



Mission to the Middle East: Report of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on Syrian Refugees

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TRIP DELEGATION

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Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) traveled to the countries of Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, October 7-20 to examine the situation of Syrian refugees and to provide policy recommendations for their protection. The delegation also visited Cairo, Egypt, to look into the plight of African refugees in Egypt. Members of the delegation included Bishop Anthony Taylor, Bishop of Little Rock, and member of the USCCB Committee on Migration; Fr. Daniel Groody, C.S.C., associate professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame and consultant to the Committee on Migration; Anastasia K. Brown, Director of Resettlement Services for MRS/USCCB; Beth Englander, Director of Special Programs, MRS/USCCB; Natalina Malwal, Transportation Specialist for Processing Operations for MRS/USCCB; and Kevin Appleby, Director of Migration Policy and Public Affairs, MRS/USCCB, and Jane Bloom, Head, U.S. Liaison office, International Catholic Migration Commission.

Introduction

The beginning of the conflict in Syria between the current regime and its opposition nearly two years ago has introduced a second major refugee crisis in the Middle East, after the Iraqi refugee crisis which began in 2003. In fact,

these two crises have overlapped each other, as Iraqis who fled Iraq for Syria earlier in the century have been caught up in the new conflict. In fact, the second refugee outflow from Syria is on pace to exceed the Iraqi crisis: the United Nation's High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that as many as 1.5 million Syrian refugees could inhabit the region by the end of 2013.

Such numbers would certainly place economic and political pressure upon surrounding nations which already feel the burden of caring for as many as 500,000 new arrivals as of October, 2012. Without international support, surrounding nations may be forced to take extreme measures to control or inhibit the refugee flow. At a minimum, vulnerable refugees, such as women with children, could suffer destitution.

This report focuses upon Syrian refugees in each of the countries visited; Iraqis who have fled Syria; and African refugees living in Egypt, including refugees trafficked and tortured in the Sinai. It will offer policy recommendations for ensuring the well-being of the refugees; working toward durable solutions for them; and ensuring the stability of receiving countries and the region over the long-term.

Syrian Refugees in the Middle East

As of October 31, 2012, approximately 550,000 Syrian refugees have escaped Syria and are residing in Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Given the current trend, as many as 700,000 Syrian refugees could reside outside of their country by year's end.

Egypt

In Egypt, nearly 100,000 Syrian refugees have arrived over the past year and one-half, the large majority arriving by plane. Egypt has welcomed the Syrians with open arms, allowing their children to enroll in public schools. They come with money and only a few have registered with UNHCR to date, but an increase in registration in the last two months indicates that these families are spending down their available

resources. It is likely by the end of the year as many as a half of the current population will attempt to register with UNHCR in order to receive services. UNHCR and other NGOs will require more assistance to care for this emerging population.

Recommendations for Egypt

- The international community should provide more support for UNHCR in Egypt to register and provide services to a large Syrian refugee population that is spending down resources.

Lebanon

Lebanon has received 175,000 Syrians since last year, predominately from Homs and Damascus, although in recent weeks more have arrived from Aleppo. About 40,000 refugees live along the northern border, while another 40,000 inhabit the Bekaa Valley, about 30 kilometers east of Beirut, having either traveled there from northern Lebanon or crossed the mountains that divide the two countries to the East. Seventy-five percent are women with children, as fathers and husbands remain in Syria to protect property and to work. UNHCR has registered about 75,000 of the Syrian population to date, with 30,000 waiting in line. The remainder either have sufficient means to support themselves (many wealthier Syrians go to Damascus to rent apartments) or are afraid to provide information to UNHCR for fear that it will be given to the Syrian government.

Shelter and education are two primary needs. As Lebanon does not host camps except for Palestinians,



Zahle, the bride of the Bekaa and haven for Syrian Christians

The delegation visited Zahle in the Bekaa Valley, a city of 320,000 nestled between the Lebanon mountains and the Syrian border. Syrian Christians have settled here to escape the conflict in their country and to escape sectarian violence. They reported threats to religious minorities from opposition forces in Syria. In one case, these forces told Syrian Christian residents in a Syrian village to leave within twenty-four hours or be killed. Others reported a common theme of the rebels, “Alawites to their coffins, Christians to Lebanon.” The Syrian Christian community remains in fear of both sides in the conflict and are reluctant to register with the Lebanese government or UNHCR for fear such information will be shared with the Syrian regime. While they are safe for the time being, many fear a sectarian conflict erupting in their home country, similar to events in the Iraq war, leaving them unable to return to their homes.

the refugees live in local communities with host families or friends or are paying rent in unfinished buildings.

