

Testimony of Assistant Secretary Anne Richard
Before the State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Subcommittee
of the Senate Appropriations Committee hearing on
“Assistance for Jordan and Lebanon”
December 10, 2013

Thank you for holding this hearing today to review the humanitarian aspects of the crisis in Syria, the consequences for neighboring countries, particularly Lebanon and Jordan, and how the United States is responding. At the very outset of this hearing, I want to express gratitude to the Subcommittee’s Chairman and Ranking Member, Members and staff for appropriating the resources that make possible the U.S. government’s leadership in international humanitarian response.

Last year, this subcommittee provided generous funding in the Federal Budget accounts that channel contributions to crises response overseas.

These humanitarian accounts include the Migration and Refugee Assistance Account that resides in the Population, Refugees, and Migration Bureau at the State Department that I head. Our partner in humanitarian response is USAID’s Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA) that manages disaster assistance and food aid.

Together, FY 2013 funding for humanitarian purposes totaled nearly \$5.2 billion for humanitarian purposes worldwide. Of this, more than \$1.2 billion has been devoted to responding to the crisis in Syria and the surrounding region. (When added to the nearly \$120 million contributed in FY 2012, the United States has provided more than \$1.3 billion in humanitarian aid since the start of the Syria crisis.)

The far-sighted action of this Subcommittee has undoubtedly saved many lives. It has helped to keep borders open, because we were able to demonstrate to neighboring countries that we would not only speak supportive words but also share the burden of coping with large flows of refugees. FY 2013 funding allowed us to do more when opportunities arose inside Syria and helped us respond to a situation that rapidly grew into a regional crisis. It permitted us to devote considerable attention and energies to the Syrian crisis while not neglecting other troubled places around the globe. Finally, our contributions demonstrated yet again that the United States is the world’s humanitarian leader.

Description of the Crisis

You already know some of the basic facts of the crisis, which I will briefly summarize: What began as popular protests in spring 2011 evolved into episodic battles between opposition and government forces in certain cities, and then further evolved into a brutal war with many fronts. The conflict has claimed more than 100,000 lives, destroyed buildings and industries, attracted

radical foreign fighters, and severely divided Syrian society. For every one person who has been killed, six other people have been injured.

More than six million Syrians have fled their homes but are trying to survive inside Syria in other areas; another 2.2 million have crossed Syria's borders and thus are considered refugees. A total of 9.3 million civilians in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance, a staggering 40 percent of the pre-war population.

When the refugees first crossed into neighboring countries, many were welcomed and benefited from extraordinary acts of generosity. In Jordan and Lebanon, early refugees lived with friends, relatives and host families. Even after camps and transit centers were instituted in Jordan, the Government allowed refugees to be "bailed out" by friends, relatives and sometimes caring strangers. However, as time has progressed and the number of refugees has increased, the welcome has started to wear thin in some places and antagonism toward refugees has grown in the region. At times, violence from the Syria conflict has spilled across borders into Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan and has aggravated already-heightened sectarian tensions in Lebanon.

Photos of Syrian refugees in camps in Turkey or Jordan are often used to illustrate the crisis, but most refugees in the region – more than 80 percent – do not live in camps and instead have found shelter in local communities.

Refugees are living in more than 1,600 communities across Lebanon. One of these communities is the town of Aarsal in northeast Lebanon. Aarsal's 35,000 residents had already welcomed 19,000 refugees when, in mid-November, they suddenly received an additional 20,000 refugees in less than one week who were fleeing new clashes in Syria. As we've seen in other communities in Lebanon and Jordan, the recent influx into Aarsal has shifted the delicate demographic balance of the area, a phenomenon that threatens to further exacerbate social tensions. Aarsal could not absorb these new refugees into its existing stock of housing, so the Government of Lebanon authorized the United Nations to set up tents for some of the newest arrivals, creating Lebanon's first "formal tented settlement" for Syrian refugees.

The impact on many communities across the region is overwhelming. Schools have moved to double-shifts to accommodate Syrian children. Hospital beds are filled by Syrian patients. Rents have risen and wages have fallen as a result of the competition for housing and jobs. There are water shortages in Jordan and Lebanon. The drain on water resources is especially severe in Jordan due to its lack of water; the Government of Jordan is already struggling to cover subsidies for water for Jordanian citizens. Both governments – as well as the Governments of Iraq and Turkey – are concerned that they must stretch the services they provide to their own citizens to reach the overwhelming numbers of people in need living in their countries.

