



Written Testimony

of

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Subcommittee on The Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights

"The Ongoing Syrian Refugee Crisis"

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Room 216 Hart Senate Office Building

I am Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of Seattle, WA, and chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Migration. I provide this written statement today on behalf of the Committee on Migration to give the Catholic Church's perspective about the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis.

I would like to thank Chairman Richard Durbin (D-IL), Ranking Member Ted Cruz (R-TX), and subcommittee members for the opportunity to comment on the crisis. A USCCB delegation travelled to the region in October 2012 and completed a report titled, "Mission to the Middle East: Report of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on Syrian Refugees" (Catholic Syria Report 2012). While our mission to the region was over a year ago, many of the humanitarian challenges of the conflict—and the suffering of its victims--have persisted and increased, without a corresponding humanitarian response from the international community.

Mr. Chairman, I ask that the report of that trip be included in the hearing record. In this current statement, I will integrate and update our observations and recommendations from that report.

Catholics and all Christians are reminded this time of year when celebrating the birth of Jesus, that one of Jesus' first experiences as an infant was to flee for his life from King Herod with his family to Egypt. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were refugees in the Middle East and faced some of the same fear, uncertainty, and dislocation as the millions of Syrians imperiled by this crisis face today. The situation is especially urgent given the unprecedented size, complexity, and rate of growth of the displaced population. There were 550,000 Syrian refugees in the region when we visited in October 2012. After little more than a year, the number of Syrian refugees has grown to 2.3 million, including 1.1 million children, 75% of whom are less than 12 years old.

Mr. Chairman, in my testimony today the U.S. Catholic bishops recommend that Congress:

- Work with other governments to obtain a ceasefire in Syria, initiate serious negotiations, increase impartial humanitarian assistance, and give safe passage of that assistance, especially for internally displaced people (IDPs), and encourage efforts to build an inclusive society in Syria that protects the rights of all its citizens, including Christians and other minorities.
- Encourage host countries in the region to maintain border and migration enforcement policies and practices that enable people to safely flee from Syria and find humane protection and care without improper rejection at the border, deportation, or arbitrary detention in poor conditions.
- Provide more U.S. support and encourage more international 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 all durable solutions; and provide host countries additional housing, food, water, sanitation, health, education, and transportation infrastructure to allow them to host such large numbers of refugees.
- Meaningfully increase U.S. resettlement through an emergency order to at least 15,000 Syrians for FY2014 and urge all other resettlement nations to increase resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees to 15,000, including unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs), women with children, minority groups, those with serious health concerns, the elderly and those in immediate danger, thereby protecting them and sharing the host countries' burden.

- Increase U.S. resettlement and urge other nations to increase resettlement of other vulnerable refugees in the region to protect them and share the burden with host countries.
- Urge the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in consultation with the Department of State (DOS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ), to expeditiously remove unjust impediments to U.S. resettlement by implementing discretionary authority to grant exemptions from overly broad terrorism related inadmissibility grounds (TRIG) of U.S. immigration law.

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 Asia, Africa, the Near East, the Middle East, and Latin America. I myself am from Latin America.

We have a long history of involvement in refugee and child protection, both in the advocacy arena and in welcoming and integrating waves of immigrants and refugees who have helped build our nation as one that embraces ethnic diversity while sharing common values. Migration and Refugee Services of USCCB (USCCB/MRS) is the largest U.S. refugee resettlement agency, resettling one million of the three million refugees who have come to our country since 1975, and is a national leader in caring for unaccompanied refugee and migrant children. We work with over 100 Catholic Charities across the country to welcome and serve refugees and unaccompanied alien 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 or religious affiliation. We serve many refugees, internally displaced persons, and host nations straining under the large influx 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 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 subsequent popes and 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*

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

Migration," January 23, 2003, the U.S. and Mexican Catholic bishops call for nations to work toward a "globalization of solidarity." "It is now time to harmonize policies on the movement of people, particularly in a way that respects the human dignity of the migrant and recognizes the social consequences of globalization" No. 57. Further, "[r]efugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection. Those who flee wars and persecution should be protected by the global community. This requires, at a minimum, that migrants have a right to claim refugee status without incarceration and to have their claims fully considered by a competent authority" No. 37; and that asylum seekers and refugees should "have access to appropriate due process protections consistent with international law" No. 99. Also, "[b]ecause of their heightened vulnerability, unaccompanied minors require special consideration and care" No. 82.

