



**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.

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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.