According to a World Bank/UN assessment, 170,000 Lebanese are being pushed into poverty by the Syria crisis. Lebanon will likely suffer cumulative economic losses of \$7.5 billion by the end of 2014 and a doubling of the unemployment rate to 20%. Lebanese government expenditures have increased \$1.1 billion due to the increased demand for public services, according to the World Bank/UN assessment. Turkey's government estimates it spent more than \$2 billion on

refugee response. And Jordan has experienced an up to 27% percent increase in the cost of food in the past year.

Humanitarian Response

The State Department and USAID are major funders of the top humanitarian organizations responding to the crisis in Syria. It is a struggle to keep pace with the immense scale of this emergency. However, the organizations we fund – both international organizations and non-governmental organizations – are staffed by experienced professionals and have succeeded, at great personal risk, in providing aid to millions. Fourteen UN agencies plus the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent (ICRC) operate inside Syria. Fifteen international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are authorized by the Syrian regime to operate inside the country.

These organizations are doing a great deal in a tremendously difficult – and, inside Syria, dangerous – situation. Another set of statistics is grim: the roster of humanitarian aid workers killed while in the line of duty. Thirteen UN staff members have been killed and while another dozen of UN staff have reportedly been abducted, and nine UN staff are reported missing. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent has seen 32 staff or volunteers killed in the line of duty, including ten this past November.

In an attachment to this testimony, I provide a summary of the multi-faceted response that has been mounted by UN agencies and NGOs working with US support, including the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the World Food Program (WFP), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Together, these agencies are providing the food, clean water, shelter, medical care and other essentials that are necessary to live. They also go beyond these basic needs and seek to protect the most vulnerable members of Syrian society today – displaced children, at-risk women and girls, the elderly and the disabled – from threats as diverse as cold winters, unsafe play areas, poor sanitation, child marriage and violence against women and girls.

The funding appeals of \$4.3 billion issued by the UN to date reflect the enormous scale of humanitarian need and, while government donors have been generous, only about two-thirds of the money needed was raised this year. PRM’s primary humanitarian partner, UNHCR, has received over \$700 million since 2012 for Syrian refugees in neighboring countries, as a result of contributions from all donors – a huge investment making a major difference in the lives of millions that the United States is helping to finance.

Now that we have outlined the overall extent of the crisis, let’s take a closer at some of the day-to-day challenges to aid delivery.

First, there are indications that the conflict has intensified. Armed clashes increased from 500 in January, to about 600 in June, to 900 in October, according to UN statistics. There has also been a surge in clashes between different factions of opposition forces.

Second, inside Syria, 2.5 million people are living in hard-to-reach areas, where they receive limited to no assistance. An estimated 250,000 people are trapped in several locations that are besieged and without access to humanitarian aid. These locations include Old City Homs, Darayya, Yarmouk, and Eastern Ghouta, and Moademiyeh in Rural Damascus. Villages in Aleppo governate (Nubl and Az-Zahraa) are besieged by opposition forces. In some communities there have been no humanitarian deliveries in months; in other places it has been more than a year. There are reports of starvation, and while we cannot confirm these reports, we know that lack of food, sanitation, and health care creates dire conditions.

Another sobering aspect of the conflict is the re-emergence of polio and the spread of other diseases. The WHO now confirms 17 cases of polio, a disease not previously seen in Syria since 1999. There are likely many more undetected cases in Syria and we are concerned that there is a high risk of the disease spreading throughout the region. The UN moved quickly with a campaign to vaccinate 2.2 million children, including 1.6 million for polio. We have also seen an increase in other communicable diseases, such as outbreaks of measles and the MERS-Corona virus.

Children not in school: There are an estimated 2.3 million children inside Syria who no longer attend school. There are over 1.1 million Syrian refugee children in the region, of whom 60 percent are not in school, including 80 percent of refugee children in Lebanon and more than half the refugee children in Jordan. Some refugee children are bullied in school or find they have fallen behind their grade and thus lose interest in showing up for classes. Taking a lesson from the Iraqi refugee emergency, we are working with governments to avoid parallel service provision, and need to find creative solutions to get as many children as possible back in school, whether in the formal education system or in community-based learning programs. We are working with international organizations to identify and support unique and innovative programs, such as the No Lost Generation Initiative, so that as many Syrian children as possible receive an education.

Need for Open Borders: One concern is whether all of the people who are in Syria and want to flee are able to escape across borders. As the crisis has continued, we have seen the numbers of refugees crossing into neighboring countries wax and wane, often due to the extent to which fighting occurs inside Syria. At times, Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, and Iraq have taken steps to control or temporarily stop the flow of these refugees. Smugglers charge high prices to help get Syrians out. We have asked all of the countries neighboring Syria to maintain “open border” policies so that those who need to flee can do so. We remain concerned that people could be trapped inside Syria, and we will monitor this situation as best we can.

