

# EXAMINING THE SYRIAN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS FROM THE GROUND (PART I)

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## HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

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## EXAMINING THE SYRIAN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS FROM THE GROUND (PART I)

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2015

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:30 a.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. The subcommittee will come to order. I am sure that some members will come, it is just that we have to end before noon because we have an important, on the GOP side an important event. So we will make sure that we end on time. Look at that. I just bang the gavel and things happen.

So the subcommittee is in order, and after recognizing myself and my good friend the ranking member Ted Deutch of Florida for 5 minutes each for our opening statements, I will then recognize any other members seeking recognition for 1 minute. We will then hear from our witnesses—thank you, ladies and gentlemen—and without objection, your prepared statements will be made a part of the record. Members may have 5 days in which to insert statements and questions for the record, subject to the length and limitations in the rules.

The chair now recognizes herself for 5 minutes. Since the beginning of last Congress, this is the sixth time that our subcommittee has convened to look specifically at the humanitarian crisis in Syria. I am grateful that we are welcoming back some of those organizations that testified before us last year and welcoming one new one, and we thank all of you for your work under these very difficult circumstances.

While the news about Syria today is dominated by geopolitics or the U.S. domestic political ramifications of the latest Russian air strikes against anti-Assad rebels, or the strain faced by EU countries because of the hundreds of thousands of mostly Syrian refugees flowing across their borders, I think it is important to remember that the Syrian crisis did not come about just a few days ago. We now have at the very least 25 million people who are going through unimaginable pain and suffering in their lives, lives that have been absolutely turned upside down in the past few years.

For years this subcommittee has been advocating for a comprehensive strategy toward the Syrian humanitarian crisis. Even though recent news headlines focus on the amount of refugees that

are heading to Europe, we cannot forget about the millions of refugees who remain in the Middle East. Internally, 7.6 million Syrians have been displaced. What a number. At least 4.1 million have fled abroad to Syria's neighbors, especially Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees has called the combined situations in Syria and Iraq a mega-crisis, one in which over 25 million people have been affected by the violence and brutality of Bashar al-Assad and ISIL. At least 16 million Syrians including refugees registered abroad are in need of humanitarian assistance, and combined with the over 300,000 people already dead it is fair to say that in Syria we may be witnessing one of the largest humanitarian disasters of our modern times.

The best and only surefire way to end the internal suffering and its external consequences, like the refugee crisis, is to put an end to the conflict in Syria and remove Assad from power. In the meantime, the United States will continue to try to improve the ability of those on the ground to deliver aid through both security and diplomatic solutions, and build the capacity of our partners in those suffering communities to respond on their own.

The United States has already met the humanitarian crisis with a tremendous response, donating over \$4.5 billion in aid since the conflict in Syria began seriously 4 years ago. However, there are many questions that need to be answered about the efficacy and the continuity of our aid and the monitoring capacities and the capabilities of our implementing partners, the lack of assistance being provided by others in the region and elsewhere.

I remain concerned that despite the large amounts of aid and resources being donated, very little of our assistance is reaching those desperately in need. In our February hearing on the humanitarian crisis, the administration testified that at that time 72 percent of our \$3 billion in aid was going through the U.N. We must ensure that there are sufficient monitoring capabilities in place to prevent fraud or corruption and to ensure that aid is not being diverted or falling into the hands of ISIL, the Assad regime or other terrorist groups.

I am also concerned about the ability of NGOs to access those in need when faced with a dangerous situation on the ground in Syria. Humanitarian workers must be allowed to reach those who are suffering without fear of retaliation. We must also not accept the arguments of some who contend that Russian and Iranian involvement will be beneficial to the humanitarian response. Nothing good will come out of Russian and Iranian involvement in Syria.

This will be the first time in over a year that the subcommittee has heard from NGOs and our implementing partners operating on the ground in Syria, and I am grateful that they have come here today to share their perspectives and to provide suggestions on how we can better respond to this, sadly, ever-growing humanitarian tragedy.

And I am very pleased to turn to my ranking member, Ted Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen. This is now the sixth hearing that the subcommittee has held focused specifically on the humanitarian aspect of the Syrian crisis. In addition,

we have held numerous hearings on U.S. policy toward Syria, but here we are 4½ years after the start of the Syrian conflict having the same conversation. The humanitarian crisis facing Syria is enormous and the entire international community must do more.

On September 21, the United States announced an additional commitment for this year of \$419 million in humanitarian aid, bringing the U.S. aid for 2015 to \$1.6 billion for a total of \$4½ billion since the crisis began. The 2015 U.N. appeal for this humanitarian crisis stands at \$8.4 billion. Even with the additional U.S. pledge, the appeal remains only 38 percent funded, and the failure of other countries to satisfy their pledges is unacceptable.

It is unacceptable that aid pledges continue to fall well short of the U.N. appeal. It is unacceptable that food aid is repeatedly temporarily suspended or reduced until new funding comes in. It is unacceptable that there aren't enough funds to ensure refugees and internally displaced persons have the most basic needs to survive winter.

At each one of these hearings I repeat the numbers of those affected by this crisis because they are truly staggering. We must remember that these are not just statistics. They are children desperate to go back to school, young adults looking for opportunity, mothers and fathers trying to find safety for their families. There are over 12 million people in need of aid in Syria. There are 7.6 million internally displaced people, 50 percent of them are children. Fifty percent. This year alone, 1.2 million people have been displaced.

Syria's neighbors are suffering under the tremendous strain of over 4 million refugees. Jordan now has 639,000 registered refugees. Over a quarter of Lebanon's population are refugees. That is 1.1 million people. There are nearly 2 million refugees in Turkey and Iraq. Now dealing with 3.2 million of its own people internally displaced by ISIS violence, it is also shouldering ¼ million Syrian refugees.

And now we are seeing hundreds of thousands making the perilous trip to Europe in search of security and opportunity. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees has estimated that 322,000 people have fled to Europe. The U.N. issued a funding appeal to aid refugees arriving in Europe, and while the refugee crisis in Europe demands international attention we cannot allow it to take the international community's focus away from the crisis that is happening on the ground in Syria.

Today's hearing is not the venue for debate over U.S. policy toward Syria, but let me just say that until we address the root of this conflict, which is the continued brutality of the murderous Assad regime and the horrific ISIS, the humanitarian crisis will continue. It is because Assad chose to attack his own people that space was created for extremist groups to rise. Now this region has been fundamentally altered for decades to come. The future of an entire generation of Syrian children could be lost in this conflict.

We know that billions of dollars have been flowing to bad actors on both sides of this conflict. Wealthy individuals from Gulf countries funded extremist groups like al-Nusra from the earliest stages. Media reports have estimated that Iran has given Assad \$9 billion in financial support, while Assad regime officials publicly

stated that they have received \$15 billion. Russia continues to provide billion-dollar arm sales and other materiel and financial support to Assad, yet it has contributed only \$6 million this year for the humanitarian appeal.

Billions of dollars have gone to perpetuate this conflict. The U.N. cannot even sustain funding for the most basic programs like providing food vouchers. This is unacceptable. Funding is unfortunately just one of the challenges. Protection for civilian aid workers must be a priority. Indiscriminate weapons like barrel bombs and chemical weapons are not designed to target a strategic position, they are designed to kill as many people as possible.

And while the vast majority of attacks on civilians come from the Syrian army, ISIS violence, coalition strikes and Russian strikes have all caused civilian casualties. Russia's decision to launch air strikes in Syria reminds the international community this conflict is far from over. In fact, on October 2, the U.N. Special Envoy for Syria stated that the U.N. would have to suspend certain humanitarian interventions due to a surge in violence. U.N. Security Council resolutions on the use of indiscriminate weapons must be enforced.

The war in Syria is difficult, it is ugly, and this focus of this hearing on this humanitarian crisis must continue even as we debate the violence. And it is also time that we have a serious discussion on the feasibility of operating safe zones to protect innocent civilians. In addition, we can't turn our back on host communities. This means continued and increased funding for schools, infrastructure support, water and sanitation projects, health care programs, and providing refugees with the ability to work and contribute in these communities.

We are fortunate today to be joined by four organizations that have been on the ground working in and around Syria witnessing firsthand the difficulties of addressing this particular humanitarian challenge. Our brave aid workers, particularly those Syrians still working inside Syria, our extreme gratitude for risking their lives every single day to make the otherwise unbearable lives of others a little bit better.

And finally, Madam Chairman, in reading through today's testimony I was struck by the personal stories that each of you told of individuals deeply affected by this crisis. We must continue to put a face on this tragedy to remind the world that the cost of continued inaction is simply too great.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Deutch, very eloquent. Thank you. Mr. Rohrabacher.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. We Americans come from every place in the world. We are every ethnic group, every race, every religion, and we have a very special role to play when there are crises like this. And I am anxious to work with all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to make sure that we thwart this horrible genocide that is going on now in that part of the world, but also to reach out to these poor people who are suffering and try to get through this crisis together.

Thank you for your leadership, Madam Chairman, and I appreciate my colleagues on the other side of the aisle and their good faith in this as well.



Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Rohrabacher. Mr. Connolly.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Madam Chairman. And welcome to our panel and thank you for the brave work your organizations are doing every day. We are facing a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented proportion. I know we say that every time there is a humanitarian crisis, but the virtual dismemberment of a state, and a big one at that—Syria—is pretty much unprecedented. And the numbers are staggering—1.7 million refugees in Lebanon, a country of only 4.5 million. And in Jordan Syrian refugees now equal 10 percent of its population. Turkey, with almost 2 million Syrian refugees and not getting quite as much credit, frankly, as it deserves for that effort.

We need to step up. We need our allies to step up. We need the Gulf state oil-rich nations to step up to this tragedy while we try as an international community to find a long term solution so that we stop generating refugees. I look forward to the hearing. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Connolly. Mr. Trott.

Mr. TROTT. I would like to thank Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen and Ranking Member Deutch for holding this important and especially timely hearing. Earlier this morning ISIS released a video of the beheading of three Assyrians from a village they captured in February of this year, and ISIS is now threatening to behead three more people.

The humanitarian crisis in Syria is getting worse by the day, and the repeated delays by the administration whether it be taking 9 months to name an Ambassador for International Religious Freedom or over 1 year to appoint a special envoy for religious minorities in the Middle East has only exacerbated the dire situation in Syria and the greater Middle East.

The frequency of attacks on Christians and other religious minorities is extremely disturbing. The attacks are not on just innocent helpless citizens but an attack on Christianity and other minority groups as a whole. Christians are under a distinctive threat in the Middle East especially in war-torn countries like Syria and Iraq where they have faced decades of persecution, some of it state sponsored, rendering them powerless and helpless. The administration needs to take the lead and show the rest of the world that we stand with the world's most vulnerable. I yield back my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Trott. Mr. Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to you and Ranking Member Deutch for calling this very important hearing. Welcome to our witnesses. Thank you for being here, and more importantly, thank you for the important work that you are doing.

The situation in Syria and the surrounding areas has become a tragedy of epic proportions, and I fear it will be a source of shame on our generation that we have not done more to prevent the human suffering which is at a scale that we haven't seen in decades. Responsibility certainly does not fall entirely on the United States. It is the responsibility of the entire international community to respond to the humanitarian crisis that is unfolding today.

And it is appalling to me that funding needs continue to be unmet; that the United States and Europe are not doing more to accept desperate refugees who have lost everything they have in

the world and that entire families are dying in their attempts to escape their bleak reality and the horrifying consequences of war. Of course the ultimate responsibility falls upon the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad whose unspeakable cruelty toward his own people including the use of chemical weapons is at the heart of this civil war.

This is not a problem that has an easy solution, but I hope today we can shed some light on what more the United States Government can do to ease the suffering of the Assyrian people and attempt to bring an end to this horrific conflict. I thank the witnesses again for being here, and thank you, Madam Chair. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Cicilline. Mr. Chabot.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you, Madam Chairman for holding this, I think, very important hearing. Since the start of the Syrian civil war, hundreds of thousands of people have fled taking refuge in neighboring countries. And while the international community has launched a massive response to the crisis, there is significant shortcomings and the political landscape is obviously extremely complicated.

We continue to deal with the brutal Assad regime and an unstable Iraq plagued by ISIS and what seems to be a disappearing border between Syria and Iraq. These tragic realities have caused an overwhelming migration of refugees fleeing to Europe and elsewhere. But I think we would be remiss if we didn't acknowledge that the administration's policies in the Middle East and particularly with respect to Syria have been in a shambles. So many mistakes have been made from drawing red lines and not following up on them to considering ISIS to be the JV team. One mistake after another and a lot of people are suffering as a result of those mistakes. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir. Ms. Frankel.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you, Madam Chair. First, I want to just thank the folks here, the panel, for all the work you are doing. I know I speak for so many Americans and people around the world to say that when we see what is going on in Syria it is heart-breaking. And it is also very complicated.

I am not going to sit here—I respectfully differ a little bit with some of my colleagues' statements about—I don't think we should be putting the blame on Barack Obama, but what I do want to say is I think what is going on requires an international focus. This is a humanitarian and a security problem now that is facing the world, and I look forward to hearing what you all have to say today.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, ma'am. Mr. Clawson.

Mr. CLAWSON. Thank you all for coming and full appreciation for what your organizations do in unimaginable circumstances. That is the first thing I wanted to say. Number two is I am against U.S. involvement in Syria under the current strategy, voted against arming folks there with taxpayer money, and offered an amendment to stop it because I think the United States is making the situation in Syria worse as opposed to better, which makes your job harder.

And the third point I have to make today is that the wealthy friends and neighbors in the neighborhood are not doing nearly

enough, not just militarily but more importantly, today, to help folks like you get aid to people that are suffering for no acts of their own but rather the conflicts that are occurring.

So those are three points I wanted to make today, and the first one of appreciation, of course, is the most important. Thank you for what you all do. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Clawson. Mr. Higgins.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Madam Chair, and just thank you very much to the panel. Save the Children, World Vision, Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, and Mercy Corps just doing extraordinary work on behalf of a compassionate nation, and these groups are so desperately needed today. You have a civil war that has killed over 220,000 people, created 4 million refugees, 7 million internally displaced, 12 million inside Syria need humanitarian assistance. This is extraordinary and extraordinarily difficult to try to distill down to a policy that we can help enact that will help relieve this problem. So I look forward to hearing from the panel, and again we thank you for the extraordinary work that you do and the extraordinary work that you will continue to do on behalf of the entire world community. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. And Ms. Meng.

Ms. MENG. Thank you, Madam Chair and Ranking Member, for calling this hearing to examine the Syrian humanitarian crisis composed of refugees and displaced families in the surrounding areas. I too especially want to thank the eight organizations who are represented here today for your challenging work on the ground. It is through your capability and willingness to put yourself in harm's way to help people that this assistance is able to be delivered at all.

With the exacerbating conflict and regional actors disagreeing on the best policies to address the root causes, we must focus on addressing humanitarian needs at this moment, specifically what best practices are and where there are gaps to accessing and delivering aid and where NGOs and governments can collaborate to effectively mitigate the effects of the crisis. Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from your expertise.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Ms. Meng. Now I am pleased to introduce our panelists. First we are pleased to welcome back Ms. Bernice Romero who is the senior director of International Humanitarian Response, Public Policy and Advocacy at Save the Children USA. Previously, Bernice has been a director for Oxfam International and an aide to former President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica.

Secondly, we welcome Mr. Mark Smith of World Vision, where he serves as senior director of Humanitarian and Emergency Operations. He has served as a senior strategist for the development department of the American Red Cross and disaster response director for World Relief.

Third, we welcome Mr. David Ray who is the vice president for advocacy at CARE USA and a managing director at CARE Action Now. He has had 19 years of experience with CARE, serving as a senior assistant to the president for CARE International and vice president of the Care Foundation. Welcome, sir.

And last but certainly not least, we welcome Mr. Michael Bowers of Mercy Corps where he serves as the vice president for Humanitarian Leadership and Response. Previously he has served as Mercy Corps country director in Afghanistan, Albania, Croatia and Kyrgyzstan. He has also performed work in West Africa as part of the National Democratic Institute.

Thank you all for being here. Your statements, as I said, will be made a part of the record. Please feel free to summarize your remarks. We will begin with Ms. Romero. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF MS. BERNICE ROMERO, SENIOR DIRECTOR,  
HUMANITARIAN PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY, SAVE THE  
CHILDREN**

Ms. ROMERO. First of all, I want to thank Chairman Ros-Lehtinen and Ranking Member Deutch for this hearing, and the time and attention that you continue to dedicate to this crisis. It is much appreciated.

