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at a hearing on

"The Causes and Consequences of Violent Extremism and the Role of Foreign Assistance"

before the
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Testimony by Bono, Lead Singer, U2; Cofounder, ONE and (RED)
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Leahy, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this invitation to speak. It is an honor to give testimony on the steps I hope the world will take to address the growing refugee crisis and the rising threats to global security.

My name is Bono and I speak to you today as an activist. In addition to my band U2, I am the co-founder of another band—the ONE Campaign—although this band has seven million members. ONE, as some of you know, is an advocacy organization taking action around the world to end extreme poverty and preventable disease. In pursuit of those goals I have had the good fortune of working with many on this subcommittee and with many more of your colleagues over the years.

We have made great progress toward ending extreme poverty—progress that would have been impossible without American leadership, American generosity, and good old-fashioned American hard-headedness, including the hard heads of members of Congress. But that progress stands in jeopardy today. So I am here to urge action by the international community in response to both the refugee crisis and the rise of violent extremism.

I have just returned from Africa and the Middle East, where I was lucky to join up with a congressional delegation led by Senator Graham. I visited Kenya, Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt—three of these countries are hosting the largest numbers of refugees. I met with many refugees and listened to their stories, some of them tragic, some full of hope. And I talked to countless officials and representatives of civil society. Not far away are countries that do not have big refugee populations but that sit, all the same, on the fault lines of chaos and violent extremism.

What both kinds of countries need—whether to address an emergency or to prevent one—is a better bridge between immediate humanitarian support and long-term development. If we value stability in the nations on the brink, we need to invest in their stability—both through additional resources for development assistance, and through trade, and through related policies that combat the corruption that further weakens fragile states. Investing today in stability is more cost-effective than investing later in crisis management and dealing with the violent extremism that conflict creates and attracts.

For too long, aid has been seen as charity—a nice thing to do when we can afford it. But this is a moment to reimagine what we mean by aid. Aid in 2016 is not just charity—it is national security. Though of course we know that aid alone is not the answer, it is also true that when aid is structured properly, with a focus on fighting poverty and improving governance, it could just be the best bulwark we have against the extremism of our age.

The global refugee crisis is the product of a lot of things: poverty, insecurity, violence, and poor or non-existent governance. When those things happen, people flee where they are and—often at the mercy of bad men and worse ideas—take themselves and their despair elsewhere. The

"elsewhere" could be anywhere. That is one big reason why we can't afford to ignore what is happening today. It affects us all. And if we don't act, it implicates us all.

To act effectively, we first have to get rid of a couple of wrongheaded ideas.

One is that the refugee problem is temporary. The typical crisis that creates refugees lasts 25 years, which in my book is a long time to be exiled from your home country—and then to face a second exile by the country that accepts your presence, but not your right to work or move. On our trip, Senator Graham and I heard the term "permanent temporary solution" thrown around, but without the irony that phrase requires.

That absurdity is made clear by the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya on the Somali border. It's been there for a quarter century. It's the world's largest camp with 345,000 people living in it -- nearly a third of whom were born in the camp. These families — many of which have been there for decades — do not view their situation as short-term.

The other wrong idea is that this is mostly a Syrian problem. Syria gets the headlines, and for very good reason, but refugees are flowing from Africa and Asia as well, not just the Middle East. In fact, according to the UN, at this moment, 1 in every 122 people in the world has been forced to flee their home. My fellow Irishman Peter Sutherland, the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary General for International Migration, has made clear that, "Today we are living the worst crisis of forced displacement since the Second World War. Almost 60 million people have been compelled to flee their homes due to conflict or other dangers." We know that a few years ago, 10,000 people on average were forced from their homes every single day. The latest numbers exceed 40,000.

And most are ending up in the countries that, in many ways, are the least equipped to handle them: 86 percent of the world's refugees are in developing countries, which are struggling with the impact on their infrastructure and services, while they try to pursue their own development.

It's good news that the Sustainable Development Goals, agreed last year, include a commitment to peaceful societies and to advancing new approaches to address conflict and development. But that's a commitment we've got to keep. Because if we sit back, we might see the whole of the Levant and sub-Saharan Africa destabilized for generations. That would be no small matter. You can't draw a perimeter around problems on that scale. We will all feel the effects.

