

**Testimony of the U.S. Agency for International Development
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Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on International Operations and Organizations,
Human Rights, Democracy, and Global Women's Issues
Hearing entitled "ISIL's Reign of Terror: Confronting the
Growing Humanitarian Crisis in Iraq and Syria"
December 9, 2014**

Introduction

Chairwoman Boxer, Ranking Member Paul and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the humanitarian crisis in Syria and Iraq. Many thanks to the Subcommittee for holding this important hearing and shining a light on the devastating humanitarian situation and abhorrent human rights abuses committed by the terrorist organization known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which as President Obama rightly clarified, is neither Islamic nor a State.

The Syrian crisis is the largest and most complex humanitarian emergency of our time, and it has now mutated into a regional humanitarian crisis on an epic scale. Millions of families have been torn apart, pushed out of ancestral homes and forced to flee unspeakable horrors in search of safety and dignity. The emergence of ISIL, first in Syria and now holding territory in both Syria and Iraq, has exacerbated an already dire humanitarian crisis in Syria, where the Assad regime has waged a cruel and unrelenting campaign of bloodshed and starvation against its own people for almost four years.

There are now 10.8 million Syrian internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees—roughly half of Syria's pre-war population. That is almost equal to the combined populations of New York City and Chicago. With the crisis now engulfing Iraq, two million Iraqis have also been displaced since early 2014 due to ISIL attacks, with almost 200,000 new Iraqi refugees fleeing to neighboring countries, including Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, and the Gulf countries.

And, this crisis is radically rewriting the map of the region. Once the cradle of Nestorian Christianity, Mosul has been emptied of all Christians, ending a presence stretching back two millennia. Minority villages across Iraq and Syria have been ethnically cleansed. Reportedly about half a million Yezidis were slaughtered en masse, driven from ancestral homes in Ninewa and corralled on Mt. Sinjar, eventually seeking refuge in the Kurdistan region. ISIL summarily executed more than 200 Shia Turkmen and Shia Shabak in Tikrit and Mosul, forcing tens of thousands of families to flee. Sunnis throughout Iraq have also fled ISIL attacks, especially in Anbar. A massive outpouring of 3.2 million Syrians refugees throughout the region has transformed the demographics of neighboring countries, especially Lebanon where Syrians now make up more than a quarter of the population.

Women and children always bear the brunt of suffering in a conflict, but under ISIL, women and girls are suffering a special hell. ISIL has abducted, raped, and sold into sex slavery Yezidi and other minority women and girls—some as young as 12 years old. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reports that ISIL is holding up to 2,500 Yezidi civilians, mostly women and children. In Kobani and elsewhere, young boys have been tortured and recruited as child soldiers, as documented by Human Rights Watch. Today, I'd like to cover three key areas: First, an update on the U.S. government humanitarian response in Iraq and Syria, including our efforts to provide protection and assistance to the most

vulnerable; second, how we are focusing on women and minorities to enable greater participation and hope for a better future; and finally, an outline of the key challenges that lie ahead as we seek to address these enormous needs with increasingly stretched resources.

The Humanitarian Situation

The humanitarian community is grappling with an unprecedented four Level 3 emergencies—the United Nation’s (U.N.) most severe emergency designation. Syria and Iraq are two of these four emergencies, occurring against a global backdrop of rising crises that include Ukraine, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Nigeria— and now the Ebola epidemic in West Africa.

For the first time in USAID’s history, our Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance has deployed four Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DARTs) and activated three Response Management Teams (RMTs) concurrently. The courageous work of USAID’s humanitarian experts is saving lives around the globe in a tangible symbol of U.S. leadership and commitment to humanitarian action. At a time of unprecedented global need, however, we are also mounting aggressive efforts to mobilize international action. Increased commitments and collaboration from other donors are critical if we are to meet the escalating needs in Iraq and Syria.

Iraq and Syria are part of one overarching complex crisis with very fluid conflicts that shift borders and territory. However, the impact on people is markedly different. In Iraq, two million people are displaced in country, while a smaller number, 200,000, have fled to neighboring countries. Due to the rapid pace of displacement, most IDPs are living in camps, informal shelters or unfinished buildings, making shelter and heating an important concern for the winter. IDPs are now scattered across over 2,000 locations throughout the country, making centralized provision of humanitarian assistance difficult. Lack of access is also a major impediment. It is estimated that 2.2 million vulnerable Iraqis are located in ISIL-held areas in Al Anbar, Ninewa and Salah ad Din Governorates. Access issues in those areas make it impossible to know the level of humanitarian need.

