



Written Testimony of

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**Regarding
“The Rigorous Security Vetting Process of
the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program”**

For a Hearing of the House Homeland Security Committee

**10:00 a.m., Tuesday, February 3, 2016
Cannon House Office Building, Room 311**

I am Reverend Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp., Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle, Washington, and Chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration (USCCB/COM). I would like to thank Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX-10th), Ranking Member Bernie Thompson (D-MS.-2d), and Committee members for the opportunity to comment on the important issue of safe and secure refugee resettlement.

Since its inception, the U.S. refugee program has enjoyed bi-partisan support as a life-saving, humanitarian program, a proud expression of U.S. values as a refugee and immigrant nation and as a world leader in addressing humanitarian crises. It has also been recognized as a good example of a fiscally responsible public private partnership that invests in America's future by building refugee newcomers' capacity of resilience and self-reliance, enabling refugees to support themselves and their families and give back to their new communities. It also helps to contribute to the strategic security and economic security of the primary refugee host countries by sharing hosting responsibility—often resettling the most vulnerable refugees to the United States.

Regarding safety and security, before, and especially since, September 11, 2001, including due to frightening moments such as the Paris attacks, Congress has been vigilant, as it should be, about maintaining the safety and security of the U.S. resettlement program. This testimony will detail security bars to U.S. refugee protection, particularly those involving crime or terrorism. It will also detail how compliance with these bars are maintained through numerous and arduous interviews, administrative reviews, security checks, and background checks built into the refugee resettlement screening process by the Departments of State, Justice, and Homeland Security. In the testimony, we will also show how fiscally sound, safe and secure resettlement fits in to the overall comprehensive humanitarian response to the world-wide refugee crisis, in general, and the Syrian crisis, in particular. USCCB/MRS has prepared a two-page summary of the rigorous screening process. See *Rigorous Screening of Refugees Resettled to the United States* by USCCB/MRS.

A delegation from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration (USCCB/COM) travelled to the Syria region in October 2012 and completed a report titled, "Mission to the Middle East: A Report of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on Syrian Refugees." We also traveled to the region more recently and released a report in January 2015 entitled, "Refuge and Hope in the Time of ISIS: The Urgent Need for Protection, Humanitarian Support, and Durable Solutions in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece." Between 2012 and 2015, we have seen more than a sevenfold increase in the number of Syrian refugees fleeing to neighboring host countries. There were 550,000 Syrian refugees in the region when we visited in 2012. That number is now over 4.5 million, with half of them being children and three quarters of them being women and children.

With the coming of ISIS we have also witnessed an enormous increase in the number of ethnic and religious minorities fleeing persecution. The conflict has also spread into Iraq, displacing some 3.2 million people in that country, as well, according to UNHCR. Mr. Chairman, I ask that the report of those trips be included in the hearing record. In this current statement, I will integrate and update our observations and recommendations from those reports.

Mr. Chairman, in my testimony today regarding the U.S. resettlement program USCCB/COM will provide further details regarding the following recommendations. We urge that the United States:

- Conduct U.S. resettlement in a safe, secure, and timely manner.
- Resettle to the United States 100,000 refugees from around the world in FY2017.

- Resettle an additional 100,000 Syrian refugees in the near future.
- Encourage the Department of State (DOS) to focus especially on the most vulnerable refugees, including unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs), other children at risk, women at risk, refugees with serious health concerns, the elderly, victims of torture and/or trauma, those with affiliations with the U.S. government or U.S. based NGOs, media, and companies; members of persecuted minority ethnic and religious groups; and refugees in immediate danger.
- Increase U.S. resettlement of vulnerable non-Syrian refugees in the region, such as Iraqis, and urge other nations to do likewise and thereby share the refugee protection responsibility with the neighboring host countries.