A single picture of a lifeless child focused the world's attention on a crisis that has reached not just Europe but all of Syria and its neighboring countries. Now in its fifth year and with no political solution in sight, the Syrian conflict has been characterized as the largest humanitarian crisis in the world.

Save the Children programs are serving millions of people across the Middle East, reaching over 2 million children since the conflict began. My remarks today, a summary submitted for the record, draw on this experience to focus on four issues. One, the importance—

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Just to interrupt you.

Ms. ROMERO. Yes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. I noticed that we have some great slides here. I don't want this to count against your time, but do you want these slides to be seen by the audience also? I don't know what—

Ms. ROMERO. That would be great, yes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. It would be great if we could get one of them in one of the screens. There we go, okay.

Ms. ROMERO. All right, great. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. We will start again.

Ms. ROMERO. Okay.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Start that clock again. Thank you.

Ms. ROMERO. Okay. I am going to draw on this experience in Syria to focus on four issues. One, the importance of increasing the annual ceiling for refugee admissions; two, the protection challenges Syrian children face including attacks on schools; three, the importance of humanitarian and development funding; and four, the need to take action now to find a political solution.

The Syrian conflict has taken a heavy toll on children, many who have fled bombs, bullets and torture only to drown in European waters. More than 4 million refugees, over half of whom are children, have fled the violence in Syria. Given the scale of this crisis, the U.S. must be better than business as usual. The recent announcement to increase the refugee admissions cap is a welcome step, but more is needed. Save the Children is calling on the U.S. to resettle 100,000 Syrian refugees and raise the overall cap to 200,000 in the next fiscal year.

We know that unless we address why people are taking such desperate measures, however, people will continue to flee. One factor is the growing insecurity inside Syria including increased attacks on education. Over the last 2 years, Save the Children has recorded 51 incidents of attacks on and military use of schools supported by our programs in Syria. These included 32 air strikes, arson, forced entry, shootings and threats. The actual number of cases is likely much higher.

One example occurred in April when a barrel bomb damaged a primary school in Aleppo, forcing 700 children to be evacuated. Last year, three schools we support in Idlib were so severely damaged that they had to be rebuilt. You can see a picture of one of these schools here. This school was attacked and bombed three times until it was finally deemed unsafe and could no longer be used.

In another incident, one student suffered severe injuries and lost his hand. Two missiles fell on the school, one killing five children and injuring 50 more. More than 1,000 schools inside Syria have been used as temporary bases, military staging grounds, or detention and torture centers. At a time when there are already limited opportunities to access education in Syria, such damage further hampers students' prospects.

Despite the challenges, with the appropriate investments it is still possible to deliver education in Syria. Targeted funding can allow education to continue. However, it must be accompanied by increased pressure on parties to the conflict to cease attacks on education.

We call on the U.S. Government to pressure parties to the conflict to fully implement the U.N. Resolutions 2139, 2165 and 2191; support the establishment of a U.N. protection monitoring body; prioritize and fully fund education including alternative schooling options.

At the same time as insecurity is rising inside Syria, the situation in host communities is deteriorating. Host countries continue to show extraordinary generosity but are at a breaking point. Many borders are effectively closed and refugees now find it harder than ever to renew residency visas or registration. Limited legal status leads to reduced access to basic services, assistance and livelihoods. Unable to access legal income, many turn to work in the informal economy often risking abuse and contributing to social tensions.

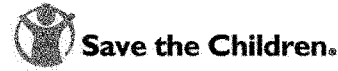
Education is also at risk. More than 700,000 refugee children are out of school because national education systems just can't cope with the numbers. Legal restrictions, decreased assistance, all of these heighten child protection risks. Families are increasingly forced to rely on negative coping mechanisms such as child labor or early marriage.

For both children's protection and host country stability, we urge the U.S. Government to work with host countries and develop an agenda that combines humanitarian and development support, and we also ask the U.S. Government to champion the No Lost Generation Initiative, a campaign to channel support for children's education and protection. The U.S. has been a generous donor, but in the face of ever-increasing needs this leadership must continue, including support for quality education and employment. We ask

Congress to pass a Fiscal Year 2016 emergency supplemental for humanitarian assistance and increased refugee admissions.

But ultimately, ending the conflict is the only way to build a better future. The U.S. should prioritize a reinvigorated peace process. We laud you as to leadership, but the scale of the crisis demands more urgent and escalated action. We look forward to working with you to help Syria's next generation.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Romero follows:]



“Examining the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis from the Ground”  
Testimony for the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa

Thursday, October 8, 2015

Bernice G. Romero, Senior Director, Public Policy and Advocacy, International Humanitarian Response

I want to thank Chairman Ros-Lehtinen and Ranking Member Deutch for organizing today’s hearing on the humanitarian crisis in Syria. We sincerely appreciate the time and attention that you have dedicated to this crisis.

A single picture of a lifeless child focused the world’s attention last month on a crisis that has reached not just Europe’s shores, but all of Syria and its neighboring countries over the last four years. Sadly, many of the issues I raised during my testimony before this committee last year are still valid, as the situation has continued to rapidly deteriorate. Now in its fifth year and with no political solution on the horizon, the Syria conflict has been characterized by the UN Secretary-General as the largest humanitarian and peace and security crisis in the world today. More than 250,000 people have been killed including over 11,000 children, and more than one million have been injured. The UN estimates that 12.2 million people inside Syria are in need of assistance, including more than 5.7 million children.

We know first-hand the urgency of the situation. Save the Children programs are already serving millions of displaced people and refugees across the Middle East, including in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq and Yemen. We have reached over 3 million people – including 2 million children – inside Syria and in neighboring countries since the conflict began.

My recommendations to Congress and the Administration today draw upon Save the Children’s experience working to address the needs of children and families affected by the Syrian crisis. Today I will focus on four issues. First, I will discuss the importance of increasing the annual ceiling for refugee admissions over the next two fiscal years to ensure that the US is a leader in helping those fleeing violence in Syria and other parts of the world find refuge. Second, I will discuss some of the overwhelming challenges Syrian children and their families are facing in the wake of nearly five years of conflict including attacks on schools inside Syria and increasingly difficult living conditions in neighboring countries. Third, I will talk about the importance of robustly funding humanitarian accounts to ensure that lifesaving assistance is available for families and children affected by the crisis. Finally, I will conclude by calling on the U.S. government to take action now to find a political solution to end this brutal conflict.

### RESETTLEMENT

Earlier this month, 34 refugees, almost half of them babies and children, drowned when their boat sank off a Greek island. Four babies, six boys and five girls died when the wooden vessel carrying them overturned. Tens of thousands of mainly Syrian refugees have braved rough seas this year to make the short but precarious journey from Turkey to Greece's eastern islands, mainly in flimsy and overcrowded inflatable dinghies.

This tragic incident underscores that the Syrian conflict – which has created the largest displacement crisis in the world today – has taken a heavy toll on children, who have fled bombs, bullets and torture in warzones like Syria, only to drown in European waters. After nearly five years of conflict, more than 4 million refugees – over half of whom are children – have fled the violence in Syria in hopes of finding a better life.

Given the scale of this crisis, the US must do better than take a “business as usual” approach, by increasing the resettlement of Syrian refugees. The recent White House announcement that the Administration will increase the cap on the number of refugees it admits to 85,000 in the coming fiscal year is a step in the right direction, but much more must be done. Specifically, Save the Children is calling on the Administration to resettle 100,000 Syrian refugees and raise the overall cap to 200,000 in the next fiscal year. Last month, 72 Members of the House of Representatives sent a letter to President Obama expressing support for this policy and we hope the Administration will build on this political support by accommodating additional numbers of those fleeing violence and turmoil. In the past, the United States welcomed more than 700,000 refugees from Vietnam and other parts of Southeast Asia. This is the kind of bold leadership we need from the United States today.

### ATTACKS ON EDUCATION

While resettling additional numbers of Syrian refugees can help relieve some of the suffering, we know that unless action is taken to tackle the root causes of why people are taking such desperate measures in the first place, that people will continue to be forced to flee. One factor contributing to the exodus from Syria is the growing insecurity inside the country, including the rise in the attacks on and military use of schools.

Through our work supporting schools in northern Syrian, we have heard from parents and children about the devastating impact of attacks on education inside Syria. Over the last two years, Save the Children has recorded 51 incidents of attacks on and military use of schools affecting schools supported through Save the Children programs in Aleppo, Idleb and Hama Governorates. These attacks include 32 airstrikes affecting our schools, as well as cases of arson, forced entry of armed men into school buildings, shootings and threats against teachers and students. Given the security and access challenges in documenting these cases, it is likely that many more incidents go unreported and the number of cases may be much higher.

One example of such an attack occurred in April of this year, when a barrel bomb damaged a primary school run by a Save the Children partner in Aleppo, forcing 700 children to be evacuated. Last year, three schools we support in Idleb governorate were so severely damaged that they had to



be rebuilt. You can see a picture of one of these schools here – this school, supported by Save the Children in the Idleb suburbs in Northern Syria, was attacked and bombed three times. Save the Children rehabilitated the school twice, but after the third bombing – including a missile strike that landed on the school playground – the school was so badly damaged that it was deemed no longer safe and can no longer be used.

In yet another incident, one student we spoke to suffered severe injuries and lost his hand when his school in Northern Syria was attacked in March of this year. Children were taking a morning break from their exams when two missiles fell on the school. One fell just outside the school's gate, killing five children and injuring fifty more. The other missile fell on the teachers' room, killing three teachers and injuring six others.

The military use of schools in Syria is also prevalent and having a negative impact on children. More than 1,000 schools inside Syria have been used as temporary bases, military staging grounds or detention or torture centers. Syrian families have informed Save the Children staff that when a school is used by armed forces or armed groups, it is recorded, reported and marked as a "military base," with the result that the school may be targeted in the future, even after the school has been vacated by fighting forces. For example, in an assessment conducted by Save the Children in northern Syria in June 2015, one-quarter of the schools visited had been used for military purposes and subsequently attacked, resulting in varying degrees of damage. At a time when there are already inadequate opportunities to access quality education in Syria, such damage to schools further hampers students' educational prospects and their futures. Moreover, seeing a school occupied by an armed force or group can also make children fearful of returning to class even when the school has been vacated.

The blatant targeting of innocent children through attacks on schools and the military use of schools is taking a toll on Syria's children who have expressed their strong desire to be protected. One child said to us, "I love animals and especially turtles because they have a very strong shield on their back to protect themselves against everything, even the missiles, and when they hear an airplane they can just hide in their shield and they will be safe. I wish we could have a shield like them because then no one would die and we could go to school every day even if there was an airplane in the sky."

In conflict and insecurity, maintaining access to education is of vital importance for children's protection and development. Education can help protect children from recruitment and sexual violence by armed groups, from being forced into the worst forms of child labor and from having to enter into early marriage. When schools are safe from attack and other threats, they can provide an important sense of normalcy that is crucial to a child's well-being, and can help provide important safety information and services.

Despite the challenges, it is still possible to deliver education in Syria with the right political will and resources. Save the Children is currently supporting 53 schools in northern Syria and our experience shows that with the appropriate community engagement, robust security analysis, investments that allow adaptations to school infrastructure, teacher training, a flexible approach to delivering learning and appropriate levels of psychosocial support, children can continue to access

education. Funding for these activities would help allow education to continue even under the most difficult circumstances and is an investment in the future of Syria's children, and the future of Syria.

If continued access to quality education is to be achieved, however, it must also be accompanied by increased pressure on parties to the conflict to cease attacks on and end the military use of schools. To this end, Save the Children calls on the U.S. government to:

- Pressure parties to the conflict to immediately and fully implement the provisions of UN Security Resolutions 2139, 2165, and 2191(2014) in order to demilitarize schools and stop attacks on educational facilities.
- Denounce attacks on and the military use of schools by all parties to the conflict in Syria and speak out against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.
- Support the establishment of a protection monitoring body comprised of UN technical experts to gather information inside Syria about attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including attacks on schools, and take further diplomatic measures against parties to the conflict in the case of non-compliance.
- Prioritize and fully fund education programming, including investment in alternative options for children to pursue their education if schools remain closed or are unsafe. Funding should prioritize increasing the number of trained teachers and supporting teachers to deliver alternative education services such as, where necessary, distance and/or home-based learning.

#### **SITUATION IN NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES**

At the same time as insecurity is rising inside Syria, the situation for refugee and host communities in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt is deteriorating rapidly and becoming increasingly difficult and unsustainable.

Governments and communities in host countries continue to show extraordinary generosity but are reaching a breaking point. Strains on infrastructure and public services, security concerns, and fears over the long-term presence of refugees have led governments to put in place greater restrictions aimed at stemming the flow of asylum seekers and encouraging refugees in-country to return to Syria or to seek asylum in third countries.

Currently, many borders are effectively closed to children and their families trying to flee Syria. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of children are living in informal camps or with host families near or even on the borders of neighboring countries.

Refugees in neighboring countries now find it harder than ever to renew residency visas or registration with government authorities. For example, in Lebanon, 70 percent of Syrian refugees currently lack valid residency status. Limited legal status for refugees leads to reduced access to basic services, assistance and livelihoods opportunities. Without papers, refugees are unable to register marriages and births, increasing children's risk of statelessness.

Most refugees are unable to access legal income earning opportunities to meet daily needs and contribute to the host community economy. As a result, refugees are routinely forced to accept

work in the informal economy often in abusive conditions, with the constant risk of detention and even deportation. The rise in the number of refugees forced to work in the informal economy in turn drives down wages and contributes to social tensions.

I have already outlined how education in Syria is under attack. Education for refugee children in neighboring countries is also at risk, with the majority of refugee children not attending schools. More than 700,000 refugee children in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt are out of school because national education systems cannot cope with the influx of students.

Legal restrictions, coupled with decreasing levels of humanitarian assistance are pushing refugee families further into destitution and heightening associated child protection risks. 86 percent of Syrian refugees living outside of formal camps in Jordan are living below the Jordanian poverty line, and 70 percent of all Syrian refugees in Lebanon are living below the Lebanese poverty line with 50 percent below the survival level. With ever shrinking prospects for their children, families are increasingly left with no alternative but to:

- Rely on negative coping mechanisms such as reduced food intake, child labor, early marriage, sex in exchange for money or food and child recruitment.
- Seek asylum in Europe through dangerous routes: 34 percent of asylum-seekers who reached EU countries by sea in the first half of 2015 were from Syria; or
- Consider unsafe return to Syria where conflict rages on.

To ensure both the protection of refugee children and stability in neighboring countries, we urge the U.S. government to:

- Develop, together with host countries, a resilience agenda, that combines humanitarian support to the most vulnerable with a comprehensive package of development, that includes increased investment in key economic sectors aligned with national development plans and inclusive livelihoods programming to boost employment opportunities for affected communities.
- Encourage host governments to uphold their international obligations and ensure that the right to seek asylum is respected without discrimination, including guarantees not to face *refoulement*.
- Influence host governments to develop administrative procedures that allow refugees to obtain and retain residency and civil documentation such as marriage and birth certificates.
- Urge host governments to help refugees from Syria access basic livelihoods, including reduced barriers to work in sectors where there is a demand in the labor market.
- Champion the No Lost Generation Initiative. Save the Children has joined together with UNICEF, UNHCR, World Vision, Mercy Corps and other partners in the “No Lost Generation” campaign to address the enormous humanitarian needs of children in the region. With this initiative, we seek to accelerate donor and public support for programs that help Syrian children inside and outside of the country to gain access to quality education, protect them from violence and abuse, provide counseling and psychological support, and meet other critical needs.

**FUNDING**

The generous support offered by many donors to date is insufficient in the face of ever increasing needs in this prolonged crisis. Needs are outstripping available resources in every country and across every sector. Humanitarian assistance is being cut without a compensating increase in opportunities for families to earn income. The funding appeal to meet the needs inside Syria is only 33 percent funded and the refugee appeal is only 46 percent met. Traditional ways of providing development funding have not been tailored to respond to a protracted crisis in middle-income countries.

The US has been a generous donor and this leadership needs to continue, through both robustly funded humanitarian assistance programs and long term resources for Syria and neighboring countries. This assistance should include a special focus on providing quality education for refugee children and employment opportunities in host countries. Specifically, Save the Children calls for the U.S. government to allocate no less than \$3.059 billion for the Migration and Refugee Assistance Account and \$1.895 billion for the International Disaster Assistance Account in FY16. In addition, we urge Congress to consider emergency funding for a two-pronged strategy to provide immediate humanitarian relief and to increase the capacity of the Department of State and Department of Homeland Security to manage the 200,000 target for FY 2016 refugee admissions into the United States.

