitarian assistance in 2014. In 2013, the UN only managed to raise about 60 percent of its goal for Syria in 2013, a request of \$4.4 billion.

The situation in Syria has raised alarm within the evangelical community globally as reports of persecution of religious minorities, particularly Christians, has disrupted the relative tolerance and protection such groups enjoyed under the Syrian government for decades. Although Syria is majority Sunni Muslim, it has been home to a diverse set of religious groups, including to Christians, Druze, and Alawites. The country’s conflict threatens the relative level of protection that the government offered these religious minorities. The suffering of Christians in Syria both within the country and as refugees is reflective of a general trend within the Middle East where beatings, church burnings, and discrimination of Christians are becoming more common. A recent report by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom on a trip to the region found that religious minority refugees from Syria are not registering with UNHCR out of fear that they will be targeted as identifying with the regime, which means they are likely not receiving the assistance that is provided to registered refugees.¹⁰ Out of a growing global concern within the evangelical community regarding the crisis, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and the World Evangelical Alliance cosponsored a Day of Prayer for Syria on December 18th, 2013 to elevate the evangelical community’s awareness of the plight of Syrian refugees as well as to pray for peace in Syria. As the needs of those

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Statement of the Ambassador of Lebanon to the United States of America Antoine Chedid before the Senate Appropriations Committee hearing on assistance to Lebanon and Jordan, 10 December 2013, <http://www.appropriations.senate.gov/record.cfm?method=hearings.view&id=58085daf-8656-4671-83b6-a010f753217c>.

⁸ UN Women, “Inter-Agency Assessment: Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, with a Focus on Early Marriage,” 2013, <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>.

⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “UN Appeals for record US \$6.5 billion for Syria operations in 2014,” 16 December 2013, <http://www.unhcr.org/52aedd62db.html>.

¹⁰ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Factsheet Syria: Syria’s Refugee Crisis and its Implications*, July 2013, [http://www.uscifr.gov/images/Syria%20Factsheet%20-%20July%2018\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscifr.gov/images/Syria%20Factsheet%20-%20July%2018(2).pdf).

displaced by violence continue to grow, numerous evangelical groups, including World Relief, are responding together with partners and churches on the ground.

As efforts continue to bring an end to the conflict in Syria, there is a strong role the United States and international community can play to ensure that civilians are protected, displaced persons are assisted, and those in urgent need of protection are resettled to a third country.

Specifically, we urge the United States to:

- **Ensure adequate levels of funding for international assistance programs directed toward humanitarian crises such as Syria.** We are encouraged to see the increase in humanitarian accounts in the continuing resolution for FY14 and support the FY14 allocation of \$2.9 billion for the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) Account and \$1.6 billion for the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account. We also support funding the Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) at \$250 million. Given the growing needs in Syria, we urge robust funding levels that will enable the United States to contribute its share to the UN appeals and also respond to other global crises.
- **Provide particular attention to urban refugees in programmatic assistance as well as diplomatic engagements.** Despite the attention and resources refugee camps receive, most Syrian refugees – about 70 percent regionally – do not live in formal refugee camps but rather among host communities. Access to shelter and the ability to pay for it remain critical problems for many urban refugees. Similarly, access to health care and education are critical, including psycho-social trauma counseling and other critical needs. Outreach on how to safely access services should be improved. Bilateral assistance to neighboring governments and a holistic funding response including support for the work of private organizations can help facilitate such access and ensure services reach women and girls in particular. Funding in response to the Syrian crisis should also support partnerships with local organizations to serve communities with high numbers of refugees as many live outside the camps and are best served by the communities themselves. This will help alleviate tensions with host communities and provide more stability to host countries.
- **Encourage countries to keep their borders open.** The borders of neighboring countries are increasingly “managed” preventing those with bona fide claims from finding safety in another country. Turkey, for example, regularly denies entry to refugees without documents until space is available in the camps, which has led to the formation of several IDP camps along the Syrian side of the Turkish border. Reports also suggest that Lebanon has put more restrictive border controls in place, denying entry to refugees with damaged documentation, while entry to Iraq remains very limited. The United States and the international community should work with host countries to make sure they have the support they need to keep the borders open and allow refugees to access government services, especially health care, education, and specialized assistance for women and girls. The United States and international community should help ensure that vulnerable Syrian civilians are able to escape the conflict and seek sanctuary.
- **Increase efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.** Gender-based violence survivors in Syria, in refugee camps, and in urban contexts are in urgent need of lifesaving medical and psychosocial services that take into account their unique needs and risks. Many lack access to these services and those that are in place are often insufficient, not adequately staffed or not specialized. There remains a real risk of suicide and “honor” killings in Syria and refugee settings where women and girls have experienced sexual violence. Providers of medical and psychosocial services need to have a proper understanding of these risks so they do not inadvertently further expose and endanger survivors. Effective complaint mechanisms for cases of sexual exploitation and abuse must be put in place. The United States, along with other donors, should commit to scaling up successful GBV prevention programs and survivor services and ensure that providers are properly resourced and trained.

- **Expand expedited resettlement in the US of vulnerable Syrian refugees for whom eventual repatriation is unlikely to be a viable solution.** The United States accepts more refugees for resettlement than any country in the world. However, in FY2013, the United States resettled only 36 Syrian refugees; in 2012, 31 Syrians and, in 2011, 29. Syrian refugees who face acute protection needs should be considered for resettlement. Providing resettlement for the most vulnerable will be an important burden-sharing tool for regional host countries as well as a critical humanitarian response for those who cannot return to Syria or locally integrate. With the Syrian private and public social safety net shredded by the civil conflict and economic collapse, a greater number of Syrian refugees should be provided permanent homes where they can rebuild their lives in peace.
- **Ameliorate unintended consequences of Terrorism-related Inadmissibility Grounds (TRIG) that bar bona fide refugees and asylum-seekers from protection.** As Syrian refugees are considered for resettlement to the United States, the U.S. should ensure that refugee resettlement is a viable protection tool by ameliorating unintended consequences of Terrorism-related Inadmissibility Grounds (TRIG) that bar bona fide refugees and asylum-seekers from protection. We urge USCIS to allow officers to examine cases and provide relief to individuals on a case-by-case basis for refugees who had voluntary associations with Tier III groups not designated as terrorist groups or treated as such by the U.S. government in any other context. Many Syrian refugees have fought with armed opposition groups in Syria and/or provided “material support” to those from the opposition. The sweeping nature of the law’s “terrorism”-related provisions would mean many vulnerable Syrians who have engaged in no wrongdoing and pose no threat to the United States could not be admitted to the United States as bona fide refugees and asylum-seekers.
- **Develop a long-term strategy to respond to refugee needs.** The destruction in Syria is such that even should the political violence be resolved soon, refugees are unlikely to be able to immediately return to Syria. To address the protracted crisis, the Administration needs to develop a long-term plan for how to help the region properly address refugees and host communities’ needs, and for refugees to be able to have a dignified life in neighboring countries in the future. This plan should include coordination with other donors, especially Gulf States. Aid from non-traditional donors like the Gulf States is an important new stream but it remains outside of the main coordination channels. The United States should make a high-level diplomatic push to encourage Gulf States to join UN coordination and reporting structures as part of a longer term planning process.
- **Engage in a robust regional peace process.** Given the rising violence and growing instability, not only within Syria but in surrounding countries, Syria urgently needs a political solution that ends the fighting and creates a peaceful future for all Syrians. We urge the United States to work with other governments to contain the violence, restore stability in the region, provide humanitarian assistance, and encourage the building of an inclusive society in Syria that protects the rights of all its citizens, including vulnerable populations such as religious minorities and women.

Written Statement by

Omar al Muqdad

Syrian Refugee Resettled to the United States

For a Hearing Before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on

The Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights

“The Ongoing Syrian Refugee Crisis”

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Room 226 Dirksen Senate Office Building

I was born in 1979 in Bosra, Dara'a, Syria, and am a Sunni Muslim, like the majority of people in Syria. After graduating from high school, I graduated with a University degree from the College of Political Science at Damascus University, majoring in international relations. When the time came, I refused to do military service because I did not want to be part of the Syrian army's human rights abuses. The government interrogated me related to my refusal and put me into jail for four months.

I worked as a journalist for over nine years, including in print media and later on in traditional and social media. Because the mainstream media in Syria is so limited in what journalists can say about the human rights situation, I became involved also in three different online magazines to write about the human rights abuses by the Syrian government.

I was arrested seven times and one of our magazines was shut down three times by Syrian security forces, and I was imprisoned for two years, between 2006 and 2008, for my work as a journalist writing about the human rights violations of the Syrian government. During my time as a prisoner of conscience, there was brutal treatment, poor food and water and sanitation, and awful living conditions. To give you some idea, my time in prison began with the guards talking to me. They said that all that I had to do was stop writing, and they would go easy on me. I said that I would not stop writing. I told them that if I see something wrong, I will write about it. They said they would help me to stop writing. They put my hand out flat on the table and broke it.

Not long after I was released, I continued working as a journalist to write against the Syrian government's human rights violations. I was one of the Syrian young people who participated in nonviolent political protests in Dara'a against the President of Syria in March 2011. The Syrian military ruthlessly pursued anyone involved in the protests and also family members and associates of protestors. They pursued me. Three of my friends were arrested and their dead, tortured bodies were returned to their families. I worked during that time to release videos to the outside world that documented the atrocities committed by the Syrian security forces, like the video showing an ambulance being gunned down by the security forces. I fled from my home and frequently moved, never staying in the same place from one night to the next. They called me and told me that they would find me no matter where I went. In April 2011 I fled from Syria. Soon after that, my mother was forced to flee, as well.

Although I was not sure if I would be safe there, I fled to Turkey. Some months later, the staff of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) interviewed me and declared me to be a refugee. I lived for over a year in Turkey and assisted international media that covered Syria. What had started in Syria in March 2011 as a nonviolent political protest began to grow into a blood bath. One of the most important reports I contributed to during my time in Turkey was with the Cable News Network (CNN) about the anti-personnel mines planted by the Syrian regime near the Turkish border to prevent Syrian refugees from escaping. These mines kept thousands of Syrians who were already fleeing for their lives from the government bombing of their homes from seeking refuge in Turkey.

In June 2012, U.S. officials approved me to come to the United States, and I was resettled by Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas. I spent my first week staying with a

family. They were very hospitable and kind to me. There was such quiet and peace in the countryside of Arkansas. It is very beautiful and natural. I needed that rest. Catholic Charities staff helped me get oriented to the community, to find a permanent place to live, and to make connections in the community. It made my transition into the U.S. so much easier.

My resettlement has provided me more safety and security as I continue to be a Syrian human rights activist and journalist, calling for an end to the bloodshed and for freedom and democracy for all Syrian people. Several months ago, I moved to the Washington, D.C., area to continue my work as a journalist.

I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank you and the American people for providing me refuge in the United States.

Also, I would like to urge you to do all that you can to bring a peaceful and just end to the bloodshed in Syria, to help as winter falls to provide shelter, food, and water for the Syrian refugees flooding into Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, and to make U.S. resettlement available for more Syrian refugees.

Obviously, the U.S. cannot resettle all of the hundreds of thousands of people who have fled from Syria into Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. But there are many very vulnerable people who could be helped. Many vulnerable women and children, including women with problem pregnancies and girls subject to forced marriages. There are many orphans, elderly people, and sick people, and many people who are at serious risk of harm. These people need U.S. resettlement. It will save them and give them new lives.

As the struggle continues, I believe in my heart that the greatest weapons available to stop the bloodshed are not rifles and bombs but cameras and computers that document the atrocities and reveal them to the outside world.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my statement.



Statement for the Record to the
Senate Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights
Hearing on "The Syrian Refugee Crisis"
January 7, 2014

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Recommendations

The conflict in Syria is having a devastating human impact. More than 100,000 people have been killed, and nearly half of the country's pre-war population is in need of humanitarian assistance inside the country. Oxfam is working in Syria as well as with refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, which between them are hosting more than 1.4 million Syrians. Based on this work, we offer the following recommendations for action by the United States Government:

1. Accelerate efforts to find a political solution to the crisis in Syria.
2. Focus on the more than 6.5 million Syrians displaced within their own country in addition to the more than 2.3 million refugees who have fled Syria.
3. Ensure that the refugee response reflects the reality that more than 80% of refugees live outside of formal camps.
4. Support host communities which are on the front lines of responding to the refugee crisis.
5. Enhance resettlement as a durable solution for refugees, while focusing humanitarian response efforts on the lion's share of refugees who will remain in the region.
6. Invest now in reconciliation amongst refugees.
7. Recognize the long-term nature of this crisis and promote the contributions that refugees can make to the countries hosting them.

Context

1. Accelerate efforts to find a political solution to the crisis in Syria.

It is impossible to discuss the Syrian refugee crisis without considering the conflict which gave rise to it. Geneva II Peace talks scheduled to begin on 22 January could mark a critical step in bringing an end to the suffering of Syrians, and ultimately enabling the displaced to return home to rebuild their lives, but only if the United States works with partners to ensure the talks take place.

Talks must be inclusive and adequately represent all parts of Syrian society, including non-military actors. A formal mechanism for the involvement of civil society – developed in consultation with these groups themselves – could help ensure that their participation is meaningful and that civil society organizations feel ownership in the peace process. Women must play an active part, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and talks must be enforced by measures that will make a difference to Syrians including a ceasefire and allowing those in need to access aid.

2. Focus on the more than 6.5 million Syrians displaced within their own country in addition to the more than 2.3 million refugees who have fled Syria.

The United States has contributed generously to meet the humanitarian needs of both refugees and Syrians inside their country in need of assistance, including the more than 6.5 million people who have been internally displaced. The US must ensure that it provides

such aid impartially and separate from political aims. With conflict ongoing however, too many people are unable to access aid. The United Nations has estimated that 2.5 million people are in hard-to-reach areas, many of whom have gone more than a year without receiving assistance.¹ While working to put an end to the conflict, the United States must work bilaterally and through the UN Security Council to ensure that both the Syrian Government and opposition groups immediately halt tactics of warfare that deny civilians their right to assistance. Additionally, they must remove bureaucratic obstacles to the delivery of aid, ensure the safety of humanitarian workers, allow unhindered access for national and international humanitarian organizations to reach all parts of the country where people are in need, and allow civilians to flee areas of active conflict.

3. Ensure that the refugee response reflects the reality that more than 80% of refugees live outside of formal camps.

The hundreds of thousands of refugees living in camps in Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq need an international response which provides for their needs, including adequate food, water, shelter, and security. Many more, however, live outside of formal camps, and often do not benefit from the same level of service delivery. Many do not have access to information about services available to them. In Lebanon, where there are no formal camps in place, refugees live in more than 1,200 locations around the country. Many are living in overcrowded rented apartments, half-constructed buildings, and tents and other makeshift structures that often provide little shelter from the elements. The United States must ensure that these and other refugees living outside of camps do not slip between the cracks, and allocate funding commensurate with the number of these refugees and their particular situations and needs.

4. Support host communities which are on the front lines of responding to the refugee crisis.

Syria's neighbors have been incredibly generous in hosting and providing for refugees. But the huge number of refugees – in Lebanon, they account for an estimated 25% of the population – and the protracted nature of the crisis is straining this generosity as services and infrastructure are being over-stretched. At the same time, instances of tensions and conflicts between refugees and the communities hosting them are on the rise.

The United States must ensure that neighboring countries allow refugees to seek asylum. Moreover, assistance that is provided must be based on need rather than on status. Potentially large numbers of Syrians are not registering with the United Nations for a variety of reasons, including safety concerns, and they must not be excluded from receiving aid on this basis. Similarly, the particular needs of Palestinian Refugees from Syria cannot be overlooked, especially in light of their varying legal status in different countries in the region.

One potential solution is to focus assistance projects on areas known to be hosting large numbers of refugees so as to improve the situation for all people living in those areas. Given that refugees are often living in poorer and more marginalized parts of their host countries,

¹ UN OCHA, "Fighting continues to intensify across the country and its impact on civilians continues to grow," <http://www.unocha.org/top-stories/all-stories/syria-%E2%80%99Fighting-continues-intensify-across-country-and-its-impact-civilians>, 25 October 2013. Accessed 5 January 2014.

this would benefit both refugees and host communities and serve to lower tensions between refugees and the communities which are hosting them.

5. Enhance resettlement as a durable solution for refugees, while focusing humanitarian response efforts on the lion's share of refugees who will remain in the region.

The US can be proud of its status as the leading resettlement country for refugees. Resettlement to the United States and other countries is crucial for providing durable solutions to Syrians who are neither safe in Syria nor who can safely seek asylum in neighboring countries. We must ensure that Syrians with particular needs can receive protection through resettlement to the US, and explore the possibility of providing special measures for Syrian refugees given the acute nature of the crisis. Nevertheless, resettlement worldwide only provides durable solutions for approximately 1 percent of refugees², and so the US must continue to focus on efforts which ensure the needs of the approximately 99% of refugees who will continue to seek asylum in the region are fully met.

6. Invest now in reconciliation amongst refugees.

With sectarian and political tensions rising as the conflict in Syria enters its fourth year, it is crucial to both prevent conflict amongst refugees, and to plant the seeds for reconciliation that will enable safe return and sustainable peace in Syria following the conclusion of a formal peace agreement. The United States should invest in these efforts now, working to identify potential conflicts and preventing them before they take place, and enhancing efforts to reconcile communities which have been divided by the ongoing conflict.

7. Recognize the long-term nature of this crisis and promote the contributions that refugees can make to the countries hosting them.

Despite their longing to return home, refugees with whom Oxfam works in the region regularly highlight their perception that they will be displaced for a long time to come. Even after a peace agreement is eventually reached, destroyed homes, businesses, and infrastructure will make a speedy return difficult for many refugees.

In the meantime, refugees from Syria can contribute to the communities and countries in which they are living. Restrictive employment laws, however, are preventing many refugees from doing so, undermining their efforts to provide for themselves and their families. In Jordan, refugees are prohibited from working. In Lebanon, where refugees are prohibited from working in many sectors of the economy, jobs that are available are typically low-paid and offer little security. Jobs in agriculture and construction, two of the sectors which provide the majority of employment for Syrians in Lebanon, for example, dry up in the winter, leaving refugees without a steady income. A recent Oxfam study of more than 1500 refugees in Lebanon found families spiraling deeper into debt, living in cramped and overcrowded accommodation with few job prospects. With people spending more than twice of their monthly incomes on necessities including food and rent, more than three-quarters of households surveyed reported carrying debt. Fewer than twenty per cent of those surveyed were able to find work, but with every working person supporting more

² UNHCR, *Resettlement*, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a16b1676.html>. Accessed 5 January 2014.

than five other people in addition to him or herself, every dollar earned is stretched to the limit. Refugees and vulnerable Lebanese need greater livelihoods opportunities, which could include cash-for-work programmes, savings schemes, vocational training and job placement, and training opportunities.

Across the region, while recognizing the legitimate concerns that refugee-hosting countries have for unemployment amongst their own citizens, the United States should engage with these countries to find ways to enable refugees to work which can contribute both to the wellbeing of refugees and to their host countries.

Statement for the Record of Refugee Council USA

Submitted to

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Hearing on

“The Syrian Refugee Crisis”

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Background

The conflict in Syria has brought on the world's worst displacement crisis in over 30 years. In Geneva in September 2013, Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns described the scale and scope of the crisis in Syria as "staggering," observing that "more people have been displaced from Syria than from genocide in Rwanda or ethnic cleansing in the Balkans."ⁱ At the beginning of December 2013, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that almost 126,000 people had been killed, more than a third of them civilians.ⁱⁱ The United Nations (U.N.) has reported that as of November 2013 more than 2.3 million have fled to neighboring countries as refugees, 6.5 million more are displaced from their homes within Syria, and 9.3 million inside Syria are in desperate need of humanitarian assistanceⁱⁱⁱ - and those staggering statistics only continue to increase. Geneva II peace talks are scheduled to be convened on January 22, 2014, but there is little optimism that they will end this war. In the meantime, the Syrian regime continues what a U.N. investigative panel has deemed its "campaign of terror" against civilians.^{iv}

The United States has made a major commitment to respond to the humanitarian needs of those inside Syria as well as those who have fled to neighboring countries. So far the United States has contributed more than \$1.3 billion towards humanitarian efforts, including providing life-saving food, medical, and other emergency assistance.^v Congressional leaders have shown their commitment to helping those affected by the conflict and many (including Senators Blumenthal,^{vi} Coons,^{vii} Corker^{viii}, Cornyn,^{ix} Durbin^x, Graham, Gillibrand, Hoeven,^{xi} Klobuchar,^{xii} and McCain^{xiii}) have visited the region and taken time to meet with Syrian refugees. The United States also views the Syria crisis, and the resulting refugee flows, as an important foreign policy imperative given the potential impact on regional stability and security, as well as the stability of key U.S. allies such as Jordan. As a result, the United States has viewed the provision of aid to assist refugee-hosting countries as an integral component of helping manage the regional impact of the Syrian crisis.

A year ago, a total of 370,000 Syrian refugees were registered in the region. Now Jordan and Turkey each host over 550,000 Syrian refugees, Lebanon hosts about 850,000, Iraq over 200,000 and Egypt over 130,000.^{xiv} The war and the refugee crisis have severely affected Syria's neighbors in many ways. Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon have incurred significant costs through provision of access to health care and other services. For example, Jordan subsidizes bread, water, electricity, and household gas as a means of social protection for the poor and the extension of these subsidized items to Syrian refugees has incurred considerable costs to the government.^{xv} In Turkey's case, the costs of the 21 camps reportedly amount to over \$2 billion already and there has been limited assistance from other donors. In some areas in particular, the presence of refugees has increased the number of people trying to access education, health care, and other services, as well as seek any form of employment. In a recent Senate Appropriations Committee hearing on assistance to Lebanon and Jordan, Lebanese Ambassador Antoine Chedid spoke of the dire effects the Syria refugee crisis has had on Lebanon and warned that "it threatens to unravel the country, economically, politically, and socially."^{xvi}

As it addresses this crisis and the suffering of the Syrian people, the United States should continue its efforts to end the conflict and to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need inside Syria. The United States should also significantly strengthen efforts to protect and assist those who have fled Syria into neighboring countries and beyond, including continuing to provide significant humanitarian assistance, urging international protection of refugees at borders, and by participating in the global resettlement initiative for Syrian refugees.

In order to lead in protecting and supporting refugees from Syria, and safeguarding regional stability, the United States should champion protection for those fleeing persecution and conflict and prepare for the longer term by immediately launching a meaningful resettlement initiative.

Champion protection for those fleeing persecution and conflict

A wide array of human rights and humanitarian organizations have documented gaps in protection for refugees fleeing Syria^{xvii}. Options for those fleeing the violence are becoming more limited. Jordan and Turkey have both pledged to keep their borders open to refugees but in practice have placed restrictions on the ability of some civilians to cross into their territory. Jordan officially denies entry to Palestinians and Iraqis fleeing Syria, routinely denies entry to men traveling alone, and has often required refugees including families and the elderly to return to the interior of Syria and then come back to the border in 30-40 days. Turkey routinely denies entry to refugees without documents until space is available in the camps, leading to the formation of many internally displaced person (IDP) camps along the Syrian side of the Turkish border. Conditions in the IDP camps are appalling and some of the camps have come under fire from the Syrian regime. Reports suggest that Lebanon has now put more restrictive border controls in place, is denying entry to refugees with damaged documentation,^{xviii} and is limiting entry for some Palestinians from Syria.^{xix} Although Iraq temporarily opened a border crossing at Peshkhabour in August allowing thousands of refugees to cross, entry into Iraq is now very limited. Egypt has imposed visa requirements for Syrian nationals, which effectively bars most Syrian refugees from seeking protection in Egypt. Countries in Europe including Bulgaria and Greece have imposed obstacles preventing Syrians and others from crossing their borders in search of protection. These moves prompted UNHCR to express its concern about European countries placing barriers to entry or forcibly returning asylum-seekers, including those who have fled Syria, and to call for a global moratorium on any return of Syrians to neighboring countries.^{xx}

Recommendations

- **Press states to lift barriers to protection:** U.S. officials at the highest levels, including President Obama and Secretary Kerry, as well as Members of Congress, should urge all states to end any bans, prohibitions, closures, entry quotas, and restrictions that are inconsistent with international human rights and refugee protection standards — including bans and restrictions that are preventing Iraqis and Palestinians from crossing borders in search of protection. While statements committing to keep borders open to refugees should be warmly welcomed, the United States should also encourage border practices that are consistent with international human rights and refugee protection law. U.S. officials should also urge states to provide protection for Palestinian refugees from Syria and not deny protection to mixed families of Syrian and Palestinian refugees.
- **Compile weekly reports on the border situation:** U.S. Embassies should compile weekly reports on the ability of refugees to cross into neighboring countries from Syria based on information from government counterparts, humanitarian partners and U.S. government sources, including information on the numbers denied entry and the reasons they were turned away. U.S. officials should raise reports of restrictions, bans, closures, delays, and denials of entry with government counterparts and intervene to support protection in individual cases when necessary.

- **Step up support to refugee-hosting states:** The United States should step up its support and encourage other states to increase support for refugee-hosting states through development assistance, bilateral aid, and increased funding of U.N. humanitarian appeals. Senior U.S. officials should make clear to states benefiting from U.S. assistance that the United States expects all refugees — regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, or other similar characteristic — to be allowed to cross borders to access protection. Any individuals who present legitimate risks can and should be excluded from protection only after a fair and individualized assessment conducted in accordance with international standards.
- **Support meaningful border monitoring by UNHCR and human rights monitors:** The United States should encourage and support the expansion of human rights and refugee protection monitoring at borders and at airports by UNHCR and independent human rights monitors. This should include monitoring inside the facilities where decisions over whether to admit or deny entry take place. PRM should encourage UNHCR to include questions on access at the border in its registration for new arrivals in Jordan and in its monitoring in the camps in Turkey, and should encourage UNHCR to raise restrictions on access directly with refugee-hosting states as well as publicly.
- **Support protection training and capacity at borders:** The United States should work with the European Union and other states to provide support to host governments to implement the training and procedures necessary to ensure that refugees are not turned away at borders, and that individuals are only denied access to protection after a fair and individualized assessment conducted in accordance with international human rights and refugee protection standards. The United States should also include a component on protection of refugees in its existing training programs with border officials.

Prepare for the longer term by laying groundwork for eventual returns and launching a meaningful resettlement initiative

Refugees first began fleeing Syria in larger numbers in April 2012. Now, three years into the crisis, it is time for the international community and refugee hosting states to start planning for the longer term.

