



March 15, 2017

Six Years of War in Syria: The Human Toll

Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Fifteenth Congress, First Session

HEARING CONTENTS:

Witnesses

Dr. Farida
Syrian Doctor
Syrian American Medical Society
[View Testimony](#)

Dr. Abdulkhalek
Syrian Doctor
Syrian American Medical Society
[View Testimony](#)

Dr. Mohamed Abu Rajab
Syrian Doctor
Syrian American Medical Society
[View Testimony](#)

Neal Keny-Guyer
Chief Executive Officer
Mercy Corps
[View Testimony](#)

David Miliband
President and Chief Executive Officer
International Rescue Committee
[View Testimony](#)

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Dr. Farida Opening Statement

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

March 15, 2017

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, distinguished members of the committee: thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am here today not only as a doctor, but as a wife, a mother, and a Syrian. Throughout the past six years, I have witnessed unspeakable horrors. I worked as an obstetrician in M2 hospital in Aleppo, which was in the opposition-held area of the city. There, together with my fellow health workers, I risked my life every day to save the lives of others. I refused to leave until the very last minute. I was one of the many victims of chemical attacks, siege, cluster munitions, bunker buster bombs, and finally, forced displacement.

I left Aleppo on December 12, 2016, along with my husband, Dr. Abdulkhalek, and our 8-year old daughter. In the months leading up to our displacement, I can only describe the events as hell. Bodies parts scattered on the streets; blood everywhere; constant bombardment by air attacks; buildings reduced to rubble. In my hospital, M2, my team and I treated many women with severe injuries. One woman came with shrapnel which penetrated her womb, cutting the 5-month-old fetus into two pieces. It took three doctors at once to stabilize the patient. We saved her life, but her unborn baby lay dead on a nearby table, split in two from the waist down. Many other women died because they couldn't make it to the hospital due to the lack of ambulances and fuel, or because of the dangerous conditions on the roads. Instead, they bled to death in their homes, along with their newborn children. The women who were fortunate enough to make it to the hospital often couldn't wait to leave.

A hospital was the most dangerous place in Aleppo. My unit in M2 hospital was on the third floor, so we were subjected to a daily barrage of rockets, barrel bombs, and cluster munitions. One day I was performing a cesarean section when a missile struck the fourth floor, causing the ceiling to partially collapse. The surgical staff

had to flee the room, but the doctor's couldn't because we were forced to clean debris out of the patient's abdominal cavity. Thankfully we were able to save her life.

After my hospital, M2, was partially destroyed by airstrikes, we tried to build a new hospital underground, but the seige prevented the materials from entering the city. I then moved to M3 hospital, where I worked until it was targeted by both airstrikes and chemical weapons. From there I moved to Al Quds hospital, which was the last remaining hospital in the city. Through all of this, I had my daughter at my side. As a mother, how am I supposed to explain all of this to an 8-year-old who has known nothing but violence, killing, and destruction? How am I supposed to protect her? I remember one day back in July when there was a chlorine attack near the hospital. She came running into the operating room, crying and unable to breath. I left the patient, gave her oxygen, and held her close. What else could I have done? This broke my heart. That feeling of powerless to protect my child had shaken me to this day.

On December 11, 2016 I was working at M3 hospital when a patient in labor arrived. The few remaining staff were making preparations to deliver her baby when a chlorine bomb hit the hospital. We were unable to deliver the baby there, so I made the decision to travel by ambulance across the city to Al-Quds hospital, the last hospital still in operation. This was the only way to save her life and the life of the baby. I said goodbye to my husband and daughter. When I left, I thought to myself that it would be the last time I would see them. The drive to Al-Quds was extremely dangerous, and the scene we encountered in the streets was pure carnage. Bodies everywhere; burning cars; collapsed buildings. Those images will never escape my head. Thankfully, we made it to the hospital and were able to deliver the baby. But I couldn't leave my family; I needed to go back to them. So the ambulance driver and I embarked on the treacherous drive back to M3, taking heavy fire from helicopters overhead. Thankfully we arrived unharmed. The next day, the doctor was shot while attempting to drive to the hospital to check in on my health.

I wish I could say that these atrocities and the plight of so many Syrian families was unique to Aleppo. Sadly, this is not the case. They are happening right now in other parts of Syria. Presently, more than 600,000 Syrians live under siege. This must end. Humanitarian access must be granted to these areas, and the international community must work together to end this practice once and for all. In Idlib, East Ghouta, Dara'a, Hama, and Homs, airstrikes have intensified, and humanitarian aid has been nearly nonexistent. Three hospitals have been targeted by airstrikes in the past two weeks, and one of SAMS nurses was killed by an airstrike last week. It is our duty as human beings to advocate to all involved parties on the ground to allow humanitarian access, and to finally hold those who violate international humanitarian law accountable.

Later this month, my family and I will return to Syria to continue our work at a hospital in Northern Syria. The reason is simple: it is our duty. As doctors, we have taken an oath to treat any and all patients, regardless of their affiliation. We have a moral obligation to try and save as many lives as possible, even if that means sacrificing our own. The Quran teaches us that: "to save one life is to save all of humanity." Work with us to save lives. If you want to do anything, do it now. There is no time to wait, as Syrians continue to die day after day. Thank you.

Dr. Abdulkhalek Opening Statement

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

March 15, 2017

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, members of the committee: my name is Dr. Abdulkhalek. I'm an ophthalmologist from Aleppo, and was the director of M3 hospital, one of three hospitals the Syrian American Medical Society supported in besieged eastern Aleppo. This hospital was built in 2014, and constructed underground to protect the patients and staff from airstrikes. M3 was a small hospital, so we were often overwhelmed by the large number of patients and wounded arriving at our facility. We did our best to save as many lives as we could, but we were forced to make very difficult decisions. With the overwhelming number of wounded civilians and the limited resources that were available to us, we had to face the unimaginable task of deciding who to save, and who to leave to die. Can you imagine having to make this decision? Yet my colleagues all over the city and I faced this every single day. We asked for help from the international community many times. We communicated with UN agencies; we risked our safety and that of our families by appearing on international media. We did everything we could, yet help never arrived.

The UN system is clearly broken, as it has no means to enforce its mandates and hold perpetrators accountable for these crimes. I was one of three doctors from Aleppo assigned to negotiate a plan for medical evacuations with the UN and World Health Organization. At first, these negotiations were moving well, with the cooperation of many parties, including Russia. However, as the regime and its allies began to take more territory, the cooperation disappeared and the evacuations never occurred. Instead, the attacks on medical facilities, schools, and markets escalated.

With the destruction of the largest trauma hospital, known as M10, in the eastern part of Aleppo by early December, our small M3 hospital became one of two functioning hospitals in the city, providing care to more than 200,000 civilians,

including 85,000 children. Equipped with only one OR we had to expand to three ORs, but that was not enough. We had to use the floor of our operating rooms to accommodate two surgeries in each of them at the same time. Doctors were performing major surgeries on the floor, sometimes without anesthesia.

Last year, on December 11, as we were trying to save lives and care for victims of barrel bombing attacks, the hospital was attacked by a chlorine bomb. We immediately ran into the inner room, closed the door, and covered our faces. We then heard a knock on the main door, and encountered three men who were suffocating from the gas. We brought them whatever medicine we still had available. Thankfully, we were able to save their lives, but many others who were outside died from the gas. After this attack, many hospital staff had to leave, fearing for their lives. Everyone was afraid that a second bomb would strike again. The next day, another chlorine attack on the hospital. Most of the victims were children, and we only had one unit of oxygen. The medical staff worked tirelessly to try and pass the mask from one child to another, so that they wouldn't suffocate. These chlorine attacks occurred after repeated attempts by the regime and its allies to destroy the hospital using barrel bombs and cluster munitions had failed. Instead, they resorted to chemical attacks to drive us out.