**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. The US and other world leaders need to step up efforts to find an end to the conflict and violence in Syria in the near term – without that, all other measures are only stop gaps and children and their families will continue to suffer. The US needs to prioritize a reinvigorated peace process that supports the UN and brings in key regional stakeholders to drive forward a diplomatic conclusion. Decisive action by the international community is needed now to facilitate a peaceful end to the violence.

\* \* \*

I would like to thank the subcommittee for the opportunity to present testimony on this important issue. Save the Children lauds the US for the leadership it has shown so far, but the scale of the global displacement crisis demands even more urgent and escalated action. We look forward to working with Congress to help the next generation of Syrians who are seeking a better life.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much for what you do.  
Mr. Smith.

**STATEMENT OF MR. MARK C. SMITH, SENIOR DIRECTOR,  
HUMANITARIAN AND EMERGENCY AFFAIRS, WORLD VISION**

Mr. SMITH. Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, the face of the Syrian crisis has become Aylan Kurdi, the 3-year-old boy who washed up on the shore of Turkey. It was an image that shocked all of us. The face of the Syria crisis is also Ali, a 14-year-old Syrian boy now living in Lebanon. Ali fled the war in Syria with his mother and his two brothers; he has now dropped out of World Vision's education program in Lebanon. Ali is now working three jobs, at a library, an exchange office, and charcoal shop to help support his family. He told our staff, I may die tomorrow or the day after. I can't dream of a future.

Madam Chair, these children don't expect to live long. Since World Vision focuses on specialized programming for children, today I will highlight the particular needs and vulnerabilities of children affected by the conflict. Across the region over 2 million Syrian children have crossed borders and now live as refugees in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq.

And the life as a refugee is very difficult for a child. Fathers and mothers are daily making decisions about whether or not to put their families in a dinghy to cross the Mediterranean; whether or not to have their children leave school in order to work; whether or not they should agree to early marriages for their daughters because it is less mouths to feed.

Quite alarmingly, the specific needs of Syrian children are largely not being addressed within the humanitarian response. In World Vision's office in Jordan, pictures drawn by Syrian refugee children line our hallways. Their colored pictures are heartbreaking, portraying destruction of homes, bloodshed and violence. One showed a child in the corner of the picture silently witnessing the horror.

These children need mental health care and psychosocial support in order to process their traumatic experiences. Not addressing emotional impact and stress children have experienced could lead to a generation of children experiencing long term mental, social and economic problems. Further, the crisis has had a devastating impact on the education of millions of children.

Before the onset of the conflict in 2011, nearly every child in Syria was enrolled in school and literacy rates exceeded 90 percent. Today, inside Syria 2.7 million children are no longer in school, outside of Syria over 50 percent of school-age refugee children are out of school. Rather than gaining an education, the crisis continues to push large numbers of Syrian children into the labor market. Refugee children working to support their families are even more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

In light of this, it pains me to see the varying degrees of negative sentiment against Syrian refugees. Our response toward Syrian families forced out of the country by conflict will define what we stand for as a nation. We can act out of fear toward Syrians who flee the war or we can show compassion to those who seek refuge. I believe we are a country that continually shows compassion.

World Vision has been greatly encouraged by the response to our refugee initiative, a long term campaign to engage the Christian Church and the American public inspiring people to take action in these places of brokenness and human suffering. In the last 4 weeks we have raised nearly \$3 million from over 11,200 donors across the country. In addition, Nielsen recently conducted a recent poll on behalf of World Vision surveying 2,000 U.S. adults. Eighty-three percent believe the U.S. should in some way assist persons affected by the conflict in Syria. Further, when engaging with our supporters, World Vision receives extremely high responses from our Syria advocacy calls to action. They want to see leadership from President Obama and Congress on the conflict in Syria. President Obama and Congress now face a unique moment where their moral leadership will be tested.

The urgency of the Syrian humanitarian crisis threatens the stability of the region. It is ground zero for a global proxy war where the primary casualties are innocent children in and around Syria. Our policy recommendations include civilian protection. We need a Syrian policy that at its core has civilian protection.

A political solution—the costs of U.N. inaction around civilian protection in Syria are now becoming clear. The U.S. must politically and diplomatically prioritize an urgent and structured process toward a peaceful solution. Third, education in psychosocial support. Unfortunately, children's programs for child protection education and psychosocial support remain some of the most underfunded areas of the response. We need to prioritize these programs for children.

Third, livelihoods. Invest in key economic sectors in host countries and incentivize livelihood programming to increase employment opportunities. And finally, humanitarian response fund raising.

In conclusion, the war haunts an entire generation of Syria's children. Every single child in Syria today under the age of eight only knows life impacted by war. This crisis is shaping an entire generation of children. The threat of aerial attacks on schools and homes shapes them. The loss of their fathers, mothers, siblings, cousins and friends shapes them. The threat of displacement from home shapes them. The reality of not having enough food shapes them. The reality of not having warm clothing and blankets during winter shapes them.

I would like to thank the committee for inviting World Vision to testify and for your work on this Syrian humanitarian crisis.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Smith follows:]



## **Examining the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis from the Ground: Part I**

**Testimony before the  
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs**

**Mr. Mark Smith  
Senior Director, Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs  
World Vision U.S.  
October 8, 2015**

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch:

Thank you for inviting World Vision to testify about the humanitarian crisis in Syria, and for your work on behalf of vulnerable people around the world. Congressional oversight can help strengthen the efforts of the U.S. Government and the humanitarian community. This hearing offers a timely opportunity to examine how efforts address the needs and aspirations of Syrian families inside Syria and in host countries. Since World Vision focuses on specialized programming for children, today I will highlight the particular needs and vulnerabilities of children affected by the conflict in Syria.

World Vision is a Christian relief, development, and advocacy organization that serves millions of children and families in nearly 100 countries. I serve as the Senior Director of Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs for World Vision U.S. and have responded to humanitarian emergencies in the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and Africa for more than 15 years. Our 45,000 employees are dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities to tackle the root causes of poverty and injustice. This work includes emergency relief and preparedness for people impacted by natural disasters and armed conflict; long-term economic development; prevention and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children; mobilizing children, youth, and local communities to hold their governments accountable; and advocating for effective systems and laws that can provide a safety net and protection for vulnerable populations.

More than one million private donors, in every state and congressional district, support World Vision. We partner with over 10,000 U.S. churches, as well as corporations and foundations. We are part of the federation of World Vision International, which last year implemented more than \$2 billion in programming for children and communities. This included our response to 132 major disasters and humanitarian emergencies worldwide that reached nearly 11 million people impacted by these crises.

World Vision began its response to the Syria crisis in May 2011 from Lebanon, where we have worked since 1975, and now also operate in Syria, Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq. Most recently, World Vision began distributing humanitarian relief to stranded Syrians in Serbia. Since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, World Vision has assisted more than two million people.

The magnitude of this historic crisis has overwhelmed the region with 16.2 million Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance. Half of those are children. The ability of the region to continue accepting massive new waves of refugees is strained and at a breaking point. As resources become further depleted, refugees face immediate risks that particularly threaten the wellbeing of their children, and the future of an entire generation.

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen and Ranking Member Deutch, it pains me to see varying degrees of negative sentiment against Syrian refugees. Our response towards Syrians forced out of their country by conflict will define what we stand for as a nation. We can act out of fear towards Syrians who flee from war or we can show compassion towards those who seek refuge. I believe we are a country that continually shows compassion. The negative response, however, that I see from some Americans, especially about Syrian refugees who are migrating across the Balkans, varies quite dramatically from what my World Vision team tells me about the situation on the ground.



“Children. Dead. Sad, so sad,” cried a teacher from Syria who told us about her war-torn hometown. She and her husband decided to sell everything and take refuge in Europe with their two young daughters. Her six-year-old daughter, Noor, still looks up in alarm whenever she hears a helicopter or plane.

She expects them to drop a bomb.

“Everything got destroyed in Syria. War, horrible war,” recounted a former physics professor from Syria, who was fleeing through Serbia with his family.

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen and Ranking Member Deutch, the American people deserve to know these stories, to see these faces. They are filled with heartbreak, sadness, and loss. But, they flee for safety and hope of a better life—for themselves and for their children.

These stories touch something deep inside us that makes us think, “I can’t imagine if my children had to live like this. What decisions would I make if I walked in their shoes?”

#### **IMPACT OF THE CRISIS ON SYRIAN CHILDREN**

The war haunts an entire generation of Syria’s children. Every single child in Syria today, under the age of 5, only knows of life impacted by war. This crisis *is shaping an entire generation* of children—the threat of aerial attacks on their schools, markets, and hospitals *shapes them*; the loss of their fathers, mothers, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends *shapes them*; the threat of displacement from their homes *shapes them*; the reality of not having enough food for their families *shapes them*; and the reality of not having warm clothing and blankets to get them through the harsh winter months *shapes them*. Syria’s children are not being allowed to be what they are: children. They have been haunted by the brutal violence and the devastating consequences of this war. Ali, a 14-year-old Syrian refugee told World Vision, “I may die tomorrow, or the day after. I can’t dream of the future.” We must go beyond the facts and figures to the faces of children affected by this tragedy.

The face of the Syria crisis has become Aylan Kurdi, the three-year-old boy who washed up on the shore of Turkey. The world saw his lifeless body—his red t-shirt, his tiny shoes, the front of his head and right cheek softly laying against the sand—and felt horror and shock. The Turkish officer who held Aylan in that now infamous photo said that Aylan reminded him of his own son. As he held Aylan, he recounted that he, “was experiencing feelings that only a father can feel when he hugs his child.” The officer continued, “While Aylan’s lifeless body was light as a feather, I, as a father, have never bore greater burden.”

The photo of little Aylan is a startling reminder of the tremendously difficult decisions refugees face when seeking safety for their families. Refugees face increasingly limited options for their future and these limited options often compromise their safety and even their dignity. Food rations have been cut time and again in refugee-hosting countries due to lack of funding. In Lebanon, \$13.50 must feed a refugee for an entire month. In Jordan, 229,000 Syrian refugees who live outside of camps were recently told they would no longer receive any food assistance whatsoever. And so they make decisions about whether or not to put their families in a dingy as they cross the Mediterranean; whether or not to ask their children to work to help support the family; whether or not they should agree to early marriages for their daughters because it’s one less mouth to feed; or whether or not to stay in Syria and risk their lives. 7.6 million, in fact, are still displaced within Syria.

Inside Syria, nearly four million children are internally displaced while some are caught in the line of fire where heavy fighting is taking place. An estimated 4.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance are in hard to reach and besieged areas.

Across the region, over two million Syrian children have crossed borders and now live as refugees in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq. Indeed, the Syrian crisis is the largest refugee population from a single conflict in a generation. Over half of those displaced are children. Together, these children represent Syria's future and the chance to rebuild their nation, but they will only have the capacity to do this if we address their unique development. Quite alarmingly, the specific needs of Syrian children are largely not addressed within the humanitarian response.

I would like to go back to Ali, the 14-year-old Syrian refugee boy I earlier mentioned. Ali fled the war in Syria with his mother and two brothers. They now live in Lebanon. Ali was a top student at an informal World Vision school but, one day, he was not at his desk. We found out that Ali chose "bread over books" and took three jobs—at a library, exchange office, and charcoal shop—to help support his family. Ali told us that he finds time to read the books from library, returning them once he finishes reading. "I read so that I don't forget what I learned the last nine years of my life in Syria," he says. "I refuse to forget what I have learned over the years."

Those words still haunt me: "I read so that I don't forget...I refuse to forget."

In World Vision's office in Jordan, pictures drawn by Syrian refugee children line our hallways. The children's colored pictures are heartbreaking: they portray destruction of homes, bloodshed, and violence. One showed a child in the corner of the picture, silently witnessing the horror. The children affected by the crisis need mental health care and psychosocial support so they can process their traumatic experiences. Their childhood has been marked by displacement, destruction, and terror. While the U.S. government primarily directs funding to basic humanitarian assistance programs, such as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), much more emphasis is needed on critical psychosocial interventions, particularly for displaced and refugee Syrian children.

The crisis has a devastating impact on the education of millions of children and youth. Before the onset of the conflict in 2011, nearly every child in Syria was enrolled in school and literacy rates exceeded 90 percent. Today, inside Syria, 2.7 million children are no longer in school. Outside of Syria, over 50 percent or 750,000 school-age refugee children are out of school. Only 2.4 percent of Syrian children who work in Jordan attend school. The reasons for such high proportions of Syrian children being out of school include insufficient learning spaces and families lacking proper documentation to register their children, inability to pay the costs of education, cost of traveling to and from school, or having to rely on children to earn money for the family's survival.

While host governments are doing what they can to accommodate the increased demand for education, public schools in these countries are not able to provide for large numbers of refugee children. The lack of legal status, social isolation, and lack of support within the schools prevent students from entering or remaining in the education system. Rather than gaining an education, the crisis continues to push large numbers of Syrian children into the labor market.

Refugee children working to support their families are even more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Children are working in agriculture, markets, begging, and are engaged in domestic work. By forgoing

education in order to sustain their families, these children jeopardize their health and future employment opportunities.

#### **WORLD VISION'S SYRIA RESPONSE**

I would like to briefly touch on how psychosocial work has an impact on children's lives and urge the U.S. government to further integrate this important emphasis into their existing programming. World Vision's psychosocial support for children is interwoven into existing programming that cuts across education, child protection, and life skills training. This programming is vitally important for the wellbeing of children. Not addressing emotional impact and stress children have experienced over the course of the conflict could lead to a generation of children experiencing long-term mental, social, and economic problems. When a child's "toxic stress" response system is activated over a prolonged period of time, without the stabilizing presence of protective and caring relationships, elevated cortisol stress hormones in the brain impact that child. This chronic stress has long lasting impact on a child's learning abilities, memory, social interactions, stress and fear responses, and ability to control emotions—both in the short and long term.

World Vision places a large emphasis on psychosocial work through child-friendly spaces, where children engage in recreational activities that encourage self-expression through art, crafts, and storytelling. They facilitate their need to play and be in a less stressful environment with the care and attention of trained facilitators. For children, the power of play is critical for them to learn to cope with the horrors of their war experiences and to rebuild safe relationships with other adults and their peers. World Vision's research on child-friendly spaces found children who participated in such programs showed more consistent mental, social, and emotional wellbeing than refugee children who did not have such opportunities. Our research highlights how these spaces minimize long-term mental damage for children by helping them return to healthy routines and experience normalcy. To adults, opportunities to play may seem like a luxury, but for children, safety and opportunities to play is essential for their social, emotional, and mental wellbeing and, in turn, their ongoing development.

In our education programming, we train teachers to support stressed Syrian students who are unable to cope with their school curriculum and who may be exposed to bullying by peers. This additional support involves remedial classes with feedback sessions about the students' perspective of the courses and where they see themselves improving academically. We aim to reduce stress and prevent early school dropouts. Teachers and parents are also trained to identify various levels of emotional or behavioral distress in children, provide "psychological first aid" and, if necessary, refer children who may need more specialized mental health care.

In total, World Vision has assisted more than two million people affected by the Syria crisis. In this crisis, we prioritize food and food vouchers, clean water, toilets, winter clothing, blankets and other household items, health services, hygiene supplies, child protection, and educational support for children. We provide assistance to Syrian refugees, host communities, and vulnerable Syrians inside Syria. Funding for our programs comes from the U.S. Agency for International Development and other institutional donors.

In addition to our U.S. government funding, we are responding to the Syria humanitarian crisis with the World Vision Refugee Initiative. This is a long-term campaign to engage the Christian church and the American public, inspiring people to take action in these places of brokenness and human suffering. The response to this initiative has already been encouraging: within the month of September we raised more than \$2.6 million from 11,000 donors across the country. Hundreds of our donors have pledged to turn

their donation into a monthly recurring gift. In addition, Nielson recently conducted a recent poll on behalf of World Vision, surveying 2,000 U.S. adults: 83% believe the U.S. should in some way assist persons affected by the conflict in Syria.

When engaging with our supporters, World Vision receives extremely high responses from our Syria advocacy calls to action. Some of the highest levels of engagement from our supporters is on the Syria crisis. They want to see leadership from President Obama and Congress on the conflict in Syria.

