

Testimony of U.S. Agency for International Development
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Chairman Smith, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Bass, Ranking Member Deutch, and Members of the Subcommittees, thank you for inviting me to testify on the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) efforts to provide humanitarian assistance in Iraq. We share your concern about the attacks on Christians and other vulnerable populations, who are suffering unimaginable horrors from the systematic violence carried out against them by the terrorist organization known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). USAID remains committed to providing assistance to all those in need in Iraq and will hold true to our mission to partner to end extreme poverty and promote resilient democratic societies while advancing our security and prosperity.

The daily atrocities committed by ISIL against the Iraqi people – including the violence targeting ethnic minorities and religious groups – is claiming and destroying countless lives, tearing at the fabric of society, and further enflaming sectarian violence. Furthermore, ISIL's abhorrent treatment of women and children is unconscionable. These circumstances demand—and are receiving—our focused attention and utmost effort.

For me this crisis is particularly painful to watch unfold. I spent my early years in southern Iraq, as the son of Christian missionaries. In fact, some of my first and fondest memories come from navigating the canals of old Basrah and gliding through the still waters of the Amarah marshes in a canoe. I have returned to Iraq many times over the years, including as the first USAID Representative for Southern Iraq in 2003 and 2004, and most recently last year, when I served as USAID Mission Director in Baghdad.

Throughout my career in Iraq, I met regularly with community leaders, civil society and women's groups representing Christian and other minority groups. I learned firsthand of their long history in the region, their concerns, and ambitions. Along with my USAID colleagues and our implementing partners, I made sure that our assistance was reaching these vulnerable populations. I also had the chance to travel throughout the country. I visited ancient sites including a monastery in the hills outside the village of Tel Kaif, just a few miles north of Mosul. Standing for well over 1,000 years, this revered structure is now probably in the hands of ISIL; its history and cultural wealth are likely gone.

I now have the privilege of leading our USAID Iraq Taskforce and am bringing much of my background and experience to bear on our Agency's current response. USAID is proud to join the Administration, the distinguished colleagues here today, and the international community in our collective efforts to provide needs-based humanitarian assistance to the people of Iraq. We not only condemn ISIL's reprehensible actions, but are actively working to respond to this destruction through the strategic delivery of humanitarian assistance and the continuation of targeted development assistance. We are working to support Iraq as it strives to form a new non-sectarian government which ensures that all individuals, including members of Iraq's diverse and historic communities, receive equal protection under the law and the human rights to which they are entitled.

Today I want to update you on three areas – the current humanitarian situation in Iraq, USAID's ongoing efforts to provide needs-based humanitarian assistance to all displaced

persons, including members of ethnic and religious minorities, and our efforts to protect and assist specific victimized groups.

The Current Humanitarian Situation in Iraq

Let me begin by addressing the current humanitarian situation. The humanitarian community is grappling with an unprecedented four Level 3 (L3) emergencies—the United Nation’s (U.N.) most severe emergency designation. These include complex emergencies in Iraq, Syria, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic. We are simultaneously combating the devastating spread of Ebola in West Africa and working to address protracted emergencies in a number of other places throughout the globe. The U.N. declared the Iraq crisis an L3 emergency on August 13, resulting in the deployment of humanitarian veteran, Kevin Kennedy, to oversee U.N. humanitarian operations in northern Iraq.

It is within this context that for the first time in USAID’s history, our Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance has deployed four Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DART) and activated four Response Management Teams (RMTs) concurrently. The courageous work of USAID’s humanitarian experts is saving lives around the globe and is providing U.S. leadership within the international arena. I am proud to be part of these efforts. We stand together in a spirit of partnership—with our U.S. government colleagues, with other governments, with the U.N. and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, with civil society, and with the households, families, and communities that are suffering.