Further, Mr. Chairman, we recommend that resettlement be integrated into a comprehensive approach to the Syria crisis and urge that the United States:

- Work with other governments to obtain a ceasefire, initiate serious peace negotiations, provide increased impartial humanitarian assistance and allow safe passage for this assistance within Syria and Iraq, especially for internally displaced people (IDPs), and establish a peace that builds inclusive societies in Syria and Iraq that protect the rights of all its citizens, including majority ethnic and religious groups and also minority ethnic and religious groups, including Christians, enabling all the refugees who want to return to their homeland in the future with safety and dignity.
- Provide more U.S. support and encourage more international humanitarian and development support for refugees in the region, especially children, for their basic necessities of life, immediate protection, primary and secondary education, and systems that lay the groundwork for durable solutions, including employment for adults; and provide host countries additional housing, food, water, sanitation, health, education, and transportation infrastructure to allow them to host these large numbers of refugees.
- Encourage host countries in the region to maintain secure border and migration enforcement policies and practices but at the same time assure policies and practices that enable Syrians and other refugee groups (such as Iraqis) to safely flee from Syria and Iraq to find protection and humanitarian care without improper rejection at the borders, deportation, or arbitrary detention in poor conditions.

I. Catholic Social Teaching

The Catholic Church is a migrant and refugee church. The Catholic Church in the United States, for example, is made up of more than 58 ethnic groups from throughout the world, including Europe, the Middle East, the Near East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

We have a long history of protecting refugees, unaccompanied children and victims of human trafficking --both in the advocacy arena and in welcoming and integrating immigrants and refugees who continue to build up our nation as one that embraces ethnic diversity while sharing common values. The work of the USCCB's Committee on Migration is carried out by Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS), which is the largest U.S. refugee resettlement agency, resettling one million

of the three million refugees who have come to our country since 1975. It is a national leader in caring for unaccompanied refugee and migrant children and victims of human trafficking, working with over 100 Catholic Charities across the United States to welcome and serve refugees and unaccompanied refugee and migrant children.

The U.S. Catholic Church also relates closely with the Catholic Church in countries throughout the world, where our worldwide Catholic communion serves the needs of the most marginalized regardless of nationality, ethnicity, race, or religious affiliation. We serve many refugees, internally displaced persons, and many refugee host nations straining under the large migration of people fleeing persecution and war. The Church's deep experience in combating poverty and forced migration and their root causes in the Middle East and throughout the world also includes the work of, among others, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the official overseas relief and development agency of the U.S. Catholic bishops, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), of which USCCB is the largest member, Caritas International, Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), and the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA).

The Catholic Church's work of assisting all migrants everywhere stems from the belief that every person is created in God's image. In the Old Testament, God calls upon his people to care for the alien because of their own experience as aliens: "So, you, too, must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:17-19). In the New Testament, the image of the migrant is seen in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. In his own life and work, Jesus identified himself with newcomers and with other marginalized persons in a special way: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt. 25:35). Jesus himself was an itinerant preacher without a home of his own, and as noted above, a refugee fleeing to Egypt to avoid persecution and death (Mt. 2:15).

In modern times, popes over the last 100 years have developed the Church's teaching on migration, teaching that has been frequently applied by church leaders. Pope Pius XII reaffirmed the Catholic Church's commitment to caring for pilgrims, aliens, exiles, refugees, and migrants of every kind, affirming that all peoples have the right to conditions worthy of human life and, if these conditions are not present, the right to migrate.¹

In our joint pastoral letter, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope, A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration*, January 23, 2003, the U.S. and Mexican Catholic bishops call for nations to work toward a "globalization of solidarity." "Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection. Those who flee wars and persecution should be protected by the global community. No. 99. Also, "[b]ecause of their heightened vulnerability, unaccompanied minors require special consideration and care" No. 82.

During his first papal trip, Pope Francis defended the rights of refugees and migrants, traveling to Lampedusa, Italy, to call for their protection. He decried the "globalization of indifference" and the "throwaway culture" that leads to the disregard of those fleeing persecution in order to seek refuge or a better life. Regarding Syrian refugees drowning at sea as they flee the crisis, he later exhorted the international community, "We cannot allow the Mediterranean to become a vast cemetery!" He urged solidarity with refugees and cooperation among the nations to address this challenge.

¹ Pope Pius XII, *Exsul Familia* (On the Spiritual Care of Migrants), September, 1952.

In his recent trip to the United States in September 2015 Pope Francis further applied that important teaching in his speech to Congress, “Our world is facing a refugee crisis of a magnitude not seen since the Second World War. This presents us with great challenges and many hard decisions.... We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation. To respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal. We need to avoid a common temptation nowadays: to discard whatever proves troublesome. Let us remember the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Mt 7:12).