Arrival of Winter: This part of the world can be an area of harsh cold. Some refugee areas typically have consecutive days/weeks of sub-freezing temperatures and heavy snowfall. In the region, more than 40 percent of Syrians living outside of camps need help to stay warm this winter. In Lebanon, an estimated 90,000 refugee households need this help. The UN agencies and NGOs we fund are insulating tents, providing heaters and heating fuel, and distributing warmer clothes and plastic sheeting. They are also undertaking renovations to collective shelters in order to weather-proof them. This is already starting out to be a rough winter with bad

flooding and farmers in Lebanon predicting the coldest in 100 years. At the same time, healthcare workers will boost health monitoring to track and guard against winter-borne illnesses such as the flu. Programs supporting shelter, health and other winter-related items will cost \$138 million, according to preliminary UN estimates.

Services for Urban Refugees: Urban refugees are often invisible and dispersed among local people in poor communities. It can be difficult to identify them and provide the help that will reach them. In Turkey, for example, more than two-thirds of Syrians are living in cities, not in camps, and many are unregistered. They are reluctant to present themselves to the government, but still need help, especially as winter approaches. Urban refugees face the added challenge of navigating an unfamiliar language and environment when enrolling their children in school or seeking health services.

Gender-Based Violence: We are very concerned by reports of gender-based violence (GBV) among refugees. The United States government is taking measures to address this scourge. At the State Department, we are working closely with humanitarian organizations (UN and international NGOs) to increase protection for vulnerable refugees. As a very first step, we seek to meet their basic needs for shelter, food, clothing, water and sanitation, and healthcare. We also need to incorporate consultations with women and girls into aid programs, ensuring they have equitable access to assistance, addressing their unique needs (such as sanitary supplies and maternal health) and identifying and mitigating risks for harm, exploitation, and abuse. We are supporting specialized programs aimed at preventing and responding to violence, including medical and counseling services for rape survivors, safe learning and healing spaces for children, particularly girls, and efforts to raise awareness about the risks of urgent issues like early marriage.

Refugee Camp Security: Violent crime, theft, rioting, and other security concerns threaten the wellbeing of residents in Jordan's Za'atari Refugee Camp, a sprawling camp of about 80,000 Syrian refugees. Previously, there was no police presence inside the camp, with the Gendarmerie providing perimeter security. The Jordanian police began camp patrols in late 2013. Britain, Canada, and the U.S. have each undertaken special initiatives to help enhance security.

U.S. Is Working to Support Regional Stability

Doing More Inside Syria

The United States has gone to great lengths to diplomatically isolate the regime of Bashar al-Assad. We continue to be a major supporter of efforts to get aid into Syria to the people who need it, so that innocent families can endure and survive the punishing war raging around them. Humanitarian aid is delivered based solely on need and regardless of political or religious affiliation. U.S. humanitarian assistance is separate from any efforts to support the moderate opposition. U.S.- supported humanitarian assistance – totaling more than \$700 million – is provided in a neutral and impartial manner inside Syria by reputable UN and other humanitarian aid organizations. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent has been a strong partner to the UN and others

aid organizations, helping them to reach as many Syrians in need as possible and at great personal risk. We seek to use every channel possible to get aid to those who need it, providing life-saving supplies and service to Syrians across all 14 governorates of the country. Our efforts are focused on four key areas: emergency medical care, food assistance, the provision of much-needed relief supplies, and the protection of vulnerable populations. The United States has provided emergency medical care to those caught in the crossfire through 260 medical facilities across Syria including field hospitals and makeshift clinics that have treated nearly one million patients. We also saw the need for more medical staff capable of saving lives so we trained 1,500 Syrian volunteers to provide emergency first aid care. The United States remains the single largest donor of emergency food assistance for the Syria crisis. Additionally with the arrival of cold weather, we have focused on the provision of winter relief supplies – such as thermal blankets, warm clothing and mattress – as well as improving infrastructure and shelters as the winter sets in this year.

Support to the Governments and Communities Hosting Refugees

The United States Government must support the neighboring countries as they respond to the Syria crisis. Neighboring countries are providing asylum for refugees and are also the logical places from which to send assistance into Syria. In order to support their efforts, we not only provide assistance but also encourage other donors, particularly wealthy governments that have not traditionally given to humanitarian agencies, to step up their contributions. But the victims of Syria's violence need much more.

The latest UN plans aim to do more to help neighboring countries by boosting the resilience of local communities to withstand the effects of taking in so many refugees. This requires continued efforts to ensure that relief operations and longer-term development projects are carried out at the same time and are well coordinated.

