

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 20, 2013

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write today to express our ongoing concern for the humanitarian and protracted refugee crisis caused by the conflict in Syria.

Earlier this year, we travelled to the region as a bipartisan congressional delegation and visited with refugees in Za'atari Camp in Jordan. We heard firsthand from refugees about the hardship and challenges families are facing as a result of the crisis. We also heard from our allies and partners in the region about the effect the conflict is having on their domestic security and regional stability. We believe U.S. efforts to address the suffering and bring the conflict to an end are a priority in their own right and a core national security interest.

This is the largest and most complex humanitarian crisis in the world today, and we are proud that the United States is leading the world in providing more than \$1.3 billion for humanitarian activities both inside Syria and in neighboring countries. However, as the influx of refugees into host countries continues at an alarming rate, and with the onset of winter, we need to do more to meet urgent humanitarian needs. On December 16, 2013, the United Nations released an appeal for \$6.5 billion in assistance for 2014, which marks the largest single request for a humanitarian emergency. This appeal exceeds two previous United Nations emergency appeals, which identified a total of \$4.4 billion in humanitarian needs, which are less than 64% funded.

More than two years of fighting have forced millions of Syrians to flee from their homes resulting in approximately 6.5 million internally displaced Syrians. In addition, approximately 2.2 million registered Syrians have fled to neighboring countries, of which the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees reports that about 1 million Syrian refugees are children.

The humanitarian crisis is quickly shifting from being a consequence of the Syrian conflict to being a potential driver of conflict itself which threatens regional stability. Host countries in the region, including Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt are accepting a staggering number of refugees at considerable cost and political risk. Each host country has its own unique set of challenges, and is struggling to meet the basic needs of newly arriving refugees.

Millions of Syrian refugees – expected to reach over 3 million by the end of the year– put a strain on already over-burdened public services in host countries including clean water, sanitation, schools, and hospitals. Limited access to healthcare and outbreaks of communicable diseases like polio, measles and typhoid in Syria, have triggered emergency vaccination efforts in neighboring countries and within refugee communities. In addition, rising sectarian and other internal tensions and cross border clashes are creating additional security threats that could also have implications for regional security.

In addition, new challenges are emerging as refugees who have resided in host countries for an extended period of time are running out of savings and have no legal authority to work. Simmering political tensions have led to crack downs on illegal employment and increased detention and deportation. And, in some cases, limited resources are forcing aid agencies to restrict aid, causing frustration and anger among those excluded.

As the former Commander, US Central Command, General James N. Mattis stated so eloquently during a hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee earlier this year, "If we seek to influence events, we must listen to partner concerns and continue to demonstrate our support through tangible actions." General Mattis rightly assessed that "[p]erhaps the greatest risk to U.S. interests in the region is a perceived lack of an enduring U.S. commitment to collective interests and the security of our regional partners."

To address a crisis of this magnitude, it is essential for the U.S. to work closely with allies in the region and partners around the world, and to ensure that the efforts across the U.S. government are well-coordinated and make the most of limited resources. Accordingly, we respectfully request information on how each federal agency is currently contributing to the humanitarian response and the activities your Administration is undertaking to facilitate interagency coordination to ensure a unity of effort across the U.S. government. We would also like to know how the effectiveness of the U.S. response is being evaluated and what process has been devised for contingency planning.

We thank you again for your attention to this important matter and look forward to your response.

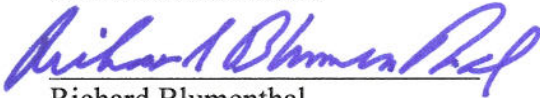
Sincerely,



John McCain  
United States Senator



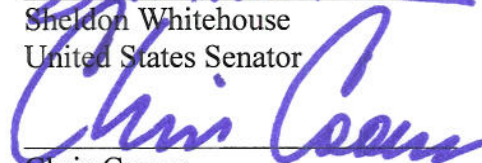
Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



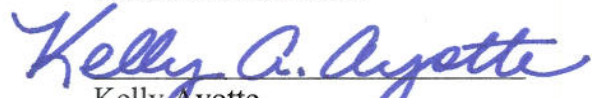
Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator



Chris Coons  
United States Senator



Kelly Ayotte  
United States Senator