Regarding the important matter of security, the focus of this hearing, another of Pope Francis’ observations goes to the heart of the U.S. refugee program, “If we want security, let us give security.”

II. Overview of the Worldwide Refugee Crisis and Syrian Refugee Crisis

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the world has hit an all-time high of nearly 60 million people forcibly displaced by war and persecution. Some 19.5 million of these forcibly displaced people are refugees. Half of the refugees are children. The growing number of displaced people and refugees across the world is caused by some 15 armed conflicts.

The Syrian conflict has created the largest number of internally displaced people (IDP) and refugees. It deserves the full attention and mobilization of the international community. The armed conflict has continued to escalate across Syria and has spread into Iraq. It has brought ongoing large-scale destruction, human suffering, and death inside the country and threatens destabilization of the whole region. The size, scope, rapid growth and complexity of Syria’s forced migration are reasons for deep concern. With the brutal conflict and ever-growing forced migration, there is a serious lack of livelihood, shelter, food, water, sanitation, education, health care, and protection inside Syria and in neighboring countries that host Syrian refugees.

As is often the case in refugee situations, the protection, humanitarian support, and pursuit of durable solutions for Syrians is important for humanitarian reasons but also as part of a strategy for maintaining the stability of the host countries and the region. This requires responsibility sharing from the international community both through generous assistance to support refugees in the host countries and also by providing refuge outside of the region for some of those fleeing the crisis. Fiscally sound, safe and secure refugee resettlement plays a relatively small, but important, role in the overall strategy to address the Syria crisis and other refugee crises around the world. Before detailing the role of safe and secure resettlement, we want to describe the overall challenge that the Syria crisis presents to the international community.

The conflict has led to the forced displacement of some 50% of the Syrian population, including 7.6 million internally displaced people (IDPs), with some 12.2 million of all Syrians being in dire need of humanitarian help.² This constitutes a 30% increase in dire humanitarian need in one year and illustrates the deteriorating nature of this situation.

Over 4.59 million Syrian refugees have been forced to flee their country, with over 1.069 million seeking refuge in Lebanon, 635,000 in Jordan, 2.5 million in Turkey, 245,000 in Iraq, 118,000 in

² Syria Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #5, March 31, 2015, accessed May 19, 2015, at http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/syria_ce_fs05_03-31-2015.pdf

Egypt, and over 813,500 who have fled to Europe and applied for asylum.³ Besides the increase of Syrian refugees to neighboring countries, those countries also host large refugee populations of non-Syrians, including, for example, some 200,000 Iraqis in Turkey, according to UNHCR.

One UNHCR official in Turkey explained to the USCCB/COM delegation the impact of the refugee arrivals there over the last four years, “It began as a migration emergency, became a protracted refugee situation, and is now a social crisis for our country.” Almost 30% of Lebanon’s population is made up of Syrian refugees; and some 10% of Jordan’s population. Although very high, those numbers alone do not capture the challenge for host nations and communities. During the first two-days of USCCB/COM’s most recent trip to Turkey, some 130,000 Syrian Kurds fled from ISIS in Kobane, Syria, into southern Turkey, where Turkey generously provided them protection and humanitarian care.

An enormous additional humanitarian and refugee protection challenge arises because over 80% of Syrian refugees in the region are so-called urban refugees who reside outside of camps, seeking refuge in widely dispersed local communities.

Some 75% of the Syrian refugees are women and children. Many, especially women and girls, face serious problems with gender-based and sexual violence in Syria and also often in the host countries. UNHCR reports that around half of the refugees are children, with 75% of them less than 12 years old.⁴ Some 60% do not attend school, including 80% in Lebanon and more than 50% in Jordan.⁵ Only 30% of Syrian, urban refugee children attends school in Turkey. This is due both to lack of education infrastructure and also because of widespread child labor—a strategy Syrian families have had to resort to for family survival. USCCB/COM also heard disturbing accounts of young girls resorting to early marriage and bride selling as a means of survival.

The most vulnerable refugees are unaccompanied children. UNHCR has so far identified 3760 unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) among the refugees in Lebanon and Jordan.⁶ The USCCB/COM delegation saw indications of many more than that during their recent trips. These are children alone in the world whose parents have died, or children who have been separated from their parents.

