

# Forced to Flee: The Syrian Exodus Continues

Migration and Refugee Services/  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



## Background

The humanitarian crisis in Syria continues to be one of serious concern for the Catholic Church and the bishops of the United States. Following a crackdown by the Syrian government in 2011 and the widespread conflict that followed, massive displacement of innocent men women and children ensued. By June 2014, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Estimates that nearly three million people have fled to neighboring regions and North Africa (<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>). Not only does this represent a significant humanitarian concern in its own right, but the large outflow of people leaving Syria for surrounding countries, including Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq , threatens regional security as refugees begin to strain the resources of these countries. The international community must do more to help alleviate the suffering of individuals and in doing so diminish some of the pressures that are slowly building in the surrounding region.

The Syrian refugee crisis is multifaceted and complex and only stresses an already fragile region. For example, the beginning of the conflict in Syria between the current regime and its opposition over three years ago has introduced a second major refugee crisis in the Middle East, following the Iraqi refugee crisis which began in 2003. In fact, these two crises have overlapped each



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other, as Iraqis who fled Iraq for Syria earlier in the century have been caught up in the new conflict. Just as Iraqis fled into Syria for protection, now Syrians are fleeing into Iraq for the same reasons today. Paired with the displacement that is now occurring in Iraq due to armed conflict in the western part of the country, over two hundred thousand Syrian refugees have arrived in recent years, thus threatening further disruption to the region. The influx of refugees is putting increased pressure on the sub-standard sanitation systems that are in place, increasing the likelihood of contagion, and stressing the already overburdened housing situation. The provision of basic necessities continue to be a challenge and the need to register Syrians as refugees here and elsewhere a pressing obligation.

## **What are the Bishops Doing?**

In January 2014, Bishop Eusebio Elizondo provided testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on The Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, where he discussed the ongoing problem in the region. Highlighting the Church's longstanding call to defend the most vulnerable among us, he provided recommendations to the US government as to how this can best be realized. Recommendations by Bishop Elizondo include his call 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
- 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.
- 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.

## **What Can You Do to Help?**

- Refugee populations are in need of your assistance, both through material support when they arrive and continual advocacy efforts on their behalf. To learn more about this situation and how you can help advocating on behalf of Syrians and other refugee populations, please visit: <http://www.usccb.org/about/resettlement-services/how-to-help.cfm>.
- If you are interested in assisting MRS continue its important work with migrants and refugees, please consider making a donation to the National Catholic Migration Fund at [www.usccb.org/mrs-ncf](http://www.usccb.org/mrs-ncf)