I am asking you today to hold the perpetrators of these attacks accountable. Whether it be ISIS, the Syrian government, or any other actors, it must be made clear that attacks on healthcare and the use of chemical weapons on civilians and healthcare workers are unacceptable, and that international humanitarian law must be strictly enforced. This can't be the new norm in Syria.

I am also asking the US government to use its influence to help improve the UN aid delivery system. Currently, the aid is not reaching the people most in need, particularly in non-government areas. Instead, the aid system is being used to enrich government officials, as well as to punish civilians in non-government areas by denying them delivery of aid or removing essential items such as medications or baby formula. In Aleppo, aid for the city was disproportionately given to the western portion of the city. It even got to the point where residents of western

Aleppo would sell their excess rations to residents of eastern Aleppo, for extremely high prices. This is unacceptable. The UN aid delivery system must be fair and equal, and meet the needs of all the beneficiaries.

In Homs, the three-year siege has blocked the delivery of medical supplies, such as blood bags, serum bags, and antibiotics. In the past six months, the siege has extended to create a complete lack of movement for all materials and medications. The situation today is dire, as people now lack basic food elements, including bread and meat. There are many reported cases of malnutrition, particularly among children. Yet the world does nothing. In East Ghouta, which is also under siege by the regime, there were more than 30 patients in desperate need of kidney dialysis medication earlier this month, after their medication had run out due to lack of aid deliveries. We pleaded with the UN and other international actors to deliver the life-saving medication, but it wasn't until after three patients died that the medications were delivered. And even then, it was a SARC convoy, not a UN convoy, that entered the area.

Constant violations of international humanitarian law, regular use of chemical weapons against civilians, besiegement of civilian areas, manipulation of humanitarian aid, and forced displacement are facts, not claims. I myself witnessed or was a victim of every one of these heinous acts. I am here today to ask the American government for help. Do not let these acts continue. Do not let more innocent civilians suffer. Do not forget the human toll of this war- the refugees, the education gap, the destruction of the health care system. An entire generation has been lost. The world failed Aleppo. Now is your chance to help protect and save the millions of Syrians still caught in the middle of this conflict. Enforce international law; hold perpetrators of war crimes accountable; reform the UN aid system; make the protection of civilians and hospitals a priority. I ask you to be a voice for us. Don't fail us again.

Dr. Abu Rajab Opening Statement

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

March 15, 2017

Good morning. My name is Mohamed Abu Rajab. I was the director of M10 hospital in Aleppo, the largest trauma hospital in the eastern part of the city. The hospital was established by the Syrian American Medical Society, SAMS, in February of 2013. It had four operating rooms, which made it the largest surgical center in eastern Aleppo. Because of the many attacks on the the hospital, SAMS moved it to an underground, fortified structure to protect its patients and medical workers in 2014. In March of 2015 we added a CAT scanner, the only one in eastern Aleppo.

From the opening of the hospital in 2013 until it was bombed out of service on October 14, 2016, M10 was hit by airstrikes 22 times. In October 2016, the hospital was targeted five times in one week, removing it from service. I myself was injured by shrapnel in one of the attacks. Some of the shrapnel remains in my body to this day. Yet I was one of the lucky ones- I survived; many others did not. Do you remember the young boy, Omran, whose photo became a symbol of the plight of the children of Aleppo? We treated him at M10. Thankfully, he survived his injuries. Sadly, his brother, Ali who was 11, died from his injuries a week later. Most of our patients at M10 were children. So much death and suffering- and for what? The people of Syria simply want to live in peace and to be free.

We built the hospital underground in order to protect the doctors and patients from the airstrikes. However, the use of bunker busters made this ineffective. It wasn't until the entrance of Russia into the conflict that we started to see these advanced weapons: bunker buster bombs, parachute bombs, and more. We moved from one hospital to another, as each was targeted and taken out of service. We struggled to eat, to sleep, and to protect our families. We were convinced that we were going to die. We lost many of our friends, colleagues, and family members.

When the final evacuations began, we were scared of what would happen to us. The Iranian militias were looting houses and killing anyone who resisted. We went to a checkpoint and boarded the infamous green buses. Many people were locked in the buses for up to 20 hours without food, water, or bathrooms. Some of the militias forced people to remove all their clothes and wait in the buses in nothing more than their underwear. We ultimately made our way north to Idlib. We would have been arrested if we had entered a government-controlled area. This kind of forced displacement cannot be allowed to continue. I love Aleppo. It is my home. It is a part of me. I dream of one day returning to my home with my family and living in peace. But I need your help. I call on you to protect hospitals and health workers. This is a simple request. In addition, we must allow civilians to remain in their homes, and not be forced to evacuate. When you live in freedom, you must help others to be free. Who among us does not like peace? The United States government must be a voice for the innocent people of Syria, and must be a moral compass for the parties involved. Thank you.

Neal Keny-Guyer
Chief Executive Officer, Mercy Corps
Hearing on “Six Years of War in Syria: The Human Cost.”
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
March 15, 2017

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin:

Thank you for inviting me to testify before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee today about “Six Years of War in Syria: The Human Cost.”

I am here in my capacity as Chief Executive Officer of the global organization Mercy Corps. In more than 40 countries around the world, we meet the urgent needs of today through emergency humanitarian assistance and disaster risk reduction, and help build stronger tomorrows by connecting people to the resources they need to strengthen their communities from within. Last year alone, we reached about 30 million people around the world.

Mercy Corps’ global headquarters are in Portland, Oregon, and I would like to thank Senator Merkley for his outstanding and devoted support of our agency and our mission.

Mercy Corps has been working in the Middle East and North Africa for more than three decades. For almost the entire duration of the conflict in Syria, we have conducted one of the largest humanitarian operations to help innocent Syrians trapped in the crossfire. We have worked through Syrian employees and partner organizations who have risked everything, even their own lives, to bring relief to civilians in their war-torn country. I talk to our teams there daily and visit the region often. We stand alongside the people inside Syria and support Syrians who are trying to rebuild their lives in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Greece, in addition to the communities hosting them.

While the situation on the ground has changed over the last year, the unacceptable levels of suffering of the Syrian people have remained constant. I would like to express my great appreciation and sincere respect for Drs. Farida, Abdulkhalek, Rajab, and their colleagues, as well as the White Helmets, all of whom have risked their lives and sacrificed greatly for the Syrian people.

On behalf of my team and the hundreds of thousands of Syrians we’ve served over the last five years, I would like to express our deep appreciation for your attention to the intense suffering and human toll of this horrific war. Through the generous support of Congress, through robust funding of the International Affairs budget, the United States is helping save the lives of millions of the world’s most vulnerable people. Your continued attention is also essential to keeping this war in the headlines in this country, and making sure that finding a political solution to resolving this conflict is the top priority of American diplomats.

Report on Mercy Corps’ Turkey Operations

I would like to begin by updating you on Mercy Corps’ situation in Turkey, from where we have delivered lifesaving aid to Syrians, with the permission and cooperation of the Turkish government, for the past five years. As you may be aware, just a few weeks ago, the Turkish government suddenly revoked Mercy Corps’ registration allowing us to operate in Turkey. This action disrupts lifesaving assistance to 360,000 Syrians every month inside Syria and effectively ends our support to 100,000 Syrian refugees and Turkish children, women and men in Turkey.