We turn last to the vulnerability of some Syrian minorities. While 75% of people in Syria⁷ and 90% of registered refugees fleeing from Syria are Sunni Muslims,⁸ there are also several ethnic and religious minority groups, including Christians and Yazidis, who are at risk as well. Christians make up an estimated 10% of the Syrian population, totaling about 2.2 million.⁹ These are among the most ancient and venerable Christian communities in the world that have a history of peaceful coexistence with their Muslim neighbors. They long to remain in Syria.

³ Syrian Refugee Regional Response, accessed February 1, 2016,. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

⁴UNHCR, *The Future of Syria: Children in Crisis*, December 2013, p. 9.

⁵ Assistant Secretary Anne Richard, Testimony, December 10, 2013.

⁶ UNHCR, *The Future of Syria: Children in Crisis*, December 2013, p. 9 (2440 URMs in Lebanon, 1320 in Jordan).

⁷ USCIRF, *Special Report Protecting and Promoting Religious Freedom in Syria*, April 2013, p. 1 (available at www.uscirf.gov).

⁸ USCIRF, Fact Sheet Syria; Syria’s Refugee Crisis and its Implications, July 2013, p. 1 (available at www.uscirf.gov).

⁹USCIRF, *Special Report: Protecting and Promoting Religious Freedom in Syria*, April 2013, p. 1 (available at www.uscirf.gov).

A growing number of ethnic and religious minorities from both Syria and Iraq are now fleeing as a result of ISIS violence. Besides the ethnic Kurds from Syria described above, the USCCB/COM delegation met many refugees during their trip who were fleeing religious persecution. Iraqi Christians had fled to Turkey from villages near Mosul, Iraq. They reported that they, as Christians, were given an ultimatum by ISIS to convert, pay a penalty for being Christian, or die. They understood the seriousness of the threat when the severed head of one of their noncompliant Christian neighbors was left on his doorstep. “I fled my country for Jesus Christ,” explained one middle-aged man. “I left so I could freely follow Jesus.” The delegation also met a young Syrian Christian convert seeking refuge in Bulgaria whose whole family had been killed after he explained to ISIS fighters why he had converted to Christianity. My fellow Bishop Oscar Cantú, Chairman of USCCB’s Committee on International Justice and Peace, rightly called religious persecution the “crisis within a crisis” in recent Senate testimony.¹⁰

III. Recommendations

We commend the peoples and governments of the refugee host countries for their generous welcome of their Syrian brothers and sisters. We commend the donor countries of humanitarian assistance led by the United States, UN agencies led by UNHCR, nongovernmental organizations, and other humanitarian actors. Yet with the escalating brutality of the conflict in Syria, the continued reports of crimes against humanity by the Syrian government and ISIS, and the thousands of Syrians fleeing for their lives every week, an even greater effort is needed.

We urge a comprehensive approach to addressing the crisis that recognizes the important role that humanitarian interventions play in addressing the safety and security of the situation. As you will note, we urge a still modest, but much more significant, role for U.S. resettlement as part of the solution. Up to now, the United States has resettled only some 2,000 Syrians.

Mr. Chairman, we will provide details now of our three sets of recommendations for Congress—the first regarding safe and secure resettlement for the most vulnerable refugees, the second regarding the need for peace that builds inclusive societies in Syria and Iraq, and the third regarding the need for taking a comprehensive approach by including sufficient humanitarian and development support for the refugees and host countries.

A. Increase U.S. refugee resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees and encourage other resettlement nations to do so as well.

International refugee protection has three durable solutions to refugee situations: voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity back to one’s home when peace comes, local integration into the host country, and safe and secure resettlement to a third country. In most refugee situations and in the case of Syria, voluntary repatriation is the most viable solution for the vast majority of refugees. To make this possible, the international community needs to support neighboring host countries to be able to safely and humanely host refugees until peace arrives. A peace that builds inclusive societies in Syria and Iraq would enable all the refugees in neighboring countries, including refugees who are part of the Sunni majority and also ethnic and religious minorities, to be able to

¹⁰ Testimony by Bishop Oscar Cantú, Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace on behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops before the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs of the Committee on Appropriations of the United States Senate, March 11, 2015.

pursue voluntary return to their home countries. Such return is very important to most of the refugees. For example, for many Catholic and Christian leaders and Catholic and Christian communities forced to flee from Syria and Iraq, it would be a cherished opportunity to return and rebuild their ancient communities and maintain the vital and important role of Christianity in a region that is traditionally diverse both in ethnicity and religion. For some refugees, with the permission of the host countries, they will be able to pursue the second durable solution and make a new life permanently in the neighboring host countries.

