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EXAMINING THE SYRIAN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS FROM THE GROUND (PART II)

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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EXAMINING THE SYRIAN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS FROM THE GROUND (PART II)

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2015

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:52 p.m., in room 2167, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. The subcommittee will come to order.

After recognizing myself and Mr. Cicilline who will read from Mr. Deutch's prepared statement—is that okay with you, Mr. Cicilline? Is that good?

Mr. CICILLINE. Yeah. I said my own statement.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Oh, your own statement. I did not know. In his own words. Sorry about that.

For our opening statements, I will then recognize any other member seeking recognition for 1 minute. We will then hear from our witnesses.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.

And, without objection, the prepared statements of all of our witnesses will be made a part of the record. And members may have 5 days to insert statements and questions for the record subject to the length and limitation in the rules.

The chair now recognizes herself for 5 minutes.

We are in the fifth year of the Syrian humanitarian crisis. The United States has contributed over $4.5 billion in both direct assistance and through three U.N. crisis appeals with nearly 75 percent going through the latter, the crisis appeals, yet there seems to be no end in sight in this tunnel. Russia's recent intervention is causing serious security concerns for not only the people of Syria but the NGOs and the aid workers on the ground trying to bring assistance to those in desperate need. The front lines are shifting, and the battle lines are fluid, causing uncertainty and making it increasingly dangerous to deliver aid to certain areas and making it increasingly dangerous for Syrians who remain in their homeland.

The situation has gotten so bad that we are now seeing Europe struggle to deal with its greatest migration and refugee crisis since World War II, as many fleeing the Syrian conflict are trying to make their way into Europe. But while the European crisis may be grabbing the headlines at the moment, let's remember that this cri-

sis was not created yesterday. For years the people of Syria have been impacted and the Syrian refugee crisis has also impacted countries like Jordan, like Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt. And yet many in the international community ignored these countries' pleas for assistance. These countries are more vulnerable because they have less capacity and less resources to deal with the crisis.

Let's take Jordan, for example. About of 630 Syrians have been registered by UNHCR, plus hundreds of thousands more that have already assimilated in Jordan, all of which places an incredible burden on the kingdom to provide basic services to over 1 million new people.

But with more and more refugees seeking to reach Europe from Syria and its neighbors, there will, of course, be those seeking to take advantage. We are now seeing smuggling networks popping up in Turkey, Lebanon, Libya, and elsewhere, turning trafficking in Syrian refugees into a billion-dollar industry and also creating security concerns, as we have no way of knowing who is being smuggled into Europe and elsewhere. And with President Obama's announcement that the U.S. will take in 10,000 Syrians, this also raises concerns for many in the U.S., especially in light of the FBI Director's testimony to Congress last week that the U.S. may not be able to properly vet all of those seeking to come to our Nation.

As a legislative body, this is something that we must take seriously. If we cannot guarantee the proper vetting of these refugees, it would be irresponsible for us to promote it. We must protect our country first and ensure that all security measures are in place to properly screen these individuals before they come into the United States. We cannot compromise the well-being of the American people or our National security.

Unfortunately, it has taken Europe's worst migration crisis to awaken the Europeans now that the Syrian conflict is knocking on their borders.

The United States has been the largest single contributor to the Syrian humanitarian crisis response, dwarfing the contributions made by any other nation and by the European nations as a whole. There is no way to tell how things may have turned out differently had other nations stepped up to the call like the United States did.

Earlier this month, committee staffers traveled to Geneva to meet with many of the organizations that receive our assistance for the Syrian humanitarian crisis. From their trip, one thing was clear: The response to the crisis has been dreadfully underfunded with a nearly two-thirds funding gap.

Of course, the problems we need to address are many and they are difficult. And it is true that there can never be a solution to the refugee crisis until the underlying root causes are addressed. And that means finding an end to the fighting, an end to the terror, and the removal of Assad from power. But we need to be less reactive and start being more proactive. We need to start thinking of ways not just to address the refugees most immediate needs, but the needs that they face in the years to come. And we can't do it alone. We need to press our European friends and our partners in the Middle East and Africa to step up and do more.

We need to do a lot more to ensure that the needs of the host communities in Syria's neighbors are being met as well because

this has taken a very big toll on their resources, and it is leading to increased tension between the communities. There is a pervasive feeling of hopelessness and despair that will have a long-term impact on the region and beyond.

Syrians for the most part want to eventually return home. According to some NGO implementing partners on the ground that have conducted surveys on this, some 90 percent of Syrian refugees reportedly state that they do have a desire to return home. But that desire may fade if the international community does not step up and do more to ensure that there is a safe home for them to return to and to demonstrate that we are working toward a better future for those who have been impacted so severely by the Syrian conflict.

And, with that, I am pleased to yield to the ranking member of our subcommittee, Mr. Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I was anticipating having a conflict with today's hearing. Mr. Cicilline had agreed to step in, and I am proud to yield my time to Mr. Cicilline. He has been a leader on the issue of refugees. He organized the first Member letter requesting that the refugee cap be lifted in the wake of the migration crisis in Europe. And I am proud to yield to him.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Madam Chairman and Ranking Member Deutch, for calling this hearing today, and for your leadership on these issues.

And thank you, Ranking Member Deutch, for yielding to me.

As we have discussed at the first part of this hearing earlier this month, the crisis inside Syria and in the region is escalating and has led to the largest movement of refugees through Europe and the Middle East since World War II.

As of September, an estimated 12.2 million people inside Syria, more than half the population, are in need of humanitarian assistance. Of these, more than 7.6 million are displaced inside the country. In addition, more than 4.1 million Syrians have registered as refugees abroad, with most fleeing to countries in the immediate surrounding region, including Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and other parts of North Africa.

As we have seen in recent months, as those neighboring countries reach maximum capacity, more refugees are risking dangerous journeys across land and sea into Europe. The United Nations has declared the situation in Syria a level three emergency in order to help facilitate mobilization of resources for the humanitarian response. But the distribution of relief supplies within the country remains dependent on guarantees from all parties to the conflict of safe and unhindered access of humanitarian staff.

The International Committee of the Red Cross estimates that 5 million people within Syria are located in places that they categorize as difficult to reach by relief workers.

I am extremely concerned about how the new Russian bombing campaign is contributing to violence in Syrian, with reports that tens of thousands of people have been displaced in the past few weeks. Syrian human rights organizations have documented cases of Russian strikes on hospitals and medical facilities. And a

Human Rights Watch report said that Russian strikes killed 59 civilians on October 15.

With this renewed fighting, pressure on Syria's neighboring countries, and by extension Europe, will only increase. As the weather turns colder, the situation for refugees on the move will only get more perilous. Many host communities are overwhelmed. Overcrowded schools, inadequate hospital services, impacts on resources, such as water: All contribute to the burden of neighboring countries.

The United States is the largest donor of humanitarian assistance to Syria and the region. From Fiscal Year 2012 through September 21, 2015, the United States has allocated more than $4.5 billion to meet Syrian humanitarian needs. This funding includes over $1.5 billion to NGOs, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent, and other international organizations, as well as nearly $3 billion to U.N. agencies responding to the needs of conflict-affected populations in Syria and the region.

Yet according to UNHCR, chronic funding shortages are greatly limiting aid programs for refugees and host communities in the region. Since 2011, the U.N. appeals have remained significantly underfunded and recently resulted in cuts to food aid and cash assistance. Lack of assistance is reportedly leading to an increase in negative coping strategies, such as begging, child labor, survival sex, and increased debt. The world can and must do better. It is imperative that when we talk to our allies, particularly in the Gulf countries, that we emphasize the necessity of meeting the humanitarian needs of these refugees.

Moreover, while the United States has been the leader in terms of financial response to this crisis, we have fallen short in absorbing refugees. Jordan has absorbed ½ million, Lebanon 1 million, and Turkey 2 million. But since 2011, the United States has taken in roughly 1,500 Syrian refugees. Most of those in the past year. This is simply not acceptable.

Last month, as Ranking Member Deutch mentioned, I led a letter signed by 70 of my colleagues asking the administration to raise that number to 100,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2017. There is precedent for this. The United States welcomed approximately 200,000 refugees during the Balkan wars, 700,000 refugees from Cuba, and more than 700,000 refugees from Vietnam. While I was pleased that the administration raised the refugee quota for 2016 to accommodated 10,000 refugees from Syria, I fear that isn't nearly enough to make an impact.

Of course, the ultimate accountability for the violence and chaos on Syrian and Iraq falls upon the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, whose unspeakable cruelty toward his own people, including the use of chemical weapons, is at the heart of this civil war, as well as upon ISIS. The only way to fully ease the suffering of the Syrian and Iraqi people is to defeat ISIS and bring an end to the civil war in Syria. There is certainly no easy fix for this problem, but I hope that our witnesses today can tell us what steps the administration is taking to bring about a solution to this terrible tragedy and what more we can do.

I thank the witnesses again for being here. And thank you for the testimony you are about to provide.

And I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Cicilline.

Would you like to add anything, Mr. Deutch, or are you waiving——

Mr. DEUTCH. I will waive.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. You will waive. Thank you.

Mr. Trott is recognized.

Mr. TROTT. I would like to start by thanking Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen and Ranking Member Deutch for holding this important hearing.

As the situation in Syria becomes progressively worse, the need to deliver aid to affected people in a timely and efficient manner becomes even more important. We have learned throughout history that unfortunately religious minorities are disproportionately affected during dire humanitarian crises. I am proud to represent a vibrant district with various religious minorities from the Middle East. And one of the most common complaints I hear from them is that aid is not getting to them quickly enough.

In April, I wrote a bipartisan letter to USAID with my colleagues in the Michigan delegation asking USAID to consider removing bureaucratic red tape to help these battered communities. Six months later, my letter remains unanswered.

While I understand that USAID is under pressure to ensure that every vulnerable citizen is taken care of, if our aid is not getting to these communities at the right time, our efforts are futile and the crisis only becomes worse.