Some live in makeshift settlements in tents provided by NGOs. As the conflict continues, demand for limited shelter options will increase and refugees will spend down their resources on rent. The Norwegian Refugee Council is working to increase housing stock by identifying unfinished homes, refurbishing them, and giving them to families for up to a year.

About 19,000 registered Syrian children are in need of education, but many more unregistered also are in need. While the Lebanese government permits these children to attend school, capacity is an issue. The Lebanese curriculum is different than in Syria, and portions of the curriculum are taught in French, with a lack of teachers to tutor the Syrian children. Some Syrian children have not attended school since the beginning of the conflict, almost one and one-half years. Teenagers from 13-17 are pressured to return to Syria and fight, so many do not attend school. Save the Children is working to increase capacity and training in needy areas and to create children-friendly spaces, hoping to serve at least 12,000 more children. Psycho-social support for children represents a growing gap in services.

Refugee protection is also an issue, as there have been reports of deportations and detention of refugees without papers or identification. Border crossers with identification are given a one-year renewable visa, but those who cross without identification or illegally remain at risk. Local police have removed temporary structures established by some refugee families without explanation.

Recommendations for Lebanon

- Additional housing units and winterization are needed as winter approaches. The international community, working with the Government of Lebanon, should make this a priority.
- Local authorities should not destroy tent settlements without notice and identify land where refugees can reside without interference.
- Additional tutors and teachers should be identified to teach Syrian school children, who study a different curriculum and who have already lost almost two years of schooling. Social workers with expertise in adolescent children are needed.
- The registration backlog for UNHCR is critical to address to enable refugees to access all available services and regularize their status.
- Refugees are in need of increased medical support. Many have recent wounds and long term chronic conditions.

Jordan

Jordan hosts as many as 200,000 Syrian refugees, although only 60,000 are registered with UNHCR, and could receive as many as a quarter million before the end of the year. This comes on the heels of the Iraqi refugee crisis, leaving the country’s resources stretched from the inflow. Nevertheless, Jordan is keeping its borders open and assisting Syrian refugees who cross the border fleeing the conflict. Notwithstanding several temporary camps existing along the Jordan-Syrian



border, only one camp, the Zaatari camp near Mafraq, has been opened, housing about 35,000 refugees. The remainder, or about eighty percent, resides with families or friends or rent apartments, in situations where they have resources. Syrians who enter Jordan are often fired at by Syrian government forces. The Jordanian military and police have done an admirable job in attempting to protect them and evacuate them for emergency care, if needed. However, Jordanian authorities have confiscated Syrian refugees' passports and other identification documents, leaving them vulnerable if they choose to return to Syria. It also leaves them exposed if they leave the Zaatari camp and live in the community. According to

Survival in the Desert: Zaatari Refugee Camp

The Zaatari refugee camp lies next to the small village of Zaatari, 15 kilometers east of the city of Al-Mafraq in the northern Jordanian desert. In selecting the site, which lies on a dusty plain, Jordanian authorities cite the presence of an underground river (“aquifer”) nearby, a ready supply of water for the refugees, but a source of tension for local residents, who rely on the water supply.

Tensions in the camp have run high, as the dusty and dirty living conditions and lack of basic necessities have led to riots, with tents and blankets being burned. At the time of the delegation visit, the unrest had ebbed, but more security was present, including high fencing around the camp.

The camp is filled with women and children, with 750 pregnant women at the time of the delegation visit. The men bring their families to the camp, then return to Syria. About 1350 girls and 1050 boys attend a tent school in the middle of the camp, but they lack school supplies, food for lunch, toilets, and water. Some of the kids are traumatized and require psycho-social support, which is lacking.

