MIDDLE EAST REFUGEE RESPONSE
CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES
BACKGROUNDER

Context:

- Catholic Relief Services, often known as CRS, is part of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. It is the official overseas humanitarian organization of the Catholic Community in the United States. A crucial part of its mission is to provide Catholics in the United States with an opportunity to live out our faith in solidarity with those members of God's family in need wherever they may live around the world.

- CRS has received top marks from all organizations that grade charities. Over 92 percent of its budget goes to benefit programs that aid those in need such as the refugees in the Middle East. CRS is also highly regarded among its peer organizations as its faith basis helps make it both effective and efficient in delivering aid in accordance with its gospel mission.

- CRS works through local partners – most of them Catholic – around the world, using the global presence of the Church to reach those in need in almost 100 countries. CRS is always present at the invitation of local bishops.

- CRS began its mission in 1943 helping refugees during World War II. Though in the years since it has broadened its work to include a wide variety of programming emphasizing development and the eradication of poverty, responding to emergencies by helping those forced from their homes by disasters – including war and violence – has remained one of its core missions. It does this as well as any organization of its type in the world.

- From its beginning, the American bishops directed CRS to deliver aid to those in need, no matter their religion, their nationality, their race, their beliefs. As we like to say, “We do this not because they are Catholics, but because we are Catholics.”

CRS' Response to the Refugee Crisis in the Middle East:

- The conflict in Syria and throughout the Middle East has resulted in the persecution of Christians and other ethnic and religious minorities, including Yazidis, Turkmen, Muslims (Sunni and Shia) in a land where many can trace their history to ancient times. Good people of all faiths are involved in the humanitarian response. At CRS, we are working with the local Church to contribute to a Middle East where people of all faiths can live together peacefully, as has been the case in many region's countries for much of their history.

- It is estimated that there are some 60 million people in the world today who have been forced from their homes by violence. This is even more than during World War II. One of the main drivers of this is the civil war in Syria, now
five years old. About half of Syria’s population – some 11 million – has been forced to leave home by the fighting that has killed an estimated 250,000. Over 4 million of those people have fled Syria.

- You have probably read about and seen TV coverage of the refugees reaching Europe, and the many who die trying. But this is only a fraction of the total who have left Syria. The vast majority of Syrian refugees are in neighboring countries – Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and even Egypt. CRS has helped many refugees in transit in Europe, but the bulk of our aid has been in those neighboring countries where, working through Church structures, we have reached over 900,000 people.

- While CRS provides an array of assistance to Syrian refugees, a major focus of our help is education, care, and trauma counseling for Syrian refugee children who make up about half of all refugees and are paying the heaviest price in this crisis. With no end of the conflict in sight, concerns are growing that Syria will experience a “lost generation”—children deprived of the education and skills needed to one day re-build Syria. Many children have been out of school for years and show severe signs of trauma and depression. Thanks to the generosity of so many people here at home, CRS is providing tens of thousands of Syrian refugee children in the Middle East with education and counseling, the type of support that will help heal their trauma and get them back on track to productive lives.

- Before this war broke out, Syria was a prosperous country. Most of these refugees led stable middle class lives, probably much like yours. Then their world was upended. They want it back. More than anything, they want to go home. Peace is what they need, but until that is achieved, they need our help, our mercy, our generosity. That is what CRS is providing in the name of Catholics in the United States.

- One thing you should know about Syrian refugees: many of them are fleeing the same sort of terrorism that we here in the United States fear. They were forced from their homes by ISIS and its allies. They want nothing more than to see ISIS defeated.

- When you visit Syrian refugees – whether in camps or crowded apartments of whatever kind of shelter they can find -- you mainly see women and children. Many men stayed behind in Syria to try to keep homes and businesses safe. Some who fled Syria have left for Europe seeking work. They are doing what any good husband and father would do – trying to support his family.

What Can You Do to Help?

- In Matthew 25, Jesus says, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.... whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” These Syrian refugees are truly the “least brothers” of Christ in the world today. In helping them, CRS is working to carry out on your behalf this fundamental lesson that Christ taught us.

- Pope Francis challenges us “...above all to confront the reality of those who have been displaced by force, with effective projects and new approaches in order to protect their dignity, to improve the quality of their life and to face the challenges that are emerging from modern forms of persecution, oppression and slavery.”

- During the Season of Lent, your support of CRS is invaluable in responding to the profound needs of so many of God’s children.