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Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today on the humanitarian crisis that has gripped Syria, its neighbors, and the global community. I want to thank you for your unwavering support for USAID and the State Department's response to the Syria crisis, and for shining a spotlight on the situation, which grows more complex every day.

**Introduction**

The Syrian conflict is the biggest humanitarian emergency of our time. For almost five years, the Assad regime has waged an unrelenting campaign of bloodshed that has decimated communities and allowed extremists, like the so-called Islamic State or ISIL, to thrive.

As many of our partners testified earlier this month, while the world's attention is centered on the perilous journey of many Syrians forced to flee their homeland, it is important to underscore that Syrian refugees are part of a much larger community that is suffering under the weight of this crisis. Over 17 million Syrians—70 percent of the country's pre-war population—are affected by the conflict. That is as if every person living in Michigan and Missouri needed humanitarian assistance. While more than four million Syrian refugees have fled across the border (with most staying in the region), another 6.5 million are displaced inside Syria. More than a quarter million people have been killed, including over 11,000 children.

One heart-breaking image of little Aylan Kurdi awoke a broader consciousness when he washed up on the shore of Turkey after traveling by boat with his family in the desperate search for safety. This image reminded us that, behind the massive figures of this crisis, are children just like our own. Behind the figures are parents who—like any parent—would do anything and risk everything to keep their children safe. Mothers and fathers struggling to feed their families and keep a roof over their heads; daughters and sons dodging daily barrel bombs to go to school; mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons who are yearning for a more peaceful future.

Amidst a backdrop of destruction wrought by Assad's brutality are men, women and children struggling against all odds to rebuild their lives. Children like Amina who touched the heart of our Syria Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) Leader Jack Myer. Amina, age eight, was picking olives with her grandmother in the family garden in Syria when a bomb hit, killing her

grandmother and sending shrapnel flying into Amina's body. She survived, but is now paralyzed. With USAID support, Amina received not only medical care, but also trauma counseling to help heal her emotional wounds, as well as her physical ones. No child should endure what Amina has suffered. But most remarkable is her resolve to persevere. "I refuse to surround myself with sadness," she says. We must stand committed to helping Amina and all of Syria's children regain their childhood, and prospects for a better life ahead.

The U.S. government is the single largest humanitarian donor to the Syrian crisis, providing more than \$4.5 billion in life-saving humanitarian assistance in Syria and the region. In addition and separate from our humanitarian efforts, we also assist moderate civilian actors inside Syria to provide basic services, providing a lifeline to communities under siege. Critically, we also help Syria's neighbors build resilient health, water, economic, and education systems to cope with the influx of refugees. Today, I would like to tell you about these efforts, including our humanitarian response; our support for essential services; and our development assistance to the region. I would also like to lay out the challenges ahead as we continue to respond, alongside our partners, to the largest humanitarian crisis in modern times.

### **Providing Humanitarian Assistance in a Time of Unprecedented Need**

The Syria crisis and other conflicts ensnaring the Middle East and Africa are driving record levels of humanitarian need globally. There are almost 60 million displaced people around the world, the largest exodus in recorded history; nearly a quarter of whom are from the Middle East, with 20% from the Syrian conflict alone. Over the past year and for the first time in USAID's history, our Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance deployed four Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DARTs) abroad simultaneously, including for Syria, to respond to the world's escalating humanitarian needs as a result of protracted and complex conflicts.

In the midst of unprecedented need, we are doing everything possible to alleviate the suffering in Syria and the region, in collaboration with other donors, the United Nations (UN) and our partners. Our partners fearlessly cross conflict lines, at great personal risk, to help those caught in the crossfire. These heroes risk their lives amidst daily hazards that include barrel bombs, shelling, and shifting conflict lines, to reach people in regime, opposition, and ISIL held areas of Syria. Too many have tragically lost their lives as a result. Since July 2012, violence in Syria has killed or injured at least 109 non-governmental (NGO) staff supported by U.S. government programs. In addition, the UN Security Council reports that more than 17 UN personnel, eight international organization staff, and 46 Syrian Arab Red Crescent aid workers have been killed in Syria between March 2011 and August 2015. Today, humanitarian organizations on the ground face an added layer of threat—Russian air strikes on Syrian soil. Russian strikes in Syria are causing more people to flee, and complicating security and access for aid workers already struggling to provide assistance across dynamic battle lines.