President Obama and Congress now face a unique moment where their moral leadership will be tested. The urgency of the Syrian humanitarian crisis threatens the stability of the region. Syria is ground zero for a global proxy war where the primary casualties are innocent civilians in Syria.

Our response to the Syria crisis illustrates who we are as a people and what we stand for. The Syria regional crisis is the defining humanitarian crisis of our time. Although I have worked in the humanitarian field for over 15 years and witnessed humanitarian crises in Darfur, Iraq, Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan, have never before seen a crisis of this scale.

The staggering number of Syrian refugees in the Middle East and now Europe represent more than a humanitarian crisis. This is the moral disaster of our generation. Let us never forget the photos of Aylan washed up on the Turkish shore, or of desperate refugees begging to cross through Hungary and being treated as less than human, and of the striking images of death and destruction across Syria. Let us not forget that our humanitarian actions and programs for children, today, will also shape their future.

So, what can we do as a nation?

#### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Civilian Protection:** Support a UN Security Council-mandated protection monitoring and reporting mechanism to track and publically expose indiscriminate attacks against civilians, including barrel bombs, mortars, and car bombs, and lay down clear consequences for violations.
  - Most civilians flee Syria because of the horrific bombardment of civilian areas, such as schools, hospitals, and markets. We need to address the reasons why civilians continue to flee Syria in a comprehensive approach to the refugee crisis. Moreover, civilian protection must be a primary objective in political negotiations for a settlement to the Syria crisis.
  - UNSC Resolutions 2139, 2165, and 2191, resolutions that prioritize the needs of civilians inside Syria, can no longer be ignored.
    - Tragically, these resolutions that call for increased access to humanitarian aid in Syria, end to attacks against civilians, and authorized UN aid operations into Syria from neighboring countries without requiring the consent of the Syrian government, have been ignored or undermined by the parties to the conflict, other UN member states, and even by members of the UNSC.
    - The UNSC has the legal authority to demand these changes, and its members have the political, diplomatic, and financial influence to enforce their commitments.
- **Political Solution:** Ensure the Syria crisis is a top diplomatic priority and engage with parties of the conflict to come to a comprehensive agreement for a peaceful solution.
  - There is a vacuum of U.S. leadership to politically and diplomatically prioritize an urgent and structured process towards a peaceful solution.

- The exodus of refugees from the Middle East is only a symptom of underlying disorders. Until the conflict is resolved, civilians will continue to flee Syria and it will not be safe to return home.
- If a political settlement is not attained in the near future, however, we then need to have a comprehensive plan to protect civilians so thousands and thousands are not killed and so children are protected from continuous exposure to violent conflict.
- **Livelihoods:** Invest in key economic sectors in host countries and incentivize livelihood programming to increase employment opportunities for refugees and impacted host communities.
  - Daily survival is becoming increasingly challenging for the four million refugees who flee to countries bordering Syria. If we are to address the migration crisis across the Mediterranean, we must look to the challenges that Syrians face as they struggle to protect their families and identify livelihood opportunities.
  - The U.S. should encourage refugee-hosting governments to develop administrative procedures that allow refugees to obtain and retain residency and civil documentation.
  - Host governments should facilitate refugees' access to basic livelihoods without being penalized and reduce barriers to work in sectors where there is demand in the labor market.
    - When refugees have limited legal status to work, they are in danger to exploitative wages and other forms of abuse, and risk being sent back to Syria.
    - Consequently, wages are driven down and vulnerable host communities who rely on low-skilled employment are affected. This can increase child labor and contribute to social tensions between refugee and host communities.
  - Refugee-hosting countries in the region and government donors need to ensure there is support for the most vulnerable and prioritize livelihood programming to boost employment opportunities for refugees and host communities.
- **Education and Psychosocial Support:** Prioritize programming for child protection, psychosocial support, and increased capacity of schools serving Syrian children in Syria and in host countries.
  - Children's programs for child protection, education, and psychosocial support remain some of the most under-funded areas of the response.
  - The U.S. could support refugee households to cover schools costs and increase informal and non-formal certified education opportunities in host communities through community based programs.
  - In addition, education could be better integrated with livelihood programming, such as vocational training.
- **Humanitarian Response Funding:** Collectively address the funding shortfall for the UN appeal for the Syria humanitarian crisis.
  - Needs outpace resources across every sector and in every country impacted by this large-scale protracted crisis. The 2015 UN appeal has only received less than half of the required funding.
  - Support robust humanitarian funding through the regular appropriations process and through a Syria/Iraq humanitarian relief emergency supplemental for FY2016. The urgent need with the Syria crisis deserves full funding. We must step up our collective action to address the needs of these children or we risk losing an entire generation.

I would like to thank the Subcommittee for your work on the Syrian humanitarian crisis—a tragedy that will impact an entire generation of Syria's children. It is an honor to testify before you today and I look forward to answering your questions.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you for everything that you do, Mr. Smith. Thank you.

Mr. Ray.

**STATEMENT OF MR. DAVID RAY, VICE PRESIDENT FOR ADVOCACY, COOPERATIVE FOR ASSISTANCE AND RELIEF EVERYWHERE**

Mr. RAY. Chairman Ros-Lehtinen and Ranking Member Deutch, members of the committee, thank you for your continued engagement on this issue. As noted, I am here representing CARE USA, a 70-year-old global poverty fighting organization working in more than 80 countries around the world including more than six decades in the Middle East.

To begin, let me tell you about a woman I will call Nasreet. Nasreet and her family spent a year fleeing from one place to another inside Syria before finding refuge in a town across the border in Jordan. When explaining the reason for fleeing her homeland, she raised her 6-year-old son's shirt exposing a jagged scar from the shrapnel that had torn through his body and destroyed their home.

What choice did I have but to leave, she said. Now her oldest sons, ages 9 and 13, who had never missed a day of school in Syria, are forced to forego the education they so desperately desire in order to work full time to provide enough money for their family to survive.

Sadly, her story is typical of the millions who are displaced by this conflict. CARE has been responding to the Syrian crisis since June 2012. With the help of the U.S. Government, private donors and other bilateral and multilateral agencies, we have helped nearly 1.3 million Syrian refugees and IDPs in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt and Syria. Our programs provide food, hygiene items, psychological and social support, and vouchers and/or debit cards that help refugees cover basic living costs such as food and rent.

We are also working to meet the unique needs of women and girls. Sixty percent of all preventable maternal deaths occur in conflict, displacement, and natural disaster settings like those currently faced by millions of Syrians. The provision of adequate maternal and child health services in these circumstances is critical. But none of these efforts are enough to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of the Syrian people.

Based on our experience I would like to offer five recommendations. One, urgently increase assistance to Syrian refugees and those displaced inside the country. Two, increase protection of civilians inside Syria and in the region. Three, immediately expand resettlement of vulnerable Syrians to the United States. Four, ensure that women have access to jobs and income generating opportunities. And five, dramatically increase U.S. Government diplomatic efforts to end the war.

CARE's recommendations are detailed in our written testimony, so in the interest of time I will focus on just three of them. First, we must increase humanitarian assistance. The United States has been the single most generous donor to date, providing \$4.5 billion to the humanitarian response. That is in large part due to congres-

sional support for this and other humanitarian crises, and we thank you.

And yet, the U.N.'s 2015 appeal is only 41 percent funded, and the Governments of Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon are struggling to respond to this protracted crisis. In addition, the World Food Program assistance to extremely vulnerable refugees has been cut in half. America can and must do more to address these desperate needs. The \$1 billion emergency supplemental introduced by Senators Graham and Leahy on Tuesday is a very welcome development, and we hope that the House will follow suit.

Second, we must increase protection of civilians both inside Syria and in the region. One of the main drivers of refugee flows has been the indiscriminate attacks on civilians. Unless U.N. Security Council resolutions calling for an end to such attacks, including barrel bombing, are backed up with real and serious consequences, the parties will continue to ignore them.

We also must remember that women and girls face particular protection challenges in any crisis and Syria is no different. Inside Syria the war has increased the levels of domestic violence faced by women as well as early marriage among girls. According to a report released by CARE earlier this year, child marriages among Syrians in Jordan have increased dramatically to as high as 25 percent. The United States must ensure that the protection and health needs of women and girls are included in all of its assistance provided in the region.

Third, we must ensure that women have the opportunity to support themselves. One of the factors forcing Syrians to make the difficult decision to leave for Europe is that they are unable to legally work, particularly in Jordan and Lebanon. While we recognize that this is politically complicated, the U.S. Government should work with host countries to allow refugees to legally work. With as many as 28 percent of Syrian refugee households headed by women, it is particularly important to focus on their needs.

I urge Congress to seize this moment of heightened attention for the plight of Syrian refugees to push for a lasting political solution so that millions of innocent Syrians can return to their homes and we can turn our attention to helping them rebuild their lives. Thank you, and I would be happy to answer questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Ray follows:]



**Testimony of David Ray, Vice President of Advocacy, CARE USA  
Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on the Middle  
East and North Africa on  
“Examining the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis from the Ground (Part I)”  
Thursday, October 8, 2015**

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch and other Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to brief the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa about the dire humanitarian crisis both inside Syria, in the neighboring countries and beyond. The humanitarian community greatly appreciates your committee’s continued engagement on the plight of Syrian refugees and those still displaced inside this war-torn country. I am David Ray, Vice President for Global Advocacy for CARE USA, a humanitarian organization fighting global poverty and providing lifesaving assistance in emergencies. In our last fiscal year, CARE responded to 41 emergencies around the globe, reaching approximately 12 million people, including Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). In all aspects of our work, CARE places a special focus on women and girls who, if equipped with the proper resources, have the power to help whole families and entire communities recover from conflict and escape poverty.

Before I get into the details of CARE’s response to the humanitarian crisis, I wanted to share a few personal stories behind the refugee numbers. Our new CEO, Michelle Nunn, recently met with Nasreet, a mother in Jordan who shared with us her family’s story of fleeing from one place to another inside Syria for a year, before finding refuge in a town on the Jordanian side of the border in February of 2013. To explain her reason for fleeing her homeland, she raised her 6 year old son’s shirt exposing a jagged scar from the shrapnel that had torn through his body and destroyed their home. “What choice did I have but to leave?” she said. Now her oldest sons, ages 9 and 13, who had never missed a day of school in Syria, are forced to forgo the education they so desperately desire in order to work full-time to provide enough money for their family to survive.



Almost every Syrian you meet will share with you a similar story of fear and sorrow. CARE, along with other humanitarian actors, both local and international, are working to try to restore a semblance of hope and normalcy to this bleak reality. CARE hopes to involve Nasreet's boys in a program to counter child labor by providing financial assistance for families who return their kids to school and keep them there.

As you know, the Syrian crisis is now in its fifth year. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the war in Syria continues to affect about 12.2 million people, including 5.6 million children. Over 200,000 people have been killed and over one million injured, with adult men being most impacted. 4.8 million people are stranded in hard to reach areas. 7.6 million Syrians are internally displaced; between January and June 2015 alone, 1 million Syrians were newly or repeatedly displaced within the country. This conflict has forced over 4 million refugees to flee – 95% of whom seek refuge in Syria's neighboring countries.

#### **CARE's Response to the Syrian Crisis**

CARE has been responding to the Syria crisis in Syria since June of 2012, and we have worked in the region for about 60 years. We have reached nearly 1.3 million Syrian refugees and IDPs in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt and those displaced inside Syria. CARE provides food, hygiene items, and closely monitored vouchers and/or debit cards to help refugees cover basic living costs like food and rent. We also provide much-needed psychological and social support, and connect sick and injured refugees to healthcare providers. We help strengthen water supply and sewage systems, so both Syrian refugees and host families' lives are improved. CARE's approach is to address the emergency needs in a way that builds the foundation for long-term solutions that are sustainable – this is why much of our programming focuses on livelihoods and skills training as elements of our emergency response.

#### **Inside Syria**

Let me begin with our response inside Syria. As you are aware, access to people in need inside Syria remains completely insufficient to meet the humanitarian need present. The passage of UN Security Council Resolutions 2165 and 2191 to enable UN cross border assistance from Turkey and Jordan has helped increase UN delivery of goods, but millions continue to be stranded in hard to reach or besieged areas. NGOs such as CARE and others at this table are reaching thousands of people in need in these areas despite increased conflict and insecurity.

Inside Syria, CARE delivers food and emergency supplies to families, and emergency medical equipment and support for women which has reached close to 800,000 IDPs to date. We also work through partners to provide families with livelihoods support, microfinance and psychosocial support. Through cross border assistance from Jordan, CARE is supporting water, sanitation and hygiene activities in IDP hosting communities.

We are also working to meet the unique needs of women and girls affected by this conflict. Sixty percent of all preventable maternal deaths occur in conflict, displacement, and natural disaster settings like those currently faced by millions of Syrians. The provision of adequate maternal and child health services is critical.

CARE is working to provide essential maternal healthcare to new and expectant mothers. This includes pre-natal and post-natal care, clean delivery kits, and providing basic emergency obstetric care at a number of health facilities. We are also working to counteract the destabilizing impact of the conflict and ensure women and families have the counseling and means needed to practice healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies.

#### **In the region and beyond**

In addition to our response inside Syria, we are working in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt to address refugee and host community needs.

In Jordan, we work in both formal refugee camps as well as urban centers because the majority of Syrian refugees – 85% – live amongst Jordanians in cities and towns. Refugees now account for more than 10% of the entire population. That would be like the U.S. suddenly hosting more than 32 million of our Canadian neighbors. Not surprisingly, local authorities and the Jordanian government are stretched to provide services to the refugees and at the same time continue to meet the needs of their own citizens. With that in mind, CARE ensures that our programming addresses both the needs of refugees as well as the needs of Jordan's citizens, many of whom also face significant humanitarian needs.

To date in Jordan, CARE assistance has reached over 300,000 Syrian refugees, 91,000 non-Syrian refugees, and 50,000 Jordanians in host communities. We provide vouchers and/or debit cards to pay for urgent living costs including rent, food, health services, and essential house-hold items. This support for food vouchers and cash transfers is especially critical as the distribution of food commodities is not feasible given the geographic spread of refugees within many of the host countries. Because of the increasing food insecurity and the unique

needs of populations such as those in the Syrian region, CARE has long advocated for flexible food aid funding.

CARE seeks lasting solutions – in particular creative approaches that will allow refugees to work and support themselves – in Jordan. Our urban resilience program, for example, has an innovative vocational training component for Syrians and Jordanians alike. In close cooperation with the private sector, we have started a solar cell maintenance training that links graduates of the program with hiring companies that make an effort to support Syrians in obtaining a work permit and also support hiring members of the host communities. Although a sensitive issue, we have had productive and useful conversations with the Jordanian authorities and other actors. US support such as preferential access to markets and private sector investment funding could be useful elements of such solutions.

In Lebanon, CARE works with Syrian refugees in Beirut, Mount Lebanon, and Northern Governorates. We work with local municipalities to improve their water supply and sanitation infrastructure, benefiting both refugees and host communities themselves. We also work in partnership with other humanitarian agencies to assist close to 1,000 economically vulnerable households with monthly financial assistance.

Following the huge influx of Syrian refugees into Turkey last fall, CARE immediately began assessing needs and coordinating with the Turkish authorities and other organizations to support these refugees. We are currently responding with much-needed cash assistance, hygiene promotion, dignity kits for women and the elderly, and establishing community groups that address protection issues, including psychosocial needs, early marriage, and gender-based violence.

In Egypt, CARE has worked with Syrian refugees to raise awareness of sexual exploitation and other forms of gender-based violence to protect them from any form of abuse as well as individual case management for sexual and gender-based violence survivors. We work with families to empower them to oppose these harmful practices.

In light of the recent surge in refugees fleeing to Europe, we are working through a local partner in Germany, Serbia and Croatia to provide emergency assistance to refugees. But none of these efforts are enough to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of the Syrian people. U.S. leadership and humanitarian assistance funding, while laudable, are still not meeting the severity of the crisis.

Based on our experience on the ground I would like to offer five recommendations for U.S. engagement in the region:

## **CARE's Recommendations**

### **1) Increase urgent assistance to Syria and the region**

Let me first acknowledge that the United States has been the single most generous donor to this crisis, providing \$4.5 billion to the humanitarian response to date, due in large part to Congressional support. Thank you. This is a remarkable figure, but we can and should do more. With 95% of Syrian refugees remaining in the region, continued indiscriminate attacks on civilians forcing hundreds of thousands to flee for their lives and little hope that refugees will be able to return to Syria anytime soon, the region is in the midst of a protracted crisis that has reached a tipping point. The governments of Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon are struggling to respond to this protracted crisis which has entered its fifth year. Currently, the 2015 appeal for assistance both inside Syria and in the neighboring countries is only 41% funded.

