

Testimony of the Rt. Hon. David Miliband
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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.