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Chairwoman Granger, Representative Lowey, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to present an overview of our response to the crisis in Syria. The human toll of this conflict grows more devastating every day. As of this past week, more than one million people have left their homes in Syria to seek refuge in another country. Over 2.5 million people are internally displaced.

And the Syrians who remain at home face a new level of ruthlessness from the Assad regime, which is raining Scud missiles down on residential neighborhoods, destroying hospitals and schools, and sending its thugs rampaging through the streets to terrorize their fellow citizens.

More than 70,000 Syrians have died since the beginning of the conflict, according to the UN. It is hard to comprehend such carnage, but here is one telling anecdote. We have heard that some Syrian parents who still send their children to school now stitch their child's name on school uniforms. That makes it easier to identify the bodies.

OUR PRIORITIES

The United States continues to support the Syrian people in their stand against this brutal and corrupt regime. As Secretary Kerry said in Rome last month, we are committed to "helping the Syrian people achieve their goal to live in a free, safe, and just society. Their goal is our goal."

We are working to alleviate the human suffering. This includes nearly \$385 million in humanitarian assistance for emergency medical care and supplies, blankets, and shelter. We are sending flour to 50 bakeries in Aleppo and sponsoring food and sanitation projects for the desperate families in Atmeh refugee camp. Our aid into opposition-controlled areas is often intentionally discreet to protect those delivering the aid, but it is significant.

We are also helping the opposition to provide basic goods and essential services – including civilian security - to communities in areas liberated from regime control as we help them to prepare for a democratic transition that protects the rights and achieves the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

And we are working with our allies and partners to compel the regime to end its war on the Syrian people through intensifying economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure.

None of this is easy. The Assad regime has harnessed the destructive force of sectarianism to keep itself alive, pitting communities against each other in an attempt to divide and conquer. Extremists are exploiting these fissures to advance their own destructive agendas. And the grinding conflict goes on.

But preserving national unity and laying the foundation for a free Syria that respects the rights of all its citizens is essential if we are to secure a Syria that helps rather than threatens stability in the heart of the Middle East. Collapse and fragmentation of the Syrian state or its takeover by extremists would worsen the risks associated with chemical weapons security, terrorist bases, and new refugee flows inundating neighboring states. Those outcomes would directly threaten our interests.

Therefore, apart from our humanitarian aid, we have provided \$54 million in non-lethal assistance to the Syrian opposition to help the Syrian people rid themselves of Bashar al-Asad and achieve their aspirations for a better future. Secretary Kerry recently announced plans to provide another \$60 million. In particular, these resources would:

- Solidify the efforts of Syrian moderates who are competing for influence with extremist groups. Although the majority of the Syrian opposition inside and outside the country firmly rejects the ideology of al-Qaida's affiliates, such as the Nusra Front, opposition groups are increasingly willing to engage in pragmatic alliances with them. We need to provide Syrian communities with an alternative source of support to prevent the influence of al-Qaida's affiliates from expanding.
- Reduce the suffering in Syrian cities and towns by helping national and local opposition leaders provide vital services such as food, water and electricity. Syrian activists and rebels are working hard to unite the opposition, establish local governing structures, and provide assistance to the many Syrians in need. We need to empower these courageous Syrians – both armed and unarmed – so that they can respond quickly to critical needs.
- Prevent the disintegration of the Syrian state by supporting a unified, inclusive, and effective civilian leadership at both national and local levels – and by retaining the civil servants that can keep state institutions functioning as Syrians struggle to recover from this conflict.

INVESTING IN SYRIANS

Let me offer a few specifics.

Our previous non-lethal assistance, totaling approximately \$54 million, focused on linking disparate Syrian opposition groups across the country to build a network of ethnically and religiously diverse civilian activists.

We supplied over 4,000 pieces of equipment, including communications gear, to enable activists to coordinate their efforts. We boosted radio signals, extending the reach of broadcast on FM stations, and funded television stations. Then we used those media platforms to address sectarian violence and issue public service messages on chemical weapons exposure.

We also trained and equipped 1,500 local leaders and activists --including women and minorities-- from over 100 Syrian opposition provincial councils to develop their capacity to rebuild shattered local civil administration. At the same time we provided grants to grassroots networks to mobilize citizens, deliver local services, and document abuses and atrocities to

prepare for transitional justice. As a result local committees and councils from Damascus to Deir al-Zour to Idlib are better able to provide for their communities.

All of these efforts build on the efforts of our international partners. We are working closely with our allies in the region and in Europe.

BUILDING A NATIONAL APPARATUS

Since December 2012, the United States has acknowledged the Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC) as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. This organization, with diverse representatives inside and outside Syria, aims to implement a credible transition plan and establish a responsible national government in a post-Asad Syria. It is directly competing with extremists, and we need to help it build credibility with the Syrian people.

On February 28, Secretary Kerry announced another \$60 million in non-lethal support to strengthen the SOC's capacity to govern at the national and local levels. This new funding will tie the SOC's national efforts to work being done by local groups and councils inside Syria.

The State Department will create a new, small grants initiative that the SOC can use to help local councils meet the needs of their citizens. This will include supporting the work of these new governing institutions and helping them undertake service delivery projects for their communities.

USAID will build on this effort by providing the SOC with two programs designed to have immediate impact. The first will provide short-term assistance for urgent needs, such as fuel, heaters, and nutritional and educational supplies for children. The second will support strategic, longer-term needs on behalf of the SOC, such as repairing schools, local power, and sanitation. USAID will also provide the SOC with technical experts to help it manage essential services and light infrastructure. These experts will help with assessments, project design, and track multi-donor rehabilitation efforts.

We are also looking to improve civilian security through training and some non-lethal equipment. This is critical to preventing a security vacuum in liberated areas that will be exploited by extremists if we do not help stand up civilian police.

CONCLUSION

We continue to believe that political transition is the only solution to the crisis in Syria. Working with other partners, we will strengthen moderate opponents of the Asad regime and help change the balance on the ground to give them leverage in future political negotiations and to change Asad's calculus. The regime of Bashar al-Asad – which is holding to power through brute force backed by Iran and Hizballah – has no credibility to govern. Those responsible for crimes against the Syrian people must be held to account.

As Secretary Kerry said in Rome, "This is a complicated challenge, but the principle that

guides us is simple: No nation should live in fear of its leaders, and all people deserve the freedom and opportunity to live in peace, dignity and justice.”

We look forward to working with Congress as we seek to support the needs of the Syrian people in their struggle to create a free, stable, and democratic Syria. Thank you again for the invitation to testify before your committee today. I am happy to take any questions you might have.