Poor countries are not the only ones showing the strain. As the conflict in Syria enters its sixth year, more than 4.8 million Syrian refugees have now fled, the majority to neighboring countries like Turkey and Jordan, which are quite strong economically and resilient politically. As I saw on my travels there, they have shown great generosity in hosting many of these refugees. Yet I heard about the immense strain being placed on public services and public finances.

Given that, and with half the world's refugees living in urban centers and many of the rest in camps, host homes, makeshift shelters, and even out in the open, it seems very clear that we need to update our approach to delivering aid and international support to host countries—in ways that reflect their economic as well as their social needs, and those of the refugees themselves.

I said that this was not a Syrian problem. Indeed it's very much a global problem, and it affects us all to varying degrees. As a European, I'm here to tell you that in Europe the problem has moved from practical to existential. In 1989, the wall that divided Europe came down. In 2016, barbed wire fences that divide Europe are going up. The integration of Europe—the very idea of a Europe "whole and free"—is now under threat. Which puts a key strategic partner of the U.S. in play. As Robert Kaplan has written, "such a transformation of political geography would leave the United States as the lonely bastion of the West."

Humanitarian organizations that I am affiliated with, like Amnesty International, are concerned about how the E.U. and Turkey have handled their latest "deal" on refugees. What's clear is that even in times of desperation, we have to stick by our fundamental values, the rights that were drafted to protect people in vulnerable circumstances and conflict. When times are tough, governments sometimes look to cut corners. But that never works in the long term—and in this case it doesn't appear to be working in the short term either. It's critically important that governments around the world stay true to the letter and the spirit of the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol; we need to see that in effect and not just on paper.

It's also dangerous to cut corners on aid—aid that's been promised, aid that's essential.

Aid budgets were strained to begin with. And now, an increasing proportion is being diverted from long-term development efforts aimed at root causes of conflict and poverty, and directed instead to pay for in-country refugee costs or disaster relief. Western governments that are struggling under the burden of incoming refugee populations are shifting spending from overseas development assistance to what's called "in-donor refugee costs" within their own borders. The Netherlands, for example, has decided to use all future aid increases to cover in-donor refugee costs in 2016 and 2017. The Danish government has decided to cut development assistance while increasing the proportion spent on refugee costs at home. And in-donor refugee costs have directly impacted Sweden's ODA budget, including its 2016 contribution for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria which has been cut by 30%.

We have to think hard, as we do this, about the kind of world we want young people to grow up in, and how we want them to perceive their future. Africa's population is set to double from 1 to over 2 billion by 2050, and by then will contain 40 percent—two out of every five—of all the young people in the world. Will these young people have access to opportunity, and will they have the mental and physical capacity to fulfill their potential? Will they embrace democratic ideals of freedom? Or will they grow up in places that are blasted by neglect and corruption, where extremist ideas prey on the extremely poor?

As the Committee knows, we're going to be living with the Syrian refugee crisis until two things happen: until the civil war comes to an end, and until the nations of the world find a more equitable way to share the costs and other challenges of forced migration on this scale. Both will require the leadership of the US and other nations—and both lie outside my expertise, such as it is.

So in my testimony I'd like to offer a few other ideas about where the world should act. Clearly we need to get smarter, think bigger, and move faster—both in addressing this crisis and in preventing the next one. We need a range of sound policies to address the humanitarian, development and security needs of the countries producing refugees, the countries in danger of producing them, and the countries on the edge of conflict zones. Having talked with refugees, and having talked to countless officials and representatives of civil society along the way, I see three basic areas for action.

Firstly, we have to address the immediate humanitarian needs of the refugees and internally displaced persons and provide support to host nations in which refugees reside.

The Global Humanitarian Overview produced by OCHA last year shows that, since 2011, the gap between humanitarian need and donor response has grown. At the end of last month, the United Nations humanitarian response plans for 2016 had only received 9% of the funding they require – leaving a shortfall of $18.6 billion.