In Iraq, the scope and complexity of the present crisis are enormous, and the pace of deterioration since the fall of Mosul to ISIL on June 9 is staggering. Nearly all parts of the country are affected by violence, and ISIL particularly targets Christians and members of other minority groups. According to the U.N., there are currently an estimated 1.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) throughout Iraq. Of the 1.8 million IDPs, the U.N. estimates that nearly 850,000 are located in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq. We acknowledge and applaud the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) for offering shelter and refuge to these IDPs, along with 215,000 refugees from Syria.

Dohuk Governorate in particular is shouldering the largest portion of these IDPs, with displaced people living in host communities, schools, public buildings, open areas, and makeshift camps. More than 650,000 of the IDPs are located in ISIL-controlled areas of Anbar, Ninewa, and Salah Ad-Din where limited access makes provision of humanitarian assistance extraordinarily challenging, if not impossible. Furthermore, IDPs are scattered across approximately 1,500 locations, so centralized provision of humanitarian assistance is difficult. Because the conflict is ongoing, and people are not able to return to their areas of origin, the continued displacement crisis is likely to become protracted and require ongoing humanitarian assistance from the international community.

Moreover, the IDP crisis is not limited to northern Iraq. Since January, over 440,000 people have been displaced in Anbar, Diyala, and Baghdad governorates and we are also seeing secondary and tertiary displacement, with increased IDP movements to central and southern Iraq. In recent weeks, attacks by ISIL and armed groups have increased throughout the country—particularly against Christians and members of other religious and ethnic minorities. To add historical context to this point, this is not the first occasion that Iraqi Christians and other religious minorities have been forced to flee their homes. During 2004 meetings in Basrah, Christian leaders (as well as Sabeen/Mandean leaders) informed me that once the Iranian-backed Shias had taken power—Shias are the majority in the south of Iraq—and imposed religious restrictions, life was made extremely difficult for Christians and other minorities. As a result, most fled to the Ninewa plains area north and west of Mosul—the area that ISIL now controls.

The Mt. Sinjar Mission in Iraq

The rapid fall of Mosul on June 9 resulted in the displacement of thousands of Christians, Yazidis, and members of other minority groups, as well as Shia. Soon after Mosul fell, the Embassy in Iraq issued a Disaster Declaration in close consultation with USAID, which began providing humanitarian assistance through a number of partners.

In early August, the world's attention focused on the plight of thousands of Yazidis, with mass killings being reported in several parts of the Sinjar region. As this desperate scene unfolded and we received first-person accounts from individuals on Mt. Sinjar of the horrific conditions, we acted quickly to explore all possible options for relieving the situation, including deploying a DART to Erbil led by seasoned humanitarian response official and a liaison deputy team leader to Embassy Baghdad and the USAID Mission. As the President noted in his remarks on August 7, we were seeing innocent people facing the prospect of violence on a horrific scale, and we had a mandate to help—in this case, a request from the Iraqi government.

We immediately coordinated with the U.S. military to begin a humanitarian air drop operation to deliver crucial commodities for thousands of trapped civilians. The U.S. military conducted seven nightly humanitarian air drops between August 8-13, delivering more than 114,000 meals and 35,000 gallons of water to those displaced on Mt. Sinjar. USAID joined our Department of Defense (DoD) colleagues to conduct an on-the-ground assessment of the situation on Mt. Sinjar after the airdrops and concluded that our actions had helped save lives. USAID continues to work with our military colleagues as needed to bring additional airdrops of commodities to other besieged areas, such as the recent military airdrops to Amerli.

In the days after the Mt. Sinjar mission, USAID's DART worked closely with local and national authorities, U.N. officials, Embassy and USAID mission officers, and NGO partners to identify needs, scale-up operations, and ensure a large-scale, coordinated international response. The generosity of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which provided an historic \$500 million in humanitarian relief funds in June, helped enable this rapid scale-up.

