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CARE USA
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Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
The Humanitarian Crisis in Syria: Views from the Ground
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Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutsch, members of the subcommittee, thank you for holding this important hearing and for inviting me, on behalf of CARE, to testify before your committee today. The United Nations Under-Secretary for Human Affairs and Emergency Relief Valerie Amos has described the crisis in and around Syria as the biggest humanitarian crisis the world today faces today, tragically with little signs of abating. I can assure you that is not an exaggeration. CARE recognizes this is a protracted crisis that will affect the stability of the region for years to come.

CARE works in 87 countries around the world, supporting poverty-fighting development and humanitarian assistance projects. Between 2012 and 2013, CARE responded to 53 emergencies in 40 countries, reaching more than four million people.

In our response, we place support for the needs and rights of women and girls at the heart of our humanitarian programming. Of the over 2.5 million Syrian refugees, 75 percent are women and children.

CARE has a long history in the Middle East, beginning in 1948. CARE has been working with Palestinian, Iraqi, and now Syrian refugees in Jordan for many years.

I want to focus my remarks today on three areas:

- First, a description of what CARE has witnessed on the ground in and around Syria since the conflict began, and its impacts on Syrian refugees and host communities in neighboring countries.
- Second, CARE's response to this crisis with a particular focus on our urban refugee programming.
- Third, the important role the U.S. government plays in addressing the Syria humanitarian crisis and our recommendations for how the government must continue to help.

Syria

The numbers associated with the Syria crisis are staggering:

- over 9 million in need of humanitarian assistance
- over 2.5 million refugees, 75% of whom are women and children
- 6.5 million internally displaced persons

Inside Syria, more than half of the hospitals have been badly damaged or destroyed and serious basic food shortages are constant. The economy is in ruins, and thousands of schools destroyed in a country where one-third of the population is 14 years old or younger. Every aspect of social and physical infrastructure has been seriously damaged, with long-term erosion of livelihoods, assets, and access to education. More than 220,000 people remain trapped in besieged areas in Syria, and several million Syrian civilians are prevented from reaching life-saving humanitarian assistance.

The high intensity of the conflict has led to new waves of large-scale displacement, both within Syria and neighboring countries. Lebanon reached the unfortunate milestone of one million refugees last month, with Syrian refugees representing one-quarter of Lebanon's current total population.

Syrian Refugees and Host Communities

The crisis has seriously impacted Syria's regional neighbors, who are generously hosting more than 2.5 million women, men, and children who have fled their homes. This has placed an inordinate pressure on these hosting nations and host communities. Jordan, with a population of just over six million, is housing nearly 600,000 Syrian refugees. To put this in context, this would be equivalent to the United States taking in more than 30 million refugees.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), this figure is expected to rise to 4.1 million by the end of 2014. The protracted nature of this conflict means that sadly the challenges they face will grow, threatening their stability as well as the stability of the region.

Host countries and local communities face significant difficulties coping with the impact of the crisis on public services. Critical shortages of shelter and a lack of income-generating opportunities further strain living conditions, with many Syrian refugees forced to live in inadequate make-shift shelters. An increasing number of Syrian refugees are at risk of eviction due to their inability to afford rent.

In April 2014, CARE issued a report: *Hidden Lives: Urban Syrian Refugees and Jordanian Host Communities Three Years into the Syria Crisis*. A key concern highlighted in this report was that Syrian refugees will continue to depend on humanitarian assistance while awaiting return, three years into the displacement crisis, all actors involved in the response must increasingly diversify their programming with the aim of bringing vulnerable Jordanian and Syrian families closer together. Programming includes community-support activities, strengthening the capacities of local service providers, and creating income-generating activities to reduce the tension and feeling that refugees and local vulnerable communities compete over resources and access to services.

The report also highlights the need to improve access to education for Syrian refugee families in Jordan. Despite considerable efforts, Jordanian schools struggle to accommodate the large numbers of Syrian boys and girls. According to the study, nearly half (43%) of Syrian school-

aged children are out of school. In some areas, that figure is significantly higher – in Mufraq, 90% of Syrian teenage boys and girls do not attend school. To prevent the loss of an entire generation of children, much greater support is urgently needed to ensure educational opportunities for Syrian refugees. Barriers preventing children from attending school include costs associated with education, threats of harassment, economic need for children to work, different educational systems and lack of capacities in local schools. With overcrowded classrooms in Jordan, it is critical to continue to invest in the Jordanian educational system to ensure it has the capacities to accommodate Syrian school-aged children.

CARE's response

CARE's vision is to ensure the dignity and resilience of those most affected by the Syrian regional crisis, so that they are empowered to support the social and economic recovery of their communities. CARE is providing life-saving services in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and also to people inside Syria. We are also undertaking initial activities in Turkey to support the increasing number of refugees in the country. To date, CARE has reached more than 400,000 people affected by the crisis through interventions, such as cash assistance, shelter, hygiene and sanitation, medical assistance, food aid, psychosocial support, prevention of gender-based violence and information services.