With the destruction of homes and infrastructure in Syria, along with the ongoing violence, many refugees are now realizing that their displacement may last years, and some will never be able to return home. The international community, host governments in the region, and humanitarian organizations need to start exploring longer term options for displaced Syrian refugees.

As of November 2013, the United States has so far resettled very few Syrian refugees. In the past fiscal year the United States resettled 36 Syrian refugees; in FY 2012, 31 Syrians were resettled; and, in FY 2011, 29. The United States has committed to resettling another 34,000 refugees from the Near East and South Asia during fiscal year 2014, including Syrian refugees, an increase of only 3,000 from last year's refugee admissions ceiling.^{xxi} In order to truly help alleviate the Syria refugee crisis and support host countries through resettlement, the United States must significantly increase the number of Syrians it resettles, including the most vulnerable.

Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan have all expressed an interest in increased resettlement of Syrian refugees, but some fear that a token resettlement effort would hardly make an impact and might

even attract more refugees to their countries. To have a real effect, the international community must launch a substantial resettlement program, and the United States should lead the way with the world's largest refugee resettlement program by a wide margin.

UNHCR has encouraged states outside the region to increase the numbers of refugees they receive either through resettlement or humanitarian admission to support the primary host countries in the region. In remarks to states at the High Level Segment on Syrian refugees in early October, UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres stated; "It is not only financial, economic, and technical support to these States which is needed... It also includes receiving through resettlement, humanitarian admission, family reunification, or similar mechanisms, refugees who are today in the neighboring countries but who can find a solution outside the region."^{xxii}

UNHCR announced in June 2013 that it would seek 2,000 resettlement places for some of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees,^{xxiii} including women and girls at risk, survivors of violence and/or torture, unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs), vulnerable older persons, LGBTI refugees at risk, persons with serious medical needs or disabilities, minorities (such as Christians), as well as those facing serious risks to their safety. UNHCR has subsequently proposed that countries admit up to 30,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2014 either through resettlement, humanitarian admissions, or other means, including family reunification. So far Europe, Australia, and Canada have offered 15,244 places for humanitarian admission or resettlement.^{xxiv}

A major obstacle that threatens to delay and impede the resettlement of Syrians to the United States is the overly broad inadmissibility provisions under U.S. immigration law intended to bar those who engaged in terrorist activity. For a number of years now, overbroad definitions and interpretations of the terms "terrorist organization" and "terrorist activity" in U.S. immigration law have ensnared people with no real connection to terrorism.^{xxv} Currently, these definitions are being applied to anyone who at any time used armed force as a non-state actor or gave support, however minimal, to those who did. In the past, these provisions have been used to exclude Iraqi refugees who supported the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, Sudanese who fought against the armed forces of President Omar Al-Bashir, and Eritreans who fought for independence from Ethiopia. As a coalition of Jewish groups noted in a letter to President Bush in 2006, "Shockingly, under today's laws, Jews who bravely resisted and survived Nazi terror would be excluded from refuge in the United States. Under current policy, the Warsaw ghetto uprising would be considered a 'terrorist activity' because it involved the use of weapons against persons or property for reasons other than 'mere personal monetary gain.'"^{xxvi}

In the Syrian context, these statutory provisions threaten to exclude from refugee protection anyone who fought with any armed opposition group in Syria (regardless of whether or not the individual applicant was involved in any violations of international humanitarian law or other crimes), anyone who provided "material support" to any opposition force or opposition fighter, anyone who solicited funds or members for such a force, and even anyone whose *spouse or parent* is found to have done any of these things. While anyone who bears responsibility for war crimes, crimes against humanity, or the persecution of other people should be excluded from refugee protection, and is in fact excludable under other provisions of U.S. immigration law, the sweeping nature of the law's "terrorism"-related provisions would affect people who have engaged in no wrongdoing and pose no threat to the United States.

Ironically, these “terrorism bars” would not apply to any of the actions of the armed forces of the Assad regime, because the U.S. government considers these statutory definitions to concern only non-state actors. The result is that unless swift action is taken to correct this problem, these laws will exclude from refugee protection anyone who assisted opposition groups, even those whose military efforts the U.S. government supports, against a regime it has repeatedly condemned.

The following recommendations contain suggestions for launching a meaningful resettlement initiative and removing TRIG barriers to the effectiveness of such an initiative.

Recommendations

- **Lay groundwork for return:** The United States should support all efforts to make sure returns are voluntary and informed, and invest in programs aimed at preparing and laying groundwork for eventual return movements, including preparation for addressing issues of land, property rights, documentation, and reconstruction.
- **Launch a Meaningful Resettlement Initiative:** The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (PRM and DHS) —with support and leadership from the White House and security vetting agencies — should increase resettlement for vulnerable Syrian refugees facing protection challenges — including victims of torture, (LGBTI) persons facing risks, women at risk, and those facing acute security threats — and should take steps to launch a more significant resettlement effort that will demonstrate real burden-sharing to Jordan, Turkey, and other refugee-hosting states in the region.
 - PRM should provide support to help increase UNHCR’s capacity to do refugee status determination, resettlement, and “best interest determinations.”
 - PRM should increase staff capacity in U.S. Resettlement Support Centers;
 - DHS should increase its capacity to conduct circuit rides to the region to interview refugees slated for potential resettlement;
 - DHS should work with security vetting agencies to increase the number of security checks that can be expedited in order to better expedite resettlement for refugees facing significant risks; and
 - Security vetting agencies and the White House should ensure sufficient staffing for security background checks.
- **Proactively address unintended and unjust impediments to resettlement:**
 - DHS, DOS, and DOJ should act now to implement their discretionary authority to grant exemptions from provisions of U.S. immigration law that treat any rebellion against any established government as “terrorist activity” and any assistance to such a rebellion as “material support” to terrorism. Specifically, DHS, in consultation with DOS and DOJ, should act now to:
 - Allow exemptions to be issued on a case-by-case basis to anyone who voluntarily provided non-violent assistance to a Syrian armed opposition group. Such exemptions would only be available to applicants who have passed all applicable security and background checks, have established that they meet the refugee definition and are not subject to any other bars, and did not knowingly support activities that targeted noncombatants or U.S. interests; such exemptions are

unavailable by statute to anyone who provided material support to a group that is designated or listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S. government.

- Allow exemptions to be granted on a case-by-case basis to former combatants who otherwise meet the refugee definition and are not subject to any other bars, have passed all applicable security and background checks, establish that they pose no threat to the safety or security of the United States, and (1) were children at the time or (2) did not participate in, or knowingly provide material support to, activities that targeted noncombatants or U.S. interests.
- DHS should also complete a long-pending review of its legal interpretation of the term “material support.” The current application of the “material support” bar to minimal donations and to routine commercial transactions with members of armed groups is greatly inflating the number of cases unjustly affected by this provision of the immigration law.
- **Continue and improve resettlement of Iraqi and other refugees:** The United States should continue to resettle Iraqi refugees and find ways to conduct USCIS interviews with Iraqis trapped in Syria who are waiting to be resettled to the United States. Bringing these refugees to safety should be a high priority for U.S. officials. Options that should be pressed include evacuation and safe passage to Jordan and should also include the use of video-conferencing. The United States has a special responsibility to address the plight of this population. Moreover, continued resettlement of Iraqi refugees — as well as resettlement of Somali, Sudanese, and other refugees in the region — will demonstrate U.S. commitment to helping host countries. DHS should also provide more detailed information to refugees awaiting resettlement on the reasons for delays in the adjudication of their applications as well as reasons for denials.

For the sake of regional stability and security, and to address the greatest humanitarian crisis of our time, the United States cannot shrink from playing a leadership role in ensuring international protection for Syria’s refugees and offering the most vulnerable among them the hope of resettlement.

ⁱ Intervention at UNHCR Excom High-Level Segment, Deputy Secretary of State William J. Burns, Sept. 30 2013, available at: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2013/09/20130930283777.html#axzz2IHT9mmDS>

ⁱⁱ Erika Solomon, “Syria death toll hits nearly 126,000: monitoring group,” *Reuters*, December 2, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/02/us-syria-crisis-toll-idUSBRE9B10ES20131202>

ⁱⁱⁱ USAID, Syria Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #4, FY 2014, December 5, 2013, available at: http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/syria_ce_fs04_12-05-2013.pdf

^{iv} Nick Cumming-Bruce, *New York Times*, “U.N. panel cites ‘terror’ campaign against Syrian civilians,” December 19, 2013, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/20/world/middleeast/syria.html?ref=middleeast&_r=0

^v USAID, Syria Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #4, FY 2014, December 5, 2013, available at: http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/syria_ce_fs04_12-05-2013.pdf

^{vi} “Bipartisan group of senators support more aid to Syrian rebels,” Kris Anne Bonifacio, *Medill on the Hill*, <http://medillonthehill.net/2013/01/senators-support-more-aid-to-syrian-rebels/>

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- ^{vii} "Senator Coons questions Kerry, Hagel, Dempsey on Syria," Ian Koski, September 4, 2013, <http://www.coons.senate.gov/blog/?tag=Jordan>
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Statement for the Record

United States Senate

Committee on the Judiciary: Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights
"The Syrian Refugee Crisis"
January 7, 2014

Syrian American Medical Society
818 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20006

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) would like to thank Senator Durbin, and members of this subcommittee for hosting this hearing on the Syrian Refugee Crisis. We hope this Statement for the Record will paint a clear picture of the ongoing Syrian conflict and its effect of displaced citizen.

STATEMENT SUMMARY

This statement will first illustrate the scope of the refugee crisis, as it is currently the largest crisis of its kind on the globe. It will then detail the ever-growing challenges the host countries of these refugees are facing, as well as the overall obstacles NGOs and other aid providers are met with in supplying humanitarian assistance. The statement will provide an overview of SAMS work with refugees in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon, including our successes and our needs. Finally, the report will discuss the prospects for the US accepting Syrian refugees and additional steps Congress and the Administration should take to address the Syrian Refugee Crisis.

THE SCOPE OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS

It is difficult to deny that the Syrian refugee crisis is the largest humanitarian catastrophe facing our world today. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres compared it to the Rwandan genocide. The UN made its largest historical appeal of \$1.5 billion in humanitarian assistance for Syria at the beginning of 2013, only to nearly triple that request to \$5.2 billion a few months later. The sheer enormity of rising death count, missing, wounded and displaced should alert us to the severity of this conflict.

There are currently more than 2.3 million registered Syrian Refugees, with another 53,000 awaiting registration. This means that in a little less than 3 years, more than 2 million people have fled their country and entered another one. The UNHRC estimated that this number could surpass 4 million by the end of 2014, making this one of the largest refugee exoduses in recent history, and by far the largest happening currently. Within Syria, over 6 million people have been displaced from their homes. This amounts to almost a third of the Syrian population, or the equivalent of 120 million Americans.

In addition to this vast displacement, violence continues to rage inside Syria and threatens to roll over its borders. The medical needs inside Syria increase daily. Since the beginning of the conflict, SAMS has provided medical aid to Syria by sending supplies, physicians and training to the country and neighboring nations. Through these interactions, SAMS has determined, first-hand, the medical and psychosocial needs of Syrian refugees. We have established offices in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon to address those needs. Those locations facilitate cross-border medical relief into Syria. SAMS also uses in-person and online training to prepare Syrian doctors to handle trauma patients in highly unstable situations. The environment inside Syria, and often for refugee camps near the border, can be dangerous or severely lacking in resources.

SAMS has sent over 100 physicians and medical personnel on medical missions under life-threatening conditions inside Syria. In Jordan, the SAMS team supports health and psychosocial services for Syrian refugees. Additionally, SAMS oversees the surgical treatment and postoperative care for wounded Syrians transported to Amman Hospital. SAMS sends medical supplies, equipment, and financial assistance to start field hospitals, medical points and aid to Syrian doctors in southern Syria. Through our office in Turkey, we provide similar assistance to northern Syria. In Lebanon, SAMS supports the Majdal Anjar Clinic that provides primary care and OB-GYN care to more than 8,000 Syrian refugees every month. All medications and services are provided for free or a symbolic fee. SAMS supports the salaries of 20 doctors and covers the rental fees for some facilities. SAMS also provides partial support to a Poly-Clinic in Tripoli, which serves more than 10,000 Syrian refugees per month, along with a surgical center in Tripoli.

Overall, SAMS has treated over 83,000 patients, performed more than 31,000 surgeries and provided 6.5 million dollars' worth of equipment and supplies. We have established 25 field hospitals, supported 14 referral hospitals, trained almost 500 medics for emergency care and spent over 5 million dollars in medical programs. Our goals for 2014 are to reach more Syrians and save even more lives.

IMPACT ON NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES

Without the generosity of various host countries and government aid, the number of deaths and internally displaced Syrians would be even higher. However, countries like Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt cannot hold the weight of this disaster on their shoulders alone. In fact, political tensions, strained economies and overflowing violence have already caused these countries to buckle. And while they are not the only providers of assistance to the crisis, the challenges they face in protecting their own people while still supporting refugees from their neighbor are unique and grave.

Prior to the conflict, the Syrian healthcare system offered advanced and specialized care. Syrians lived in a middle income country with the ability to visit a medical specialist when needed. It should be stressed that the current condition of the healthcare situation in Syria is a drastic change from only a few years ago. The level of medical care most Syrians were accustomed to no longer exist. This unique shift forced the international community to revisit their typical response activities and change their strategy in order to accommodate the Syrian refugees.

JORDAN

Challenges on the Government

In Jordan, there are 569,003 registered refugees as of Dec. 19, 2013. About 80 percent of these live in urban settings rather than camps. This has resulted in 10 percent of Jordan's population. This sizeable refugee influx has strained Jordan's resources as it struggles to provide services to its own population. The Jordanian government, UNHCR and other organizations currently provide Syrian refugees with free medical care, but, there significant limits to what

they can provide. Jordanian public hospitals only accept and treat a few life threatening surgical operations. Increasingly, they fail to cover more complex procedures including dialysis, invasive procedures such as cardiac surgeries, and cancer treatments. Many refugees have died without these treatments since they cannot afford the treatment and are turned away from facilities.

Obstacles faced by NGO's Within Jordan

In Jordan, SAMS and other NGOs aim to cover the costs of surgeries in private run hospitals. Currently, four private hospitals in Amman receive aid from SAMS and other NGOs. Over the past two years, more than 3,000 Syrians received treatment in these hospitals. The average cost per patient averages \$2,000, although some patients required care adding up to \$100,000. NGOs and private donors incurred costs totaling around 6 million dollars. In particular, the transport of wounded Syrians has proven especially difficult throughout Jordan. Patients from Daraa or Damascus receive first aid at medical points or field hospitals, if available. Then they are transported to NGO-operated Jordanian hospitals at the border. These hospitals often lack equipment and cannot perform the surgical operations needed for bombing, shelling or combat injuries. Still with only basic first aid performed on these life-threatening wounds, patient must wait until they can be transferred to one of the private hospitals in Amman. This process has complicated and lengthened the path to medical care that SAMS and other NGOs hope to provide. Currently, all aid agencies deliver assistance in Jordan through the Jordanian Hashemite Charity Organization (JHCO), but the process is slow and expensive. With increased hostilities and worsening situation in Syria, refugee outflows will continue to increase and impact Jordan. The current humanitarian crisis requires more medical support, and many of those supplies need to come through Jordan to reach those still inside Syria.

Policy Recommendations for the US in Jordan

In Jordan, donor countries like the US should prioritize providing wounded Syrians with free surgical care and postoperative care, including rehabilitation of the wounded and patients with amputations and spinal cord injuries. This can be accomplished through direct and indirect support. First, the US can provide direct support to the Jordanian government specified for the purpose of medical care. Secondly, the US needs to support the surgical treatment of patients in private hospitals via donations and assistance to the NGOs currently working in Jordan. SAMS recommends the US encourage the Jordanian government to include a medical team at the Jordanian/Syrian border to evaluate cases that require urgent care. By working with NGOs to establish a clear process and criteria used to refer patients to different facilities, the Jordanian government could eliminate some of the confusion and delay within the transport process. Additionally, we recommend donor countries like the US continue to work towards providing free, or highly subsidized, medication and antibiotics to refugees in Jordan.

The US must urge the Jordanian government to grant special medical licenses to Syrian doctors residing in Jordan to allow them to treat, manage, and operate on Syrian patients. Since NGOs support the treatment of patients in these facilities, but would have a huge impact with little expense to the government. This simple change in policy would allow Syrian physicians to contribute to the medical response and lessen the strain on Jordan's health services.

TURKEY

Challenges on the Government

There are 700,000 estimated Syrians in Turkey as of December 25, 2013. There are 210,627 registered refugees living in camps and another 347,715 living outside of camps. Refugees living outside of the camps often have difficulty receiving aid as they are not integrated into the system, even when they have registered. Turkey has generously provided housing, food and care for Syrian refugees in 17 government-run camps in eight provinces. Turkey experiences a unique challenge in communication as unlike other neighboring countries, a language barrier exists. Syrian refugees speak Arabic but most citizens of Turkey speak Turkish and this can cause difficulties in distributing aid. The political tension between the two countries has led to border closings by the Turkish government and threats of violence between segments of the Turkish population and Syrian refugees.

Policy Recommendations for the US in Turkey

We recommend the US urge the Turkish government to grant special medical licenses to Syrian doctors who are residing in Turkey that will allow them to treat, manage and operate on Syrian patients only in certain named hospitals. This could happen at little cost to the government, since NGOs support the treatment of patients in these facilities, but would have a huge impact, as it would allow Syrian physicians who are refugees in Turkey to contribute to the medical response and lessen the strain on Turkey's health services.

We also believe Turkey needs additional aid from the US government to support health services for refugees. The gap between what is currently available for rehabilitation services for wounded and disabled Syrian refugees and the needs of these refugees is growing. Providing prosthetic limbs, support for complex treatments and support for urban refugees are all specific ways the US can urge Turkey to lessen this gap.

LEBANON

Challenges on the Government

In Lebanon, there are currently 802,744 registered refugees and 53,486 awaiting registration (Dec. 27, 2013). This massive number of refugees in a tiny country, coupled with the expensive healthcare in Lebanon, political tensions between the two countries, and restricted resources has resulted in the lowest level of care provided to Syrian refugees in host countries. Syrian refugees must pay out of pocket for medical care: up to 25 percent of medical costs and many drugs and procedures have no coverage. These expenses are extremely high in Lebanon and most refugees simply cannot afford them. UNCHR pays 75 percent of the expenses and the Qatari Red Crescent picks up an additional 15 percent.

Obstacles faced by NGO's Within Lebanon

Cross-border medical relief efforts from Lebanon in to Syria have been less robust than other neighboring countries. Combat between the Syrian regime and opposition often takes place along the Syrian side of the Syrian-Lebanese border. Many times these battles lead to continuous bombing and shelling by Syrian military. A large displacement of people and countless injuries happen just miles from the border. This situation could be eased by cross-border efforts from organizations in Lebanon. Without cross-border humanitarian aid, conditions in areas like Al Qusayr, Tal-Kalakh and Al-Qlamoon continue to deteriorate.

Policy Recommendations for the US in Lebanon

Within Lebanon, the US should urge the UNCHR to support the full medical expenses of Syrian refugees, rather than just the 75 percent. The UNCHR should also add coverage of accidents to its list of services provided to Syrian refugees. Additionally, the US should use its influence to pressure organization such as the ICRC to provide cross-border medical and humanitarian relief from Lebanon to border areas inside Syria, whereas the transfer of supplies and humanitarian aid across the border can be done through NGOs like SAMS.

SAMS CONTRIBUTIONS TO SYRIAN REFUGEES

SAMS uses its offices in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon to directly support facilities and medical programs within Syria, but these offices also offer programs to displaced Syrian refugees. SAMS has provided direct medical care in the form of outpatient services, clinics and OB-GYN care in multiple countries surrounding Syria. Two of the most successful programs include medical treatments not covered by primary or surgical care: dental and psychosocial.

SAMS started its dental program to provide this often overlooked service to refugee camps both inside and outside Syria. After its start, the demand for these services became much more apparent and it quickly expanded. In less than a year over 4000 dental procedures had been performed. There are now 17 free dental clinics supported by SAMS. While emergency care to those affected by the violence in Syria is often the most critical concern, SAMS has not overlooked the fact that many refugees have trouble attaining basic medical care such as vision and dental. These concerns are something that SAMS has tried to provide for, in addition to acute care.

We view the psychosocial program as essential to the rehabilitation of refugees in any country. Those who have witnessed the conflict in Syria first-hand are deeply affected by the experience, no matter their age or gender. SAMS collaborates with a team of psychologists, psychiatrists, social coordinators and psychosocial therapists in Jordan to provide mental health rehabilitation to Syrians. The teams offer services in the SAMS-run facility and visit families in their homes to provide care. Syrian families receive counseling and social services, as well as physical and mental health screening. 12,000 people, many of them women and children have been helped by these programs.

SAMS provides psychosocial programs that include photography, painting, group or individual therapy, as well as trainings and workshops. These programs take place in our Amman facility, family homes, camps across the border and also inside schools. The UN Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates 3 million Syrian children stopped their education to flee Syria. SAMS offers programs to children to help them deal with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and integrate into their new country. Finally, SAMS has an agreement with Hathi Haiati NGO to refer refugees into training programs, craft-making and English courses.

We'd like to specifically highlight our art therapy program for children. Many children under the age of 10 have not only been physically injured during the conflict, but often have psychological scars that are difficult to evaluate. The art therapy program allows children to express themselves through pictures, often conveying emotions that they do not have the words to describe. Art therapy can provide a measurement for healing, as before-and-after drawings from Syrian children can attest.

The psychosocial program provides immediate emotional relief in a way few other programs available to refugees can. SAMS intends to expand this program to cover other regions and plans on opening a second rehabilitation center in the near future. We feel strongly that providing for the mental health of refugees from Syria must be highly prioritized. The impact of these programs has a tangible benefit for those who have access to them.

While SAMS has seen tremendous success with these programs and believes them to be vital to the refugees we support, there are some needs we have been unable to meet. Particularly of note, the winterization of hospitals and emergency clinics that are set up for refugees. Often these make-shift facilities lack adequate electricity or heat. SAMS has tried to provide generators and fuel when possible, but the countries taking on the brunt of the refugee overflow have not been able to keep up with demand. If SAMS had the resources, it would consider supporting an ICU in Turkey, but currently the greatest medical needs are still within the borders of Syria.

ADDITIONAL STEPS FOR UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

The UNHCR is seeking to resettle approximately 40,000 particularly vulnerable refugees in FY 2014. The United States typically accepts about half of resettled refugees. With more than 2 million refugees fleeing Syria since the conflict began in 2011, the US has only accepted about 90 Syrian refugees. The United States has not specified the number of Syrian Refugees it plans to accept in the coming year. The United States has specified that it would like to resettle 33,000 refugees from the near East and South Asia, according to the Presidential Memorandum issued on October 2, 2013. The US has set the number of refugees it will resettle for the FY 2014, at 70,000. However, in 2012, the US accepted only 31 Syrian Refugees. This is partly because the US efforts in Syria have been focused on providing humanitarian relief, with the US providing more humanitarian aid than any other government thus far. However, the US refugee standards are incredibly difficult to meet. They require that an individual must prove they were targeted for persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.

In preparation for the upcoming entry of Syrian refugees, SAMS established a Refugee

Resettlement Office six months ago. Through our Refugee Resettlement Coordinator, SAMS has built relationships with major refugee resettlement agencies and official refugee offices in potential receiving cities. The Refugee Resettlement Office hopes to build coalitions for refugee resettlement in major cities in coordination with other Syrian American relief and civic organizations. SAMS previously established the American Relief Coalition for Syria (ARCS), which includes 20 member organizations who provide humanitarian and medical relief to Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). In the last two years, this coalition has spent more than 150 million dollars on humanitarian relief. Less than 10 percent of that income came from US government grants.

SAMS urges the US government to increase the numbers of Syrian refugees admitted in to the United States in FY 2014. The US should create special provisions for Syrian refugees that prioritize their resettlement application. Applications for asylum from Syrians unable to leave Syria or unable to register with the UN in Turkey, Jordan, or Lebanon should receive priority.

The US should pay special attention to their needs of humanitarian and medical parolees. Medical parolees and their families need special visas to facilitate their entry into the US. These cases deserve special attention; their lives are in eminent danger. The American government should raise the profile of this issue and set an example for the rest of the world to follow. Congress should impress upon the administration the urgency of this matter, parolees should be admitted along with their families.

Finally, we request government work with SAMS, ARCS and other Syrian American entities throughout the planning and discussion stages of this process. SAMS and other organizations in ARCS have worked extensively with in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Syria, giving them a unique perspective into the needs and challenges of the Syrian refugees. Syrian refugees in the United States will need programs like many of those already operating in other countries, particularly those similar to the psychosocial program SAMS runs in Jordan. These refugees will need organizations like SAMS and members of ARCS who understand their struggle and can work to assist with their resettlement. By working with SAMS, ARCS and other similar entities, the US Government can simplify a challenging, but ultimately, life-saving, transition for thousands of people.

GENERAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

SAMS recommends that the US policies should focus on addressing the health and psychosocial needs of Syrian refugees. Additionally the government should provide them with education, job training and civic training. Civic training and education of refugees must be an integral part of any resettlement campaign. These tools counter the potential extremism that can arise from intense political turmoil and helps build a better democratic system in both Syria and America. These efforts should focus on the youth and women in particular, while remaining sensitive to cultural and religious traditions.

Additionally, we ask that you protect humanitarian assistance in FY 2014. The US can ensure safe passage for humanitarian aid, while protecting medical facilities and personnel. We

encourage you to allow the highest possible allocation for humanitarian assistance in FY 2014, and exempt humanitarian accounts from sequestration. Adapting the current branding requirements of US-funded programs to the conditions facing aid agencies and governments facilitating cross-border assistance could ensure safer passage in the distribution of aid.

CONCLUSION

During the resettlement of Syrian refugees the USG should coordinate with and benefit from the infrastructure, fundraising and networking of the Syrian American diaspora including the Syrian American Medical Society, American Relief Coalition for Syria (ARCS) which includes 20 US-based relief and nonprofit organizations, and Coalition for Democratic Syria that includes 6 civic and grassroots organizations. Furthermore, the diaspora should be consulted for placement of refugees in order to establish communication with the diaspora, so sensitivity to religious and cultural values can be upheld, with additional connections to cultural institutions in host locations.

