



Written testimony of

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Summary: Given the deteriorating situation in Syria, the level of displacement will continue to grow. Humanitarian support both inside Syria as well in neighbouring states must not only be maintained but enhanced. The strong leadership undertaken by the United States has been critical in ensuring the successful refugee response to-date. The refugee response must, however, be linked to longer support for Jordanian host communities who have borne the brunt and who we, as humanitarians, have relied upon for the protection of Syrian refugees.

Introduction

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member and members of the subcommittee, on behalf of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), I would like to express our appreciation for the opportunity to appear before you today to address the humanitarian situation of Syrian refugees in Jordan and the challenges being borne by their respective host communities. I would also like to request that my full written statement be submitted for the record.

I would like to sincerely thank the people and the Government of the United States for their tremendous support and leadership in relation to this refugee response. Without this support the significant achievements that have been made in providing life-saving protection and assistance to the hundreds of thousands Syrians who have been hosted in the Kingdom of Jordan would not have been possible. I thank you for this opportunity to testify and to explain further on the overall needs in Jordan.

Syrian Refugees in Jordan

Jordan is a keystone state in a turbulent region. The generosity that it has shown towards refugees since the crisis began must be reinforced through enhanced and sustained international support. It is critical that other refugee groups in Jordan, including an estimated two million Palestinians and tens of thousands of Iraqi refugees, are also acknowledged and continue to receive critical support.

Mr. Chairman, this weekend I was on Jordan's remote eastern border with Syria, where we witnessed a relentless tide of mainly women and children cross the border. Many of these refugees had been displaced several times already in Syria. All had been severely impacted by the conflict. One family had just had their 12 year old son shot dead in Homs. Another their home destroyed in Aleppo. Many did not know the whereabouts of their husbands, fathers or brothers. None of the children that I spoke to had been to school in the past six months.

Of the 1,400 refugees that crossed in the space of several hours that evening, over 700 were children. We had elderly in wheelchairs being pushed across the desert by their grandchildren. There were pregnant women, one of whom gave birth later that night in Jordan. Of the pre-conflict population of the neighbouring province of Da'ara, over 40 per cent are now registered with UNHCR in Jordan.

The conflict in Syria has caused the worst humanitarian crisis in almost two decades, with the impact affecting stability throughout the entire region. Hardest hit have been Syria's immediate neighbours. The impact of the refugee influx upon the societies, economies, and communities of the host countries has been immense. Since the beginning of the crisis in March 2011, Jordan has maintained an open, albeit managed, border policy. The influx further compounds dire economic consequences created by the conflict, which include a loss of foreign investment, reduced trade flows and cross-border economic and commercial exchanges, as well as drastically diminished tourism revenues – not to mention very real security concerns, given the scale and intensity of the war just across the border.

As Syrians in urban areas are granted access to public services, including health, education, shelter, water and electricity, the pressure on scarce resources and subsidised services has dramatically increased. The families and communities hosting vulnerable Syrian refugees face significant challenges, as does the Jordanian Government. Continuing to meet these challenges will depend largely on increased and sustained support from the international community.

The pace of refugee arrivals into Jordan has grown dramatically since 2012. By the end of 2011, some nine months after the crisis started, only 5,000 Syrian refugees had been registered with UNHCR. The number of Syrians seeking refuge in Jordan is now estimated to be more than 600,000, with 565,000 registered with UNHCR. Of this, only one fifth are located in camps, such as Zaatri. The remainder are in urban areas. This number will continue to increase as the security, social, economic and political situation deteriorates further in Syria.

Jordan has a population of six million people. The current Syrian refugee population now constitutes an additional 10 per cent to this population. The projected 800,000 refugees by the end of 2014 would increase this to 13 per cent. Tragically just over half of the refugee population are children with the majority of adults being women.