Recently, 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 a better life.

II. Overview of the Ongoing Syrian Refugee Crisis

"War is like fire. A fire eats everything before it. So does war. There is no peace anywhere," says a Syrian Christian refugee woman in Lebanon served by CNEWA, a Catholic aid group.

The Syrian refugee crisis deserves the full attention and mobilization of the international community. Since the recent USCCB trip to the region, the armed conflict has escalated across Syria. It threatens ongoing large-scale destruction, human suffering, and death inside the country and 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 shelter, food, water, sanitation, education, health care, and protection inside Syria and in neighboring countries that host Syrian refugees.

The conflict has reportedly caused over 130,000 deaths, more than 40,000 of them civilian.² Some 40% of Syrians have been forced from their homes, including 6.5 million internally displaced people (IDPs), with some 9.3 million of all Syrians being in dire need of humanitarian help.³ The U.S. Department of State (U.S. DOS) warns that 2.5 million people are in isolated locations within Syria, including 250,000 reportedly under siege who have no access to humanitarian aid. The U.S. DOS also reports that some 2.3 million children within Syria are not able to attend school.⁴

The Syrian Christian woman quoted above is among the 2.3 million Syrian refugees forced to flee their country, with 850,000 seeking refuge in Lebanon, 565,000 in Jordan, 550,000 in Turkey, 200,000 in Iraq, 130,000 in Egypt,⁵ and 31,000 in 90 countries outside the region where they have

² Stephen Kalin, "Anti-Assad Monitoring Group Says Syrian Death Toll Passes 130,433," *Reuters*, December 31, 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/31/us-syria-crisis-toll-idUSBRE9BU0FA20131231>. Three weeks before, the U.S. DOS put the death toll at over 100,000. Assistant Secretary of State Anne Richard, Testimony before the State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Subcommittee of Senate Appropriations Committee hearing regarding "Assistance for Jordan and Lebanon," December 10, 2013.

³ Syria Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #4, FY 2014, December 5, 2013, available at: http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/syria_ce_fs04_12-05-2013.pdf

⁴ Assistant Secretary of State Anne Richard, Testimony before the State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Subcommittee of Senate Appropriations Committee hearing regarding "Assistance for Jordan and Lebanon," December 10, 2013.

⁵ Syria Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #4, FY 2014, December 5, 2013, available at: http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/syria_ce_fs04_12-05-2013.pdf

fled and sought asylum.⁶ Besides the recent fourfold increase of Syrian refugees to neighboring countries, those countries already have hosted large refugee populations, including over 480,000 Iraqis, with 61,000 of them UNHCR registered refugees.⁷ There are also vulnerable African refugees in Egypt, including some 120,000 in Cairo, over 2000 in Salloum Refugee Camp, and trafficked and tortured Eritreans on the Sinai peninsula.⁸

Lebanon reports that 30% of its population is made up of Syrian refugees;⁹ and Jordan reports 10%.¹⁰ Although very high, those numbers alone do not capture the challenge for host nations and communities. Lebanon reports that its recent 30% population growth from Syrians is equivalent to the nation's projected growth and expanded infrastructure needs for 2050. Or to use a local community example, in Aarsal, Lebanon, the city of 35,000 has already welcomed 39,000 Syrian refugees, including 20,000 in November 2013 alone.¹¹

An enormous additional humanitarian and refugee protection challenge arises because 75% of Syrian refugees in the region are so-called urban refugees who reside outside of camps, seeking refuge in widely dispersed local communities.¹² In Jordan, Syrian refugees live in 390 locations and in Lebanon, in 1650 communities.¹³

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 in the host countries. UNHCR reports that 1.1 million of the refugees are children, with 75% of them less than 12 years old.¹⁴ Some 60% do not attend school, including 80% in Lebanon and more than 50% in Jordan.¹⁵ UNHCR has so far identified 3760 unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) among the refugees in Lebanon and Jordan.¹⁶ These are children alone in the world whose parents have died or who have been separated from their parents.