To better coordinate the various humanitarian relief efforts ongoing in the region, I introduced legislation that would require the interested parties to better coordinate with one another to ensure timely relief to these endangered citizens. After spending 30 years in business, I know that the key to success of any project is cooperation and communication, not more red tape, obstacles, and excuses.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Trott.

Mr. Boyle is recognized.

Mr. BOYLE. Thank you. And I would just briefly say that we faced a real turning point in late August ever since the shocking and horrific sight of a small boy's body being washed ashore on a beach in Turkey. That really, I think, awoken the consciousness of and the consciences of many people. I was in Europe at that time as part of an international conference, and it clearly changed the dynamic in many Western European countries that had not been stepping up to the plate to do their part.

I would say that besides the humanitarian assistance—and I preread some of the testimony, and I know that we have had a three-prong approach—clearly our humanitarian assistance has led the world. We are number one in that regard, and we should be quite proud of it. I think the question that I am searching for an answer—that I really want answered and cannot at this point is, are we going to continue to do a series of one-offs, or will there actually be a worldwide collaborative effort to solve this problem?

So in the hearing today and many of the questions that are asked and answered, I hope we could spend a moment, take a look

at the United States, not in isolation but ourselves as part of a larger global solution.

Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Very good, sir.

Do any other members wish to be recognized?

If not, I would like to introduce our witnesses who are three very good friends of our subcommittee.

First, we are pleased to welcome back the Honorable Anne C. Richard, who serves as Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration for the Department of State. She has served as the vice president of government relations and advocacy of the International Rescue Committee and was a nonresident fellow for the Center for Transatlantic Relations at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies.

Welcome back, ma'am.

And, second, we are pleased to say hello to the Honorable León Rodríguez, who is the Director of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service. Previously, Mr. Rodríguez served as the Director of the Office for Civil Rights at the Department of Health and Human Services and, before that, served in the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Pennsylvania and was a trial attorney in the Civil Division of the Department of Justice.

Welcome, Mr. Rodríguez.

And now we also welcome back a good friend, Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator Thomas Staal of the Bureau of Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance at USAID. He has served in USAID since the late 1980s and has served as a Director of the Iraq Reconstruction Office. And Mr. Staal also served as the mission director in Lebanon, Ethiopia, and Iraq.

And you don't have to be a good friend of the subcommittee to be a witness, but we just get good witnesses, and we welcome you back. So thank you.

Ms. Richard, we will start with you.

Ms. RICHARD. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Closer to your mouth.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ANNE C. RICHARD, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF POPULATION, REFUGEES, AND MIGRATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Ms. RICHARD. Oh. I can bring this to me.

Thank you, Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Deutch, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs to discuss the Syrian humanitarian crisis.

I returned recently from a series of meetings overseas, including my fifth visit to Turkey and my eighth visit to Jordan during my tenure as Assistant Secretary. I greatly appreciate the interest of this committee on this very challenging situation.

I would like to briefly outline the steps taken by the Population, Refugees, and Migration Bureau and others at the State Department, USAID, and in the Obama administration to provide humanitarian assistance to innocent civilians and to assist the governments of other countries to deal with the crisis in Syria.

As you know, in early September, and as Congressman Boyle just mentioned, the tragic photo of a little boy's body on a beach in Turkey awakened people to the plight of Syrian refugees in ways that years of grim statistics, bleak images, and climbing casualty figures could not. What started as unrest in Syria in 2011 has developed into a multifront war and spilled over to become a regional crisis. Recently, the crisis reached Europe as hundreds of thousands of young men, women and sometimes entire families seek to reach that continent bu boat, bus, train, and foot. They are joined by refugees and migrants from other countries, chiefly Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Iraq. While the outflow of refugees to Europe has garnered a lot of attention, it is important for us to remember and acknowledge that the vast majority of Syrian families remain in the Middle East. And you just heard the figures in the opening statements of the chair and ranking member that there are more than 4 million refugees in the surrounding countries and roughly 7 million Syrians are displaced within their own country.

For more than 4 years, the Obama administration has helped these countries neighboring Syria and the innocent people caught up in the Syria crisis even as we continue to play a leading role in providing humanitarian aid to people affected by conflicts in many other places. We have a three-pronged approach to the humanitarian aspects of the crisis in Syria and the region: Strong levels of humanitarian assistance, active diplomacy, and expanded refugee resettlement.

First, the U.S. Government is the leading donor of humanitarian assistance to people in need inside Syria, in the surrounding countries, and to others caught up in crises around the world. Through contributions to international organizations, such as the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Organization for Migration, the World Food Programme, UNICEF, and leading nongovernmental organizations, U.S. funds are being used to save millions of lives. U.S. humanitarian assistance and response to the Syrian conflict, as you have said, totals more than $4.5 billion since the start of the crisis and is made possible thanks to strong bipartisan support from Congress. Without U.S. support, more people would be making the dangerous voyage further north.

Even with our sizeable contributions, however, U.N. appeals for humanitarian aid to address the crisis in Syria remain underfunded. With only 45 percent of the needs covered as of October 2015, these shortfalls have had real consequences. Cuts to food and other assistance was one of the triggers of the current migration of people to Europe. Syrian refugees in Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon are losing hope of ever returning to their homes. They are unable to work regularly to sustain their families. Rents are high. And their children are missing out on school. Roughly 85 percent of refugees now live outside of camps. And that is something that is not well understood or known. We need to help refugees become self-sufficient while we also support the communities that host them. We are looking at ways to better link our relief and development assistance. And, importantly, we are working to get more refugee children in school throughout the region.

The second prong of our response is diplomacy on humanitarian issues. For several years, we have engaged government officials in the region to encourage them to keep borders open and allow refugees to enter their countries; authorize the work of leading humanitarian organizations; and allow refugees to pursue normal lives, or as normal a life as possible. Diplomacy on humanitarian issues means working constructively with other nations to find solutions. The issue of the refugee and migration crisis was taken up again and again in recent international fora. And in my testimony, I talk about the places that I have traveled recently and the meetings I have had pursuing our so-called humanitarian diplomacy.

Diplomacy also includes pushing when needed those who can and should be doing more. We are engaged on encouraging countries that provide assistance outside the U.N. system to contribute to the U.N. appeals for Syria. Contributions to U.N. appeals can help prevent duplication and ensure that assistance is provided to those who need it the most. And we are also encouraging countries to promote refugees to pursue jobs and livelihoods.

The third prong of our response is resettling refugees in the United States. As you know, for the past 3 years, we have brought 70,000 refugees from all around the world to the United States. And for this year, the President has determined we should bring 85,000 including at least 10,000 Syrians. We recognize that admitting more Syrian refugees to the United States is only part of the solution, but it is in keeping with our American tradition. It shows the world that we seek to provide refuge for those most in need. It sets an example for others to follow. And it adds to diversity and strength of American society.

I have been up on the Hill a couple times recently and have gotten a lot of questions about the process that we use to bring refugees here. They are referred by the UNHCR. We work very carefully to have them tell their stories. No one comes who hasn't been approved by the Department of Homeland Security. And León Rodríguez and I are here to answer any questions you have about the resettlement process, but it generally lasts 18 to 24 months. And we take very seriously the need to secure our borders as part of that program.

In conclusion, the vast majority of refugees of the 3 million who have been admitted to the United States, including from some of the most troubled regions in the world, have proven to be hard working and productive residents. They pay taxes; send their children to school; and after 5 years, may take the test to become citizens.

So I am happy the answer any questions you may have about this three-pronged approach and to provide details about our program.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Richard follows:]

UNCLASSIFIED

Testimony of Anne C. Richard,
Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs,
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
"Examining the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis from the Ground (Part II)"
October 27, 2015, 2:00pm

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Mr. Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs to discuss the Syrian humanitarian crisis. I returned recently from a series of meetings overseas, including my fifth visit to Turkey and my eighth visit to Jordan during my tenure as Assistant Secretary. I greatly appreciate the interest of this Committee in this very challenging situation. I would like to briefly outline the steps taken by the Population, Refugees and Migration bureau and others at the State Department, USAID and in the Obama Administration to provide humanitarian assistance to innocent civilians and to assist the governments of other countries to deal with the crisis in Syria.

As you know, in early September, the tragic photo of a little boy's body on a beach in Turkey awakened people to the plight of Syrian refugees in ways that years of grim statistics, bleak images, and climbing casualty figures could not.

What started as unrest in Syria in 2011 has developed into a multi-front war and spilled over to become a regional crisis. Recently, the crisis reached Europe as hundreds of thousands of young men, women and sometimes entire families seek to reach that continent by boat, bus, train and foot. They are joined by refugees and migrants from other countries, chiefly Afghanistan (16%), Eritrea (6%), and Iraq (3%). While the outflow of refugees to Europe has garnered a lot of attention, it is important for us to remember and acknowledge that the vast majority of Syrian families remain in the Middle East. Four million are refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Roughly 7 million Syrians are displaced within their own country, and many more are dependent on aid to survive.

For more than four years, the Obama Administration has helped countries neighboring Syria and the innocent people caught up in the Syria crisis, even as we continue to play a leading role in providing humanitarian aid to people affected by conflicts in many other places.

We have a three pronged approach to the humanitarian aspects of the crisis in Syria and the region: strong levels of humanitarian assistance, active diplomacy, and expanded refugee resettlement.

First, the U.S. Government is the leading donor of humanitarian assistance to people in need inside Syria, in the surrounding countries, and to others caught up in crises around the world. Through contributions to International Organizations such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Organization for Migration, the World Food Program, UNICEF and leading non-governmental organizations, US funds are being used to save millions of lives.

U.S. humanitarian assistance in response to the Syrian conflict totals more than $4.5 billion since the start of the crisis and is made possible thanks to strong bipartisan support from Congress. Without U.S. support, more people would be making the dangerous voyage further north.

