

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 27, 2013

The Honorable Susan E. Rice
National Security Advisor
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear National Security Advisor Rice:

We write regarding the urgent need to increase the coordination and delivery of lifesaving humanitarian aid to the people of Syria. As you well know, the ongoing conflict has created a regional humanitarian crisis: over 100,000 Syrians have been killed and more than 1.9 million have fled to neighboring Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. Within Syria, almost 7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Aid to refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and host communities is critical to meeting our nation's moral obligation to alleviate human suffering, while advancing our strategic interest in broader regional stability in the Middle East. However, factors on the ground have prevented aid agencies working inside Syria from reaching all those in need, and there is a sense that Syrian refugees and IDPs are losing hope.

The international community continues to struggle with meeting the growing needs of Syrian refugees and IDPs. Due to the scale of the conflict and significant operational restrictions imposed by the Assad regime, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working inside Syria have been limited in their ability to provide aid to the vulnerable population. Strikingly, while the United States has contributed over \$800 million in humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people and implements vital programs through the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), it has been reported that Syrian refugees and IDPs feel increasingly abandoned. They are losing confidence and, importantly, there is a real danger that this waning confidence could hinder our ability to create the types of high-trust partnerships with Syrian humanitarian actors that are necessary to provide aid to those who need it most.

Now in its third year, the Syrian conflict continues to displace thousands of people daily. A window is closing and the United States must adapt its aid delivery effort to more effectively help the people of Syria, particularly IDPs. Increased engagement with Syrian and Syrian-run groups is essential to not only expanding assistance inside Syria, but fostering the development of an active civil society. These relatively small and informal groups have been instrumental in distributing aid within Syria's borders, including opposition-controlled and contested territory. Therefore, we urge you to work with the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to establish training, capacity building, and aid delivery partnerships with Syrian relief organizations in order to expand their operations.

There are now Syrian aid groups working in nearly every sector of the humanitarian response. From providing flour for bakeries and medical supplies for field clinics to other basic needs such as blankets, tents, and fuel, many of them work at personal expense and risk to help as many of their fellow Syrians as possible. Some of these groups have even been able to partner with international NGOs, which rely on their information and distribution networks to deliver supplies to areas in most need, but greater coordination and funds are necessary to deliver more aid to more people. In many cases, these groups are operating with few resources other than donations from concerned people around the world.

The United States should continue to uphold its commitment to provide humanitarian assistance to Syria, and expand training and capacity building programs for Syrian relief NGOs, especially those working inside Syria. To this end, we recommend that the Department of State and USAID work together to create a grant program dedicated to helping emerging Syrian aid groups that abide by humanitarian principles and exhibit the potential to effectively deliver aid to communities inside Syria. Combined with training in humanitarian principles and the international standards governing the delivery of aid, the United States could enable dozens of groups on the ground to continue assisting those inside Syria who are not reachable by other means, and who depend on them for survival.

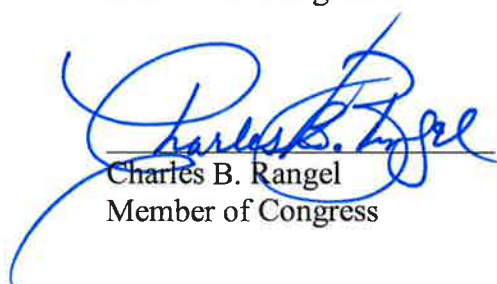
In addition, we strongly encourage the United States to lead international donors in coordinating with the Syrian Opposition Coalition's Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU). Currently, the ACU is struggling to define its role in the overall humanitarian response and establish realistic expectations among its stakeholders. Furthermore, it has failed to reach out to many Syrian and diaspora aid providers that have access to Syria's interior and are trusted by local communities. The ACU has the potential to become the effective coordinating body that Syrian aid groups and large international NGOs need, but it must take steps to engage them.

As the international community continues working to find a peaceful resolution to end the violence in Syria, the situation on the ground grows increasingly dire. It is clear that millions of Syrians are in need of immediate assistance, and that more must be done to help Syrian IDPs. Expanding the provision of aid inside Syria can help people remain safely in their communities, but greater coordination and support are needed. Syrian and Syrian-run relief groups have proven that they can be successful in delivering cross-border and "zero-point" aid, and the United States should work with them to reach those impacted most directly by the conflict.

Sincerely,


Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress


John Conyers, Jr.
Member of Congress


Charles B. Rangel
Member of Congress


James P. Moran
Member of Congress



Corrine Brown
Member of Congress



Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress



Sam Farr
Member of Congress



Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress



Loretta Sanchez
Member of Congress



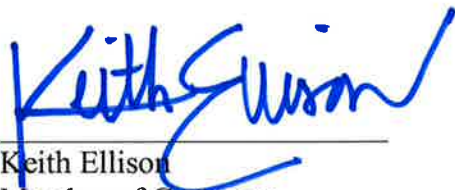
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress



Gwen Moore
Member of Congress



Keith Ellison
Member of Congress



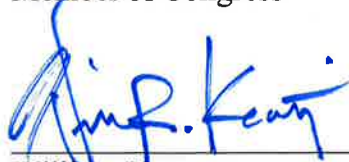
André Carson
Member of Congress



David N. Cicilline
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Ted Deutch
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William R. Keating
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Frederica Wilson
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Daniel T. Kildee
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