The Iraqi government and the KRG have also taken responsibility and dedicated substantial funding in support of humanitarian relief efforts. This includes initial cash grants of approximately \$860 per displaced family, which are being distributed by the Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement. We are pleased to see this financial commitment, have worked with Iraqi officials to find more efficient and effective ways to distribute their resources, and we will continue to engage with Iraqi officials to ensure that these funds are being distributed in a non-discriminatory and impartial fashion.

Outreach to Iraq's Faith-Based and Minority Communities

USAID is currently working through a range of partners to provide needs-based humanitarian assistance. Some of the most effective international relief organizations, many of which are USAID's implementing partners around the world, come out of Christian and other faith communities. USAID's partnerships with these organizations are enormously valuable and critical in our current response.

While we are not publicizing our NGO partner names or the specifics of their work due to security concerns, our current implementing partners work with an array of faith leaders throughout northern Iraq. We do not know exactly what percentage of the IDPs are religious minorities, however we do know, based on partner reporting and field-level assessments, that many of Iraq's Christians lived in the Ninewa plains area, and an overwhelming majority of them have been forced to flee their homes. We are working closely with faith-based partners to

monitor the situation and ensure that these communities are treated impartially and are receiving assistance at the same level as all other IDPs.

USAID actively monitors our programs to ensure our assistance reaches all those in need in an equal fashion, including Christian and other minority communities. We and our State Department colleagues are meeting regularly with faith-based leaders in and around Erbil and Baghdad to ensure assistance is reaching those groups. On August 30, our DART met with Archbishop Bashar Warda of the Chaldean Church in Erbil, who reported that the Government of Iraq had been distributing cash grants to Christian IDPs in an impartial fashion and that any hold-up in the grant process was due to broader issues with IDP registration. Our team also spoke with displaced Christian families sheltered in the church, who told us that although they had access to basic relief items and air-cooled tents, there were still IDPs without access to adequate shelter. USAID is working closely with international partners to address this concern.

In the recent weeks, I have had the privilege to meet with both Iraqi and U.S.-based leaders of religious minority groups. These groups include Chaldean organizations, American Mesopotamian Organization, Assyrian Aid Society of America, Assyrian Aid Society of Iraq, Assyrian International News Agency, Catholic Near East Welfare Association, Hammurabi Human Rights Organization, One World Medical Mission, and the Yezidi Human Rights Organization. Regular communication with these groups is vital, allowing us to exchange real-time information, learn about their efforts, and connect them to the broader international humanitarian architecture.

USAID Humanitarian Assistance in Iraq

Total U.S. government humanitarian funding for Iraq in fiscal year 2014 has now reached more than \$138 million. USAID is focusing our assistance strategically, with the aim of filling critical response gaps, and using our voice within the international humanitarian community to advocate for an efficient allocation of resources and effective coordination among response actors. We are providing assistance to deliver immediate relief commodities; address emergency health needs; provide water, sanitation, and hygiene support; ensure emergency and transitional shelter; and address the massive protection and trauma needs of populations who have fled untold horrors.

In addition, as winter in northern Iraq descends as early as the end of September, we are currently working with partners to reach the most vulnerable populations—including women, children, and religious and ethnic minorities with winterization programs. USAID assistance includes basic supplies which are critical for those who are displaced and seeking refuge. Clothing, kitchen sets, blankets, mattresses, and bedding, as well as materials to prepare shelter for winter conditions all provide dignity and a semblance of comfort in the midst of chaos. On September 2, USAID airlifted more than 60 metric tons of humanitarian aid into the city of Erbil, from where one of USAID's partners will distribute the commodities to vulnerable families countrywide. Another airlift is planned for this week.

Lack of shelter is a serious concern as 45 percent of all IDPs in Iraq are living in public buildings, open spaces, or camps across the country. Nearly half of all schools in the Iraqi Kurdistan Government are hosting IDPs in cramped conditions not intended for longer term accommodation. As the school year begins, this will be problematic. In fact, officials from the KRG have already indicated that IDPs should be relocated to camps as soon as possible to make the schools available for the beginning of the new school year. The Government of Iraq (GOI) and the KRG are working to construct IDP camps with technical assistance from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). While in some contexts UNHCR or the International Organization for Migration (IOM) might run the IDP camps, in this case the GOI

and the KRG are the official responsible authority, with UNHCR or IOM providing technical assistance. The GOI is also providing financial support, and I commend the GOI and the KRG for working in partnership to address these needs.