Despite these horrific conditions, we continue to provide life-saving support—including food, water, shelter, medical care, and warm clothing—to approximately five million Syrians each month. Where aid convoys are harassed, we work through concerted diplomacy to gain access. Where hospitals are barrel bombed, we work with fearless medical teams to provide life-saving care through a range of field hospitals and clinics. USAID supports more than 140 hospitals and health clinics across Syria that, in FY 15 alone, helped us reach more than 2.4 million people with medical assistance.

In times of crisis, shelter and clean water are critical to survival. Take for instance, Nadine and her husband, a couple our partners were able to support in Damascus. Constant shelling forced them to flee their hometown with their 10 member family. Like most internally displaced Syrians, they do not live in a camp, but rather in a cramped two room home with decaying furniture and a few kitchen items and mattresses. The family survives on a budget of \$50 a month, making it hard to prioritize cleaning products over food, which resulted in unsanitary living conditions. USAID assistance provided Nadine and her family with house cleaning products, soap, dishwashing liquid, and feminine hygiene items. These small but crucial investments ensure families can afford dignified, clean shelter and helps avoid the spread of disease. USAID has also repaired water and sanitation facilities throughout Syria, providing access to clean water for 1.3 million people.

Freezing temperatures grip Syria in the winter months, leaving millions of people searching for winter clothing and blankets to stay warm. For a fourth winter, our partners are working tirelessly to prepare and distribute supplies appropriate for cold weather to nearly one million Syrians. Our partners distribute seasonal relief supplies—including warm clothing, thermal blankets, mattresses, shoes, winter coats, fuel for heating and shelter—which Syrians have told us are what they most need. With fuel prices likely to increase in the winter, a lot of Syrians may struggle to pay for fuel, so we are giving families vouchers to help buy fuel to heat their homes. We are also focused on helping families protect their homes from year-round rain and wind, and ensuring the most vulnerable, especially displaced Syrians, have access to adequate and secure shelter.

### *Food Assistance*

The U.S. government is the largest donor of food assistance in the Syria response, contributing over \$1.5 billion to date. The UN World Food Programme (WFP) and USAID-funded NGOs provide monthly food assistance to approximately 5 million Syrians inside Syria and in the five neighboring countries. USAID partners have delivered 1.5 million food baskets into Syria since the conflict started, with each basket providing basic sustenance for a family for one month. Since 2013, we have provided wheat flour and yeast to bakeries inside Syria, to ensure that most basic of foods – bread – is available to Syrians in need. More than 230 bakeries in Syria have distributed more than four million daily bread rations.

Through the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account, we have had the flexibility not only to get food into Syria but also to provide \$700 million to date to support WFP's food voucher program for Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. The electronic food vouchers can be used in local shops throughout the countries, providing a boost for host countries as WFP's program has injected over \$1.2 billion into their local economies. Having familiar and nutritious food on the table provides a basic, but profound comfort for families under duress.

Recently, WFP has experienced funding shortfalls, which led to a reassessment of those most in need and cuts in the voucher program and to the food baskets inside Syria. In July, USAID provided WFP an additional \$65 million to prevent even more severe cuts. We are pleased to see that since then, other donors have stepped in, allowing WFP to reinstate some recipients and increase voucher amounts. Ongoing commitment by donors to this program will be critical not only because winter is coming, but because without the food vouchers, assessments show many refugees are unable to feed their families, especially given their limited income options.

Oversight of these efforts is critically important and USAID has a robust monitoring system. For example, we use third-party monitoring and GPS technology to track the transportation and arrival of packages of our relief aid inside Syria. Leveraging the widespread use of cell phones in Syria, we also provide call-in numbers where people on the ground can let us know when a package arrives. In the region, oversight of the food voucher program has expanded to include monitoring the usage of vouchers through the participating banks' electronic systems, regular in-person visits to supermarkets taking part in the program, and periodic re-verification of beneficiaries through biometrics to ensure that they are still in need of food assistance.

### **Securing a Lifeline for Moderate Civilians Actors Inside Syria**

Even in these darkest of times, there are brave Syrians trying to keep the lights on inside Syria. Separate from our humanitarian assistance, the United States remains committed to supporting provincial and local councils and civil society groups who fearlessly provide essential services to the Syrian people. These efforts allow those who choose to stay in Syria, or are unable to leave, the opportunity to live as normal a life as possible given the larger circumstances. And by showing the Syrian people that they can deliver services based on constituent needs, such councils also keep extremists at bay who would otherwise fill the governance void.