While the increase in consumption brought by refugees can contribute positively to economic activity, the World Bank estimates that the direct budgetary costs associated with increased spending on health, education, infrastructure, and social programs as a result of the refugee crisis is about 1–1.4 percent of GDP for Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan.

This would be a significant additional strain for any host nation but to expect developing countries like those hosting large refugee populations in sub-Saharan Africa, where basic services are already stretched and where the majority of refugees are still seeking sanctuary it is simply unsustainable.

And these sums absolutely must be additional – they can't be cut from core lifesaving health or other development accounts. We can't pay to fight one crisis and inadvertently feed more future crises through insufficient resources. That's what is going on right now across the world and it will cost far more in the long run.

As I described earlier, these humanitarian needs are not short term but in-fact long term.

I mentioned the Dadaab camp, which has been in existence for twenty-five years.

The refugees there told me of their desire to gain an education, learn skills, go to university, and be able to work legally in the local economy. But in the quarter century since its formation, the Dadaab operation has not been able to expand beyond providing basic services to the refugees—and cannot manage even that to the extent that is needed. Half the children in the Dadaab complex are not in school, and families with 3 children or more are limited to 70% of their usual food rations because of continued shortages.

In theory, refugees in Kenya should have the same access to the labor market as any other foreign national. In practice, work permits for refugees are rare, preventing them from working towards becoming financially independent. Following recent Al Shabaab attacks close to Dadaab, the Kenyan government threatened to close the camp altogether, and then re-banned any permanent structures being built within the camp.

Second, we need to get creative in how we think about the contribution that refugees can make to the countries where they reside. The refugees want to work, and we should want their hands to be occupied and not idle. They need education; they need training; they need access to the labor market. If we can help provide those things, it will greatly reduce the pressure on host countries, and give refugees an opportunity to contribute to those communities.

At Za'atari in Jordan I saw a camp of 80,000 refugees that have already established 3,000 shops within the camp's borders. The Syrians I met there were ambitious and entrepreneurial. Let me give you just one example; when it was announced that the Dutch Government were donating bicycles to the camp that had been discarded in the streets of Amsterdam, even before the bikes arrived, the refugees had set up bicycle repair shops. Once the bikes arrived and had been reconditioned, the refugees set-up a bicycle pizza delivery service.

The politics of integrating refugees into local economies, I don't need to tell you, is really hard. We need to work with governments so that they see refugees as being not exclusively a burden – but a benefit to the societies where they end up.

Alexander Betts and Paul Collier argued recently that refugee camps can be reconceived as "industrial incubator zones," where refugees can have access to education, training, and the right to work.

That's exactly the right approach. Tents and camps won't solve the problem. Displacement is protracted, measured in years not months. It can be a whole lifetime for children who may well grow up without an education, without opportunities to contribute to the world's future growth.

The international community must work to reduce the pressure on countries hosting refugees by supporting them in providing access to jobs and education that will benefit both refugees and host communities.

Third, we tend to give humanitarian efforts and development efforts their own separate bureaucracies and unlisted phone numbers, as if they're completely separate concerns. But to be effective they need to be better coordinated; we need to get creative about linking the two and get innovative about providing new and sufficient sources of funding.
The U.S., of course, has a big role to play here. But other nations, for example in Europe, and international financial institutions can and must also play a vital role in identifying and providing these new sources of finance.

In Jordan I had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Jim Kim of the World Bank Group. And he was clear that the Bank is ready to implement innovative financing instruments to respond quickly to crisis situations, for example by giving concessional loans to countries that are hosting refugees to help ease their financial burden. Under his leadership, the Bank is also developing a Special Economic Zones project, which aims to contribute to creating 100,000 jobs for both Syrian refugees and host communities.

Finally, we need big ideas to get ahead of violent extremism over the long term, which means meeting the development needs of nations that don't necessarily have large resident refugee populations but are vulnerable to instability and conflict.

An example would be the Sahel, a region where the three extremes – extreme climate, extreme ideology, and extreme poverty - combine to form a toxic brew that threatens the people of the region and potentially the world.

What are the big ideas that will reverse that trajectory? Here's what I'm hearing….