We turn last to the vulnerability of some Syrian minority groups. While 75% of people in Syria¹⁷ and 90% of registered refugees fleeing from Syria are Sunni Muslims,¹⁸ there are also several

⁶ Ewen MacLeod, UNHCR Representative to Lebanon, Written Testimony before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs hearing "Assistance for Jordan and Lebanon," December 10, 2013.

⁷ 2013 UNHCR Country Operations Profiles—Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e486566&submit=GO> (Jordan); <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e486676&submit=GO> (Lebanon); <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e0fa75&submit=GO> (Jordan); <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e48e0fa7f&submit=GO> (Turkey).

⁸ For more details, see USCCB, *Mission to the Middle East: Report of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' on Syrian Refugees*, October 2012, pp. 7-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Honorable Alia Bouran, Jordanian Ambassador to the United States, Testimony at Hearing of the State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Subcommittee on "Assistance for Jordan and Lebanon," December 10, 2013.

¹¹ Assistant Secretary of State Anne Richard, Testimony, December 10, 2013.

¹² Jordan has four refugee camps: Za'atri camp, the Emirati Jordanian camp, Cyber City, and Azraq, a new camp. Za'atri refugee camp houses 120,000 Syrian refugees, making it the fourth largest city in Jordan and the fourth largest refugee camp in the world. Turkey runs 21 refugee camps mostly in the south of the country, while Lebanon has no formal camps, although there are informal camps in areas of large influx, such as Aarsal. Egypt has no camps. Urban refugees there live primarily in Cairo, Alexandria, and Damietta. USCIRF, *Factsheet Syria*, July 2013, pp. 3-7 (available at www.uscirf.gov).

¹³ Honorable Antoine Chedid, Lebanese Ambassador to the United States, Testimony at Hearing of the State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Subcommittee on "Assistance for Jordan and Lebanon," December 10, 2013. The 390 locations for Jordan were on a chart that UNHCR prepared for the hearing.

¹⁴ UNHCR, *The Future of Syria: Children in Crisis*, December 2013, p. 9.

¹⁵ Assistant Secretary Anne Richard, Testimony, December 10, 2013.

¹⁶ UNHCR, *The Future of Syria: Children in Crisis*, December 2013, p. 9 (2440 URMs in Lebanon, 1320 in Jordan).

¹⁷ USCIRF, *Special Report Protecting and Promoting Religious Freedom in Syria*, April 2013, p. 1 (available at www.uscirf.gov).

minority groups, including Christians, who are at risk both within Syria and in neighboring host countries. Christians make up some 10% of the Syrian population, totaling about 2.2 million.¹⁹ 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.

These Syrian Christians report fleeing generalized violence. One Syrian Catholic leader reported that some 50,000 Christians in Homs were obliged to flee in March 2013 when the opposition forces took up positions in a Christian neighborhood and the Syrian government bombed the Christian section of the city.²⁰ Christians also report being targeted. The same leader described priests in Syria who were recently kidnapped for ransom by opposition groups who thought Christians were wealthy. During USCCB's trip to Lebanon, another Christian described how opposition forces in Syria threatened Christians to leave within 24 hours or be killed.

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 led by the United States, UN agencies led by UNHCR, NGOs, and other humanitarian actors. Yet with the escalating brutality of the conflict in Syria and the thousands of Syrians fleeing every week, an even greater effort is needed. Mr. Chairman, we have three sets of recommendations for Congress.

A. Pursue peace in Syria and safe access for humanitarian aid and workers.

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." We lament and are grateful for the loving sacrifice of those seeking peace and providing humanitarian help for Syria, including 45 humanitarian workers who have been killed, 12 abducted, and 9 gone missing.²¹

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 encourage efforts to build an inclusive society in Syria that protects the rights of all its citizens, including Christians and other minorities, and enables them to remain in their homeland

B. 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 is needed to maintain border and migration enforcement and asylum policies that safeguard refugee protection and

¹⁸ USCIRF, Fact Sheet Syria; Syria's Refugee Crisis and its Implications, July 2013, p. 1 (available at www.uscirf.gov).

¹⁹ USCIRF, *Special Report: Protecting and Promoting Religious Freedom in Syria*, April 2013, p. 1 (available at www.uscirf.gov).