Even with our sizable contributions, however, UN appeals for humanitarian aid to address the crisis in Syria remain underfunded, with only 45% of the needs covered as of October 2015. These shortfalls have had real consequences: cuts to food and other assistance was one of the triggers of the current migration of people to Europe; Syrian refugees in Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon are losing hope of ever returning to their homes; they are unable to work regularly to sustain their families, rents are high and their children are missing out on school.

Roughly 85% of refugees now live outside of camps. We need to help refugees become self-sufficient while we also support the communities that host them. We are looking at ways to better link our relief and development assistance. Importantly, we are working to get more refugee children in school throughout the region. Education for children who have been displaced is essential for their own futures and for ours. We support the "No Lost Generation" campaign to educate and protect Syrian children and youth with funding to UN agencies like UNICEF and leading non-governmental organizations.

We stay in close touch with UN agencies to encourage the most efficient use of our aid dollars. Contributions from other donor governments, the private sector and the public are also urgently needed. In recent weeks, we have been gratified to see increased contributions from the public. We encourage members of the public seeking information about private efforts to visit www.aidrefugees.gov.

The second prong of our response is diplomacy on humanitarian issues. For several years we have engaged government officials in the region to encourage them to keep borders open and allow refugees to enter their countries, authorize the work of leading humanitarian organizations, and allow refugees to pursue normal lives – as normal as is possible given what they have been through. We are part of a chorus of nations that call for the respect of humanitarian principles, even inside Syria in wartime.

Diplomacy on humanitarian issues means working constructively with other nations to find solutions. The issue of the refugee and migration crisis was taken up again and again in recent international fora such as the UN General Assembly in New York in September, the UN High Commissioner for Refugee's Executive Committee meeting in Geneva in early October, and the recently-concluded Global Forum on Migration and Development in Istanbul. All provided opportunities for countries to come together and unite in a common effort. I attended the first and led the US delegations to the others. At all of these venues, we met with government officials involved in the crisis, from Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, to Sweden and Germany.

Diplomacy also includes pushing, when needed, those who can and should be doing more. We are engaged on encouraging countries that provide assistance outside the UN system to contribute to the UN appeals for Syria. Contributions to UN appeals can help prevent duplication and ensure that assistance is provided to those who need it the most. We are also encouraging countries to permit refugees to pursue livelihoods and become more self-sufficient, and to do this in ways that do not exacerbate existing unemployment issues in their countries.

The third prong of our response is resettling refugees in the United States

In FY 2015, nearly 70,000 refugees of 67 different nationalities were admitted for permanent resettlement in the United States, including 1700 Syrians. In FY 2016, the President has determined that we should increase that number to 85,000, including at least 10,000 Syrians. We recognize that admitting more Syrian refugees to the United States is only part of the solution, but it is in keeping with our American tradition. It shows the world that we seek to provide refuge for those most in need, it sets an example for others to follow, and it adds to the diversity and strength of American society.

Resettlement is offered to refugees who are among the most vulnerable – people for whom a return to Syria someday would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, such as victims of torture, burn victims, or others with chronic medical conditions. Families or individuals who could benefit the most from resettlement are referred to the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) by the UNHCR. We screen applicants carefully in an effort to ensure that no one who poses a threat to the safety and security of Americans is able to enter our country. Consequently, resettlement is a deliberate process that can take 18-to-24 months. All refugees of all nationalities considered for admission to the United States undergo intensive security screening involving multiple federal intelligence, security and law enforcement agencies, including the National Counterterrorism Center, the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center, and the Departments of Homeland Security, State and Defense.

Applicants to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program are currently subject to the highest level of security checks of any category of traveler to the United States. These safeguards

include biometric (fingerprint) and biographic checks, and a lengthy in-person overseas interview by specially trained DHS officers who scrutinize the applicant's explanation of individual circumstances to ensure the applicant is a bona fide refugee and is not known to present security concerns to the United States.

The vast majority of refugees of the three million refugees who have been admitted to the United States, including from some of the most troubled regions in the world, have proven to be hard-working and productive residents. They pay taxes, send their children to school, and after five years, many take the test to become citizens. Some serve in the U.S. military and undertake other forms of service for their communities and our country.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have about this three-pronged approach and to provide details about our programs.

Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Secretary Richard.

Mr. Rodríguez.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE LEÓN RODRÍGUEZ, DIRECTOR, U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Deutch, distinguished members of the committee, thank you all for convening this very important hearing.

When I first became Director of USCIS, in fact during the confirmation process, I knew that the work of operating the refugee admission process, particularly with respect to refugees from various parts of the Middle East, but chief among them Syria, was going to be one of my priorities and one of the most important parts of the work that we do at USCIS. The statistics recited by Congressman Cicilline tell a very grim story of what is going on in Syria today.

More than half of the population of Syria is displaced. Four million people are now essentially in exile somewhere in the Middle East, be it Jordan, be it Turkey, be it Lebanon, be it Egypt. But the individual stories that we hear are probably the most compelling of all. Recently one of my refugee officers shared with me a story of an individual who was screened. And during the screening process, we learned that he was with his elderly mother during a time when his town was being bombed by the Syrian Air Force. His mother, because of the stress of the bombing, had a heart attack. She ultimately died in his arms, but not after hours actually of this young man attempting to resuscitate his mother through CPR and having no access to medical care because of the horrendous conditions in that town. And this is one of legions of stories that we have heard at USCIS from the individuals that we have screened.

I took the opportunity this past June to travel to Turkey where in Istanbul, we have a resettlement support center where my officers work with a State Department contractor to screen refugees. And I observed both the screenings, and I observed them, incidentally, with the particular eye that I bring as a former criminal prosecutor who has myself conducted thousands of interviews, many of them confrontational interviews. Many of them interviews with individuals who I knew were lying to me. So I observed those screenings as they took place.

But I also had the opportunity to sit down with the families that were in that resettlement support center. And what was amazing to me is how recognizable those individuals were to me, how familiar they were to me. They were individuals from all walks of life, but they were individuals who really want the same thing that any of us here want, is to get out of harm's way and to find a better life for their family.

I had the opportunity to spend a few minutes with the children at the resettlement center, to witness their excitement about their potential new life in America, to hear what they had already learned about our country and their excitement about coming here. So, amidst that challenge, the men and women who work in a refugee admissions program do their job. And that essentially involves their doing two things. One, making sure that the individuals who

ask for refuge in the United States satisfy the legal requirements in order to obtain that refuge. But, two, and importantly as the chairwoman noted, ensuring that none of those individuals who are seeking refuge in the United States are people who mean us harm.

Now, how do we do that? Part of that is done through a suite of biographic and biometric checks. And I am hoping during the course of the hearing to be able to explain in some detail as to how those work. But the key is we actually have screened out individuals who we identified through that process as being potential threats. So the process has actually worked.

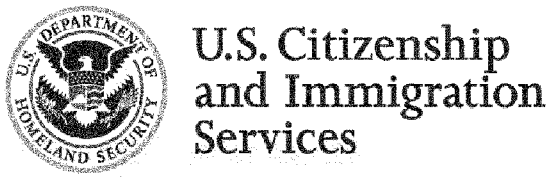
But, two, as importantly, the refugee officers in our agency are among the most highly trained professionals in the Federal Government. And they are specifically trained in country conditions to conduct interviews to screen out individuals who may do us harm. That process has also resulted in a number of people being placed "on hold," not permitted to travel to the United States until security concerns can be resolved.

I would like to conclude by dedicating my testimony here today to my maternal grandfather, John Policar, who I actually never had the opportunity to meet. My grandfather was one of the leaders of the Jewish community in Cuba in the late 1930s and 1940s. And among his activities as a leader of that community was to attempt to assist refugees from Nazi Europe, who some of whom had sought refuge here in the United States and were denied that refuge—many of us have heard the story of the St. Louis—and who then traveled to Cuba, some of whom were able to find refuge there but some of whom were not.

I intend, as director of USCIS, to honor his legacy. First and foremost, by making sure that we don't admit people who do us harm to the United States. But, secondly, by making sure that we honor our tradition of offering refuge to those who so desperately need it.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, and I look forward to answering the committee's questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Rodríguez follows:]



WRITTEN TESTIMONY

OF

LEON RODRIGUEZ
DIRECTOR
U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR A HEARING ON

"EXAMINING THE SYRIAN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS FROM THE GROUND (PART II)"

BEFORE
THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

OCTOBER 27, 2015
2:00 P.M.
2167 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC

Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing on the refugee admissions program, with particular emphasis on Fiscal Year 2016. As the Director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), my team works in close partnership with our colleagues at the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), with other components within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and with colleagues in the law enforcement and intelligence communities to meet the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program's (USRAP) mission to offer resettlement opportunities to eligible refugees while safeguarding the integrity of the program and our national security.

As you know, the United States has a proud and long-standing tradition of offering protection, freedom, and opportunity to refugees from around the world who live in fear of persecution and are often left to languish in difficult conditions of temporary asylum. USCIS remains dedicated to fulfilling this mission, in partnership with PRM, and continuing the United States' leadership role in humanitarian protection. An integral part of this mission is to ensure that refugee resettlement opportunities go to those who are eligible for such protection and who do not present a risk to the safety and security of our country. Accordingly, we are committed to deterring and detecting fraud among those seeking to resettle in the United States, and we continue to employ the highest security measures to protect against risks to our national security.

As the Director of USCIS, I can assure you that this commitment to our humanitarian and national security mandates is shared inside and outside of DHS. The refugee resettlement program has forged strong and deep relationships with colleagues in the law enforcement, national security, and intelligence communities and we continue to benefit enormously from their expertise, analysis, and collaboration. It simply would not be possible for us to support a

resettlement program of the size and scope that the United States maintains without this critical interagency infrastructure.

My testimony today will describe USCIS's role in refugee resettlement generally, and I will discuss the screening measures and safeguards that have been developed by the USRAP and enhanced over time. While many of these enhancements were first deployed in connection with the Iraqi refugee resettlement program, they are now being applied more broadly to applicants of all nationalities, including Syrians who now represent a growing portion of our caseload.