As you have likely seen, World Food Program assistance has been cut time and again, increasing the struggle to feed families. In Jordan, assistance to extremely vulnerable refugees was cut in half to just \$13.50 a month and 229,000 vulnerable families no longer receive humanitarian assistance. On top of this, winter is on the way, and refugees will face increased shelter and health needs to survive the elements.

As you have likely seen, World Food Program assistance has not been sufficient in the face of the increased food needs of children and. In Jordan, food assistance to extremely vulnerable refugees was cut in half to just \$13.50 a month and an additional 229,000 vulnerable families will no longer receive food assistance. On top of this, winter is on the way, and refugees will face increased shelter and health needs to survive the elements.

CARE has conducted urban assessments of Syrian refugees living in host communities in Jordan for the past few years, and in 2015, we found startling trends –

- More families report unmet food needs than in previous years;
- One in three families have not been able to access medical services when they needed them;
- One-third of school age children remain out of school;
- In an environment where adults cannot legally work, refugees are coping in part by sending children to work instead of enrolling them in school;

- More women and girls are becoming income providers, and men are staying at home; and
- Women and girls face increased risk of gender-based violence including early marriage

We must increase urgent assistance to help Syrian refugees and IDPs, particularly women, children and other vulnerable populations. Congress can accomplish this now as it finalizes the Fiscal Year 2016 appropriations by providing increased funding for the humanitarian accounts.

## **2) Increase protection of civilians both inside Syria and in the region**

One of the main drivers of refugee flows has been the indiscriminate attacks on civilians that continue to be committed by parties to the conflict inside Syria. We at CARE share the outrage of our partners in Syria and others at these attacks and the human suffering that the Syrian people face on a daily basis. Despite UN Security Council resolutions calling for an end to indiscriminate attacks on civilians including banning the use of barrel bombs in December 2014, over 11,000 barrel bombs have been dropped since the resolution was passed, an estimated 1,500 in August 2015 alone.

A more serious strategy to end the bombardment and targeting of civilians, including in schools and hospitals, by all parties to the conflict should be at the heart of international efforts moving forward. Congress should continue to pressure the Administration to ensure that the United States is using all measures at its disposal to ensure that existing Security Council resolutions are fully implemented immediately. Unless the Security Council's resolutions are backed up with real and serious consequences the warring parties will continue to ignore them. Exactly what those consequences should be is beyond the scope for us as humanitarians to suggest. That said, please know that according to our conversations with people fleeing Syria, ending the barrel bombing would do more to make people feel safe in their homes and less compelled to leave the country than other measure short of ending the conflict. And it would directly translate into tens of thousands of civilian lives saved.

We also must remember that women and girls face particular protection challenges in any crisis, and Syria is no different. Inside Syria, the war has increased the levels of domestic violence and harassment faced by women as well as early marriage among girls. Once women and girls flee the violence in Syria, they still face many of these same grave protection concerns. According to a report released by CARE this past May, child marriages among the Syrian population in

Jordan have drastically increased as families seek to protect their daughters within the institution of marriage and secure the financial help marriage can provide the girl and her family. In 2011, 12% of registered Syrian marriages involved a girl aged 15 to 17; by 2013, this percentage has risen to as high as 25%. Similar trends have been observed in other host countries.

The United States must ensure that protection needs of women and girls are included in all short and longer term assistance provided both inside Syria and in the region, including measures to protect against gender-based violence and other actions that put them at risk, like child marriage. We must also ensure that all survivors of gender-based violence have immediate access to care and services.

**3) Immediately expand resettlement of vulnerable Syrians to the United States and elsewhere**

While 95% of Syrian refugees are in the region, up to one in ten Syrians in neighboring countries are estimated by UNHCR to be in need of durable resettlement or asylum in to third countries. These vulnerable populations include the sick, disabled, elderly, unaccompanied children, and female-headed households. The United States has a long and proud history of welcoming the most vulnerable to seek refuge in our country. CARE, along with many other humanitarian and human rights organizations, has called for at least 100,000 Syrian refugees to be resettled to the United States in fiscal year 2016. This increase in the resettlement of Syrian refugees should not come at the expense of other vulnerable populations who are also fleeing conflicts and atrocities.

In addition, the United States should diplomatically support European countries that admit Syrians and other refugees and urge those who could do more to increase access to asylum for this population. The United States should also diplomatically pressure European governments to establish and maintain humane practices to address the flow of refugees without the use of force or violence.

**4) Ensure that women have access to livelihoods opportunities**

One of the factors forcing Syrians to make the difficult decision to leave neighboring countries for refuge elsewhere is that they are unable to legally work, particularly in Jordan and Lebanon. When assistance is being cut, and Syrians cannot legally provide for their families, it forces people into illegal work, leading to higher rates of child labor and other abuses. The U.S. government should call on host countries to allow refugees to legally work while they seek refuge from the fighting in Syria, and should invest in exploring options that make the right to work politically viable in each specific context. With as many as 28% of Syrian

refugee households headed by women, it is particularly important to focus on their needs. The U.S. should support livelihoods programs and skills trainings that include providing women with the opportunities to provide for themselves and their families and will enhance their future employment opportunities.

As CARE has found in our programming, though, we cannot neglect the needs of host communities. The U.S. should work with countries bilaterally and multilaterally to achieve access to employment and livelihoods for both refugees and host communities. CARE is currently working with the private sector to provide training for both Syrian refugees and Jordanians. Ensuring that both populations have access to legal, dignified income-generating activities is critical for the resilience of the region.

**5) Dramatically increase U.S. government diplomatic efforts to end the war**

Ultimately, the only real solution to the humanitarian crisis is to end the conflict. The U.S. must dramatically increase diplomatic efforts to end the war in Syria. By all accounts there are no military solutions; a lasting political solution must be found and those who have violated international human rights law must be held accountable for their actions for peace to develop and flourish. The U.S. must continue to actively engage with international actors and provide leadership in multilateral discussions to find such a solution.

In addition, as the U.S. and the international community actively pursue political negotiations, Syrian women must be actively included for any future peace and transition process to hold. The U.S. and others should continually engage with local civil society and international partners to ensure that all perspectives are represented and heard in the peace process.

As the Syria crisis continues into its fifth year, and the hope of the Syrian people understandably wanes, the international community and the United States must not give up. Providing continued humanitarian assistance, ensuring that innocent civilians are not harmed by indiscriminate attacks, and working to find a negotiated settlement are not only the right things to do, they are also in our national self-interest. I urge Congress to seize this moment of heightened attention to the plight of Syrian refugees and internally displaced to push for a lasting political solution so that millions of innocent Syrians can return to their homes and we can turn our attention to helping them rebuild their lives.

Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, sir.  
Mr. Bowers.

**STATEMENT OF MR. MICHAEL BOWERS, VICE PRESIDENT,  
HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP AND RESPONSE, MERCY CORPS**

Mr. BOWERS. My colleagues are eloquent. I hope I can do them well. Madam Chair, Ranking Member Deutch, thank you very much for inviting me today to testify. Last month I spent time on the island of Lesbos, Greece, which serves as a way station for many Syrian refugees on their long journey to Europe. There I saw thousands of people who have risked everything they have to flee for their lives; the vast majority of them fleeing the civil war in Syria, but many of them also fleeing Syria's unstable neighbors.

I am glad my colleague provided some faces of the people who are affected, but let me also try to provide some voice to the people we are encountering on this journey. "Crossing is very dangerous, but we are looking for a small dream." This from a small, young Syrian boy from Hama told our team in Lesbos. He added that "We had to escape. In Syria there is only death and killing." Another 14-year-old Syrian youth named Hammed, we met, had lost his leg when a barrel bomb fell into his school. Though he had already made it to Lesbos he wondered out loud how he would continue his journey on crutches all the way to Austria, his intended destination.

Though most of the people we met in Greece were men and older boys sent ahead by their families to establish a base in Europe, women also make up this trip into fragile crafts crossing the Aegean. Babies just a week old or two were found on the beaches as well as these boys. It is something to highlight that the Syrians we met in Lesbos are in the minority though, those able to pull together the substantial resources required to reach the beaches of Lesbos. Many Syrians in the region cannot pull together that same amount of money, an endeavor costing many families their entire savings.

I have also spoken with the mayor of Athens and other global city leaders on how ill-prepared they feel in supporting and accommodating thousands of migrants and refugees flowing into Europe. Countries neighboring Syria know this situation all too well as we know. Tragically, Syrians are worse off today than they were a year ago, whether they are in Syria or living in neighboring countries.

Regional host countries that are receiving the vast majority of refugees face particular strain on their resources, as my colleagues mentioned, and as long as the war drags on we find more and more challenges to cope with. Humanitarian aid to assist those fleeing unimaginable violence in Syria is critical and the U.S. Government has been generous, as we have mentioned. Still, ending this crisis and its impact on the region requires more than writing checks.

Absent a political solution in Syria, the situation will not abate. I cannot say without hesitation that for Mercy Corps and my colleague organizations, Syria is probably one of the most hostile and complex environments we have ever worked. It is an active war zone where very few areas could be described as safe and operations are carried out at great risk, as a member mentioned before.



Yet in the face of extraordinarily difficult circumstances through our local partnerships with Syrian civil society groups, we have been able to respond to humanitarian needs at large of scale. In Syria, Mercy Corps is one of the largest providers of food assistance as well as essential supplies that people need to survive and maintain a modicum of dignity and small comfort, who are working hard to provide clean access to water and sanitation and to find a means to earn an income.

These response efforts continue to be just a drop in the bucket, however, compared to the exponentially growing needs. The humanitarian community is struggling to assist hundreds of thousands of innocent people who need our help, and to be direct, the sheer number of people in need is staggering. Their needs grow ever greater and more desperate by the day, and there is still no end in sight.

Let me quickly tell you what we are seeing on the ground. Protection continues to be the number one challenge facing Syrians who are still in the country. On a daily basis, civilians living outside of the area where the coalition is fighting ISIS face unrelenting aerial attacks including the threat of barrel bombs dropped by the Syrian regime.

And we are witnessing the tragic outcomes of an entire generation of Syrian children and youth growing up in a war zone. Instead of worrying about their schoolwork, they worry whether their family or themselves would be killed. They are frustrated and isolated. Young women in particular never leave their homes. Young men and women both experience a sense of powerlessness and humiliation.

Not surprisingly, when faced with this bleak option for their children, many families hazard the long and dangerous trip to Europe, trusting their fates to luck and smugglers in the absence of a legal, well-regulated path. And while many have left for Europe, many more have remained in Syria and the neighboring host countries seeking support to carve out a life of meaning and dignity.

For the first time since Mercy Corps started delivering aid into the Aleppo Governorate 3 years ago, families we spoke to this week said they depend solely on our food aid. Their personal resources are now completely gone. Without this aid they would go hungry. In August alone Mercy Corps delivered over 3,000 tons of food to 400,000 people, and yet that is not enough.

Layered on these challenges, humanitarians are grappling with a new development: The entry of Russia into this battlefield and the resulting internationalization of the armed conflict, which comes with higher standard for civilian protection as outlined in the Geneva Protocols, yet we already are seeing concerning reports of increased numbers of civilians casualties in these areas impacted by the Russian strikes. If this intensity of strikes continues, we will prepare for the possibility of significant redistribution of IDPs, internally displaced people.

The largest obstacle for delivering in Syria is, of course, access. A July 2015 Operational Peer Review by the IASC on the Syria crisis responded that less than 1 percent of over 400,000 people in besieged areas receive any kind of assistance from U.N. agencies, and

on average only 5 percent of 4.5 million in hard to reach areas receive any assistance on a monthly basis.

While the situation is bleak, there are a number of concrete steps that Congress can take now to help the people of Syria. I would like to leave the committee with just a few of them. First, as my colleagues said, provide adequate funding for humanitarian assistance and longer term needs. This month alone, the joint U.N. and NGO appeal in Iraq are barely funded at 30 and 46 percent, respectively. A few weeks ago the World Food Program had to unavoidably cut food aid for people in Jordan. It is more important than ever to shore up funding for these humanitarian accounts.

Secondly, change the U.S. Government approach to assisting fragile states. The widespread nature of the worst refugee crisis since World War II should be a wake-up call. Third, provide conditions for the dignity of refugees in the Middle East, particularly by enabling them to work and access education by shoring up for resources for host communities. And then finally, as it can't be emphasized enough, the humanitarians are not a solution to this crisis, and I urge this Congress to work with the administration to seek immediate diplomatic assistance to end this war. Thank you. I look forward to your comments.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bowers follows:]



**Statement of Michael Bowers  
Vice President, Humanitarian Leadership and Response, Mercy Corps**

House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa

**For a hearing, entitled:**

**“Examining the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis from the Ground (Part 1)”**

**October 8, 2015**

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch:

Thank you for inviting me to testify before the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa today about the spiraling humanitarian crisis in Syria and for the close attention you have paid to this complex and protracted crisis. I am here today in my capacity as Vice President of Humanitarian Leadership and Response with Mercy Corps, a global humanitarian and development non-governmental organization (NGO) that responds to emergencies and supports community-led development in more than 40 countries around the world. Mercy Corps has been working in the Middle East and North Africa for more than three decades; we currently run and manage programs in Syria and Iraq, as well as in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and now Greece.

Last month I spent time on the island of Lesbos, Greece, which serves as a waystation for many Syrian refugees in their long journey to Europe. There I saw thousands of people who have risked everything they had left to flee for their lives; the vast majority of them fleeing the civil war in Syria, but many also fleeing Syria’s unstable neighbors.

“Crossing is very dangerous, but we are looking for a small dream,” one Syrian youth from Hama told our team in Lesbos. He added, “We had to escape. In Syria there is only killing.”

Another fourteen-year-old Syrian youth named Hammed crossed a parking lot, packed with refugees waiting to secure tickets on to Athens, to tell us that he was frightened. He had lost his leg when a barrel bomb fell onto his school. Though he had already made it to Lesbos, he wondered aloud how he could continue to walk on crutches hundreds of miles to Austria, his planned destination.

Though most of the people we met in Greece were men and older boys, sent ahead by their families to establish a base in Europe, women also make the trip on fragile crafts. Some are

pregnant, and give birth on the beaches. Babies just a week or two old were among those we saw crowding the island.

It is important to highlight that the Syrians we met in Lesbos are in the minority - those able to pull together the substantial resources required reach the beaches of Lesbos, often through sales of property in Syria. Many Syrians in the region cannot pull together the resources to leave, an endeavor costing many families their entire savings.

Tragically, Syrians are worse off today than they were a year ago, whether they are in Syria or living in neighboring countries. Regional host countries that are receiving the vast majority of refugees face particular strain on their resources. The longer the war drags on, the more new challenges emerge.

I have also just spent time with the Mayors of Athens and other global city leaders on how ill-prepared they feel in supporting and accommodating thousands of migrants and refugees flowing into Europe. Countries neighboring Syria know this situation all too well.

Humanitarian aid to assist those fleeing unimaginable violence in Syria is critical, and the U.S. government has been incredibly generous. Still, ending this crisis and its impact on the region requires more than writing checks. Absent a political solution in Syria, the current situation will not abate.

**Humanitarian response efforts: under extreme stress**

I can say without hesitation that for Mercy Corps and other humanitarian agencies, Syria is one of the most hostile and complex environments in which we have ever worked. It is an active war zone, where few areas could be described as safe and operations are carried out at great risk.

Yet, in the face of extraordinarily difficult circumstances, through the work of our Syrian staff on the ground and our local partnerships with Syrian civil society groups, we have been able to respond to humanitarian needs on a large scale.

In Syria, Mercy Corps is among the largest providers of food assistance as well as essential supplies that people need to survive and maintain a modicum of dignity and small comfort, such as blankets, toothbrushes, soap and cooking utensils. We are also working hard to strengthen access to clean water and sanitation services, as well as a means to earn income and keep local markets going.

Many of our programs focus on youth. In 2013, we partnered with UNICEF under its “No Lost Generation” campaign, carrying out needs assessments of at-risk adolescents in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Syria. Our adolescent programs have been ongoing in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria since early 2014, and expanded to Turkey and Iraq in 2015. To date, our programs have reached over 10,000 youth affected by the Syria crisis.