For a very small percentage of the refugees, especially the most vulnerable and those most victimized and traumatized, the most viable and humane durable solution is resettlement to a location outside the region.

Resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees is a strategic, complementary measure to robust humanitarian support for refugees in host countries. Through it, the United States, a nation of immigrants and refugees, often demonstrates solidarity with refugees and host countries in far-away crises like Syria's. It is strategic for the most vulnerable refugees because removing them from danger keeps their vulnerable situation from becoming catastrophic. It is strategic for host nations because it often removes vulnerable people who otherwise cause a disproportionate drain on the host's already strained resources. It is strategic for the overall crisis because it shares the responsibility and spurs other nations to act—either to provide aid or to agree to do resettlement or another durable solution. The U.S. generally resettles as many refugees as all other resettlement countries in the world combined. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops urges the United States to make meaningful and strategic use of resettlement for the most vulnerable Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

Among the most vulnerable in Syria and other refugee situations are unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) whose parents have died or who are separated from their parents. There is a great risk that many other URMs, as urban refugees, will not be identified at all and their needs will go unnoticed by the overwhelmed host government and international staff. There is a strong need for community-based systems to identify vulnerable, at-risk refugees, especially unaccompanied children, to screen them, to provide protection and care, and to prepare for resettlement or whatever durable solutions is in each child's best interest. URMs who are part of the Syria crisis and other URMs around the world should receive "best interest determinations" (BIDs) and ongoing support from social workers.

I must also call attention to some members of religious minorities from Syria and Iraq as being among the most vulnerable refugees. As described earlier, it continues to be the hope and plan for many Catholic and Christian refugees to return home in the future. But for others, their vulnerability, trauma, and loss is such that the most viable and humane durable solution for them is resettlement outside the region. Other at-risk groups for whom resettlement is most viable include women and children at risk, refugees with serious health concerns, the elderly, victims of torture and/or trauma, those with affiliations with the U.S. government or U.S. based NGOs/media/companies; members of other minority persecuted groups, and refugees in immediate physical danger.

Mr. Chairman, before turning to recommendations regarding resettlement, we want to focus on maintaining the security and integrity of the refugee program, a goal that we share with this subcommittee. The U.S. resettlement program is a public-private partnership between the refugees

and the local communities that welcome them. The local Catholic Charities of dioceses across the country and other community resettlement affiliates work with thousands of volunteers from churches and the community to help refugees build new lives. They help establish refugees and their families with jobs and enrollment in schools, English language classes, and in some cases counseling and care to heal from their traumas. Building resilience and self-reliance are the hallmarks of the refugee programs whereby refugees build relationships within their new communities, heal, find work, support their families, and contribute to their communities.

Before, and especially since, September 11, 2001, Congress has been vigilant about barring bad actors from U.S. asylum and refugee protection, particularly those involved in crime or terrorism. Among other bars, asylum or refugee protection in the United States cannot be granted to anyone who has persecuted others, been convicted of a particularly serious crime in the United States or a serious, nonpolitical crime in another country, engaged in terrorist activity, been a member of a terrorist organization, or otherwise posed a security threat to the United States.

Compliance with these bars are maintained through numerous and arduous interviews, administrative reviews, security checks, and background checks built into the refugee resettlement screening process.¹¹ Initially, most resettlement cases first involve a UNHCR refugee determination interview process that screens out individuals who have no grounds for refugee protection or who have committed heinous actions that fall under the exclusion clauses of the 1951 Refugee Convention. UNHCR (or sometimes the U.S. Embassy or a trained staff from a nongovernment organization) refers the refugee applicant to a Resettlement Support Center (RSC) overseen by the U.S. Department of State (DOS), where detailed biographical and personal information is gathered that will be used for in-person interviews by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and for security and background checks. DOS submits the names of all refugees through the Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS). Further security checks are done through U.S. interagency checks that have been conducted since 2010. If needed, a Security Advisory Opinion (SAO) is submitted to U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies. When DHS arrives for in-person interviews, they take fingerprints and photos that are run through certain U.S. government data bases. If the person demonstrates grounds for asylum and no security problems, DHS grants a conditional approval, pending final security and medical screening. Prior to departure, another U.S. interagency security check is conducted. If the person passes, he/she travels to the United States where another check is done by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at the Port of Entry. If any of these checks reveal information that disqualify the person, that ends their ability to be admitted to the United States as a refugee.