Refugee Resettlement Case Processing

As I mentioned above, the USRAP is a shared operational responsibility of the State Department and USCIS, among other agencies. The State Department is responsible for the overarching coordination and management of the USRAP, including the decision on which refugees around the world are granted access to the USRAP for resettlement consideration. As contemplated by section 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, this work is guided each year by a Presidential determination, which sets the refugee admissions ceiling following consultations with Congress. USCIS is responsible for conducting individual, in-person interviews with applicants to determine their eligibility for refugee status, including whether they meet the refugee definition and are otherwise admissible to the United States under U.S. law.

To maximize flexibility and program integrity, in 2005 USCIS created the Refugee Corps, a cadre of specially-trained USCIS officers who are dedicated to adjudicating applications for refugee status overseas. These officers are based in Washington, D.C., but they travel to multiple locations around the world. In addition, USCIS has a small number of officers posted at embassies overseas who conduct refugee adjudications, and we assign specially-trained officers from other programs – such as the Asylum Corps, Office of the Chief Counsel, and

Administrative Appeals Office – to supplement the Refugee Corps. Using this model, USCIS has been able to respond to an increasingly diverse refugee admissions program, working in 64 countries in Fiscal Year (FY) 2015.

Recognizing that a well-trained cadre of officers is critical to protecting the integrity of the refugee process, we have focused our efforts on providing the highest quality training to our adjudicators. In addition to the basic training required of all USCIS officers, refugee officers receive five weeks of specialized training that includes comprehensive instruction on all aspects of the job, including refugee law, grounds of inadmissibility, fraud detection and prevention, security protocols, interviewing techniques, credibility analysis, and country conditions research. Before deploying overseas, officers also receive pre-departure training which focuses on the specific population that they will be interviewing. This includes information on the types of refugee claims that they are likely to encounter, detailed country of origin information, and updates on any fraud trends or security issues that have been identified. With the advent of large-scale processing of Iraqi applicants in 2007, USCIS officers who adjudicate Iraqi refugee applications began receiving additional two-day training on country-specific issues, including briefings from outside experts from the intelligence, policy, and academic communities. This training has since expanded to a one-week training in order to include Syria-specific topics as well.

In order to fully explore refugee claims and to identify any possible grounds of ineligibility, specially-trained USCIS officers conduct an in-person, in-depth interview of every principal refugee applicant. The officer assesses the credibility of the applicant and evaluates whether the applicant's testimony is consistent with known country conditions. These adjudicators also interview each accompanying family member age 14 and older to determine their admissibility to the United States. In addition, refugee applicants are subject to robust

security screening protocols to identify potential fraud, criminal or national security issues. All refugee status determinations made by interviewing officers undergo supervisory review before a final decision is made. Refugee Affairs Division policy requires officers to submit certain categories of sensitive cases – including certain national security-related cases – to Refugee Affairs Division Headquarters to obtain concurrence prior to the issuance of a decision. This allows for Headquarters staff to conduct additional research, liaise with law enforcement or intelligence agencies, or consult with an outside expert before finalizing the decision.

Security Checks

Security checks are an integral part of the USRAP process for applicants of all nationalities, and coordinating these checks is a shared responsibility between the State Department and DHS. Refugee applicants are subject to the highest level of security checks, and a refugee applicant is not approved for travel until the results of all required security checks have been obtained and cleared.

All available biographic and biometric information is vetted against a broad array of law enforcement, intelligence community, and other relevant databases to help confirm a refugee applicant's identity, check for any criminal or other derogatory information, and identify information that could inform lines of questioning during the interview. Biographic checks against the State Department's Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS) – which includes watchlist information – are initiated at the time of prescreening by the State Department's Resettlement Support Center (RSC) staff. In addition, the RSC request Security Advisory Opinions (SAOs) from the law enforcement and intelligence communities for those cases meeting certain criteria.

In the fall of 2008, USCIS launched a third biographic check with the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), which we now refer to as Interagency Checks or "IAC's." Initially the IAC was required only for Iraqi applicants, but the IAC is now required for all refugee applicants within a designated age range, regardless of nationality. In addition, expanded intelligence community support was added to the IAC process in July 2010. In 2015, all partners coordinated to launch IAC recurrent vetting. With recurrent vetting, any intervening derogatory information that is identified after the initial check has cleared but before the applicant has traveled to the United States will be shared with USCIS without the need for a subsequent query.

In addition to these biographic checks, biometric checks against three sets of data are coordinated by USCIS, using mobile fingerprint equipment and photographs which are typically collected at the time of the USCIS interview. These fingerprints are screened against the vast biometric holdings of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Next Generation Identification system, and they are screened and enrolled in DHS's Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT). Through IDENT, applicant fingerprints are screened not only against watchlist information, but also for previous immigration encounters in the United States and overseas – including, for example, cases in which the applicant previously applied for a visa at a U.S. embassy. Starting in 2007, USCIS began to work with the Department of Defense (DoD) to augment biometric screening by checking against the DoD Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS). ABIS contains a variety of records, including fingerprint records captured in theatre in Iraq, and it is a valuable resource to identify a wide array of relevant information. Today, ABIS screening has been expanded to refugee applicants of all nationalities who fall within the prescribed age ranges.

In addition to the existing suite of biometric and biographic checks that are applied to refugees regardless of nationality, USCIS has instituted an additional layer of review for Syrian refugee applications, taking into account the myriad actors and dynamic nature of the conflict in Syria. Before being scheduled for interview by a USCIS officer in the field, Syrian cases are reviewed at USCIS headquarters by a Refugee Affairs Division officer. All cases that meet certain criteria are referred to the USCIS' Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate (FDNS) for additional review and research. FDNS conducts open-source and classified research on referred cases and synthesizes an assessment for use by the interviewing officer. This information provides case-specific context relating to country conditions and regional activity, and it is used by the interviewing officer to inform lines of inquiry related to the applicant's eligibility and credibility.

Throughout the review process of Syrian refugee applicants, FDNS engages with law enforcement and intelligence community members for assistance with identity verification, acquisition of additional information, or deconfliction to ensure USCIS activities will not adversely affect an ongoing law enforcement investigation. When FDNS identifies terrorism-related information, it makes the appropriate nominations or enhancements to the Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment (TIDE), using standard interagency watchlisting protocols. Additionally, USCIS drafts and disseminates reports to U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies alerting the interagency to information that meets standing intelligence information requirements.

USCIS continues to work with DHS's Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) and other intelligence community elements to identify options for new potential screening opportunities to enhance this already robust suite of checks. Finally, in addition to the checks that I have described, refugee applicants are subject to screening conducted by DHS colleagues

at U.S. Customs and Border Protection's National Targeting Center-Passenger and the Transportation Security Administration's Secure Flight program prior to their admission to the United States, as is the case with all individuals traveling to the United States regardless of immigration program.

The Refugee Admissions Pipeline

Given the wide geographic scope of the USRAP, including remote and sometimes dangerous locations, and the complexities of refugee resettlement processing, USCIS coordinates closely with PRM to develop a schedule for refugee interviews each quarter of the Fiscal Year. This yields a "pipeline" of refugee applicants who can be admitted to the United States, once all required security checks, medical examinations, and other pre-travel steps are completed.

In FY 2015, USCIS officers conducted refugee status interviews for applicants from 67 countries. The leading nationalities admitted to the United States were Burmese, Iraqis, and Somalis, as the multi-year program for Bhutanese nationals in Nepal continued its downward trend. Admissions from Africa continued their multiyear increase, notably including larger numbers of Congolese from the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Refugee processing operations in the Middle East, which have been primarily focused on Iraqi nationals since 2007, expanded to include a larger number of Syrian referrals from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As of late September 2015, the USRAP has received approximately 19,000 referrals of Syrian applicants from UNHCR, primarily in Turkey, Jordan, and Egypt. The USRAP continues to interview large numbers of Iraqi applicants in these same three locations, and has also resumed processing Iraqi nationals in Baghdad in spring 2015, after a break in operations since June 2014. USCIS was not able to

work in Lebanon in FY 2015 – but for one exceptional, one-officer visit – due to space constraints at the embassy, where officers both live and work due to the security conditions.

In Fiscal Years 2013, 2014, and 2015, USCIS and the State Department have succeeded in meeting the annual refugee admissions ceiling of 70,000. This accomplishment reflects a worldwide commitment to refugee protection, as well as intense and committed efforts by all the interagency partners to improve, refine, and enhance the security vetting regime for refugee applicants, while maintaining its integrity and rigor. We will continue these interagency efforts to improve the quality and efficacy of the USRAP security screening regime, including progress toward more automated processes.

USCIS is prepared to work closely with the State Department and other interagency partners to support a larger refugee admissions program of 85,000 arrivals in FY 2016, including at least 10,000 Syrian refugees, while assiduously maintaining the integrity of the program and our national security.

I would be happy to answer your questions.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Rodríguez. Excellent testimony.

Mr. Staal.

STATEMENT OF MR. THOMAS STAAL, SENIOR DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, BUREAU FOR DEMOCRACY, CONFLICT AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. STAAL. Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Deutch, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for your support and the attention today to this Syrian crisis, which grows, as we have heard, more complex every day.

For almost 5 years, the Assad regime has waged an unrelenting campaign of bloodshed that has decimated communities and allowed extremists to thrive. And while the world's attention is centered appropriately on the perilous journey of Syrians forced to flee their homeland, the refugees, as we have heard, are part of a much larger community that suffers under the weight of this crisis.

Over 17 million Syrians, 70 percent of the country's pre-war population, are affected by this conflict, with the majority facing daily attacks inside Syria. Indeed, half of all Syrians are either dead or displaced from their homes.

While more than 4 million of them have gone to neighboring countries, another 6.5 million to 7 million are displaced inside Syria.

And behind these massive numbers, the children, just like our own, and parents, like any parent, would do anything and risk everything to keep their families safe. Families inside Syria face the painful ultimatum: If you stay, your child could be killed on the way to get bread. If you leave, you risk their safety on a dangerous journey across borders. And we are doing everything possible in USAID to alleviate the suffering for families inside Syrian as well as those fleeing to the neighboring countries.