The refugee response to this influx has been well coordinated, rapid and effective. Some of the main achievements include:

- Some 565,000 Syrians have been registered by UNHCR, including enhanced biometric registration;

- Zaatari camp has provided protection and assistance to 360,000 newly arriving refugees (GoJ, UNHCR). Zaatari's current population is approximately 80,000. Assistance for newly arrived refugees includes tents, blankets, kitchen sets and food parcels.
- Azraq camp has been built with a capacity of 52,000 in the first phase and a potential of up to 130,000 persons in total.
- Almost 400,000 refugees receive food vouchers and all refugees in Zaatari receive food assistance (WFP)
- Almost 70,000 families are receiving regular cash assistance – including 30,000 from UNHCR.
- Over 106,000 Syrian children are registered in public schools in both host communities and in camps (UNICEF);
- Nearly 32,000 school-aged children in host communities and in camps benefit from informal education;
- 115 Jordanian public schools supported to increase learning space through double-shifting, refurbishment and prefabricated classrooms;
- All Syrian children and over two million Jordanians are being vaccinated against polio and measles (WHO, UNICEF)

Refugees are received and assisted at the border by the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF), supported by the International Organization for Migration. On some nights, as many as 4,000 Syrians have crossed the border. This required the mobilization of up to 80 buses to transfer the refugees to safety. The JAF transfer the refugees to a screening center at Rabaa Al-Sarhan, before onward transport to the refugee camps. On arrival in the camps, refugees are registered by UNHCR, receive medical screening, are assisted with food, NFIs and shelter, and are provided access to water and sanitation, education, psycho-social support and other services.

Of the over 600,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan, approximately 20 per cent of Syrian refugees reside in refugee camps. The largest refugee camp is Zaatari, administered by the Government, with the support of UNHCR. More than 360,000 Syrians have been registered in Zaatari camp since its opening in July 2012, although a large number of refugees have subsequently left Zaatari to urban and rural areas in Jordan.

The absorption capacity in urban areas is rapidly being exhausted and some northern cities such as Mafraq and Irbid may have already reached capacity. Unlike previous refugee influxes into Jordan, the majority of Syrians who have taken refuge in the Kingdom have limited education and little in the way of resources. As a result, they have tended to settle in low income areas, where services were already oversubscribed and work opportunities too few. In some northern towns, one room apartments have increased from USD 50 to USD 150. Some Jordanians have reported that young people have been forced to delay marriage, as they are unable to find affordable accommodation. With a failing economic situation in the north as trade with Syria has

ground to a halt, the massive increase in prices in some sectors is causing real hardship for refugees and Jordanians alike.

The early arrival of refugees from the Syria in 2011 primarily affected border areas and governorates in the north and north-west of the country, which were traditional destinations for Syrian migrant workers, notably in the agricultural sector. Pre-existing cross-border economic, commercial, and social links (tribal, family) between Jordanian and Syrian communities eased the initial reception of refugees. The town of Dara (pop. 100,000+), which provided the trigger for the uprising, rests on the border with Jordan. This has often resulted in shells landing in neighbouring Jordanian towns and villages.

As the number of Syrian refugees grew, local absorption capacities and response capabilities of municipalities and humanitarian aid providers have come under enormous strain. For the most part, refugees are concentrated in areas of the Kingdom where poverty rates among Jordanians are among the highest in the country.

Mr. Chairman, Jordan has limited natural resources but has been an example to the world in terms of providing refuge to people fleeing conflict in the Middle East. It has no oil. It imports nearly all of its energy (96 per cent, consuming about 20 per cent of GDP), as well as large proportions of its water and grain. The economy depends heavily on expatriate worker remittances, tourism, and foreign direct investments and grants.

Over the past several years, Jordan has confronted multiple external shocks. High prices for imported oil and food, repeated interruptions of natural gas flows from Egypt, and sluggish foreign direct investment flows have combined with the civil war in Syria to produce a profoundly negative impact on the economy, including increased inflation and a sharp deterioration in its fiscal and external balances. Stimulating growth, while simultaneously lowering the deficit, has become Jordan's main economic challenge.

Over the last decade, the share of poor households in Jordan has been halved from 32 to 15 per cent- a considerable achievement that could be affected by the current challenge. The improvement on many development indicators, along with the implementation of political reforms, is credited as having mitigated domestic public discontent, which in other parts of the region has led to violence. Jordan's stability and generous protection space cannot be taken for granted, and in a turbulent region, it must be prioritised. As we have seen in other regional states, once stability is compromised, it is difficult to regain.

The majority of poor households are found in the northern governorates hosting refugees. Part of the Governorate's efforts to protect lower income Jordanian families involves the provision of subsidized items such as bread, electricity, water and household gas. The provision of these

subsidized items to Syrian refugees in the country constitutes a significant and unforeseen burden for the Jordanian Government. The estimated cost to-date for the Government to cover these subsidies this year is USD 152.4 million (USD 19.2 million for water, USD 23 million for flour, USD 93.6 million for electricity and USD 16.6 million for household gas).

