

Statement by Nazanin Ash, Vice President of Global Policy and Advocacy, International Rescue Committee (IRC) to the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Committee on Appropriations, US Senate

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Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Graham, and members of the subcommittee, on behalf of the International Rescue Committee, a global humanitarian aid organization that offers emergency aid and long-term assistance to people in crisis in over 40 countries and helps refugees and other displaced people integrate into their new communities across dozens of cities in Europe and the Americas, thank you for this opportunity to testify on the needs of people fleeing conflict, violence, persecution, and disaster. The following testimony strongly urges increased funding levels for **International Disaster Assistance** (\$5.27 billion); **Emergency Refugee and Migrant Assistance** (\$50 million); **Migration and Refugee Assistance** (\$4.12 billion); **Basic Education** (\$1.1 billion); **Malnutrition** (\$300 million); **Vulnerable Children** (\$35 million); and for a three-fold increase in funding for **gender-based violence**. In an era in which humanitarian need is vastly outstripping humanitarian financing, it also asks Congress to introduce novel language to **improve the effectiveness, transparency and accountability** of humanitarian financing. Finally, it supports the allocation of 20,000 additional **Special Immigrant Visas for U.S.-affiliated Afghans**.

Increasing Capacity to Respond to Crises and Fragile Contexts

The compounding challenges of COVID-19, climate change, and conflict are driving unprecedented humanitarian need and attendant instability: this year, 235.4 million people – 1 in every 33 people – are in need of humanitarian assistance, 40% more than in 2020. These needs are vastly outpacing humanitarian funding. Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) continue to be underfunded by nearly 40%. The greatest gaps in response remain in fragile, conflict-affected states that drive the majority of displacement, and where impacts of the pandemic are reversing decades of hard-won progress to protect women and girls, increase access to education, and reduce poverty, hunger, and disease. As the IRC's [2021 Watchlist](#) reveals, 20 countries, representing just 10% of the global population, account for 85% of humanitarian need, 84% of all refugees, and 88% of populations internally displaced. The US must focus and scale up humanitarian financing and programming in these contexts to help reverse these trends. ***We urge Congress to ensure that at least 50% of bilateral and multilateral economic and humanitarian assistance goes to these to these fragile and conflict affected states, to address urgent needs and their root causes.*** We further urge Congress to:

- **Increase International Disaster Assistance (IDA) to \$5.27 billion**, \$588 million higher than the FY22 Presidential Budget Request, to support direct disaster and emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction, and the ability to address root causes of conflict at scale, including in Northern Central American, where increasing numbers of those internally displaced by violence are overwhelming communities of first refuge.
- **Double funding for nutrition programming to \$300 million** to respond to rising malnutrition. The number of food-insecure people worldwide increased by 82% in 2020 as a result of the pandemic. ***To meet rising needs, we recommend Congress direct a portion of these funds for the rapid scale-up of a simplified protocol for testing and***

treating acute malnutrition with the help of community health workers, which could significantly expand the reach of existing nutrition programming.

- **Bridge global gaps in education and early childhood development interventions for refugee and conflict-affected children by appropriating \$1.1 billion for Basic Education**—compared to \$682M requested in FY22—with **at least \$150 million dedicated to education programs in conflict zones and settings with high rates of displacement; and \$35 million for the Vulnerable Children program.** Prior to the pandemic, refugee children were already five times more likely to not be in school than their peers. Now, more than half of refugee girls may not return as schools reopen. Despite rising need, less than 3% of humanitarian aid is allocated toward education. This is no time to retreat from education funding. Further, 71 million children under the age of five have lived in conflict areas for their entire lifetimes, leaving them without access to the necessary foundations of healthy human development. Yet just 3% of development assistance and 2% of humanitarian assistance globally is for Early Childhood Development. In order to support successful implementation of the 2021 Global Child Thrive Act, we further recommend that *USAID and the Department of State conduct a pilot program in up to three crisis contexts to jointly provide the full range of early childhood development interventions to displaced populations.*
- **Triple funding for the prevention of and response to gender-based violence (GBV).** Less than 1% of global humanitarian assistance is allocated to GBV programming despite disproportionate impacts of conflict and crises on women and girls. These impacts accelerated with the pandemic, with an estimated 15 million additional cases of GBV for every three months of pandemic lockdown.

Restoring US Global Leadership on Refugee Protection and Resettlement

Violent conflict has increased 75% over the last decade; accordingly, the number of people forcibly displaced has nearly doubled since 2010, with over 80 million people now forcibly displaced and the number of refugees [increasing by 8 million](#) just over the last four years. There are now over 26 million refugees worldwide, with nearly 90% of them hosted in low- and middle-income countries straining to provide support. On average over the last decade, fewer than 1% of refugees have been resettled and fewer than 3% have been able to return home. Against this backdrop, humanitarian leadership from wealthy nations has been in retreat, with humanitarian aid levels stagnating and global resettlement slots offered by wealthier nations dropping more than 50% over the last four years, while over 1.4 million refugees await resettlement. Urgent and expansive US financing and leadership is needed to support refugees overseas and incentivize host countries to provide access to jobs, education, and other pathways to self-reliance for refugees; and to rebuild, anchored by US resettlement commitments, global resettlement commitments. We urge Congress to:

- **Increase Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) to \$4.12 billion** to respond to emerging, growing, and protracted refugee crises, including in the Western Hemisphere, and to rapidly restore the US Refugee Admissions Program. The previous administration issued four consecutive, all-time low, annual refugee admissions goals; reduced arrivals by 86%; and dismantled the US global refugee referral and processing infrastructure. *To meet the President's ambitious and necessary goal of admitting 125,000 refugees next*

fiscal year, the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration must be equipped to support capacity building, program expansion, and innovation, including expanding resettlement and protection programming in the Americas, where needs [rose by 489%](#) from 2020 to 2021 – more than any other region in the world.