USAID has assisted these groups by providing them critical equipment for emergency responses that have saved tens of thousands of lives. Additionally, USAID has provided substantial assistance to civilian organizations, including through the Syria Recovery Trust Fund (SRTF), a multi-donor mechanism that channels funds in a transparent and accountable manner into priority projects inside Syria. With this support, local authorities have improved health services, restored electricity, repaired irrigation and potable water systems, enhanced waste management, and repaired roads, reaching two million Syrians in moderate opposition areas. They have also kept

schools running, and reinstated school meal programs. These efforts are keeping essential services running in Syria, and increasing the visibility of moderate opposition bodies as legitimate representatives of their communities.

## **Supporting Women and Children**

Without a doubt, women and children have been profoundly impacted by the crisis. Eighty five percent of those killed inside Syria have been men, leaving behind women heads of households. Layered atop the Assad regime's unyielding bombing campaign, extremist groups have tortured, trafficked, and forcibly recruited young Syrian girls and boys.

Families face painful ultimatums. If you stay inside Syria, your child could be bombed, shot, kidnapped, or forced to join an armed group while on the way to get bread. If you leave, you risk their safety on a perilous journey across borders. These are choices no family should have to face, but they are daily realities for Syrian families.

That is why our attention and resources must be directed at helping Syrian families cope with the stresses they face and the trauma with which they are dealing, especially women and children. As part of our commitments to *Safe from the Start*, the U.S. government campaign to protect women and girls in humanitarian emergencies, we have directed resources toward ensuring maximum safety for Syrian women trapped in the conflict. All partners are required to take women's needs into account in their relief efforts, including by ensuring that relief kits include sanitary items and that toilets and showers can be accessed safely. With our support, mobile clinics have increased access to reproductive health services and clinical care for survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV) inside Syria. We trained 640 health workers to respond to GBV cases in a way that does not stigmatize or endanger survivors. One partner in Jordan ran a successful campaign to educate refugee women and their families about the dangers of early teen marriage. These efforts are one piece of an effort to help women regain the autonomy to determine their own future.

We are also assisting Syrian women by helping them acquire the tools needed to build a more peaceful future for their families and their communities. We have trained more than 500 Syrian women in advocacy and conflict negotiation. These women lead and regularly convene Peace Circles in all 14 governorates that have been critical in negotiating the release of political prisoners and humanitarian access.

With two million Syrian children out of school, we are working to ensure an entire generation is not lost to this crisis. This is critical in a region that can ill afford to lose youth to despair. A future Middle East needs young people who can drive forward peace and opportunity, not spirals of retribution. As World Vision described in its testimony recently, we support safe spaces, where kids can be kids again, and engage in creative play therapy to shed their trauma.

We are helping neighboring countries to provide learning environments where Syrian refugee children can thrive alongside their host community peers. In Jordan and Lebanon, USAID is renovating and expanding more than 450 schools, and supporting remedial programs so that refugee students can make up years of lost schooling. We are training 4,000 teachers in Jordan so that they can counsel children who, at best may struggle to fit in, and at worst may grapple with the trauma of violence and abuse.

There are always educators committed to their craft who take seriously their responsibility to inspire and shape a new generation. Maha Al Ashqar, the principal of the Khawla Bint Tha'laba Primary Girls School in Jordan, is one of those educators. When a Syrian refugee mother showed up at the school gates, desperate to enroll her daughter, she was told the school year had started months prior and classes were full. The determined mother asked to speak to the principal. Ms. Al Ashqar's response was simple: "Yes your daughter can come. I just ask that you bring a chair because we do not have any left." Time and again, Ms. Al Ashqar had seen the tears of refugee mothers begging to enroll their children. She could not turn them away, so she simply asked them to bring chairs. The school has even recruited mothers as teaching aides to keep up with the larger class sizes. By supporting educators and refugee families determined to get ahead, we can make sure Syrian children are not lost to this conflict.

### **Building Resilience in the Region**

Certainly, addressing refugee flows into Europe is a critical challenge as the global community grapples with the myriad regional and global impacts of the Syrian crisis. However, the Middle East remains the largest refugee-hosting (and refugee-producing) region in the world, with important consequences for the region's development in the years ahead. As CARE noted a few weeks ago, ninety-six percent of the four million refugees that have fled Syria's borders seek refuge in neighboring countries. Most people prefer and can only afford to stay in the region close to their home.

