

**Testimony of U.S. Agency for International Development
Assistant Administrator Nancy E. Lindborg to the**

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

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Crisis in Syria: the U.S. Response

Chairman Royce, Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you about the U.S. response to Syria's crisis to date. Thank you also for your continued support for our assistance programs around the world, which are making a positive difference every day in millions of lives around the world.

Introduction

We have just passed the two-year anniversary since the onset of the Syrian conflict. Sadly, the country continues to face a grim situation and an escalating humanitarian crisis. The dreams of those who first began with hopeful demonstrations on the street of Damascus are far from being realized. The statistics are numbing: more than 70,000 dead; more than 4 million people inside the country in need of assistance; and more than 2.5 million displaced from their homes. We have already reached the somber milestone of more than one million refugees in neighboring countries, with greater numbers of refugees fleeing the violence each day.

The United States is fully committed to standing with and supporting the Syrian people. I traveled to Turkey and Jordan with Ambassador Ford and Assistant Secretary Richard in late January to underscore that message of support. I met with young activists who have been yanked from their dreams of college, braved arrest and in some cases served brutal jail time, and who are now dedicated to organizing their generation for a better future. Several of them sent me text messages on March 8th as part of their "I Am She" Campaign, urging people to wear white on International Women's Day in honor of the many Syrian women who have suffered violence during this conflict. And we met with refugees who have fled bombardment and attack. One man and his three young sons all had fresh shrapnel wounds as we talked in the camp in Jordan. And in a tragic twist of technology, more than one woman showed me photos on her cell phones of dead children or lost husbands.

I will highlight today several of the ways in which the United States is providing assistance, including support for the democratic transition, help for the neighboring countries reeling under the influx of refugees, and urgently needed humanitarian help, as well as underscore the magnitude of the challenge ahead.

Investing in Syria's Democratic Transition

The United States is investing in the future of a democratic, prosperous Syria and has committed nearly \$115 million in non-lethal assistance to support Syria's Opposition Coalition (SOC), its Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU), and emergent democratic institutions at the grassroots level. We are working from the ground up by supporting the efforts of the local councils and civil society groups and from the top down by helping the SOC build its capacity to administer opposition-held areas and provide urgent and essential services to the people of Syria. Newly

announced program commitments will support the SOC/ACU's ability to manage and implement donor funds both to meet urgent needs and for strategic initiatives that support rehabilitation and restoration of basic services for the Syrian people.

We know from prior transitions the importance of providing basic services and meeting the fundamental needs of a community – from fuel to schools to trash collection. In conflict and post-conflict environments, this is especially vital as communities need reason to believe in the possibility of a better future and establish trust in opposition leadership. At USAID we are working quickly through USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives to provide the SOC with support to respond rapidly to immediate requests from local councils -- including the provision of emergency power, clean water, heaters, and educational supplies for children in strategically selected areas -- as well as support strategic transition initiatives that restore basic services.

As Ambassador Ford has detailed, \$54 million in non-lethal assistance, of the \$115 million committed, is already at work through State and USAID-supported mechanisms to support, train, equip, and connect a network of civil society activists, civilian opposition leaders, and emergent democratic institutions. USAID has prioritized help for Syrian women to play a meaningful role in the country's transition through training and support for coalition-building. Working with the State Department, USAID recently co-sponsored a workshop for Syrian women that resulted in the development of a formal Syrian Women's Network and the drafting of a Charter for Syrian Women.

Support for Syria's Neighbors

We fully recognize the toll of this conflict on the neighboring countries that have so generously taken in the thousands of refugees that flee each day. Assistant Secretary Richard has noted the extensive efforts underway to support Syrian refugees. We are working as well through our USAID missions to help alleviate the potential tensions and impact of a growing Syrian refugee burden on host communities and stressed country systems.

In Lebanon, Syrian refugees now comprise more than 10 percent of the population, comparable to more than 22 million refugees suddenly coming to the United States. We have shifted existing programming to focus on mitigating conflict in particularly affected, vulnerable Lebanese communities, primarily in the North and the Bekaa Valley. Programs are focused on reducing strains on resources by improving service delivery and expanding economic and education opportunities. We are working to support Lebanon's leaders in their efforts to bridge sectarian and ethnic divides, with a particular focus on youth to encourage their participation in resolving community concerns.

In Jordan, the United States has responded vigorously to support the Government of Jordan (GOJ) as it copes with the influx of 350,000 Syrian refugees to-date, as well as help the Jordanian people who are hosting Syrian refugees in their communities. We have used the Complex Crisis Fund to help mitigate potential conflict in northern Jordanian communities where water supplies, never abundant, are stretched thin by arriving refugees. The USAID Mission has realigned existing projects and cash transfer assistance (\$284 million in FY 2012) to cover gaps in the GOJ budget that are, in part, due to increased costs related to the arrival of the Syrian refugees.

The U.S. Humanitarian Response

Finally and most urgently, the United States has fully mobilized to provide humanitarian assistance in Syria. We have provided nearly \$385 million in humanitarian aid to date, \$215 million of which is helping those in need in all governorates inside Syria. Our aid is reaching all 14 governorates in Syria, and an estimated 60 percent is working to help those in contested and opposition-held areas. And I want to be clear: our funding is not just a pledge; every dollar counted is already at work on the ground every day, in some of the worst violence-affected areas, including Idlib, Aleppo, and Dar'a.

We are working through all channels to enable our assistance to reach people throughout Syria: the United Nations (UN), international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and local Syrian organizations and networks – and thousands of dedicated aid workers and Syrians who risk their lives daily.