The protracted nature of the Syrian conflict has resulted in humanitarian needs of a massive scale. There are 7.6 million IDPs in Syria, and another 3.2 million Syrians have fled to neighboring countries. The majority of those who are displaced inside Syria and in neighboring countries live in urban centers with extended family or friends that have offered them shelter, putting a massive strain on households and economies in major cities. Many of them have been uprooted more than once. The seemingly endless flow of Syrian refugees across borders has overwhelmed basic infrastructure in neighboring countries, including water, electricity, schools, and hospitals.

U.S. Humanitarian Response in Iraq

In early August, the world’s attention focused on the plight of thousands of Yezidis, with mass killings reported in several parts of the Sinjar region. As this desperate scene unfolded and we received first-person accounts from individuals on Mt. Sinjar of the horrific conditions, we deployed one of our most seasoned DART leaders to coordinate with the U.S. military as they began an air drop operation to deliver crucial aid for thousands of trapped civilians. The U.S. military conducted seven nightly air drops between August 8-13, delivering more than 114,000 meals and 35,000 gallons of water to those displaced on Mt. Sinjar. The DART leader joined our Department of Defense (DoD) colleagues to conduct an on-the-ground assessment of the situation on Mt. Sinjar after the airdrops and concluded that the air drops reached thousands that otherwise likely would have perished. The opening of an eventual land route was critical in allowing Yezidis to move off of the mountain and away from the fighting and threat of ISIL.

In Fiscal Year 2014, the U.S. government is providing more than \$208 million in humanitarian assistance to meet the growing needs of those displaced by the spread of violence. Working through 12 UN and international NGO partners, we have delivered relief supplies; addressed emergency health needs; provided water, sanitation, and hygiene support; ensured emergency and transitional shelter; and addressed the massive protection and trauma needs of populations who have fled untold horrors.

ISIL has systematically targeted Yezidis, Shia, including members of the Shabak and Turkmen ethnic minority, and Sunnis who refuse to adhere to their extremist ideology. According to Human Rights Watch, ISIL has killed scores or even hundreds of male Yezidi civilians and carried off their relatives, forcing thousands of women into forced sexual servitude. In recent talks with Yezidi religious figures, they have shared with us a massive sense of fear and despair that their entire community will be wiped out from their ancestral lands. USAID remains committed to engaging closely with faith-based leaders, meeting regularly here in Washington and the region to hear and address concerns and ensure our aid continues to reach Yezidis and members of other minorities. Shia communities have also suffered relentless daily suicide and car bomb attacks against civilian centers, religious sites, open markets, and schools over the past 18 months, condemned by ISIL extremists as being “heretical” and “non-Muslim.” The relentless targeting by ISIL aimed at removing religious and cultural diversity and denying freedom of belief is a horror to us all.

The Government of Iraq (GOI) and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) have also dedicated substantial funding, including a commitment of cash grants of \$860 per displaced family that are being distributed by the Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement. We are pleased to see this financial commitment and are working with Iraqi officials to ensure these resources are disbursed efficiently and without discrimination to all displaced communities, including Yezidis, Christians, and Shia Turkmen minorities. The KRG deserves special praise for offering refuge to more than 750,000 IDPs, along with over 220,000 refugees from Syria. A recent partner survey found that displaced communities are very satisfied and appreciative of the KRG’s response. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s contribution of \$500 million was essential as it scaled up the response at a critical time, including by supporting the World Food Program to distribute food aid to more than 1 million IDPs.

As winter ramps into full gear, we are working tirelessly with our partners to respond to potential cold-weather needs of over 150,000 members of the most vulnerable populations—including women, children, and religious and ethnic minorities. The State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) has supported seven emergency airlifts by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), delivering 25,000 tent insulation kits throughout Iraq. Clothing, kitchen sets, blankets, mattresses, and bedding, as well as materials to prepare shelter for winter conditions all provide dignity and a semblance of comfort in the midst of chaos. USAID has also begun to distribute cash grants of \$100-\$600 per family, especially in Dohuk where many Yezidis are displaced, offering greater freedom to IDPs to purchase seasonally appropriate items and much needed kerosene to help families endure the harsh winter.