The influx of Syrian refugees into Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and other neighbors has radically reshaped the demographics of a region with an already delicate ethnic and religious balance and scarce resources. Turkish, Jordanian, and Lebanese towns along the Syrian border have doubled or tripled in size. The total number of refugees from Syria is equivalent to at least one fourth of the Lebanese population. Turkey hosts more refugees than any other country in the world, and Lebanon has the highest per capita number of refugees in the world. Most refugees live in urban areas not camps, putting a strain on local water, health, economic, and educational systems that normally sustained smaller populations.

Today, more than ever Syrian refugees are struggling to get by, a challenge compounded by limited employment options. When a USAID team visited refugees in the Marka neighborhood on the outskirts of Amman, Jordan just two weeks ago, they found a community bound by common loss, and eager to get ahead. "Our dreams are very simple," said Mohamad, one refugee

they met with who had lost four sons, “To have a decent living so that we can be self-sufficient and not put out a hand to beg. We want people to look at us as humans, because we are just like them.” Mohamad’s neighbor, Abu Rajad, added, “I just want to feed my kids, and keep them in school.” Working with our partners in the region to expand opportunity for refugees will be critical over the long term.

We are also trying to address basic needs for refugees, as well as host communities. In addition to our support for schools, we are building more resilient health and water systems in the region. In Jordan—one of the world’s most water-scarce countries—we support systems to collect rainwater in schools and homes through the Complex Crisis Fund, and in Lebanon we have improved access to water for half a million people. USAID has expanded access to care at more than 30 medical facilities across Jordan. In Lebanon, our Office of Transition Initiatives is working with young people, to decrease tensions between host communities and refugees, and reduce the appeal of violent extremism.

### **Meeting the Challenges Ahead**

We need renewed attention and focus on the Syrian conflict to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people, and to find a negotiated political solution that can end this nightmare. Only a political solution can stop this crisis, but in the meantime we will work to save lives. The UN and other partners continue to face challenges reaching the many Syrians in need, especially as conflict lines shift daily. The stubborn challenge of access continues to prevent the international community from consistently reaching all those who desperately need our help, including almost 4.5 million people in hard to reach areas inside Syria. Even in war there are rules, and deliberately blockading innocent civilians and preventing impartial and neutral humanitarian organizations from reaching people with humanitarian aid is unconscionable. Unfettered access has long been denied to those who seek to help the millions of people in need, and this access must be granted immediately. More help is urgently needed, and time is not on our side as humanitarian needs continue to escalate. The Russian campaign in Syria is driving new displacement; we are hearing reports that more Syrians may flee due to increased aerial bombardment. It is critical that we work with partner governments to expand access across Syria and ensure all actors in the conflict respect international humanitarian law.

We are also struggling to provide the most basic assistance—such as food and relief supplies—to millions inside Syria and the region. We are grateful for the strong Congressional support for our response, and we work every day to meet the humanitarian needs in Syria. The IDA account has been critical to our response, providing much-needed flexibility to meet emergency relief and food needs. The UN humanitarian appeal for the Syria crisis is only funded at 45 percent. We applaud the generosity of other donors, and host countries, but we must continue to work with our partners to mobilize a concerted effort to address the humanitarian needs, both for those inside Syria as well as refugees in the region. Additional and new commitments from our

partners in the Gulf region, Europe, and elsewhere are critical, as we most certainly cannot meet these needs on our own.

We know that conflict and state fragility are at the heart of our humanitarian dilemma. Now more than ever we must focus our development efforts to address the root drivers of complex crises like Syria, so that we can abate the further escalation of humanitarian need globally. Through accounts like the Complex Crisis Fund and Transition Initiatives Fund, we are laying the groundwork for Syrians inside Syria and the region to build a more peaceful and democratic future. We also know that we must work with our partners in the region to bridge our relief and development efforts, and seek investments that build resilience so that refugees and host communities can thrive in peace.

### **Conclusion**

As part of our mission to end extreme poverty and promote resilient, democratic societies, USAID remains committed to saving lives inside Syria and the region, and laying the groundwork for a future peace. Forging strong partnerships will be crucial to meet the immense needs ahead. USAID is deeply appreciative of Congressional support that makes our work possible in Syria. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to your questions.