PRIMER FOR MEMBERS OF THE 116TH CONGRESS ON INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE
CONTENTS

6 SUPPORTING HUMANITARIAN WORK IS IN THE INTEREST OF THE UNITED STATES

7 KEY HUMANITARIAN PRIORITIES

Humanitarian Funding Levels
U.S. Border and Domestic Protections
Rohingya
Yemen
South Sudan
Climate Displacement
The United States Congress plays an essential role in both financial support and legislative action that makes a lifesaving difference to millions every day. By responding to the world’s worst crises, members of Congress not only uphold humanitarian values through direct and immediate action, but also set global expectations about the involvement and assistance of other governments. These efforts have only been strengthened by a strong tradition of bipartisanship in the provision of international humanitarian aid.
68.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide

Internally Displaced People
40 million

Refugees
25.4 million
19.9 million under UNHCR mandate
5.4 million Palestinian refugees registered by UNRWA

Asylum-seekers
3.1 million

Source: UNHCR / June 19, 2018
SUPPORTING HUMANITARIAN WORK IS IN THE INTEREST OF THE UNITED STATES

Humanitarian and development funding provided by the United States saves lives every day.

• The world has reached the highest global displacement numbers ever recorded. According to the UN Refugee Agency, there are now more than 68 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide, including some 25 million refugees, 40 million internally displaced people, and 3 million asylum seekers, with humanitarians struggling to meet the needs in emerging and protracted crises.
• Congress has consistently responded with speed and empathy to emergency crises abroad. According to a 2018 report by USAID, nearly 4 million Syrians benefit from U.S. humanitarian assistance each month. Congress not only provided significant lifesaving resources for the Syrian humanitarian and refugee response when millions were forced to flee their country, but also helped ease tensions within communities for new arrivals by providing host community support.

Humanitarian support is a worthwhile investment.

• Humanitarian funding from governments of the world does not meet current needs. In November 2018, UN-coordinated appeals requested $24.93 billion to assist 97.9 million people in urgent need, but only $15.07 billion (60.5 percent) of funding requirements had been met as of January 2019. The need for humanitarian assistance is increasing, and U.S. contributions must be sustained.
• Humanitarian assistance constitutes far less than 1 percent of the annual U.S. budget, but it represents a major share of world funding to meet the needs of those suffering as a result of conflict, persecution, human rights violations, and natural disasters.

U.S. leadership in humanitarian affairs is a proud tradition.

• The Congress has long been a stalwart supporter of assistance to vulnerable communities around the world, based on an understanding that the United States has security interests in promoting reconciliation and well-being in circumstances where despair and misery threatens stability.
• Members of Congress have made clear that aid also serves a moral imperative to save lives and alleviate suffering, and members have acted by appropriating funds, mandating action and diplomatic engagement, and holding hearings and voicing statements that raise the visibility of urgent crises.

U.S. refugee resettlement remains an essential protection tool and a humanitarian imperative.

• For decades, the U.S. refugee resettlement program has built a proud history of supporting vulnerable populations while working alongside resettlement agencies, faith-based com-
munities, and partners to support a successful integration of refugees into the United States. While the global refugee population has increased by about 50 percent over the past five years, U.S. refugee admission numbers have declined each year since the beginning of the Trump administration, reaching record lows.

- After resettling only 22,491 refugees, down from a 45,000 refugee cap, in FY2018, the Trump administration dramatically slashed the refugee cap once again, this time to 30,000, in FY2019.
- Refugees International strongly supports congressional efforts that bring pressure to bear on the administration to reestablish a vibrant refugee resettlement program.

**KEY HUMANITARIAN PRIORITIES**

**Humanitarian Funding Levels**

Multiple funding requests from the Trump administration have called for enormous cuts to key humanitarian accounts. These cuts would have significantly undermined the capacity of the United States to save lives and meet pressing humanitarian needs around the world. Refugees International was deeply concerned about the proposed drastic reductions in the FY2020 budget, and Congress should continue to reject such proposals and demonstrate its strong bipartisan support of humanitarian accounts. Specifically, Refugees International calls for the following levels of funding for these accounts: Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) at $3.6 billion; Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance account (ERMA) at $50 million; International Disaster Assistance (IDA) at $4.4 billion; Peacekeeping Operation (PKO) at $553 million; Contributions to International Peacekeeping Activities (CIPA) at $2.58 billion; and P.L. 480 Title II (Food for Peace) at $1.9 billion.