To date, our situation is not resolved, and we continue to seek a dialogue with Turkish officials so that we may resume our operations as soon as possible. In the meantime, we are shutting down our presence in Turkey while working closely with our partners and donors, including USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and the State Department's Bureau for Population, Refugee and Migration- both of which have been extremely helpful-, to quickly fill any gaps in our assistance to Syrians in Syria and to identify solutions for refugee services in Turkey.

As you can imagine, this is a tough time for our team. I just received a note from one of our team members who has worked on the border for four years helping deliver almost 1 million food kits in Syria. He said: *"We are sure that these problems will end soon just we ask you not to give up, please don't say we have done our best and it didn't work. We are sure that you will get that registration. We are proud of this work, we are proud of Mercy Corps, we have not done anything wrong, and this is why we all have a clear conscious [sic]."*

Principled Humanitarianism in Peril

The revocation of our Turkish registration is a deeply disturbing turn of events.

Turkey has been a generous global leader in humanitarian action. A country of almost 80 million people, it has welcomed more than 3 million Syrian refugees and boasts one of the world's most progressive policies on refugees, allowing them to earn a living for their families and offering them a clear path to citizenship. Like the United States, Turkey is a signatory to international humanitarian laws and the U.N. refugee convention, requiring it to protect civilians caught in or fleeing conflict. It is an important ally of the United States and NATO and an essential partner in the fight against ISIS.

We have not been given any official justification by Turkey for the closure of our program. And we are worried by the many news reports that other international aid groups may also soon be ordered to cease working in Turkey.

It is important you know that as an independent and impartial humanitarian organization, Mercy Corps' mandate is to deliver essential aid to civilians in need in Syria on all sides of the conflict. If we were to appear to take sides, our credibility and our ability to reach the people in greatest need, as well as the safety of our staff, would be in grave jeopardy. We have lost count of the occasions when our staff had to cross as many as a dozen armed checkpoints and multiple lines of control when driving just 20 miles to deliver food. We were only able to do this because we had proven to all parties to the conflict that our assistance was going to vulnerable families – widows, children, elderly citizens and others enduring the direst of circumstances.

Our situation raises the very real specter that principled humanitarianism is imperiled. I fear that it might no longer be just irregular militias or non-state actors blocking urgent assistance, but also members of the community of nations, even those most concerned about the well-being of the Syrian people. In 2014, despite UN Security Council resolutions requiring access to humanitarian aid be granted for all Syrians, we were forced out of working in Damascus because we stuck by our humanitarian principals and refused to stop providing humanitarian assistance to civilians in opposition controlled areas. The reality is Syria is a cauldron of the world's conflicting political and military agendas, and humanitarian aid, with its fundamental principles of impartiality and independence, risks becoming another casualty of this horrifying war.

Syria would not be the first time principled humanitarian aid has been threatened. For two decades, we have witnessed an alarming trend in which humanitarian assistance falls victim to political and military calculations. But the degradation of the safeguards has accelerated, and Syria has become a laboratory for how that infringement of this space can lead to devastating consequences for innocent men, women and children.

These grave challenges are not in the power of humanitarians like Mercy Corps to solve. They are political, and only member states of the United Nations can resolve them. We ask you, distinguished Senators, and the United States government to resolutely push for a lasting peace in Syria. After six years and hundreds of thousands lives lost and millions more ruined, finding a way out of this conflict must be a top priority for politicians and diplomats. Until then, we also urge you to continue America's strong financial support of the lifesaving assistance to the Syrian people and to exercise your political power to ensure that aid is provided to all innocent civilians in need, no matter who they are or where they have found safety.

A Great Human Catastrophe

The scale of the human toll of the war in Syria defies description – the dark statistics are staggering. More than 400,000 people have been killed; 13.5 million are in desperate need of food, clean water and other humanitarian assistance – half of these are children. According to the United Nations, an estimated 6.3 million Syrians have fled their homes and are trying to survive inside Syria. Every day, another 6,000 or more people are displaced and 5 million people have fled to safety in neighboring countries.

Mercy Corps continues to deliver lifesaving food, clean water and other essential supplies to about 470,000 innocent Syrian civilians each month. Our team members do this at great personal risk and with unwavering courage – we have lost five team members to this conflict and family members too. Just last week a Mercy Corps driver lost a son and a nephew to an airstrike.

In December, as the Syrian government and Russian forces pounded the city of Aleppo, we received scant reports from our remaining 19 team members in the city, who were delivering the last of our food stocks at night during the short lulls in the bombing. They were too afraid to turn on their lights, and made deliveries door-to-door carrying boxes of food in wheelbarrows. Everyone eventually made it out of the city – six of our team members were on the very the last green evacuation buses. We are so thankful they are now safe.

The toll on our team has been great and we thank the many great heroes of this conflict, like the doctors sitting next to me, for their unwavering devotion and courage under these extremely dangerous conditions.

Although the shape of the conflict has changed significantly over the past year, Syrians are still suffering enormously and in ways we cannot begin to express. Civilian protection remains the number one challenge with people caught up in the fighting, facing death every day. There have been few tangible advances by the international community to end the misery and deliver a sustainable and inclusive peace that reflects the needs and desires of the Syrian people.

These headline descriptions of the human cost of the war are, I'm sure, familiar to everyone here. I find that the scale of the crisis is so massive that it is too much to take in. So I will break it down into four

areas of focus: hotspots where the humanitarian crisis is most acute; access to food, clean water and sanitation; the impact of the war on adolescents and youth; and the effect on livelihoods.

Hotspots and Critical Issues

In central Syria, the government of Syria is using similar tactics in Eastern Ghouta as it did in Aleppo. Eastern Ghouta is facing a tightening siege designed to force the armed opposition groups and the 350,000 plus civilians to surrender and accept some sort of 'reconciliation' agreement¹. In the lead up to such an agreement, already limited humanitarian access will be further restricted, and fighting is expected to displace a large number of people. We expect people to be in desperate need of shelter, water and sanitation, in addition to food and medical supplies.

In Idleb governorate, many of the people evacuated from communities that have previously “reconciled” with the government are now caught in the middle of armed opposition groups vying for control of this area. No-one knows exactly what will happen in Idleb, but the fighting will inevitably catalyze more displacement of people and affect access for both commercial and humanitarian supplies, with severe implications for the well-being of the innocent people trapped there.

In Raqqa, various military forces are launching an offensive with the aim of pushing ISIS out of the city and surrounding areas. Current humanitarian projections expect more than 432,000 people to be in need of humanitarian assistance in Raqqa governorate, with upwards of 300,000 people potentially being displaced by the fighting.

In southern Syria, the government of Syria and opposition forces are fighting over control of the Jordan-Syria border crossing. Simultaneously, airstrikes are targeting ISIS and ISIS affiliates. Both of these developments are forcing large numbers of people to flee their homes. They urgently need shelter, food, and other basic supplies, in addition to small amounts of cash assistance so that they can buy what they need from local markets.

In short, countless innocent children, women and men across Syria continue to bear the brunt of the war.

For years now we, as humanitarians, have delivered these same reports:

- Indiscriminate attacks are killing civilians and damaging civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and schools.
- All parties to the conflict are using humanitarian assistance as a pawn, by withholding permission to reach communities under siege and leveraging humanitarian access as a bargaining chip at the negotiating table.
- Humanitarian access is denied or heavily obstructed even though unfettered access is required under international law.
- Syrian humanitarian workers, who account for almost the entirety of the humanitarian response inside Syria, are targeted and criminalized for trying to help their communities survive.

¹ In this context, “reconciliation” is the process by which the government of Syria reasserts its control over an area by negotiating an agreement that centralizes local political groups, civil society and humanitarian bodies under its authority, and forcibly evacuates individuals and armed opposition fighters who are not willing to engage with this process.