Lebanon continues to keep its borders open and is now hosting the largest numbers of refugees in the smallest country in the region. Lebanon has opened its hospitals and clinics to Syrian refugees and is coping with the strain on its public services. Lebanon has allowed refugee children to enroll in local schools that already were overcrowded with local students, yet the demand for more refugee enrollment is even greater.

The U.S. Government continues to support Lebanon through emergency response and longer-term development assistance. USAID is working to improve the lives of Lebanese citizens and their communities by enhancing economic opportunity, increasing access to education, improving water and wastewater services, strengthening civil society and municipalities, and protecting the environment.

At the meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon held at the UN in September, Secretary Kerry announced plans to provide an additional \$30 million in direct assistance for growing needs in Lebanon's host communities. We are working to identify ways we can help address deteriorating economic conditions and gaps in delivery of important services, particularly related to health and education, which will help both Lebanese and refugees from Syria.

Since 2012, the United States has provided \$300 million in bilateral budget support to the Government of Jordan, on top of our annual budget support, specifically to offset spending Jordan has devoted to hosting refugees from Syria. We have also provided over \$30 million to help alleviate strains on the water and education systems. USAID has built five new schools in northern Jordan and is expanding 67 existing schools. They are also supporting a water program in communities in northern Jordan hosting a large number of refugees, focused on water collection, storage, conservation and the repair of water pipelines. New programs have also been launched to help community members, parents, and schools cope with tensions between Syrians and Jordanians. WFP vouchers are used by refugees to buy food from merchants, thus providing another benefit directly to local people. The United States also provided a \$1.25 billion sovereign loan guarantee to help Jordan respond to external pressures, like the Syria crisis, while it continues its economic reform program.

Looking Ahead – Why the United States Must Remain a Leader in Humanitarian Response

The United States, other countries and UN humanitarian leaders are working intensively to ensure that the U.N. Security Council's Presidential Statement from October 2 is implemented. That document calls on all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law and sets out a list of steps that, if followed, would do much to help protect and aid the Syrian people. The steps include approving the dispatch of convoys to besieged areas, facilitating the expansion of relief operations, providing medical care to the wounded and sick, and stopping the deliberate targeting of medical facilities and personnel. Millions of people currently suffering in Syria depend on the success of our humanitarian diplomacy.

Humanitarian leaders have found it difficult to reach populations in opposition held and contested areas because the Syrian Government had requested all official humanitarian aid go through Damascus first. The Syrian regime recently agreed to allow assistance to enter Syria from Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq and to travel straight to communities in need. The regime has agreed to issue 52 of 79 pending visa requests by international humanitarian personnel, including those of the UN's security staff which are needed to enable humanitarian agencies to reach people in need in the most dangerous areas of the country. The regime has further agreed to streamline convoy procedures and to allow the UN to open additional regional hubs for aid deliveries so that aid does not have to move through Damascus to reach those in need elsewhere in the country. However, these are only words, and we need to see this agreement implemented on the ground. Recent progress on access needs to be sustained and expanded.

Access to those in need would be one contribution to addressing the rampant violations of international humanitarian law that have unfortunately been a hallmark of the Syria conflict. In Syria we have seen evidence of summary executions, unconscionable targeting of health facilities and medical personnel, and attacks on innocent civilians such as schools full of young students in schools. As recently as November 11, the shelling of a school in Damascus killed or injured 16 children in their classrooms; that same day, four other children and a driver were killed when shell hit their school bus.

The United States and others are speaking out. Earlier this year the ICRC's head of delegation in Syria has said, "Little regard is being paid to the population as the hostilities intensify. Attacks are causing a very high number of casualties among civilians. We strongly urge all sides involved in the fighting to take immediate action to fully comply with international humanitarian law." Just last week, the UN Under Secretary General Valerie Amos told the UN Security Council that "The call by this Council to take all appropriate steps to protect civilians has clearly not been heeded and civilians are paying heavily for this with loss of life, serious physical injury, psychological trauma and damage to property."

The Syria crisis has demanded a great deal of attention from our government's foreign policy makers. Those of us working on the humanitarian response have benefited from the keen interest of the Secretary and other senior diplomats, including Deputy Secretary Burns, Under Secretary Sherman, colleagues of the National Security Staff at the White House and those assigned to U.S. Embassies and missions, including the missions to the UN. We meet often with the leaders of UN humanitarian agencies and our counterparts from other governments that are deeply engaged; we routinely reach out to other donors to encourage them to give more and to coordinate the aid that is given. Just in the past two weeks, there have been discussions on overcoming obstacles to humanitarian assistance at the trilateral meeting between the United States, the UN, and Russia in Geneva, a high-level dialogue to discuss access issues convened by the UN's Emergency Response Coordinator, Valerie Amos, and the latest in a series of periodic gatherings of the UN's Emergency Directors together with representatives from the host and donor countries.