In addition, Mercy Corps has deep expertise in conflict mitigation and social cohesion, which are particularly relevant in communities experiencing a large influx of refugees. We have implemented more than 95 conflict management programs in more than 30 countries. In the

Middle East, we have worked to develop the capacity of communities, government officials and young people to peacefully engage one another. Since the Syria Crisis began in 2011, we have worked with host communities in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq to address social tension, find space to cooperate and empower peaceful resolutions.

Funding for these programs comes from contributions of the United States Agency for International Development; the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration; and other private and institutional donors.

These response efforts continue to be just a drop in the bucket compared to the exponentially growing needs. The humanitarian community is struggling to assist millions of innocent people who need our help. To be direct: the sheer number of people in need is staggering, their needs grow ever greater and more desperate by the day, and there is still no end in sight.

#### **Humanitarian situation in Syria**

Let me tell you what we are seeing on the ground. At this juncture, more than 11.6 million Syrians are on the run and half of those people are children. According to the U.N., an estimated 7.6 million Syrians have fled their homes and are still trying to survive in Syria. Another four million have been forced to seek safety in neighboring countries. Syria's prewar population is estimated to have been 22 million. By this accounting, to date more than half of the country has been displaced by the conflict.

#### *Protection challenges*

Protection continues to be the number one challenge facing Syrians who are still in the country. On a daily basis, civilians living outside the areas where the coalition is fighting ISIS face unrelenting aerial attacks, including the threat of barrel bombs dropped by the Syrian regime. In ISIS-held areas like Mare in Northern Syria, we heard reports from multiple sources, including medical personnel, of chemical agents being used against civilians; some of our own staff were impacted. Medical professionals throughout the country are overwhelmed and targeted.

#### *A lost generation*

We are also witnessing the tragic outcomes of an entire generation of Syrian children and youth growing up in a war zone. Instead of worrying about their schoolwork, they worry whether or their family might be killed. They are frustrated and isolated – young women in particular rarely leave their homes. Young men and women both experience a sense of powerlessness and humiliation. Mercy Corps recently conducted a survey of 120 adolescents from eight communities, including in opposition-controlled and besieged areas. We found that three quarters of this group faced serious difficulties in accessing and continuing their education. Family financial burdens coupled with the security situation have forced many children on the cusp of adulthood to drop out of school. This is a heart wrenching decision for parents, many of whom told us that they believe a strong educational grounding is critical for their children's future and the future of the country at large.

Not surprisingly, when faced with this bleak option for their children, many families hazard the long, dangerous trip to Europe, trusting their fates to luck and smugglers in the absence of a legal, well-regulated path. And, while many have left for Europe, many more have remained in

Syria and neighboring host countries, seeking support to carve out a life of meaning and dignity. As in Syria, refugee adolescents in regional countries are overwhelmingly out of school: 81 percent in Lebanon, and 43 percent in Jordan. Perhaps worse, the link between aspirations and outcomes has begun to break: many youth feel that gaining an education, as a refugee, is not meaningful because it will not lead to a job or improved life circumstances.

*Economic hardship*

For the first time since Mercy Corps started delivering aid into the Aleppo governorate three years ago, families we spoke to this week said that they depend on our food aid to survive; their personal resources are now completely exhausted. Without this aid, they would go hungry. A mother of 10 in Aleppo told us that she has no money left to buy groceries, but with the monthly food basket, her children will not go hungry. During August alone, we responded to the needs of more than 400,000, delivering 2,600 tons of food. In refugee hosting countries, the inability of Syrians to work legally is driving an underground economy and negative coping mechanisms, including child labor, and forced and early marriages.

*Emerging displacement*

Layered on top of these challenges, humanitarians are grappling with a new development: the entry of Russia into the battlefield and the resulting internationalization of the armed conflict. With this comes higher standards for civilian protection as outlined in the Geneva Protocols, yet we are already seeing concerning reports of increased numbers of civilian casualties in the areas impacted by the Russian strikes from civil society groups like the White Helmets, the Syrian Civil Defense. If this intensity of strikes continues, we will prepare for the possibilities of significant redistribution of internally displaced persons.

At the same time, the possible redeployment of armed opposition groups to parts of the country targeted by Russian strikes could have a major impact on the fragile balance of power in places like Aleppo city and North Aleppo governorates. In these locations, our access is already being challenged daily by the shifting conflict and alliances between armed opposition groups, ISIS, regime forces and the Syrian Kurdish Forces, commonly known as the YPG. In particular, ISIS is exploiting this shift in the fight to gain footholds in towns and villages in this area. As a result, people are increasingly moving closer to the border with Turkey so they can cross if things get too bad. Everyone is on the phone with relatives, many already outside of the country, so they can make a decision in real time. Preparing for reduced access, we are stocking up aid into areas where civilians may be cut off and are strategically repositioning our staff where necessary.

**Response coordination – key course correctors**

Until last year, operations between different locations in Syria were inconsistently coordinated and a collective effort for delivery throughout the country was not in place. In July 2014, the UN Security Council Resolution 2165 changed this course by providing the legal basis for cross border assistance from Turkey, Jordan and Iraq – which had previously been implemented under the radar – launching the opportunity for all humanitarian actors to be more joined up and coordinated. The new leadership and coordination efforts in place now through the ‘Whole of Syria’ approach, took some time to gain traction and confidence among humanitarian actors, but there is a sense that the trajectory is now in place for a joined up approach that reaches more people. At the same time, the leadership structures for the Whole of Syria, while consultative,

could benefit from a more agile structure that also brings in greater representation of local stakeholders and civil society.

The largest obstacle to delivery of assistance in Syria continues to be access. A July 2015 Operational Peer Review by the Inter Agency Standing Committee on the Syria crisis response cites that less than one percent of the 422,000 people in besieged areas receive any kind of assistance from UN agencies, and on average, only five percent of the 4.5 million in hard to reach areas receive assistance on a monthly basis. The Syrian regime continues to restrict access – in some areas, agencies wait up to eight months for permission to access people in need. On a daily basis, our partners, as a matter of common practice, painstakingly negotiate access across numerous conflict lines in order to deliver lifesaving aid.

#### **Recommendations for Congress**

While the situation is bleak, there are a number of concrete steps that Congress can take now to help the people of Syria. I would like to leave the Committee with the following four key recommendations:

##### **First, provide adequate funding for humanitarian assistance and longer-term needs.**

As of this month, the joint U.N. and NGO funding appeals for Syria and Iraq are funded at barely 30 percent and 46 percent, respectively.

It is more important than ever to shore up funding for the various humanitarian accounts in the FY16 budget – Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA), International Disaster Assistance (IDA), Food for Peace (FFP), and Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA). Specifically, we urge that these accounts be funded at no less than the following levels – \$3.059 billion for MRA, \$1.895 billion for IDA, \$1.466 billion for FFP, and \$50 million for ERMA. Recognizing the growing global needs, we also recommend considering additional support in addition to this base.

We also urge you to support funding levels of \$6.1 billion for Economic Support Funds (ESF), to help local governments and service ministries respond to citizens' needs and rebuild trust and legitimacy in communities hosting refugee populations.

Finally, US assistance streams focused on preventing and managing violent conflicts – such as USAID's Offices of Conflict Management and Mitigation and Complex Crises Fund, and the State Department's Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF) – are minuscule in comparison to funding streams focused on responding to the symptoms of crises. We need a better balance of funds that address the spectrum of need and address root causes. To support these efforts, we urge you to provide no less than: \$100 million for the Complex Crisis Fund (CCF), a crucial flexible account that enables civilian agencies around the world to undertake rapid stabilization, prevention and crisis response activities; \$28 million for the office Conflict Management and Mitigation; and \$80 million for the Human Rights and Democracy Fund.

**Second, change the US government approach to assisting fragile states.** The widespread nature of the worst refugee crisis since World War II should be a wake-up call. It calls for

nothing less than a dramatic reappraisal of how we do development in fragile states like Syria that suffer from chronic insecurity, poverty and weak governance.

After four-plus years of war, families are tired of dependency. Despite the risks, they want to rebuild and repair schools, clinics and water systems. They want to address the underlying conflicts that fuel cycles of violence and the people we work with want opportunities to earn a living. But because of the way assistance is compartmentalized, humanitarian aid does not fully allow for these types of programs.

An overreliance on emergency response – without simultaneous support to programs that seek to address the underlying causes of crises – is unsustainable. In Syria, we need more multiyear, multi-sector programs that integrate “humanitarian” and “development” and that support local and national actors – including the private sector, local administrative bodies, and civil society – who usually have the greatest knowledge and capacity to operate effectively. Further efforts are required to support Syrian NGOs and staff working inside Syria with international NGOs.

As part of our long-term resilience-enhancing strategies for fragile states, we also need to strengthen civilian efforts to mitigate the grievances that fuel cycles of violence and lure communities into joining or supporting violent groups. The February White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism helped spark a new global dialogue on how to empower community-level actors to prevent violence and promote stability in order to move beyond recurrent militarized responses to sources of instability. However, we have yet to see meaningful progress to support this agenda beyond political rhetoric. We urge Congress to support this emerging, but potentially pivotal, policy framework.

In Syria, we also need greater leadership from the UN System to collectively lend its weight to advocacy efforts on humanitarian access and protection of civilian populations. Senior officials, including in the US government, need to speak out on human rights issues in Syria to prevent serious violations and to strengthen protection for civilians. Discussions need to deliver more actionable commitments to reduce violence, including through elevated, regional leadership within UNHCR for its protection mandate.

**Third, improve conditions and dignity of refugees in the Middle East, particularly by enabling them to work and access education and by shoring up the resources of host communities.** Many of the Syrian refugees making the dangerous trek to Europe are doing so because life in refugee camps and host communities in the Middle East are unsustainable. For the millions who have stayed behind, conditions must improve and humanitarian needs must be fully funded. Host communities in Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon are under extreme stress with their capacities to provide services greatly overstretched. Specific priorities include:

- **Refugee livelihoods**, particularly the right to work in neighboring countries. The right to work is not simply about survival; it is also about dignity. The social status of refugees in host communities is greatly diminished by their inability to participate in the formal labor market.
- **Adolescents**. Young people are often overlooked in programming, and yet they are often the most vulnerable to negative influences. Donors should specifically develop strategies to provide education for adolescents and youth that builds the technical and soft skills



required for meaningful, future employment within the local labor market. Private sector partners can and should play a significant role in shaping these efforts.

- **Implementation of a comprehensive regional development and reconstruction plan.** Syria's neighbors continue to shoulder a disproportionate number of refugees and need our support. The United States took a leadership role both diplomatically and financially for European recovery following the Second World War through the Marshall Plan. A similarly proportional response is needed for a comprehensive recovery and support plan for Syria and its neighbors. The U.S. should work with allies and the United Nations to lead in a funding and development plan for Syria and its neighbors, mirroring the scale and commitment of the Marshall Plan instituted to repair war-torn Europe, to meet the urgent needs of refugees in the region and foster their resilience. Such a plan should move beyond humanitarian emergency relief to include sustainable development projects, education, livelihood programs, and reconstruction.

**Finally, humanitarians are not the solution to these crises. I urge you to work with the Obama administration to urgently seek a political solution to the war in Syria.** Our world leaders must take decisive action and push for a lasting peace. The push factors behind the refugee exodus are at the root of the current challenge, and until a political solution is reached, refugee populations will continue to surge toward Europe, if they can, or else suffer in sub-standard conditions in neighboring states.

Where is the diplomatic attention? With the G-20 coming up next month in Turkey, Congress needs to urge the Obama Administration to work with other P-5 governments, among others, to seize this window of opportunity and invest the diplomatic energy necessary to end the war in Syria. As an initial step, the United States should proactively support the passage of the French-proposed Resolution at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). This Resolution includes the establishment of a mechanism to track and publicly disclose indiscriminate attacks against civilians, including barrel bombs, car bombs, and mortars, and lays down clear consequences for such indiscriminate attacks.

In conclusion, I would like to say that through our work and partnerships in the region, we have been humbled and touched by the grace and dignity of Syrians, as well as by the generosity of their hosts, despite the many profound challenges they face.

I wish to sincerely thank the sub-committee for its focus on this tremendously important issue, and for extending me the privilege of testifying today.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. Thank you to each and every one of you, and thank you for the work that you are doing. Because we will have to adjourn by noon, I am going to save my excellent questions but I am going to Mr. Rohrabacher to start.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. We have people who need clothing, blankets, shelter and food, and certainly Americans should be able to understand ordinary people who are in a desperate situation. I am going to give you a chance now to say something to the American people because the visions that they have been having lately have not been the ones that you are presenting today.

When we see these little kids and our hearts go out, I mean, I have 11-year-old triplets at home and of course I identify with any picture of a child, any parent does. But we keep seeing these pictures of the migration and the people who are fleeing Syria as being strong young males. That is the image now.

And if the American people get this, but number one if it is accurate, but even if it is not accurate, this will be very detrimental to providing the clothing, the blankets, the shelter and the food for the children and for people who are in a desperate situation. Because quite frankly we would expect healthy young males to be fighting for their own freedom and not having refuge in Jordan or someplace else. Have Jordanians fight against the people who would kill them.

So I would like for you to talk to the American people now. When they see those men, very virile young men, especially the migrants in the pictures from Hungary are frankly very upsetting to me when you see these trainloads of young men who are said they are desperate refugees. So put that in perspective to me, and it needs to be addressed. Who wants to do it?

Mr. BOWERS. Thank you, Congressman. I think it is important to note that yes, the majority of them may be the young males or men in general. In fact, we think of the 400,000-plus or 350,000-plus fleeing into Europe around 60 percent may be male. They could be young. We also should recognize in that population they are vulnerable as well. There are many unaccompanied minors, young males, in that group.

The primary motive for why men are going is because they are seen as the primary livelihood earner, so they are seeking employment opportunities in Europe. They are seeking shelter and safety of course on the way, but they are seen as a remittance opportunity to bring money back into where their homes are or their families are, be it refugees or not. So many of them are seeking to go there because they want to earn an income, because in many of these host countries that they live in they are not allowed to legally work so essentially they are depending on our aid.

The American people should not be frightened that there are young men fleeing. They should be frightened that the scope of the people fleeing at this point indicates we are at a tipping point that these Syrians and many of the migrants no longer see a future or hope in staying in either refugee camps or obviously in Syria itself. So that hopelessness is now encompassing their need to find a different future. Many of these men will try to earn an income to bring then their families with them, be it their wives or sisters or children themselves.

I think we could also demonstrate to the American people as the World Vision poll would indicate that what binds us as a country is our compassion for those humanitarian needs and that people are fleeing war and they have a right to seek refuge. So I would argue that the American people should see not only faces of boys, but everyone in that spectrum and how those boys and men need our assistance as well.

Mr. SMITH. I would like to just add to Mr. Bowers' comments. When a family is in Jordan or in Lebanon and trying to decide who should go to Europe to kind of lead the way, are they going to send young women, single women? No. Are they going to send a mother and child? No. The most able person to send would be their young men. And so those are the people who are going first, and in many ways opening the door for the rest of the family to come, or as my colleague has said, earn money there and send it back. The families are going to send the least vulnerable, and so that is why you are seeing a lot of young men going.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Those are some very good answers. Thank you. Do you have something to add?

Ms. ROMERO. Yes. I would just add that it does—I agree with everything that has been said, and it does underscore the need to really work with host governments to look at the legal registration and the livelihoods and job opportunities for refugees because they are leaving Syria and neighboring countries out of desperation. On the one hand from Syria because of the violence, but from the neighboring countries because they can't work there.

So initiatives particularly identifying parts of the labor market where there are gaps, where there are needs, existing work programs being built on would help address these issues.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, thank you very much. And one thing for the record, Madam Chairman, is that for those people who are leaving and our refugees who are Muslims, I think that it is absolutely despicable that oil-rich countries like Saudi Arabia are not taking in more of these people as compared to Jordan who it is a very poor country. And so we have to work with the Jordanians in helping pick up the slack. Thank you very much.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Rohrabacher. Mr. Deutch is recognized.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman. Ms. Bowers, you talked about an issue that I think is really important to focus on which is the issue of access. If all of you could speak to what you are hearing from your partners on the ground about their ability to access areas, specifically areas controlled by ISIS and then areas controlled by the Assad regime.

Mr. Bowers, you gave some numbers, 5 percent of difficult to reach areas. If you could walk through that and if everyone could speak to that. And those areas that are unreachable for aid; that are totally unreachable at this point, if you could estimate how many people live within those areas who aren't getting any aid at all.