I wish to be clear: These actions are illegal. They violate the laws of armed conflict and international humanitarian law. This flagrant violation of international law by warring parties in Syria sets the world back by decades, and undermines the moral authority of the international community. We need the international community, including strong US leadership, to exert all possible leverage to ensure that civilians are protected, that humanitarian assistance is allowed without any precondition or obstruction, and that humanitarians are allowed to continue to work legally in support of their communities, with their safety guaranteed.

Food, Water and Sanitation: The Basics of Life

War tears down humanity in many different ways. As I share examples, I wish to highlight how Syrians are trying to maintain their humanity and dignity.

Food insecurity and the risk of hunger is one of the most serious issues in Syria, with an estimated 7 million people currently food insecure and a further 2 million at risk of food insecurity. A note of hope from our food security experts is that despite the real threat of food insecurity and hunger, levels of malnutrition where food aid has reached people are relatively low in comparison to malnutrition in other conflict zones. This shows that the food assistance provided by the United States and other nations – through partners like Mercy Corps – is working.

With no end to the conflict in sight, inaccessibility, besiegement and displacement will continue to cause food insecurity on a massive scale. In response to these needs, since 2012 Mercy Corps has partnered with USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and Food for Peace – funded by the International Affairs budget and specifically the International Disaster Assistance and Food for Peace Accounts. Thanks to authorities and funding Congress has provided – and which Chairman Corker has championed – Mercy Corps has been able to locally procure large quantities of wheat in Turkey to deliver into Syria.

Among many interventions, since 2013, Mercy Corps has provided flour to bakeries in order to ensure affordable bread prices for families, keep bakers in business and support a functioning local economy. At one point we were providing 19 bakeries with 50 percent of their monthly flour needs, targeting communities in greatest need. Bread is a staple of the Syrian diet, and one bakery alone – which serves 40-some villages – requires some 14 metric tons of flour per day to keep pace with the needs of their residents. Thanks to our deliveries of flour, the price of bread was kept to 65 Syrian pounds, whereas in other areas the price was more than twice as high, closer to 150 Syrian pounds. Separately, it is worth noting that by purchasing food in the region, American taxpayers achieved more impact for their dollar, and supplies were delivered quickly and at a lower cost, while stimulating local markets.

Another basic need of human life is clean water, sanitation and hygiene. Because of disrepair and destruction, water and sewage systems are only functioning at a fraction of their previous capacity, and shortages of electricity limit their operation in many places. As a result, nearly 15 million people in Syria urgently need access to water, sanitation and hygiene services.

One of the people we helped through our water and sanitation programming is Mahmoud, a father of five. The family lives in a small camp just outside of Aleppo, where they found relative safety after fleeing attacks by Syrian government forces and ISIS. When they arrived, they found that water was more expensive than they could afford. It had to be trucked in from distant areas and was inconsistent in quality. There were few latrines or washing facilities in the camp, which led to the spread of disease, the inability to wash clothing or cooking utensils, or to practice personal hygiene. As we all would be as

parents, Mahmoud was desperately concerned for the safety and health of his children, and he could not afford the water they needed to stay healthy.

In response to the needs of people like Mahmoud and his children, Mercy Corps quickly provided toilets and showers, as well as clean water to cover the needs of the camp. After our intervention, Mahmoud said he and his family are less worried about the spread of disease since they now have access to sanitation and hygiene facilities. Mercy Corps continues to work hard to help families like Mahmoud's to strengthen access to clean water and sanitation services. Although Mahmoud's family and others like them continue to face enormous challenges, interventions like ours show it is possible to make their lives a little better and a little safer.

A Generation We Can't Afford to Lose

An entire generation of Syrian children, teenagers and young people are growing up in a war zone. Nearly half the 4.8 million Syrian refugees in the region are children, and more than 8.5 million children and young people in Syria need immediate humanitarian support. Nearly one in four of these young people is a teenager. The impact of the war on them is horrific: a recent report found that 652 children were killed last year, 255 in or near a school. Children's deaths rose 20 percent and injuries rose by 25 percent in 2016. Instead of worrying about their schoolwork, they are terrified they or their families might be killed, and worry about whether they will have food to eat and clean water to drink. They are frustrated and isolated – young women in particular rarely leave their homes. Young men and women both experience a sense of powerlessness and constant humiliation.

We fear two related consequences of this situation: a lost generation of youth and social instability. Widespread deprivation and prolonged stress among Syrian youth seriously affects their well-being. Young people are suffering from mental health issues and are more likely to take part in high-risk behavior. Isolation and hopelessness, combined with experiences of violence and injustice, are also pervasive among Syrian adolescents. These make a dangerous recipe for producing violent attitudes and actions. Without positive social connections and prospects for their future, young people affected by conflict and displacement may become a destabilizing force in their communities and in the region.

But it is possible to address these issues. In collaboration with UNICEF's No Lost Generation initiative launched in 2013, Mercy Corps has been working hard to empower and address the needs of adolescents impacted by the crisis in Syria. Through years of hands-on experience, we know that the key to supporting this generation is to promote learning and psychosocial resilience, build social understanding and peace and help youth set their own goals for the future. We also know that if you fail to address the effects that years of trauma have had on young people's mental health, other efforts, such as education and vocational training, will not be as effective.

Mercy Corps has developed a model for helping young people's psychosocial needs, but these interventions need support. I urge the Committee to increase funding for programming that meets psychosocial and mental health needs of adolescents, including through fully funding humanitarian accounts and Economic Support Funds in the FY 2018 budget process.

At the Helsinki Conference in January, Humam, a young Syrian and one of our Mercy Corps team members, told the assembly: *"For me, I'm waiting for the war to stop so I can go back and rebuild Syria. I believe that we can rebuild Syria better than before. I have a lot of power that I bring from my skills. I can now speak out and lead. I want the same for other youth too."*

As Humam expressed, the young Syrians of today will build the Syria of tomorrow. They are at a crossroads in their lives – because of their age and because of the hardship they face every day. Although they are living in the darkest of hours, Mercy Corps sees immense possibility in Syrian youth. We see changemakers full of incredible strength and resilience, and capable of creating peace. They will decide today the fate of our world tomorrow, and have the ability to drive lasting change.

Helping Syrians Regain Control of Their Lives

A bright spot amid this misery is our success helping Syrians regain a measure of control over their own lives, which they tell us is their deepest desire. It is imperative that we do much better at learning from Syrians who have found positive ways to cope with this disaster and to support themselves. Right now, Mercy Corps is conducting a study to identify positive strategies that Syrians are using, so that we can support their adoption across the country.

Already we are using our deep understanding of the local context and the needs of the people we serve to undertake longer-term, sustainable programming. And we have been able to do this even in the midst of siege by working with small-business owners to build “siege-resistant businesses.” Abdulaziz, a blacksmith, was forced out of business by a siege on his community; he couldn’t continue because of shortages in the electricity and fuel he relied on, as well as increases in the price of the raw materials he needed. Thanks to a grant from one of Mercy Corps’ partners, Abdulaziz has been able to open a new grocery store, which he hopes will be less vulnerable to the impacts of siege than the blacksmith business; there is a greater demand for groceries, and the business itself is less reliant on electricity and fuel.

Across Syria, there are similar opportunities for longer-term programming. Our experience shows us that it is critical to take a holistic, multi-faceted approach to livelihoods and economic opportunities. We have to work across the individual, business and market levels. Vocational training alone is not enough. For example, providing agricultural supplies to farmers as well as small loans to start new businesses and get businesses back into operation will support market development and provide individuals the means to support themselves and their families.