The U.S. Government has been, as you have heard, the single largest donor to the Syrian crisis. And our partners fearlessly cross conflict lines amidst daily barrel bombs and shifting conflict lines to reach people in the regime in opposition and even in ISIL-held areas. Today they face an added layer of threat, Russian aggression on Syrian soil.

Several partners report that Russian air strikes are driving new displacement and complicating access. One heroic partner told us he feels like every time he goes to the hospital that he manages, it is only a matter of time until it will explode. His hospital has been bombed, by the way, over 18 times by the Syrian regime and recently by the Russians.

Despite ongoing access and security challenges, we are reaching approximately 5 million people inside Syria and another 1.5 million in the region every month with our humanitarian assistance. And this aid is saving lives and reducing suffering every day.

USAID supports inside Syria 140 health facilities, and in Fiscal Year 2015 alone, it reached over 2.4 million people with health assistance. And we have provided access to clean water for 1.3 million people. We are the largest donor of food assistance, providing 1.5 billion to date. We provide flour, even, to bakeries inside Syria

and support food vouchers for Syrian refugees that have injected over $1.2 billion into the economies of the Syrian neighbors.

And separate from our humanitarian efforts, we help moderate civilian organizations in Syria to essential services, providing a lifeline to communities under siege.

And then also our development assistance helps Syria's neighbors, who are strained more than ever to build more resilient public services to cope with the influx of the refugees.

With 2 million Syrian children out of school, we are working to ensure that this entire generation is not lost to this crisis. In Jordan and Lebanon, we are expanding public schools, supporting remedial programs, training teachers so that Syrian refugees can thrive alongside their host community peers. We have upgraded water systems and hospitals to help the communities in Jordan and Lebanon cope with the increased demand. In Lebanon, we are working with young people to decrease tension between host communities and refugees and help them find constructive solutions to common ends.

And these efforts, by the way, are possible thanks to the generous support from Congress.

Nevertheless, we struggle to meet the escalating needs with stretched dollars. We are working closely with other donors to mobilize resources because we cannot meet the needs alone. Certainly no amount of humanitarian assistance will stop the suffering or stem the tide of refugees, which is why a negotiated political solution is urgently needed. In the meantime, we are committed to saving lives, alleviating suffering, and helping Syria's neighbors to cope with the largest humanitarian crisis we have ever faced.

Thank you for your support. And I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Staal follows:]

Testimony of Thomas H. Staal
Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator
Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance
U.S. Agency for International Development

House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Middle East & North Africa
Hearing "Examining the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis from the Ground (Part II)"
October 27, 2015

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

Providing Humanitarian Assistance in a Time of Unprecedented Need

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

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

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

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

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

Food Assistance

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

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

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

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

Securing a Lifeline for Moderate Civilians Actors Inside Syria

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

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

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

Supporting Women and Children

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Building Resilience in the Region

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

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

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

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

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

Meeting the Challenges Ahead

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much to our Government agencies for the great work that you are doing under difficult circumstances.

I would like to yield my time to Mr. Chabot of Ohio.

Mr. CHABOT. I thank the chair lady for yielding.

I will begin with you, Mr. Rodríguez. During a recent hearing before the House Committee on Homeland Security, FBI Director James Comey stated that government background checks on refugees is limited to only that information which has been previously collected and stored in its database. Given that ISIS has threatened to exploit the current Syrian humanitarian crisis, what is being done to increase scrutiny and the thoroughness of security checks on those seeking refugee status in the United States?

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. Thank you, Congressman, for that very critical question.

We, working together with the State Department, conduct a suite of biographic and biometric checks of individuals who are applying for admission. The biographic checks, in fact, occur before my officers interview the individual seeking admission.One among the sources of the biographic checks are something called the interagency check, which is hosted by the National Counterterrorism Center. That database is populated from information from all kinds of law enforcement and intelligence sources, and there is a constant and ongoing effort to feed that database. It is true, as it has often been true in other places, that we do not currently have any meaningful United States presence inside Syria. Nevertheless, we do have, as we always have had, ability to gather intelligence information, gather law enforcement information, using a number of techniques and doing so in a number of places. And as a result of that process, our officers in 30 cases were able to identify individuals who, in fact, based on their showing up in the databases that I just described, denied those individuals admission.

Once we interview individuals, we also take fingerprints. We run those fingerprints against Department of Defense databases, United States law enforcement databases, including both the FBI and also our own Customs and Border Patrol, in those events where some individuals have encountered, really, United States either military or law enforcement authorities at some point along the way.

But very critically, Congressman, is the interview process. I started my career as a street prosecutor in New York City. And we have all the technology in the world. We could run fingerprints. We could conduct chemical analysis. But at the end of the day, criminal cases were made by New York City Police detectives. The work that we do, Congressman, I would suggest is similar. At the end of the day, the judgments that we make are the judgments of the men and women, the highly trained and highly prepared men and women, that work in our refugee admission process. They are trained and briefed at a great level of depth in country conditions within Syria. In fact, the interviews that we conduct further populate our understanding about those country conditions, and they use that knowledge, that information, to then test the information that is being given to them by the individuals applying for admission. As a result of that training, hundreds of individuals have ei-

ther been placed on hold or denied admission all together because that process of interviewing has identified problems with the account being given by those individuals. So we are going to continue to polish that process. We are going to be continuing to work to further access different sources of intelligence so that we can test individual stories against that information.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. I would like to get one more question in, and I just have a minute left.

So, either Ms. Richard or Mr. Staal, whichever one of you wants to handle it, why has the administration opted to channel aid for the humanitarian crisis through the United Nations rather than through direct aid or NGOs? Would it not be more efficient and cost-effective to work directly with partners on the ground? So either one of you that would like to take that is——

Ms. RICHARD. I can start. We do both. We channel aid through the best U.N. operational agencies, humanitarian agencies. And we also work with the top nongovernmental organizations. And we try to use all channels to get aid inside Syria, which Thomas is the expert on, and our sense is that because the U.N. plays a coordinating role and reviews the requests from a whole span of agencies and puts together these, appeals, it actually reduces duplication and makes sure that professionals who know what they are doing are responding with the aid. Now, of course, at the same time, most aid workers are from the countries in which they are working. So, inside Syria, it is mostly Syrians. In Jordan, it is Jordanians, et cetera. But at the top, there are people who are quite seasoned who are involved in this.

Tom, do you want to add anything?

Mr. STAAL. Yes. Thank you. I mean, it is an excellent question. And what we try to do is make sure we are using the most effective means and the organizations that can do the job the best in a given area. And sometimes it can vary between different parts of the country. Frankly, in the regime-held areas within Syria, the U.N. agencies are able to operate most effectively and most broadly into, you know, the far reaches of the area.

In the nonregime areas, we do work also somewhat with the U.N., but there we work more with international NGOs. Now, they in turn work through local organizations, and that is a critical aspect that you mentioned. It is difficult for us to work directly with local organizations just through the financial systems and oversight. But through our international NGO partners, they are able to work with local organizations. Indeed, that is how they get there, including with like local councils and civil society organizations that really know the situation on the ground, have the best access.

We actually have better reporting and oversight of our programs and our assistance than in many other countries. So even the GAO and our IG shows that our aid is getting to the right people. And then the nice thing about working with local councils is that you are building some local capacity so that, hopefully, when the regime—excuse me. When the crisis is over, you have got some local capacity to build up again.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. My time is expired.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chabot.

Mr. Deutch is recognized.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I am going to yield to Mr. Cicilline.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank the gentleman for yielding.

Under Secretary Richard, if I could begin with you, can you explain—I recognize this is a complicated process, but could you could explain to us from sort of beginning to end how a refugee from Syria might navigate the process to be admitted to the United States? How long that typically takes? Where is the first contact? How many agencies are involved and have jurisdiction over this determination? And kind of just explain sort of the process because I think people have sort of a mistaken impression that they just show up, and they are admitted and sort of a better understanding of kind of what that process is.

Ms. RICHARD. Thank you, Congressman. The process lasts 18 to 24 months. The refugees are identified as people who are particularly vulnerable in the places where they have fled. So I guess the process starts when they decide to leave their country, which is a very challenging thing. They cross the borders. They try to live as well as they can for a time. But they may come to the attention of the UNHCR or other aid workers who will then look at their case and see if there are certain characteristics about them that would make them match what we are looking for.

What we are looking for is that they have to fit the definition of a refugee, which is someone fleeing persecution for one of—they have a well-founded fear of persecution for one of five reasons, which is race, religion, nationality, political belief, or membership in a social group. And we also, though, seek to bring those who are the most vulnerable people. So that might be someone who has been tortured or has a specific medical condition that makes it very hard to survive where they are or just people for whom there is never going to be a chance to go home again.

The first contact, then, is really with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. They refer them to us. They do not choose who gets admission to the United States. But they refer the cases they think are likely to fit what we are looking for. And then the process continues where we have a relationship with several resettlement support centers, RSCs, in different places around the world where they will work with the refugee, the individual, or the family, and put the case together of how they became a refugee and make the case that they do actually qualify for refugee status.

As part of that, they have a series of background checks, and then this picks up where León Rodríguez was describing the types of checks, the fingerprints, the medical background, the biographic history, until they get interviewed by that DHS officer who has traveled out to the field, usually in a circuit ride, and is interviewing people during the course of a day—for Syrians, it is three per day—and really double checking several things. And they are trying to screen out people who are lying to us, people with a criminal past, or people who are, of course, would-be terrorists. So once that all has happened and the final checks work out, they are scheduled then to be brought to the United States. They are

brought to the U.S. escorted by the International Organization for Migration. So that is two U.N. agencies involved, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration.