The Government of Jordan has granted access to free primary and secondary education to all Syrian refugee children registered with UNHCR (estimated at 190,000), despite existing pressures on the education system. With 90 per cent of Syrian children concentrated in four governorates (Mafraq, Irbid, Amman, and Zarqa), the pressure on public schools in these locations is extremely high. By the end of November 2013, **97,000** Syrian children were enrolled in Jordanian public schools (excluding camps), with 80 schools currently double-shifting in order to accommodate them.

Mr. Chairman, Jordan is one of the countries with the lowest infant and maternal mortality rates in the region, it has been polio free since 1995, was due to be certified free from indigenous measles transmission, and was on course to eliminate tuberculosis. All of these gains are now at risk. Following a declared polio outbreak in Syria, with 17 reported cases as of mid-November, there is a need to ensure immunization of children under five in Jordan, with coordinated campaigns targeting not only Syrian refugees but also Jordanians and other members of the host community. With at least a 10 per cent increase in the demand for health care, the sector is faced with significant shortages of medications – especially those for chronic diseases – and beds, overworked staff and short consultation times. In the northern city of Mafraq, out of 16 infant incubators, 12 were occupied by Syrian refugee babies. It is worth noting that as a result of the efforts of the Ministry of Health (MoH), UN and NGO health organizations, mortality and acute malnutrition rates are not currently elevated among Syrian refugees.

The Ministry of Labour has highlighted concerns over the increased number of job seekers in many of Jordan's northern cities. The arrival of Syrian refugees has resulted in a major increase in the labour force, in addition to a substantial number of migrant workers already in the country. As many as 160,000 Syrian workers may be working in Jordan, primarily in the construction, agriculture and service sectors. For those refugees able to find regular casual work, these opportunities tend to be illegal, scarce, exploitive, and insufficient to support their livelihoods. Since Syrians are unable to secure jobs in the public service or in the formal private sector, the impact is felt most acutely in the informal labour market. The immediate consequence of a large increase in additional, unskilled labour have been declining wages and increasing levels of unemployment (estimated at 15 per cent pre-conflict), especially among the low skilled and young.

Jordan is a desert country and water is its most precious resource. Providing water and wastewater services for an additional 600,000 people poses severe challenges, particularly since

the existing systems and infrastructure were in many places antiquated (often over 40 years old) and already stretched. The aquifers in the area of the camps are at risk if steps are not taken to avoid pollution. The water infrastructure and aquifers are not able to withstand the significant pressures resulting from the additional population. The aquifers once exhausted or polluted are gone forever. The increased population is overstressing a struggling municipal service delivery. In solid waste management alone, the influx of refugees means an increase of 340 tons of waste to be disposed of daily,

A significant increase in electricity generation capacity is required to cover the additional demand from the Syrian refugee population. It is estimated that USD 110 million is required to construct a gas turbine with the adequate megawatt capacity in the north. More generally, the capital investment to meet additional demand is estimated at USD 338 million.

Mr. Chairman, despite the enormous social, economic and resource costs that Jordan has incurred in being an exemplary host to the Syrian refugees, it continues to work hand in hand with UNHCR and the international community in order to enhance the protection and assistance to Syrian refugees. Last week a decision in principle was made to extend the validity of the refugee registration from six to twelve months. In addition, UNHCR will initiate a joint registration with the Ministry of Interior, again reducing the pressure on refugees, while at the same time introducing biometrics to the registration system. This is just one example of the very strong partnership we have with the Jordanian Government.

The dynamics of the influx of Syrian refugees into Jordan remain highly unpredictable, but the present signs indicate a deteriorating situation. Jordan's continuing ability to provide a minimum level of services to refugees and local communities without jeopardizing its broader economic and development objectives depends on continued international solidarity.

Assistance to Jordan has so far been mobilised primarily within the framework of successive UNHCR-led Regional Response Plans. They have had the full support of the Government and respective Ministries. Over 60 different government partners, NGOs and UN agencies have contributed to the next edition of the plan which will be released on 16 December. The budget is calculated on the projected needs of an expected 800,000 refugees who will be protected in Jordan by the end of 2014, and includes assistance that will reach over two million Jordanians affected by the presence of refugees.

Conclusion

In closing, Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I would like to thank you for your leadership in highlighting and addressing the critical protection needs of Syrian refugees and others of concern in the region. We look forward to working with you to ensure that enhanced

protection and assistance are delivered, and durable solutions are identified, through robust support and cooperation from the United States and other members of the international community. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.