Providing shelter with proper heating and sanitation facilities continues to be a priority for the winter. It is also critically important to clear schools that have been used for shelter, so that children can resume their education. In Dohuk Governorate, which is shouldering the largest number of IDPs, KRG officials have relocated 82,000 IDPs from schools to camps as of November 24, but another 450,000 IDPs remain in informal shelters or unknown locations. The KRG has made progress in evacuating virtually all schools, and we encourage the GOI and the KRG to continue

constructing IDP camps that can be suitable shelter replacements with technical assistance from the UNHCR.

To assist with sanitation needs, USAID is helping to provide five liters of water per person per day in Dohuk and Ninewa Governorates while also supplying women and girls with hygiene supplies to stay healthy. A USAID partner is also strengthening the water and sanitation infrastructure in Diyala and Sulaymaniyah Governorates in concert with local authorities.

U.S. Humanitarian Response in Syria

While the pace of deterioration in Iraq is staggering, renewed focus on Iraq must be balanced with extraordinary needs in Syria. Violence from all sides in Syria has killed more than 200,000 people since March 2011, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, limited humanitarian access, and prompted widespread displacement. A UN report released on November 14 details the atrocities committed by ISIL in Syria, including forced displacement, kidnapping and disappearances, executions, amputations, public lashings and stoning, slavery and the recruitment of child soldiers. These abuses are layered on top of the Assad regime's indiscriminate killings and barrel bombings against their own people. Ongoing conflict has hindered the delivery of essential humanitarian assistance to populations in need, including in both regime and ISIL controlled areas of northern Syria.

In the midst of an ever more challenging security environment, the U.S. government continues to work through all possible channels— including more than 50 UN and international and Syrian NGOs—to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of more than 12.2 million people across all 14 governorates in Syria, and 3.2 million refugees in neighboring countries. Of the 12.2 million people in need throughout Syria, an estimated 4.8 million reside in UN-identified hard-to-reach areas, including 2.7 residing in areas of ISIL control. Despite access constraints throughout Syria, including in areas cut off by ISIL or regime forces, humanitarian actors are continuing to tirelessly work through all channels of assistance, including cross-border, cross line and operations from within Syria to access those in need throughout the country. In addition to significant ongoing NGO cross border operations, 558,000 people have benefitted from UN deliveries to northern Syria since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2165 in July, which authorizes the UN to cross border and conflict lines without approval by the regime.

The United States is the single largest donor in the Syrian crisis, and food aid is a big part of our assistance. The U.S. government is the largest contributor to the World Food Program (WFP)'s response to the Syrian crisis, providing \$944 million since the crisis began. Through WFP, USAID delivers family rations and flour-to-bakeries programs reaching more than 4 million people inside Syria, and food vouchers, supplementary nutritional food and meal-replacement bars for 3.2 million refugees in neighboring countries. On November 22, Vice President Biden announced \$135 million in new funding for ongoing emergency food needs in Syria and neighboring countries, primarily through assistance to WFP. Despite these latest contributions, WFP was forced to temporarily suspend its food aid to Syrian refugees in neighboring countries due to depleted funds. While new pledges and commitments this week will allow WFP to resume provision of food aid for Syrian refugees through December, the United States and its global partners will need to give more to meet the enormous demands for food aid and other humanitarian needs in the Syrian crisis. Funding from Congress is critical for USAID to provide additional support to WFP, and we look forward to Congressional approval of a full-year budget for Fiscal Year 2015, which will enable us to meet our humanitarian commitments for the new year.

USAID also continues to provide life-saving medical care during this brutal conflict. Nearly two million patients have been treated and more than 350,000 surgeries have been performed at 260 U.S. supported field hospitals, makeshift clinics, and medical facilities across the country. In October alone, USAID partners provided essential reproductive health care services, including emergency obstetric care, reproductive health vouchers and family planning activities for over 26,000 women in six governorates. We are also supporting mobile clinics to increase access to reproductive health services and clinical care for Gender Based Violence (GBV) victims in remote areas and IDP settlements. Recognizing the need for more medical staff capable of saving lives, we have trained more than 3,000 Syrian volunteers to provide emergency first-aid care, and actively recruit female health staff to meet the needs of female IDPs.