SAMS recommends that the US policies should focus on addressing the health and psychosocial needs of Syrian refugees. Additionally, the government should provide them with education, job training and civic training. Civic training and education of refugees must be an integral part of any resettlement campaign. These tools counter the potential extremism that can arise from intense political turmoil and helps build a better democratic system in both Syria and America.

Additionally, we ask that you protect humanitarian assistance in FY 2014. The US can ensure safe passage for humanitarian aid, while protecting medical facilities and personnel. We encourage you to allow the highest possible allocation for humanitarian assistance in FY 2014, and exempt humanitarian accounts from sequestration. Adapting the current branding requirements of US funded programs to the conditions facing aid agencies and governments facilitating cross-border assistance could ensure safer passage in the distribution of aid.

The Committee will need to focus its efforts on finding a solution to this crisis. Syria has a strategic location as a connection between Europe and the Middle East, and a strong geopolitical position between many US allies. Syria has a large and educated middle class, young population, and diversified economy. The US must consider using its influence in the region and the international community to form a unified front and end the violence in Syria. Only then, can the Syrian refugee crisis be truly resolved.

Lastly our reminder is Syria is not a lost cause. The US can still prevent Syria from becoming the next Rwanda. Humanitarian assistance is critical and appreciated, and no country is better positioned than the United States to affect change in this country and make a difference in the lives of so many Syrian refugees.

**Written testimony on the Syrian refugee emergency, submitted by Refugees International
to the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights**

January 2014

Introduction

Refugees International wishes to commend Senator Dick Durbin for convening this Hearing of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights, and for focusing this hearing on the plight of the growing number of Syrian citizens who have been forced to leave their own country and to become refugees, not only in neighboring and nearby states but also in other parts of the world. We also wish to thank the Senator and his staff for inviting Refugees International to present written testimony to the hearing.

Refugees International

Refugees International advocates for the provision of life-saving protection and assistance to refugees and displaced people and promotes solutions to humanitarian crises. Founded in 1979, with its Headquarters in Washington DC and with offices in New York and London, Refugees International is a fully independent organization that does not accept funding from any government or from the United Nations.

Each year, Refugees International conducts between 12 and 15 missions to the field in order to examine the situation of refugees and displaced people, to assess the international humanitarian response to their needs and to make recommendations that are intended strengthen that response.

The organization has taken a particularly close interest in the Syrian refugee crisis, visiting the region six times in the past three years. The most recent of those visits, to Jordan and Northern Iraq, took place in November 2013, while the two other major refugee-hosting countries, Lebanon and Turkey, were visited in August 2013.

The written testimony that follows draws upon the findings of these recent field missions. It is divided into two halves. The first half of the testimony identifies five key characteristics of the Syrian refugee crisis; while the second half presents four recommendations with respect to the way that the US government and other actors might ensure that the international humanitarian response to the crisis is as effective, efficient and expeditious as possible.

Speed, scale and scope of the exodus

The humanitarian emergency provoked by the armed conflict in Syria has erupted with unprecedented speed and on a scale that no-one envisaged when it began less than three years ago. More than half of Syria's population is now in need of humanitarian assistance. Six million people have been forced to abandon their homes but remain within the country. Over 2.3 million have become refugees in other states.

According to the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, that figure could climb to four million by the end of 2014 if the exodus continues at its current rate, making it the largest refugee situation anywhere in the world. Given the trajectory of the conflict and the extremely limited progress in establishing a viable peace process, that scenario may well transpire.

The refugee crisis is also expanding in scale. While the vast majority of exiled Syrians are still concentrated in Jordan, Lebanon, Northern Iraq and Turkey, growing numbers have made their way to countries such Bulgaria, Egypt, Germany, Greece, Libya, Serbia and Sweden.

The human consequences

The impact of this crisis on the refugees themselves cannot be overstated. In our recent visit to Jordan, for example, we met one refugee whose house in the Syrian city of Deraa had been destroyed in an airstrike launched by the Syrian armed forces. He had left all of his possessions behind, selling what he could and borrowing money from friends and relatives in order to finance his escape.

Now he lives in a house with 13 other people, several of them with serious medical conditions and none of whom are working. We asked the man whether the refugees were helping each other to survive in such difficult circumstances. "No," he said. "A dead man can't carry another dead man."

The plight of refugee children is a particularly tragic characteristic of this crisis. More than 1.2 million Syrian youngsters have now become refugees, 75 per cent of them under the age of 12. Every day, dozens of Syrian babies are born in exile, their futures uncertain and insecure.

On our recent visit to the region, we saw how difficult life is for these children: boys and girls aged seven or eight who are working for minimal pay in order to support their families; teenagers who have been out of school for two or three years and who are now losing all hope of completing their education; kids scrambling around in drains and ditches because they have nowhere safer to play.

Protection

At a time when states in many parts of the world are expending enormous efforts to obstruct or deter the presence of refugees and asylum seekers, and to ensure the early return of those who manage to cross an international border, it has been remarkable to witness the extent to which Syria's neighbors have been able to offer a safe haven to refugees.

Despite the massive scale of the exodus, borders have to a considerable extent been kept open, particularly for the most vulnerable refugees. The authorities and security services of the main refugee-hosting countries have generally treated the Syrians well, with relatively little of the harassment and exploitation that are often to be found in refugee situations, especially in urban areas. Moreover, while tensions between refugees and local residents certainly exist, particularly in Lebanon, overt conflict between the two groups has been thankfully rare.

That is not to suggest a complete absence of protection problems in the Syrian refugee emergency. Border closures have taken place, sometimes for extended periods of time, and some isolated incidents of forced return to Syria have been recorded. Some refugees have been adversely affected by the criminality, political allegiances and military activities of their compatriots. Child labour is a growing problem, while early marriages and gender-based violence are thought to be rife, although difficult to quantify.

International support

One reason why it has been possible to maintain the protection available to Syrian refugees has been the massive scale of the international response to the emergency. And that response has in many respects been led by the United States, which has now provided well over \$1 billion in assistance for displaced Syrians throughout the region. Refugees International wishes to acknowledge the importance of this contribution – a contribution which is making a very real difference to the quality of life that the exiled Syrian population is able to attain.

As UNHCR reported last week, in 2013, almost 200,000 tents and more than 800,000 tarpaulins were distributed last year, as well as 5.7 million blankets and quilts along with 4.9 million mattresses. To ensure the preparation of food, some 870,000 kitchen sets and a similar number of jerry cans were distributed. With tens of thousands of infants forced to flee with their families, nearly five million diapers were given to the refugees. For the cold winter season, UNHCR allocated almost \$138 million to provide additional weatherproofing, to insulate tents, to provide thermal blankets, mattresses, stoves, fuel and warm clothing.

None of this would have been possible without the funding provided by the United States, other donors, particularly in Europe and the Gulf, not to mention the refugee-hosting countries themselves. Turkey, for example, has established a large network of camps for the refugees, with standards that are particularly high in some locations. In northern Iraq, we visited a camp

accommodating some 45,000 refugees, all of them receiving electricity free of charge from the government.

Refugees and host communities

A fifth important characteristic of the Syrian crisis is to be found in the fact that the vast majority of refugees are living not in camps but have taken up residence in cities, towns and villages throughout the region, where they live alongside local Iraqis, Jordanians, Lebanese and Turks. Indeed, Lebanon, the country with the largest number of Syrian refugees (between 800,000 and a million) has not established a single camp.

While this approach enables refugees to live a more normal life than is possible in the artificial confines of a camp, it also creates some difficulties. The refugees themselves have to find accommodation, look for work to support themselves and ensure that they have access to education and healthcare. Aid agencies find it more difficult to make contact with refugees, identify the most vulnerable and provide them with appropriate assistance when they are scattered throughout a country rather than being concentrated in specific locations.

Moreover, when large numbers of refugees take up residence in a host community (and in parts of Lebanon Syrians easily outnumber the local population) they inevitably place massive pressures on the land, environment, water supply, infrastructure and public services of the area where they settle, a situation which increases the likelihood of tension between the two populations.

And that is exactly what is happening in the Middle East. While a considerable amount of attention has justifiably been given to the needs of the refugee population, only recently has the international community started to recognize that host communities also require strong and urgent support.

Ways forward

Refugee emergencies are by their very nature volatile and unpredictable events. Even so, it now seems very likely that conditions in Syria will prevent the early and large-scale return of the refugee population, that the number of exiled Syrians will actually increase in the short term, that they will place growing pressures on the countries and communities that have absorbed them, and that in the absence of lasting solutions within the region, growing numbers will try to move on to other parts of the world.

On the basis of these assumptions and the analysis provided in earlier parts of this testimony, Refugees International would like to propose a four-point plan of action to the US government and other relevant actors.

Continued and reoriented humanitarian support

There is an evident need for continued support to the humanitarian effort in the countries neighboring Syria, so that the refugee populations there can have access to the food, water, shelter materials and other essentials that they need to survive. At the same time, Refugees International encourages the US government to ensure that the aid agency programs that it supports do not focus solely on material assistance or to refugees living in camps.

First, such programs must have a strong protection and human rights focus, ensuring that refugees are freed from the scourge of sexual and gender based violence, that they enable the Syrians to register and be properly documented, and that they shield refugees from the threat of eviction, exploitation and forced return.

Second, more attention should be given to the longer-term aspects of the refugee assistance program, including education, healthcare, psycho-social support and livelihoods. Special efforts are needed to engage with refugee children and youth. If they are left traumatized, unskilled and disaffected, how will they live productive lives while in exile and eventually contribute to the reconstruction of their own country?

Third, while standards in camps must be maintained and if possible improved, far more attention must be given to those refugees living in other locations. Many of those refugees have now run out of money and are accumulating significant debts, and yet they must continue to pay rent and meet other essential costs. As the Syrian crisis continues, there is a very real risk that they will become destitute and feel obliged to resort to negative survival strategies, a situation that will put women and children at particular risk.

Engagement of development actors

The Syrian crisis has demonstrated very clearly that traditional forms of humanitarian assistance, involving the provision of short-term relief and focused on the immediate needs of refugees, are inadequate in the context of a sudden and massive influx which places enormous pressures on host states and poorer members of host communities.

In Jordan, for example, we visited a village where two families – nine people in all – were living in a ramshackle two-room house without a toilet, water supply, or any land on which to grow their own food. A young man from one of the families was on the run from the police. His crime? Cutting down wood in a local forest to provide fuel for cooking and eating. We asked one elderly woman what was the greatest challenge of living in such conditions. “All of my life is difficult,” she said. “And it is getting worse.”

While aid agencies are doing their best to incorporate such poor local families in their refugee assistance programs, a much more ambitious approach is required – an approach which is developmental rather than humanitarian in nature, which provides host states and communities with the capacity to absorb the new arrivals, and which in doing so mitigates the risk of conflict between refugees and local populations.

A concerted effort is now being made to formulate such an approach. The World Bank, for example, has published a major study of the impact of refugees on Lebanese host communities - the first time that it has undertaken such an assessment - and a similar study of Jordan is currently under completion. UNHCR is also entering into an agreement that will enable the UN Development Program to contribute to the task of supporting refugee-hosting countries in the region.

Refugees International encourages the US government to ensure that these efforts have a successful outcome, both for the sake of the refugees and their local hosts, but also to reinforce the social and political stability of the countries concerned. It would be unthinkable if the failure of the Syrian state and its attendant refugee exodus were to provoke further emergencies in what is already a highly volatile region.

Responsibility-sharing

The international refugee protection regime is based on the notions of international cooperation, solidarity and responsibility-sharing. According to these principles, states which receive significant refugee influxes should not be expected to cope with them alone, but should be supported by other members of the international community, including states, the United Nations and its operational agencies.

The notion of responsibility sharing has a particular relevance in relation to the Syrian crisis, given the massive number of refugees involved and the precarious economic situation in some of the major host countries. And in certain respects, that principle has been respected. As indicated already in this testimony, the USA and other donor states have contributed very substantial amounts of funding to the refugee operation, much of it channeled through UNHCR and its humanitarian partners.

Refugees International welcomes these contributions, which have had the effect of preventing an unusually large and complex emergency from spinning completely out of control. At the same time, Refugees International calls on the US government and other members of the international community to consider two other forms of responsibility-sharing, both of which involve admitting Syrian refugees to their territory.

First, and as also noted earlier in this document, Syrian refugees are increasingly looking beyond the Middle East in their search for safety, security and solutions, and more particularly to the

countries of Europe. With certain notable exceptions, they have received a chilly reception from those states.

Responding to this situation, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres has called on European Union member states “to focus less on protecting borders and more on protecting people, and to turn into action their commitments for more solidarity and burden-sharing with the countries in the Middle East that host the vast majority of Syrian refugees.” Refugees International is fully supportive of this statement, believing that it will be impossible to advocate on behalf of open borders in the Middle East when refugees are being shut out from other and more prosperous parts of the world.

Second, while the US is unlikely to experience an influx of Syrian asylum seekers due to the distance between the two countries, Refugees International commends the US government for its willingness to participate in a modestly-sized and global resettlement program for Syrian refugees, proposed by Mr. Guterres.

While such a program would not resolve the refugee emergency, it would send a powerful signal of solidarity to refugee-hosting countries in the Middle East, provide protection and solutions to the most vulnerable members of the refugee population and set a very important example to the rest of the world.

Syria and its neighbors

Given the continued violence taking place in Syria, as well as the distinct likelihood that it will not be brought to an end by the scheduled Geneva Two talks, Refugees International considers it imperative for neighboring countries to allow the free passage of refugees on to their territory. Given its influence in the region, the US government has an important role to play in ensuring that borders are kept open, thereby upholding a fundamental principle of refugee protection.

At the same time, the US should support the ongoing efforts that are being made to ensure humanitarian access inside Syria and to support displaced and affected populations there by means of cross-border operations. In October last year, the UN Security Council urged “all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, to take all appropriate steps to facilitate the efforts of the United Nations, its specialized agencies and all humanitarian actors engaged in humanitarian relief activities, to provide immediate humanitarian assistance to the affected people in Syria,”

Hitherto, little progress has been made in the implementation of this statement. Further diplomatic efforts are consequently required on the part of the US and other Security Council members to ensure that its provisions come into effect.

While the violence continues in Syria refugees will continue to leave the country, even if the distribution of assistance improves. In this respect, Refugees International wishes to underline a lesson learned in many previous crises: namely that humanitarian action can alleviate suffering and in some situations can even facilitate negotiations between the warring parties, but it cannot resolve conflicts that are political and military in nature.

In that context, Refugees International urges the US government to join with other members of the international community in bringing the Syrian conflict to a swift, lasting and equitable conclusion.

Refugees International
6 January 2013



Senator Durbin, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide a written statement of record for today's hearing on the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis.

Syria Relief and Development (SRD) and United Muslim Relief (UMR) are concerned with the state of millions of Syrians who are either refugees or internally displaced. Many of them are in dire need of humanitarian assistance.

Syria Relief and Development (SRD) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization incorporated in November 2011 to provide humanitarian aid to Syrians and Syrian refugees affected by violence, hunger, poverty, injury and displacement.

The volatile situation in Syria has created a severe shortage of food, shelter and medical supplies. SRD is working to address these needs through its established programs within Syria as well as the surrounding regions. SRD is based in the United States with offices in Overland Park, Kansas and Amman, Jordan.

United Muslim Relief (UMR), formerly known as Muslims Without Borders, is a 501(c)(3), nonprofit organization which integrates their global partners' services to provide comprehensive relief and developmental aid to underserved communities around the world. UMR accomplishes this humanitarian mission by blending advocacy, youth mobilization, disaster response, aid delivery, and empowerment through education.

We want to take the opportunity to bring to light core issues/problems regarding the Syrian refugee crisis. Our main concern is that humanitarian organizations struggle to keep up with the ever-increasing need of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons. Many Syrians go without food, proper shelter, and medical care. The current hazards of winter exacerbate an already critical illness and malnutrition problem. Additionally, children are suffering the physical and psychological tolls of war, and many of them have been forced to leave school.

Refugee Crisis: The growing need for aid and the decline of public interest

As the crisis in Syria continues, the number of refugees and displaced persons continues to grow. The amount of aid necessary to address the needs of those forced to flee their homes in Syria has risen proportionately. At this moment, nearly 2.3 million Syrians are registered as refugees in neighboring countries and elsewhere. The United Nations estimates that this number could reach over 4 million by the end of 2014. The need for aid is critical. Humanitarian organizations struggle to meet the increasing demands for aid.

Recently, the United Nations made an appeal for \$6.5 billion¹. This is the largest appeal ever made for a single country, thus highlighting the unsustainable scope of the Syrian crisis. What is even more troubling is that the United Nations estimates that three-fourths of Syria's population of 22.4 million will need aid in 2014.² Nearly the entire population of a single country is at risk of needing humanitarian assistance. These numbers are staggering.

Although the UN has made an appeal for \$6.5 billion, it is unlikely that they will reach this figure. This means the projected aid needed to address the Syrian crisis will not be achieved. Therefore, many Syrian refugees will continue to starve and go without the humanitarian assistance necessary to survive. In its third year, the crisis continues to increase while public interest has decreased and relief organizations struggle to gather the funds needed to ensure Syrian refugees receive the aid they need. For instance, Oxfam, a well-established organization that was able to raise \$38 million in public donations after the Haiti earthquake, was only able to raise \$700,000 in public donations for Syria.³ Declining public interest has definitely taken a toll on the amount of aid that is distributed among Syrian refugees. We must address this problem and generate more interest and awareness from the general American public.

Starvation & Malnutrition:

UNICEF spokeswoman Marixie Mercado was reported as saying, "We know that there is an upward trend in the number of children being admitted with moderate and severe acute malnutrition. Most of these cases are being reported from two referral hospitals in Damascus - the Children's Hospital and the Damascus Hospital."⁴ SRD knows very well the tragic circumstances of malnutrition in Syria. We have received pleas of assistance time and time again and have witnessed this horror first hand at our medical facilities in the area. Unfortunately, aid is very difficult to distribute in areas blocked by various forces in Syria, specifically in the Eastern Ghouta and Mo'adamiya provinces in Damascus and the Al-Wair province in Homs.

Several areas in Syria are unable to be reached due to embattlement and roadblocks, particularly in rural areas. Many children, women, and men in these areas have gone months without food assistance and have therefore resulted to eating whatever it is they can find, be it grass or leaves. The conditions are so horrific in some areas that Islamic religious leaders issued

¹ Bilal Hussein, "Largest-ever UN appeal shows scope of Syrian refugee crisis," The Boston Globe, Dec. 25, 2013 (<http://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/editorials/2013/12/25/syrian-refugee-crisis-dire-and-unsustainable/e6zU3eiX2nXwi3YPWy1JLO/story.html>).

² "Syria crisis: UN launches record \$6.5bn aid appeal," British Broadcasting Corporation, Dec. 16, 2013 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-25398012>).

³ Bilal Hussein, "Largest-ever UN appeal shows scope of Syrian refugee crisis," The Boston Globe, Dec. 25, 2013 (<http://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/editorials/2013/12/25/syrian-refugee-crisis-dire-and-unsustainable/e6zU3eiX2nXwi3YPWy1JLO/story.html>).

⁴ Stephanie Nebehay, "U.N. feeds record 3.3 million Syrians but malnutrition rising", Reuters, Nov. 1, 2013 (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/01/us-syria-crisis-food-idUSBRE9A00EK20131101>).

rulings allowing Syrians to eat cats and dogs, an act otherwise forbidden by Islamic law.⁵

Refugees leave Syria to surrounding countries such as Lebanon, and arrive thin, frail, and malnourished. There is also evidence that malnutrition is contributing to small but increasing numbers of death.⁶ However, experts warn that with the winter conditions, death from hunger and illness may begin to dwarf deaths by violence. Doctors and aid workers receive a number of malnourished patients but lack the proper medical treatment to alleviate the malnutrition, leaving their patients to suffer and potentially die.

Education & A Lost Generation:

Before the conflict, Syria was a regional leader in school enrollment with primary school attendance rates at 97%. Today, nearly 3 million children have been forced to leave school, with about 500,000-600,000 living as refugees outside of Syria.⁷ One in every five schools cannot be used because they are either damaged, destroyed, or are now shelters for internally displaced persons. Children also leave school from fear of shelling or are forced to leave school to work and help support their families.

Many children are growing up in fractured families and are often the main providers. As in numerous cases one, sometimes both, parent(s) have been detained, injured, or has died. The UNHCR reports that children are "scarred by the horrors of war, they suffer from psychological distress, live alone or separated from their parents, receive no education or are thrown into illegal child labor."⁸ Our own team has seen many children in Jordan not attending school but rather selling water, juice, or tissues in order to make a livelihood to support entire families. While these children have been encouraged to go to UNICEF schools funded by many Gulf and European countries, children are not allowed to go to school by some of their families who instead insist on them working illegally in order to bring home any type of financial assistance.

While it may be easier for younger children to adapt to these changes, children in middle and high school tend not to adapt as well and are discouraged from attending school altogether. Furthermore, due to the differences of curriculum and sometimes differences in language,

⁵ Ashish Kumar Sen, "Clerics encourage hungry Syrians to eat dogs and cats," The Washington Post, Oct. 16, 2013

(<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/oct/16/clerics-permit-hungry-syrians-eat-dogs-and-cats/?page=all>).

⁶ Anne Barnard, "Stick Figures and Stunted Growth as Warring Syria Goes Hungry," The New York Times, Nov. 2, 2013

(<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/03/world/middleeast/stick-figures-and-stunted-growth-as-warring-syria-goes-hungry.html>).

⁷ Unknown, "Syria: UN human rights chief alarmed by rise in abductions, disappearances," UN News Centre, Dec. 13, 2013

(<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?www.iaea.org/html/www.scalthedeal2009.org/petition/html/story.asp?NewsID=46735&Cr=syria&Cr1=#.UsQUimSic1>).

⁸ Marie-Louise Gumuchian, "Syria's refugee children: Alone, 'in crisis,' UN report says", CNN, Nov. 29, 2013 (<http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/29/world/mcast/syria-children-refugees-report/>).

parents are unable to provide their children with the support they need at home to succeed at school. That does not include the refugee bureaucracy of finding a way to feed the family, concern for friends and relatives back home etc. Although there are efforts to address the problem of education among Syrian refugees, the before mentioned issues must be taken into account when developing school opportunities for refugee youth.

Along with the problem of education, comes the problem of self sufficiency. Many Syrian refugees have certain skills and trades that can be utilized to provide for their family as well as contribute to their host country. The Syrian crisis is now entering its third year but there is still a culture of self sufficiency among refugees and even internally displaced persons. For example, one of SRD's beneficiaries, a family trapped in Syria amidst the fighting, has an olive tree and goes out when they can to pick the olives, make oil and then sell it. Although they live within a conflict zone, they want to make a living for themselves; maintaining their dignity and self-worth. Syrians are eager to find work and be able to provide for themselves and their families. If they are unable to maintain a livelihood, their self-worth and desire to be self-sufficient will dwindle, thus leading them to a culture of dependency.⁹ There is a critical need to work with host countries in establishing job opportunities for refugees. Not only will this promote self-sufficiency but, as European Commissioner for Development, Andris Piebalgs said, "mitigate the negative consequences that their presence may have on local communities and, at the same time, enhance the quality of refugee protection by helping them to become self-sufficient."¹⁰

Recommendations:

In conjunction with the Senate hearing, we would like to make the following recommendations:

Addressing the Refugee Crisis...

We recommend that the committee

1. Increase aid to Syria and neighboring refugee camps.
2. Work with international aid organizations and Syrian organizations to better address the growing number of urban refugees in cities like Amman and Beirut, with Syrians living underneath buildings or sleeping in the streets.
3. Work with neighboring countries like Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq to allow some type of legal work opportunities so that refugees do not have to remain dependent solely on aid organizations or have their children work illegally.
4. Generate public interest on humanitarian relief to Syria by speaking publicly about the crisis and

⁹ Rochelle Davis and Abbie Taylor, "Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon: A Snapshot from Summer 2013," Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, Sept. 2013 (<http://ccas.georgetown.edu/document/1242799693627/Syrian+Refugee+Report+Sept+2013.pdf>).

¹⁰ European Commission, "New EU regional development and protection programme for refugees and host communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq," Dec. 16, 2012 (http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-1253_en.htm).

- encouraging the general public to give to relief organizations providing aid for Syrians in need.
5. Utilize our relationship with the European Union to encourage its members to host more refugees in their countries.

Addressing Starvation and Malnutrition...

We recommend the committee to...

1. Pressure Syrian forces to provide greater access to civilians in need especially those besieged areas of Syria. The United States can pressure the Syrian government to provide medical and food support to all civilians in need of these items.
2. Recognize the difficult role that Syria's neighbors must play during this conflict, as they provide the most immediate aid to the tide of refugees escaping violence in Syria. We urge you to encourage these countries to assist humanitarian NGOs in the transit of relief teams and supplies into Syria.
3. As a member of the United Nations, we ask the United States to work towards a humanitarian UNSC resolution mandating cross border humanitarian and medical relief to millions of Syrians who are not reached by current cross line efforts. Prompt UN agencies to provide greater relief within opposition held territory, or at the very least provide basic humanitarian aid at the Syrian border.

Promoting Education & Self Sufficiency...

We recommend that the committee...

1. Supports and develops education programs for children based on the Syrian curriculum. Especially allowing Syrian children in Turkey to attend educational programs that are provided in Arabic, since they do not speak Turkish.
2. Provide tools of trade for self sufficiency & promote & support small businesses and entrepreneurship.
3. Survey refugees on trades/ways they try to support family, create programs based on results and provide assistance.
4. Work with development organizations to provide long-term sustainable measures for families to be able to provide for themselves.

Thank you again for the opportunity.



Relief, development and peace in the name of Christ

Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Statement for the record
Submitted January 6, 2014

Hearing on the Syrian Refugee Crisis
U.S. Senate
Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights
January 7, 2014

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On behalf of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), we would like to thank Chairman Durbin for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record. The Syrian refugee crisis is of utmost importance and we are heartened by the Committee's attention to it.

Mennonite Central Committee has worked in Syria for 23 years. In the past two years of responding to the Syria crisis, MCC has allocated more than \$15.3 million in emergency food, shelter, non-food items, education, peacebuilding and disaster response training in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Our work is carried out through local partner organizations.

Immediate need: Ceasefire

The situation for Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) is dire. The humanitarian needs are far beyond the scope of the response thus far. Furthermore, the conditions are worsening each day as more and more refugees leave their homes and winter takes a heavy toll on those without adequate shelter. Responding to the needs of refugees, while absolutely vital, is only treating the symptom of the problem.

Therefore, we call in the strongest possible terms for all involved actors, including the U.S. government, to work for an immediate ceasefire to the violence. This includes stopping the escalation of military involvement by foreign actors, including the United States and our Gulf allies.

In the longer term, a political agreement that guarantees the rights of all Syrians will also be needed to ensure that Syrian refugees are able to return home safely. One small piece of good news in the midst of this terrible crisis is that Syrian refugees continue to indicate a strong desire to return home as soon as they are able and to begin the difficult work of rebuilding their country.

Overview of humanitarian needs

As noted above, the humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees are many. Our comments here are not intended to be comprehensive, but rather will focus on sectors with which we are most familiar in our work in Lebanon and Jordan.

- **Education:** Syrians have long placed a high value on education, with a literacy rate of about 85 percent before the conflict began (World Bank). Now, however, there is nothing short of an education crisis, both within Syria and for Syrian refugees in surrounding countries.

A generation of Syrians is at risk of growing up without adequate schooling. In addition to the obvious concern of lack of basic educational skills, there are many other ways in which education is critical for the wellbeing of refugees.

- The routine of a school day provides an important, familiar structure for children, assisting with their psychosocial wellbeing.
- Having children enrolled in school also enables parents to pursue employment during the day.
- Finally, when refugee children are not enrolled in school, there is much greater potential for unrest within communities and for radicalization of beliefs among youth.

Commendably, the Jordanian and Lebanese governments have announced that Syrian refugee children are eligible for free education. However, many barriers to access remain. Only a small percentage of eligible children register and even fewer children continue throughout the year.

- **Employment:** Few opportunities exist for meaningful employment for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. In Jordan Syrian refugees cannot legally work. Often refugees seek work in the informal sector, selling items on the streets. Because of the difficulty in finding employment, Syrian refugees are willing to work for lower wages than members of host communities. As this happens, Syrian refugees are seen as taking low-wage jobs from Jordanians and Lebanese, thus exacerbating tensions with host communities.

Because of the lack of employment opportunities, MCC has found that the use of cash grants and vouchers for refugees are an effective aid strategy that allows refugees the dignity of determining how best to allocate their resources. Our analysis has shown that the recipients of this assistance use it wisely.

Longer-term, international assistance thus needs to be directed toward economic development opportunities, including income generation projects, which benefit Syrian refugees as well as host communities.

- **Housing:** While many refugees initially were able to find housing in flats, this has become much more difficult as the crisis has worn on. The scarcity of housing has driven up housing prices. Many refugees are living in crowded living conditions. Many

others are in unfinished buildings, sometimes with just a tarp to protect them from the winter weather.

- **Protection:** The stress faced by refugees due to crowded living conditions and increased poverty have led to an increase in stress at home as well. Some of MCC's partner organizations have reported increasing levels of family violence among women and children.
- **Psychosocial needs and trauma recovery:** While often overlooked in the international community's response, there are significant psychosocial needs among Syrian refugees. The trauma that they have experienced as a result of the war, losing homes, livelihoods, and loved ones will not be addressed quickly or easily and will require years of psychosocial attention.
- **Concerns of particular communities**
 - **Non-camp refugees in Jordan:** Much of the international community's attention has been focused on Za'atari camp in northern Jordan. However, the majority of Syrian refugees in Jordan are in non-camp settings, where they are much less visible.

These non-camp refugees face significant hurdles, including difficulty in finding affordable housing and lack of employment opportunities. Far greater attention from the international community needs to be devoted to the needs of this refugee population.
 - **Palestinian refugees in Lebanon:** Many Palestinian refugees who had settled in Syria fled to Lebanon as a result of the war. The majority of these have settled in southern Lebanon, where MCC works. These refugees discover that the living conditions for Palestinians in Lebanon are difficult, and some have returned to Syria. In addition, MCC is hearing increasing reports of Palestinian Syrian refugees being harassed or turned back at the Lebanon border.

Host communities

As Syrian refugees began flowing into neighboring countries, many host communities responded with remarkable hospitality and generosity. Some in the region remember being refugees themselves and wanted to respond warmly to those in need.

However, as the war has continued and the number of refugees continues to grow steadily, **tensions with host communities are growing**. Vital services such as water and sanitation and infrastructure are being strained beyond their capacity. Although not stated as official policy, host governments such as Jordan are wary of providing so many supports that refugees will settle permanently and not return to Syria when the conflict finally does come to an end.

Lebanon, a country of just four million people, has more than 1 million Syrian refugees—one-quarter of the population. This has stretched resources incredibly thin. The lack of a functioning government within Lebanon also makes it more difficult to adequately process and deliver humanitarian assistance to communities in need.

In addition, sectarian tensions from the war in Syria have exacerbated differences within Lebanon. This has resulted in increasing incidents of violence, and there is potential for much greater spillover.

Syrian refugees in the United States

As is the case in any such crisis, there will be the need for resettlement in a third country for particularly high-need or at-risk individuals. The U.S. should recognize this need and provide for the resettlement of such individuals, with an expedited processing procedure. In addition, **Syrian refugees settling in the United States will need support systems once they are here**, including assistance with legal concerns, employment, housing and medical care. While the private sector can provide some of these needs, the government must also play a role in ensuring that these support systems are in place.

However, given the vast needs created by the Syrian refugee crisis, **we strongly recommend that U.S. funding be primarily directed toward providing for the humanitarian needs of refugees within the region.**

U.S. humanitarian assistance

We commend the U.S. government for its contributions to the Syrian refugee crisis thus far. The U.S. should continue to provide as generously as possible for humanitarian needs, while continuing its efforts to encourage others in the international community to respond generously as well.

U.S. humanitarian assistance for Syrian refugees should be provided to agencies operating in accordance with international humanitarian law, including the United Nations and its related agencies and nongovernmental organizations. This ensures that aid will be directed to those populations who are most vulnerable, rather than distribution based on one's political beliefs, or religious or sectarian identity.

Recommendations for U.S. policy

1. **The U.S. government should support all efforts to declare an immediate ceasefire and work urgently to de-escalate the violence** that has taken such a tremendous toll on Syrian IDPs and refugees. In the longer term, a political agreement that guarantees the rights of all Syrians will be necessary to ensure that Syrians are able to safely return home.

2. The U.S. should provide as generously as possible for humanitarian needs, directing its funding to agencies, such as the United Nations, that are operating in accordance with international humanitarian law.
3. U.S. assistance should include support for the needs of host communities and governments, as well as less visible refugee populations, such as non-camp refugees in Jordan.
4. The U.S. should support and expedite efforts by international organizations to work toward longer-term development needs, such as infrastructure.
5. The vast majority of U.S. funding for Syrian refugees should be directed to the needs of refugees in the region. However, the United States should offer resettlement as an option for persons who are particularly at risk, including support services for them once they arrive in the United States.

Again, we thank the Committee for its attention to this critical and urgent topic. For further information, please contact Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach, Director, Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office, rls@mcc.org, (202)544-6564, extension 112.

MCC, a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, shares God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice.

mcc.org

**Statement for the Record of HIAS and the Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project
Submitted to
Senate Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights
Hearing on
“The Syrian Refugee Crisis”
January 7, 2014**

The Syrian crisis has imperiled a staggering—and growing—number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), rendering it the worst displacement crisis in decades. The United States has demonstrated its commitment to addressing this humanitarian emergency, recognizing humanitarian relief as both morally imperative and vital to regional stability. Over the past nearly three years since the armed conflict in Syria began, it has become clear that the United States must also include refugee resettlement in its response to the crisis.

The United States and other major resettlement countries had hoped that the Syrian refugee crisis could be regionally contained and that an eventual resolution would enable refugees to return home. Time and experience contradict this. It is clear that the Syrian conflict will continue for a significant period of time, forcing many Syrian refugees to establish lives in exile.

Although most Syrians would like to return home, there is widespread recognition that the conflict will result in thousands of refugees who can never safely return to Syria. While many will be able to temporarily integrate into Lebanon, Jordan, and other host countries, others have no possibility of doing so. For many refugees, resettlement to a safe third country is the sole assurance of their long-term safety. A viable resettlement process is urgently needed to aid the most vulnerable refugees. These particularly at-risk cases include persecuted religious minorities, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), survivors of torture, female-headed households (a non-traditional gender role), human rights activists, LGBTI refugees, and those persecuted for political reasons.

The Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) operates programs in Lebanon and Jordan that provide protection and resettlement assistance to high-risk refugee populations, including LGBTI refugees and survivors of gender or sexual-based violence (SGBV). HIAS has extensive field experience providing critical services in refugee camps and urban areas, as well as rapid response in humanitarian crises. IRAP and HIAS have spent time in the region and have collaborated to evaluate the cases and profiles of Syrian refugees who are in urgent need of resettlement.

As member organizations of Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), HIAS and IRAP endorse the Statement for the Record submitted by RCUSA, which provides background on the Syrian displacement crisis and outlines a recommended plan for refugee resettlement.

In this joint Statement for the Record, HIAS and IRAP will provide:

- (1) Information about Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan;
- (2) Profiles from IRAP’s pro bono legal assistance casework of some of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees; and

- (3) Recommendations for ensuring that Syrian refugees are not unjustly barred from resettlement because of the “terrorism-related inadmissibility grounds” (TRIG).

It is our hope that this information will shed light both on the problems faced by countries of first asylum for Syrian refugees, as well as on the challenges facing certain groups of refugees in these countries, in order to develop adequate responses to this displacement crisis.

Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

Nearly one million Syrian refugees are registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or are awaiting registration in Lebanon—a country of 4.7 million people.¹ Currently, approximately one of every five individuals in Lebanon is a Syrian. The massive influx of Syrian refugees into this small, densely packed country exacerbates Lebanon’s already deteriorating political and security situation. Syrian refugees are dispersed over 1,500 locations throughout Lebanon, with a majority residing in North Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley.² Syrian refugees face acute needs and imminent dangers in Lebanon—most pressing, inadequate shelter, lack of access to education, and threats to their safety.

Through IRAP’s work in Lebanon, we have learned that lack of adequate shelter and education are nearly universal problems for Syrian refugees, and that many Syrian refugees are extremely unsafe in Lebanon.

o Immediate Shelter & Education Needs

According to UNHCR, 41% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon report living in tents, collective shelters, unfinished buildings, and garages.³ Some 14% of households live in tented settlements.⁴ Inadequate shelter for hundreds of thousands of Syrians in Lebanon is an especially acute problem at the height of winter and in the summer months and presents serious public health concerns.⁵ Although many international and local organizations are working to assist refugees needing better shelter, more assistance is needed.⁶ The international community should work with the Lebanese government to create a plan for formal camps.⁷ Even if a number of refugees are resettled from Lebanon or eventually return home, providing adequate housing for those who remain must be a priority until health and security concerns are addressed.

According to UNHCR, more than half of Syrian children are not attending school, mostly because of a lack of financial resources and limited enrollment slots at schools.⁸ In some areas, there are simply no schools available for Syrian children; in others, a lack of transportation

¹ UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response, Inter-agency information sharing portal, January 6, 2014, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>.

² *Ibid.*

³ World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) & UNICEF, Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: 2013 Report, December 26, 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/VASvRreportFinal11-12-13.pdf>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ See, e.g., Oliver Holmes, “Tents, refugees crowd Lebanese valley—just don’t call it a camp,” Reuters, November 29, 2013, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/29/us-syria-crisis-camps-idUSBRE9AS0Q820131129>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) & UNICEF, Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: 2013 Report, December 26, 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/VASvRreportFinal11-12-13.pdf>.

prevents children from attending school.⁹ This absence of educational opportunities could result in a lost generation of Syrians if such opportunities are not increased.

o Protection Concerns

The ongoing crisis in Syria and deepening refugee crisis in Lebanon have resulted in a number of protection concerns for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Armed groups can easily cross Lebanon's porous border from Syria, and the Syrian conflict has spilled over into Lebanon. Some refugees fleeing persecution in Syria continue to be in danger of being persecuted in Lebanon.¹⁰ Political tensions between pro- and anti-regime Lebanese and Syrian communities have grown.¹¹ Perceived and real political and/or religious adversaries, both pro-regime and anti-regime have been victims of targeted killings, kidnappings, physical attacks, and illegal detention.¹²

Refugees with irregular legal status are also in heightened need of protection. While Lebanon has kept its border open to Syrian refugees, border policies became stricter in August 2013, especially for Syrians with damaged or invalid personal documentation.¹³ Further support is required to help strengthen the government's border processes and to decrease the risk of rights violations during flight and upon entry into the country.¹⁴ Syrians are frequently arrested and detained for irregular stay and/or entry.¹⁵ As the security situation in the country further deteriorates and some Syrians lack the financial resources to renew their Lebanese residency permits (which expire after a year), many have lost legal status and consequently their movement is restricted.¹⁶ Lack of legal status gives rise to increasing exploitation of Syrian refugees and exacerbates their difficulty in accessing services.¹⁷

Syrian refugees who do not have official documents and who are residing in regions of the country which have increasing numbers of checkpoints, such as Wadi Khaled in the north and Aarsal in the Bekaa Valley, are at increased risk.¹⁸ Refugees fear kidnappings or exploitation at unofficial checkpoints throughout the country, especially in the Bekaa region. Syrian refugees without legal status rarely approach the police to report crimes. The Norwegian Refugee Council reported recently that the challenges faced by Syrian refugees without legal status include limited access to UNHCR registration sites, income generating activities, essential services, justice, birth

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees- Protection Working Group Lebanon, "Lebanon: RRP5 Update," November 2013, available at http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/working_group.php?Page=Country&LocationId=122&Id=25#.

¹¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees- Protection Working Group Lebanon, "Lebanon: RRP5 Update," November 2013, available at http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/working_group.php?Page=Country&LocationId=122&Id=25#.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees- Protection Working Group Lebanon, "Lebanon: RRP5 Update," November 2013, available at http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/working_group.php?Page=Country&LocationId=122&Id=25#.

¹⁴ UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response, Inter-agency information sharing portal, January 6, 2014, <http://http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>.

¹⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees- Protection Working Group Lebanon, "Lebanon: RRP5 Update," November 2013, available at http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/working_group.php?Page=Country&LocationId=122&Id=25#.

¹⁶ Norwegian Refugee Council, The Consequences of Limited Legal Status for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, December 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/9687105.pdf>.

¹⁷ Norwegian Refugee Council, The Consequences of Limited Legal Status for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, December 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/9687105.pdf>.

¹⁸ Norwegian Refugee Council, The Consequences of Limited Legal Status for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, December 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/9687105.pdf>.

registration, healthcare, shelter, and education.¹⁹ Living in legal limbo also forces many Syrian refugees to take extreme survival measures to provide for themselves. Many refugees have found themselves in dire situations forcing them to engage in survival tactics such as child labor and sex work.²⁰ The United States and the international community should work with the Lebanese government to regularize the status of Syrian refugees, including but not limited to waiving the residency permit renewal fee, to reduce the possibility of further protection risks.

In light of these protection issues facing Syrians in Lebanon, individuals who meet the international refugee definition, present urgent cases, and are priority categories for resettlement, must be processed quickly for resettlement to a third country.

Syrian Refugees in Jordan

As of September 2013, UNHCR reported that there were approximately 550,000 Syrian refugees living throughout Jordan, a number that has grown by thousands since then. While many remain in border towns in the north including al Mafraq, Irbid, and Zafra, there is a substantial population in Amman, the capital and largest city. While the eastern border remains closed, the western border is open. The Jordanian military closely monitors entries into the country because it is being used by infiltrators, smugglers, and others pursuing illegal activities that could destabilize Jordan.

Another one million Syrian refugees are expected to flee across international borders in 2014; a significant number of these will arrive in Jordan. According to the UNHCR, this is now the largest refugee crisis and the largest urban refugee crisis in the world, which shows little signs of abating. The majority (80%) of refugees are living in rented dwellings of various types ranging from two bedroom apartments to corrugated boxed homes.

Many Syrians are referred upon arrival to the Zaatari refugee camp in a desert, desolate part of northern Jordan. While at one time the camp's population was upwards of 125,000, it has since decreased to 80,000 according to UNHCR. Zaatari camp was once the fourth largest city in Jordan. While the Government of Jordan has stated that they have not maintained an open camp policy, in actuality it is—as often the new refugee arrivals receive their allocations (e.g. bedding, food, etc.) and by the following morning they are gone, assimilating into one of the many small Jordanian cities. The United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNWRA) maintains the refugee camp “Cyber City” for Syrian Palestinians, who similarly cannot return home because they would be harmed by both the Government of Syria and the opposition. While Palestinians received favorable treatment under the Assad regime, they are viewed as pariahs by the opposition and considered negatively or deserters by the Assad regime for fleeing. The Government of Jordan also maintains a camp for Syrian military deserters and those that have military ID cards in a former cement factory in Mafraq. In fact, there are more Syrians in Mafraq city than there are Jordanians.

The Syrian refugee population is clearly suffering—children are traumatized and comprise a significant portion of the refugee population. Many children have already lost a year or more of

¹⁹ Norwegian Refugee Council, The Consequences of Limited Legal Status for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, December 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/9687105.pdf>.

²⁰ International Rescue Committee, Reaching the Breaking Point: An IRC briefing note on Syrian refugees in Lebanon, June 2013, available at <http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/Lebanon%20Policy%20Paper,%20Final%20-%20June%202013.pdf>.

education, which does not bode well for those who eventually return. Women and single woman-headed households are subjected to abuse and exploitation, and are often in substantially sub-standard housing. Survival sex and child employment exists, and Syrian refugees' debts are escalating.

The government of Jordan has been receptive and open to Syrian refugees, and to working with UNHCR and the international NGOs providing assistance. However, there is a clear strain on the municipal infrastructure, including water resources, and the need for ongoing humanitarian aid from the international community in order to continually serve this population. While tensions have been minimal so far, this state of affairs may not last due to strain and competition for scarce resources and employment, and the ongoing stress of the war.

These refugees, whose welcome in urban host communities is strained with the passing of each day, are in a constant struggle for survival. The majority fled to cities in the hope of accessing jobs and opportunities for subsistence, but instead they have become part of the urban poor. Women and children are among the increasingly vulnerable urban refugees; they live in fear, feel unwelcome, and are subject to a variety of exploitations as they live on the margins of society.

Most of the Syrian refugees, whether in urban areas or camps, want to return home and leave the insecurity of their current situation. However, there are many who would face persecution or harm if they were to return to Syria if the conflict ended, and they have no possibility of successful integration in their host countries.

In Jordan, they include Syrians who are persecuted religious minorities, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), the disabled (including those deliberately mutilated as a political strategy of the conflict), survivors of torture, women heading households (a non-traditional gender role in this culture), human rights activists, LGBTI refugees, and those persecuted for political reasons, among others. For these high-risk refugees who cannot repatriate or safely integrate to a first country of asylum, the Refugee Convention of 1951 prescribes resettlement to a welcoming third nation as a last-resort solution.

In addition, through HIAS' and IRAP's work and travels in Jordan, we have learned of restrictive border practices and troubling detention policies that impact certain types of refugees in particular. Jordan has a policy of separating "civilian" refugees from "non-civilian" refugees (military deserters). A camp in Mafraq specifically for defectors from the Syrian armed forces houses 2,130 Syrians.²¹ IRAP's field research suggests that at least some of these defectors may be particularly in need of resettlement because they may be among the least likely to ever be able to return to Syria, regardless of the outcome of the conflict. As one interviewee stated, "we are considered traitors by both the Assad regime and the Free Syrian Army; we deserted both armies." Regardless of who wins the war in Syria, these individuals will never be trusted or able to return safely to Syria.

²¹ Amnesty International, *Growing Restrictions, Tough Conditions: The Plight of Those Fleeing Syria for Jordan*, October 2013, Available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE16/003/2013>.

Case Examples of Groups Especially in Need of Resettlement and Protection

In October 2013, UNHCR released a paper entitled “International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic, Update II.”²² The paper offers guidance for assessing individual asylum claims and details several risk profiles of individuals likely in need of international protection.²³ HIAS and IRAP have interviewed a number of refugees who fit these profiles, and IRAP has worked with many refugees in these categories who have since been resettled in a third country or are in the process of resettlement. The following are redacted examples from IRAP’s caseload illustrating many of these risk profiles.

o LGBTI Syrian Refugees

Among UNHCR’s Syrian refugee risk-profiles is “Persons with a lesbian, gay or bisexual sexual orientation and gender-nonconforming persons (lesbians, gay and bisexual persons; transgender and intersex persons [LGBTI]).”²⁴ Due to its extensive work with the LGBTI population in the region and also because of the persecution facing this community in Syria, IRAP’s caseload is overwhelming LGBTI. That said, many LGBTI refugees fit into several risk categories and have valid refugee claims based on several grounds.

Members of the Syrian LGBTI population have been the targets of attack by a variety of actors. The regime, pro-regime militants, armed opposition militias, and individual actors—notably family members—have all targeted this group for their non-conforming gender and sexual orientations.²⁵ LGBTI refugees who identify with various religious and ethnic groups—e.g. Christian, Muslim, Arab, Kurdish, etc.—have come forward with claims of extreme persecution because they have been perceived to violate community norms.²⁶ For example, LGBTI individuals have been targeted by armed Islamist groups as they have taken over territory from the regime, pledging to purge areas of its un-Islamic elements, including LGBTI individuals.²⁷ Unlike other minorities, sexual and gender minorities do not enjoy the protection of political, ethnic, or religious institutions inside Syria or in surrounding countries.²⁸ Therefore these individuals should be a high priority for third country resettlement as countries of first asylum such as Jordan and Lebanon are not welcoming and do not offer long term integration prospects.

In Lebanon, many LGBTI refugees face discrimination by both refugee and host communities. Unlike other groups, LGBTI refugees usually must hide their sexual orientation and gender identity out of fear that disclosure would result in further persecution. Without a social or community network to rely on in order to secure the rudiments of life—housing, employment,

²² UNHCR, International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic, Update II, October 22, 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/5265184f4.pdf>, at 9-10.

²³ UNHCR, International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic, Update II, October 22, 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/5265184f4.pdf>, at 9-10.

²⁴ UNHCR, International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic, Update II, October 22, 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/5265184f4.pdf>, at 9-10.

²⁵ Human Rights Campaign, *Islamist Elements of Syrian Opposition Allegedly Targeting LGBT Individuals*, Nov. 14, 2013, available at <http://www.hrc.org/blog/entry/islamist-elements-of-syrian-opposition-target-lgbt-individuals>.

²⁶ Hannah Lucinda Smith, *How Jihadists are Blackmailing, Torturing, and Killing Gay Syrians*, Vice Magazine, Nov. 12, 2013, available at <http://www.vice.com/read/gay-syrians-are-being-blackmailed-by-jihadists>; *Gays and the Syrian Revolution*, Gay City News, available at <http://gaycitynews.com/gays-and-the-syrian-revolution/>.

²⁷ Human Rights Campaign, *Islamist Elements of Syrian Opposition Allegedly Targeting LGBT Individuals*, Nov. 14, 2013, available at <http://www.hrc.org/blog/entry/islamist-elements-of-syrian-opposition-target-lgbt-individuals>.

²⁸ Haley Bohseine, *Out and Down in Syria's Civil War*, Foreign Policy, Dec. 5, 2013, available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/12/04/down_and_out_syria_gay_community.

etc.—many are left to sleep on the beach, in the streets, or in substandard housing. Many engage in survival sex and through this become victims of further persecution, physical attack, and rape. While some international and local NGOs have provided support and services to this population, a number of refugees have complained that they face discrimination when attempting to access refugee services.

Furthermore, Syrian LGBTI refugees often cannot avail themselves of the protection of the Lebanese state. The Lebanese penal code criminalizes any sexual intercourse “contrary to the order of nature” and so LGBTI refugees are often left with a lack of legal redress.²⁹

In Lebanon, IRAP has undertaken efforts to support this population, specifically by providing emergency housing for the most at-risk LGBTI refugees. IRAP has also worked with local and international NGOs and UNHCR to push for greater access to services and assistance for this vulnerable population, notably in the areas of sexual health and psychosocial services.

▪ **Case examples of protection concerns faced by LGBTI refugees in Lebanon:**

- A refugee living in an informal tented settlement along the Syrian border was suspected to be gay by members of the surrounding community. After several weeks of continuous harassment he was physically attacked. He then relocated to Beirut. Finding no place to live, he returned to the informal tented settlement and awaits the result of his case for resettlement.
- A gay Syrian refugee was stopped by Hezbollah members when they heard his Syrian accent and asked for his identification. When they saw he was from Raqqa, an opposition controlled city in eastern Syria, they blindfolded him and took him away. He was interrogated and all of his personal belongings were searched. The interrogations focused on whether he was with the opposition; he was threatened to be electrocuted if he did not respond to the questions. They said they wanted names of people supporting the opposition in Hezbollah strongholds. As a gay man, he could not seek recourse through formal state channels for these acts.

○ **Case Examples of Other UNHCR-designated Risk Profiles**

▪ **Opponents of the Syrian Government³⁰**

- A Syrian human rights activist and protestor fled from Homs, fearing arrest and persecution at the hands of the Syrian regime after it was discovered that he was involved in organizing protests and documenting human rights abuses. He was later detained and tortured by the regime in Damascus. He fled to a neighboring country but

²⁹Human Rights Watch, *Sex Workers at Risk*, July 19, 2012, available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2012/07/19/sex-workers-risk-0>.

³⁰UNHCR, International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic, Update II, October 22, 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/526518414.pdf>, at 9 (“I. Real or perceived opponents of the Syrian Government, including but not limited to members of political opposition parties; human rights and civil society activists; protestors; civilians residing in urban neighbourhoods, villages and towns (perceived to be) opposing the Government; army defectors and deserters; draft evaders; family members and affiliates of (perceived) Government opponents”).

cannot return to Syria as his name is recorded on the border and his return to Syria would mean his immediate arrest or worse.

- In response to the killing of a number of pro-government militants by rebel forces, pro-Assad troops, supported by paramilitaries, attacked nearby Sunni villages in retaliation. During the massacre at Baniyas, one man's four sons were murdered. He and the rest of his family fled to Lebanon. The elderly father has suffered from epilepsy for years but now also suffers a neurological disorder brought upon by the trauma. He is the only surviving male in the family but due to his age and health condition, he cannot work to support his large family.
- A woman continues to receive threats for her pro-opposition peaceful activism work, including death threats, via Facebook messages, phone calls, and other forms of communication from Sunni oppositionists and pro-regime Alawites while in Lebanon. She was recently physically attacked by unknown assailants while working with refugee children.
- **Opponents of Armed Opposition Groups³¹**
 - A Syrian civil society activist and atheist was living and working in Aleppo. He supported the opposition but was a secular atheist who did not agree with the increasing Islamist radicalization of the armed opposition. He spoke out and wrote articles against al-Qaeda linked groups in control of areas near Aleppo. After a series of death threats, he went into hiding. Once he was able to secure necessary documentation, he fled from Syria, fearing for his life.
- **Professionals³²**
 - A Syrian man worked in and around Damascus as a doctor, treating whoever needed medical care, mostly those who were involved with the opposition and feared seeking care at hospitals. He often moved from neighborhood to neighborhood and operated under different names, fearing detection by the regime. One day he was detained and tortured by pro-regime militants and blackmailed and extorted for money. This was the deciding factor that led him to flee the country upon his release from detention.
- **Members of Certain Religious Groups³³**
 - An Ismaili family living in Homs was repeatedly threatened for supposedly contravening Shari'a law by Sunni Islamist groups operating in their neighborhood. Several other Ismailis in the neighborhood were kidnapped or killed due to their religion. The family often hid inside, fearing that they may fall victim to the next attack. Once the wife was directly threatened for not wearing a headscarf, the family fled Syria.

³¹ UNHCR, International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic, Update II, October 22, 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/5265184f4.pdf>, at 9 ("III. Persons (perceived to be) opposing armed opposition groups and Kurdish armed groups in areas under the de facto control of such armed groups.").

³² UNHCR, International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic, Update II, October 22, 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/5265184f4.pdf>, at 9 ("IV. Professionals, in particular journalists and other media professionals, including citizen journalists and bloggers; doctors and other health professionals; academics; artists; human rights defenders; and humanitarian workers.").

³³ UNHCR, International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic, Update II, October 22, 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/5265184f4.pdf>, at 9 ("V. Members of religious groups (Sunnis, Alawites, Shi'ites, Christians, Ismailis, Druze) and persons perceived to be contravening Shari'a law by Islamist opposition groups.").

- **Kurds and Members of Other Minority Ethnic Groups³⁴**
 - A Syrian Kurdish man had been a longtime political activist with a Kurdish political party and was imprisoned and tortured prior to the outbreak of the war in 2011. After the war started, he again became active in politics and protested the regime in the northeastern city of Qamishlee. One day his house was raided by the regime. Fearing arrest, he fled to a surrounding country.
- **Women Who are Victims of or are At Risk of Sexual Violence or are Without Male Protection³⁵**
 - A Syrian woman fled from her estranged husband's home after years of domestic violence, mental abuse, and her husband's refusal to sometimes feed her and her children. She initially went back to her father's home but her family did not accept her and threatened to throw her kids on the street if she did not return to her husband. Due to the war, she no longer had any work as an Arabic teacher to foreigners and had no way to support herself. Lying to her family, telling them that she was reuniting with her ex-husband and moving to another country, she fled to Lebanon. Several months later her family found out that she was living alone without her husband in Lebanon. Her brother in Lebanon violently attacked her and her son and her father threatened to kill her.

Terrorism-Related Inadmissibility Grounds (TRIG)

A major obstacle to resettling Syrian refugees in the United States is likely to be the application of the Terrorism-Related Inadmissibility Grounds (TRIG) to Syrian refugees. This could bar from resettlement anyone who provided even the most minimal levels of "support"—including a meal or a night of lodging in one's home—to anyone who engaged in resistance against the Assad regime. Children are not exempt from the TRIG bars to admission.

Since the USA Patriot Act expanded the definitions of "terrorist activity" and "terrorist group" in 2001 to include any armed opposition or support for armed groups, regardless of the goals or aims of the group or whether the United States also provides them with support, thousands of bona fide refugees have been kept from resettling or receiving permanent legal status in the United States.

The U.S. government must ensure that Syrian refugees who are otherwise eligible for resettlement and need protection are not barred because of overbroad terrorism definitions that should not be applied to them.

³⁴ UNHCR, International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic, Update II, October 22, 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/5265184f4.pdf>, at 9 ("VI. Kurds and members of other minority ethnic groups.").

³⁵ UNHCR, International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic, Update II, October 22, 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/5265184f4.pdf>, at 10 ("VIII. Women and girls who are victims of or at risk of sexual violence, early and forced marriage, domestic violence, 'honour crimes', sexual exploitation, and, in particular, women without male protection.").

IRAP and HIAS endorse recommendations listed in the RCUSA Statement for the Record and urge the Administration to implement the authority Congress has granted it to exempt Syrian refugees from the TRIG provisions of U.S. law.

There are some Syrian refugees who will never be able to return home or live safely in Lebanon, Jordan, or another country of first asylum. The United States can help Lebanon, Jordan, and the other countries of first asylum that have shouldered the responsibility for so many Syrians fleeing the crisis by providing assistance and resettling some of the most vulnerable refugees who are unable to live in these countries in safety. By doing so, the United States will proudly honor its tradition of providing safe haven for refugees and ensure that the most vulnerable can rebuild their shattered lives free of fear.

Statement for the Record of Human Rights First**The Syrian Refugee Crisis**

Before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the

Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights

January 7, 2014

Introduction

Over 2.3 million refugees have fled Syria in search of safety in neighboring countries—Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq—and North Africa. This number, which represents over 10% of Syria's population, continues to grow as relentless, widespread, and systematic attacks on civilians in Syria continue. An additional 6.5 million are displaced within Syria, amounting to close to a third of the country's population. An estimated 9.3 million people within Syria are in desperate need of life-saving assistance, but their access to aid is being blocked or delayed, primarily by the regime.

At the same time, refugees from Syria are facing increasing challenges both in gaining admission to countries of refuge and in surviving after they get there. The influx of refugees, which accelerated dramatically over the course of the past year, is placing very serious strains on neighboring states, which are increasingly imposing bans, restrictions, closures, and quotas that leave many people trapped inside Syria or force them to flee by more difficult or dangerous routes. Refugees who attempt to seek protection farther afield are also facing ever more difficult and hostile conditions, as they are met with a combination of visa restrictions, detention, discrimination, and physical abuse. Over 250 people, most of them refugees from Syria, are believed to have drowned in a single incident in October when the boat on which they were trying to reach safety in Europe sank in the Mediterranean.

Syrian refugees in the neighboring countries that continue to host the overwhelming majority of them are struggling to support themselves in conditions that have become even more miserable with the onset of an unusually harsh winter. Syria's neighbors have been generous, and the United States and other countries have supported the relief effort, but providing humanitarian relief to hundreds of thousands of people remains a massive logistical and political challenge for the neighboring countries, and the United Nations refugee appeal, funded at less than 50% for most of 2013, had collected only 68% of requested funds by the end of the year. The situation of refugees living outside of official camps (who make up the majority of refugees in the region) and that of children are particularly alarming. On a trip to Jordan and Turkey in late October and early November, a Human Rights First delegation found refugees in Jordan falling severely into debt in their attempts to maintain themselves in inadequate shelter, and families in Turkey living in makeshift tents without regular food, with no electricity, and with very limited access to toilets and running water. One family of seven living under these conditions had fled Hama, Syria, after their baby daughter was killed in the bombing of their house; the surviving family members included a severely traumatized four-year-old and a father who was receiving no medical care for wounds sustained in the same bombing that killed his baby.

How the United States addresses this refugee crisis will be a critical test for U.S. leadership in the region. The United States has played a leading role in providing humanitarian assistance, giving \$1.3 billion to relief efforts both within Syria and in neighboring countries. This is consistent both with U.S. leadership on humanitarian relief and its strategic interest in preventing further destabilization of the region. But the U.S. government can and should do more, including by using its unique position as a global leader to champion the protection of refugees trying to flee from Syria and to launch a meaningful resettlement initiative. Vital human rights protections long championed by the United States are currently being undermined, giving the impression that the international community will stand by while people fleeing persecution and brutal conflict are turned away at borders. The United States moreover has not launched, or taken key steps to prepare for, a significant resettlement initiative that would demonstrate to Syria's neighbors a real commitment to share in hosting at least some of Syria's refugees and would encourage other resettlement states to follow suit. Nor has it addressed some of the impediments relating to admissibility under U.S. immigration law that could deny U.S. protection to some of the very refugees who are of particular concern to the United States. A meaningful resettlement initiative, in addition to providing a future to the individual refugees and families it would directly assist, should be seen as part of a broader effort to increase the protection space available to Syrian refugees in the region and globally.

Specific recommendations for steps the U.S. government should take to address this crisis are outlined at the end of this statement. Additional detail on these recommendations and a fuller description of the situation underlying them can be found in a Human Rights First report, *Refugee at Risk: The Syria Refugee Crisis and U.S. Leadership*, published in November 2013 and based on visits to Jordan and Turkey in late October and November 2013 and interviews with refugees, humanitarian workers, and government officials.¹ Those recommendations that are country-specific focus on Jordan and Turkey because those are the countries we visited; this should not be read to diminish the role of Lebanon, which is hosting more refugees from Syria than any other neighboring country, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of its population. These recommendations are endorsed by Refugee Council USA, a coalition of U.S. non-governmental organizations focused on refugee protection, of which Human Rights First is a member, and which is submitting a separate statement for the record.

Flight from Syria and Access to Protection Abroad

Even as violence in Syria continues to escalate in advance of peace talks scheduled to begin later this month in Geneva, the options for refugees seeking protection abroad are becoming more limited. While Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, in the face of extraordinary challenges, have committed themselves to keeping borders open as a matter of principle, in practice, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, and to a lesser and more recent extent Lebanon, have all imposed restrictions on access to their territory by persons fleeing Syria. In parallel to these developments, states that do not share a border with Syria are using a variety of measures including visa regimes, unlawful pushbacks, and detention that prevent Syrian refugees from seeking their protection.

The Refugee Convention and customary international law prohibit the return of a refugee to any country where his or her life or freedom would be threatened on account of race, religion,

¹ That report is available at <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/HRF-Syrian-Refugees-Jordan-Turkey-final.pdf>.

nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The Refugee Convention precludes any act of *refoulement* attributable to a state—including non-admittance at borders—which could have the effect of returning an asylum seeker or refugee to a place where his or her life and freedom would be threatened. *Non-refoulement* is also a principle of customary international law, binding on all states including those which are not parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. It applies to the moment at which asylum seekers present themselves for entry at a border or entry point, and it also applies in situations of mass influx.

Both the Jordanian and the Turkish governments have repeatedly affirmed their commitment to the principle of *non-refoulement*. These expressions, on the part of states that are disproportionately bearing the brunt of the Syrian refugee crisis, are important and should be welcomed. In practice, however, while both countries continue to allow Syrian refugees to enter, Jordan and Turkey have both implemented significant restrictions that generally refuse entry to some categories of persons arriving from Syria, episodically deny entry to others, and impose what appear to be numerical limitations on the entry of refugees generally, leaving some in unsafe situations within Syria.

People fleeing persecution and violence in Syria are not freely able to seek protection at Jordan's borders. Jordan denies entry to Palestinians and Iraqis resident in Syria, and in practice regularly denies entry to men traveling alone. Refugees not falling into any of these categories have also been turned away from Jordan's borders, however. The number of new arrivals of Syrian refugees in Jordan fell off dramatically between April 2013 (when over 40,000 entered Jordan on a monthly basis) and August 2013, when only 1,809 entered. This drastic decline is not explicable either by conditions in Syria—where violence continued and in several areas intensified during this period—or by the impact of fighting and airstrikes in border areas.

While the border remains officially open, some people are simply turned away, while others are turned away and told not to come back for a month or 40 days, or are sent to other border crossings. Syrians without valid identification face difficulties in crossing or are entirely unable to cross. There are also obstacles in reaching the border on the Syrian side due to fighting or the presence of dangerous checkpoints along the way. At present, a few hundred continue to enter Jordan every day, but the vast majority of them are now forced to do so through irregular channels along the eastern edge of Syria's border with Jordan. This is a much longer and more arduous route, which requires refugees, including some very elderly people, pregnant women, and very young children, to walk for up to three days through the desert in order to reach the Jordanian border.

Persons deemed by border officials to constitute a security threat are also being turned away at the Jordanian border, while defectors from the Syrian armed forces or security services are being placed in a "defectors camp" in Jordan where they do not have access to UNHCR registration or monitoring. While Jordan and other states receiving refugees from Syria should be taking steps to ensure that they are not extending safe haven to individuals who have committed grave crimes and may also refuse protection to those who pose a threat to their security, such decisions must be based on individualized assessments. Currently, there is no monitoring of Jordan's security screening, including of young men traveling alone. There is also not yet consistent monitoring by UNHCR or independent human rights monitors at formal ports of entry, including the airport as well as the more regularly used irregular border crossing points.

Refugees also continue to flee the north of Syria into Turkey. Entry into Turkey, however, depends on whether a particular border post is open, whether the person has a valid passport, and (for those seeking entry into one of the camps) whether there is space available. While Syrians who have valid passports are admissible to Turkey without visas and in fact continue to be admitted, those without passports who do not present an urgent medical need are frequently barred from crossing into Turkey if the camps on the Turkish side of the border are full.² Border posts have also been formally closed on a regular basis due to security concerns. This has led to the establishment of IDP camps on the Syrian side, which at the time of our visit to Turkey in early November, were home to around 77,000 people. Conditions in these camps are reportedly appalling and the camps have been subject to airstrikes by the Syrian regime. There is currently almost no protection monitoring at the Syria-Turkey border.

Entry into Iraq, which as of December was hosting 209,460 registered refugees, is currently very limited, as unofficial border crossings, open in August, have now been closed again, and the official border crossing is also closed. Lebanon, which has received a staggering 858,641 refugees from Syria and kept its borders open both in policy and in practice, is reported to have implemented some more limited border restrictions, denying entry to refugees with damaged documentation and limiting access for some Palestinians fleeing from Syria.

Growing restrictions on access for refugees fleeing Syria are also spreading to more distant countries in the Middle East and North Africa, including Egypt which, in addition to imposing new visa requirements, has also become a hostile environment for Syrian refugees under the military regime. In the European Union and in North America, meanwhile, Syrian nationals have long been required to obtain visas, and in general, worsening political conditions in the home country make such visas harder to obtain. These restrictions on entry to more distant countries of refuge, combined with increasingly difficult conditions in countries of first asylum in Syria's immediate region, are costing lives as refugees from Syria attempt dangerous sea crossings and difficult land routes.

Growing Challenges of Survival in Neighboring States

Refugees from Syria across the region are struggling to support themselves and their families. These challenges are particularly acute for those living outside of refugee camps, who constitute the majority of Syrian refugees in both Jordan and Turkey and the totality of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Housing is an overwhelming problem for refugees in all of these countries. In Jordan and Turkey, most refugees do not have permission to work and so are dependent on aid. Even though most refugees are living in urban settings where they must cover their own costs for housing, transportation, and all the other critical expenses of daily life, funding for cash assistance has not kept pace with the crisis. Only a very limited number of families are receiving any form of regular cash assistance from humanitarian agencies.

² For years before the current crisis, the Syrian government used the refusal of passports and restrictions on foreign travel as a means of political control over its population. Under current conditions, Syrians coming from opposition-controlled areas face serious obstacles in obtaining or renewing a passport, as do those who are wanted by Syrian intelligence for their activism or have not completed their military service. As UNHCR has emphasized, "entry and admission of persons having fled Syria needs to be dealt with in a protection-sensitive manner regardless of whether they resort to seeking entry without appropriate documentation or in an otherwise irregular manner."

Many refugees in the neighboring countries are currently living in conditions that are unsafe and have become life-threatening with the onset of winter. In Amman, we met with a family who over the course of 11 months in Jordan had been forced to move ten times because they could not pay rent. When we interviewed them they were living in a single room on the roof of an apartment building. Bare wires hung from the ceiling and water poured in through the ceiling and outer wall whenever it rained. Human Rights First visited one home in Amman where approximately 40 people were living in three rooms.

Over half of Syrian refugees are children, yet only a minority of Syrian children of school age in Jordan are currently attending school, and the same is true of an even smaller minority of children living outside of camps in Turkey. There are many reasons for this situation, including the inability of families, lacking any source of cash, to pay for school supplies and transportation, difficulties in Turkey in obtaining the residence permits required for registration in Turkish schools, the reluctance of some school officials in Jordan to register Syrian children despite official policies allowing their enrollment, and the fact that many children are working to help support their families. Many of these children have fled horrific violence in Syria. A frightening number of Syrian refugee children are survivors of torture or traumatized from having witnessed extreme violence, and they and their parents (who are also suffering high levels of trauma and struggling to cope with the effects this has on their children) have very limited access to psychological support. This too poses a challenge to children's education, and makes their enrollment in school and reintegration into the routines of a more normal life all the more important. But the longer children are out of the school, the less likely that they will re-enroll in school, or be able to catch up if they do. An entire generation of Syrian youth is on the verge of being lost, a situation that should be of grave concern not only for the future of Syria but for the broader region and the international community.

At the time of Human Rights First's visit to Jordan and Turkey two months ago, it was disturbing that even those refugees who were in better situations appeared to be on a downward spiral, as their residual savings disappeared and they were caught between increasing difficulties in finding and retaining illegal work, rising rents, the wearing effects of months of anxiety about their ability to meet the most basic needs of their families, and a growing realization that their own futures and those of their children were being foreclosed.

Resettlement, Returns, and Planning for the Long Term

In the early stages of this crisis, refugees fleeing Syria were overwhelmingly focusing their hopes on an imminent return to their home country. The UNHCR and humanitarian actors on the ground were almost entirely focused on providing them with initial assistance and protection in their countries of first asylum, and also hesitant to move forward with resettlement at a time when the situation in Syria seemed susceptible to reversal. Now, nearly three years after the beginning of the uprising in Syria, violence has escalated further in advance of unpromising peace talks scheduled for later this month in Geneva. Many refugees who long to return home no longer have homes to return to. Others are in urgent need of protection or assistance that is not currently available to them in neighboring states. The time has come for the international community, refugee-hosting states, and humanitarian organizations to move forward with planning for the long term.

Refugee resettlement for those in greatest need should be one piece of the long-term plan, but in order for resettlement to bring relief to the refugees who need it and the neighboring communities

currently hosting them in ever-larger numbers, the international community will need to do a great deal more a great deal faster than it is accomplishing at present. U.S. leadership will be critical in making that happen. The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is a critical part of U.S. efforts to provide protection around the world and offers opportunities for a new beginning for tens of thousands each year. By stepping up U.S. efforts to resettle some of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees, the United States will reaffirm its solidarity with the Syrian people who continue to suffer the effects of the protracted conflict, as well as solidarity with Syria's neighbors as these each host hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees. Launching a significant resettlement effort for Syrian refugees is an achievable and meaningful way for the United States to provide humanitarian leadership.

Human Rights First met with a number of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Turkey, and continues to receive information on other cases, for whom resettlement could very well be the most appropriate durable solution. These include:

- Several human rights activists, most of them also survivors of torture, who have paid a very heavy price for their support of principles of democracy, government transparency, and human rights. These people are left at a professional and educational dead-end in Jordan, even while they and their families try to cope with the lasting effects of their experiences in Syria and in several cases with the continuing persecution of their extended families and home communities. They believed that the United States supported their peaceful struggle. It is in the interest of the United States and of the future of Syria that these people not feel that they have been entirely abandoned.
- Refugees with urgent or chronic medical needs that are not being met locally. These included a Syrian man who has lost all his limbs to amputation and at the time of our visit was living with his wife and four children on the fourth floor of a dilapidated apartment with no heater and no door; the family was receiving no cash assistance and had no income. This man stated that doctors he had seen at Jordanian hospitals did not know how to deal with his disease.
- Families left with no adult breadwinner due to horrific persecution in Syria, whose conditions in their countries of first asylum are jeopardizing the future of their children. These include a family whose middle son, aged 14, crawled away from the site of a massacre in which his father and uncle are believed to have been killed. The father was being pursued by Syrian security forces for having provided assistance to demonstrators. The child was covered in his uncle's blood and apparently escaped because the killers believed that he was dead like the rest. The family fled to Jordan with nothing. As of October 2013, the older son, 17, had abandoned his studies to try to support his surviving family of five, whose needs are exacerbated by the chronic medical needs of his younger sister.

UNHCR, which referred relatively few Syrian refugees for resettlement in 2013, for the reasons indicated earlier, is asking that countries accept 30,000 refugees from Syria for resettlement, humanitarian admission, family reunification, or other programs by the end of 2014. In anticipation of this, UNHCR has begun to scale up its own capacity to identify those most in need of resettlement and prepare their applications for submission to resettlement countries. UNHCR has recently increased its refugee status determination and resettlement capacity in Jordan and Lebanon and is in the process of doing so in Turkey.

As of December 2013, resettlement countries collectively had pledged places for 15,244 Syrian refugees, of which 10,000 took the form of an offer of temporary humanitarian admission (rather than full resettlement) by Germany. Each year, the United States resettles more refugees than any other country and resettled 69,926 refugees from around the world in FY 2013. Of those, only 36 were from Syria. The United States has yet to prepare for a serious Syrian resettlement effort by increasing staffing at its Resettlement Support Centers in Amman and Istanbul.

Moreover, the State Department does not anticipate receiving large numbers of Syrian refugees over the coming fiscal year. The refugee admission numbers the State Department has proposed for fiscal year 2014, which commit to resettling up to 33,000 refugees from the Middle East and South Asia combined during the coming year, represent an increase of only 600 from last year's total. The 32,390 resettled from the region last year included almost 20,000 Iraqi refugees as well as nearly 10,000 Bhutanese. Both these countries are likely to contribute sizeable numbers again this year, leaving few places available for Syrian refugees. Making resettlement available to Syrian refugees should not be done at the expense of others in the region who are in urgent need.

The governments of Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan have all expressed an interest in increased resettlement of Syrian refugees, but in order for such an effort to constitute a real show of solidarity with those states and to help alleviate the conditions of Syrian refugees within their territories, the numbers involved will need to represent more than a token gesture. A Turkish government official told Human Rights First that if resettlement countries would commit to receiving a sizeable number of refugees, Turkey would appreciate this as a demonstration of actual support. When we asked what he considered sizeable, he reminded us that Turkey was hosting an estimated 700,000 refugees and said, "You do the math." Lebanon is currently hosting 858,641 Syrian refugees. Lebanon's total population as of 2012 was about 4.425 million. As Senator Menendez noted at a hearing in late October before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, this "is equivalent to some 58 million refugees entering the United States." (The number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has increased by over 80,000 since Senator Menendez made that remark, so the current equivalent in U.S. terms would be closer to 59.5 million.³) The United States and other countries outside the region should recognize the enormity of what Syria's neighbors are facing and consider their own resettlement commitments in that context.

As part of this effort, the United States should move swiftly and proactively to address the unintended effects of over-broad inadmissibility provisions under U.S. immigration law intended to bar from the United States persons who engaged in terrorist activity. As detailed in reports issued by Human Rights First over the past six years, for a number of years now, provisions of U.S. immigration law that treat any rebellion against any established government as "terrorist activity," and any assistance to such a rebellion as "material support" to terrorism, have ensnared legitimate refugees with no real connection to terrorism. In a number of interviews throughout the region, questions were raised about the ability of the United States to resettle refugees who have not engaged in or supported any wrongdoing, but could be swept up by the inadmissibility provisions of U.S. immigration law. In the past, these provisions have been used to exclude Iraqi refugees who supported the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, Sudanese who fought against the armed forces of

³ Numbers of refugees per country provided throughout this statement are those of registered refugees. The actual numbers of refugees are believed to be significantly higher, as some have not registered as refugees in the countries where they are.

President Omar Al-Bashir, and Eritreans who fought for independence from Ethiopia. As a coalition of Jewish groups noted in a letter to President Bush in 2006, “Shocking, under today’s laws, Jews who bravely resisted and survived Nazi terror would be excluded from refuge in the United States. Under current policy, the Warsaw ghetto uprising would be considered ‘terrorist activity’ because it involved the use of weapons against persons or property for reasons other than ‘mere personal monetary gain.’”

In the Syrian context, these statutory provisions threaten to exclude from refugee protection anyone who fought with any armed opposition group in Syria (regardless of whether or not the individual applicant was involved in any violations of international humanitarian law or other crimes), anyone who provided “material support” to any opposition force or opposition fighter, anyone who solicited funds or members for such a force, and even anyone whose *spouse or parent* is found to have done any of these things. While anyone who bears responsibility for war crimes, crimes against humanity, or the persecution of other people should be excluded from refugee protection, and is in fact excludable under other provisions of U.S. immigration law, the sweeping nature of the law’s “terrorism”-related provisions would affect people who have engaged in no wrongdoing and pose no threat to the United States. Unless swift action is taken to correct this problem, these laws will exclude from refugee protection anyone who assisted opposition groups, even those whose efforts the U.S. government has supported verbally and/or materially, against a regime it has repeatedly condemned.

More than five years ago, Congress, in a bipartisan effort led by Senators Patrick Leahy and Jon Kyl, amended the law to expand the administration’s discretionary authority to exempt persons with no actual connection to terrorism from the effects of these statutory definitions. However, to date, the relevant government agencies have failed to establish workable procedures to implement that authority effectively. The United States has not yet developed any specific exemptions or policies for addressing the impact of these inadmissibility provisions on resettlement or asylum for Syrian refugees. In the past, the U.S. government’s approach to such situations has been reactive: it has waited until it is presented with actual cases in need of exemptions, and has then taken years to issue them.

Overbroad interpretation of the law’s already broad terms compounds the problem: the federal agencies involved in the adjudication of refugee and other immigration cases currently treat virtually *any* assistance to an armed group—of any type and in any amount—as “material support.” This notion has been applied to the most minimal of donations to rebel groups, to ordinary commercial transactions with armed groups or their members, and to assistance that has nothing to do with the furtherance of violent acts, e.g. donations of medical supplies. Many Syrian refugees currently seeking protection abroad were formerly resident in areas of Syria where opposition forces were present or in control, and whose civilian inhabitants were in many cases targeted for overwhelming violence by Syrian government forces. While not all of these ties would make refugees inadmissible under U.S. laws, those laws as currently interpreted and applied would exclude, for example:

- A family who, while their residential neighborhood was being bombed by government forces, sheltered a wounded opposition fighter in their home;

- A boy who, after his father was killed, was recruited by opposition forces and after serving with them for a time, left the conflict to join his mother and younger siblings in a neighboring country;
- A refugee who gave money to members of an opposition group to assist herself and her children in reaching the border to seek safety in a neighboring country; and
- Even the owner of a grocery store in a neighborhood under opposition control from whom opposition fighters bought vegetables.