²⁰ "Embattled Syrians hope Argentine pope can broker peace," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 21, 2013.

²¹ *Ibid.*

related humanitarian care for Syrians and also for Palestinians, Iraqis, and other refugees. In Lebanon, there is a commendable policy that grants Syrian refugees who arrive with identity papers with one-year renewable visas, but reports are disturbing about the government practice of sometimes subjecting Syrians and others seeking refuge without documents to deportation and arbitrary detention under poor conditions. In Jordan, the recent decision to provide Syrians with one-year instead of six-month residency cards is commendable (a recommendation that we made a year ago). However, the government practice of confiscating and keeping Syrians' documents and the reported border practices of restricting refugees' entries according to a daily quota or nationality limitation or for lacking identity documents are disturbing.²² In Turkey, welcoming 550,000 Syrian refugees is a huge and generous undertaking, but the reported 6-week delays are problematic for Syrian refugees waiting in dangerous makeshift camps on the Syrian side of the border for Turkey's permission to cross over.

Beyond maintaining protection at the border, there are enormous political and logistical challenges involved in protecting and serving the 75% 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 hospitality, 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. Some fortunately still live with host families or friends. Others who lived in apartments have already spent down what savings they had, and with few jobs, have no 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. In Lebanon, local police have sometimes torn down such makeshift settlements without explanation.

During winter, the 1.1 million refugee children are especially vulnerable to the lack of shelter, and also of food, water, sanitation, education, and health care. Girls, especially, are at risk of gender-based violence, and there are reported incidences of forced marriages. There are also reported problems with access to birth registration for newborn refugees in both Lebanon and Jordan, putting the infants at risk of statelessness. We also learned of many teenagers, ages 13 to 17 years old, who have no access to school and are being pressured or feel compelled to return to Syria to fight. Many children also work instead of attending school so that their families can survive.

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

- Encourage host countries in the region to maintain border and migration enforcement policies and practices that enable Syrians and other refugee groups (such as Palestinians and Iraqis) to safely flee from Syria and find humane protection and care without improper rejection at the border, deportation, or arbitrary detention in poor conditions. And
 - Work with Jordan to retrieve and redistribute identification papers to Syrians who had them confiscated by Jordanian officials and institute alternative procedures instead of confiscating these important documents, such as copying them.

²² Human Rights First has documented risks to refugee protection in the region, including Jordanian border enforcement. See *Refugees at Risk: The Syrian Refugee Crisis and U.S. Leadership*, Human Rights First, November 2013.

- Provide more U.S. support and encourage more international 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; and provide host countries additional housing, food, water, sanitation, health, education, and transportation infrastructure to allow them to host these large numbers of refugees; and
 - Support host countries and local communities to address the challenges implicit for urban refugees by creating community based mechanisms for communication, problem solving, dispute resolution, and collaboration between locals, refugees, and humanitarian providers.
 - Provide access to education and psycho-social support for children at risk of being recruited to fight in Syria and for kids at risk of gender-based and sexual violence.
 - Provide alternative financial support for families whose children are now forced to work for the sake of family survival.
 - Assure proper registration of all Syrian refugee children born in the region.

C. Increase U.S. refugee resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees, including Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URMs), and encourage other nations to do so.

The United States often demonstrates solidarity with refugees and host countries in far-away crises like Syria's by providing strategic refugee resettlement for the most vulnerable refugees. 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 burden 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 combined.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops urges the United States to make strategic use of resettlement for the most vulnerable Syrian refugees. UNHCR calls for 30,000 Syrians to be resettled in 2014. Among the most vulnerable 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 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 should receive "best interest determinations" (BIDs) and ongoing case management.

Mr. Chairman, I must also call attention to the plight of religious minorities in Syria, particularly Christians. Among other destinations, Syrian Christians have fled within Syria; others have fled to Zahle, a city of some 320,000 nestled in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon; others to Turkey. Most Christians do not undertake refugee registration because they fear that UNHCR will hand over their information to the Syrian government. Acting on fear has a price, since the protection and assistance from host governments, UNHCR, and implementing partners often depends on a refugee being registered. Nonetheless, Christians express fear, both of reprisals by the Syrian government for leaving Syria, and also fear some sectors of the opposition, such as the radical sects from outside of Syria who are now part of the conflict. They are truly caught in the middle of the conflict.