Life in Zaatari refugee camp is not easy for the refugees, and many have stayed here longer than they expected. Some refugees have left the camp, with a few saying that they “would rather die a quick death in Syria than a slow death in Zaatari.”

Jordanian officials, attempts are being made to collect the documents, scan them, and return them to Syrians living in Zaatari camp and other locations. Syrians are given only a 6-month residency card, many of which have expired. With a four-month backlog in UNHCR registration, refugees are left without valid identification and are not eligible for basic assistance.

The needs of the refugees both in the camp and in the community are great, although those living among the citizenry are most at risk. In Zaatari camp, there is a need for basic necessities such as food, clothing, school supplies for children, toiletries and basic medicines, and basic cooking supplies—oil, flour, corn, etc. The government is building more permanent structures in the camp in anticipation of winter, but progress has been slow. Another camp is being planned near Zarqa, about 20 kilometers from Amman, which is not as exposed to the elements.

As many as 60 percent of Syrians arriving in Jordan are women and children, as some men are either remaining in Syria to protect property or are fighting in the conflict. This leaves women and girls vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. Young boys, age 15-17, reject help and leave the camp, move around the local communities, and disappear, presumably back to Syria to join the fighting.

The majority of Syrian refugees live in local communities, but often are without documentation and are unable to access the services available in the camp, such

Erdogan will pay the bill

In Hatay province in southern Turkey, next to the northwest border with Syria, tensions are rising. A region with a large Alawite presence, Sunni refugees, some of them involved in fighting the Alawite-led Assad regime, are escaping Syria. With the influx of the refugees, local prices have risen and services, such as utilities, health-care, and water, are less available. In some health-care facilities, certain refugees are being given priority over local residents. Some of the Syrians have failed to pay restaurant bills, proclaiming to the restaurant owners that the Turkish prime minister, Tayyip Erdogan, will pay the bills.

Rebel fighters occupy dwellings in the city of Antakya, the ancient city of Antioch, the first area where followers of Christ were called Christians. In this city, St. Peter met with early Christians in a cave with an escape tunnel for fear of the Romans. Today, Syrian Christians in the area, mainly fleeing fighting in Aleppo, feel the same persecution.

The government of Turkey has accepted thousands refugees in this region, but now is sending refugees to points farther north and is urging Syrians in the province to move into the interior of Turkey.

as health-care. Syrian children are permitted to attend school, usually in the afternoons, after the Jordanian school children have finished for the day. While organizations such as Caritas, International Catholic Migration Commission, and other NGOs provide blankets, toiletries, and school supplies to the urban refugee population, they must obtain food, medicine, and clothing using their limited resources, which many are spending down by the day.

It was clear to the delegation that the government of Jordan was responding to the refugee outflow from Syria generously and transparently. Without more international support, and as the numbers increase, gaps in services to the refugees will continue and expand.

Recommendations for Jordan

- Syrian passport and identification documents should not be confiscated. A system should be established which records or copies the information but allows the refugees to maintain their original documents. The authorities should return documents already seized.
- Syrians entering Jordan should receive a one-year visa, to give UNHCR time to register them and to provide them protection within the country.
- An alternative camp or alternative living arrangements should be developed, particularly for vulnerable women with children.

- Winterization of the camp and the refugee housing in surrounding areas is vital.

Turkey

Turkey has received approximately 150,000 refugees since the conflict began, with 100,000 living in 16 camps along the southern border. Turkey has been deservedly praised for the overall conditions of the camps, with many featuring electricity, kitchens, and other benefits not normally found in refugee camps. The country has spent over \$300 million to care for the refugees to date.

However, there are signs of strain on Turkish resources and hospitality. Most disturbing is that Turkish authorities are holding as many several thousand refugees at a time at three border crossings along the southern border for as long as six weeks. In the meantime, they sleep on the ground or under trees and use whatever resources they have to purchase food. Once they are allowed in the country, those with passport or other identification are allowed to live outside the camps, while the others are sent to the camps.

