

Testimony of Deputy Assistant Secretary Kelly T. Clements
Before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and
North Africa and the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human
Rights, and International Organizations

“The Syrian Humanitarian Crisis: Four Years Later and No End in Sight”

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Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen, Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting us to this important hearing on humanitarian assistance for those imperiled and uprooted by the violence in Syria. I am grateful for the opportunity to update you on how the U.S. government is targeting life-saving aid, on the impact of our efforts, and on the challenges ahead.

I would also like to thank you for your leadership and Congress for its generous and unwavering support for the humanitarian response we have been undertaking in Syria and in the region. U.S. leadership and resources are playing an essential role, enabling us and the organizations we fund to cope with emergencies and protracted, complex crises, to ease suffering and save innocent lives.

Historic High in Simultaneous Global Emergencies

It is hard to think of a time when the need has been greater. Not since World War II raged across three continents has violence and persecution driven so many people from their homes. Right now, there are over 50 million refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons in the world. In addition to the cataclysm in Syria, we face major crises in Iraq, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Gaza, Ukraine, Somalia, and Yemen. As these crises fester and convulse many nations, they are stretching the international community’s ability to respond.

With limited resources, our strategy has been to provide the basics in order to keep people alive—and making sure that we find and assist the most vulnerable among them. Many things that we regard as basic rights, like children going to school or women delivering their babies in clean, safe places, have become luxuries, and would not be possible for many without the presence of international humanitarian actors. Collectively, we are saving lives. The United States has been the leader in providing this assistance. To date, thanks to support from Congress,

we have contributed over \$3 billion in assistance to Syria and the region.

In 2014, the level of global humanitarian assistance rose to a record \$22 billion. But even this enormous amount is not enough to provide basic life-saving relief to all of those most in need. This is certainly true in the case of Syria. The Syrian crisis is the worst human-made catastrophe of our time, requiring one of the most expensive humanitarian responses in history. UN humanitarian appeals have grown exponentially over the last three years, and the total amount given by donors has remained roughly the same. The 2014 appeals for assistance inside Syria and for refugees in surrounding countries were just over half funded. This year's estimate of what will be needed climbed higher still. The UN's recently launched 2015 appeals for response to the Syria crisis exceed \$8 billion.

Funding shortages have hindered the response and left critical needs unmet. Tom and I just returned from Iraq a few days ago, and while we were there we visited refugees and IDPs alike with government authorities and aid agencies struggling to respond to enormous humanitarian needs. Domiz Camp in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region is bursting at the seams with an official tally of 35,000, but far more seeking services not available in overwhelmed host communities. Camps are under construction, but not available fast enough to house one of the most dynamic population movements in modern history. Heroic efforts are underway to educate, feed, shelter, and clothe the displaced, but there are not enough openings in schools or latrines for families to take care of basic needs. We saw firsthand how the lack of funding has hampered relief efforts. To deliver healthcare, mobile clinics have become static clinics in order to handle the demand for medical services in the camp. At child friendly centers we saw thousands of children who have missed critical years of primary education, but remained upbeat, grateful for the chance to learn and resume their normal lives. Unless we get more of them in school, they risk becoming a "lost generation."

Syria's Dismal Milestones

So far, the conflict has claimed the lives of over 200,000 Syrians. According to the UN Commission of Inquiry, most of them died at the hands of the Syrian regime. The Syrian crisis has set unenviable records, producing almost four million refugees, more than any other modern conflict, and forcibly displacing more than seven million internally, the vast majority as a result of the Assad regime's campaign of destruction. Cumulatively, half of its pre-war population has been displaced. Many of the refugees who have fled the country are unable or unwilling to return to Syria anytime soon. In a few short years, Syria has been transformed from a middle income country that hosted hundreds of thousands of

refugees from Iraq and elsewhere into the largest refugee-producing country in the world.

Inside Syria, the Assad regime and extremist groups continue to target innocent civilians, who are already suffering from sieges, food shortages, inadequate shelter, and what used to be preventable diseases.

Addressing Iraq in the Syria Context

The crisis has wreaked havoc beyond Syria's borders, incubating violent extremism and the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in both Syria and Iraq. ISIL's attacks and reign of terror have displaced millions of Iraqis and Syrians. It is important to note though, that the political situations in Syria and Iraq differ. In Iraq, we have a strong partner in the Iraqi government. In Syria, the regime remains the single largest threat to the Syrian people.

