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Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, ranking member Deutch, Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, alongside my distinguished colleague from the Department of State. The Syria conflict is one of the largest and most complex humanitarian emergencies of our time, driving record levels of displacement. Nearly 11.3 million people are displaced within Syria or have fled to neighboring countries as refugees — that's more than the population of New York City and Chicago combined.

For more than seven years, the regime of Bashar al-Assad has waged an unrelenting campaign of violence against its own people, even using chemical weapons, which the U.S. has strongly condemned. In 2014, the emergence of ISIS exacerbated this already protracted crisis, with the group imposing brutal tactics — including public beheadings, torture, and the taking of slaves — as punishments for minor offenses. Many innocent Syrians have been forced to flee their homes with little more than the clothes on their backs. Over the last seven years, many have resettled more than once, fleeing when active combat drove them to seek safety and shelter in yet another village or town.

Behind these staggering statistics is the very real toll on the innocent people of Syria who have endured these crises and gotten caught in the crossfire — the women and girls who endure rape and violence, the more than 2 million children who are out of school, representing a lost generation of talent, innovation, and entrepreneurship, and the thousands of families who have been torn apart by death or separated across borders. Years of ongoing violence have ripped apart places that should be safe: schools, hospitals, playgrounds, parks, and even people's own homes.

Yet through it all, we remain committed to the Syrian people, working with partners who are fearlessly crossing conflict lines at great personal risk to help those caught in the crossfire, delivering emergency food, water, shelter, and relief supplies, as well as providing lifesaving medical care.

U.S. Humanitarian Response

The United States has been working to help Syrians and the communities that host them since the crisis began. As the leading donor of humanitarian assistance for the Syria response, the United States has provided more than \$9 billion in aid throughout Syria and the region, half of which is through USAID. USAID assistance is reaching 5 million Syrians every month, including 4

million people across all 14 governorates inside Syria and 1 million refugees in neighboring countries.

Since 2012, USAID has had a team located in the Middle East, leading and coordinating the U.S. government's humanitarian efforts for Syria. Currently, a 20-person USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team — or DART — is on the ground in Syria, Turkey, Jordan, and Kuwait, working with our brave partners to find creative ways to navigate war zones and fluid front lines in order to reach the millions of people who would otherwise be cut off from receiving aid. Whether backpacks, small trucks, air drops from planes, even donkeys, our DART coordinates with our interagency colleagues at State and DoD, as well as with our implementing partners who will use whatever means necessary to get the job done. With 13 million people in need of humanitarian aid, failure is not an option.

Food Assistance

The ongoing seven-year war has crippled the Syrian economy, destroyed local infrastructure and damaged the agricultural sector. As a result approximately 11 million Syrians are not able to meet their basic food needs. The United States remains the single largest donor of emergency food assistance for the Syria crisis. Staying flexible is a central part of our approach.

USAID food assistance includes rations, such as bulgur wheat, beans, lentil, pasta, and rice, as well as ready-to-eat emergency rations to help people on the move who don't have access to cooking areas or equipment. It includes programs like electronic food vouchers which enable refugees to buy food in local markets. This allows us to address food needs of Syrian refugees and invest in the local economy of neighboring countries.

USAID food assistance is also helping families become more self-sufficient and food secure by teaching them how to grow and sustain their own gardens and providing vital training in modern cultivation methods and rainwater harvesting.

Our assistance is making a difference and, where possible, helping families become more self-sufficient. In Al Hasakah in northeast Syria, nearly half the population depends on agriculture as a source of income. But the war has devastated this industry, and food prices have skyrocketed, with families spending an astonishing 80 percent of their income on food. Parents like Fatima and her husband, who both had jobs, had to skip meals to ensure their five children had enough to eat. Now, thanks to the training she received from a USAID partner, Fatima is growing her own nutritious food for her family at home, and growing enough to share the bounty with her neighbors.