Moreover, the more than 50,000 Syrians living in communities are unable to access the services provided to those in the camps, leaving them vulnerable. While NGOs are attempting to fill this gap, many are dependent upon the local community or work illegally in olive tree fields or other manual labor to survive. In some border areas, tensions are on the rise because of the strain on the economy caused by the additional popula-

tion and the lack of available resources for the general population, such as health-care.

In our meetings with the Turkish officials, they complained that the international community is not doing enough to support their efforts. However, it was clear that they wanted bilateral assistance and shunned any involvement of international non-government organizations in providing assistance in the camps, other than the International Red Crescent. UNHCR is providing a technical role in the camp settings but otherwise is not present.

Recommendations for Turkey

- The more than 50,000 Syrian refugees living outside the border camps require attention and should be provided assistance, including clothing, blankets, and other necessities. NGOs should be allowed to work with the Turkish government to fill these gaps in services.
- The U.S. government should urge the Turkish government to accept funding assistance for the refugee population through international organizations, such as the UNHCR and other NGOs.

A View from Outside the Camps

The delegation was not permitted to enter the refugee camps along the Turkish-Syrian border, camps which have received international praise for their conditions. Two camps east of Antakya and about 5 kilometers from the Syrian border were eerily quiet, with high walls and a heavy military presence. Rows of tents could be seen from the road, but no refugees. There was little activity seen inside the barbed wire fencing. Further down the road, along the Syrian border, a Turkish military station and armored vehicles could be seen.

A third camp, near a small town, also contained high walls, with a few of the refugees walking outside the entrance. The delegation was told that refugees were allowed to leave the camp with a sponsor from the local area, likely to work for the day in the local olive groves.

The Turkish government has responded generously to the Syrian refugee inflow, yet has permitted limited access to the camps and their inhabitants.

- The U.S. government should urge the Turkish government to allow NGOs to provide cross-border assistance to refugees waiting to enter Syria.

Generally, the increasing number of Syrian refugees with basic needs calls for additional support from the international community, both in assistance and protection. The United States should seriously consider resettlement for certain Syrian cases. To date, only one Syrian has been referred for resettlement in Lebanon and 13 in Jordan, a miniscule number compared to the need.

Iraqi Refugees Fleeing Syria

The delegation looked at another group of refugees impacted by the Syrian conflict—Iraqi refugees residing in Syria (hereinafter referred to as Iraqis ex-Syria). In Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, the delegation heard stories of Iraqi refugees who fled the fighting in Syria—the second war they had fled in the past ten years. These refugees are even more at risk, as some are fearful to return to Iraq and they are left unprotected in the surrounding nations.

In Syria the Iraqis are seen as supportive of the Assad government as they enjoyed some protection under the regime. Those concentrated in the Damascus area have expressed fear of the opposition forces, who have warned them to leave at certain points. Of particular concern are Iraqis who are in the refugee resettlement pipeline, having either been interviewed by a third country (like the United States) or been referred for resettlement by UNHCR. As the U.S. government has closed its embassy and is no longer processing refugees out of Syria, these refugees have no access to the U.S. program unless they travel to a neighboring country. Some have been languishing in Syria for many years, waiting for security clearances and to clear the cycle of expirations in the U.S. refugee program.

While Iraqis ex-Syria are being accepted by Turkey, they are being denied official entry into Jordan and Lebanon unless they first travel to Iraq. The Jordanian authorities will not accept an Iraqi passport with a Syrian stamp, so some Iraqis are forced to travel back to Iraq, obtain a new passport (which can take months), then attempt to enter Jordan to reconnect with UNHCR. In Jordan, the Iraqis are generally unwelcome, as close to one million entered the country during the Iraqi war.

“My rights are my dreams”

Three young Iraqi men of the Mandaean faith escaped the fighting in Syria, returned to Iraq where they faced religious persecution, and found their way to Lebanon. In Syria, they had been referred to the United States for resettlement, but interviews with U.S. officials had been suspended because of the conflict in that country. In Lebanon, they were able to register with UNHCR and, with help from the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), were rescheduled for another interview, which also was cancelled because of security concerns. They now await another opportunity to interview with U.S. officials, hopeful for an opportunity to begin a new life.

