



United States Department of State

Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration

Washington, D.C. 20520

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The Continuing Humanitarian Crisis in Syria

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Given the attention that the U.S. government continues to place on ending the escalating violence which has uprooted hundreds of thousands of Syrians, we take the opportunity to update you regarding our humanitarian diplomacy and programmatic response. At the highest political levels, the international community's message is clear: end the violence against civilians, permit humanitarian access, and allow a real political transition that protects the rights of all Syrians. Meanwhile humanitarian needs continue to grow: the number of Syrians displaced to neighboring countries now exceeds 50,000, with nearly one million in need inside Syria, including UN-estimated 300,000 internally displaced persons. Vulnerable populations of Iraqi and Palestinian refugees within Syria, while not explicitly targeted, are also feeling the traumatic effects of ongoing conflict.

As Secretary Clinton said at the Friends of the Syrian People meeting in Istanbul this past weekend, "To those still suffering we say: help is on the way." At that meeting she announced additional humanitarian funding, bringing total U.S. government humanitarian support addressing the Syria crisis to nearly \$25 million. For a full view of U.S. government contributions, please see our factsheet, [Additional Humanitarian Relief for Syrians](#).

Secretary Clinton also met last week at the State Department with President Kellenberger of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). They discussed the urgent humanitarian crisis in Syria and the ICRC's work there, in partnership with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. These two organizations have been critical in providing much-needed humanitarian assistance and protection to the Syrian people under incredibly difficult circumstances -- and in a manner consistent with its long-established commitment to independence and neutrality. The Secretary conveyed to Dr. Kellenberger that the United States Government is proud to support the ICRC's important humanitarian work in Syria and worldwide. In FY 2011, the U.S. government was the number one donor to the organization with contributions approaching \$280 million.



The U.S. government continues to focus on the humanitarian crisis in the region. Together with my USAID colleague, Mark Bartolini, Director of the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, we recently represented the U.S. Government at the first meeting of the High Level Syria Humanitarian Forum in Geneva, Switzerland on March 8. We then traveled to Turkey for consultations with the Turkish government and met with displaced Syrians in two camps in Hatay province, Turkey. Our visit to the camps was the first by U.S. personnel since July 2011 and coincided with the anniversary of the 1980 massacre ordered by then-Syrian President Hafez al-Asad, Bashar al-Asad's father, in Idlib province. On the day of our visit, Idlib was under heightened attack, which led one of the Syrians we met to despair, "People are being put in jails or in graves."

We listened carefully to their accounts and reiterated the international community's commitment to responding to the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people. We sought their assessment of the humanitarian assistance needs in Syria and ways we could help respond to them.

Despite recent marked increases in the number of Syrians seeking refuge in Turkey, the Turkish government has demonstrated the best of Turkish hospitality, continuing to accept full responsibility for assisting displaced Syrians within its borders, maintaining an open border to fleeing Syrians, responding robustly to their humanitarian needs, and providing them temporary protection. The government's humanitarian assistance provided through the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) exceeds international standards, and we commend the Turkish government's leadership and humanitarian response. We encouraged the Turkish Government to expand its engagement with established multilateral humanitarian organizations and were pleased to note that UNHCR is working with the government on international standards of protection in the camps in southern Turkey.



Photo: UNHCR
Weekly Food Distribution in Ramtha Transit Facility,
Jordan, March 2012

I also traveled to Amman, Jordan, where I met with representatives from UNHCR, NGOs, and the Jordanian government. Jordan has been a generous host to Syrians who have fled the violence and is engaged in contingency planning for increased flows of displaced Syrians. Of significant note, Panos Moutzidis, who previously served as the UN humanitarian coordinator for Libya, has been named UNHCR's Regional Refugee Coordinator. We are confident his appointment will bolster the international community's ability to respond to this crisis in partnership with regional governments.

Finally, the U.S. government commends the governments of Lebanon and Iraq for hosting displaced Syrians. Importantly, like Turkey and Jordan, these neighbors have kept their borders open for all individuals fleeing the escalating violence. The generosity demonstrated by families in the region who have taken displaced Syrians into their homes is truly heroic.

Our trip was a timely opportunity to evaluate current emergency response efforts, discuss contingency planning for larger Syrian arrivals, and explore opportunities for an even stronger international community humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis.

Kind Regards,

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Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Population, Refugees, and Migration



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