Some of the legal interpretations at issue here (specifically the treatment of minimal contributions and “routine commercial transactions” as “material support”) have been under review by the DHS Office of General Counsel for over two years now. This review needs to be completed. The United States should treat the Syrian refugee crisis as an opportunity to get its approach to mitigating the unintended consequences of these immigration law provisions on legitimate refugees out of crisis mode and onto a workable footing for the future.

In addition, Iraqi refugees inside Syria, including U.S.-affiliated Iraqis, currently waiting to be resettled to the United States face severe obstacles and significant dangers. Approximately 4,000 Iraqis, many of whom worked with U.S. troops and NGO’s during the war, are stuck in Syria even though they are already in the “pipeline” for resettlement to the United States. Another 1,500 have been approved and are still awaiting departure. Thousands more are awaiting USCIS interviews before they can be approved for resettlement to the United States. The U.S. embassy in Damascus is closed and USCIS staff are not traveling to Syria. Jordan has not allowed these refugees to travel to Jordan for USCIS interviews. Those able to reach Iraq are continuing the resettlement process there, but for many the journey from their location within Syria to the border with Iraq is fraught with danger, as is travel within Iraq where they still face the same threats of persecution that precipitated their initial flight.

Although some refugees are currently returning to Syria, Human Rights First did not hear evidence of people returning due to a perception that it was now safe to do so, and did hear from a few refugees that they were considering returning to Syria because their lives had become so desperate in Jordan. Very little preparation has begun at this stage for eventual large scale returns, but when and if such returns happen they could happen quickly, and the international community should begin planning now to deal with the significant challenges that will arise due to the devastation of the Syrian economy, mass displacement, and major issues surrounding housing, land and property, and documentation.

Recommendations

Because of its range of relationships with political, military, and civil society leaders in the region, the United States is uniquely situated to help address the challenges discussed above. The highest priority is to help find a political resolution to the violence that ultimately guards against instability, secures respect for human rights, alleviates suffering, and saves lives. With respect to the areas of greatest relevance to this hearing, the United States should:

Champion protection for those fleeing persecution and conflict, by:

- **Pressing states to lift barriers to protection.** U.S. officials, including President Obama and Secretary Kerry, and Members of Congress should urge all states to end any bans,

prohibitions, closures, entry quotas, and restrictions that are inconsistent with international human rights and refugee protection standards.

- **Compiling weekly reports on the border situation.** U.S. Embassies should compile weekly reports on the ability of refugees to cross from Syria based on information from local government counterparts, humanitarian partners and U.S. government sources.
- **Stepping up support to refugee-hosting states.** The United States and other countries should increase support for refugee-hosting states through development assistance, bilateral aid, and increased funding of UN humanitarian appeals.
- **Supporting meaningful border monitoring.** The U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) should encourage and support human rights and refugee protection monitoring at borders and at airports by UNHCR and independent human rights monitors.

Step up support for protection of refugees, addressing acute needs outside camps, by:

- **Strengthening support for refugees outside camps.** The United States should provide additional funding for urban refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, and make assistance inclusive of marginalized and underserved groups.
- **Supporting host countries with bilateral aid to assist with costs associated with hosting refugees.** The United States should support Jordan with increased bilateral aid, targeted to help refugee-hosting communities and needs, and work with other donors to provide bilateral aid to Turkey.
- **Increasing support for host communities through development aid**
- **Encouraging countries to make work authorization more accessible.**
- **Improving access to education.** The United States should work with the government of Jordan and humanitarian partners to obstacles to access. It should also encourage Turkey to waive residence requirements to register in Turkish schools, provide accreditation for schools teaching the Syrian curriculum, and support efforts to expand these schools. The United States should also support higher education initiatives.
- **Speaking out against detention:** The U.S. should request regular updates from UNHCR and NGO partners regarding detention of Syrian, Iraqi and other refugees and raise concerns with host governments.

Launch a meaningful resettlement initiative and lay groundwork for return, by:

- **Launching a meaningful resettlement initiative:** The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, with support and leadership from the White House and security vetting agencies, should increase resettlement for vulnerable Syrian refugees facing protection challenges and should take steps to launch a more significant resettlement effort that will demonstrate real burden-sharing to Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, and other refugee-hosting states in the region. This initiative should aim to resettle at least 15,000 Syrian refugees a year from the region, depending on the evolving needs and length of the crisis. Key steps include:
 - PRM should provide support to help increase UNHCR's refugee status determination and resettlement capacity;

- PRM should increase staff capacity in U.S. Resettlement Support Centers;
 - DHS should increase its capacity to conduct circuit rides to the region to interview refugees for potential resettlement;
 - DHS should work with security vetting agencies to increase the number of security checks that can be expedited in order to better expedite resettlement for refugees facing significant risks; and
 - Security vetting agencies and the White House should ensure sufficient staffing for security background checks.
- **Proactively addressing unintended and unjust impediments to resettlement:** DHS, in consultation with the Departments of State and Justice, should act now to allow exemptions to be issued on a case-by-case basis to anyone who voluntarily provided non-violent assistance to a Syrian armed opposition group that the United States does not consider to be a terrorist organization outside of the context of the immigration law. Such exemptions would only be available to applicants who have passed all applicable security and background checks, have established that they meet the refugee definition and are not subject to other bars, and did not knowingly support noncombatants or U.S. interests; such exemptions are unavailable by statute to anyone who provided material support to a group that is designated or listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S. government. These agencies should also allow exemptions to be granted on a case-by-case basis to former combatants who otherwise meet the refugee definition and are not subject to any other bars, have passed all applicable security and background checks, establish that they pose no threat to the safety or security of the United States, and (1) were children at the time, or (2) did not participate in, or knowingly provide material support to, activities that targeted noncombatants or U.S. interests. DHS should also complete a long-pending review of its legal interpretation of the term “material support.” The current application of the “material support” bar to minimal donations and to routine commercial transactions with members of armed groups is greatly inflating the number of cases unjustly affected by this provision of the immigration law.
- **Continue and improve resettlement of Iraqi and other refugees:** The United States should continue to resettle Iraqi refugees and find ways to conduct USCIS interviews with Iraqis trapped in Syria who are waiting to be resettled to the United States. The United States has a special responsibility to address the plight of this population. Options that should be pressed include evacuation and safe passage to Jordan and should also include the use of video-conferencing. Moreover, continued resettlement of Iraqi refugees—as well as resettlement of Somali, Sudanese, and other refugees—will demonstrate U.S. commitment to helping host refugees from the region.
- **Lay groundwork for return:** The United States should support all efforts to make sure returns are voluntary and informed, and invest in programs aimed at preparing and laying groundwork for eventual return movements addressing issues of land, property rights, documentation, and reconstruction.



Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the
Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights

Hearing on “The Syrian Refugee Crisis”

Andrea Koppel
Vice President, Global Engagement and Policy, Mercy Corps

Statement for the Record

January 6, 2014

Mercy Corps is an Oregon-based humanitarian and development non-profit organization working in over 40 countries. Our mission is to alleviate suffering, poverty and oppression by helping people build secure, productive and just communities. For over 30 years, Mercy Corps has had a presence in the Middle East, working together with local partners to address humanitarian and protection needs, build the capacity of local and national governments, mitigate violence, and address the specific needs of children and youth.

We greatly appreciate the attention this subcommittee has paid to the Syrian refugee crisis, and particularly, Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Cruz, for their leadership in highlighting the needs of both the displaced, as well as host communities impacted by the massive refugee influx. As the crisis nears its third year anniversary, and refugees continue to leave Syria en masse, the Middle East region is being dramatically altered. The number of Syrian refugees is estimated to reach 3.5 million by the end of 2014: one in four people living in Lebanon is already a Syrian refugee while Jordan’s scarce natural and financial resources have been stretched gossamer-thin.

From our experience working in the refugee hosting countries of Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, we believe it is imperative that the donor community shift gears and develop an integrated strategy that moves beyond basic provision of humanitarian assistance. The gravity of the challenge, and the shortage of funds,¹ require that donor resources are spent smarter and more efficiently. If Congress wants to best address this protracted crisis, we urge you to support the following recommendations:

1) Recalibrate the response strategy to fund and integrate relief and development.

Short-term programs alone cannot adequately address the needs of the Syrian crisis. Unfortunately, relief programs of 3-12 months duration have made up the majority of the response. This is counterproductive. Short-term programs do not allow for comprehensive responses to complex needs. Lurching from one short-term plan to the next undermines efficiency and, among recipients, creates unhealthy dependencies on external support. Instead, donors must shift away from “siloed” approaches – in which short-term humanitarian responses

¹ For details on the most recent consolidated appeal, see online at: <http://www.data.unhcr.org/syria-rrp6/regional.php>

and three- to five-year development programs are kept separate— and instead implement a holistic strategy that bridges relief and development needs; works to deliver best “value for money” outcomes; shores up the ability of front-line communities to withstand and respond to the challenges of a protracted crisis; and enables donors and implementers to efficiently marshal limited resources in response to growing, long-term needs.

The US Congress can aid in these efforts through support to flexible funding accounts such as the Complex Crisis Fund (CCF) that bridge these aims and are nimble enough to respond to emerging needs. At the same time, we also ask you to shore up the US government’s core humanitarian accounts: International Disaster Assistance (IDA), Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) and Food for Peace (FFP). The vast requirements in Syria, alongside unexpected global challenges in countries ranging from the Philippines to South Sudan, have resulted in unprecedented needs. This funding is an important cornerstone of the US government’s efforts to support stability and provide lifesaving assistance around the world. Additionally, Congress must also support the Economic Support Fund (ESF), which provides essential longer-term development programs to countries including Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq and protects fragile development gains previously made in these countries.

2) Build the resilience of refugees and host communities. As part of the US response, we must emphasize “resilience” that is, building the capacity of communities to learn, cope, adapt, and transform in the midst of this crisis. Increasing the ability of communities to adapt and respond to shocks and stresses requires more than simply digging a well or building a new school. Programs should buttress local institutions and build cross-community partnerships. To prevent the disruption resulting from a sudden drop-off in services, the US Congress can encourage programs that invest in local actors who can ultimately manage, design, and implement programs that work in tandem with national response plans.

3) Implement accountability mechanisms to empower refugees and host communities. At present, the response has not fully integrated Syrian and host community voices. More inclusive coordination mechanisms would help ensure a comprehensive and tailored response, mitigate conflict between different ethnic or religious groups, and provide formal opportunities for hosts and refugees to cooperate and build social capital. Multilateral funds and bilateral programming must be rebalanced toward a “bottom up” approach. Based on Mercy Corps’ experiences in Iraq and other recent response efforts in countries like Afghanistan have shown that when responses are top-down, sustainability, efficiency, and buy-in suffers. Instead, local civil society actors should have a seat on Secretariats responsible for guiding and shaping response strategy, planning, and budgeting, and their inclusion should be a *prerequisite* to donor funding of such bodies. We ask this subcommittee to ensure that any multilateral funding structures incorporate local voices and that USG bilateral programs prioritize empowerment of refugees and host communities.

We greatly appreciate the opportunity to present these recommendations, drawn from our on-the-ground experiences in the region. To read more on our in-depth recommendations related to the Syrian crisis response, please see our report *Charting a New Course: rethinking the Syrian*

refugee response.² Thank you again for the much-needed attention this committee has paid to the crisis and for your efforts to improve the lives of the Syrian people and their neighbors.

² Available online at: <http://www.merivcorps.org/research-resources/charting-new-course-re-thinking-syrian-refugee-response>

Physicians for
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Using Science and Medicine to
Stop Human Rights Violations

Statement for the Record from Physicians for Human Rights

Hearing Before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights

The Syrian Refugee Crisis

January 7, 2014

Dear Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Cruz, and distinguished Members of this Committee:

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) appreciates this opportunity to share our experience and the voices of the medical and legal communities inside Syria concerning the plight of Syrian refugees. In order to properly meet the needs of the refugee population, one must understand the underlying violence and persecution that drives people to leave their homes.

Mass Atrocities in Syria

Mass atrocities – including indiscriminate and targeted physical attacks upon civilians, arbitrary arrests, torture, and crimes of sexual violence – have forced an estimated 6.5 million people to flee their homes. Despite dire humanitarian situations in internally displaced person (IDP) or refugee camps, high numbers continue to flee the conflict, which has taken an estimated 125,000 lives to date. Over 500,000 refugees have sought safety in Jordan, another half million have gone to Turkey, and over 800,000 have sought refugee protection in Lebanon. Inadequate humanitarian assistance in neighboring countries and in IDP camps inside Syria is creating crisis situations where civilians cannot access basic medical care, food, or clean water, with some facing the threat of starvation.

Targeted Attacks on Health Workers and Infrastructure

A particularly harrowing feature of the ongoing conflict in Syria is the systematic and widespread nature of attacks on the country's health system, including physical attacks on medical facilities and the arrest, detention, and torture of medical personnel. PHR has documented violations of medical neutrality – or attacks on health workers, medical facilities, patients, transport, supplies, and infrastructure – since the outbreak of the conflict. The Syrian government launched an all-out assault on the country's medical system, destroying over 100 facilities and leaving untold numbers of people without access to medical care. Over 100 health workers are estimated to have been killed, approximately 450 are detained, and an estimated 15,000 have fled the country, fearing for their lives. PHR documented evidence that Syrian government forces have been primarily responsible for attacks on the medical community: denying wounded civilians impartial medical treatment; invading, attacking, and misusing hospitals; attacking and impeding medical transport; and detaining and torturing doctors for treating wounded civilians. While reports have indicated

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Washington, DC

opposition forces have also carried out attacks on health workers and facilities, PHR and other groups have documented many more instances of attack on the part of the Syrian government. PHR documents such violations in various contexts around the world, but in no situation is the assault on health as systematic and destructive as the current case in Syria.

The brutal assault on Syria's health system impacts not only health providers and those in need of urgent care, but such violations also threaten entire communities. The widespread attack on medical care has enormous consequences for civilians in Syria: lack of qualified surgeons to conduct operations; insufficient medical equipment, medicines, sterile medical supplies, and vaccines; lack of blood; and increased numbers of infections, diseases, and deaths.

The deliberate targeting of medical facilities and personnel in a time of conflict is a war crime – a clear violation of the Geneva Conventions. To date, there are few options to prevent these crimes and promote accountability for perpetrators. Until these violations cease, the international community – including the United States – must prioritize increased humanitarian assistance that is desperately needed by Syrians both within the country and along its borders.

Sexual Violence

PHR volunteers have been documenting cases of sexual violence among Syrian refugees in the Middle East and North Africa region for the past 18 months. Due to cultural sensitivities and difficulty in obtaining data from inside Syria, estimating the number of victims with certainty has been challenging. However, it is clear that sexual violence is being used against both men and women in order to punish, instill fear, extract “confessions,” and destroy communities. According to interviews with Syrian refugees as well as reports from human rights investigators, the use of sexual violence and torture has become a common feature inside prisons and detention centers. Countless numbers of refugees have cited fear of sexual violence against themselves and their family members as one of the primary factors for their flight from Syria. Moreover, because of the overwhelming stigma concerning sexual violence, there are little to no resources available for survivors who wish to seek support as they recover from their trauma.

Unmet Humanitarian Needs

Despite the generosity of international donors, refugees in neighboring countries face serious humanitarian concerns. The winter has made living conditions even worse, as refugees are experiencing snow and freezing temperatures. Additionally, Syrian doctors in refugee camps and urban areas in Jordan are unable to formally practice medicine and serve others within the camps and towns. Hospitals in host countries that care for Syrian refugees are lacking adequate financial support, and facilities desperately need additional funding to treat the continuous flow of people who arrive wounded and ill. For most refugees, follow-up therapy or medical attention is unavailable. Refugees who are paralyzed or immobile do not receive home medical care. Many refugees arrive in the host country without any clothes, money, documents, or personal items. Injured children have arrived without any accompanying family members. Syrian doctors have told PHR that they and their colleagues are eager to treat their own people, but lack the formal authorization or resources to do so.

Refugees, and many who remain in Syria, face serious physical and psychological trauma. Refugees have lost family and friends in the conflict, and many have been wounded or tortured. Psychosocial and medical assistance is particularly important for this population, and host countries must take decisive steps to address these specific needs.

Humanitarian Assistance

While the humanitarian situation in refugee camps along Syria's border is serious, those who remain inside Syria under siege face even more dire needs. Civilians in besieged areas have little to no access to food, clean water, medicine, and other basic necessities. The United States should immediately establish a humanitarian framework, in collaboration with the Russian Federation and other nations, to allow international humanitarian aid workers to access those in besieged areas. Such a framework can follow the model of the chemical weapons negotiations, as weapons inspectors now have safe access to essential areas. Collaboration with the Russian Federation allowed such protected access, and the United States should now lead the call for a similar framework to deliver urgently needed assistance. Humanitarian aid workers must have the same access to serve those in besieged areas who will face starvation without immediate assistance. Because a successful framework for aid delivery must include the proper personnel to administer the assistance, these negotiations should also allow for the unconditional release of health workers from detention. Such a framework is necessary immediately and must remain independent of any other political negotiations regarding the conflict.

Assistance for Syrians in the United States

Until a negotiated humanitarian framework creates substantial improvements in Syria, the United States should add flexibility to its current immigration system to provide protection for those fleeing violence and persecution. Facing limited immigration options, thousands of Syrians already in the United States are left to confront the dangerous realities of returning to Syria. The Department of Homeland Security re-designated temporary protected status (TPS) for Syria, extending the protection for Syrians until March 31, 2015. While the crisis in Syria necessitates such a re-designation, TPS is only a temporary benefit. It does not provide Syrians with legal permanent residence in the United States, but merely prevents them from being returned to Syria for the duration of the designation period. Such uncertainty about the future takes an extreme mental toll on Syrian TPS applicants, as well as applicants from elsewhere, and prevents them from earnestly building their life in the United States.

Many Syrians do not have viable claims for asylum because general civil strife that affects the entire population is not commonly considered persecution for the purposes of an asylum application. Asylum applicants must demonstrate a fear of persecution on the basis of religion, political views, race, nationality, or membership in a particular social group in order to receive that status. Furthermore, many Syrians' claims for legal status are compromised because they cannot produce the original certified documents (passports, birth certificates, diplomas, etc.) that have been lost or stolen before or during flight from Syria. Often, the most deserving cases for asylum are the most challenging because the Syrian government refuses to provide the identity documents Syrians need to obtain legal status in the United States. Notwithstanding the need to balance leniency with security concerns, the U.S. government still needs to be more flexible in applying its typical criteria to refugee, asylum, TPS, and other immigrant and non-immigrant applications from Syrians. Such flexibility would be appropriate given the extremely small number of Syrian refugees who have received status in the United States since the conflict began, as well as the high numbers of refugees currently living in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey.

Recommendations

- The United States should immediately convene a humanitarian summit with the Russian Federation and other nations to facilitate negotiations with the Syrian regime that will

guarantee the delivery, access to, and protection of humanitarian assistance to impacted areas in Syria, particularly in besieged communities. Such a framework should also facilitate the release of medical workers from detention. Negotiations related to humanitarian assistance should be completely separate from any political negotiations.

- Support psychosocial and trauma counseling and referral services on Syria's borders to assist refugees and survivors of torture and sexual violence in their recovery.
- The Obama Administration should immediately review any undue obstacles that account for the extremely small number of Syrian refugees resettled into the United States and should take immediate steps to increase quotas for resettlement of Syrian refugees in the United States.
- In light of the ongoing attacks on Syria's health system and the lack of proper health care in refugee camps, PHR recommends that the United States allow increased flexibility for applications for asylum or TPS from Syrians given the widespread unavailability or destruction of essential documents necessary for applications. For example, allow copies of documents instead of original versions for application purposes.
- Allocate funds to address the tremendous physical and psychosocial needs of Syrians arriving in the United States.
- Devote heightened attention to the systematic and widespread nature of the attacks on health care within Syria, and ensure that the development of any accountability mechanisms for crimes against humanity and war crimes in Syria take into account the assault on the country's medical system.



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Written Statement for the Record

**Submitted by Sharon Waxman, Vice President for Public Policy and Advocacy
 International Rescue Committee**

**To
 Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights**

**For the Hearing
 "The Syrian Refugee Crisis"**

January 7, 2014

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) thanks Chairman Dick Durbin, Ranking Member Ted Cruz, and the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights for holding this timely hearing on the plight of Syrian people. The IRC shares the Committee's deep concern about the safety and security of the Syrian people, and we have been responding to the humanitarian crisis since it started nearly three years ago.

IRC is a global humanitarian organization with a presence in 40 countries worldwide and 22 cities in the United States, providing emergency relief and post-conflict development and helping refugees and people uprooted by conflict and disaster to rebuild their lives. Since its inception, IRC has been involved in virtually every major refugee crisis and resettlement initiative around the globe.

The IRC has one of the largest operational presences in the region. We are working in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq to respond to the increasing needs of refugees and host communities in those countries. We also work directly, as well as with a network of partners, inside Syria to provide life-saving assistance to displaced persons. In the last two years, IRC has written a series of policy papers highlighting the impact of the Syrian crisis on the region.

The IRC is also one of the largest resettlement organizations in the United States. Through our network of 22 offices across the country, IRC helps refugees fleeing persecution resettle and become self-sufficient in their adopted country. In the last 10 years, IRC has provided resettlement support to more than 77,000 refugees and asylees in the U.S., including 9,000 refugees in 2013 alone. Much of this work is carried out as a public-private partnership with U.S. federal and state government offices. IRC facilitates refugees' integration into their new communities by helping them find jobs and become self-sufficient, pursue education, learn English and orient them to their new life in American communities. In

addition, the IRC resettlement network is recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice Board of Immigration Appeals to provide comprehensive immigration services to refugees and asylees, helping them on the path to permanent residence and U.S. citizenship.

The IRC would like to draw attention to three urgent issues in the Syria humanitarian response. In addition to funding international appeals for humanitarian assistance, to mitigate the suffering of civilians, IRC believes the U.S. Government and its partners in the international community must:

1. Contribute generous resources toward the needs of Syrian refugees and countries hosting them;
2. Apply pressure on parties to the conflict and those governments who have influence with them to ensure victims of conflict in Syria have access to humanitarian aid;
3. Identify and fund innovative approaches to supporting non-camp refugees and communities hosting them;
4. Increase resettlement of Syrian refugees to third countries and ensure that resettlement is a critical component of the overall humanitarian response.

Urgently and generously respond to international funding appeals

The UN and its partners have launched one of the largest funding appeals in the history of humanitarian response. Nearly 100 humanitarian organizations involved in the response estimate that \$6.5 billion is needed to assist Syrians in Syria, in the region, and host communities affected by the influx of refugees in countries neighboring Syria.

The donor community needs to respond – and urgently – to ensure that life-saving assistance will be provided to Syrians in need. Despite the generous donor response to the previous funding appeal, which totaled more than \$2 billion for the refugee response alone, the 2013 funding appeal was only 69 percent funded. As refugees struggle to survive the harsh winter and are increasingly incurring debt, the donor community must do better in its response to the latest appeal.

Unfunded percentages on funding charts translate into human tragedies on the ground. Unfunded appeals mean that Syrian children in Lebanon and elsewhere continue to miss out on school, creating a lost Syrian generation. Insufficient funds mean that women have to resort to “survival sex” in order to take care of their children and households and that families are forced to give their daughters into early marriages. It means that communities hosting an ever increasing number of refugees continue to struggle with increasingly scarce jobs and cope with increasing prices for basic goods, giving rise to tensions.

In fiscal years 2012 and 2013, the U.S. Government has generously contributed \$1.4 billion to the Syria response. Its response should continue and increase in proportion to the increase in the international funding appeal. The U.S. has not been the sole donor in this response, with other countries also mounting a generous response, including humanitarian assistance from EU countries totaling over €1.6

billion (\$2.1 billion). The U.S. should continue to set an example of a generous response for the world to follow.

The Second Pledging Conference for Syria is set to take place in Kuwait City on January 15, 2014. The international community must come to the conference prepared to fully fund the 2014 appeal of \$6.5 billion with new funds that will be quickly disbursed. The U.S. should pledge a generous amount consistent with its traditional response of 20 percent or more.

Congress should make those funds available quickly, in addition to including appropriation of funds needed to address other global humanitarian challenges in South Sudan, CAR, and elsewhere in fiscal year 2014 for the International Disaster Assistance (IDA), Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA), and Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) accounts.

Work to reach Syrian civilians trapped in the country who have no humanitarian support

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), 2.5 million people are trapped in hard-to-reach or besieged areas in Syria, and many have not received assistance for over a year. While we may disagree on the political outcome of the conflict, we must agree to change the conduct of the war. Civilians must not be prevented from receiving life-saving humanitarian assistance.

The international community must capitalize on the political momentum leading up to the Geneva II Syria peace conference to realize full and unimpeded access to civilians in critical need of humanitarian assistance. The conversations leading up to the conference are an invaluable opportunity to remind all parties of their obligations under the UN Presidential Statement to allow civilians to receive life-saving humanitarian assistance. While the Geneva talks will focus on the key issue of resolving the conflict that is resulting in a massive humanitarian emergency, urgent steps must be taken now to help Syrian civilians who cannot survive the war without humanitarian aid.

The imperative to access civilians in need has been underscored by the recent polio outbreak which poses a public health risk within Syria and across the region. The Syrian medical system has been decimated, along with key infrastructures such as water and sanitation. The Syrian government has indicated that a polio campaign will cover the whole country, but a large number of children in hard to reach areas may be missed. Polio is not the first, and will not be the last outbreak, and IRC health teams have warned of a serious risk of other communicable diseases outbreaks on the horizon.

On 2 October 2013, the UN Security Council adopted a Presidential Statement (PRST) that called for all parties, particularly the Syrian authorities, to facilitate improved humanitarian access. Yet little progress has been made. UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos briefed the UN Security Council in October, November, and December 2013 expressing her disappointment at the lack of progress in implementing the PRST.

To mitigate the suffering, the IRC recommends the following:

- First, the international community's diplomatic efforts in the run up to peace talks should include pressure on all actors to increase humanitarian access to civilians, including ensuring the safety and security of humanitarian workers and allowing them freedom of movement to deliver aid to those most in need.
- Second, the U.S. should continue to work with neighboring countries to ensure that borders remain open. Syrians must be allowed to find safe haven in neighboring countries. At the same time, lifesaving aid must be allowed to enter Syria.
- Third, the U.S. should work with UN Agencies to ensure that the UN facilitates elements of cross-border work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This should include support to coordination, information and analysis, as well as logistical support.
- Finally, to measure progress, the U.S. should work to ensure that the UN issues a monthly report on the areas besieged and inaccessible to humanitarian aid, stating the numbers and the location of affected populations, the duration of the siege and noting attempts to achieve access.