In the coming weeks the UN will issue new funding appeals for 2014. We expect them to be larger and more comprehensive than previous appeals, projecting needs for the whole of 2014 instead of only the first six months. The appeals will respond to the immediate humanitarian needs of those inside Syria and refugees in the region and will look at ways the humanitarian community can address some immediate needs in the refugee hosting communities to strengthen local service delivery and resilience. The UN has worked to make the appeals cost-efficient, high impact and provide accountability benchmarks for refugees and donors.

Finally, Kuwait again plans to co-host a pledging conference with the United Nations and it is scheduled for January 15, 2014. With your help, the United States should again be in a position to serve as a leading donor and voice to spur on giving from other countries. Support from the United States and many other governments will be critical to maintain stability and hospitality in the region. The involvement of this Subcommittee continues to be crucial.

I thank this Subcommittee for the role it has played in making possible a strong response to the crisis in Syria. I trust this testimony provides some of the evidence for all of the life-saving and life-sustaining work that has been done through U.S. aid programs. I am happy to answer your questions.

Thank you.

What the International Community has Accomplished Highlights of Aid Deliveries

Convoys: A total of 41 UN aid convoys to hard-to-reach areas, involving several UN agencies, have assisted 2.9 million Syrians during 2013. They have reached more than a half-million persons in opposition-held areas, a half-million in government-held areas, and 1.8 million in contested areas. Negotiations to move more convoys continue.

Food: The U.S. government supports food assistance efforts currently reaching more than 3.8 million people within Syria (family rations and flour-to-bakeries) and over 1.3 million Syrian refugees in five neighboring countries (over 90% of whom receive food vouchers). Within Syria this includes 3.4 million reached by WFP in government-controlled, opposition-controlled, and contested areas, and approximately 400,000 through cross-border NGO programs in areas not reached by WFP. This USG food assistance includes approximately \$372 million through WFP and \$71 million through NGOs, provided through primarily cash support but also including approximately \$38.2 million in US-origin Title II in-kind food.

Vaccinations: Vaccination campaigns for measles, rubella, and polio have been organized by WHO and UNICEF and supported by those agencies and UNHCR. These efforts have reached at least 1.4 million children inside Syria. Vaccinations campaigns carried out for refugees and locals have reached 3.8 million refugees and local children in Turkey and Jordan. In Lebanon, the first of a series of nationwide polio vaccination campaigns in early November reached 580,770 children under the age of five, resulting in a 98.4 per cent coverage rate nationwide. The total included 8,400 children vaccinated at five border entry points, and 25,500 Palestinian children vaccinated through UNRWA. U.S. government-supported programs aim to help refugees and also improve the ability of local health services to meet local residents' needs.

Basic/Essential Household Supplies: UNHCR and partner NGOs have reached 3.2 million people inside Syria with non-food items in 2013.

Medical Care: WHO and partners have provided medical treatment to 2.7 million people inside Syria.

Water: UNICEF and partner NGOs have reached more than 10 million people with safe water inside Syria. The U.S. government supports programs that build latrines and ensure clean water is available.

Psychosocial: UNICEF and partners have reached 460,000 children with psychosocial support inside Syria.

Education: Despite widespread destruction and closings of schools inside Syria, UNICEF and partner NGOs have provided education supplies to 620,000 children in 12 governorates, as well as 118 prefabricated classrooms. The U.S. government supports programs to enhance refugee

children's access to schools, including learning programs that help youth who have fallen behind in their studies to catch up and enroll at local schools at appropriate grade levels.

Palestinian refugees inside Syria: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) continues its efforts to provide support to Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, including those who have fled the fighting that has enveloped and consumed Palestinian neighborhoods in Syria.

Shelter: Innovative programs in Jordan and Lebanon helps property owners in local communities upgrade unfinished structures into suitable refugee housing, in exchange for free rent to refugees.

Child Protection: Special recreation, educational, and mental health activities have reached 100,000 Syrian children in Jordan and Lebanon.

Gender-based Violence: The U.S. government supports programs to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence. This includes enhancing the capacity of local service providers to assist refugees to benefit from their services and to manage the individual cases of refugees.

Safety: A U.S. government project in the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) supports the Jordanian government's efforts to improve security in the Za'atari refugee camp. It helps Jordanian police to train approximately 600 Syrian refugee residents over six months to act as a safety presence and deterrent to crime in the camp, and to report major issues to police.