Recommendations for Congress

Although the situation is bleak, there are a number of concrete steps that Congress can take now to help the people of Syria. I would like to leave the Committee with the following five key recommendations that we hope will lessen their suffering:

1. **Access:** We ask that you continue to raise the primacy of humanitarian access with all actors inside and around Syria.
2. **Funding.** Provide adequate funding for the U.S. government to lead globally and reject any cuts in the President’s FY 2018 International Affairs request. Diplomacy, development and lifesaving humanitarian aid supported through the foreign aid budget are critical to help not only the people of Syria, but also communities around the world that are suffering severely. We ask that you fight in FY 2018 for no less than \$60 billion for the International Affairs budget, which would still be only 1 percent of the federal budget. With growing needs, it is more important than ever to shore up funding for the various humanitarian and development accounts in the FY18 budget. We ask that you fight for funding in the FY 2018 appropriations bills for:
 - International Disaster Assistance (IDA), and Food for Peace (FFP) and the Migration and Refugee Account, which are critical to providing lifesaving aid; and

- Economic Support Funds, which provide development assistance to fragile states and, in the case of Syria, can lay the groundwork for community-level reconciliation and livelihoods.
3. **Continue to provide and expand authorities to allow for the appropriate response, including local and regional procurement, cash and vouchers.** We would appreciate continued support for letting our field team members, in partnership with USAID, utilize the most effective response possible to incredibly complex crises. We appreciate that the Chair has been a champion of using the most effective interventions possible in foreign aid, which in many cases are through local and regional procurement of commodities or providing cash or vouchers to vulnerable families. The use of vouchers and cash for internally displaced people and Syrian refugees has not only empowered families with the dignity to buy what they most need, but also helps to keep markets functioning, allowing for some degree of normalcy in a completely abnormal environment.
 4. **Increase support for adolescents.** Increase funding for psychosocial, livelihoods and education for adolescents and others to help them recover from years of trauma and harness their energy for building a bright future.
 5. **Diplomacy.** Humanitarians are not the solution to the Syrian crisis. I urge you to work with the Trump administration to urgently seek a political solution to the war in Syria in line with the Geneva Communique and UN Security Council Resolution 2254. Our world leaders must take decisive action and push for a lasting peace. The Syrian people have paid too high of a price for six long years. The human misery must end.

Our Call to Action

Less than a year ago, I stood with the global humanitarian community in Istanbul at the United Nations' first-ever World Humanitarian Summit. There in Turkey, world leaders from government, civil society and business stood up for our common humanity and action to prevent and reduce human suffering. Then, as now, the government and people of Turkey demonstrated their hospitality, and their indispensable role at the forefront of humanitarian action. At this historic summit, President Erdoğan stated in his closing remarks, "As the participants of this summit, we all know very well that pain knows no color, ethnicity, language or religion." We could not agree more and want to continue to support Turkey in what Mr. Erdoğan rightfully called its "vital role in the name of humanity."

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Members of the Committee, we hope that the spirit of that summit will endure and its promises will be realized. We thank this Committee, the United States government and, most of all, the American people for your lifesaving support for the people of Syria. We know that principled humanitarianism is directly connected to our deeply held American values about what is right and good in the world. Know that Mercy Corps stands firmly committed to alleviating the long, intense suffering of the millions of Syrians trapped in this great human catastrophe.

Thank you.

Testimony of the Rt. Hon. David Miliband
President and CEO of the International Rescue Committee
Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing
“Six Years of War in Syria: The Human Toll”
March 15, 2017

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin and distinguished Senators: The humanitarian dimension of the Syrian war has lacked for strategic analysis and informed prescription, so I congratulate you for your ongoing commitment to understand and address the humanitarian catastrophe unleashed across the region and beyond. I spent last week in Lebanon and Iraq, and am happy to contribute to your full committee hearing from the perspective of the International Rescue Committee, which is working across the full arc of this crisis, from Syria to the four neighboring states, to the refugee transit routes in Europe, and to refugee resettlement for the lucky few who are admitted to start new lives in the U.S. We are able to do so because the United States government has long been a valued partner. The State Department, through its Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), and USAID, through its Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) have led the global community in humanitarian response. Likewise, PRM has shepherded the refugee resettlement program for decades with bipartisan support. Rarely has there been greater need for this US leadership.

Nearly 18 months ago, I spoke to the committee about the human suffering inside Syria and the impact on its neighbors. During the summer of 2015, attention on Syria and its refugees had skyrocketed, with stunning images in the news of families setting out across the Mediterranean. But we now know that the worst was yet to come. The last 18 months have been the worst yet for civilians inside Syria. Since I last testified to the Committee, the introduction of Russian airpower has ushered in a new phase in the conflict – with devastating and deliberate effects on civilians and civilian infrastructure. At least a hundred thousand more Syrians have been killed; hundreds of medical facilities have been purposely attacked (including those of IRC); the number of Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance has ballooned by over a million and it is harder than ever to reach them; nearly 700,000 people live under siege and millions more, nearly half of them children, live beyond the reach of humanitarian organizations¹. Over half of all Syrians – some 12 million people – have now been forced from their homes, either as refugees or internally displaced.

An additional million Syrian refugees have flowed into the already fragile political and economic systems of Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq – bringing the number of Syrians seeking refuge in these front line states to nearly 5 million. It is vital to recognize the extraordinary openness of these countries to Syrian refugees, while also understanding that it has become harder and harder to be a Syrian living in these countries. After six years of war, most refugees – from doctors and dentists to farmers, laborers and taxi drivers -- have depleted their savings and are

¹ [Joint Statement on Syria- WFP, UNICEF, OCHA, WHO, UNHCR](#) Jan 16, 2017

living in poverty, with limited access to legal work, struggling to afford healthcare and rent and in too many cases unable to send their children to school. The education of Syrian refugee children is probably one of the best illustrations of the strain that the influx has placed on surrounding countries and the failure of the humanitarian aid system to keep up. In Lebanon alone, despite advances in enrollment numbers in the last school year, nearly a quarter of a million Syrian children are still out of school, many for three years or more. Across neighboring countries, that number rises to 700,000² – threatening significant parts of an entire generation.

The last time I spoke to this Committee, what had been a civil intra-state conflict had evolved into a regional humanitarian disaster. But the failures of the international community to respond appropriately—to resolve the conflict, to protect civilians, to provide adequate aid to the displaced and to host countries, and to provide durable solutions, including resettlement for refugees—have now engendered consequences far beyond Syria and the region. This is not just about refugee flows. The conflict has exposed the divisions in the U.N. Security Council, undermined International Humanitarian Law (IHL), and in the assault on Aleppo plumbed new depths for the abuse of civilians, including well sourced claims of renewed use of chemical weapons.³

The U.S., given its unique place in the global system, now faces three significant choices that will have long term implications both for the humanitarian situation and for regional politics.

The first major choice is about military and diplomatic commitments. This is not an area where humanitarian organizations have locus, but our staff and beneficiaries bear the consequences of the decisions that are made, and so have a great interest in the issues on the table and the players at the table. Since the collapse of the Kerry-Lavrov dialogue last fall, the U.S. has been notably absent from the public diplomatic efforts to achieve a political solution in Syria. Russia, Turkey and Iran have put themselves center-stage. The U.S. needs to decide what role it wants to play, and who it wants to ally with, in the debates about the future of those parts of Syria still outside government control, and the future shape of national government. This cannot be considered independent of the commitments to defeat Isis/Daesh in Iraq, where the U.S. again faces the conundrum that Iran has the same declared enemy, but where victory threatens to extend her influence. From the point of view of our staff and beneficiaries, it is vital that there is a strong and principled American voice articulating support for international humanitarian law in the conduct of war(s), and for inclusive and legitimate governance to underpin the peace. If the U.S. does not provide this voice, no one else will.