Furthermore, Refugees International is concerned that the consolidation of funds in the new International Humanitarian Assistance (IHA) account is not only being used to slash humanitarian assistance but will also severely damage the government’s capacity to assist and protect refugees. By effectively seeking to eliminate the authority of the State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) to administer refugee assistance around the world, the administration is discarding a critical tool of international humanitarian policy. PRM’s unique blend of both senior diplomatic engagement and humanitarian assistance has served to elevate the plight of the displaced and directly benefited the lives of countless refugees.
U.S. Border and Domestic Protections

Recent measures, including the separation of families of asylum seekers, have caused asylum seekers in the United States significant harm. Other areas of concern include the blocking of access at U.S. ports of entry; forcing asylum seekers to return to Mexico and wait while their cases are processed; an unreasonable narrowing of grounds for asylum; the criminal prosecution of asylum seekers for unauthorized entry without regard to the credibility of their requests for protection; and pressure in detention facilities, where conditions are poor and counsel hard to access, for asylum seekers to self-deport. Congress must reinforce important U.S. legal and policy commitments to protect vulnerable persons fleeing persecution and violence. Of particular concern is the profound and negative impact on women and children as a result of changes in policies that limit grants of asylum and humanitarian visas for victims of violence, especially by non-state actors.

Rohingya

On December 13, 2018, the U.S. House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a resolution recognizing the crimes committed by Myanmar’s security forces against Rohingya Muslims as genocide. The determination follows findings of strong evidence of crimes against humanity and genocide by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and an independent international fact-finding mission authorized by the United Nations. More than 700,000 Rohingya fled Rakhine State in western Myanmar at the end of 2017 following attacks on civilians by the Myanmar security forces. A report by the U.S. State Department, based on interviews with more than 1,000 Rohingya who had fled, found evidence of well-planned and coordinated attacks including wholesale burning of villages, mass rapes, and indiscriminate killing of civilians. The U.S. Treasury Department has sanctioned five army and border guard officers and two battalions, but not the highest levels of the Myanmar security forces. The 116th Congress should pass S.1186 – Burma Human Rights and Freedom Act of 2019 and continue legislative options for both additional accountability and expanded humanitarian funding for the Rohingya population.
Yemen

The United Nations is calling Yemen the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. Access to food and water through major ports has been blocked by the Saudi-backed Yemeni government in their four-year war against Houthi rebels, worsening extreme food insecurity in Yemen. A horrific cholera outbreak has resulted in more than 1 million suspected cases and millions of people are on the brink of starvation. Some 11 million children are in dire need of humanitarian assistance, and more than 1 million children are acutely malnourished. Late last year, the Saudi government and Houthis agreed to a ceasefire in Hodeidah, a key port that handles more than 75 percent of the country’s imports and is an essential access point for humanitarian aid. Congress should continue supporting humanitarian aid as well as the international community’s involvement in the peace talks.

South Sudan

South Sudan has experienced one of the largest displacement crises in the world, with nearly 4.5 million South Sudanese forced from their homes both within and beyond the borders of the country. A civil war since 2013 has been marked by ethnically targeted atrocities. If not for international aid, the country would almost certainly be experiencing famine. The United States has been the leading donor of humanitarian aid and has a long history of support for the people of South Sudan, including playing a key role in the independence of the country from Sudan in 2011. A peace agreement signed in September 2018 has sparked some hope for returns of those displaced, but instability continues in several parts of the country, and key benchmarks for the agreement have already been missed. The United States has placed an arms embargo on the country and sanctioned three individuals in December 2018 for providing weapons and fueling conflict. Congress must continue to play a key role in advocating humanitarian assistance to South Sudan to prevent famine, holding spoilers to account, and prioritizing the need to thoughtfully fill the vacant position of U.S. Special Envoy to South Sudan.
Climate Displacement

As extreme floods, droughts, and storms continue to displace tens of millions of people worldwide, the time is now for Congressional leadership to minimize and address the impacts of a changing climate on already vulnerable communities. Humanitarian and development actors must work cooperatively to address disasters and climate change-related impacts on displacement and migration. At the international level, achievable measures to avert, minimize, and address internal and cross-border displacement and migration due to climate change have now been identified. Several international mechanisms now exist for further action on the issue of disaster risk reduction and response to climate-induced migration, including the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the UN Global Compact for Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration, and the Platform on Disaster Displacement. Congress should:

1) Increase investments in community-based and inclusive disaster risk reduction (DRR) programs.

2) Urge that humanitarian and development actors work together in post-crisis situations to restore livelihoods and build long-term resilience. As we have seen in countries like Ethiopia and Somalia that are experiencing more recurrent climate-related disasters, U.S. investments in building the resilience of vulnerable communities have the potential to ease humanitarian caseloads. Yet the fact that more and more people displaced by floods, droughts, and other disasters are unable to return home reveals the urgent need to scale up recovery and resilience programs to help affected households return and recover their homes and livelihoods.
Refugees International is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that advocates lifesaving assistance and protection for displaced people in parts of the world impacted by conflict, persecution, and forced displacement. Based in Washington, DC, we conduct fact-finding missions to research and report on the circumstances of displaced populations in countries such as Somalia, Iraq, Colombia, and Turkey. Refugees International does not accept any government or United Nations funding, which helps ensure that our advocacy is impartial and independent.