The three young men, who had experienced two wars and persecution, were fearful that Americans would treat them as an enemy, not persons who shared their values. One wished to study to become a doctor and one expressed a desire to live without fear. “My rights are my dreams,” he stated.

In Lebanon, there are as many as 9-10,000 Iraqi refugees in Beirut, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council and the UNHCR. The largest number fled Iraq to Lebanon during the Iraqi war, with only 326 Iraqis ex-Syria registered with UNHCR. In Jordan, only 1,600 Iraqis ex-Syria are registered with UNHCR, mainly because of the Jordanian government’s policy of denying entry to Iraqis with a Syrian stamp in their passport. In Turkey, 2,052 Iraqis-ex Syria are registered with UNHCR, with only 28, according to UNHCR, in the U.S. refugee pipeline. However, it was clear to the delegation that this low number was probably due to backlogs in registration rather than a reflection of reality.

In Turkey, Iraqis are sent to satellite cities (smaller cities away from larger urban areas) to live among the general population. The delegation was able to visit with six Iraqi ex-Syria refugee families in the resort town of Yalova, about 1.5 hours from Istanbul. Five of the families were in the United States refugee pipeline with case numbers, but had waited months to receive instructions from UNHCR or IOM as to timeline for resettlement. As they languished in Yalova, a very expensive tourist city, they were struggling to afford rent and medical care without working illegally or spending down the

last of their dwindling resources. Having met five of the 28 Iraqi ex-Syria resettlement cases in one location, the delegation strongly believes that more than 28 Iraqi ex-Syria cases existed in Turkey.

It was clear to the delegation that the Iraqi ex-Syria population in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey was lost among the many victims of the Syrian conflict. The U.S. government has a special obligation to protect this vulnerable group, which now has experienced two traumatic conflicts in which they feared for their lives. The delegation urges the U.S. government to make identification of Iraqis ex-Syria a priority and to expedite cases referred to or already approved by the United States. We applaud the efforts of UNHCR, WRAPS, IOM, and the Refugee Support Centers (RSCs) to align data systems to identify cases and expedite their transfer. This should continue.

African Refugees in Cairo

The delegation visited Cairo, Egypt to look at the situation of African refugees in Egypt—Sudanese, Somalians, Ethiopians, and Eritreans, to name a few. While Cairo has been perceived as a “safe” city without much need for resettlement, the delegation found the reverse to be true.

Only 44,000 African refugees are registered with UNHCR, but an estimated 120,000 live in Egypt. The largest group is Sudanese who fled conflict in their



“Life in Egypt is hard”

The group of women protesting outside the UNHCR office in Cairo was from the Nuba Mountains in South Sudan. They held banners in Arabic stating, “Please help the women refugees from the Nuba Mountains.”

They complained about the long wait for resettlement out of Cairo, with some having waited for as long as 10 years. They cannot work because of a lack of documents and they have no means to support themselves or their children. Their children were not receiving an adequate education. Security is a problem. They all complained about how hard life was in Egypt.

They no longer hear from their relatives in the United States, who have forgotten about them and no longer send them money. Resettlement to the United States would help solve their problems, they all agreed.

country, primarily women with children. Many have lived in Egypt for ten years or more and are expected to return to South Sudan, but have no place to live in that country.

The security situation in Cairo is unstable, given the recent revolution and the absence of police protection for the refugees. Harassment and sexual violence against women are a common occurrence, with women refugees fearful to venture far from home. Women with children are particularly at risk as they are unable to afford day care and must work during the day, leaving their children at home alone. Many should be considered for resettlement as the United States accepted only 1600 of a possible 2000 cases last year.

Children are permitted to enroll in private community schools, but not public education. Catholic Relief Services in Cairo runs a program that assists families with educational costs.

Salloum Refugee Camp, Western Egypt

Although the delegation did not visit the Egyptian border with Libya, we learned of the situation in the Salloum refugee camp, which is located at the northernmost border of Egypt with Libya. More than 2,000 refugees from East Africa who fled the Libyan civil war—Sudanese, Somalis, Eritreans, and others—are languishing there. They live in harsh desert conditions and have been threatened by Libyans, only a few kilometers away. They cannot return to Libya for fear of persecution there and cannot return to their countries of origin. The United States has accepted for resettlement about one-third of the refugees in the camp, but only 152 cases have departed to the United States. Another

300 are waiting for final approval.