Our support to families affected by the crisis in Syria is based on humanitarian needs alone, regardless of their religion, political affiliation or ethnicity. As I've noted, women and children make up the majority of refugees, and are particularly vulnerable. CARE is working to address those needs by assuring they have access to basic services and safe spaces to gather and receive support.

Inside Syria, CARE's partners have provided life-saving emergency assistance to more than 170,000 people affected by the conflict. Working in close collaboration with local and diaspora Syrian groups, we are providing food and emergency supplies to families, and emergency medical equipment and support for women.

In Jordan, CARE has reached more than 250,000 refugees from Syria. CARE focuses primarily on supporting refugees in urban areas of Jordan, who often live in overcrowded apartments, many sleeping on floors with mattresses, or blankets. CARE set up and is operating urban refugee centers in Amman and three other areas (Zarqa, Irbid, and Mafraq). CARE volunteers, who are refugees themselves, assist in organizing and preparing distributions of relief supplies. We also provide cash assistance to help them pay for basic living costs. Most refugees use this support to pay for rent (50%), medication (26%) and food (17%).

Serving as a central referral system, CARE also assists newly arrived refugees in neighboring countries who often arrive with nothing more than the clothes on their back. We provide information on how they can access health, education, and social support services. In addition, we are providing psychosocial assistance to women, men, and children to help them cope with the experience of violence, flight, and loss of family and friends.

In addition to operating the urban refugee centers, CARE has partnered with UNHCR, the Jordanian government, and other agencies to set up a new refugee camp in Azraq, Jordan's sixth Syrian refugee camp. The Azraq camp was officially opened on April 30, 2014, to accommodate the continued influx of refugees from Syria with an initial capacity of 51,000. The camp could be expanded to host up to 130,000 refugees if needed. With the Za'atari refugee camp already at capacity, accommodating over 100,000 refugees, Azraq will play an important role in hosting additional refugees from Syria. Azraq is designed as four refugee 'villages', with each village hosting 10,000 to 15,000 people. Each village has its own community center, primary health center, safe spaces, recreational grounds, and schools.

Similar to our work in urban refugee centers, in Azraq, CARE plays a crucial role in providing vital information to refugees upon their arrival through community centers. These community centers inside the camp provide a safe haven for vulnerable refugees, including women, as they will be able to receive psychosocial support, engage in recreational activities, and learn new skills. We are also running various community-based activities and setting up committees of refugee representatives so that their own concerns and views are considered and community leaders are part of the decision making process within the camp setting.

Role of the United States Government

I want to conclude by offering CARE's recommendations for how the U.S. government can continue to play a leadership role in responding to this humanitarian crisis.

First, we seek unfettered humanitarian access to Syria. As you probably noted, my testimony focused on CARE's work in Syria's *neighboring* countries. Humanitarian access in Syria is significantly restricted and prohibits humanitarian organizations from reaching the millions of people in need. With limited access, and through partners, CARE has reached more than 170,000 beneficiaries inside Syria with life-saving assistance. But with improved access, CARE and our partners are poised to reach millions more. There are an estimated 9.5 million people living in Syria in need of assistance.

While we recognize and continue to call for a political resolution to the conflict, we must do all that we can now to address the devastating humanitarian crisis in the region and support the millions of vulnerable civilians affected by the conflict.

While there is high expectation in the NGO community that access will improve, unfortunately ninety days after the adoption of the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 2139, access to and within Syria remains extremely challenging for aid agencies. CARE appreciates this committee's attention to the issue of humanitarian access outlined in H. Res. 520, a resolution calling for the immediate and full implementation of the U.N Security Council Resolution 2139, which both Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen and Ranking Member Deutsch both cosponsored.

Lastly, CARE greatly appreciates the United States leadership in addressing the Syria humanitarian crisis, providing more than \$1.7 billion in humanitarian assistance to-date. Unfortunately, despite this generosity, increased funding is desperately needed as the crisis

shows no signs of waning. Three plus years into this protracted crisis, the U.S. and other donors must support both life-saving humanitarian assistance now, but also long-term funding to rebuild lives and livelihoods.

We recognize the fiscal constraints our nation faces, but are concerned that the Administration's FY 2015 budget request cut humanitarian assistance by 25%. We encourage Congress to restore this critically needed humanitarian funding as it crafts its FY 2015 State and Foreign Operations bill. To adequately address the Syria humanitarian crisis and others around the globe, it is critical this funding is restored. Stability in the Middle East is in everyone's best interest, but I would be remiss in not highlighting for this committee that as we sit here, CARE and our partners are currently addressing the other major humanitarian crisis in the world today, including South Sudan and the Central African Republic.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share CARE's experience on the ground. Let me conclude with this: the Syrian conflict is the most catastrophic humanitarian crisis of our time, and it's not going away. The U.S. government and its partners have a pivotal role to play, not only in helping to bring an end to the conflict, but in saving millions of lives in the process. Thank you.