We recognize that the challenges are regional and integrated, and our humanitarian responses must be as well. There are many pieces to this complex puzzle. We are fitting them together, working hand in hand with our colleagues at USAID to ensure that we are thinking strategically, and aligning our Syria and Iraq responses to meet the emergency and protracted needs of conflict victims, refugees, and overstretched host communities. Along with USAID, we recognize that the nature of the crisis makes coordinating humanitarian and development assistance essential.

Quantifying What U.S. Humanitarian Assistance Has Done

Thanks to the U.S. Congress, the United States remains the single largest donor to the humanitarian response for Syria, contributing over \$3.1 billion since the crisis began—in 2014 our contributions represented more than one-third of all funding to the crisis. Roughly half of our assistance has gone to conflict victims inside Syria, and half has gone to refugees and communities in the region that host them.

Since 2011, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) has provided nearly \$1.4 billion of this humanitarian aid. Last year alone, PRM's support for conflict-affected Syrians reached nearly \$725 million, the largest single-year contribution to a humanitarian crisis in the history of the Bureau.

The results of that coordination and our assistance strategy are clear. The assistance we provide is saving lives both inside and outside Syria. Over the last six months we have overcome hurdles and aid has reached millions of civilians in

dire need. By adopting UN Security Council Resolution 2191 and its predecessors, UNSCRs 2139 and 2165, the UN Security Council has authorized the UN to reach areas that were previously cut off from outside aid through the end of 2015. Aid has crossed international borders and conflict lines to reach civilians in Dar'a, Idlib, Quneitra and Aleppo governorates. UN convoys have crossed Syria's borders bringing food, water, winter relief items and medical supplies to 20% of conflict victims inside Syria since July 2014. The UN is also delivering aid *across conflict lines* inside Syria, getting into an average of 66 hard-to-access areas each month out of a total of 287. In 2014, with support from the United States and other donor governments, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provided aid to more than one out of every three Syrians in need, including nearly one million people who have been cut off in difficult-to-reach areas. UNHCR remains the Bureau's largest partner, but other aid organizations we fund have also provided much-needed relief supplies such as clean water, food and medicines to numbers close to half of Syrians in need.

American funded protection and assistance also supports refugees from Syria living in neighboring countries. In these countries, eighty-five percent of Syrian refugees live outside of camps, many housed in sub-standard shelter in urban settings. In 2014, aid agencies we fund helped improve shelter for over 20% of all Syrian refugees living in and outside camps. This included providing winter-proofed tents to help people in substandard and dangerous dwellings. They also provided access to safe drinking water for over one million refugees.

At least half of all refugee children from Syria are still not enrolled in school. In urban areas of Turkey, where the vast majority of 1.6 million refugees from Syria live, UNICEF cites enrollment rates below 20% in urban areas despite recent efforts by the Government to improve access to public schools. While schooling remains a challenge, with increasing numbers of refugee children and insufficient schooling options, we are making progress. With U.S. support, the UN and its NGO partners helped over 360,000 refugee children in neighboring countries enroll in school in 2014, triple the number enrolled in 2013.

The assistance the United States provides feeds nearly half of all Syrian refugees. Over 20% of all refugees received additional items to help them survive—from cooking pots to jerry cans for water to winter clothes and shoes. Over 75% of all Syrian refugees also received healthcare consultations and nearly 366,000 were referred to more specialized healthcare services for serious conditions or injuries.

Our programs also provide critical support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, mental health counseling services, assistance for the disabled and the elderly, and protection for unaccompanied minors.

Challenges

The crisis is placing enormous pressure on a region that was already economically fragile and politically volatile. As I mentioned earlier, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt are hosting nearly four million Syrian refugees. In Lebanon, one in four residents is now a refugee from Syria. In Jordan, housing is in such short supply that rents have doubled in some areas. In Lebanon and Jordan, schools are running double shifts, hospitals are overcrowded, and municipal services cannot keep up. Across the region, host community tensions have risen as Syrians work informally for lower wages in fields and factories in order to provide the most basic support for their families. Economic growth has slowed in communities that were already poor, exacerbating social tensions between host communities and Syrians. These types of tensions affect both refugees and communities hosting them, and impact the ability of communities to continue hosting refugees; thus our assistance must address the needs of both populations.

