

**Testimony of Anne C. Richard,  
Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration  
to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs,  
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa  
“Examining the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis from the Ground (Part II)”  
October 27, 2015, 2:00pm**

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Mr. Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs to discuss the Syrian humanitarian crisis. I returned recently from a series of meetings overseas, including my fifth visit to Turkey and my eighth visit to Jordan during my tenure as Assistant Secretary. I greatly appreciate the interest of this Committee in this very challenging situation. I would like to briefly outline the steps taken by the Population, Refugees and Migration bureau and others at the State Department, USAID and in the Obama Administration to provide humanitarian assistance to innocent civilians and to assist the governments of other countries to deal with the crisis in Syria.

As you know, in early September, the tragic photo of a little boy’s body on a beach in Turkey awakened people to the plight of Syrian refugees in ways that years of grim statistics, bleak images, and climbing casualty figures could not.

What started as unrest in Syria in 2011 has developed into a multi-front war and spilled over to become a regional crisis. Recently, the crisis reached Europe as hundreds of thousands of young men, women and sometimes entire families seek to reach that continent by boat, bus, train and foot. They are joined by refugees and migrants from other countries, chiefly Afghanistan (16%), Eritrea (6%), and Iraq (3%). While the outflow of refugees to Europe has garnered a lot of attention, it is important for us to remember and acknowledge that the vast majority of Syrian families remain in the Middle East. Four million are refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Roughly 7 million Syrians are displaced within their own country, and many more are dependent on aid to survive.

For more than four years, the Obama Administration has helped countries neighboring Syria and the innocent people caught up in the Syria crisis, even as we continue to play a leading role in providing humanitarian aid to people affected by conflicts in many other places.

**We have a three pronged approach to the humanitarian aspects of the crisis in Syria and the region: strong levels of humanitarian assistance, active diplomacy, and expanded refugee resettlement.**

**First, the U.S. Government is the leading donor of humanitarian assistance to people in need inside Syria, in the surrounding countries, and to others caught up in crises around the world. Through contributions to International Organizations** such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Organization for Migration, the World Food Program, UNICEF and leading non-governmental organizations, US funds are being used to save millions of lives.

U.S. humanitarian assistance in response to the Syrian conflict totals more than \$4.5 billion since the start of the crisis and is made possible thanks to strong bipartisan support from Congress. Without U.S. support, more people would be making the dangerous voyage further north.

Even with our sizable contributions, however, UN appeals for humanitarian aid to address the crisis in Syria remain underfunded, with only 45% of the needs covered as of October 2015. These shortfalls have had real consequences: cuts to food and other assistance was one of the triggers of the current migration of people to Europe; Syrian refugees in Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon are losing hope of ever returning to their homes; they are unable to work regularly to sustain their families, rents are high and their children are missing out on school.

Roughly 85% of refugees now live outside of camps. We need to help refugees become self-sufficient while we also support the communities that host them. We are looking at ways to better link our relief and development assistance. Importantly, we are working to get more refugee children in school throughout the region. Education for children who have been displaced is essential for their own futures and for ours. We support the “No Lost Generation” campaign to educate and protect Syrian children and youth with funding to UN agencies like UNICEF and leading non-governmental organizations.

We stay in close touch with UN agencies to encourage the most efficient use of our aid dollars. Contributions from other donor governments, the private sector and the public are also urgently needed. In recent weeks, we have been gratified to see increased contributions from the public. We encourage members of the public seeking information about private efforts to visit [www.aidrefugees.gov](http://www.aidrefugees.gov).

**The second prong of our response is diplomacy on humanitarian issues.** For several years we have engaged government officials in the region to encourage them to keep borders open and allow refugees to enter their countries, authorize the work of leading humanitarian organizations, and allow refugees to pursue normal lives – as normal as is possible given what they have been through. We are part of a chorus of nations that call for the respect of humanitarian principles, even inside Syria in wartime.

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Diplomacy on humanitarian issues means working constructively with other nations to find solutions. The issue of the refugee and migration crisis was taken up again and again in recent international fora such as the UN General Assembly in New York in September, the UN High Commissioner for Refugee's Executive Committee meeting in Geneva in early October, and the recently-concluded Global Forum on Migration and Development in Istanbul. All provided opportunities for countries to come together and unite in a common effort. I attended the first and led the US delegations to the others. At all of these venues, we met with government officials involved in the crisis, from Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, to Sweden and Germany.

Diplomacy also includes pushing, when needed, those who can and should be doing more. We are engaged on encouraging countries that provide assistance outside the UN system to contribute to the UN appeals for Syria. Contributions to UN appeals can help prevent duplication and ensure that assistance is provided to those who need it the most. We are also encouraging countries to permit refugees to pursue livelihoods and become more self-sufficient, and to do this in ways that do not exacerbate existing unemployment issues in their countries.

### **The third prong of our response is resettling refugees in the United States**

In FY 2015, nearly 70,000 refugees of 67 different nationalities were admitted for permanent resettlement in the United States, including 1700 Syrians. In FY 2016, the President has determined that we should increase that number to 85,000, including at least 10,000 Syrians. We recognize that admitting more Syrian refugees to the United States is only part of the solution, but it is in keeping with our American tradition. It shows the world that we seek to provide refuge for those most in need, it sets an example for others to follow, and it adds to the diversity and strength of American society.

Resettlement is offered to refugees who are among the most vulnerable – people for whom a return to Syria someday would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, such as victims of torture, burn victims, or others with chronic medical conditions. Families or individuals who could benefit the most from resettlement are referred to the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) by the UNHCR. We screen applicants carefully in an effort to ensure that no one who poses a threat to the safety and security of Americans is able to enter our country. Consequently, resettlement is a deliberate process that can take 18-to-24 months. All refugees of all nationalities considered for admission to the United States undergo intensive security screening involving multiple federal intelligence, security and law enforcement agencies, including the National Counterterrorism Center, the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center, and the Departments of Homeland Security, State and Defense.

Applicants to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program are currently subject to the highest level of security checks of any category of traveler to the United States. These safeguards

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include biometric (fingerprint) and biographic checks, and a lengthy in-person overseas interview by specially trained DHS officers who scrutinize the applicant's explanation of individual circumstances to ensure the applicant is a bona fide refugee and is not known to present security concerns to the United States.

The vast majority of refugees of the three million refugees who have been admitted to the United States, including from some of the most troubled regions in the world, have proven to be hard-working and productive residents. They pay taxes, send their children to school, and after five years, many take the test to become citizens. Some serve in the U.S. military and undertake other forms of service for their communities and our country.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have about this three-pronged approach and to provide details about our programs.

Thank you.