At the point of applying for legal permanent residency another round of security and background checks is conducted for refugees. At the point of applying for U.S. citizenship another round is conducted. If above described security problems are revealed, they will bar the person from gaining the status they seek and subject the person to removal. As is clear from the arduous process, DOS and DHS have put in many layers of security to help assure the security and integrity of the

¹¹“Security Screening of Refugees Admitted to the United States: A Detailed, Rigorous Process,” U.S. Committee for Immigrants and Refugees, accessed May 19, 2015, at <http://www.rcusa.org/uploads/pdfs/Refugee%20resettlement%20-%20step%20by%20step%20USCRI.pdf>; “Bars & Security Screening in the Asylum & Refugee Process,” Human Rights First, accessed May 19, 2015, <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/HRF-Security-Safeguards.pdf>

program that both provides a new life to deserving refugees and assures the safety of the U.S. communities that welcoming them.

Despite Congress' best intentions, Republicans and Democrats alike have noted that certain U.S. security provisions create the unintended consequence of keeping certain deserving refugees from securing resettlement in the United States. For U.S. resettlement of Syrians and Iraqis and for virtually any other refugee population that is fleeing an armed conflict, the set of overly broad U.S. immigration law provisions that bar entry to the United States, so-called TRIG (terrorism-related inadmissibility grounds). While having a laudable goal, TRIG provisions have been written and applied in such an overly broad way that they have delayed or barred admission of many deserving refugees who have no connection to terrorism.

Under the provisions, if a country has an armed, nongovernmental opposition group fighting against the government, that group is deemed to be involved in "terrorist activities." It does not matter if the opposition includes noble freedom fighters supported by the U.S. government to fight against a brutal regime that the U.S. condemns. If someone is a member, solicits funds or provides material support for the armed opposition group, or has a parent or spouse so involved, that person is barred from entering the United States. It does not matter if the person never violated any rules of war or criminal laws or has a neutral, nonmilitary role in the community such as providing humanitarian assistance or healthcare or retail sales. It does not matter that the person poses no danger or threat to our country.

In Syria's refugee crisis, there are armed opposition groups fighting against the Syrian government, a government that the UN has condemned for committing crimes against humanity. The opposition groups include some who have received nonmilitary aid from the U.S. government. Because of these and other aspects of the Syrian crisis, the overly broad and unfair application of the TRIG provisions pose a serious impediment for the resettlement of Syrians unless the Administration uses its exemption powers. These are measures painstakingly drawn up by a multi-agency, high level team from the Departments of Homeland Security, State, and Justice. They are also meant to be carefully, judiciously applied during the resettlement screening process. DHS officials have told us that exemptions tailored to the Syrian crisis have been completed and are awaiting the final authorization.

Mr. Chairman, to facilitate the small but crucial role of resettlement in addressing the massive humanitarian refugee crisis caused by the Syrian conflict, we urge the United States to:

- Assure that U.S. resettlement is done in a safe, secure, and timely manner by:
 - Maintaining the rigorous security and background checks in the resettlement process while assuring that Congress appropriates and the Administration, through DHS and other security screening agencies, allocates sufficient resources and staff to increase the number people for whom security checks can be diligently conducted, thereby speeding up the process for refugees facing significant risks.
 - Increasing the nongovernmental and community capacity to identify and screen the most vulnerable urban refugees in host countries, including URM, to meet their immediate protection and humanitarian needs, and to prepare for their durable solutions;