Before turning to recommendations, a major hurdle to U.S. resettlement of Syrians is the set of overly broad U.S. immigration law provisions that bar entry to the United States for being involved with terrorist activities, so-called TRIG provisions. The TRIG provisions have a laudable goal, but they 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. 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 nonmilitary role such as providing humanitarian assistance or healthcare. 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 a government that the UN has condemned for committing crimes against humanity. The opposition groups include some who 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 poses a serious impediment for the resettlement of Syrians unless the Administration uses its exemption powers.

Mr. Chairman, to facilitate increased resettlement, especially for URM, we urge Congress to

- Meaningfully increase U.S. resettlement, through an emergency order, to at least 15,000 Syrians for FY2014 and urge all other resettlement nations to increase resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees to 15,000, including unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs), women with children, minority groups, those with serious health concerns, the elderly and those in immediate danger, thereby protecting them and sharing the host countries’ burden.
 - Increasing the nongovernmental and community capacity to identify and screen the most vulnerable urban refugees, 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 URM identified in the region, and use BIDs to pursue their short-term protection and durable solutions;
 - Developing community-based mechanisms to identify, protect and serve Christian and other minority group refugees who do not register because they fear reprisals;
 - Increasing DHS’ capacity to do circuit rides to the region to interview Syrian and other refugees for potential resettlement;
 - Allowing Syrians with noncurrent visa petitions to receive refugee interviews (this was one of the successful strategies to increase Iraqi resettlement).
 - Encouraging DHS, other security screening agencies, and the White House to allocate sufficient staff and to work collaboratively to increase the number of security checks that can be expedited thereby speeding up the process for refugees facing significant risks.
- Increase U.S. resettlement and urge other nations to increase resettlement of other vulnerable refugees in the region, thereby sharing the burden with host countries.

- Urge neighboring countries to receive Iraqi refugees from Syria and continue expediting the resettlement cases of Iraqis referred for U.S. consideration.
 - Work with Egypt to halt trafficking and torture of Eritrean refugees in the Sinai.
 - Consider for resettlement the vulnerable African refugees in Cairo who are unable to integrate and remain at risk of harassment and attack, and the African refugees in Salloum Refugee Camp who were displaced from Libya and now cannot return either to Libya or their home countries, and other African refugees in the region.
- Urge DHS, in consultation with DOS and DOJ, to proactively and expeditiously remove unjust impediments to U.S. resettlement by implementing discretionary authority to grant exemptions from TRIG provisions of U.S. immigration law and by judiciously interpreting the meaning of the “material support” bar.
 - Allow case-by-case exemptions to be issued for applicants (such as humanitarian and healthcare workers) who provided nonviolent assistance to an armed opposition group, who have passed all required security and background checks, who meet the refugee definition, who are not otherwise barred, and who did not knowingly support activities that targeted noncombatants or U.S. interests (by statute, such exemptions are not available to anyone who participated in or provided material support to a group designated or listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S. government).
 - Allow case-by-case exemptions to be granted to former combatants who otherwise meet the refugee definition, who are not subject to any other bars, who have passed all applicable security and background checks, who establish that they pose no threat to the safety or security of the United States, and who either (1) were children at the time or (2) did not participate in, or knowingly provide material support to, activities that targeted noncombatants or U.S. interests.
 - Complete a long-pending review of its legal interpretation of the term “material support.” The application of the “material support” bar to minimal donations and to routine commercial transactions with members of armed groups greatly inflates the number of cases unjustly affected by this law.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to share our observations and recommendations.

Mr. Chairman, as UNHCR High Commissioner Antonio Guterres has stated, the Syrian humanitarian crisis is among the worst refugee crises on record. Millions of innocent persons have been impacted by this conflict, which seems to have no end in sight. The international community can no longer stand by and witness this ongoing death and suffering. I urge you to adopt our recommendations. The U.S. Catholic bishops and our affiliated agencies stand ready to assist you in this effort.

I close with Pope Francis’ recent reflection to Catholic aid groups assisting with the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis. He observed that Christians are called to help the people of Syria because “where there is suffering, Christ is present. We cannot turn our back on situations of great suffering. The weapons must be silenced.”