With such a small population, the refugees in Salloum should be resettled to third countries and the United States should consider accepting more cases. Departure to the United States for cases that are already approved should be expedited.

Human trafficking in the Sinai peninsula

Perhaps the most disturbing finding of the delegation were the horrific stories of the human trafficking and torture of (mostly) Eritrean refugees in the Sinai peninsula of Egypt.

Escaping forced military conscription and extreme poverty in their homeland, Eritrean refugees, including many youth, have crossed into neighboring countries or attempted to travel to Europe or to Israel. Unfortunately many of these Eritrean refugees have fallen prey to human traffickers in the Sinai.

As told to the delegation, Eritrean refugees leaving Eritrea or Ethiopia (many young people leave Mai Ani camp in northern Ethiopia) for the Sudan are seized by Sudanese authorities, sold to members of the Raishida tribe in Sudan, who subsequently sell them to the Bedouin tribes in Egypt. The Bedouin traffickers then take them to an undisclosed location, known as “torture houses,” and attempt to extort money from the family of the refugees. In some cases, the traffickers torture the refugees as they call the family members, so they can hear the screams of their loved ones. The torture includes sexual violence, the beating of hands and feet, forced standing for days, and the lack of sanitary conditions or adequate food or water. Tortured refugees have



reported requesting their torturers to kill them.

The price extorted from the families by the traffickers has risen to as much as \$40,000, the estimated amount for the organs of a person. Although there have been reports of organ trafficking in the Sinai, these reports have yet to be confirmed. Families in Eritrea and elsewhere reportedly sell all of their possessions and ask for money from extended family to pay the ransom. Paying the traffickers, however, only encourages them to sell the refugees to another trafficker, who repeats the practice.

According to local NGOs assisting the refugees, 70 Eritrean refugees have escaped their captors to Cairo, either by force or with the help of local residents or other tribal leaders. They remain in danger, however, as they are tracked or accompanied by some of their

torturers, who pose as victims. The delegation heard reports of victims being kidnapped again in Cairo.

The delegation feels strongly that the U.S. government has the power to end this inhumane practice by pressuring the Egyptian government to help identify and prosecute these traffickers and stop their horrific practices. These houses of torture can be identified by local residents or other tribal leaders, as they were in a report on CNN. If the United States purports to be a world leader in anti-trafficking efforts, then we should not shy away from confronting trafficking in the Sinai, which is well-documented.

Over the long-term, this practice can be halted by looking at the root causes of flight of African refugees and seeking durable solutions for their plight. The situation of refugees from Eritrea and other African countries can be addressed at their core, in the countries of first asylum, such as Ethiopia, where they languish in refugee camps for years. The protection of these young refugees early in their journey is essential to stopping this flow. A Best Interest Determination process for unaccompanied minors in the camps in Ethiopia and Sudan must begin as soon as possible.

Below please find the general findings and recommendations of our mission:

Findings

The number of Syrian refugees continues to increase, placing the most vulnerable at risk. According to the United Nation's High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the outflow of Syrians could reach 750,000 by year's end and as many as 1.5 million by the end of 2013. Neighboring countries told the delegation that services to the refugees could be cut back or the refugee flow limited without more support from the international community. Vulnerable refugee cases, including women with children, the elderly and disabled, and unaccompanied children could suffer the consequences as protection falters and resources become scarce.

Iraqis residing in Syria have been denied entry into

neighboring countries and remain in limbo. Iraqi refugees who fled the war in Iraq now face another conflict. Iraqis are being denied access to Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey and must return to Iraq before entering those nations. Iraqis who have been approved for UNHCR for resettlement to the United States continue to await their interviews in a third country.

Religious minorities, especially Christians, are at extreme risk, as they were in Iraq. The delegation heard many stories from Christian families that they are being targeted in the conflict, similar to the persecution many of these groups experienced during the Iraq war. This persecution could worsen if the conflict dissolves into a sectarian and ethnic civil war. Some remain at risk in neighboring countries.