Medical care, food aid, relief supplies

We have prioritized the provision of food aid, basic medical care, trauma care, and relief supplies. Working through partners, including a cadre of very brave Syrian physicians, we are supporting a life line of essential medical supplies and drugs, trauma training for doctors and support for hospitals and mobile clinics. This assistance is saving lives every day. Right now in Syria, the United States is providing support for 144 hospitals, health clinics, and mobile medical units. This includes providing medical supplies and equipment, paying doctors' salaries, and training additional first responders and medical staff. USAID-supported field hospitals are providing emergency care and emotional support for children, women and men who have suffered sexual- and gender-based violence. The hours and days following rape are critical to treat injuries related to the assault, prevent infection, and receive the basic emotional support that will allow survivors to recover and resume a full life.

The U.S. is the largest donor for emergency food assistance for those affected by conflict in Syria, including those who have fled to neighboring countries. World Food Program (WFP) activities supported by the United States currently provide monthly rations to nearly 1.5 million within Syria and approximately 300,000 refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. WFP targets for these programs are set to increase in coming months to 2.5 million people inside Syria and 755,000 in neighboring countries.

In Aleppo Governorate, the U.S. is providing enough flour to more than 50 bakeries to provide daily bread for 210,000 people. Some of these bakeries had been shuttered for nearly three weeks before this program began, and they are now able to operate. Syrian families in these areas have bread, and the bakery owners and workers are once again earning income.

Throughout the winter, we pushed hard to ensure warm blankets, winter clothes, plastic sheeting and mattresses for over one million internally displaced Syrians who had fled their homes, many of whom have been displaced two or three times already. Now, as winter becomes spring, we face a new set of warm weather challenges, and we will shift greater focus to providing clean

water, improving sanitation and stepping up hygiene supplies and education to thwart the onset of waterborne disease.

As makeshift camps have sprung up along the Turkish border, such as the Olive Tree Camp in Atmeh, near the Reyhanli border crossing in Turkey's Hatay Province, we are responding with assistance to improve basic personal hygiene—including hygiene kits for each family—also essential to preventing disease. At Olive Tree, U.S. assistance has also established 120 garbage collection points and trash removal services, repaired the water pump, established water trucking, installed pipe for a sewage system, and constructed 140 latrines.

After the brutality they have suffered and witnessed, children and adults alike need psychosocial support to help them through this crisis. From helping to form women's groups that encourage discussion to providing vital psychosocial support for children by providing a safe space for them to play and interact with their peers, we are helping to provide ways for Syrians to work through the trauma. With U.S. government support, UNICEF continues to provide psychosocial support to more than 32,000 children in Damascus, Rif Damascus, Homs, and Aleppo governorates, including in conflict locations. In 2013, UNICEF aims to reach 300,000 children throughout the country.

Coordination

In complex crises, coordination with international partners is imperative to ensure the greatest effectiveness of humanitarian contributions. The UN-led coordination effort for Syria enables the humanitarian community to collectively identify and meet immediate humanitarian needs without duplication. Meanwhile, the SOC's ACU has assumed a vital role in coordinating efforts to reach Syrians, especially in opposition-held and contested areas. The UN, UK and USAID each have full time liaisons in Turkey to work with the ACU, which holds a weekly coordination meeting with all donors and implementing partners to share information and map out delivery of assistance to priority areas. Thanks to the determination of ACU leadership, it has grown quickly since its inception in November, and we continue to help the ACU build its capacity to coordinate and leverage international assistance inside Syria.

Key Challenges

Despite our efforts, Syria's humanitarian crisis is quickly outpacing current international response capacity. As violence escalates, three critical challenges are impeding the international humanitarian system from more effectively meeting the urgent needs of the Syrian people. First, **access** remains greatly constrained, especially to the seven northern governorates. In late January, the UN had a breakthrough in delivering assistance across battle lines and has since completed three cross line missions. These efforts are making a tangible difference—but these cross-line operations are logistically complicated and dangerous, underscoring the need for direct, cross-border delivery. This is essential if we are going to be able to reach those in need more quickly.

Secondly, **security** remains a critical concern. We receive daily reports of aid workers being targeted, arrested and kidnapped, of bakeries and clinics being bombed. Our priority is providing life-saving aid, so we provide our assistance in a way that maximizes the potential for protecting the many courageous aid workers and those who receive the aid. This means U.S. humanitarian

assistance in Syria is currently provided without branding. We continue to work however to find ways we can safely let the Syrian people know that the United States is the leading donor and the largest, most proactive provider of humanitarian assistance, including media campaigns, trips to the region and branding where possible.

Finally and importantly, resources are running short. It is imperative that all countries help shoulder this burden. The Emir of Kuwait hosted an international pledging conference on January 30 that raised \$1.5 billion in pledges for the UN Appeal, but unfortunately only about 20 percent of these pledges have turned into funding for programs on the ground. We continue to urge all countries to follow through with their generous pledges and, as the current appeal only covers operations through June, they need to begin looking at next stage funding, especially as the worst-case scenario quickly becomes the current case.

Conclusion: A Pivotal Moment

Our continued, full-throttled humanitarian response is a vital lifeline to millions of Syrians. And our support to help build the Syrian opposition's capacity to provide accountable leadership is crucial as Syrians seek to build a new democracy even as conflict continues.

But we also know our humanitarian aid is not enough to meet the growing needs. And we know our humanitarian aid will not end the bloodshed. We are seeing a shift in the level of violence, in numbers of Syrians fleeing into neighboring countries and collapse of basic systems inside Syria that is outstripping response. Without a political solution, no amount of aid will turn the tide.

After two brutal years of conflict, the Syrian people have more than earned the chance to achieve their democratic aspirations.