USAID is working to provide additional shelter support, and address public health concerns, which are particularly acute in IDP populations. With the support of USAID, UNICEF is providing safe drinking water and hygiene supplies to IDPs, and an NGO is conducting hygiene promotion campaigns and sanitation infrastructure improvements. Similarly, USAID support is helping provide five liters of water per person per day in areas of Dohuk and Ninewa governorates while also supplying women and girls with essential hygiene supplies to maintain optimal health. A USAID partner is strengthening the water and sanitation infrastructure in Diyala and Sulaymaniyah governorates and working with local authorities to devise a strategy for managing these resources.

In times of crisis, food is a critical lifeline. The World Food Program (WFP) and its partners are providing different types of food aid appropriate to the needs and mobility of various IDPs. WFP has received support from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia sufficient to fund its food assistance in Iraq until November. USAID has deployed an emergency food officer with the Erbil-based DART to monitor food needs in consultation with WFP and other partners. Since mid-June, WFP and partners have reached more than 719,000 Iraqis with food. This figure includes 176,000 IDPs still in transit, or without access to cooking facilities, who have received three-day emergency rations since displacement escalated in early August. It also includes 128,800 IDPs in more stable locations, or with access to cooking facilities, who WFP and partners reached with monthly household food rations in August. From field kitchens in Dohuk and Erbil governorates, WFP and partners have served approximately five million hot meals in total, currently benefiting 218,000 people daily.

Protection is another critical component of our humanitarian response, particularly given the type and scale of human rights violations being witnessed. We know that there continues to be a danger of sexual and gender based violence, that children and youth are at risk of recruitment into armed groups, that families have been separated, and that all those affected by this crisis have witnessed violence, lost family members, and live in an environment of fear and uncertainty. As a result, we are working on programs and strategies to respond to the urgent needs of survivors, mitigate the long term effects of these abuses, and most importantly, help prevent further instances from occurring.

USAID support has helped establish mobile protection teams, which will visit IDP-hosting communities and provide opportunities to meet confidentially and share protection concerns, including those of women at risk of violence and abuse. In conjunction with the GOI, we are also helping address the needs of children and their families through mobile child-friendly spaces, which will serve as platforms for meeting the psychosocial needs of children. USAID is also working in Diyala and As Sulaymaniyah governorates to establish family tracing and reunifications systems, as well as provide appropriate temporary care for separated and unaccompanied children and youth.

Given significant threats against members of minority populations in Iraq, USAID is providing targeted psychosocial assistance and distributing relief commodities to Yazidi and Christian IDPs, in coordination with the broader humanitarian community and local government authorities. Similarly, USAID is helping the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) provide psychosocial care to children, train social workers, create safe spaces, and conduct other protection activities in Anbar Governorate and other areas of Iraq hosting IDPs.

All USAID partners are required to apply a protection and gender lens to their programming and ensure that assistance and programs meet the unique needs of beneficiaries and can be accessed safely and equitably, regardless of age, gender or religious and ethnic

identify. These efforts help ensure that all of our assistance programs, regardless of the sector, work to promote the protection and wellbeing of all, especially women, children, the elderly and infirm, and members of marginalized groups.

USAID Development Programs in Iraq

USAID's response to this humanitarian crisis builds on a solid foundation of over ten years of programming to help build Iraq's health, governance, and civil society capacity. In recent weeks, our existing programs were able to shift some focus to shorter-term humanitarian needs, while continuing to work toward longer-term goals of a stronger Iraq. Before this latest crisis, USAID programs in Iraq were working to build local governance capacity and support civil society and religious and ethnic minority groups. These programs ensured that USAID was well placed to help local Iraqi partners respond to the crisis. Our deep contacts with threatened communities and local groups also made USAID one of the first stops for Christian groups and others seeking and offering help.