The second choice concerns the contribution of humanitarian aid to the relief of suffering and the promotion of stability in the region. Tomorrow we will learn the Administration's plans for U.S. foreign assistance. Major cuts have been foreshadowed in advance briefing. These are the very resources that are used to throw a lifeline to the families caught up in this crisis in the form of basic food, water and sanitation, medical assistance, protection for women and girls and education. My staff make use of these resources across the region: for example when areas

² <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=53145#.WMTG4NLyt0w>

³ [Fourth report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism 19 October 2016.](#)

of Fallujah, Sal ah Addin, or Mosul are retaken from Isis/Daesh, humanitarian workers are the next to enter. In Lebanon, one-quarter of the population is now Syrian refugees. Allies such as Jordan are struggling with the same disproportionate responsibility, hosting over 1 million Syrian refugees. The humanitarian and economic assistance provided is not just a moral choice, but a strategic necessity. An insufficient humanitarian and development response sustains and begets further crises. This is evident in the flows of Syrian refugees to Europe, at great risk to refugees' lives and with great political consequences for Europe. These flows began three years into the war, when refugees' savings were depleted and sufficient aid, work, and education for their children remained out of reach. It is also demonstrated by the fact that U.S. troops are helping to clear some parts of Iraq of terrorist groups for the third time; in part because insufficient investment in humanitarian response, development progress, and political reform has each time allowed extremists to take hold. In the midst of an unprecedented global displacement crisis, now is no time to be scaling back these efforts.

Third, there is the question of the interaction of flagship domestic policy with foreign policy. The future of the Middle East is about hearts and minds. Last week's revised Executive Order – which suspends the refugee resettlement program in the U.S. – together with the reduction in US resettlement numbers from 110,000 to 50,000, is a stark message to allies in the region coping with the humanitarian crisis. It is good that Iraqis are no longer banned from travel to the U.S., but Iraqi refugees remain subject to the 4-month pause on the resettlement program. It is good that Syrian refugees now no longer face an indefinite ban, but they are affected by the four month pause too. In all 60,000 refugees approved for entry to the United States, after extensive vetting, now face a life on hold or in reverse. Resettlement is an American success story, and the four month halt to the program, with uncertainty about what lies beyond, is a gift for those who would argue that America will not help Muslims in need.

INSIDE SYRIA

The devastation in Aleppo is to be set out for you by some of the doctors doing heroic work there. In late 2016, the conflict reached a new low for brutality and destruction. In the final assault on Aleppo there was deliberate targeting of civilians, hospitals, schools, and public utilities, with starvation and the denial of medical care used as weapons of war that brought the eastern part of the city and its inhabitants to their knees.

Last week, the UN Human Rights Council released a report on the conclusion of the Aleppo offensive that affirms what INGOs like the IRC have long asserted -- that Syrian civilians fell victim to war crimes from all parties. Air strikes destroyed or otherwise rendered all hospitals in eastern Aleppo out of service -- meaning even a minor injury or illness could turn life threatening. As the assault reached its final and deadliest stages, daily Russian and Syrian airstrikes claimed hundreds of lives. The report also alleges use of chlorine bombs, resulting in hundreds of civilian casualties. Rebels also abused civilians, firing shells indiscriminately into western Aleppo. In the final days of the siege, the UN reported the killing and "disappearing" of civilians as well as forced conscriptions.

The IRC has been delivering aid into Syria since 2012, but our experience thus far did not diminish the shock at what has befallen the people of Aleppo. As civilians fled for their lives in the cold and snow toward Idleb – our staff were there to meet them and provide assistance. We are the largest health care provider in Southern and Northeast Syria. Last year, thanks to funding from USAID, over 900,000 Syrians received primary, reproductive, and trauma care from the IRC and our partners. Looking beyond the emergency, the IRC supports schools in conflict-affected parts of Idleb province. Our classrooms provide safety and stability to thousands of children – many have known nothing but war and, according to a new IRC survey, are a full six years behind in their studies.⁴ Our livelihoods programs (“cash distribution”, and the like) are a lifeline to Syrians struggling to pay rent and purchase food and other essential items for themselves and their families.

If violence against civilians has characterized the Syrian conflict, so too has violence against aid workers. IRC programming not only connects us closely with the victims of violence inside Syria, it has made us a target of violence as well. Although the UN Security Council passed a resolution (2286) last spring condemning attacks on medical facilities, hospitals and humanitarian operations continue to be targeted at an alarming rate. IRC-supported clinics and hospitals were bombed eight times in 2016, including the destruction of two facilities in a single week in October. Another IRC-supported hospital was hit just last month in southern Syria. These types of attacks on aid workers and health facilities are commonplace and devastating, affecting thousands of Syrians who rely on these facilities for lifesaving aid and care. And they are designed to intimidate and deter humanitarian aid workers. Last week, UN investigators confirmed that the 2016 attack on a UN convoy carrying humanitarian aid that killed 14 aid workers was both purposeful and premeditated.

Six years into this war and three years after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2139, which demanded an increase in humanitarian access, the neediest Syrians still cannot access the food, water, and health care they need to survive. Capacity is not the issue. The UN and its implementing partners stand ready and able to deliver assistance to the hundreds of thousands of Syrians living in besieged areas. Denial of lifesaving aid is explicit in the government’s war strategy. In December, the UN sought and received Syrian government approval to reach close to one million Syrians. Subsequent delay tactics and barriers put up by national and local authorities kept all but one convoy from reaching its destination. As a result, according to UN Humanitarian Chief Stephen O’Brien only 6,000 people – less than 1 percent of those living under siege - received the food, fuel, and water needed to survive the winter and all were denied lifesaving medicines and surgical supplies. Preliminary reports for 2017 show only marginal improvements – leaving many Syrians without assistance for the better part of a year. Civilians in parts of Idleb province, which has seen its population swell with displaced Aleppians, have not received an aid delivery since April of last year.

Daily life is desperate and dangerous for the Syrians trapped in these neglected towns and cities. The IRC has heard from ordinary people living in areas near Damascus that are under siege by the Syrian government. They tell us, “You never saw any malnutrition before the siege.

⁴ IRC Report: [Impact of War on Syrian Children’s Learning: Testing Shows Gaps in Literacy and Math skills](#) 12 March 2017

Now you see some people who look like walking skeletons. Children [are] passing out at school because they haven't eaten." The siege has pushed up prices for basic necessities tenfold – with a loaf of bread costing a full day's pay. Few jobs remain and children have left school to help their families survive. This is needless suffering. And "Peace" achieved by means such as siege cannot, and will not, hold.

Beyond the sieges, there is a broad picture of increasingly challenging choices for civilians and NGOs. There are access challenges at various border points. NGOs have been afforded welcome hospitality in neighboring states but we cannot be sure of what the future holds. Shifting frontlines across Syria compound these problems. Syrian forces are advancing toward crossings along the Jordanian border: if they succeed in seizing them, it would deliberately and effectively cut off large swathes of Southern Syria from cross-border assistance. The regime is likely to set its sights on Idlib – where it has forced opposition fighters to relocate as part of truce deals, straining the humanitarian infrastructure. Hundreds of thousands of civilians – many evacuees from Eastern Aleppo -- cannot get the assistance they need and wait in fear of the same brutal attacks and siege tactics. Violent in-fighting among disillusioned opposition groups in Idlib is on the rise and is disrupting humanitarian activities. Check points have sprung up around the town of Dana – a center of IRC activity– and elsewhere around the governorate. Clashes in January delayed much needed aid distribution in eastern Idlib to thousands recently displaced from Aleppo. Each uptick in fighting will severely hinder our ability to provide health care and other forms of vital aid to the 700,000 people displaced in Idlib.