Mr. CICILLINE. And if I can just interrupt you, before—so after they get to the United States, I understand the process, but that process you just described, is that any different than the process that was in place when the United States accepted 200,000 refugees from the Balkans or 700,000 refugees from Cuba or 700,000 refugees from Vietnam? Has it improved, is it the same——

Ms. RICHARD. After 9/11, the security aspects of that program were tightened quite a bit. And then again in the last couple of years. Therehas been a lot of effort to scrub the program to make it as efficient as possible without cutting corners on security. And right now, we are under direction from the White House to keep doing that and keep seeing if we can speed up the length of the process without doing anything to undermine security.

Mr. CICILLINE. And this has been described by some as the most intensive vetting process in the Federal Government interagency——

Ms. RICHARD. Well, for any traveler to the United States. I mean, no traveler to the United States gets this kind of intense vetting.

Mr. CICILLINE. And, you know, are there any limitations, assuming you had additional resources, Director Rodríguez, or Under Secretary Richard, any limitations on your ability to do this for more refugees—if you were provided the additional resources to do it, to go through this process—are there any other obstacles?

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. I mean, I think this is always a resource question. And so right now we have about 100 refugee officers. We have an asylum corps of 400 plus that we can draw from to supplement. They are trained very similarly or just about identically to the refugee officers. But these situations always require us to adapt, to build to whatever the task is that is in front of us. And we have actually—my agency has become very good. And I know PRM has become very good at adapting when these challenges are presented to us. But does it put further stress on our resources? No question.

Ms. RICHARD. You know, just in talking about it, we knew that we can't—we can't change the numbers like a dial on a—I don't know. Do people make things with dials anymore? Dial on an old-fashioned stereo. Because, you know, even if we were to get more funding to get more interviewers, they have to be recruited, and they have to be trained before they are sent out. And then the conditions overseas kick in which in some places where we had wanted to carry out interviews in the past are—they are security concerns. And so we, you know, have to make sure we are not sending the officers somewhere where they themselves would get into trouble. But then also sometimes there is acts of God. We had to slow down bringing people from Nepal year after the earthquake happened this past year. So they have to be able to travel out to the places where the refugees are ready to be interviewed. And in the Middle East, there have been some security issues. Same with the Dadaab camp in Kenya. And also there are parts of Africa that are just hard to get to. You can't just fly in and fly out without careful planning.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you. I see my time is up. Thank you.

I yield back, Madam Chairman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Cicilline.

Mr. Boyle.

Oh, Ms. Frankel.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you very much.

And thank you to the witnesses. And I agree with my colleagues here who have said that they consider this one of the great humanitarian—probably the greatest humanitarian crisis of our time right now.

So I just want to get a couple things clarified. I got a little confused. On the refugees, it sounds to me—you say there are millions displaced within Syria and 4 million displaced out of Syria. So what would you—how would you quantify the number of refugees that would like to come to the United States? What figure would that be?

Ms. RICHARD. Well, they don't get to come if they would like to come to the United States. I think it is probably a very large number, but not 100 percent because most refugees usually want to go home.

Ms. FRANKEL. No. No. I am not saying that. I just want to know what you think is the——

Ms. RICHARD. What the UNHCR does is they believe that of 15 million refugees that they are concerned about, that about 1 million are people who are suitable for resettlement in other countries.

Ms. FRANKEL. So how does this come about? Does someone leave Syria in order to be considered by us? They have to—and is there any type of prioritization? I mean, if you are a family member, or is it first in line or first to sign up or——

Ms. RICHARD. It is who is—first, you have to qualify to be a refugee, and then——

Ms. FRANKEL. And what is the—what do you——

Ms. RICHARD. Based on the legal definition, which was those five factors, well-founded fear of persecution. And then we seek to resettle the people who are the most vulnerable, who——

Ms. FRANKEL. Which would be who?

Ms. RICHARD. So it is widows with children or orphaned children; or people who have medical conditions that make it very difficult for them to get the treatment they need in a refugee camp; people who are burn victims and can, you know, benefit from maybe, you know, the type of medical services we can provide here; you know, torture victims, people who, you know, feel that they will never be able to go home again. They have seen terrible things happen.

Ms. FRANKEL. So if you are able to process someone, do most of these folks have somebody in the United States that they are coming to settle with, or are they just coming here on their own and——

Ms. RICHARD. If they have a family, if they have a relative in the United States, we seek to reunite the families.

Ms. FRANKEL. And if they don't, there are services that you can——

Ms. RICHARD. What happens is when they arrive in the U.S., they are met at the airport by a representative, one of nine national networks we have. Six are faith-based; three are not, but they work in 170 cities across the United States. And they use a

lot of volunteers. They will take the refugee from the airport to their new home. It is probably an apartment that has been set up for them. And it may have been furnished with donated furniture. And then they will make sure that there is a meal in the refrigerator and show them how to turn off and on the lights. Depending on where they are from, sometimes some of the modern conveniences are new. And then the next day they take them to help get their new life started. And that could be using the bus, going to the grocery store, getting a Social Security Number, getting the kids enrolled in school.

Ms. FRANKEL. And as to the USAID, your workers are not in Syria. I think that is what you said. How many aid workers are dedicated now to Syrian relief, and where are they?

Mr. STAAL. Yeah. That is correct. Our aid workers are not inside Syria. We have a team in Jordan and another team in southern Turkey that is a Disaster Assistance Response Team. And then they work with our implementing partners, NGOs, U.N., and who in turn have local partners who work inside. So there are no Americans or international staff inside Syria.

Ms. FRANKEL. And the workers inside, is it basically food and medicine?

Mr. STAAL. It is actually quite a bit more. I mean, food and medicine are a big part of it. But it is also helping to repair water systems, even schools. We have trained teachers and helped rebuild things. Sometimes it is an underground school, you know, that is safe. Working—building capacity of local councils. We work with—we have trained hundreds and hundreds of first responders who are, you know, like a, you know, the fire department in a number of cities inside Syria. They have been a huge thing. And they are independent. They are volunteers, but we provide them training and even equipment. We have given, you know, like fire trucks and things like that. So we do a variety of things inside Syria.

Ms. FRANKEL. Madam Chairman, may I ask another question or just wait for another round, or——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Oh, please, go ahead. Thank you, Ms. Frankel.

Ms. FRANKEL. Okay. Excellent.

If I can just—if you all have an opinion, I would like to hear what your opinion is of what would happen if we would—if we were not doing this aid? And what does that mean to our—not just to our humanitarian part of this, which I think we all understand, but I think a lot of people don't—what they don't understand is that a lot of this effort really goes toward our national security. Because what happens? I mean, we are back to losing a generation of children, it looks like. And hopelessness breeds a lot of bad things. But I would like to hear it from your own words as to why your missions are so important.

Ms. RICHARD. Well, Congresswoman, I am convinced that, as I mentioned in my testimony, we are saving millions of lives with this aid because some of it is from USAID; is backing up our World Food Programme; is feeding so many people; vaccinations that go to children, that if they are not vaccinated, you know, makes them susceptible to really dangerous diseases. So there is a lifesaving piece of this. But then there is the life-enriching part of it, too. And

that is what, I think, you were getting at with our concerns about losing a generation of Syrian children. Many are out of school, have been out of school for years. It takes—that there are places in school, it is pretty tough for them. You know, if they go to Turkey, that they are living, surrounded by a different language, Turkish. But even in Lebanon and Jordan, they sometimes go to a second shift of school where they are trying to catch up to where they would have been had they stayed in school throughout.

Too many girls are getting married young. Boys and girls are sent to work early. So they are really missing out on childhood, missing out on education. And for those who are just left idle, they are really susceptible, I think, to bad influences. We see what happened when the rest of the world did not provide the funding to these U.N. appeals. I think, thanks to Congress, we have done our share of funding, the U.N. appeals for the Syrian crisis and for many other crisis around the world.

But we weren't matched at the same levels by the rest of the world. Part of it was because the number of crises have grown and the needs have grown. But you see what happened is when the World Food Programme started to cut back on food assistance and vouchers, that may have played a role on triggering the numbers of people streaming out of the Middle East and walking and taking dangerous journeys to Europe. So it is very destabilizing. It is destabilizing for the neighboring countries. It is destabilizing now for various parts of Europe. And I think that that shows you that had we not been there, things would have been much worse.

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. Congresswoman, this is who we are as Americans, put simply. My parents were refugees from Cuba, who were offered refuge, as was the chair. I would not be surprised if there are other stories about there being refugees or children of refugees, certainly, in this Chamber today. And that has been our tradition as a country as far back as anybody can remember.

When we talk about the importance of this work, it is certainly a humanitarian task that we are engaged in. And I think you have certainly painted very clearly sort of the scope of this problem. But it also promotes the stability of that region for us to take responsibility for our refugees and for us to lead by example as far as other countries. It has been our history that we have always taken a disproportionate share of refugees that has inspired other resettlement countries to do the same. And I would hope, and I think it is certainly the President's intention that we continue to honor that tradition.

Mr. STAAL. If I might add as well, and my colleagues have stated very eloquently, but I think it is important even to realize, notwithstanding the scale and scope of this crisis, there has not been large famine or major disease outbreaks, things like that, which would have been very likely without our assistance. So it has been amazingly successful, actually, given the constraints that they actually have to work with, both inside Syria and in the neighboring countries, and that is something to remember. Thank you.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you very much.

I yield back, Madam Chair.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Ms. Frankel.

Ms. Meng is recognized.

Ms. MENG. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman and Ranking Member Deutch, and to all of our witnesses for being here today.

As the weather gets colder, as winter approaches, how are our partners, implementing partners on the ground, helping to prepare winter for the refugees and displaced persons?

Mr. STAAL. I could begin the response. Especially within Syria, that has been the major focus of our efforts in addition to basic food and health supplies. We have been focusing over the last month or so on providing things like blankets and coats and, you know, additional supplies for the winter wherever we can get it in, and that is why it is important for us to work throughout the country wherever we can either in regime-held areas or in opposition-held areas, as long as we can be sure that it gets to the right people, which we have been able to do. But, yeah, that is a major issue for us inside Syria, and I know for the refugees as well.