- Increasing UNHCR’s capacity for refugee status determination, resettlement, and BIDs; and for U.S. Resettlement Support Centers’ refugee and URM processing capacity;
 - Facilitating Best Interest Determinations (BIDs) for the 3760 unaccompanied refugee minors identified in Jordan and Lebanon and for all URMs identified in the region, and use BIDs to pursue their short-term protection and durable solutions;
 - Increasing DHS’ capacity to do circuit rides to the region to interview Syrian and other refugees for potential resettlement; and
 - Allowing Syrians with noncurrent visa petitions to receive refugee interviews while maintaining the same strict security processing measures (this was one of the successful strategies to increase Iraqi resettlement).
 - Urge DHS, in consultation with DOS and DOJ, to proactively and expeditiously remove unjust impediments to U.S. resettlement by fully authorizing the discretionary authority to grant exemptions from TRIG provisions of U.S. immigration law currently awaiting approval at DHS and by judiciously interpreting the meaning of the “material support” bar.
- Resettle to the United States 100,000 refugees from around the world in FY2017.
 - Resettle 100,000 additional Syrian refugees in the near future.
 - Encourage DOS to focus especially on the most vulnerable refugees, including unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs), other children at risk, women at risk, refugees with serious health concerns, the elderly, victims of torture and/or trauma, those with affiliations with the U.S. government or U.S. based NGOs, media, and companies; members of persecuted minorities, refugees in immediate danger.
 - Increase U.S. resettlement of vulnerable, non-Syrian refugees in the region, such as Iraqis, and urge other resettlement nations to do the same, and thereby further share the burden with host countries.

B. Pursue an inclusive peace in Syria.

While resettlement is the main focus of this hearing, it is very important to also recognize the other elements that contribute to a holistic response to the crisis. During a public appearance on August 25, 2013, Pope Francis denounced and called for an end to the “multiplication of massacres and atrocious acts” in Syria. Later, Pope Francis urged “the international community to make every effort to promote clear proposals for peace without further delay, a peace based on dialogue and negotiation, for the good of the entire Syrian people. May no effort be spared in guaranteeing humanitarian assistance to those wounded by this terrible conflict, in particular those forced to flee and the many refugees in nearby countries.” Mr. Chairman, we urge Congress to

- Work with other governments to obtain a ceasefire, initiate serious peace negotiations, provide increased impartial humanitarian assistance and allow safe passage for this assistance within Syria, especially for internally displaced people (IDPs), and establish a peace that builds inclusive societies in Syria and Iraq that protect the rights of all its citizens, including majority populations as well as minority ones, making safe and dignified voluntary return a viable future option for most refugees.

C. Support host countries to maintain generous protection and humanitarian care for refugees, especially children.

Given the huge influx of refugees, international support and special vigilance are needed to maintain border and migration enforcement and asylum policies that safeguard refugee protection and related humanitarian care for Syrians and also for Iraqis, and other refugees, while also maintaining the safety and security of the refugee host countries.

Beyond maintaining access to protection beginning at the border, there are enormous political and logistical challenges involved in protecting and serving the 80% of Syrians who are urban refugees. When refugees reside in camps, the international community generally partners with host nations to create the camps' infrastructure and service delivery system parallel to that of local communities, with refugees and communities remaining insulated from one another. With urban refugees, the international community partners with the host country and local communities to expand local infrastructure and services and facilitates face-to-face interactions, problem solving, conflict resolution, and collaboration between the local communities and refugees.

Lack of housing continues to be a chronic issue for Syrian urban refugees, most of whom were hard-working, middle-class people when they fled the conflict. Some fortunately still live with host families or friends. Others who lived in apartments—often 4-5 families per apartment-- have already spent down what savings they had, and with few jobs, have insufficient money for rent. They, as well as new arrivals, are forced to find shelter in abandoned or unfinished buildings, or to create settlements of makeshift tents provided by NGOs. Many are also fleeing onward on dangerous maritime routes to seek refuge in Europe and beyond, with thousands losing their lives at sea. This dangerous onward migration has escalated alarmingly over recent months.

Mr. Chairman, regarding the neighboring countries who host Syrian refugees, we urge Congress to

- Encourage host countries in the region to maintain secure border and migration enforcement policies and practices but at the same time refugee protection policies and practices that enable Syrians and other refugee groups (such as Iraqis) to safely flee from Syria and Iraq to find humane protection and care without improper rejection at the border, deportation, or arbitrary detention in poor conditions.
- Provide additional U.S. support and encourage more international humanitarian and development support for refugees in the region, especially children, for their basic necessities of life, immediate protection, primary and secondary education, and systems that lay the groundwork for durable solutions, including employment for adults; and provide host countries additional housing, food, water, sanitation, health, education, and transportation infrastructure to allow them to host these large numbers of refugees.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to share our observations and recommendations.