The conflict is now shaped by Russian and Iranian support for President Assad (exemplified by Moscow's Feb 28 veto of a UNSC resolution to impose sanctions for Damascus' use of chemical weapons), Turkey's focus on Kurdish forces in northern Syria, Saudi Arabia's attention on Yemen. There are no shortage of actors in the region and no shortage of interests, but none have civilian protection primary among them. Keeping borders open and aid flowing is not at the top of any actor's priority list. But humanitarian access is a right not a privilege under the Fourth Geneva Convention and related protocols – not a bargaining chip or confidence-building measure. There is experience from Sudan (Operation Lifeline Sudan) and Afghanistan (Operation Salaam) for negotiating access across conflict lines during a civil war. It requires political leadership, credible interlocutors, willingness to work with all sides, and clear pressure on all sides. Ensuring that humanitarian assistance is available to those whose lives have been shattered by this conflict is the minimum we must do.

The new Administration has commissioned a review of options for countering Isis/Daesh. Two preoccupations have dominated the briefing so far: speeding up military action and accelerating the return of refugees (to Syria). We would submit that historical evidences shows the following. 1. The conduct of war affects the prospects for peace. This makes civilian protection a strategic as well as moral priority. 2. Military haste produces humanitarian harm, and in particular military options without political destination risk ruin. The future of Raqqa, for example, is a complex political as well as military question. 3. Discussion of "safe zones" needs to be detailed not rhetorical. The Committee has discussed this on various occasions. The context inside Syria has shifted considerably since the idea was first explored in 2013. The

shifting frontlines and rearranging constellation of parties on the ground, coupled with the multiple and contradictory policy intentions of those parties, severely complicates the options. At worst it would legitimize land grabs and put civilians or returning refugees in jeopardy.

SYRIA'S NEIGHBORS

We know that Syria's civilians have borne and continue to bear overwhelming harm from the country's conflict. The humanitarian, economic, and political impact of the rapid and massive influx of five million refugees on Syria's nearest neighbors is not properly understood. Turkey hosts 2.5 million Syrian refugees, Lebanon 1.5 million, and Jordan 1 million —placing these countries among the world's top refugee-hosting countries. The images of Syrian families on flimsy rafts in the Mediterranean pulls at our heartstrings – and rightfully so. But we can't let that blind us to the fact that most Syrian refugees remain on the dry land of Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

In Lebanon, the arrival of Syrian refugees has led to a 30% increase in its pre-crisis population of 4 million and made it the highest per capita refugee host in the world. These already fragile countries are shouldering unreasonable and unsustainable responsibilities simply by virtue of their geography. Over a year ago, Jordan's King Abdullah warned that his country was at a "boiling point" and that "the dam is going to burst." And the inadequate international assistance has only made it worse.

While refugee-hosting governments and populations deserve great credit for their hospitality and their sacrifice, we cannot overstate how hard life is for Syrian refugees in these countries. In exile for years, with their lifesavings now depleted, most Syrian refugees live on the margins - - unable to meet their families' basic needs, unable to work, and unable to send their children to school. A 2016 assessment found that 71% of Lebanon's registered refugees live in poverty, while a full 90% of Syrians in Jordan live below the poverty line⁵. And, while this crisis brings to mind images of endless rows of tents, the majority of Syrians are not living in refugee camps. Across the region, refugees rent often-overcrowded apartments, squat in abandoned buildings, or live in ad hoc shelters and informal settlements that expose them to the elements and insecurity. And, despite advances in enrollment numbers in the 2015/16 school year, nearly 60% of Syrian children are still out of school – creating an entire generation lost to this conflict.

As the crisis intensifies so do the needs and the desperation of vulnerable families. UN agencies, NGOs like the IRC, and government service providers are unable to keep up with the demand for assistance, which is increasing as refugees deplete their assets. As such, refugees are coping by pulling children from school and putting them to work, offering daughters for early marriage, and increasing indebtedness to relieve economic pressure on themselves and their families.

It should have come as no surprise that in the absence of adequate and appropriate international support, these countries are buckling under the strain of their refugee caseload and taking steps to contain political tensions within their countries. Refugees face restrictions

⁵ [3RP Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2017 and 2018 in Response to the Syria Crisis](#)

on their ability to stay and work legally, and often encounter barriers to attending school. For instance, due to restrictions introduced in 2015 and only partially remedied last month, over 70% of refugees in Lebanon lack residency permits, significantly increasing protection risks, while simultaneously blocking access to formal justice, civil documentation, and health services – not to mention livelihood and education opportunities.

Second, these governments have closed many formal and informal border crossings to limit the inflow of additional refugees. As a result, hundreds of thousands of people are living in makeshift camps on or near borders with little or no access to humanitarian assistance. The most concerning example is the situation along the Berm, a desert no man's land between the borders of Syria and Jordan. Tens of thousands of Syrians have been trapped at the berm for nine months, first with no and now with limited humanitarian assistance. The situation at the berm is a global responsibility – and it is a stunning snapshot of the international community's failure to adequately address the refugee crisis.

Likewise, it should have come as no surprise that in 2014, after three years under these increasingly pressing circumstances, refugees began to undertake dangerous passage to Europe in increasing and often staggering numbers. The top reasons refugees cite for moving on are first the obvious and all too elusive search for security, closely followed by a lack of jobs for refugee parents and education for refugee children⁶. Here is the clue to how to address the humanitarian crisis. There is growing research showing that when refugees are in a safe and decent job, and have access to enabling services like education, they have the dignity of providing for themselves and their families and can become net economic contributors to their host economy.⁷ Like the rest of us, refugees want and deserve opportunities to control their own lives and provide for their children.

More aid is part of the answer, but change in the sector is also important – notably to recognize the increasingly long term nature of displacement (once out of their own country for five years, refugees are likely to be away for 26) but also to address other changes in the refugee experience (for example its increasingly urban nature). We advocate strong commitment to evidence-based programming; clearer “collective outcome” measures for what we expect to achieve for the health, safety, education, and incomes of displaced populations; greater investment in R&D for the sector; and we also need to move beyond short-term financing of basic needs and camp-based responses to financing structures that respond to current trends in displacement. In this regard, we have promising developments in the entry of the World Bank, with strong U.S. support, to provide sustained financing to refugee-hosting nations to improve their markets, institutions, and health and education systems in exchange for greater access for

⁶ <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/briefing/2015/9/560523f26/seven-factors-behind-movement-syrian-refugees-europe.html>

⁷ Philippe Legrain. 2016. “Refugees Work: A Humanitarian Investment That Yields Economic Dividends.” Tent Foundation and Open Network. T. Alexander Aleneikoff. 2015. “From Dependence to Self-Reliance: Changing the Paradigm in Protracted Refugee Situations.” Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. Alexander Betts et al. 2014. “Refugee Economies Rethinking Popular Assumptions.” Oxford, UK: Humanitarian Innovation Project, University of Oxford. www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/publications/other/refugee-economies-2014.pdf

refugees to jobs and public services. The U.S. must similarly re-evaluate its financing tools for humanitarian response and for refugee-hosting nations. Finally, we must bring the interests of women and girls—those disproportionately impacted by conflict—from the margins to the mainstream. Seventy-five percent of Syrian refugees are women and children⁸. Conflict disproportionately affects women and girls and they face unique and dangerous circumstances in displacement – sexual violence, harassment, domestic violence, and economic disenfranchisement. Gender inequalities that precede their displacement are exacerbated by it, with women and girls often being the last to receive the benefits of aid, and the first to bear the consequences of displacement—through child labor or other exploitative work, early marriage, and other desperate and negative “coping mechanisms”. Donors, host governments, and implementers need systematically to identify and prioritize these gender-based challenges.