There are no short cuts to breaking the cycle of violence; political and security-related issues must go hand-in-hand with development cooperation.

Just think: the Marshall Plan was a bulwark against violent extremism in the early days of the Cold War, through finance and through incentivizing well-functioning political and economic systems. And as I have been talking to people about the precipitating factors in the refugee crisis in the last few months, I keep hearing calls for something like a Marshall Plan to head off the rise of violent extremism in North Africa, the Middle East, and the Sahel.

Sanctuary for refugees and our safety are complementary, not competing. The conflict in Syria that has resulted in so many people fleeing their homes has in turn created a home in the abandoned war torn areas for violent extremists, and same is true for Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria.

The pressing need for a new approach to the global refugee crises and their precipitating factors are now being recognized by those with the vision and imagination to look to the past for a solution to the problems of our future.

Just last week the Chairman of this Subcommittee Senator Lindsey Graham suggested that the international community should seek inspiration from the success of the Marshall Plan after World War II.

The Finance Minister of Germany, not famous for wild pronouncements, has also called for this kind of big thinking. As did the new president of the African Development Bank, Akin Adesina, who said recently "The future of feeding a projected 9 billion people in the world by 2050 depends on Africa. To seize this potential requires a scaled global partnership, a modern day Marshall plan but led by Africa."

As we hear from more experts and develop our thinking on this together, we can discuss the components of such a plan: investing in areas that produce jobs, like agribusiness and energy; investing in education, especially for girls, because as we know, poverty is sexist and girls are impacted first and worst by extreme poverty; investing in targeted social safety nets to help protect the vulnerable; combating corruption and poor governance; supporting the rule of law and a free and independent media without which power inevitably corrupts. Some pay for themselves, some will attract private investment, some need increased smart strategic aid, though aid alone is not the only answer.

Very specifically, we hope the U.S. will back ambitious proposals at the Global Anti-Corruption summit in London in exactly one month from today. Terrorist financing feeds of the opaque underbelly of the global financial system as much as extremists prey on the states weakened by the corrupt.

We need to back countries that take on this fight, like Nigeria. President Buhari is implementing a zero tolerance towards corruption as part of his drive to beat Boko Haram and end extreme poverty in Nigeria. We need to back his initiative for the North East of that country which is currently a development disaster zone

What we can't doubt is that we need big ideas and innovative new partnerships… the kind of ideas that America has always been known for. I want to close on this point. I've been talking today about the need for global action—comprehensive, well-coordinated. And that is what's needed. But there remains a role that only America can fill—leadership that only America can provide. And when you step forward, you can really save lives, ease conflicts, and bring hope.

We know what American ingenuity can do when unleashed. We know what American compassion can do. We know what American leadership can do.

I know, myself, because I've seen it in action. Remember the AIDS crisis in sub-Saharan Africa? Not much more than 10 years ago, it seemed a sure bet that AIDS would wreck the whole of Africa. But when the American people got engaged, and when American science and American business and especially American political leaders, including this Congress, really got going, we began to beat back the plague.

In a sustained effort marked throughout by bipartisan support—and never let that be forgotten—the U.S. has, since 2000, spent more than $50 billion on the global fight against AIDS through programs such as PEPFAR and support for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. In 2002, there were just 50,000 people on life-saving anti-retrovirals in Africa; now there are more than 10 million. Since 2002, U.S. taxpayers have put more than 8.5 million people in developing countries on lifesaving anti-retrovirals and due to PEPFAR programs for prevention of mother-to-child transmission, 1.5 million babies have been born HIV-free.

The fight against HIV/AIDS is not fully won yet, but global health is a success story. It has strengthened the continent of Africa, and—no coincidence—it has strengthened America's standing in the world. Not only have deaths from AIDS been cut in half, but citizens of African nations have a far higher regard for the U.S. because of Americas response to the pandemic.

In that sense and others, the global refugee crisis is another opportunity for America to lead. In the spirit of PEPFAR, in the spirit of the Marshall Plan, America once again has the chance to advance global security through global generosity, and turn this moment of great jeopardy into a time of opportunity. To answer the forces of hate with a future of hope.

Those are the stakes. And that is the choice that confronts us today.