Vulnerable African refugees in Egypt lack protection and support. The delegation heard horrific stories of the torture and trafficking of Eritrean refugees in the Sinai peninsula, some of whom have escaped to Cairo. Women and children refugees from Sudan lack protection in Cairo and face harassment and discrimination. Many urban African women refugees fear leaving their homes for fear of harassment or attack.

Recommendations

As the conflict in Syria continues and intensifies, more international support will be required to assist Syrian refugees to find durable solutions. To date, only about one-third of the UNHCR international appeal for Syrian refugees has been met. The resources of the receiving nations are being stretched and tensions between residents and the new refugees are rising. The United States has given approximately \$132 million for support of the refugees, but more will be needed as the refugee numbers rise. Of particular need are refugees residing outside of the camps, both in Turkey and Jordan.

The United States and other nations should consider resettlement for the most vulnerable refugee cases. As the conflict continues and vulnerable refugees—women with children, religious minorities, unaccompanied minors—become even more vulnerable, the United States and other nations should consider resettlement for certain refugee groups. UNHCR should consider this option as a durable solution and begin identifying refugees for possible resettlement.

The United States should urge neighboring countries to receive Iraqi refugees from Syria and should expedite the resettlement cases of Iraqis referred for consideration to the United States. The delegation spoke with Iraqis in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey who lived in Syria and escaped the conflict there. Many entered these countries after returning to Iraq and have resettlement cases pending with the U.S. government. Some have even been accepted by the United States for resettlement, pending a complex security clearance process. These refugees should receive expedited consideration by the U.S. government. Efforts to coordinate databases of UNHCR, IOM and Refugee Support Centers to identify cases in pipeline should continue.

The U.S. government should work with the Egyptian government to halt the trafficking and torture of Eritrean refugees in the Sinai peninsula. Eritrean refugees fleeing their country are being captured and tortured by local tribes in the Sinai peninsula. This hideous practice should be stopped by the U.S. and Egyptian governments as soon as possible. Victims who have escaped the torture remain at risk from their torturers and should receive emergency resettlement. Moreover, the situation of refugees from Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the Sudan should be examined to prevent them from migrating north and becoming vulnerable to kidnappers. For example, rescuing Eritrean children from camps in northern Ethiopia should be strongly considered.

Vulnerable African refugees in Cairo who are unable to integrate and remain at risk of harassment and attack should be considered for resettlement. Women refugees with children from Sudan, Somalia, and other African countries are unable to support themselves and live in fear of harassment and attack in Cairo. Only 1600 of a possible 2000 refugee resettlement slots referred by UNHCR were resettled last year. The United States

should increase the level in 2013 and meet the quota. Particular attention should be paid to the completion and expansion of processing in Salloum camp, near the Egyptian-Libyan border, and cases already approved should be expedited.

The United States should urge neighboring countries to protect religious minorities fleeing the Syrian conflict. Christians and other religious minorities fleeing Syria remain in fear in neighboring countries and should receive special attention. Many are afraid to ask for protection from UNHCR for fear the information will be shared with the Syrian regime; others are afraid to go to organized camps for fear of further persecution by elements in the camps.

Conclusion

The Syrian conflict is nearly two years old and there is increasing anxiety that it could last for an extended period of time. Absent an end to the fighting, Syrian refugees will remain in neighboring countries and their numbers will increase. The international community should share the burden of caring for the refugees now rather than when it reaches a crisis point, with the potential for destabilizing the entire region.

Iraqi refugees who first fled their home country and now Syria should receive special protection, especially those who have already been identified for resettlement to the United States or another nation. The United States has a special obligation to identify these refugees and to expedite their resettlement cases, many of which have been delayed because of complex security clearances.

In Egypt, it is unconscionable that the United States and Egypt permit the trafficking and torture of vulnerable Eritrean (and other) refugees. We have the power to end this practice immediately and not simply talk about anti-trafficking efforts when it is politically expedient. The United States should also consider expanded resettlement out of Cairo for these torture victims and women and children at risk.

The United States is in a position to prevent this current refugee crisis from growing worse and possibility destabilizing the region. We urge our public officials to adopt our recommendations and act.