Through 18 partners, USAID is distributing winterization supplies—including warm clothing, blankets, mattresses, shoes, heating and fuel—and shelter support to help an estimated 1.5 million Syrians cope with the harsh weather and fend off health risks during the winter months.

Protecting Women and Children

Without a doubt women and children have been profoundly affected by these crises. Women have been the target of stoning, sex slavery, and other atrocities committed by ISIL. Recent reporting notes that 200,000 have died since the start of the conflict in Syria, with approximately 85 percent of the deceased being male. That figure alone is changing the sociological make-up of the country as women and young children are increasingly taking on roles that they had not previously filled. Almost half of the 12.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in the Syrian conflict are children, and 80 percent of three million Syrian refugees are women and children. Nearly three million Syrian children are out of school and growing increasingly vulnerable with each classroom destroyed. In Iraq, similar trends are occurring as displaced populations have taken up residence in schools. Behind these statistics is a generation of girls and boys yearning to shed the trauma of conflict and build a more prosperous and peaceful future.

Since 2012, USAID has been front and center in implementing the U.S. National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security, an essential roadmap for advancing gender equality and female empowerment, particularly of women and girls in crisis and conflict situations. As part of USAID's commitments within the Safe from the Start Initiative, and the US Government Action Plan on Children in Adversity, USAID has provided \$26 million in humanitarian protection activities, including \$10.5 million to respond to and reduce the risk of GBV and other abuses towards women in Syria and Iraq, as well as neighboring countries hosting refugees.

These programs have provided critical psychosocial support to help GBV survivors overcome the trauma of their past abuses and trained 360 psychosocial and healthcare workers to identify and respond to GBV cases in an appropriate way that does not stigmatize or further endanger survivors. One program in Idlib Governorate in Syria is providing a safe space for young displaced women to gather around workshops that provide information on hygiene and personal safety and skills-building sessions so that they are empowered to be self-reliant.

Another successful program is transforming attitudes around early marriages, which are on the rise among refugee communities. The Safety and Protection project waged an innovative media campaign that included 51 interactive plays, 270 lectures, TV and radio infomercials and social media messages that reached 9,000 individuals in remote and urban areas across Jordan to raise awareness about the dangers of early marriage, human trafficking, child labor and violence against

women. The interactive plays evoked strong emotions from audience members who related to the stories that mirrored their lives.

USAID has also spent \$15.4 million in child protection efforts that meet the objectives of No Lost Generation, an initiative by the international community that helps restore access to education and some sense of normalcy for Syrian children. USAID is providing learning and recreational opportunities for girls and boys that reduce the risk of exploitation, recruitment by armed groups, and abuse, and that help them develop life skills. USAID also supports case management and referral services for children at high risk of exploitation and abuse.

In central and southern Iraq, one USAID partner is deploying mobile protection teams that monitor and document human rights violation and abuses by state and non-state actors against displaced women and children. We have also built child-friendly spaces in displacement areas, such as in Erbil where 2,100 IDP children have received psychosocial support to improve their sense of safety and emotional well-being. USAID is also working in Diyala and Sulaymaniyah Governorates to establish family tracing and reunifications systems, as well as provide appropriate temporary care for separated and unaccompanied children and youth.

USAID partners also prioritize protection in all humanitarian efforts so that women and children have access to assistance that meets their needs. For instance, USAID partners in Syria and Iraq are ensuring that relief kits contain women and infant hygiene supplies; installing separate toilets and showers for women and with inside locks to increase safety; and building latrines near tents.

Promoting Inclusion and Empowerment of Women and Minorities

Iraq

For over a decade, USAID has laid groundwork for locally-owned governance and rule of law in Iraq, and at a local level we have seen results, including greater empowerment of women and minorities. Our ongoing Access to Justice (A2J) Program, which established a legal assistance network of 25 civil society and law school clinics across 13 governorates, has helped 18,000 Iraqis file for identity documents and seek legal protections. Three-quarters of these have been women, including many who needed to register their marriages so that they could receive benefits to which they are entitled under Iraqi law.

When entire communities were displaced by ISIL, they often left behind or destroyed identity documents as they fled out of fear of retribution if identified as a non-Sunni Muslim or part of a minority group. In response, the A2J program pivoted to work with IDPs and the GOI to help those who fled replace identification documents essential to government and international assistance, greatly easing the burdens of Christians and other minority groups who had fled and restoring their sense of identity and security.