For example, our Access to Justice Program in Iraq had previously established a national legal assistance network to help with issues like identity documents and legal protections for women and members of minority communities. When entire communities were displaced by ISIL's advance, they often left behind or destroyed identity documents as they fled out of fear of retribution if identified as a non-Muslim or part of another minority group. In response, our Access to Justice Program pivoted to work with IDPs as well as the Government of Iraq on identity and registration issues, including replacing identification documents essential to government and international assistance, greatly easing the burdens of Christians and other minority groups who had fled.

Further, our "Foras" (Arabic for "Opportunities") project is working on economic development by focusing on the employability of Iraq's labor force by the private sector. This program has been able to use its structure and contacts to pivot and begin to provide short-term labor opportunities for IDPs—because we know that a job is preferred to humanitarian aid in both the short- and long-term. Other ongoing programs in Iraq are serving both IDPs and other Iraqis around the country by improving government provided primary health care, strengthening local governments' ability to provide essential services, promoting administrative reform in the Government of Iraq, assisting with the decentralization of key services from the central government to the provinces, and strengthening the role of civil society in local communities.

Key Challenges Moving Forward

In the coming months in Iraq, the international community will continue to face challenges. First, as ISIL and other belligerents continue to try to claim territory and as sectarian violence roils across much of Iraq, displaced persons will likely be unable or unwilling to return home. In recognition of this, the U.N. will release a revised Strategic Response Plan in late September, laying out a longer-term humanitarian strategy, along with financial and human resource needs. Early discussions with senior U.N. officials indicate that the cost of such a plan to the international community may exceed \$1 billion, far exceeding the Saudi contribution. USAID is working closely with our U.N. colleagues to determine how we can most appropriately leverage our resources to support another long-term response.

Second, humanitarian access will remain the central challenge of this response, particularly in ISIL-held and contested areas where attempts at negotiated access have fallen short. We will continue to work closely and creatively with DoD and other entities, including

other donor governments, and to determine how to best maximize humanitarian effectiveness in semi-permissive to non-permissive environments.

Third, there will continue to be perceptions of preferential assistance going to one group over another. Imperfect coverage and perceptions of bias are realities in large-scale humanitarian emergencies where large numbers of people require assistance. We will remain sensitive to how the provision of needs-based assistance to members of religious and ethnic minorities impacts the perception among a broader population, and we will calibrate assistance accordingly to ensure that assistance does not lead to further protection challenges.

Finally, identifying long-term, durable solutions for IDPs and members of minority groups, including local integration or return to their areas of origin, will be challenging and will require creativity and diplomacy to resolve. The central Iraqi government and provincial governments have requested technical assistance for the longer term from our USAID Mission and Embassy colleagues, which may require resources not yet programmed or available. USAID is prepared to engage in a dialogue with the new Iraqi government, when appropriate, about future technical assistance.

Conclusion

Due to these immense challenges, forging strong partnerships will be critical. We remain deeply committed to assisting all those in need, and we will continue pushing to secure access to additional populations currently trapped in areas controlled by ISIL. In the coming months we will seek opportunities to link our humanitarian and development efforts to ensure that displaced families can recover from the current crisis, and become more resilient in the coming years. USAID will also continue to engage closely with faith-based leaders, meeting regularly here in Washington and in Iraq to hear and address concerns. Our hearts are with the thousands of people who remain besieged or trapped under unsustainable conditions, and we are gravely concerned for the health and safety of these displaced men, women, and children, including Christians and other vulnerable ethnic and religious minorities.

USAID continues to be deeply appreciative of Congressional support to provide the resources that makes our humanitarian assistance work possible in Syria, Iraq, in the broader Middle East, and indeed throughout the world. Thank you for your interest, and I look forward to your questions.