As hosting countries see no end in sight to this crisis, we have seen borders start to close. Lebanon and Jordan have joined Egypt in placing restrictions on Syrian arrivals. Turkey generously admitted nearly 200,000 mostly Kurdish Syrians that fled from ISIL's advance on Kobane in September and Iraq has also accepted over 25,000 Kurdish Syrians from the same influx, but these options may not be available for future waves of people in trouble. Refugees from Syria are running out of safe places to flee. In desperation, tens of thousands of Syrians are attempting dangerous boat journeys to reach asylum in Europe with diminishing options in the region.

U.S. diplomats have asked neighboring countries to keep their borders open and aid those in harm's way but in order to do so, they will need more help. We are redoubling efforts to get more aid to Syrians still inside Syria so that people are not forced to flee because they lack material goods. Neighboring countries deserve our steadfast support to help cope with refugee populations that will likely remain for many years to come. As part of that effort, the State Department is assisting communities hosting large populations of refugees. In Lebanon, our assistance has improved municipal services through rehabilitation of water systems, schools, and health clinics, which will last beyond the conflict to support host communities, but the needs remain great.

We also are working to integrate relief efforts with USAID's long-term development programs. Our joint efforts have provided hundreds of millions of dollars to projects that provide vital services, clean water, sanitation, education, and economic opportunities to both host communities and refugees. Meeting refugee needs in this way is new for us, but we see this as an important component of our effort to work with governments to keep borders open to vulnerable Syrians and ensuring their protection. It is much easier to aid people in need in the neighboring countries than in Syria. Fortunately, this crisis has also been an impetus to implement innovative and cost-effective ways to reach more people in need – for example by the use of debit cards, cash transfers, biometrics, and GPS tracking devices and barcode scanners for aid convoys to conflict areas.

Next Steps

Unmet needs and real risks loom ahead. Inside Syria, 2.9 million children require lifesaving vaccinations; 6.2 million people need monthly food rations; and 3.5 million children and adolescents should go to school. A failure to act could endanger millions of innocent civilians caught between the Syrian government and armed groups. Strong, sustained support from a larger donor base for the humanitarian response is critical and U.S. leadership remains essential.

As we plan our assistance for 2015, we also continue to urge other donors to increase their contributions to UN-led relief efforts. Donors have already been generous. The European Commission, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, Japan, Qatar and UAE have made significant contributions to UN-led relief operations for both Syrians and Iraqis.

We applaud, for instance, the tremendous generosity of Saudi Arabia, whose \$500 million contribution to the UN in the early stages of the Iraq crisis last year helped many Iraqis affected by ISIL's violence. Saudi Arabia also stepped in with a \$52 million contribution at the end of 2014 to the World Food Program when it exhausted their funding and faced the prospect of suspending food assistance to almost half of the region's Syrian refugees – two million people. Kuwait, for its part, has emerged as a regional leader on humanitarian issues. They have not only hosted two Ministerial-level pledging conferences — and plan to host the next conference on March 31 — they have also given \$800 million to provide desperately needed food, shelter, and medical supplies. The March 31st pledging conference is an important opportunity for other countries to stand up and pledge their support for Syrians. In the past years, senior level U.S. bilateral engagement has been instrumental in encouraging non-traditional donors to step forward. We are working to encourage strong representation from an expanded pool of donors

and ensure that we are sharing responsibility for the humanitarian response with the entire region and the entire community of nations. A top donors group mechanism also galvanizes support from Gulf states and keeps the spotlight on the Syrian crisis.

We and others have also stepped forward to resettle Syrian refugees. In recent months, the United States has received referrals for over 10,000 Syrian refugees. We're working with the Department of Homeland Security to interview and process these referrals, and expect to admit 1,000-2,000 in FY 2015, and higher numbers in FY 2016 and beyond. More Syrian refugees have arrived in the United States in this fiscal year than arrived in the last four years combined. With this refugee crisis threatening to become protracted, the U.S. resettlement program is another way for us to follow through on our commitment to extend help and hope to those displaced and endangered by the violence in Syria.

Thank you for your support and I welcome your questions.