- **Fund Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) to at least \$50 million** to support rapid response to unforeseen and emerging refugee and migrant needs. The President recently drew down \$46 million from this account for the purpose of meeting humanitarian needs of vulnerable refugees and migrants in Central America and the President’s Budget Request estimates that there will be a \$50 million drawdown on this account next fiscal year. *We further recommend that the authorized funding level be raised to \$200 million and that the Secretary of State be authorized to draw down ERMA funds.*
- **Ensure emergency protection for US-Affiliated Afghans jeopardized by the US military withdrawal.** The US withdrawal from Afghanistan will leave tens of thousands of Afghans under mortal threat as a direct consequence of their affiliation with the US mission. The US must be prepared to meet its commitment and moral obligation to help its allies escape violent retribution for their critical assistance. *We urge the allocation of 20,000 additional visas in the FY22 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs bill.* We also recommend that the Committee include report language directing the protection of surviving spouses and children of SIV applicants who are killed before receiving their visas. We further urge the Committee to direct the Department of State to designate US-affiliated Afghans for Priority 2 status under the US Refugee Admissions Program, a measure that will provide a critical pathway to protection and family reunification in the long-term; and to request that the Biden-Harris administration’s inter-agency review of SIV processing and vetting, as directed in President Biden’s [Executive Order 14013](#), be shared with Congress.

Improving the Effectiveness, Transparency and Accountability of Financing

We thank Congress for appropriating nearly \$20 billion in supplemental funding to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts globally, including \$11 billion in the American Rescue Plan relief bill. What is needed now is to ensure this funding as well as funding to be allocated in FY22 is effective, transparent and achieves outcomes in the lives of the most vulnerable. We urge Congress to:

- **Increase the volume of funds to frontline responders.** Frontline NGOs and community-based organizations are uniquely situated to quickly scale COVID-19 prevention and mitigation measures, including last-mile vaccine delivery in complex humanitarian contexts. In some contexts, where governments either cannot or will not respond, they are already delivering 80% of health services. In addition, frontline NGOs—including international, national, and community-based NGOs that have built trust with communities over years of delivering services—are critical when responding to a complex crisis like a pandemic. However, in recent years, almost two-thirds of global humanitarian assistance has gone through multilateral agencies, including [80% of funding](#) for the COVID-19 global appeal—even though funding can take up to [8 months](#) to reach frontline actors.

- **Support multi-year planning for protracted humanitarian crises.** Of the IRC’s 20 Watchlist countries, 13 crises are protracted, with humanitarian response plans averaging 15 years. However, humanitarian grants remain about one year in length on average, hampering strategies to support the development and self-sufficiency of long-term displaced populations, and introducing program inefficiencies. A comparative analysis of two IRC cash programs in Somalia found that the longer-term program [cost 44% less](#) in delivery costs for every dollar transferred. These crises require multi-year programming and thus multi-year financing to implementing partners to better meet the immediate and long-term needs of crisis-affected populations. *We recommend USAID and the Department of State commit to jointly develop multi-year humanitarian strategies for protracted crises and agree on a target for increasing the number of multi-year humanitarian awards, contingent on available funds, to help ensure that long-term needs are met and people caught in crisis can move from dependency to self-reliance.*
- **Increase transparency on humanitarian financing flows and program results.** Humanitarian financing is not routinely or completely reported to public systems, like the Financial Tracking Service (FTS). The FTS shows funding flows from donor governments to immediate recipients, but not the secondary recipients of that funding. For example, there is [no transparency](#) on where 80% of funding for the Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) has gone past first-level recipients because these recipients—including UN agencies—generally do not publicly report to FTS the pass-through of their financing to frontline implementers, including international, national, and community-based NGOs. Moreover, there is no consistent framework for reporting results, mirroring implementing agencies in multiple and duplicative reporting requirements, while failing to provide comprehensive—and comparable—information on outcomes achieved. *USAID and the Department of State should develop and adopt (1) a single standard for financial reporting and transparency, requiring implementing partners to report the speed, amount and grant length of passed-through funds, and the recipients of funding through the full transaction chain to frontline implementers; and (2) a single outcome and indicators framework for the health, safety, education, and economic well-being of crisis-affected populations, disaggregated by population status and gender.* By taking these steps, the US can lead the way for a reformed humanitarian system.

Thank you for your long-standing commitment to humanitarian action. Proliferating humanitarian crises are robbing generations of their human potential and exacerbating instability and insecurity, from the Middle East to Africa to Central and South Asia and Latin America, with direct consequences for US interests. Urgent and expansive US humanitarian leadership can reverse these trends, galvanize others to do more, and restore America’s reputation for protecting the most vulnerable.