Medical Care

Since the conflict started, nearly 75 percent of Syria's medical doctors have left the country, leaving a profound health care gap. According to the latest humanitarian reports, 50 percent of Syria's public hospitals and more than 50 percent of the country's primary health care centers are either partially functioning or closed entirely.

The UN estimates 12 million in need of health assistance from January to October of this year. That's almost equivalent to the total number of Syrians displaced by this crisis.

At great risk to their own safety, USAID partners have stepped in to help fill the void. Last year alone, our partners responded to the health needs of nearly 5 million people inside Syria. This included everything from training medical workers, delivering direct health care services, providing much-needed supplies, and support for vaccination campaigns.

Over the past seven years, the doctors, nurses, and healthcare professionals of our partner organizations have worked amidst daily bombings, threats of kidnapping, and chemical weapons attacks to keep health care services operational in northern Syria. Their heroic efforts and courage have saved countless lives.

Protection

Women and children often fare the worst in war, and the crisis in Syria is no exception. Civilians have been deliberately targeted and killed; women have been raped; and children have been forcibly recruited to be soldiers.

One of the protection advisors on our DART heard stories of these atrocities first-hand when she visited displacement camps in northeast Syria and held focus groups with women and teenage girls earlier this year. At one camp, she heard about an 8-year-old who was married to an ISIS fighter because she was deemed "acceptable" in their eyes. At another camp, a teenage girl told her that she used to dream of being an engineer. Now, she assumes she'll either be forced to get married or have to go fight.

USAID works with our partners in Syria to provide programs that ensure maximum safety and dignity for women and children. We support women's health centers, mobile clinics and specialized medical staff training to provide care for survivors of gender-based violence. In addition, our partners implement simple measures, like setting up gender-separated latrines and showers in camps for the internally displaced, which can prove life-changing for people who face the risk of violence and abuse.

Assistance to Syrian Returnees

This past May, the United States, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, and local partners — including the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) — launched operations to liberate the final ISIS

strongholds in Syria. As ISIS has been driven out of areas of northeast Syria, people have started returning home. Last October, SDF recaptured Ar Raqqa, the city that for four years served as the de facto capital of ISIS' self-declared caliphate. As of October 31, nearly 153,000 people have returned home to Ar Raqqa City.

The United States is providing assistance to Syrian returnees, prioritizing life-saving humanitarian aid, landmine clearance, and rubble removal. In Ar Raqqa city, 80 percent of all buildings were damaged or destroyed and more than half of the city's water system requires rehabilitation. Here, USAID-supported NGOs are providing safe drinking water and food, distributing shelter and other relief commodities, conducting mine risk education, and providing primary and trauma health care services.

I saw the impact of our assistance first-hand in January, when I traveled to Ar Raqqa with Administrator Green. It was chilling to drive around Naem Circle; the infamous traffic circle broadcast worldwide in the days following the city's liberation. This circle became a focal point for the Syrian Democratic forces' victory celebration. However, as we drove around the circle, I could not help but think that just three months before, this was a site of torture and death. The spikes on the fence surrounding the fountain where people were celebrating had been used to display the heads of ISIS victims.

The Syrian people are exceptionally resilient. When I flew into Ar Raqqa, I saw green fields emerging in the vast desert. Syrians are once again growing food to sell in markets that used to be under ISIS control. Around Naem Circle, stores are popping up. People are moving home, opening businesses, and going back to school, although much work remains.

This is all being done with the generous support of the U.S. government on behalf of the American people. This is what we, as humanitarians do; we help shine light into the darkest places on earth.

Challenges

Despite our best efforts, the single-greatest factor limiting the reach of our humanitarian assistance is the lack of access to people in need. The Syrian regime regained control of southwestern Syria in late July following a military offensive against opposition groups, after which Assad's forces stopped cross-border humanitarian operations from Jordan — a major blow to our response efforts and the hundreds of thousands of Syrians who still need assistance in the area. However, the ability of our partners to remain flexible and find alternative ways to deliver assistance has been key to this response. We are now working with our partners to provide aid — including food, water, and health supplies — on convoys from the capital city of Damascus.