A non-camp approach to supporting refugees, states and communities hosting them is needed

Nearly three years into the Syrian crisis, it is clear that this is a protracted, regional disaster which will have a profound impact on the entire region for decades.

The displacement of civilians is massive. While some refugees are living in camps, a majority are not. According to UNHCR, some 85 percent of the 2.3 million refugees across the region have fled to urban centers, towns and villages outside of formal refugee camps. Nonetheless, most funding and assistance remain focused on supporting Syrians in refugee camps. Even more, most of it has been drawn from traditional humanitarian -- rather than long-term development oriented -- funding accounts. This needs to change. Systems need to be put in place to meet the needs of a majority of refugees and development dollars need to be provided -- and quickly -- to meet needs of communities hosting them across the region. The World Bank has drawn this conclusion, based on assessments in the region. It is time for the international community to provide the resources necessary to ease the burden and meet needs.

Urban refugees face unique challenges and vulnerabilities. They often find refuge in economically deprived neighborhoods that lack the capacity to absorb them. While some have found shelter with families, most are renting small, overcrowded, run-down apartments that they increasingly cannot afford. Others are finding shelter in abandoned buildings. Refugees in urban areas struggle to access needed medical care and education, and to purchase food, water, fuel, clothing and other essentials to survive. Some remain hidden, not registering with UNHCR owing to fear or inability to access registration sites. Many lack basic information on legal rights, documentation or sources of support.

The large influx of Syrians is putting a strain on the social, medical, and economic systems as well as the stability of the countries hosting them. Schools are running double shifts to accommodate the influx of Syrian children. Hospitals are overwhelmed providing treatment to Syrians with war-related injuries. Both are turning Syrians away because they can no longer address mounting needs. The cost of living across the region has increased, while wages have declined for both Syrians and communities where they are seeking refuge. In Lebanon, for example, rents have increased by up to 44 percent in some areas, and due to the 35 to 50 percent increase in labor supply, wages have plummeted.

Neighboring countries have welcomed Syrian refugees. However, tensions between refugees and host communities are on the rise. As a result, borders are being constricted. Without increased financial support from the international community to support services in countries neighboring Syria, borders may close altogether and refugees will find it increasingly difficult to escape Syria.

Supporting urban displaced and communities hosting them globally – but especially in the Syrian crisis given the magnitude and pronounced urban component -- will require solutions beyond the humanitarian sector. Meeting the urban displacement challenge will require humanitarian, development, human rights, and political actors to collaborate together at international, national and very local levels, leveraging capacities across the sectors involved.

The average length of displacement in ‘protracted crises’ is 17 years, and development actors have a particularly important role in supporting the needs of the displaced in urban areas. They can support host authorities to prepare for and manage urbanization and ensure that support for the needs of urban displaced is included in this process. They can galvanize direct budget support for infrastructure development, benefitting both the urban poor and displaced population. They can contribute to longer term efforts to promote durable solutions for both refugees and internally displaced people. This requires planning and an acceptance of the fact that even if the war ends tomorrow, a majority of Syrians will remain in neighboring countries and not return home anytime soon.

To address this challenge, the IRC recommends the following:

- The U.S. should continue to work with governments, UN agencies, and other humanitarian and development donors to ensure that Syrian refugees are able to access services where they reside. A response that focuses only – or exclusively – on camps leaves far too many without support.
- Since UNHCR is the primary vehicle of the U.S. response to the refugee crisis, the U.S. should ensure that UNHCR develops benchmarking criteria to monitor coordination, leadership, and outreach to non-camp refugees across the Middle East. To measure progress and increase the effectiveness of the response in meeting needs of Syrian refugees, the U.S. should also closely monitor the implementation of recommendations in the Real Time Evaluation report of July 2013, especially as it relates to recommendations on urban response. It would also be prudent

to conduct a follow up Real Time Evaluation prior to the mid-term review of the Regional Response Plan to ensure that the response continues to improve and strengthen. Additionally, to promote transparency, and in line with the PRM-UNHCR Agreement Framework 2012-2013, UNHCR should make public the amount of funds it is spending in non-camp settings. A decision by the U.S. Government to make a similar breakout available for its funding response would demonstrate welcome leadership on this important issue.

- The U.S. should continue to support host countries, whose local communities are bearing the brunt of this protracted emergency. By providing protection and assistance to refugees in communities, there is an opportunity to strengthen local services and address the needs of vulnerable and marginalized host community members. Funds from across the U.S. Government have already been used to address the needs of refugees and host communities alike, including in Jordan and Lebanon. Use of pooled funds from development and humanitarian arms of the U.S. Government should be the norm, not the exception.
- The refugee community constitutes only one part of the response challenge. The overall response effort should therefore be adjusted to meet needs beyond immediate humanitarian relief. This will require strong cooperation with development actors and donors who should provide robust longer-term and holistic funding, through a diversity of channels including UN agencies, INGOs and local civil society. The work of the World Bank in Lebanon should serve as a blueprint for using development dollars to provide relief to communities responding to the crisis. This approach should be expanded to Iraq, Turkey, and Jordan.

Resettlement of Syrians to third countries should be increased

Resettlement to third countries should be an integral part of the current humanitarian response. Resettlement countries should commit the resources, infrastructure, and put in place policies needed to allow for the resettlement of thousands of Syrian refugees in 2014.

As the international community seeks a solution to the war in Syria, the suffering of innocent civilians continues unabated. More than two million refugees have fled the country, and UNHCR estimates that an average of 127,000 people flee across Syria's border each month in search of refuge. Inside Syria, 6.5 million are displaced, and its economic foundation and infrastructure are devastated. According to a recent report released by the UN, Syria has lost 35 years in human development. Rebuilding Syria to accommodate for a return of what may be 10 million displaced by the end of this year – half of its prewar population - will be an immense reconstruction effort. It could be many years before Syrians who want to return home as soon as possible are able to do so.

Syrians have been tortured and traumatized. They have faced unspeakable persecution. Due to the sectarian nature of the current conflict, the country is increasingly fragmented and neighborhoods are becoming drawn along sectarian lines. As sectarian lines deepen, concerns about the threat of persecution and retaliation in once mixed neighborhoods increases.

Although refugees maintain a hopeful outlook, they have increasingly become more pessimistic about the prospect of returning to Syria. They feel stuck, with no way out of their desperate situation. Syrians increasingly incur unsustainable debt in host countries to survive, and their children are missing out on school. For many Syrians – as Iraqis before them – there will be no homes and no familiar neighborhoods to return to, no savings and jobs to rebuild their lives.

Resettlement has traditionally been an integral part of an international response to protracted humanitarian crises. It helps protect those for whom return and local integration in the region are not viable options. Many Syrians are starting to inquire about resettlement as their hopes to a speedy return home grow dim.

To address this challenge, IRC recommends the following:

- Resettlement countries should meet UNHCR's proposal to resettle 30,000 Syrians in 2014. This represents 1.27 percent of the total number of refugees who have fled Syria to date, and an even smaller percentage of those who will be refugees by the end of next year if the conflict continues. To this end, IRC welcomes resettlement commitments by 20 countries around the world that together total 18,300 resettlement slots. We urge those countries to fulfill those commitments in 2014.
- We note that the U.S. government has expressed an interest in welcoming Syrian refugees for resettlement in 2014, but that it has not specified how many refugees U.S. will seek to admit. Consistent with the long-standing U.S. tradition of providing refuge for those fleeing persecution, we urge the United States to begin to resettle increasing numbers of persecuted Syrians. As a first step, IRC urges the U.S. to announce its intention to resettle 12,000 Syrian refugees in 2014 to address UNHCR's call to resettle a total of 30,000 next year. It should then work with UNHCR and the international community on a long-term strategy for resettlement of the most vulnerable Syrians.
- The international community must help vulnerable Syrians by opening their borders to resettlement and asylum. Due to the large scale of displacement in the region, resettlement should be focused on the most vulnerable, including urgent medical cases, and women and girls who are most at risk. Many Syrians have been exposed to torture, gender based violence or have experienced psychological trauma. The U.S. should continue to work with UNHCR to ensure the most vulnerable are able to escape the conflict and seek sanctuary in this country and across the globe.



SYRIAN EMERGENCY TASK FORCE

Syrian Emergency Task Force Testimony on Behalf of Syrian Refugees

In December 2013 the UN, called the Syrian crisis the “greatest humanitarian disaster of our time.” There are an estimated 2.3 million Syrian refugees, half of whom are children, with hundreds of thousands estimated to be unregistered. Despite this, the U.S. Department of State has only granted asylum to 90 Syrians in the past three years. To uphold the promise of America as a haven for those seeking protection against oppression and persecution, the U.S. should offer greater resettlement of Syrian refugees.

In addition to the monumental numbers of refugees, Syrian refugees face additional unique challenges. Aid agencies like UNHCR are confronted with the difficult prospect of reaching refugees in countries like Lebanon where the vast majority are relocated in urban areas. As an organization engaged in civil-society work inside and outside of Syria, we are profoundly shocked by the staggering numbers, but are more impacted by the refugees we have met and worked with, each of whom has a story more harrowing than the last, and each of whom has found their own way to hold on to hope.

We also know from our work with refugees, that in many cases they represent the most vulnerable elements of Syrian society, as well as those least involved in violence. This is why so many of the camps are defined by their large populations of women and children, groups that share no responsibility in this terrible war. A country with values like the United States should be more committed to helping those that chose not to participate in the bloodletting, but to flee and pursue a safe life somewhere else.

Increased American aid and opportunities for refugee resettlement are especially urgent considering the extended duration of the conflict with limited prospects for resolution soon. A generation of refugee children have been cut off from access to schools for the third consecutive year. Uncounted in the statistics of casualties from the crisis are Syrians who die from easily treated medical ailments due to lack of the most basic medical care.

Asylum to Syrian refugees offers assurance that financial commitments cannot match, considering the extent of unmet need. Based on a long legacy of welcoming people seeking refuge from humanitarian crises abroad, the U.S. has thus far failed to make a similar commitment to Syrian refugees.

Statement of the Syrian Human Rights Organization—"Swasia"
To the Senate Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights
The Syrian Refugee Crisis

Foreword:

As President of the Syrian Human Rights Organization ("Swasia"), I will begin by offering our thanks to the Subcommittee generally and to Senator Durbin in particular for his oral permission, given after the Subcommittee's hearing last week on the Syrian refugee crisis, to submit this statement to your esteemed Committee, offering us the opportunity to offer our views on issues relating to Syrians in the United States. I am confident that your efforts will lead to quick and courageous decisions consistent with the depth of the Syrian refugee tragedy, and worthy of the United States of America as a nation responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security and one that is bearing the banner of civilization into the third millennium.

As this is a hearing process and as you have heard from government witnesses in order to arrive at the truth, I beg your leave to present this brief testimony both as a Syrian refugee in the United States and as a human rights defender concerned with the crisis your Committee is trying to address.

First--Personal Testimony:

My name is Muhanad Al-Hasani. I am a lawyer and for 20 years had a large and successful law practice in Damascus, as did my father before me. I am also an activist in the field of human rights. On the basis of my activities in defense of human rights, I was detained more than once, intermittently, in Syria. I was last detained in the seventh month of 2009, and was released two years later under a special amnesty in 2011, but only after the Bar in Damascus issued a decision barring me from the practice of law for life on the basis of my defense of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience.

As a human rights defender in Syria I discussed the human rights situation in Syria with representatives of the U.S. embassy in Damascus. Soon after my release from prison, a series of confidential State Department documents relating to the situation in Syria were published by Wikileaks, and my name appeared in 16 of these, forcing me to leave Damascus for Cairo within the space of two hours, without even a suitcase, to wait and see how the situation would unfold. But I was then informed that the Syrian authorities were trying to have me extradited, and I was forced to leave Cairo for Paris and from there to the United States of America.

In the United States, all that awaited me was selling coffee in the streets, and more recently working in a factory making plastic bags. With legal assistance from the organization Human Rights First I obtained asylum, but I carried with me a sense of injustice and sorrow that the negligence of the State Department in preserving the security of its documents had deprived me in the blink of an eye of my family, my wealth, my property, my friends, my office, and my position in society, and discarded me like a broken cup on the side of the road in the state of New Jersey, without any assistance from any quarter except legal assistance from a human rights organization in obtaining political asylum.

As time went on, the security situation in Damascus worsened. My office was subject to more than one assault in my absence, including an attempt to burn it down in the wake of my participation in the activities of the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva, and two of my brothers were forced to go into hiding and had their livelihoods disrupted because they were being pursued by the security forces.

Despite my disappointment in the U.S. government, which often forgets its victims, for the first time I wrote to Ambassador Robert Ford, with whom I had met once in Damascus after my release from prison and before being forced to leave the country. I explained to him the situation of my family and asked him for help, and he undertook to save my family, who were then allowed to come to the United States, including my mother who is 77 years old.

Then, for the first time since setting foot on American soil, I felt that I was no longer a victim of American government mistakes, and that despite the very hard life I am living here currently, America is a country I can be happy to call my own, a country that protects you and gives to you just as it takes from you.

I have offered this account of the recent events in my life to show that I speak as a devoted advisor whose prospects for return to Syria have been cut off, as the Syrian regime, since the publication of the Wikileaks documents, has done everything to distort my image and ruin my reputation particularly in legal circles in Syria, and the only option open to me is further integration and fusion into American society as my final homeland. From this comes my concern for American society, which I wish to see respected by the other peoples of the world.

To state matters more directly, the United States urgently needs to provide more humanitarian gains to the oppressed peoples of the region in order to wash the errors of successive administrations against them.

The peoples of the region still remember that America and Great Britain imposed no-fly zones on Iraq for more than 10 years and in the absence of a legal basis authorizing them, even though the former regime in Iraq was not bombing its people with planes, whereas in Syria three years of aerial bombardment with all kinds of munitions, including the indiscriminate “barrels of death” dropped on Syrian cities, have not been enough to provide a basis for the imposition of no-fly zones on the Syrian regime or for equipping the opposition with the missiles necessary to confront those raids. Whereas the United States at that time approved a special resettlement program for Iraqi refugees, all the tragedies suffered by Syrians have not sufficed for them to be considered refugees in many countries of the world, which continue to describe them as “guests.” Every day and for the past three years, dozens of people in Syria die of hunger and cold in the besieged areas, and yet all of this has not been considered a valid basis to open safe corridors or buffer zones, and still major powers hide behind the position of Russia, though everyone knows this is only a veil or mask for the position agreed upon among the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council.

Talk of chemical weapons in Syria not falling into the wrong hands—as if Bashar Al-Assad’s hands were the right ones—was a mistake for the American Administration, and talk of red lines against killing by chemical weapons and green lines for killing with all other types of weapons has been cause for despair and frustration and feelings of despondency and abandonment and loss of hope. Talk of supporting armed groups in opposition to the Syrian government that were moderate and acceptable to the U.S. government with non-lethal assistance and military equipment was a blatant joke.

Moreover, although it is very difficult for any people to fight an overwhelmingly well-armed and trained force without recourse to a religious ideology, Islamophobia has played a serious role in granting Bashar Al-Assad an undeclared license to kill, and has exacerbated the number of the victims. Experience has shown that the Syrian people cannot bear religious fanaticism or extremism, because Syrian society is fundamentally diverse, and a realistic view would establish that all the manifestations of religion currently associated with militant groups on the ground are transient, fleeting, and temporary phenomena; the recent battles between other warring factions and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria are another indication of this.

We should be honest with ourselves and acknowledge that the human cost in Syria would not be as high as it is if Syrians had not been abandoned by international complicity in crushing their hopes and their aspirations to freedom, dignity, justice, and humanity.

Syrians generally, and especially women and children, have paid a very high price for demanding their basic rights. Like all the respected peoples of the world, they deserve to win the right to change their government by peaceful means, regardless of the embarrassing and farcical statements we hear from time to time from some quarters in the West to the effect that “we want to save the lives of Syrians regardless who is in power in Syria in the future,” or that “the priority in the next phase is the fight against terrorism and not the transfer of power from Bashar Al-Assad,” or that “Assad’s fate will be determined by the Syrian people, whose true position remains unknown,” now that more than half of Syria lies under rubble and 16 million Syrians are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance according to statements by United Nations officials. Despite all these tragedies, Tehran still wonders about the attitude of the Syrian people towards Bashar Al-Assad, and is trying to condition Iran’s participation in the Geneva II talks on these talks not including the transfer of power in Syria as a condition, and thus is conditioning its participation in Geneva II on non-recognition of Geneva I.

The United States of America needs to take courageous, practical, and honest steps to make humanitarian gains in the matter of refugees at the very least, to relieve the consequences of negative official policies with respect to Syria more broadly, and this through a realistic program aiming to accept the greatest possible number of refugees in 2014. As one who loves America, its land and its people, I am sure that Syrian refugees will become with time messengers of love and peace between their new country that picked them up and surrounded them with warmth and care, and their small oppressed exhausted homeland that sits in grief in the oldest part of the world in the middle of the shores of the Mediterranean.

Second:

We would like to draw the attention of your distinguished Committee to the following findings of the Syrian Human Rights Organization’s most recent study, covering a period of 14 days between the 14th and the 28th of December, 2013, and including the names of the victims and the place and date of death of each:

--Every ten and a half hours . . . a person dies of hunger in Syria.

--Approximately every eight and a half hours . . . a person dies of the cold in Syria.

--Every 50 minutes, the Assad regime kills a child in Syria.

--Every hour and 45 minutes, the regime kills a woman.

--Every 30 minutes, the Syrian regime kills a man who is the sole provider for his family.

--Every 10 hours, a detainee in the prisons of the regime in Syria dies under torture.

--Every 12 minutes, a civilian is killed by the forces of the Assad regime.

--And every 15 seconds, there is a new Syrian refugee forced to join the diaspora.

Worse, millions of Syrian refugees outside the country are threatened with the loss of their Syrian citizenship after the announcement of the Syrian regime that it will deprive of citizenship any Syrian outside of the country who has any connection with any "terrorist" faction, according to the standards of that criminal regime, considering that the issuance of new identity cards by the regime to Syrians inside the country (provided that they are not opponents of the regime) is the only document to be recognized as proof of citizenship for Syrians, meaning that citizenship is being tied to loyalty to the regime which is considered the only condition to obtain citizenship, and Syrian embassies abroad are not being allowed to register Syrians for these identity cards, with the result that refugees will be deprived of their civil and political rights . . . a prelude, it would seem, to what Geneva II will produce.

The only document currently relied upon with respect to Syrian refugees is the United Nations report issued on December 2, 2013, in which the United Nations estimated that there were 2.3 million Syrian refugees in the neighboring countries. U.N. statistics indicate that there are 2,301,641 refugees registered on the rolls of the UNHCR, and 52,805 on the list of those waiting to register, that the number of registered refugees will exceed 4 million in 2014, that there are 6.5 million Syrians who have become homeless in Syria, and that there are 9.3 million inside Syria who are in need of urgent humanitarian aid. The World Food Program estimates that 16 million Syrians are in need of urgent food and humanitarian assistance.

We have reservations about the United Nations report, and emphasize that it provides only part of the truth, and that the problem in our view lies in the number of refugees who are not registered, for whom no exact statistics increase, and whose numbers are increasing, for a number of reasons, including refugees' fear of deportation from the countries that have become a refuge for them, if they register with the UNHCR, or the fear of violence from the Syrian regime if they later return to Syria and the regime learns that they registered as refugees with the UNHCR, or the fear of poor treatment in the refugee camps, particularly in Jordan. An additional reason for lack of registration is the lack of permission from the host country to register with the UNHCR, as has been the case in Morocco.

According to research by the Syrian Human Rights Organization, a third of the Syrian population is now outside of Syria, including both registered and unregistered refugees, and that number is on the rise; note also that more than half of them are in need of urgent assistance.

We studied a sample of approximately 1000 refugees in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, and the demographic breakdown of this sample was as follows:

Male: 49%		Female: 51%
	Age	
9.2%	0-4 years	8.9%
9.7%	5-11 years	9.2%
6.7%	12-17 years	6%
22.3%	18-59 years	25.3%
1.2%	60+ years	1.6%

It should also be noted that according to U.N. figures on registered Syrian refugee population as a whole, 70% of those registered as refugees are not receiving the assistance they need, and that over 55% of refugees are children aged 15 and under, and most of them have had no access to any means of education for close to three years now, or any assistance or programs to foster their intellectual development.

Third:

Up to now, the world has been dealing with the situation of Syrian refugees in a degrading and humiliating manner:

--None of the countries bordering on Syria that are receiving Syrian refugees have committed themselves to the 1951 Convention relating to the protection of refugees, and all are exerting ugly and unethical pressures on Syrian refugees, especially Lebanon (on the part of the Hezbollah militia) and also Jordan.

--In Egypt, a hostile atmosphere and policies of incitement against Syrian refugees have prevailed since the military coup, to the point where refugees are choosing death at sea over remaining in Egypt.

--The states of North Africa have decided to bar Syrian refugees from entering their territory, invoking security concerns, and as for Syrian refugees already present there, they have been deprived of their most basic rights, even including that of registering with the UNHCR.

--Only 10 European countries have agreed to host Syrian refugees, bringing the number of refugees they have collectively committed to accept to only 12,000 persons. Not included among these countries are the United Kingdom—a “friend of the Syrian people”—and Italy. Most of the Syrian refugees who have been accepted in Europe have been obliged to migrate there illegally, and European states have then granted them refugee protection as the only avenue to settle their situations.

--Germany stipulated a hierarchy for the acceptance of Syrian refugees, which included, after kinship ties in Germany, consideration of a refugee’s Christian religion, and that the refugee must be registered with the UNHCR’s branch in Lebanon, which many Syrians consider to be a branch of Syrian intelligence,

due to the fact that some of the local staff are associated with the Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement or with Hezbollah.

--Then there is the recent suspicious business transaction between Turkey and the European Union, through which Europe seeks through diplomatic means to shirk its obligations towards Syrian refugees starting in 2014, and through which Europe considers any refugee who enters the territory of the European Union from Turkey to be the responsibility of Turkey, to be returned to Turkey, in exchange for some facilitation of travel within the European Union without visas for Turkish citizens.

Fourth:

The United States is presented with an important opportunity to set an example for all those hesitant, fearful, and sometimes hypocritical countries, by accepting a real number of refugees, commensurate with the horror of the Syrian tragedy and the depth of the wound left by international complicity with the regime in Damascus that is killing its people.

One of the main obstacles that stands in the face of this project is the generalized and over-broad definition of terrorism in American immigration law, which lends itself to misapplication and abuse.

Serious thought should be given to allowing the immigration service a broader margin of discretion in interpreting the text of these laws.

It is illogical to say that any armed group that defends people must be considered a terrorist organization, when it is confronting an oppressive government like the regime in power in Syria.

And it is unreasonable to say that anyone who has any connection to such a group is a terrorist by association, even when the relationship between the person and the group is not causal or reciprocal or continuous or systematic.

In considering these matters, please do not forget that we are dealing with the following realities:

The Syrian revolution that broke out on March 15, 2011, was entirely peaceful. Syrians were chanting for freedom and received live bullets in their chests. Their eyes were on you, and on the international community and the U.N. Security Council and the United Nations and the human rights organizations, when the army of the Syrian regime descended into the streets on March 25, 2011, just 10 days after the outbreak of the first peaceful demonstration.

We should also remember that the first call—which at that point was only a call—to form a military movement against the regime went out on July 29, 2011, or four and a half months after the outbreak of the revolution.

And that this call in and of itself did not constitute militarization, and that the revolution then entered into travails during which the U.N. Security Council distanced itself from its responsibility to protect civilians, a responsibility that had been decided upon since 2005, enabling the murderous and terroristic regime in Damascus to suppress the peaceful revolution, which gradually took the course of militarization, until on July 12, 2012, the International Committee of the Red Cross declared that Syria was in a state of non-international armed conflict as defined by international law. This came more than a year and four months after the outbreak of the peaceful revolution, and confirms the reality that the

Free Syrian Army that the United States is treating as terrorist under its immigration laws, was born of the civil and popular demand for freedom in Syria.

The United States urgently needs to reexamine the absolute nature of the definitions of terrorism currently present in American immigration law, if it does not want to be limited to accepting the applications for refugee protection of persons under the age of five, a situation that would not be worthy of a great nation like the United States.

The time has also come to set clear legal controls on the kinds of relationships with armed groups that are prohibited, to protect refugees with a real and legitimate need for protection against the unjust or arbitrary application of these legal terms, and to limit this to connections that are causative or continuous or reciprocal or systematic.

It is also time to time to rethink the immigration law's definition of a terrorist group, for it is contrary to logic that the Free Syrian Army should be considered a terrorist organization for these purposes at the same time that the American government continues to provide it with aid.

The moment of truth has come that requires you to take bold decisions.

The time has come for America to return to the greatness left to it by the founding fathers.

The time has come for the Statue of Liberty again to turn her beautiful face towards the oppressed on the other side of the ocean, to stretch out her tender arm to them, and to invite them to cross.

Muhanad Al-Hasani
President, Syrian Human Rights Organization—"Swasia"



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Senator Dick Durbin
Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, civil rights and Human Rights

Hearing: The Syrian Refugee Crisis

The Office of Immigration and Refugee Services for the American Baptists Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) is writing in support of providing humanitarian assistance for the resettlement of Syrian refugees, assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Syria and support of the United States accepting Syrian refugees. The Syrian conflict has resulted in over 100,000 deaths and millions of people fleeing the country. The devastation is being compared to the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and the greatest exodus of refugees in recent history. UNHCR reports the following statistics:

- 6.8 million Syrians in need
- 4.25 million IDPs
- Over 2 million refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR
- 75% of the refugees are women and children

Baptist history is rooted in concern for conscience and for freedom of individual beliefs, for choice, and for unregimented living whether by religious dogma and institution or by social and political structures. Resolutions by the American Baptist Churches over the years have particularly sought to reflect the denominations basic principles of freedom of thought and belief, the right of dissent, the responsibility to speak prophetically to church and society and support for human dignity and social justice.

Our practice of advocating for social justice is based on biblical principles. The Bible teaches us to see the world as one community. The Apostle Paul's words, "For He hath made of one blood all the nations of the world to dwell on the face of the earth together," (Acts 17:26) are a reminder that nations are intended to live in community, that we should not turn away from the world but that nations and individuals have responsibilities toward the whole human community.