Ms. MENG. And how are we supporting our European allies? And what more can we do as they absorb the large influx of refugees, and how can we urge countries that have made pledges of humanitarian aid to fulfill those commitments?

Ms. RICHARD. Well, we are responding to the appeals put out by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration and for their activities in Europe. They are really focused on the periphery of Europe, so to speak, so Serbia, Macedonia, and Greece. And part of what they are doing is trying to make sure that as people approach borders and cross borders, that they are treated humanely and not as criminals, but as people who deserve a hearing to determine whether they deserve asylum or not and people who need help along the way.

So that is a piece of what we are doing, but it is nowhere near the size and scope of what we are doing closer to Syria in the region.

The other thing we are doing is we are participating in international conversations with the European leaders. We did that in New York, at the U.N. General Assembly. I just came from Istanbul from the Global Forum for Migration Development. You know, I met with everyone from the German Foreign Minister to the Swedish Migration Minister to the Lebanese Prime Minister. We are talking to them, asking them: What do you need? What can we do to help you?

One of the proposals is that we try to do a better job internationally pulling people together to do more, not just in terms of money, which is part of it, but certainly, in terms of a settlement, work visas, family reunification, humanitarian visas, trying to get permission for refugees to work in the places to which they fled, trying to get kids in school, trying to get development assistance also tapped to help governments like Lebanon and Jordan, whose societies are really strained by having done the right thing. So that gives you a little flavor for the kind of international diplomatic exchanges we are having right now.

Ms. MENG. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Ms. Meng.

Mr. Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I appreciate it.

Thanks, Assistant Secretary Richard and Deputy Assistant Administrator Staal, for being with us again today. We appreciate your willingness to keep the dialogue with the subcommittee. I have been clear where I stand on the need for increased humanitarian aid, the support by our allies around the world, attention, the need for action in Syria, and the need for real and serious discussion on the practicality of the safe zone. And I hope that we will have that conversation.

But today, I want to take advantage of doctor—of Director Rodríguez' presence to the explore refugee process. I appreciate what you have shared already.

I will tell you, I have written to the chairman of Judiciary Committee asking for a hearing on this topic as well. Thus, we will have an opportunity to delve into these issue further there also.

So I just would like to walk through a few questions. You talked about USCIS' role in the U.S. refugee admissions program. You talked about the interviews to determine who is eligible for refugee status. You said that refugees—applicants for refugee status are interviewed in person. Who is responsible for conducting those interviews?

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. Those—sorry. Those interviews are conducted by refugee officers, who are part of our refugee admissions program.

Mr. DEUTCH. And I know you talked about the way cases are solved in Europe, but can you talk about the role of these refugee officers in adjudicating the application for refugee status?

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. So I think the way to describe that role is, first, to talk about both their—the training and briefing process that they take into the—so they all participate in a 5-week training course followed—as officers, followed by a specialized training course as refugee officers.

Once we know that they are going to be deployed to a particular environment, let's use the case of screening Syrian refugees, they receive a specific 8-day briefing prior to their deployment. The purpose of that briefing is to steep them in the country conditions that are applicable to the country from which these individuals are coming. And those country conditions consist of all the things that you would think: In what part of the country is the government dominant? What part of the country is ISIS dominant? What are the specifics of what is going on in the particular province, and much more that would be really be difficult to talk about in a public hearing. But I think you get the sense of the kind of content with which they are briefed.

Mr. DEUTCH. How many of them are there? How many of them have been trained to deal with Syrian refugees?

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. In total, there are 100. I don't know specifically how many are trained. What I will tell you is that, for example, in Istanbul, at any time, we will have deployed a team of either 5 or 10, depending on how many cases are actually ready for their interview.

Mr. DEUTCH. And are there specific security checks that have been instituted specifically for Syrian applicants?

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. The Syrian vetting is the most intense vetting that we conduct. I talk about the interagency checks——

Mr. DEUTCH. Which agencies are——

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. A number of intelligence agencies, a number of law enforcement agencies are populating the database that we use for the information check, including specific databases that identify individuals who may be terrorists.

Mr. DEUTCH. And while their application is pending, where do they reside?

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. They may reside in specific—depending on where they are. A lot of that depends on where they are. They could be in refugee camps, a large number of them are.

Mr. DEUTCH. They are broad?

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. They are broad. They certainly are not in their country, and they certainly are not here in the United States.

Mr. DEUTCH. And the U.S. refugee admission ceiling over the last 3 fiscal years has been 70,000. Would USCIS have the capability to conduct these extensive security evaluations and interviews if the cap were raised to 85,000?

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. Absolutely, Congressman. We do our job no matter what.

Mr. DEUTCH. And if it were raised to 100,000?

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. As I said, Congressman, we will do our job. We understand how critically important it is that we absolutely do our job and leave no stone unturned when it comes to conducting these security checks. We will not cut corners.

Mr. DEUTCH. And you said that hundreds have been placed on hold or denied altogether. Do you know what those specific numbers are?

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. I apologize. I don't remember them right now. I usually have them at my fingertips, but I certainly can provide them to members in response to your——

Mr. DEUTCH. If you would. And, finally, I want to thank you for the work that is being done. I want to thank you for your testimony here today to help provide some much-needed context and to push back against some of the statements that have been made wholly without any factual basis about the review that is done, the extent of the review, and I think without a full or, in many cases, without any appreciation for the efforts that they are undertaken every day to go through this refugee process and to contribute to our Nation's safety. You said in your opening testimony that it is important to you to honor our tradition of offering refuge to those who desperately need it. I agree, and I thank you sincerely for the work that you do.

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. Thank you, Congressman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Amen.

And how touching to dedicate this program, in your mind, to the legacy of your grandfather, very touching.

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. Thank you, Chairwoman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Connolly of Virginia is recognized.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

And, welcome, to the panel.

Ms. Richard, with the 12.2 million Syrians within Syria who are in need of humanitarian assistance, we have got in a country with 4.5 million people in Lebanon, 1.1 million Syrian refugees. In Jordan, 10 percent of the country's population are Syrian refugees equivalent. To what extent are we concerned about the desta-

bilizing effect of long-term refugee presence in small, you know, delicate countries in the Middle East region?

Ms. RICHARD. Thank you for your question. We are very concerned about it.

It is one reason that we are very often in discussion with these government officials in those countries.

We have a very strong aid program in Jordan that is stretching now to do more to help the communities that have taken in all these refugees.

I have been very influenced by the High Commissioner for Refugees, who is visiting Washington just now, Antonio Guterres, who really believes that this requires more than just relief to the refugees but also requires help to the communities whose hospital beds are filled, whose schools have gone to second shifts to accommodate Syrian children, whose water systems are straining, water and sanitation systems. You know, on a municipal level, there is a lot more people there in both Jordan and Lebanon.

I mentioned that I recently came back from Jordan. That was my eighth visit in the 3½ years I have been Assistant Secretary, so we have very close working relationship with them.

In Lebanon, I had met with the Prime Minister when he was in New York in September. He met me several times before, so we have a good conversation there.

We are particularly interested in doing two things: One is making sure that these developmental resources come into these countries, whether it is from USAID or the World Bank and multilateral mechanisms. And then the other is to make sure that children get into school because we think that is one of the most worrisome things right now, is that there is a whole generation of Syrian children who are out of school and, you know, in danger of being unskilled and at loose ends.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Do we have an estimate of the total population of Syrian refugees that will need to be permanently resettled, that are not going to be going back to Syria?

Ms. RICHARD. I don't think we have an estimate of that. It is very much done on a case-by-case basis, and we work with UNHCR to identify the most vulnerable cases. Starting in September 2013, they started to look at targeting a certain number of Syrians. It is now up to 130,000 Syrians as a goal, and they have referred 20,000 of that number to us. And in recent months, it has climbed between 22,000. The will U.S. probably end up taking most of the Syrian refugees who are referred for resettlement, but we are also trying to convince other countries to also do their share.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Right. And I want to get to that. But the number we have decided, the President announced, is 10,000. Is that not correct?

Ms. RICHARD. That is correct for this fiscal year.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Right. How do we arrive at that number? Based on what?

Ms. RICHARD. Well, we had been planning to bring between 5,000 and 8,000. And the President pushed us to stretch and really gear up to take more, and that, you know, makes sense as we are adding 15,000 refugees to our overall ceiling. And then the number for the following year we haven't determined yet, and in part, that is

because we want to see how well we do this year or in the first half of the year in getting more Syrians to the United States.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And what progress are we making impressing Gulf partners both to accept refugees and to help finance the humanitarian services that are so desperately needed in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, and elsewhere?

Ms. RICHARD. I would say our scorecard on that is very uneven. It is very uneven. We have seen how Kuwait has held three major pledging conferences for the Syrian crisis, and they, themselves, provided hundreds of millions of dollars several years running and followed through on their pledges, but not all of the Gulf states do that. Some give very little, some give a little bit, and then they will pledge some and then don't follow through. The UAE, in addition to Kuwait, has done several hundred millions of dollars. In general, none of these states resettle refugees. They are permitting Syrians to come and work in their countries. So that is one way that they are sheltering Syrians and their families, but that is normally a temporary situation.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And a drop in the bucket in terms of numbers?

Ms. RICHARD. We need more. We need more.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Madam Chairman, my time is up, but thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Connolly.

Mr. Rohrabacher of California.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So when we were talking about this great challenge that we face, you are saying that these oil-rich Gulf states are bringing people in as guest workers? How many? Do we know what magnitude that is, we are talking about?

Ms. RICHARD. I don't have those facts.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Are we talking about 5,000 people, talking about 20,000, talking about 50?

Ms. RICHARD. We will get you that information because what happened was in the last month in September with Europe migration, there has been a lot more criticism of the Gulf states, and then some of them pushed back and provided more information than we had previously had.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. How many migrants do we know have gone into Europe in these last 18 months?

Ms. RICHARD. It is hundreds of thousands, upwards of 600,000 that we are expecting.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Upwards of 600,000, and we don't know if the Gulf states have even brought in 10,000 people?