NGOs like the IRC are already working toward these goals with strategies that include more employment and self-employment programming to help refugees, and especially women, generate income, as well as supporting host communities struggling with unemployment. With US government support, the IRC’s small business program is helping Syrian women in Jordan start new ventures to help keep their families afloat. Likewise, Syrian children need to get back to school, but the region’s schools have been unable to absorb the hundreds of thousands of new students. To change this calculus, the IRC provides community-based education programs (flexible and tailored to the needs and circumstances of refugee children) to increase education opportunities and provide socio-emotional support for refugee children. Last year, with US government support, the IRC piloted new non-formal early childhood education and retention programs in Lebanese communities, designed to meet the immediate needs of refugee children while the Lebanese government strengthens its capacity and reach to provide for the hundreds of thousands of Syrian children within its borders.

The question is how to bring these efforts to scale and to do so sustainably. The global community came together in 2016 to achieve that very goal. Anchored by US commitments, the global community committed to a 30% increase in humanitarian aid and a doubling of resettlement commitments globally in exchange for greater legal protections and access for refugees to jobs, education, and other essential services in their countries of first refuge. The agreement relies on a grand bargain between wealthy nations and the low and middle income countries that collectively host 88 percent⁹ of the world’s 21 million refugees. And while we can, and should, expect other wealthy nations to do more, it is US assistance and US leadership that underpins the global protection regime.

The U.S. commitment to provide humanitarian, development, economic, and security assistance to support the protection of civilians in countries of first refuge is also a function of enlightened self-interest—the forced and premature return of Syrian refugees to an unstable Syria, or of Afghan refugees to an unstable Afghanistan, foments new currents of conflict and crisis that, given US interests and commitments in the region, draw U.S. funds and U.S. troops into further quagmires.

⁸ <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations>

⁹ Forthcoming: IRC-CGD Study Group Report

THE VITAL ROLE OF AMERICAN LEADERSHIP

The U.S. has major interests in the next phases of the Syrian crisis. (1) To push back against regional instability that threatens regional security as well as instability in Europe that distracts and diminishes U.S. allies; (2) To fight ISIS and other terrorist groups that capitalized on the lawlessness in Syria and the instability elsewhere in the region to gain territory and resources; and (3) To stand up for International Humanitarian Law that is one of the foundation stones of the post-World War II global political order.

Amidst the noisy debate about the future of Syria, America's humanitarian leadership is needed in the following areas:

- **Humanitarian Law and Civilian Protection.** The U.S. can use its role at the UN Security Council and beyond to increase the diplomatic and economic price for those who support violation of International Humanitarian Law. Ambassador Haley's strong condemnation of Russia on February 28th for vetoing the resolution that would have sanctioned Syria for its use of chemical weapons was important. There are Security Council Resolutions on the books that should afford protection to civilians and aid workers – like 2139 that demands humanitarian access and 2286 that condemns attacks on hospitals. Monitoring and reporting mechanisms that name and shame violating countries and individuals would give these resolutions teeth. In December 2016, the UN General Assembly established an investigation mechanism that would create trial-ready evidence for eventual prosecutions of those that committed war crimes and violations of IHL in Syria. The U.S. should support this mechanism and push others to do the same. A strong and vocal U.S. commitment to robustly implement its international commitments towards the minimization of harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure are rallying points for the U.S. to call on other states to respond with comparable measures and to name and shame those that do not. This matters not only for the lives of civilians caught in the midst of conflict, but also for the aftermath of conflict and for future conflicts.
- **A Commitment to Foreign Assistance:** Resolving the crisis is a complex political undertaking that requires skilled diplomacy, tenacity, and a willingness to pressure all sides. However, responding adequately to humanitarian needs of those requiring life-saving assistance is more straightforward; and something that the international community, led by the United States, has no excuse not to do. We *can* get assistance to the people who need it inside Syria, we *can* provide adequate support to refugees living in precarious situations in the surrounding countries, and we *can* support our allies who have provided safe harbor to five million people as this conflict has raged on; *if* we fund and organize to do so. The United States through OFDA assisted some 6.9 million Syrians in FY 2015, and this should be a benchmark for the future¹⁰. Yet the combined UN appeal in 2016 was only 57% funded by year's end. This year we're off to a feeble

¹⁰ [Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2015](#)

start, with only 14% of the \$9 billion appeal committed. These seemingly sterile statistics translate into excruciating choices made by UN agencies and aid organizations like the IRC regarding which needs will go unmet and whose pleas for help will go unanswered. As noted earlier in my testimony, it is these gaps in assistance that have inspired so many refugees in the region to take dangerous journeys onward to Europe in the hope of improving their untenable situation. As stated in a recent letter—which I would like to submit to the public record— signed by 120 three and four star retired generals and admirals urging Senate leadership to support the International Affairs budget, “now is not the time to retreat.” I urge this authorizing committee overseeing United States foreign policy and assistance to defend the foreign assistance budget as Congress considers the FY 2018 and future year requests.

- **The Case for Resettlement:** When I was in Lebanon and Iraq last week, I spoke with some of the people who are impacted by President Trump’s executive order. Over 75% of the refugees we resettle in the United States are women and children. Many are Iraqis who have served US institutions, including the State Department, USAID, or US NGOs. They are the family members of those who served with American troops. They are unaccompanied children, survivors of rape and violence, widows struggling to make a new life, and those in need of urgent medical care. They are those under persecution for their political or religious beliefs. True to a proud tradition, the U.S. takes the most vulnerable refugees. They are also the most vetted population to enter the United States. Far from the experience of Europe, where Syrian refugees arrived on Europe’s shores by the tens of thousands per week, every Syrian refugee that enters the U.S. is selected for entry by the Department of Homeland Security, and vetted by US national security and intelligence agencies, undergoing a 21-step, 2-year process that includes biometric and security screenings and multiple forms of identify validation. The President’s four-month pause will have a very significant impact on refugees who have waited years and endured multiple screenings to enter the United States, as each step of the security process has a different validity period. There are 60,000 refugees cleared for entry to the United States who would have arrived to the U.S. before the end of September, who are now indefinitely delayed. It’s a population the U.S. should proudly embrace in keeping with its history and values, and in keeping faith with our allies shouldering the responsibility of millions of refugees.

We urge the committee to ensure a good faith, speedy review; to encourage waivers for those most vulnerable; and to support an increase in the number of refugees admitted upon completion of the review. Every administration should take its opportunity to review security procedures. President Bush did it after 9/11 , but even the ‘pause’ of resettlement arrivals after 9/11 – a moment of existential crisis for the nation – lasted just two months, after which the Bush Administration recommitted itself to the refugee admissions program. President Obama also reviewed security procedures, several times, resulting in continuous improvements and without denying entry to the neediest refugee families. But once the review is complete, there is no reason for an arbitrary cap. The world’s greatest superpower should not reject the world’s most vulnerable. It is

a symbolic show of solidarity with the neighboring countries, and a life-changing, life-saving intervention for the individuals concerned.

I thank you and the members of the United States Senate for the opportunity to provide the IRC's perspective on this defining humanitarian challenge. I look forward to addressing your questions.