The United States carries a particular responsibility in human rights because of its basic historical commitment to freedom and because of the power it wields in the world and the influence it has on other countries.

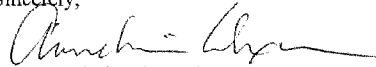
The American Baptist Churches is the most diverse denomination in the United States. We have a rich history of refugee resettlement and partnership with immigrants. We urge our government to accept as refugees those who out of extremity and fear for their lives flee to our shores.

Discipleship ■ Community ■ Justice

Incorporated as: The American Baptist Home Mission Society ■ Woman's American Baptist Home Mission Society

The conflict in Syria has been formally declared a civil war by the international Red Cross. There has been evidence of chemical weapon use upon ordinary citizens. The country is replete with violence, displacement, hunger and over all devastation. We strongly urge and, in fact beseech, the United States congress to pursue measures to do all that can be done to assist those impacted by the crisis in Syria including accepting Syrian refugees.

Sincerely,



Rev. Aundrea Alexander, JD
 Director-Office of Immigration and Refugee Services
 American Baptist Home Mission Societies of
 American Baptist Churches, USA

Written Testimony of KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights
Before the Senate Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights
Hearing: “The Syrian Refugee Crisis”

January 7, 2014

Assistant Majority Leader and Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Cruz, and esteemed members of the Subcommittee: thank you for providing KARAMAH the opportunity to share testimony on the urgent and ongoing refugee crisis in Syria. KARAMAH is an apolitical, non-profit organization that has fought for the civil and human rights of all people across the globe for over 20 years.¹ We do not hold an official organizational position on the Syrian civil war. Our interest is the human rights of the Syrian people, with a particular focus on the humanitarian emergency facing Syrian women and children.

Over 39% of Syria’s total population is displaced domestically or in neighboring states; on average, 6,000 Syrian residents are fleeing the country each day.² The situation is particularly stark for Syrian women and children, who comprise more than 80% of the refugee population.³ When displaced from their homes, both women and children face dire conditions. The United Nations Refugee Agency reports that refugee women are less likely than their male counterparts to have access to food, water, shelter and other fundamental needs.⁴ They are regular targets for rape and have little economic opportunity.⁵ Their conditions create unique social vulnerabilities, many of which have lasting consequences.

This written testimony focuses on how the crisis is particularly horrific for refugee women: the environment is rapt with their abuse and exploitation. We also concentrate on the adverse health outcomes facing refugee children, a direct result of refugee conditions and resource access.

In the interest of minimizing the needless suffering of millions of displaced and refugee Syrians, we ask Congress to consider four general proposals. First, support programs

¹ KARAMAH is a U.S.-based non-profit organization that derives its name from the Arabic term “karamah”, which means “dignity.” KARAMAH’s vision and mission are informed by the view that a just society values the informed participation of its members through the pursuit of knowledge, access to opportunities, and equity among all “children of Adam”, regardless of gender or other differences. Through education, legal outreach, and advocacy, KARAMAH contributes to the understanding and promotion of human rights worldwide, particularly the rights of Muslim women.

² William Ockenden, *Syrian crisis is the worst since Rwandan genocide, UN official says*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (July 17, 2013, 6:06 PM AEST), <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-07-17/syrian-crisis-worst-since-rwandan-genocide-un-official-says/4826332>.

³ *Syrian refugee women have key role to play in country’s future – UN official*, UN News Centre (December 4, 2013), <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46663#.UsXMwNJDtu0>.

⁴ Frances Nicholson, *Refugee Women – “Survivors, Protectors, Providers”*, UNCHR.org.uk (November 2011), <http://www.unhcr.org.uk/resources/monthly-updates/november-2011-update/refugee-women-survivors-protectors-providers.html>.

⁵ *Id.*

allowing women to financially support their families. Second, create an international mechanism to ensure donations and aid are actually reaching refugees. Third, focus funding on the immediate need to combat child death and malnutrition. Finally, push for international commissioners in refugee camps available for reporting abuse and requesting urgent assistance.

Dire Economic Conditions Put Women At Risk For Sexual Violence and Exploitative Marriage

Advocates and aid workers across the Syrian refugee diaspora report crowded camps with dwindling resources and few opportunities for paid employment.⁶ According to a UN Women's report released late last year, the overwhelming majority of families survive on savings because of inability to find work.⁷ The publication also found that 70% of Syrian refugee households in Jordan (which has one of the largest refugee concentrations), reported being without any paid employment in the month prior to reporting.⁸

Women have scarce economic opportunity in refugee camps despite increasingly serving as their family's head-of-household.⁹ Several advocates and friends of the organization with whom we spoke supported this reality for Syrian refugees. Although aid organizations provide assistance, Syrian refugee women consistently report being unaware of these resources or unable to easily access them.¹⁰ As a result of their social and economic vulnerability, women and girls become more likely victims of exploitation. Women serving as head-of-households are particularly vulnerable, as their decisions determine the survival of multiple persons. This dynamic leaves them and their families extraordinarily vulnerable to exploitation.

Sexual Violence Against Refugees

Sexual violence and the perceived threat of sexual violence also has profound effects on the daily lives of Syrian refugee women. For Syrian women victims of sexual violence, the consequences include potential social ostracization, a unique and compounding factor to already difficult circumstances. Additionally, stories of women being raped at supply centers and other communal areas are common, making women increasingly reluctant to leave their homes/tents/shelters or female children alone. Because of the fear of imminent

⁶ Hilary Margolis, *Syrian refugees struggle to protect daughters from exploitation*, Global Post (Aug. 7, 2013, 5:10 PM), <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/08/07/syrian-refugees-struggle-protect-daughters-exploitation>.

⁷ UN Women, *Inter-agency Assessment: Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, With a Focus On Early Marriage*, UNWomen.org (July 2013), <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Livelihoods: Promoting Economic Opportunities for Refugee Women and Youth*, womensrefugeecommission.org (June 2007), <http://womensrefugeecommission.org/programs/livelihoods/research-and-resources/1-livelihoods-promoting-economic-opportunities-for-refugee-women-and-youth>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

danger or threat, many risk their well being by not leaving to procure supplies or visiting aid organizations. The fear and threat of sexual violence or exploitation is almost as victimizing as the crime itself.

Many people report fleeing their homes in Syria partly because of the prevalence of sexual violence as a weapon of war.¹¹ Unfortunately, not only are refugee women increasingly exposed to the inherent trauma of displacement, but they are vulnerable at “endemic” levels to sexual violence like rape and human trafficking.¹² Syrian women in refugee camps consistently report being aware of rapes in their community. At least one major aid organization has reported that 50% of the refugee women they spoke with were victims of sexual abuse.¹³ Few areas have adequate mechanisms to protect women from physical insecurity, and many women are reluctant to report their own rape because of cultural concerns related to social stigmatization.

Advocates and observers generally agree that the most vulnerable are female heads-of-households and other women and girls forced to financially support their families. Because job permits are exceptionally difficult for refugee women to procure, the only available options often are domestic or agricultural. In these environments, women are vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse but lack almost any recourse.

Mistreatment Through Marriage

This economic insecurity also makes women more vulnerable to multiple forms of marriage-related exploitation. Throughout their refugee diaspora, women have reported an increasing number of men attempting to marry Syrian refugee women. Common reports involve foreign nationals promising financial security in exchange for marriage. Syrian refugee women are vulnerable and are seeking support not only for themselves, but also their extended families. In exploitative marriage situations, men are often not required to demonstrate their ability to support a spouse or a family.¹⁴ Many refugee families are financially desperate, incentivizing the marriage of daughters who will no longer be a financial obligation – even to men who would not otherwise be considered suitable or properly vetted.¹⁵ Moreover, the ever-present fear of sexual violence creates an additional reason to marry daughters.¹⁶ The perception is that marriage will provide their daughters with an additional protector and financial stability. However, once these marriages are consummated, the men often disappear.

¹¹ *Syrian Women & Girls: No Safe Refuge*, [refugeesinternational.org](http://refugeesinternational.org/policy/field-report/syrian-women-girls-no-safe-refuge) (Nov. 15, 2012, 11:00 PM), <http://refugeesinternational.org/policy/field-report/syrian-women-girls-no-safe-refuge>.

¹² Phoebe Greenwood, *Rape and domestic violence follow Syrian women into refugee camps*, *The Guardian* (July 24, 2013), <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/25/rape-violence-syria-women-refugee-camp>.

¹³ *Syria's Women, Many Raped In Refugee Centres, Long To Return Home*, *The Huffington Post UK/PA* (Oct. 26, 2013), http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/10/26/syria-women-rape_n_4166185.html.

¹⁴ *Syrian refugee women exploited in Egypt*, *IRIN News* (Jan. 31, 2013), <http://www.irinnews.org/fr/report/97387/syrian-refugee-women-exploited-in-egypt>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Shira Rubin, *Poor and vulnerable, Syrian refugee families push girls into early marriage*, *The Christian Science Monitor* (Dec. 6, 2013), <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/1206/Poor-and-vulnerable-Syrian-refugee-families-push-girls-into-early-marriage>.

These individuals are exploiting vulnerable women by making fraudulent promises of financial security and physical protection. They are often flaunting legal restrictions on marriage (such as age and citizenship requirements), using refugee desperation and lack of another country's laws to their benefit.¹⁷ For many of these women, this exploitation goes far beyond the immediate trauma of their abandonment. While their marriages are conducted within religious and/or geographic legal requirements, their desertion makes it difficult to divorce. Furthermore, cultural norms make it difficult for divorced and separated women to re-marry.

Even women in marriages that predate the civil war are experiencing a more difficult home life as a result of refugee-related stress. Aid groups, journalists, and our sources report an increase in domestic abuse throughout refugee camps and communities as the conflict wears on.

Also, of concern is the "early marriage" phenomenon with Syrian refugee women. Early marriage is defined by the United Nations as marriage of girls or boys who are under the age of reasonable consent; it is considered a form of gender-based violence.¹⁸ While early marriage is a cultural practice common in certain Syrian communities, many financially distressed families - who would otherwise not consider the practice - are allowing it. While observers report a profound desire of most refugees to protect daughters and other young women in their communities, financial desperation is leading to these exploitative marriages. Because of family financial needs and the possibility of a financial gift from the prospective husband, young women are being married off.¹⁹ Many families view marriage as the only realistic alternative to child labor, which leaves their daughters vulnerable to sexual abuse.

These stories are told but are often unreported. KARAMAH has spoken to aid workers on the ground and have been watching news reports from varied sources that whisper these stories. However, they are not reaching the mainstream media. We believe that this is the case for several reasons. To fully understand the refugee crisis, we must understand the cultural and religious underpinnings of the region. Women who are abused or who are victims of exploitative marriage are not likely to report crimes against them. As noted above, cultural stigma surrounding sexual assault, divorce, and abuse beget lack of reporting on the issue. Moreover, because there are no sound mechanisms within the camps for attaining justice, there is no impetus for women to report crimes against them. If there is no promise for their abusers to be held accountable, they have little to no reason to report and risk attacks on their reputations.

¹⁷ Phoebe Greenwood, *Rape and domestic violence follow Syrian women into refugee camps*, The Guardian (July 24, 2013), <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/25/rape-violence-syria-women-refugee-camp>.

¹⁸ Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Livelihoods: Promoting Economic Opportunities for Refugee Women and Youth*, womensrefugeecommission.org (June 2007), <http://womensrefugeecommission.org/programs/livelihoods/research-and-resources/1-livelihoods-promoting-economic-opportunities-for-refugee-women-and-youth>.

¹⁹ Megan Bradley, *Syria's Unseen Crisis: Displaced Women Face Rape, Insecurity, Poverty*, Brookings (March 8, 2013), <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2013/03/08-women-syria-bradley>.

Children's Health

Because of the crowded camps, widespread poverty, and insufficient access, the health outlook of Syrian children is abysmal. Of the approximately 2 million total Syrian refugees, 1.1 million are under the age of 18 and many lack the food and medicine they desperately need. They are surrounded by unsanitary conditions and do not have consistent access to clean water.

Additionally, many children are suffering from the profound psychological effect of their suffering. Those who have suffered physical injuries lack access to treatment for the accompanying psychological trauma. Others who have experienced consistent violence and the loss of family are likely to suffer from long-term emotional damage.²⁰

Of particular immediacy is the recent outbreak of polio, a disease thought extinct by much of the world. Believed to have been brought to Syria and nearby refugee camps by foreign fighters, this horrific disease is quickly spreading amongst refugee children.²¹ While there have been plans and pledges for the necessary increase in vaccinations, action has been slow and thus far inadequate. Vaccinations remain scarce, while the number of polio infections increase by the day.

The historically cold weather is exacerbating the suffering of Syria's children. Under-resourced and unprepared for frigid temperatures, many refugee children are dealing with cold-related afflictions, such as pneumonia. Additionally, food prices have increased as temperatures have lowered, heightening the likelihood of malnutrition.²²

It is important to note that these health conditions that are afflicting refugees are not exclusive to the camps. Because of the threat of polio, many host countries are vaccinating their children as a precaution as well. Besides the obvious health concerns to the host country, there is an even larger issue. Host countries are not happy at the actual or perceived health threat to their citizens by refugees. We have seen throughout history the pain experienced by refugee communities when they are unwelcome in host countries. They may be further victimized and exposed to even more conflict because they are perceived as a threat. Refugees are fleeing their own country due to political insecurity and are facing not only the humanitarian crises outlined here, but are also threats within and without the camps themselves. Without proper policing mechanisms and adequate resources (especially for health crises), there will continue to be a victimization-resulting lack of trust in the refugee camps.

²⁰ Amanda Woerner and Loren Grush, *The invisible scars of war: How the Syrian crisis affects refugee children*, FoxNews.com (Sep. 5, 2013), <http://www.foxnews.com/health/2013/09/05/invisible-scars-war-how-syrian-crisis-affects-refugee-children/>.

²¹ Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, *Syria's children suffer, and the world just shrugs*, CNN.com (Jan. 1, 2014), <http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/01/opinion/lemmon-syria-children/index.html>.

²² Michael Sheen, *The plight of Syria's refugee children: Fear, poverty and a freezing winter*, The Telegraph (Nov. 24, 2013, 6:00 AM), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10470075/The-plight-of-Syrias-refugee-children-Fear-poverty-and-a-freezing-winter.html>.

Final Observation

Refugees are sandwiched between political and military struggles extending into each camp in various forms, with Syrian refugees facing disproportionate pain. The situation of the Syrian refugee women and children in particular is dire due to a variety of reasons, some of which have been mentioned above. Not only are these conditions subjecting refugee women to unspeakable horrors, but they are also creating a new generation of children at risk for health, social and financial reasons. Additionally, in this milieu, the new generation of children is not receiving an education or any other training that would prepare it to re-enter a peaceful civil society. This makes gullible or desperate youth vulnerable to various bad choices that are not in their best interest in the long term. The effect of these possible choices may not be limited to the youth or their refugee camps. It may spread further and contribute to the instability in the region itself. Hence, it is urgent that this humanitarian crisis be addressed effectively immediately before the damage multiplies further.

Recommendations

We ask the committee to protect vulnerable populations by:

1. Funding programs enabling refugee women to safely and consistently earn funds to support their families.
2. Funding programs enabling refugee children, both male and female, to acquire an education and a skill or profession,
3. Supporting (financially and otherwise) international watchdog groups who work to ensure donations to refugees are reaching the intended targets.
4. Supporting international efforts to protect all refugees, but especially vulnerable child populations, from the bitter cold and other conditions that contribute to adverse health outcomes. Most urgently, support programs combatting malnutrition and the rising polio epidemic.
5. Promoting the appointment of international commissioners or ones from the host country in refugee camps to whom victims of gender-based violence can report their trauma and seek help.



Personal Testimony

United States Senate

Committee on the Judiciary: Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights

"The Syrian Refugee Crisis"

January 7, 2014

Ayman A. Okar

Provided by Syrian American Medical Society

SAMS presents this personal testimony for the public record from a Syrian refugee, Ayman A. Okar. This statement includes his experiences transitioning to the US in his own words.

I came on the 19th of July 2012 on a visitor visa as we have been afraid of kidnaping that became a daily story all over Syria. Also, due to the security situation of Damascus, where many explosions took place, and two of them on the bus way to/from the kids schools. Their basketball coach and the driver of the school's principle have been killed in front of the school. Some army officers have been targeted in the school area.

We have been lucky that we had this visit visa to the USA.

On the emotional side, I've been always concerned about the safety of my family (wife, kids and self). Other family members are now still in Syria. We have been very limited on the resources and I can't get a work to support my family due to work permit and social number requirements. The second most important challenge for us was the medical and health insurance and we have been able to get a MIHEALTH Card for Emergency Cases (Services only. Not the medication). Then we had the choice of either extending for another six months or wait for the renewal of TPS for Syrians or apply for Asylum which we did on 10/25/2012. We did the finger print on 11/16/2012 and the interview on 12/04/2012 and still waiting for a reply for our case which we never got till now?! We got the work permit in May 2012 due to the "No Reply" from the DHS after 150 days of the interview and we can't ask about our case status as per the paper we got from the office by the end of our interview.

We are short of resources, can't work due to work permit and most of all we have to survive and without the support from friends, family members and community we could be in a very bad situation and so far we are still fighting to survive.

Due to papers or status and no credit history we had to pay higher guarantee amount and ask for the help of one of the friends to co-sign for us to be able to lease an apartment after we have been hosted by a friend for about four months. With the help of friends also we managed two or three medical cases when we needed help and as we don't have insurance.

After we got the work permit so far I'm not able to find a job to make the minimum living requirement for me and my family and still fighting for a chance. Regardless of any qualification, skills or experience I got from back home I didn't have any work experience in the USA. Although I worked for Marriott Hotel as the sales Manager of their General Sales Agent in Syria and also for Conoco Oil Company in their operation in Syria and both are very big and well know American Companies??!! And in two cases I had to get a letter from the Social Security Administration that this Social Security Number is assigned to me and is valid number.

I have seen many other cases Syrian or others that are facing the same difficulties and other issues such as a family that lost a son and they have been asked for more papers. I have seen other individuals that have been denied and only heard about some who have been approved in other states and in a shorter wait period.

My direct family members are now all in the USA but the rest of my relatives are still in Syria

and some are in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, UAE, or Europe. I lost four of my relatives in Zabadani due to unknown fire?! and one of them in prison. My wife's family are still in Syria and one of her sisters still in Aleppo. They are all looking for resettlement but it is very difficult for them as they are holding Palestinian Syrian travel document and only one sister is holding Syrian Passport with her family. Also one of her brothers is now with his family is in UEA.

I have been introduced to Mrs. Suzanne (SAMS Refugee Resettlement Coordinator) last October to attend the 2013 Refugee Congress as a delegate for Michigan. It has been a great chance to present our situation and help advocate on behalf of all refugees and Syrian in particular. But still we have a long way ahead of us as Syrians due to the many challenges that we are facing.

SAMS as far as I know is trying to help as much as they can but they need more help and support which they are trying to get. What is offered is so limited compared with what is required to cover the basic needs.

Since I came to the US I became a member of the Rotary Club of West Bloomfield, Den Leader of the Tigers Cub Scout of America with Pack 243. I volunteered for several events and activities for Sheiko and Doherty Elementary Schools and now working with them on multicultural night. The Unity Center Community, Walled Lake Rotary Club and attended the 2013 Refugee Congress in Washington.

Ayman A. Okar

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TESTIMONY OF DEBORAH STEIN AND KATIE CONWAY ON BEHALF OF THE
 EPISCOPAL CHURCHⁱ

JANUARY 7, 2014

We thank Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Cruz for the opportunity to submit this testimony. The Episcopal Church, a member of the 80-million member worldwide Anglican Communion, welcomes this important and timely hearing, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis," and wishes to voice its strong support for continued and significant humanitarian assistance abroad for Syrian refugees and a robust refugee resettlement program that can meet the needs of vulnerable people fleeing violence and seeking peace. The Episcopal Church has been engaged in humanitarian assistance abroad and refugee resettlement in the United States since the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief was established in 1940 and we continue these ministries of presence today.

Episcopalians have just celebrated Epiphany, the culmination of Christmas, in which we recall the journey of the magi toward the infant Jesus. One important theme of this story is persecution and refuge. As it is written in Matthew:

"¹³ Now after [the magi] had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' "¹⁴ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.' "- Mathew 2:13-15

The story of the flight of Mary, Joseph, and their infant son, under the cover of night and threat of death, points Christians today to acknowledge and address the needs of refugees and other victims of persecution on our own time. Episcopal Migration Ministries has worked in public-private partnership with the U.S. Government to resettle thousands of refugees since the inception of the refugee resettlement program and remains committed to serving and welcoming refugees as they begin their new lives in our communities.

The case of Syrian refugees presents unique challenges worthy of particular attention from the U.S. government and its partners. Of more than 2.3 million Syrian refugees, 1.1 million are childrenⁱⁱ. Since the conflict began displacing large numbers of Syrians in 2012, the number of people forced to flee the violence there has eclipsed those of the Rwandan genocide or ethnic cleansing in the Balkansⁱⁱⁱ, and an entire generation of Syrian children struggles daily to secure housing, food, healthcare, and education with no end to displacement in sight.

The U.S. has provided key humanitarian assistance to neighboring countries receiving Syrian refugees. As the conflict continues, however, it can and must provide even stronger commitments. In addition to providing ongoing support to displaced people, the U.S. should

THE
Episcopal
 CHURCH

maintain a robust and fully funded domestic refugee resettlement program that is able to receive higher numbers of Syrians while continuing to serve other refugees, asylum seekers, unaccompanied immigrant children, victims of trafficking and other vulnerable populations. In FY2011 and FY2012, the U.S. resettled a total of 60 Syrians despite staggering levels of displacement^{iv}. While proposed FY2014 resettlement numbers from the region are higher, the gravity of the Syrian refugee crisis demands a more robust response. The United States should work to safely, swiftly, and effectively to resettle Syrian refugees as testament to our national commitment to refugee protection and an effective demonstration of burden-sharing with refugee-hosting states in the region such as Turkey and Jordan.

Increased federal funding is necessary in order to equip the sort of public-private partnerships at the heart of our nation's refugee-resettlement system, such as those embodied in the work of Episcopal Migration Ministries, to respond adequately to the special challenges presented in resettling Syrian refugees. These refugees often have suffered torture and other forms of extreme violence and many families have lost breadwinners. These factors frequently require extended case management and mental health services in order to give them the best chance of success and a firm foundation in their receiving communities. The U.S. government also should consider the needs of Iraqi refugees who were awaiting resettlement in Syria, and should seek to honor our nation's commitment to these refugees.

We hope that this hearing moves our national conversation and actions towards the security and peace that we seek for the people of Syria. Thank you for carrying the costly burden of public service, and for the opportunity to submit these views to the Committee.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah Stein and Katie Conway

ⁱ Deborah Stein is the Director of Episcopal Migration Ministries and Katie Conway is the Immigration and Refugee Policy Analyst for The Episcopal Church, a multinational religious denomination based in the United States with members in 15 other sovereign nations.

ⁱⁱ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis," November 2013, available at: <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Future-of-Syria-UNHCR-v13.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Intervention at UNHCR Excom High-Level Segment, Deputy Secretary of State William J. Burns, Sept. 30 2013, available at: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2013/09/20130930283777.html#axzz2HT9mmD5>

^{iv} Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2014, p. 1, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/219137.pdf>



Human Rights Initiative of North Texas represents a family of Syrians who are applying for Temporary Protected Status. Their lives would be in danger if they were returned to Syria. On June 14, 2012, our Client, her husband and their two younger daughters came to the United States from Syria to visit the rest of their family. The family has a son studying in the United States and a daughter who is also here. Afraid of what would happen to her if she returned to Syria, Client chose to remain in the United States beyond the period authorized by her visitor's visa. In addition, her flight back to Syria was cancelled because all commercial passenger flights were cancelled due to the violence in the country.

Although Client and her immediate family were not active participants in the demonstrations against the Assad regime, the Syrian government would still consider them to be traitors and Client would be placed in grave peril should she return to her native country.

Client would be in danger for several reasons. First, she is a Sunni Muslim, and most of the fighters against the Assad family and their supporters are Sunnis, while the Assad clan is Alawite. Second, she is from Midan. Midan is known as a hotbed of activity for the protest movement. Client believes that the Assad government would hurt her if they detained her. The government would assume that because she is from an area in which many rebels live that she, too, is a revolutionary and a threat to their rule. Third, members of Client's extended family have been working in Syria to overthrow Assad. Again, she may be found guilty by association. Finally, Client's family has been participating in rallies against the Syrian government in the United States. It is possible that the government in Syria knows about these activities and would punish Client for them.

The conflict in Syria is raging, but it is particularly bad in Client's neighborhood, Midan. Fighting is often dispelled by the use of tear gas. The tear gas often seeped into Client's family home and caused coughing and other physical harm, such as a burning sensation in family members' eyes. Client has learned that her house has had its roof blown off, possibly the result of a missile strike. Her home has also been ransacked. Client's brother went to check on it and found bullets in her bed, as well as in the kitchen, closet, and a wall.

Client's family in particular has suffered. Client's husband's business has been shut down for many months because it is too dangerous to operate. Another relative's factory was burned because he was sympathetic to the rebels. An uncle was kidnapped and only released after a hefty ransom was paid. Three of Client's brothers have been detained; thankfully all were eventually released, but one was held for nine months. One of Client's brothers told her that seven months ago their father passed away. He would not tell her anything about the circumstances of his death. The Syrian government taps phones, and he may have been afraid to relay the truth. When she speaks with her family back home, Client can hear bombs exploding in the background. Especially frightening is that her extended family's surname is on a blacklist in Syria; all of Client's family is stopped and questioned at the border whether entering or exiting Syria, and some have been abducted by government forces. Threats against the extended family have been posted on social media sites.

None of Client's family still lives in Midan. It is simply too dangerous to remain there. Before she left Syria, the neighborhood was so dangerous with sectarian fighting that Client was afraid to go outside of her house, even to go to the mosque to pray. If Client is forced to go back to Syria, she will have no home to which to return. She will be targeted by a ruthless regime

because she is Sunni and because of the actions of some members of her family. To expel her from the United States would be to consign her to a dangerous fate.

Human Rights Initiative of North Texas (“HRI”) determined that although Client and her family had a compelling story and would face great danger upon their return to Syria, they would have difficulty establishing that they met the stringent legal requirements for asylum. Therefore, HRI is representing them for purposes of seeking termination of their removal proceedings as they seek Temporary Protected Status (“TPS”). The family recently received TPS and their corresponding work permits, and we hope to terminate their removal cases this week.