Mr. RAY. I will just jump in briefly to respond to the question about the numbers. We have slightly different—in these circumstances it is always difficult to get definitive numbers to work with. The latest estimates I have seen in terms of the ability to

reach people in besieged areas, areas that are surrounded by military and right in the middle of conflict, is that over the course of the summer the U.N. and its partners, which would include all of us, were able to reach only about 9 percent of people in need in those besieged areas, and that is only with medical services and that does not include food or other kinds of humanitarian needs. That figure goes up to about 24 percent in so-called hard to reach areas.

I don't have a good fix on what the number of people are that are in those areas that are not being reached at all, but even in those areas and with these numbers those are obviously woefully low. We believe that one of the main reasons that those numbers are that low is because of the ongoing violence inflicted by both the Syrian Government on its own people through the use of indiscriminate weapons like barrel bombs, as well as obviously the brutality of ISIS. And until those issues are addressed it is going to continue to be extremely difficult for any of us to get access on any kind of consistent basis to those who are in greatest need.

So I would just echo again what I said earlier. We believe that unless and until there are real and serious consequences for those who break those resolutions that those kinds of attacks will continue to go on.

Mr. BOWERS. If I could add, I think the difficulty too, roughly you could say ½ million people in besieged areas at any one point during a month are very difficult to reach. That is in a population of up to 7 million internally displaced. So though that number sounds smaller relative to the overall need, again it is a significant issue in terms of how we broker or negotiate access into those besieged areas. The complication now of having Russian military involvement makes it just even worse. Obviously if there is a major counteroffensive going on, we will lose access. If roadblocks or other additional things are set up, those conduits we had before will be lost.

What we don't know always scares us, and I would say what we definitely don't know is the level of consistency of aid in those areas is also an issue. So though you may get a distribution in one time, you may lose it the next month.

Mr. DEUTCH. And if I could just ask, given the numbers you describe, if there were any type of safe zone created, if you could create one anywhere in the country in the place that would be the easiest—it is not easy. That is a different discussion. But if you could create a safe zone, how many people, how many lives could you save? Can you estimate that? How many people could have access to lifesaving aid?

Mr. BOWERS. I am going to be a little controversial and basically say we are troubled by safe zone policy talk. In theory, yes, a safe zone you could get say a governorate of Aleppo, maybe 200,000 if not more. But that is in theory. So ideally with a safe zone you obviously are neutralizing any aerial issues, but in addition you need to have the ability to control those forces on the ground. So even if you remove aerial issues, which is significant in this environment, you would need to sort of figure out how do those combatants on the ground react? They are not going to recognize a safe zone anymore than Assad perhaps would not with his aerial bombardment. So safe zones have to be thought of in a very, very careful

way. I don't believe in this current context it is a very actionable item, frankly, given this time.

Mr. DEUTCH. I would—go ahead.

Mr. BOWERS. Please.

Mr. DEUTCH. Listen, that is the debate that is going on and I am just trying to figure out, and I get it. We call it safe zone but combatants won't view it that way. It would be difficult to maintain. I understand all that. All I am trying to figure out is if it could be done and if it could be done correctly, what is the potential impact? And I understand you are advising against it. I just want to know if it a plan were devised to do it in such a way to create a true safe zone what impact? Mr. Smith?

Mr. SMITH. Similar to my colleague Mr. Bowers, we have problems with safe zones. We do recognize that they have been used in the past to varying degrees of effect. In some cases they have gone horribly wrong and in some cases they have gone relatively well. We would really—I think, there are a lot of conditions that would need to be met before we discussed safe zones. And so the right to protect is something that we take very seriously and we do recognize that international humanitarian law does allow for safe zones, but in terms of the conditions that need to be met before we have that discussion they are quite lengthy. And we honestly feel that the diplomatic efforts in terms of trying to address this issue have not been exhausted and matter of fact have not really been vigorously pursued, and until we have exhausted that I think it is really difficult for us to discuss the safety zones.

Mr. DEUTCH. That is a fair point and we ought to certainly be able to agree that it would have a dramatic impact. And we know what the impact would be right now if the world decided that we would no longer tolerate barrel bombing.

Mr. SMITH. Absolutely.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much.

Mr. DEUTCH. If I could, Madam Chairman, if I could just—

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Yes, without objection they would be entered into the record.

Thank you so much. Mr. Trott is recognized.

Mr. TROTT. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I want to thank all the panelists for taking time to be here this morning. And I think all of you mentioned in your comments the need to end the conflict is a critical element, any solution, and I am just curious if you could get some insight on what a solution looks like, how we get there, particularly in light of Russia's involvement.

Mr. RAY. I would say that as humanitarian organizations the political considerations about what kind of a solution might be reached are really beyond our mandate and our area of expertise. I would underline, however, that without a real concerted effort on behalf of the United States and other international powers there is not going to be a solution, and we need to see increased emphasis from our own government and from those in Europe in order to see any chance of a solution reached.

In the meantime, there are real things that can be done to minimize the humanitarian consequences, and among those are the efforts to actually enforce the kind of resolutions that have been put in place to stop the kinds of indiscriminate attacks that are harm-

ing so many civilians. So the protection of civilians needs to be heightened and it needs to be given very serious consideration even while debate goes on about how to reach a negotiated settlement.

Ms. ROMERO. Yes, I would add to that. I was at a discussion recently with a number of groups that involved some Syrian Americans and some Syrian groups, and consistently they said that they felt that the U.S. was the one government that could broker this by bringing together the right set of actors. And that really struck me, because sitting here I am like none of those actors like us, I thought, so I would not have jumped to that conclusion.

But really that is the sense in the region. That the U.S. has a power of convening that has not really been effectively utilized, so the first thing would be to really commit to that. Convene the players in the surrounding region that we know are supporting various actors that are contributing to this conflict, supporting the U.N. process that is already going on. There is a series of working groups that the U.N. has convened that are working on different aspects of the conflict and of humanitarian assistance. Engaging with that more forcefully, I think would send a loud signal.

And then as my colleague has already said, supporting some interim measures such as this protection mechanism that is also at the table at the U.N. that has been suggested, or proposed rather, by the French Government. Really getting some mechanisms on the ground to the extent that we are able to send a stronger message that the kind of civilian protection violations going on right now are not acceptable.

Mr. TROTT. Mr. Bowers, do you have any comment?

Mr. BOWERS. Yes, I would add, and respectively to the chair's comments, to begin with Russia and Iran do have a role here. It is a regional war and increasingly a global security threat, so you would need to look at the P5+Germany as the central actors to be discussing how to cease, first and foremost, these aerial attacks, and look for the conditions to create greater humanitarian access, be it call it safe zones or not, but that is in a comprehensive way.

And I do think President Obama and the Europeans that are involved here and the P5 who need to come together and understand that. Now you have the G20 coming up in Turkey. Why there is not an opportunity to sit down and really look at this, I don't know. That is something that this administration should focus on. And Russia's recent involvement only highlights the need for them to be at the table to peacefully resolve that.

Mr. TROTT. Mr. Bowers, you mentioned in your comments that the U.S. needs to change its approach to fragile states. How would you change that approach and what steps should we consider here in Congress?

Mr. BOWERS. There is much more detail in my written testimony, but a lot of the work that we do right now of course as humanitarians is very short term. A lot of structural issues that these countries, especially host countries as well as Syria itself are predicated already on fragility—bad governance, poor infrastructure, et cetera. So the way the U.S. Government right now funnels assistance and humanitarian aid is more or less segregated. We have great difficulties working together to sort of bring a more holistic approach, both short term saving lives and livelihoods, as well as

trying to address the sources of instability, the cycles of violence that will continue should and when there will be a peace.

So both are proposals I think that our colleagues would support as well. Focus on enhancing humanitarian aid, but also looking at structural changes in how the U.S. Government administers aid in these fragile states.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Trott. Thank you. Mr. Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I believe you indicated that 41 percent of the current U.N. effort is funded, so that is a huge unmet need. And I wondered if each of you would share who you think, which countries do you think should be donating to meet the U.N. appeal and on. I think we should call them out and know that so we can use the influence hopefully that Congress has to help suggest to some of them they should be doing their part.

Mr. RAY. I will just say I think many times several members of the committee have called out the nations in the region, and in fact certainly they could be doing more. We don't have definitive figures, but it looks like Kuwait has given something like 304 million, Qatar about 9½, Saudi Arabia about 18½, UAE somewhere in the neighborhood of 42½. But certainly those countries are capable of doing much more. That said, I think there is—every country is going to have to do more including the U.S.

Mr. CICILLINE. No, I recognize that and I am not suggesting we shouldn't, but it is helpful to know the countries that you believe have the capacity to do more that aren't, and I wonder if anyone has any other countries to add to that list.

Mr. BOWERS. The formal mechanism for how those appeals go out typically look at all the bilateral contributions. I think for the nations that Mr. Ray has talked about we have seen inconsistent pledges in that and I think we would be supportive of them being more consistent at higher levels, especially the richer Arab nations.

We obviously are concerned about robbing one account for another. You have humanitarian needs in Yemen, Iraq, other places in the Arab world in particular that they have interest in. But I would think in addition to Mr. Ray's comments, we are looking for an international approach that deals with resettlement too. Resettlement is not cheap. It is over \$1 billion in the U.S. just for the current allotment. So I think we need to look at it comprehensively.

Mr. CICILLINE. Okay. I also understand that the U.N. does not currently run any refugee camps in Lebanon, and I wondered if you could tell me how is assistance getting to the refugees that are in Lebanon and what resources are in place to make sure that we are tracking them and ensuring that they are receiving services that they need while in Lebanon?

Mr. SMITH. It is true that there are no camps in Lebanon and that is a decision by the Lebanese Government. That is not a decision by the aid community, and so we work with the constraints that are put on us by the host governments. Most of the people that we would be dealing with obviously are then going into the host community into the urban environments. Informal camps are popping up. You will have people who are taking residence in abandoned buildings. They will be going in with families.

We were talking recently with a sheikh from Lebanon who was telling us that in the early days of the crisis the Lebanese community really opened their arms to the Syrian population coming in. We are now into our fifth year. Things are starting to get strained. As it has been mentioned, a quarter of the population in Lebanon are Syrians, and so it becomes very difficult. As agencies we have experience working in these types of environments. We don't just work in camps. Matter of fact, in Jordan and in Turkey, most of the people who are in these countries as refugees are not in camps.

So we have gained expertise in terms of working with non-camp refugees. We know how to do the assessments. We know how to identify people. We know how to put mechanisms in place to track how we are doing. So it is something that we are skilled at, we just realize that that is the reality. Most people are not in camp environments and Lebanon is a classic example of that.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you. And Ms. Romero, I and 71 of my colleagues have called on the United States to accept an additional 100,000 refugees, a total of 200,000 refugees in total. And when you look at what is happening, particularly in Jordan and Lebanon where they are being asked to absorb just huge numbers of refugees, how would our going to that number impact the actual magnitude of the problem, and what impact is it likely to have on the willingness of other countries to accept refugees?

Ms. ROMERO. Thanks. I mean, I think you would see more Syrians looking at this as an option. That would put pressure on other countries as well as on the conflict and on the humanitarian assistance.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Ms. Romero, I am going to stop you for a second just because we have a few more folks who want to ask questions.

Ms. ROMERO. Okay.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And if we have enough time, Mr. Cicilline, we will get back to that.

Ms. ROMERO. Right.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Your time is up. Mr. Meadows of North Carolina.

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you, Madam Chairman. Thank you for calling this hearing because it is the compassionate hearts of Americans that get lived out each and every day by some of your organizations. I know that my wife and I have contributed personally over some time to some of your organizations not knowing where the money went, just knowing that it was reaching out to a people group that perhaps we would never know or never see. So I just want to applaud each of you for your effort to meet the very basics of humanitarian relief. So I thank you.

I am a little bit concerned, Mr. Ray and Mr. Smith, when we talked about free zones both of you got visibly nervous. And so Mr. Smith let me come to you because you said under a number of different circumstances they may work well. I need you to illuminate that a little bit mainly because the dialogue of additional negotiations whether it be at the U.N. or be with the United States leading those negotiations, there is not a lot of hope for the American people that that is going to be productive. We have seen a lot of negotiations already take place, and we as Americans want to be-



lieve that we can find that common ground. And yet at times it is extremely difficult especially within Syria where you have a number of different factions.

So Mr. Smith, can you help me understand the path on those free zones that how can we make that work?

Mr. SMITH. So the right to protect has been discussed significantly within the humanitarian community. If we were to take a look at, we look at free zones, we look at the use of force to protect civilians as really a last resort. It is not kind of a first go-to, it is a last resort. We would need to go through a checklist of things that include clear and compelling need for immediate protection; trained and disciplined intervening forces are provided; have a clear mandate for civilian protection including a timetable specific for protection objectives; clear rules of engagement; establishing of a civil-military coordination mechanism where force is applied it is only applied for the protection of civilians.

Mr. MEADOWS. Okay, let me stop you because I only have a limited time and we are about to have to adjourn. So with that long list have any of those steps been embarked upon at this point to create at least that framework to hit the first two or three?

Mr. SMITH. You really would be looking at needing a special calling of the U.N. Security Council to begin discussing this, and that has not happened.

Mr. RAY. If I could just add very briefly, there was an excellent paper produced by InterAction in November of last year on safe zones that I would recommend to the committee as you explore these options.

Mr. MEADOWS. All right. In the interest of time I will yield back, Madam Chairman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Meadows.

Ms. Frankel.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you again. And Madam Chairman, thank you again for this hearing and to the panel for your time and your work. I just wanted to start off again by saying that to me this is probably the most horrific humanitarian crisis of our generation. And I think there is a lot of good debatable questions about military action and whether it would be helpful or not, but I do think there is no question about humanitarian assistance and I think that is an absolute, a must. Not only because it is morally the right thing to do, but we will pay the penalty. Our children will pay the penalty if we ignore this. Because to have people fleeing Syria, these refugees coming into now Europe, there is going to be economic consequences. And to have a generation of unhappy, disenfranchised young people, the world will pay the penalty for that.

I have a couple of questions. Number one, are there any safe areas in Syria now and who control those areas? Number two, yesterday we heard testimony from folks who were saying that we should use more vouchers than give direct food aid. I would like to get your opinion on that. Three, I would like to know if you think the United Nations is doing enough. And number four, if you can get to number four, from what you see on the ground is there any indication that there are any peaceful, sane people who could fill

the void of an Assad leaving? Those are my four questions. Somebody jump in.

Ms. ROMERO. I don't think I can handle all four, but I will speak to the vouchers issue. I think that generally the use of food vouchers or the use of vouchers that can be used for a number of needs are preferable because they allow refugees to choose what they need and to use those for flexible purposes, so would support that.

And in terms of the U.N.'s inaction or action there have been fits and starts. But at the end of the day, the U.N. starts with its member states, so yes, more could be done and more is needed and that requires more political will from the states that comprise it.

Ms. FRANKEL. Just quickly, do all of you agree with the answer on the voucher issue? You do. Okay. Could someone answer the question on whether there is any place that you feel is safe now in Syria?

Mr. BOWERS. There is a desert. To be honest, not to be flippant. When you look at the map in terms of violence and activities of course you can see the contours of what ISIS maintains, what the Government of Syria maintains, and then sort of the areas in between, Free Syrian Army, other groups. So I would hesitate to say that—1 year you could say yes. Idlib was safe last year, not anymore, right. Two years or three years ago maybe it was Al-Raqqah, not anymore. So that is some of the difficulty in declaring safe zone issues. Until we go through a very thorough issue of how do you declare that truly safe through protective needs, no area in Syria is safe, frankly, from bombardment.

Ms. FRANKEL. And would you say from what you are seeing on the ground, are all the different forces whether it is Assad, ISIL, al-Nusra, are they all equally terrible to the people?

Mr. RAY. It is hard to rank them in a level of awfulness. Yes, thank you. But I would say that I have seen estimates that as high as 95 percent of the civilian deaths are actually being caused by the Syrian military itself and through the use of indiscriminate weapons such as barrel bombs.

Mr. SMITH. I might also add further to my colleagues' comments. The humanitarian space is shrinking. It was wider before, as Mr. Bowers said, and it is shrinking. And we were just talking to our Syrian staff this morning, and the comments with respect to the Russian strikes, it is now in the Idlib area. Where we are working we had to adjust a planned distribution yesterday because of the strikes. We are being told that civilians are being killed with respect to the strikes. One thing that was very disturbing was one of our staff reported that they came in and bombed, and then when people came to assist the injured they came in and bombed again.