Further, USAID's "Foras" (Arabic for "Opportunities") project has secured over 9,300 job placements for job-seekers, 25 percent women, through its online jobs portal and partner agencies, and trained more than 20,000 Iraqis in job-related skills. In the wake of the crisis, this program has provided short-term labor opportunities for IDPs—because we know that a job is preferred to humanitarian aid in both the short- and long-term.

Syria

In Syria, we are empowering Syrian women leaders to play a more active role in transition planning and peace negotiations, in keeping with UNSCR 1325 and our objectives under the NAP for Women, Peace, and Security. We believe that support for Syrian women bolsters opposition credibility, increases pressure for a negotiated settlement, and effectively counters extremists. We have trained more than 500 Syrian women so that they are equipped with essential advocacy and negotiation skills to contribute to high-level and community-level peacebuilding efforts. We also provided support to help an impressive group of women leaders create the Syrian Women's Network. I have met these women many times over the last three years, witnessing firsthand their transformation into powerful change agents and peace brokers. We supported the women from the network so that they could participate in the Geneva II negotiations, where they shared compelling messages about the devastating impact of the conflict and the need for peace. We also trained several women who ran in provisional local council elections in liberated areas of Aleppo last December.

These advances are nevertheless constrained within the greater context of a shrinking space for civil society and nascent local governance structures inside Syria, due to the violence perpetrated by the Syrian regime, ISIL and other terrorist groups' exploitation of ungoverned spaces. But I am confident that these simple acts of female empowerment are critical for Syria's future.

Key Challenges Ahead

The crises in Iraq and Syria are stretching the international humanitarian community to the brink of capacity, underscoring the need for increased commitments and coordination among foreign donors. The GOI and the KRG must also continue to address the pressing needs of their citizens. Given the fluid security situation, it is difficult to predict where humanitarian needs will unfold, particularly in light of broader political and security concerns.

Humanitarian access will also remain the central challenge, particularly in ISIL-held and contested areas where attempts at negotiated access have fallen short. The U.S. government and our Syria and Iraq DART teams will continue to work with the humanitarian community – including the UN and international and national non-governmental organizations, U.S. military, and other partners on the ground to ensure a rapid and agile response to shifting humanitarian needs, especially as needs are more clearly identified in southern Iraq.

As sectarian violence roils much of Iraq, displaced persons may be unable or unwilling to return home, and atrocity prevention efforts will be ever more important. We anticipate enormous needs in liberated areas to help communities recover, prevent cycles of retaliatory violence and atrocities, and fill critical governance gaps.

On October 23, the U.N. released a revised Strategic Response Plan for Iraq, laying out a longer-term strategy, which estimates that \$2.2 billion will be needed to address ongoing humanitarian needs through 2015. USAID is working closely with our U.N. colleagues to determine how we can most appropriately leverage our resources to support another long-term response. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's historic contribution of \$500 million in humanitarian relief funds, as well as support from Turkey, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Brunei Darussalam, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates has been critical, but more partners will need to step up to meet these growing needs.

In Syria, the needs inside the country continue to mount with ISIL's offensives and the Assad regime's continuing campaigns in Syrian cities. Concerted attention and assistance is needed to help relieve the strain on host countries, especially Lebanon where Syrians now make up more than 25 percent of the population. Despite an enormous response and commitment by the U.S. government and other donors, we struggle to keep pace with ever growing needs almost four years into the crisis. On December 18, the U.N. will release its Strategic Response Plan for Syria, which will inevitably require greater commitments from all donors. USAID will continue to work with other donors, the U.N. and partners to leverage and pool all resources to try to meet these demands.

Conclusion

Forging strong partnerships will be critical to meet the immense challenges and needs ahead in Iraq and Syria. As part of our commitment to ending extreme poverty and promoting resilient, democratic societies, USAID will continue to provide life-saving, needs-based assistance and protect and empower women and minorities, while pushing to secure access to additional populations currently trapped in areas controlled by ISIL.

Our hearts are with the thousands of people who remain trapped in unsustainable situations, and we are gravely concerned for the health and safety of these displaced men, women, and children, besieged by acts of violence committed by ISIL, the Syrian regime, and other extremists.

USAID is deeply appreciative of Congressional support to provide the resources that makes our humanitarian work possible in Syria and Iraq. Thank you for your interest, and I look forward to your questions.