Ms. RICHARD. Well, I probably should know, but I don't know today. Sorry.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. All right. I appreciate that.

And what we are talking about here is bringing in 70,000, is it, or 75,000 here in the United States?

Ms. RICHARD. For the past 3 years, we have brought 70,000 refugees from all around the world to the United States. Last year, we brought 1,700 Syrians as part of that 70,000.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. 1,700 out of 70,000.

Ms. RICHARD. That is right. And then for this year, we intend to bring 85,000 refugees to the United States and 10,000 Syrians.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. And 10,000. Where are the rest of those refugees from, by the way, the other countries?

Ms. RICHARD. The top countries they are coming from are Iraq, Burma, and Somalia. But they come from 67 different countries.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. How many are coming from Iraq?

Ms. RICHARD. I have that, and I can tell you that.

So 12,676 came from Iraq for fiscal year that just ended, September 30.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. 12,000. Now, of these people—now, one thing that we have noticed that the migrants coming into Europe, we have just seemed to notice that they seem to be very strong young men, who are virile and Muslims, leaving this Muslim part of the world to go into this other part of the world that is not a Muslim part of the world. And they are getting away from conflict, and they are going there.

Is there any—let me ask you this, of the people that we are bringing in, are they going to be Muslim men like are going to Europe, or is there some way that we are trying to see that we have maybe a better definition of refugee, helpless people who are in need rather than bringing more Muslim men into the United States and into Western Europe?

Ms. RICHARD. Well, of the 1,700 that we have brought, only 2 percent were young men, you know, young adult, single men. Of course, we bring men. We bring families. We bring families that have had terrible things happen to them. I would question, I guess, some of the thinking behind your statement about the young, able-bodied Muslim men walking to Europe. I think the reason that they are able to walk to Europe is because they are able-bodied. And I think the reason they are going is because they have lost hope in the places they are living now of being able to finish their educations or have an education or have a job or earn some money and support their families.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I will tell you, when we see these pictures of thousands and thousands of young Muslim men in the streets in Western Europe, one thing has to be a priority: We want to help refugees whose lives are in danger. That is is our moral standard. This is what makes us America; we care about people who are in danger like that. But you are talking about—the people I have seen are military-aged people, who—if we are ever going to—if they are against radical Islam, they should be there fighting radical Islam. And I hope that—let me ask you in terms of religion.

Ms. RICHARD. I think some of them are——

Mr. ROHRABACHER [continuing]. Of the people would are here, of the people who are coming, we know that the Christian community in Syria and in Iraq and in that part of the world has been targeted for what most of us would consider to be genocide. They take the Christians out, and they just massacre them. Now, there are other Muslims, or get the Sunnis and Shiites to kill each other, that is clear. But it is pretty hard to miss the fact that the Christian community in that part of the world has been targeted for extinction. Should we not, then, try to prioritize so that we take care of those people who are targeted for extinction rather than just people who are caught up in a horrible situation?

Ms. RICHARD. All right, three very quick points. One is that the Muslim men are going to Europe. Some of them are trying to avoid

being drafted into Assad's regime, into his army. And so I am very sympathetic to them for that.

Second, Europe is, in history, primarily Christian, but today, there are a lot of Muslims already living throughout Europe. I assure you, Congressman.

And then, third, we do agree with you that the Christian community is being targeted and particularly by ISIL. And as the High Commissioner reminded me today, the ones who are most targeted, the most vulnerable, are the Yazidi, who are non-Christians and are considered therefore not of the Book and are, therefore, even more miserably treated and murdered and raped.

So we agree with you that this qualifies, then, refugees who have fled because they are Christians or other ethnic or religious minorities as particularly vulnerable, and it does help them put their case together that they should be particularly helped and also that sort of have settlement in the United States.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I would hope that we give priority to Christians and other people who have been actually targeted for their faith.

And also let me note about whatever we have to say about Assad trying to murder those people who would create a more democratic Syria, he did offer a safe haven to Christians for a long time, and that is at least one thing that we need to recognize. If Christian communities in the Middle East is, indeed, being targeted for genocide, we need to understand that. We need to target that. We need to act with that part of the assumption of how we are going to handle this great humanitarian crisis that we now face in the Middle East.

Thank you for doing your part. God bless you. We will work with you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Rohrabacher.

Mr. Rodríguez, I wanted you to have another opportunity to walk us through the vetting process. This hearing is being broadcast through C-SPAN 3, and then they will view it. They will run it a few more times. So maybe some in the television audience have not had a chance, because they have just plugged in now, to hear you talk about how the vetting process that you have in place is, how secure you feel that is, how comfortable you feel that there is the existing security screening process that we have is able to identify potential extremists and threats to the United States. So if you could walk us through that process about what your department is doing.

Mr. RODRÍGUEZ. Thank you, Chairwoman, for that opportunity. And Under Secretary Richard actually did a very nice job of walking through the broader process, which, of course, starts with the first encounter with the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees. Then they go to a resettlement contractor that works with the Department of State. That begins the first part, two of the first critical parts of the vetting process, which is UNHCR itself conducts an interview of the individual in order to determine whether they are stating a refugee claim. That is information that we receive, and then later on becomes part of our interview process.

The biographic checks, basically based on the pedigree information, if you will, that is given to us by the applicant's refugee status are tested against three important databases. First is the consular lookout database, which is maintained by the State Department, and it essentially describes people who have been encountered during the consular process. In some cases, we look to the FBI to give us something called the security advisory opinion, which, again, looks to a series of sources that are both law enforcement and intelligence sources. But most critically for this particular population is the third of the databases that I mentioned, which is the interagency check. That interagency check queries against the number of law enforcement and intelligence sources in the community that is working in partnership, the National Security Council, the National Counterterrorism Center, the State Department, and us. We are in a constant process of thinking about how we further strengthen those sources, not just to vet Syrians but to vet anybody else, be it Iraqis, be it Afghans, and Somalis, as the case might be.

So as I indicated before, that process, just in the Syrian case, has identified 30 individuals who just as part of that process who are identified as having derogatory history were denied admission at that point.

We then get to the point where our officers conduct the interviews. By the time they are doing that, they have the benefit of the interview that has already been conducted by the High Commissioner. They have the results of these checks, but very critically, they have not only their own deep understanding of the country conditions about which they have been briefed prior to deployment, but they also have their experience interviewing individuals. And so, through that, they also gain a lot of depth of understanding of what makes sense, of what adds up, what is credible.

And so through that process, they are making decisions about whether people will in fact move to the next stage or whether in fact there is a problem with the account they are given. Sometimes that problem could be a contradiction between what they are saying during the screening interview and what they told the High Commission. Sometimes it can be that the information that they are given is completely inconsistent with the country conditions as we know them. And, by the way, the information that we gather, we actually often nominate that information to be part of intelligence databases because we get information that is then used to deepen our understanding of what is going on, whether it is in Syria or somewhere else. And, of course, that then fortifies the work we are doing in the future.

Is the process risk-free? There is no risk-free process. Are we doing the absolute best that we can practically with the resources? Are we giving our folks the best training we can give them? Are we using the best intelligence resources that we can get our hands on? And the answer to that is absolutely yes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

Ms. Richard and Mr. Staal, I wanted to give you an opportunity in case you had any concluding statement that you would like to make.

Ms. RICHARD. You know, you will notice that we all said that we are able to do this with the bipartisan support of Congress. And we

actually say that to people in other countries, too, and explain to them that no matter what they hear about Washington, this program actually has benefited year in and year out from bicameral, bipartisan support. And it is my desire to keep it that way. And I appreciate both of you sticking this out to the end here and your help to help us to keep it that way because I think there is a risk that as we bring more people and as there is more press attention to the program and attention during a Presidential campaign season, that people can start misinterpreting the goals of this.

This is an American program. It is a fine American tradition. I think most Americans should take pride in both our overseas humanitarian endeavors and our domestic ones. So I thank you in advance for the help you are giving us with your colleagues to continue the strong support we get. Thank you very much.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you to all of you for the great work you are doing.

Mr. Staal.

Mr. STAAL. Yes. Thank you very much for holding this hearing and also for identifying that it is not only the Syrians themselves who are suffering but the countries in the region and the importance of maintaining their stability, but also their ability to absorb these additional refugees and people, and that is a critical part of the resources that you provide us, not only on the humanitarian side, but even the development dollars are providing assistance to this crisis.

And, of course, at the end of the day, though, no matter how much we do on the humanitarian side, that is not going to resolve the problem. That is not even going to stop people from going to Europe. It is resolving the political issues and getting a solution there, and that is what we all hope for. Thank you very much.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Amen.

Thank you very much, and we look forward to having you back with us in a few months' time so you can update us on the progress you have made.

Thank you very much.

Mr. STAAL. Looking forward to it.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And, with that, the subcommittee is adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 4:19 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Material Submitted for the Record

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman

October 26, 2015

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa in Room 2167 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov):

DATE: Tuesday, October 27, 2015

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: Examining the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis from the Ground (Part II)

WITNESSES: The Honorable Anne C. Richard
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
U.S. Department of State

The Honorable León Rodríguez
Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Mr. Thomas Staal
Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator
Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance
U.S. Agency for International Development

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON *Middle East and North Africa* HEARING

Day *Tuesday* **Date** *October 27* **Room** *2167*

Starting Time *2:52pm* **Ending Time** *4:19pm*

Recesses [*0*] (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session [✓]
Executive (closed) Session [✓]
Televised [✓]
Electronically Recorded (taped) [✓]
Stenographic Record [✓]

TITLE OF HEARING:

Examining the Syrian Humanitarian Crisis from the Ground (Part II)

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Reps Chabot, Weber, Clawson, Trott, Deutch, Connolly, Cicilline, Meng, Frankel, Boyle

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: *(Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)*

Rep Rohrabacher

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes [✓] **No** [ ]
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

None

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE *NA*
or
TIME ADJOURNED *4:19 PM*

Subcommittee Staff Director