Some of our partners are exploring other options to continue to provide humanitarian assistance in southern Syria, including trying to find ways to work under the Assad regime. NGOs are now required to register with the Syrian Arab Republic Government in order to operate in areas controlled by the regime. This has resulted in fees, delays, permit denials, and other bureaucratic impediments that have limited the aid these groups can deliver. Some of our partners have been forced to suspend or partially suspend their activities in Dar'a because of the absence of approvals from Damascus.

In addition, our partners continue to face security challenges that make our life-saving operations more dangerous. Violence against aid workers and looting of relief supplies are regular occurrences in Syria. From January to June 2018, 55 aid workers were killed in Syria, representing the highest number of aid workers killed during the first half of the year in any country experiencing protracted conflict, according to the USAID-funded Danger in Aid project. Our stance on this issue remains firm: All parties must allow for unfettered humanitarian access throughout the country. Humanitarians work tirelessly at great personal risk to deliver aid, but they need full and unhindered access to save lives.

Conclusion

As we look ahead, it is clear that many challenges remain. The Assad regime is gearing up for a large-scale offensive in northwest Syria, an area already facing significant humanitarian needs due to years of conflict, as well as the large number of displaced people who already live there. The city of Idlib currently hosts the highest concentration of displaced people inside Syria-- with thousands of people arriving just in the last couple months from eastern Ghouta and southwest Syria — further taxing the area's ability to support them. This upcoming offensive has the potential to create a humanitarian emergency at a scale not yet seen during this seven-year civil war, possibly creating temporary displacement for up to 900,000 people. In addition to this mass displacement, the UN and other humanitarian groups are bracing for intense bombing and shelling, resulting in civilian deaths, as well as the destruction of schools and hospitals. Our partners are looking to pre-position relief supplies where possible, and our DART is already looking to identify areas of greatest need.

An additional challenge in Syria, particularly the northwest, is the ability of aid groups to reach people living in territory controlled by terrorist organizations. Because the Syria crisis is subject to elevated risks of aid diversion to U.S.-sanctioned terrorist groups, USAID has put risk mitigation programs in place — including the hiring of dedicated risk mitigation staff — to reduce the possibility of fraud, waste, and abuse, and the diversion of benefits. Do not be mistaken: USAID places the highest priority on ensuring that taxpayer funds are used wisely, effectively and for their intended purpose. But without aid from the United States and the international community, Syrians in desperate need of basics aid — food, water, and shelter — do not have a good chance of survival. So USAID works with our partners to put in place checks

and safeguards that will allow assistance to keep flowing to the people who need it, without being diverted.

Looking ahead, we will continue grapple with dynamic population shifts — and the humanitarian needs they cause — as more Syrians look to return home. Between January and October of this year, approximately 1.5 million internally displaced people moved throughout Syria, according to the UN. Border closures and restrictions on the shipment of supplies will constrain our partners' ability to reach people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

Many families who return home will face obstacles to rebuild their lives and livelihoods, including lack of housing, infrastructure, and a way to make a living. Working closely with other international donors, we will continue to provide lifesaving aid to Syrian returnees while working with Coalition partners to support longer-term initiatives, such as repairing basic infrastructure, reopening schools and medical facilities, and supporting rubble and mine removal. These efforts will help stabilize communities and enable Syrians to voluntarily and safely return to their homes.

Humanitarian assistance alone cannot provide a solution to this conflict, but it is saving lives and helping to alleviate the suffering of everyday people throughout the region. As the leading donor of humanitarian assistance for this crisis, the United States remains committed to a strong humanitarian response--coordinating closely with other international donors--to support the Syrian people and Syria's neighbors. Thank you for your time and I look forward to answering your questions.