And so we are just seeing that the space that we have to work in is getting smaller. We were working in areas before that were considered safe to work in. ISIS moved in, we continued to work there for some time until security concerns did not allow us to remain there. So we have moved into non-ISIS controlled areas, but now they are getting closer to that area as well. And so our space is shrinking.

Mr. RAY. If I may just speak to the question about sane and peaceful people, briefly, I would say that one of the things that gives me hope in an otherwise pretty bleak situation are the people

that we all work with in terms of our local partner organizations. There are people who are doing incredible work.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Ray, and that gives us hope as well. Thank you. Mr. Higgins, you are our last question and answer.

Mr. HIGGINS. Yes, when you talked about humanitarian protection, and within the middle of a brutal civil war it is kind of an elusive goal. I mean, you have acknowledged, all of you that you reach a very small percentage of the people who are actually in need. So in order to help solve the humanitarian crisis, I think we have got to stick with trying to solve the political crisis.

We have got a situation in Syria where now you have got Bashar al-Assad who obviously is a bad guy, an Alawite that represents probably 12 to 14 percent of the population supported by Arab Christians and Kurds, not because they like what he is doing but they are afraid they will get slaughtered if the Sunni Arab majority takes over.

Mr. Bowers, you had indicated that we have reached the tipping point. People aren't just leaving to flee the conflict, they ain't coming back. They have given up entirely on Syria. So who do you negotiate peace with? And then you have got Bashar al-Assad who probably have 1,000 militias. Their best fighter are Islamic extremists and al-Qaeda affiliates of the Islamic State that we made an attempt to train and arm the moderate militias, which we were going to vet and spent about \$½ billion doing so, and we end up with three or four qualified fighters.

I don't want to say that this is hopeless, but this seems hopeless, and it is extraordinary that you do the work that you do in these places. How do you stay protected and how do you—obviously there is no light here, it is all dark. And the dark are interconnected pieces which add up to one big seemingly unsolvable problem.

Mr. Ray, you were talking before time expired, and complete your thoughts about—

Mr. RAY. Not a lot more to say about that other than to recognize the really selfless work of the local partner organizations that we work with on the ground inside Syria as well as the people who are working as volunteers and serving their own communities in Lebanon and Jordan and Egypt and Turkey where there are so many refugees. Those folks are going to be the future of Syria and the people who are going to put this all back together again when eventually there is some kind of political settlement.

Mr. HIGGINS. What distinguishes them? I presume they are Syrian based non-governmental organizations.

Mr. RAY. They are, and many of them actually registered in the U.S. and in Europe. But they have been organized by Syrians who recognize the need and who may not have the length and depth of experience of some of the international organizations, but who are eager to learn and eager to do the work well and who are eager to serve the folks in their communities who need their assistance.

Mr. HIGGINS. When they talk about the political situation what do they say when they—

Mr. RAY. I think they are aware of all the complexities that you just alluded to. It is a very difficult situation and they know it, but they also know that unless they continue to provide those kinds of

humanitarian services that in fact there is no hope and that they have to continue to do that and we have to continue to assist them.

Mr. HIGGINS. Okay.

Mr. SMITH. I was just going to say two things. When we talk about access, access in many of the hard to reach places are only through our Syrian partners. And so their role in this work is absolutely essential and crucial because we can't get there in many cases. So whatever we can do to ensure that we can work effectively with Syrian partners is something that we would encourage you as well. We do not need more roadblocks put in our way in terms of our work with Syrian partners.

Mr. HIGGINS. Are the number of those Syrian partners increasing or decreasing?

Mr. SMITH. I would say that we are always looking for more Syrian partners just with the shrinking space. So we work with a number. All of us work with a number of Syrian partners in the region and their work is absolutely essential.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you. My time is expired. I yield back.

Mr. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much. All of our subcommittee members want to thank you and your organizations for the great work that you are doing to bring assistance to those who need it so desperately in Syria and elsewhere, because your work is everywhere else as well. And we applaud you. We applaud your organizations. We will continue to seek ways to best support you. And with that the subcommittee is adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 12:03 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

# APPENDIX

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MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

**SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE**  
**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

**Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa**  
**Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman**

October 6, 2015

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at <http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov>):

**DATE:** Thursday, October 8, 2015

**TIME:** 10:30 a.m.

**SUBJECT:** Examining the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis from the Ground (Part I)

**WITNESSES:** Ms. Bernice Romero  
Senior Director  
Humanitarian Public Policy and Advocacy  
Save the Children

Mr. Mark C. Smith  
Senior Director  
Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs  
World Vision

Mr. David Ray  
Vice President for Advocacy  
Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere

Mr. Michael Bowers  
Vice President  
Humanitarian Leadership and Response  
Mercy Corps

**By Direction of the Chairman**

*The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.*

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Middle East and North Africa HEARING

Day Thursday Date October 8 Room 2172

Starting Time 10:30AM Ending Time 12:03PM

Recesses 0 ( to ) ( to ) ( to ) ( to ) ( to ) ( to )

Presiding Member(s)

*Chairman Ros-Lehtinen*

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session

Electronically Recorded (taped)

Executive (closed) Session

Stenographic Record

Televised

TITLE OF HEARING:

*Examining the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis from the Ground (Part I)*

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

*Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Reps Chabot, DeSantis, Meadows, Clawson, Trott, Deutch, Connolly, Higgins, Cicilline, Meng and Frankel.*

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an \* if they are not members of full committee.)

*Rep Rohrabacher*

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes  No   
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

*None*

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE NA

or  
TIME ADJOURNED 12:03PM

  
Subcommittee Staff Director

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN,  
A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF FLORIDA, AND CHAIRMAN,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



تحالف المنظمات السورية غير الحكومية  
SYRIAN NGO ALLIANCE

Statement for the Record Submitted By:

**Syrian NGO Alliance**

Submitted To:

House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa

Hearing On:

**“Examining the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis From the Ground (Part I)”**

October 8, 2015



Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and all members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit a written statement on the important issue of the humanitarian crisis in Syria.

We write to you as a group of Syrian humanitarian NGOs who deliver multi-sector, cross-border relief to millions inside of Syria each year. Together, we are the major implementing partners for the majority of INGOs and United Nations agencies. It is our staff who risk their lives crossing into Syria to deliver food and supplies, who remain working in field hospitals even while they are being targeted by Syrian government – and now Russian – airstrikes, who have found creative alternatives to standard modes of assistance delivery and infrastructure, building schools and medical clinics underground and providing vaccinations to children through mobile units.

**We have witnessed the horrors befalling our countrymen, women, and children for the last four years and we feel unable to continue to bear witness to these crimes without speaking out.** War crimes and crimes against humanity, including ongoing systematic and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, are a shocking daily reality that has been allowed to become the norm. We distribute food baskets to civilians, only for them to then be mercilessly targeted and killed. We rebuild recurrently destroyed hospitals, only for them to be targeted and bombed again and again by the Syrian government, killing our health workers, patients and their relatives. We risk our lives to save others only for our colleagues to be traumatized or killed delivering aid.

We are now collectively under extreme pressure from the civilians we serve to speak out. Our beneficiaries say that the humanitarians are “fattening up the cows before the slaughter.” They say that we continue to persist with policies and statements that are routinely ignored. **They believe that we continue to put a sticking plaster on a life-threatening wound and leave the source of the bleeding untreated.**

The international community’s response to the Syrian catastrophe has been with aid. But food baskets and stethoscopes cannot stop the daily savage violence that has engulfed our country. Food baskets and stethoscopes cannot stop the Syrian government’s barrel bombs from murdering our friends and families.

What is happening in our country is not only a humanitarian catastrophe; it is a political and military catastrophe that has caused untold suffering, death, displacement and the exodus of millions of innocent people. This is a suffering that grows each day, causing desperation, and fueling hatred and extremism.

**Our catastrophe has metastasized across the globe, affecting international security, yet humanitarian assistance continues to be used as a substitute for concerted political action to stop the bloodshed.**

The international community vowed to learn lessons from past catastrophes, from the genocides of Rwanda and Bosnia and the systematic targeting of civilians in DR Congo, Somalia and South Sudan, to name just a few. The Syrian people are falling victim to the same systematic atrocities right now, in full view of the international community, yet far too little is being done to bring pressure to bear upon the perpetrators.

In addition to systematic attacks, Syrians face the systematic withholding of humanitarian aid to hundreds of thousands under siege in Ghouta, Homs, Deir Ez'zour, Zabadani and beyond. Some of these communities have faced more than three years under siege. They feel no

urgency coming from UN Security Council members or UN agencies to enforce strict measures and guarantee the delivery of assistance to them with unrestricted access.

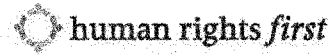
We have worked tirelessly, to beyond exhaustion, to help and support Syrian civilians and we now feel morally and ethically obliged to stand up for their right to be protected. The U.S. and all UN Security Council member states need to take leadership and act immediately to stop massacres against civilians. They have an ethical, moral, and legal obligation to uphold international humanitarian laws enshrined in the Geneva conventions. **They need to act with urgency to prevent this violence, perpetrated with impunity, whose primary victims are doctors, aid workers, and school children. Political action, accomplished by concerted military action if necessary, is required without further delay in order to save lives; humanitarian assistance is not enough.**

We feel that our impartiality and neutrality is not compromised by what we say as we are on the side of civilians, all Syrian civilians, who are the principal targets and victims of this war and have been since the beginning. We feel that this is not inappropriately political as we are coming out in favor of international humanitarian law and the enforcement of already established civilian protection norms.

We call upon the U.S. to act with urgency to protect the lives of Syrian civilians, and work with other UN Security Council members to act immediately to put an end to the ongoing deliberate massacre of civilians by enforcing the UN Security Council Resolution 2139 by all means necessary.



MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN,  
A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF FLORIDA, AND CHAIRMAN,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



**HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST**  
**Written Statement for**  
**House Committee on Foreign Affairs**  
**Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa**

**“Examining the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis from the Ground (Part 1)”**

**October 8, 2015**

We are pleased to submit this statement on behalf of Human Rights First. Human Rights First works in the United States and abroad to promote a secure and humane world by advancing justice, human dignity, and respect for the rule of law. Human Rights First is an independent advocacy organization that challenges America to live up to its ideals. We are a non-profit, nonpartisan international human rights organization with offices in New York, Washington D.C., and Houston, Texas.

For over 30 years, we've built bipartisan coalitions and teamed up with frontline activists and lawyers to tackle issues that demand American leadership, including the protection of the rights of refugees who flee persecution. Protecting the persecuted is a core American value. Reflecting this country's deep-seated commitment to liberty and human dignity, as well as its pledge under the 1951 Refugee Convention's Protocol, the United States has long led efforts to protect those who flee from political, religious, and other persecution.

The world is facing the largest refugee crisis since World War II. Globally, about 60 million people have been forced to flee their homes. Over 4 million Syrians have fled their country, and many have been stranded for years in neighboring countries where they can't work, cannot support their families, have little access to education, and face shortages in food and other assistance due to massive underfunding of UN humanitarian aid appeals. Syria's neighbors, faced with overwhelming refugee numbers and inadequate international support, have made it more difficult for refugees to enter to seek protection or extend their stays. Meanwhile, the fighting and violence within Syria has intensified, leaving refugees with little hope that they will be able to safely return.

Many are turning to dangerous routes to reach places of safety where they can rebuild their lives. Thousands have embarked on risky journeys in an attempt to reach Europe.

This is a defining moment for the world, and the United States. Faced with the largest refugee crisis since World War II, how will the United States respond? Will it exercise leadership by truly sharing in the responsibility of hosting more of Syria's refugees or will it provide refuge to only a token or minimal number?

How the United States addresses this refugee crisis will be a critical test for U.S. leadership. The United States has played a leading role in providing humanitarian assistance, giving over \$4 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. The global humanitarian appeal for the Syria crisis is only 38% funded, leaving many refugees struggling to survive in states neighboring Syria. Moreover, the United States is not adequately tapping or leveraging development assistance to support the communities in front line states that are hosting millions of Syrian refugees. In addition, the United States, the global leader in resettlement, has not launched a significant resettlement initiative that would demonstrate to Syria's neighbors a real commitment to share in hosting a meaningful number of Syria's refugees and would encourage other resettlement states to follow suit. 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.

The United States has long been a leader in protecting refugees and has typically resettled about half of the refugees identified as in need of resettlement each year. The United States had only resettled about 1,300 Syrian refugees in fiscal year 2015 through August 31, and has only committed so far to resettle at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in fiscal year 2016. Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon are hosting about 4 million Syrian refugees. Meanwhile, Germany has announced it can host 800,000. This level of U.S. response falls far short of global leadership, and our resettlement process is much too slow, often taking two years or longer.

The United States must lead, and lead by example. Not only is it the right thing to do, but it is strategically smart. In addition to supporting Europe, a stronger refugee response will promote the stability of states bordering Syria including key U.S. allies in the region, such as Jordan. The United States should also encourage other countries to step up their resettlement and assistance contributions, an effort that will be greatly enhanced by the U.S. example in increasing its commitments.

In light of this global emergency situation, we urge the United States to lead a comprehensive global initiative in partnership with European and other states to improve access to protection for refugees. We urge the United States government, led by the President and the Secretary of State to:

1. **Increase resettlement and other routes to protection.** The United States should lead a global initiative that includes many countries working together to resettle or provide other admission to 1 to 1.5 million Syrian refugees. The U.S. should press other countries to sharply increase resettlement or other admission routes, and call on the European Union to create safe and legal ways for refugees to reach Europe. The United States should lead by example by increasing its own resettlement commitment to 100,000 Syrian refugees for fiscal year 2016 and increase the overall refugee ceiling (for refugees from all countries) to 200,000. The United States should also implement more expeditious routes to protection for Syrian refugees with family in the United States and other at-risk refugees, utilizing various priority processing mechanisms and other tools. In the next month, the administration should appoint a high-level coordinator in the White House to oversee the refugee response and improve inter-agency collaboration to improve the pace of resettlement, as well as high-level refugee coordinators at the Departments of State and Homeland Security, who can focus – full time – on addressing resettlement processing delays and logjams.
2. **Ensure sufficient vetting resources.** The resettlement process includes the execution of multiple security checks. In fact, refugees are much more thoroughly vetted than other categories of individuals who come to the United States. At a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing last week, Department of Homeland Security witnesses outlined the many background, security, and other vetting processes that must be cleared before a refugee can be resettled to the United States. The President should direct the FBI and other security vetting agencies to

increase their focus on, and devote additional and sufficient staff time and resources to the conduct and completion of such checks, including all follow up reviews. Improving the timeliness and efficiency of the security clearance process would enhance security and would also eliminate some delays and save government resources which are now wasted when parts of the process have to be redone due to these delays.

3. **Finally reform the resettlement process.** Over the next six months, the administration should review and reform the delay-plagued resettlement process to be more timely and effective without compromising security. This is not the first time the system has failed to respond adequately. Many Iraqis who worked with the U.S. military or U.S. entities were left stranded for years waiting to be brought to safety in the United States. Some suffered attacks while waiting for our slow resettlement process to move forward.
4. **Meet humanitarian assistance goal and increase development assistance.** The United States should lead a global push to secure 100% funding of the UN's humanitarian appeal for the Syria crisis, set a strong example by further stepping up its contribution to cover a higher percentage of the appeal, significantly increase development funding for refugee-hosting countries, press wealthy states to increase contributions and develop longer term strategies for meeting the front-line needs of refugees and hosting communities. By increasing development assistance to front-line refugee hosting communities, in addition to providing increased humanitarian assistance for Syrian refugees in the region, the United States will better enable countries in the region surrounding Syria to continue to host large numbers of refugees.
5. **Champion protection for refugees.** The United States should encourage states in the region neighboring Syria – and in Europe and beyond - to respect the human rights of refugees and migrants, including to allow refugees to work to support their families, to educate children, to facilitate access to higher education, and to respect obligations to protect people from arbitrary detention and return to persecution.
6. **Redouble efforts to find effective multilateral solutions to the political and security crisis** in Syria and to address the human rights abuses causing so many people to flee in search of protection.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, leading Jewish groups, major faith-based groups, and even the Pope have called on the United States to respond to this refugee crisis. Human Rights First and other leading organizations focused on refugee protection and refugee resettlement have called on the administration to resettle at least 100,000 Syrian refugees in fiscal year 2016. Various former government officials including national security experts who served in both democratic and republican administrations have called on the United States to lead by example to commit to resettling 100,000 refugees.

The United States has always led in times of international crisis. This country should continue to be a beacon on human rights. Human Rights First believes that America is strongest when our policies and values match our actions.