

**Opening Statement**  
**Ranking Member Stephen F. Lynch (MA-08)**  
**Joint hearing of the Oversight Subcommittees on National Security and Government Operations:**  
**“National Security, Threats at Our Borders”**  
**March 23, 2016**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank you, Chairman Meadows, and Ranking Member Connolly for holding this hearing to examine immigration and border security. I'd also like to thank our witnesses for helping this Committee with its work.

As reported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, we are witnessing the largest global forced displacement of people since World War II. Conflict, persecution, violence, and flagrant human rights violations have forcibly displaced nearly 60 million people worldwide – including 19.5 million refugees, 38.2 million internally displaced persons, and 1.8 million asylum-seekers. That's a 60% increase from the 37.5 million displaced people recorded by UNHCR a decade ago.

**Over 50% of the refugee population is now made up of children below 18 years of age – marking the highest child refugee figure in more than ten years. In 2014, over 34,300 asylum applications were submitted by unaccompanied or separated children across 82 countries. That's the highest count on record since the agency began collecting this data in 2006.**

The War in Syria and the rise of the Islamic State have been the primary factors behind the unprecedented surge in global displacement. Approximately 7.6 million people have been internally displaced within Syria alone and more than 4 million refugees have fled the country since the start of the conflict in 2011.

The stark increase in global forced displacement, coupled with devastating terrorist attacks in Paris, France, San Bernardino, California, Beirut, Lebanon, Ankara, Turkey, and just yesterday, Brussels, Belgium, have led to ongoing policy debate in the U.S. over how best to prevent terrorists from infiltrating our legitimate immigration processes. This is a critical and necessary examination that must entail fact-based oversight of our existing immigration and border security policies across the board.

**In the interests of national security, it must also be undertaken in a manner that continues to reflect our longstanding international commitment, as a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, to protecting highly-vulnerable individuals who are fleeing from persecution and violence. As stated in a recent letter to Congress signed by 22 U.S. national security leaders from Democratic and Republican administrations alike: “We believe that America can and should continue to provide refuge to those fleeing violence and persecution without compromising the security and safety of our nation...to do otherwise would undermine our core objective of combating terrorism.”** These leaders include General David Petraeus, the former Commander of U.S. Central Command, George Schultz, former Secretary of State under President Reagan, and former NATO Supreme Allied Commander James Stavridis.

In furtherance of this Committee's efforts to review our national security framework, Congressman Steve Russell and I recently traveled on an oversight mission to Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon to assess and even participate in the vetting processes required for Syrian refugee resettlement to the United States. After visiting refugee camps along the Turkish-Syrian and Jordanian-Syrian borders and meeting with various refugee families, we discovered that the vast majority – about 70% - are not even interested in resettlement at all. Rather, they seek to stay in neighboring host countries in the hopes of returning home. The overwhelming preference of these families to stay close to Syria indicated that one of our primary national security goals should be to ensure that financially-strained host countries and

international humanitarian agencies have the resources necessary to provide a dignified life for their refugee populations.

Regarding the vetting process itself, I must say that prior to our oversight visit, I had my doubts about the effectiveness of vetting conducted in virtual war zone environments and I supported both Republican and Democratic measures to enhance the vetting process. I would note that the Delegation arrived in Beirut only two months after a double-suicide bombing in that city that killed over 40 people. We arrived in Istanbul only four days after a suicide bombing in a central square that killed 10 German tourists and we left Kilis Province only one day before a rocket attack fired from Syria hit a Kilis school.

**However, for the small percentage of families who do seek resettlement to the U.S., what we found in our oversight of vetting centers in all three host countries was a multi-layered vetting process that is robust and extensive.** It is conducted by specialized United Nations and U.S. agency personnel trained to ensure that only the most vulnerable, or 1%, of Syrian refugee applicants are admitted for resettlement. They are also very cautious in their work given that any misstep in the vetting process could not only pose a grave danger to the American public but also effectively halt resettlement for millions of legitimate refugees.

It is this type of fact-based oversight that should guide our review of our immigration and border control procedures across the board. This is absolutely imperative at time when our federal agencies responsible for securing the homeland continue to face severe budgetary constraints and every homeland security dollar must be allocated towards the most critical national security risks.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you again for holding this hearing and I look forward to discussing these and other issues with our witnesses. I yield the balance of my time.

Contact: Jennifer Werner, Communications Director, (202) 226-5181.