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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

JOINT ECONOMIC

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 22, 2015

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

In the more than four years that have passed since Bashar al-Assad's brutal regime began its crackdown against peaceful protestors, as many as 250,000 people have been killed. According to the UN High Commission for Refugees, more than 7.6 million are internally displaced inside Syria and more than 4.1 million have fled to seek refuge in other countries. These two numbers combined represent approximately half of Syria's population who have been forced to flee their homes.

The terrorist group ISIS has taken advantage of the conflict to subject Syrians to another form of vicious rule. The Iranian regime continues to provide military and financial support to the Assad regime, which provides a conduit for support to Hezbollah. Assad's forces and ISIS both target moderate elements of the Syrian opposition as well as Syrian civilians.

American leadership is critical to bringing about an end to this horrific conflict in a manner that puts a united Syria on the path to real political transition featuring inclusiveness, rule of law, and the primacy of citizenship over sect, ethnicity, and other divisive categories. We also cannot expect lasting success in the fight against ISIS without taking steps to set Syria on a path towards peace. I write to urge you to take steps on three critical issues: political negotiations, humanitarian assistance, and in multilateral efforts at the United Nations.

First, I believe the United States must reinvigorate its public efforts to support a negotiated end to the conflict in Syria, based on the principles of the Geneva Communique and reiterated in UN Security Council Resolution 2139. I am troubled that both the Assad regime and, at times, the Russian Government have opposed the principles agreed to in Geneva. Further, Russia has recently scaled up its military support to the Assad regime, under the guise of fighting ISIS. I believe there can be no sound basis for a negotiated end to the conflict in Syria so long as the regime is able to sustain its opposition, thanks to lifelines from Russia and Iran.

Second, the humanitarian crisis emanating from this conflict continues to grow, and the scope of human suffering is staggering. The exodus of refugees to Europe is a powerful reminder of the horrific conditions inside Syria. American taxpayers have already made a significant contribution of more than 4.5 billion dollars to address the humanitarian crisis. However, the United Nations' appeals have gone woefully underfunded. This has led to serious assistance shortages, including severe limitations on the World Food Programme's provision of food aid to refugees. It is important that we not only continue to lead by example with our assistance pledges but to press other countries, especially non-traditional donors, to increase their contributions.

I welcome the Administration's statements of concern for the welfare of the refugees fleeing to Europe from Syria. In addition to reviewing opportunities for resettlement, more must be done to address the root causes of the desperate migration. For more than four years, the international community has taken a piecemeal approach to addressing the humanitarian crisis emanating from Syria. Syria's neighbors – especially Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon – have accepted millions of refugees, many of whom wish to return to Syria if and when it becomes safe to do so. The U.S. should be supporting these countries in shifting to a longer term view of the problem, including looking at allowing legally registered refugees opportunities for employment that would not adversely impact the local economies. Future U.S. pledges of support should be regular and consistent, ensuring that aid implementers and host governments are able to count on and plan for our sustained support.

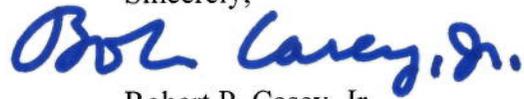
Third, UN Security Council Resolutions 2139, 2165, and 2191, which the United States led and which passed unanimously, have not been fully implemented. For example, Bashar al-Assad's denials that his forces have continued to use barrel bombs directly contravenes the evidence from international monitors and firsthand witnesses that the onslaught has continued unabated. Recent news reports detailing the use of both chlorine and mustard gas in Syria is evidence that, despite UN Resolutions to the contrary and an international effort to secure the Assad regime's chemical weapons stockpiles, these indiscriminate, horrific weapons continue to be used in attacks against Syrian civilians.

Earlier this year, aid groups accused the UN Security Council of "failing Syria" and a UN spokesperson acknowledged that many countries are putting their national interests above their responsibilities on the Council. I am disappointed but unsurprised that the Russian Federation continues to protect the murderous Assad regime in the UN Security Council. Continued efforts to ensure that Security Council resolutions are fully and immediately implemented are needed, including efforts to scale up humanitarian assistance into Syria. I believe the United States should make the protection of Syrian civilians from war crimes and crimes against humanity a higher priority.

More than four years of strife have displaced nearly twelve million Syrians from their homes. Millions are seeking refuge in neighboring countries, placing incredible strain on the local communities and are now migrating into Europe, seeking better living conditions. Civilians are suffering under ISIS rule in parts of Syria and hiding from Assad's barrel bombs in others.

American leadership is critical to bringing about an end to this horror. I urge you to take steps on the political, humanitarian, and multilateral fronts and stand ready to work with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bob Casey, Jr." in a cursive, slightly slanted script.

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator