

USCCB Middle East Fact Finding Mission

October 7-20, 2012

"...am I my brother's keeper?" Gn 4:9

Every year the Committee on Migration and Refugees of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) undertakes a fact-finding mission to some region of the world in which there is particular concern for the welfare of those who are forced by circumstances to migrate within their home country or seek refuge in a foreign land.

The USCCB is the largest resettlement agency in the world (not just the largest resettlement agency in the United States), resettling as many as 20,000 refugees per year across the United States...and the United States is by far the largest resettlement country in the world, welcoming 70% of the total world resettlement population.

This is something of which American citizens and especially American Catholics can rightly be proud. The United States is also the most flexible country in receiving refugees for resettlement—we rightly have no limitations based on ethnicity or religion. Moreover, the Catholic network in Muslim countries—especially Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Caritas, and the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)—works hand in hand with the local Catholic Church, which is itself deeply engaged in providing charitable help to the entire local population regardless of religion. We were told: *"The US government and individual Americans often do things that incite Muslim anger, but the Catholic Church does things that win the esteem of Muslims!"*

This year a delegation of from the Committee on Migration and Refugees led by committee member Bishop Anthony B. Taylor of Little Rock visited Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey from October 7-20, 2012. The other members of the delegation were Kevin Appleby, USCCB Director of Migration Policy and Public Affairs; Anastasia Brown, USCCB Director of Resettlement Services; Rev. Dan Groody, CSC, professor of theology at Notre Dame University and theological advisor to the committee; Natalina Malwal, USCCB Transportation Specialist and Arabic speaker; Beth Englander, USCCB Director of Special Programs; and non-USCCB member Jane Bloom of the ICMC.

The goal of our mission was to examine more closely the humanitarian needs of refugees and migrants in these countries, to strengthen networks of support between the bishops and other relief organizations, to stand in solidarity with the people who suffer, to discover, to understand more clearly the complex political and sectarian context in which drama is occurring, and then to return to the United States to advocate on behalf of those who suffer, educating policy makers about these needs and to recommend possible durable solutions for these refugees and migrants.

We are particularly concerned about the plight of exceptionally vulnerable people, including unaccompanied minors, households headed by women, victims of gender based violence and disabled refugees. The principal realities faced by refugees and migrants in this part of the world fall into three

categories: 1) human trafficking, 2) refugees fleeing persecution, and above all 3) people fleeing the conflict in Syria.

We sought to understand more clearly the real situation on the ground, which we discovered is far more complex than what is generally reported in the news media, and we sought to learn how we can best support the efforts of charitable agencies working to help these migrants and refugees in the short term as well as to help them find durable solutions long term.

Short term needs include: food, clothing, shelter, schooling for children, health and hygiene needs, spiritual and psychological needs, and the need for physical security. Long term needs include achieving either a successful return of refugees to their homeland when and if circumstances allow, successful integration into the country that gave them refuge, or resettlement in a third country able to receive them.

In each country we visited the United States embassy and were received warmly by all four US Ambassadors and their staff, all of whom seemed well informed regarding the issues relating to refugees and migrants in the countries in which their embassy is located and genuinely concerned about their plight. In a couple of countries we were also able to meet with representatives of their national government and the Vatican Nuncios.

In every country we met also with representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in that country, with some of the local Catholic bishops and with representatives of charitable Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), especially Caritas, CRS, ICMC, Save the Children, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The following is not an official report of the entire USCCB Committee on Migration and Refugees, but rather simply an account of what I, Bishop Anthony B. Taylor, a single member of that committee, have heard and observed. Therefore, the content of this report should not be attributed directly or in part to the committee as a whole, nor to any of its members, nor to any of the entities with whom we met.

EGYPT

The situation of refugees and migrants in Egypt is very different from the other three countries which we visited, all of which border Syria. Human trafficking and refugees from African countries are the major problems currently faced in Egypt, but there is also a growing concern for relatively prosperous refugees from Syria who are now running out of money and are beginning to have to apply to the UNHCR for help. We discussed these matters with US Ambassador Anne Patterson who was very concerned and attentive throughout the discussion. We met with Msgr. Kurian Matthew Vayalunkal, the Charge d'Affaires of the Vatican Nunciature to Egypt and Bishop Boutros Fahim from the Coptic Catholic Patriarchy in Cairo.

We also met with Mohamed Dayri, the Regional Representative of the UNHCR and his assistants Ziad Ayoubi and Elizabeth Tan; Hani El-Mahdi, Acting Country Representative of CRS and her staff; representatives of African and Middle Eastern Refugee Assistance (AMERA); representatives of Save the Children and the Psycho-Social Training Institute of Cairo (PSTIC). We had a roundtable discussion

with other refugee service providers in Egypt, including St. Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS), Caritas, the Egyptian Foundation for Refugee Rights (EFRR), the IOM, and the Comboni Missionaries.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

“Judah said to his brother, ‘What profit is there if we slay our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites.’ ...Then Midianite traders passed by; and they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver; and they took Joseph to Egypt.” Gn 37:26-28

The Sinai Peninsula is presently a lawless region over which the Egyptian government has long been unable to exercise effective control. The peninsula is dominated by Bedouin clans who until recently have supported themselves in part through smuggling merchandise and refugees into Israel. The human trafficking across that border mainly involved people from Eritrea (and elsewhere), especially children and young men fleeing the Eritrean military draft, which in Eritrea includes forced conscription for teenagers and is for an unlimited period of time under extremely harsh conditions.

Prior to the construction of the Israeli barrier wall along its border with Egypt, people paid about \$3,000 to be smuggled from Eritrea, through Sudan and Egypt, to a location near the Israeli border...at which point it frequently occurred that the Bedouins who handled this portion of the operation would seek to extort more money from these people, especially those known to have relatives living in Europe or North America who would have better access to money than those who only had relatives in Eritrea. They would have their captive speak on the phone with these relatives to ask them for more money to ensure their Bedouin-facilitated passage across the border into Israel.

When this money was not immediately forthcoming, the Bedouins would torture these migrants mercilessly and then have them call their relatives again and continue torturing their captive while still on the phone so that reluctant relatives hearing their family member screaming and begging for mercy would take the danger seriously and find a way to ransom the captive. In addition to suffering rape and other forms of sexual violence, survivors describe the beating of their hands and feet, having melted plastic dripped on various parts of their bodies, having to stand up for days at a time, and being locked away in dark, filthy torture houses with very little food or water.

With the construction of the border wall, entry into Israel across that border is no longer feasible, but human trafficking continues in the lawless Sinai, though now the sole purpose is to turn a profit from kidnapping, torture, rape and extortion...now with the added threat of trafficking in human organs. Refugees from Eritrea are now being apprehended by Sudanese enforcement authorities who then turn these captives over to the Sudanese Rashaida tribal clan, who sell them to the Bedouin tribe in Sinai.

The victims targeted are those—even children—who have relatives living in Europe or North America. Organs that can be harvested for transplantation are now worth about \$33,500 on the black market, and so the usual ransom price is now about \$33,500. The kidnappers tell the victim's family that they will make \$33,500 from the transaction one way or another: Ransom paid by them to rescue their

living relative, or organs taken from their dead relative and sold. There are 90 documented cases of persons whose families paid this ransom and about 70 others who escaped captivity and made it to Cairo, but their lives are still at risk.

Their traffickers continue to pursue them and some have been kidnapped more than once. We met 4 children in Cairo who had been kidnapped in Sudan, taken to the Sinai and eventually ransomed by their family in this way. There are no documented cases of actual organ sales, but doctors are paid very low salaries in Egypt, including those with the skills necessary to harvest organs properly, so it is very conceivable that some might be lured into participating in this criminal enterprise. In any event the threat is real and believable to the captives and their families. Victims who have escaped the torture remain at risk from their torturers and should receive emergency resettlement.

It is believed that there are presently about 700 such captives held for ransom by Bedouins in the Sinai. This drama is largely unknown in the West, despite the fact that CNN did a documentary on this subject. The CNN documentary (in 3 parts) and other documentaries on human trafficking in the Sinai can be found on YouTube and elsewhere.

REFUGEES AND OTHER MIGRANTS

“...they went into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him...and they said to Pharaoh, ‘we have come to sojourn in the land; for there is no pasture for your servant’s flocks for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan; and now, we pray you, let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen.’ ...Thus Israel dwelt in the land of Goshen; and they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly.” Gn 46:6; 47:4, 27)

There are between 500,000 and 3 million foreigners who have immigrated to Egypt in recent decades in search of employment, mostly without proper documentation—which is in any event unavailable to people migrating to Egypt from Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. Among this population the UNHCR has registered approximately 44,000 as refugees. Though they live better in Egypt than in their country of origin, these people nevertheless suffer grave violations of their human rights and dignity.

Their children cannot attend Egyptian public schools and those born in Egypt are classified as “stateless persons”—citizens neither of Egypt where they were born, nor of their parents’ country of origin unless special arrangements are made. Catholic religious orders and other charitable organizations run very overcrowded private schools which serve many Sudanese, Eritrean and Ethiopian children. Female African refugees with children have an extremely difficult time trying to support themselves and given the neighborhoods their poverty forces them to live in, many do not leave their homes except when absolutely necessary due to fear of harassment and attack.

Vulnerable refugees who are unable to integrate should be considered for resettlement. Only 1600 of a possible 2000 refugee slots referred by UNHCR were resettled last year. The United States should increase the level in 2013 and meet the quota.

St. Joseph and Sacred Heart parishes in Cairo: We visited these two parishes which have schools serving the children of Eritrean and Sudanese refugees in Egypt, giving us insight into the challenges faced in serving these populations. It was there that we met with the children who had been ransomed from human traffickers in the Sinai.

PEOPLE FLEEING THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA

Refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria fall into 7 principal categories: 1) beneficiaries of the present status quo, especially prosperous Syrians and those belonging to religious minorities, 2) Syrian wives and children joining husbands already working in neighboring countries, 3) foreign nationals who had been working in Syria now returning to their home countries, now without a job to support their families, 4) decades-long Palestinian refugees in Syria, now forced to flee a second time, 5) Iraqis who had taken refuge in Syria now forced to flee a second time, 6) Syrians supporting the resistance or the Assad government, and 7) Syrians without political affiliation who are "caught in the middle."

These last three groups were the major focus of our visit, which I shall discuss last, on a country by country basis. One thing we discovered is that in some parts of Syria, especially in the region of Aleppo, the conflict is as much a revolt of the poor, rural Sunni majority against the economic and political dominance of the more prosperous, diverse urban powers-that-be, as it is an effort to eliminate Assad per se.

Given the diversity of the population and sectarian allegiances, many Syrians still support Assad and the Syrian Army, others actively support the Free Syrian Militias, and many more have no political affiliation and are simply caught in the middle of the conflict and forced to flee. The UNHCR estimates that the number of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries is presently around 545,000 (of which around half are formally registered with the UNHCR) and may reach 700,000 by January 2013 and 1,500,000 by June.

On all sides of the Syrian conflict, we have great concern regarding the welfare of unaccompanied minors and other minors who are vulnerable to every conceivable form of exploitation, including boy soldiers (typically 15-17 year olds) and very young brides (as young as 12-13 year olds). Even though early marriage is culturally acceptable, there is a concern that some families may be bartering/selling-off their daughters for fear that they might not be able to marry should they experience gender-based violence. In this culture, girls who have suffered a violation can become unmarriageable and a source of shame to her family—despite the fact that she is a victim and not guilty of anything.

It should be noted that insufficient staffing and resources to assist people fleeing the conflict in Syria was the gravest readily solvable problem we encountered throughout our visit and everywhere we visited. The UNHCR is especially understaffed, with resulting in excessively long waits for the registration of newly arrived refugees.

For instance, there is currently a waiting list of 22,000 persons to have their initial appointment to begin the process to establish their refugee status with the UNHCR in Amman, Jordan, resulting in a 4 month wait for this initial meeting to apply for refugee status and a 6 month wait for refugee status

renewal. During this time the children have no right to attend school, the petitioners have no authorization to work, and the refugees have no access to the benefits for which most refugees are eligible.

Syrian Refugees in neighboring countries as of October 30, 2012

Syrian Refugees	Egypt	Jordan	Lebanon	Iraq	Turkey	Total
Registered with the UNHCR		60,089	75,668	44,772	101,834	282,363
Awaiting registration with the UNHCR		32,160	30,612	16,357		79,129
Total in the UNHCR pipeline		92,249	106,280	61,129	101,834	361,492
Additional refugees believed to be present without authorization	≥75,000	≥100,000	≥70,000		≥33,000	≥278,000
Total Syrian refugees in neighboring countries	≥75,000	≥192,249	≥176,280	≥61,129	≥134,834	≥639,492
General population of country	90,000,000	6,500,000	4,200,000	31,100,000	74,700,000	206,500,000

Beneficiaries of the present status quo, especially prosperous Syrians and members of religious minorities tend to be very conflicted about the Assad regime, but many do support the status quo because they fear the breakdown of public order and persecution of Christian and other minorities, as occurred in Iraq following the fall of Saddam Hussein and to a lesser degree in Egypt following the fall of Hosni Mubarak. This fear-driven support for the regime is found especially among religious minorities (Christian, Alawite, etc.) who enjoyed a degree of protection under Assad, who is himself an Alawite.

Since Egypt is accessible from Syria only by air, most Syrians taking refuge in Egypt are from the wealthier sectors of society. There are believed to be about 100,000 such persons in the Cairo and Alexandria areas. Most came with sufficient means to rent lodging for what they believed would be a quick victory of Assad over his adversaries. Many of these families are now running out of money. Many Christians and other minorities who have fled Syria to whatever country, regardless of political persuasion, remain in fear in these countries and should receive special attention. Many pro-Assad minorities are afraid to go to organized camps for fear of further persecution by elements in the camps.

Many anti-Assad minorities are afraid to ask for protection from the UNHCR for fear that their information might be shared with the Assad regime. We heard many stories from Christian families and other minorities who described how they were being targeted by some elements in the conflict, similar to the persecution members of these same groups experienced during the aftermath of the Iraq

war. This persecution could worsen if the conflict dissolves into a sectarian civil war, a persecution which could easily spread to those living in camps outside Syria, particularly in Lebanon.

Syrian wives and children are leaving the country to join husbands already working in neighboring countries. We have been informed about this reality, but did not interview any such families directly. These people often need to find different accommodations because “bunk house” lodging may be adequate for individual adult male laborers, but it is not suitable for families with wives and children.

Non-Syrian workers in Syria are leaving to escape the conflict or due to losing their jobs in industries or businesses that have closed, or are in crisis, as a consequence of the conflict. Now unemployed, most have great difficulty finding jobs in the already saturated labor market of their countries of origin. Worse, they are not eligible for the charitable assistance offered by most agencies working with foreign refugees since they are not foreign. They are citizens of the country to which they have returned, not refugees in the usual sense.

Palestinian Refugees from Syria face two special disadvantages: 1) they are expressly excluded from the mandate of the UNHCR to assist refugees from the Syrian conflict because they are already the responsibility of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and 2) because neighboring countries that already have huge, decades-old Palestinian refugee camps are unwilling to admit more Palestinians out of fear that their presence would further destabilize their already fragile societies. Therefore, almost all Palestinians seeking to enter Lebanon are turned back at the border and in Jordan those who have crossed the border are held in an area called Cyber City.

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled...and all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. [Because they were not citizens of Galilee] Joseph went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to the City of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David” [ius sanguinis]. Lk 2:1, 3-4

None of the countries visited extend citizenship to the children of Palestinian refugees born and living in their countries—there is no *jus solis* [birthright citizenship], only *jus sanguinis* [bloodline citizenship] and no path to citizenship available to them at all, even after 60 years of exile. Bishop Taylor pressed the Jordanian Foreign Minister on this topic, but got only resistance. He said the fate of the Palestinians depends on the outcome of a final settlement of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

LEBANON

Lebanon was in every respect the most troubled country we visited. It is politically and socially sectarian and deeply divided about which side to support in the Syrian conflict. Violent episodes can erupt at any time and in fact the head of Lebanese Military Intelligence was killed, along with 8 others, by a car bomb in central Beirut less than a week after our visit.

The government is so divided and in such a state of paralysis that they have been unable to develop a coherent approach regarding how to handle the large number of people fleeing the crisis next door. We discussed these matters with US Ambassador Maura Collins and Caitlin Spicer, the Political Officer in the highly fortified American Embassy in Beirut—security concerns that were a reflection of the instability of Lebanese society and previous attacks on the Beirut embassy.

Ambassador Collins was exceptionally articulate regarding the complex sectarian and political issues in Lebanon, and the unique threat that the Syrian conflict poses for Lebanon. She had many insights into the larger geopolitical issues and possible scenarios going forward. We met with retired auxiliary bishop Roland Abou Jaoude at the Maronite Patriarchate; Davide Benocchi, Country Representative of CRS and Hala Khoury, his administrative officer; Joseph Farah, President of Caritas Middle-East North-Africa (Caritas MONA) and his Regional Coordinator Rosette Hechaïme along with representatives of the Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center (CLMS); Ninette Kelley, Regional Representative of the UNHCR and her Regional Resettlement Officer, Maha Kashoor; Ruba Khoury and Miled Abou Jaoude of Save the Children; Alexandre Adam, Program Manager of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Mads H. Almaas, Country Director of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

Although charitable groups are doing fine—and even heroic—work in Lebanon, the need far outstrips the resources at their disposal, and for understandable—though unfortunate—reasons, the response of the Lebanese government has been very weak and disappointing.

As a consequence, of all the countries bordering Syria, Lebanon as a society is least equipped to handle a possible flood of new refugees, and is ever more at risk of bleed-over contagion from Syria the more the Syrian conflict takes on a sectarian character that mirrors the sectarian divide that is already present in Lebanon. About half of the Syrian refugees believed to be in Lebanon have not registered with the UNHCR, many because they fear their names could be given to the Syrian authorities. The Melchite Catholic Patriarch, Archbishop Gregorius Laham has been a strong supporter of the Assad regime, which has been a source of controversy among Syrian Catholics who are divided viz à viz Assad.

Syrian refugees in Lebanon: In order to depart Syria legally (which is a requirement for entering Lebanon legally, but not to enter Egypt, Jordan or Turkey) there are exit formalities to be observed that include notifying the Syrian government of one's departure...which many fear might endanger family members of those who oppose of the regime who remain in Syria, with the result that many people—especially the Sunni—who are forced to take refuge in Lebanon have no realistic alternative than to do so without proper documentation. Moreover, Lebanon is not a signatory to the International Convention regarding Refugees, which would protect vulnerable persons from the threat of involuntary repatriation.

“When the Magi departed, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod.” Mt 3:13-15

BAR ELIAS, LEBANON: We visited a small “tent settlement” (euphemism for “refugee camp,” which Lebanon forbids due to disastrous experiences with Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon) located near Bar Elias, a mostly Sunni village about 2 miles from the Syrian border. There are 10 tents in this settlement, each containing 2 rooms and a small area for cooking. 4 Sunni families from Homs province who had no previous knowledge of each other reside in each 2 room tent, mostly men in one room and women and small children in the other. Though they are present in Lebanon without proper documentation, the police have tolerated these 10 tents, but no more than that.

They destroyed 3 additional tents that had been built more recently and have threatened to destroy all 10 tents if they try to build any more. These people all entered Lebanon fleeing the Syrian Army, which had killed the husbands of 3 of the women of the group--all brothers of each other--and we were told that there are other family members who are still unaccounted for. One of the widows showed us a gruesome cell-phone video she took of her husband and his brothers just after they had been killed. Then the mother of these 3 men came in, weeping, to tell us that she had just gotten news that her grandson had been killed the previous day. These families had all been poor day laborers in Syria and now are even poorer—now able to find about one day of poorly paid agricultural work every few weeks. Their many children are not in school, for which their irregular status makes them ineligible.

ZAHLE #1, LEBANON: There are many Christian refugees in the mostly Christian town of Zahle, which is about 15 miles from the Syrian border. Though not wealthy, these families had lived in fairly comfortable circumstances in Syria and had no problem leaving Syria legally—and so entered Lebanon with proper documentation. There are no tents in Zahle; these families are living in rented accommodations, though prices are rising rapidly due to the great demand—and unless something changes, they too will soon find themselves in dire straits.

We visited a Melkite Catholic family from Kosaire, a Catholic village in Homs province. All the Christians in their village were told to leave or they would be killed, and so they fled for their lives. One adult woman had been paralyzed when a wall fell on her during an exchange of artillery between the Syrian Army and the rebels in Homs province, but they do not know which side it was fired from. Their children are in school, but it is difficult for them. They are subjected to stigma and mistreatment by the other children.

Zahle #2, LEBANON: There is a small number of Syrians who, because they are in mixed (Muslim/Christian) marriages, lack support even from their fellow refugees and the sectarian receiving population—among whom religious identity and solidarity are unifying factors. We visited one such mixed religion family in Zahle: a Muslim husband, Catholic wife and their recently born baby boy.

They pay \$100 per month plus utilities to rent a tiny room (estimate: 8' x 20') containing a sofa and a tiny improvised kitchen, but no bathroom and no bed at all. They fled Kosaire village in Homs province after a close friend of the husband was mutilated (eyes gouged out, face cut up) and then executed, all in the husband's presence, for taking pictures of atrocities inflicted by members of the Syrian Army on civilians and rebels. Since he had been the victim's friend and had witnessed his gruesome torture and execution, this man was convinced that they would soon come also after him—so he fled with his wife

and son immediately. They obviously could not risk complying with the departure formalities of the very government which they were fleeing, and so had to enter Lebanon without authorization.

DAYR ZANOUN, LEBANON: We visited improvised accommodations in the basement of a bakery in which 75 people were living, all members of a single extended family. The conditions there are extremely unsanitary because it is lower than the nearby sewer line, which leaks badly and fills the front portion of the basement...the area across which all must pass in order to exit the only door to the basement.

They have tried to clean and dry the area, but within 2 hours it fills up with human effluent again. This large Sunni family is from Damascus. They were caught between 2 sides fighting in the conflict there and several of their family members were killed in the bombing. These 75 had proper documentation and entered Lebanon legally. They have many other family members who would have fled with them, but they couldn't find their identity papers...papers which they could not get re-issued because the relevant governmental agencies in Damascus had been bombed and were no longer functioning. The children of this large family are not in school, even though they have proper documentation and are thus eligible to attend Lebanese public schools, but they cannot afford the transportation to the nearest--though relatively distant--schools.

Here also there is very little work available and the men work for pay perhaps only one day every few weeks. With this group I experienced the esteem that (at least some) Muslims have for Catholics: two of these Sunni families took me aside individually and asked me to bless them and their children--at first I didn't understand what they were asking, but by their gestures it was clear what they wanted! And then a Muslim boy from yet another family came up and gave me a brass image of a boy receiving his First Holy Communion--I don't know where he found it, but he knew I was Catholic and wanted me to have it. I was very touched by these encounters with these gentle non-Christian people of sincere faith.

Iraqi refugees ex-Syria in Lebanon. Many Iraqi asylum seekers who in the past decade had taken refuge in Syria pending resettlement in the United States or another country able to receive them have now been forced to flee a second time to a neighboring country. Even if they had stayed, they would not have been able to continue to pursue their case from within Syria because the US embassy in Damascus has already been closed for over 18 months and will not be reopening any time soon, meaning that all refugee status interviews in Syria have been suspended and applicants miss deadlines due to the breakdown of the system. The Iraqi refugees who are forced to flee Syria due to the conflict (and are able to do so) lose any benefits they had been receiving from the UNHCR as pending applicants for resettlement.

The small number of "ex-Syria" Iraqi refugees who have managed to make it to Lebanon can have their cases transferred to the US Refugee Program in Beirut, at least in principle, but if deadlines have been missed (which as a practical matter is almost always the case) they may have to start the whole process all over again from the beginning and the extended processing time means that they overstay their legal status in Lebanon.

BEIRUT, LEBANON: We met with 3 Iraqi refugees ex-Syria who are members of the ancient, much persecuted Mandaean religious sect/minority. They fled Iraq 7 years ago following the killing of numerous Mandaeans in their village, perhaps half of the population. Their asylum petition has been in process for most of that time, but when circumstances in Damascus became too dangerous, they were forced to flee for their lives once again and so they fled by air to Beirut. Their case had been in limbo for the previous 18 months due to the closing of the US Embassy in Damascus, causing them to miss processing deadlines through no fault of their own. Their status remains very insecure: their presence in Lebanon is unauthorized and ever returning to Iraq is simply not an option.

“When Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.’ And he rose and took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He shall be called a Nazarene.’ Mt 2:19-23

JORDAN

Jordan is a stable, peaceful country with a much more sedate pace of life than we experienced in the other countries. It is also a country whose people have long had close personal and cultural ties with Syria. There is much intermarriage, strong tribal connections, a shared language and often extended family ties that transcend political borders and may help to shape the accommodation of Syrian refugees in Jordan, many of whom are actually staying with Jordanian relatives.

Jordan actively welcomes NGOs of a charitable nature and does everything possible to support them in their efforts to help the refugees, almost all of whom are very poor Sunni from the adjacent Dera’a province and from Damascus. The UNHCR estimates that there could be 250,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan before the end of 2012. We had an insightful conversation regarding the refugee situation in Jordan with US Ambassador Spencer Jones at the US Embassy in Amman, along with Giacomo (Jack) Hijazin, the Embassy’s Refugee Program Specialist and Peter T. Chisholm, the Regional Refugee Coordinator and we noted especially the remarkable efforts of tiny Jordan to receive refugees from Syria.

We also met with the Jordanian Foreign Minister (the Jordanian equivalent of the Secretary of State) Mr. Nasser Joudi and Mr. Anmar Al Nimer al Hmoud, the government official who chairs the Jordanian Steering Committee for Syrians in Jordan. We also met with Bishop Maron Laham, the Latin Catholic Bishop of Jordan; Wael V. Suleiman, Executive Director of Caritas Jordan and George Akl, his Projects Manager; the Associate Pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Madaba, where we celebrated Mass; Rev. Francis Abraham Shahim, Pastor of St. Joseph parish and school in Mafraq; Rev. Elie Kurzum, Pastor of Twelve Apostles parish and school in Zarqa. We were hosted for a lovely dinner in Amman by Madam Huda Muasher, Chairperson of the Administrative Board of Caritas Jordan, and her husband, who is a member of the Jordanian Senate. We were also able to make a courtesy call on Gazi and Jacqueline

Rifari, personal friends in Amman of Ambassador Johnny Young, Executive Director of the USCCB Office of Migration and Refugees.

Syrian refugees in Jordan: The government of Jordan and the Catholic Church in Jordan has opened its arms to welcome refugees from Syria to a degree that is truly surprising and inspiring, especially considering that Jordan has only a small population, is poorer than any country in the region, and has the fewest Catholics of any country in the region.

Moreover, they are doing so after having received so many Palestinian refugees in the past 60 years that about half of the citizens of Jordan now have Palestinian roots. 40% of the citizenry is foreign-born, largely in Palestine, plus there are over 338,000 non-citizen residents who still live in Palestinian Refugee Camps. The Jordanians do not believe that receiving Syrian refugees will have the same destabilizing effect as was caused by the influx of 1.9 million Palestinian refugees in previous decades because once the Syrian conflict ends, most Syrians should be able to return home—which has not been the case with the refugees from the still-not-ended Palestinian conflict. Despite this obvious difference, it nevertheless seems improbable that all Syrians will be able—or want—to return...and if a significant number stay, it could impact Jordan's future significantly.

ZA'ATARI CAMP, JORDAN: At first Jordan sought to absorb the Syrian refugee population into the available housing throughout the country—as they had done with between 700,000 and 1 million Iraqi refugees between 2004 and 2007. But by 2011 the saturation point was reached for refugees of whatever provenance, so the Jordanian government established 3 camps, by far the largest of which is at Za'atari in the Mafraq governate west of the city of Mafraq, about 15 miles from the Syrian border.

Although planners anticipated as many as 100,000 refugees, the current camp was built for 30,000 people and they have 500 new arrivals every day. They are presently working on increasing the size of the camp six-fold, to include laying down gravel to help control the dust (somewhat). We saw a small section at a distance of one of these newer units. The desert location is extremely inhospitable, the unfortunate refugees resident there are simply miserable, and it was reported that a significant number who return unprotected to Syria say they would rather have a quick death in Syria than a slow death at Za'atari, which is a place of extreme heat in summer and numbing cold in winter, constant wind, dust everywhere permeating everything. There is insufficient water and while no one is starving, the food available there is of very low quality.

Moreover, there is lack of other basic necessities, including cooking facilities, despite the best efforts of many charitable NGOs working at the Camp—for instance, disposable diapers are scarce and rationed, given to families no more than 3 times a year. The atmosphere is volatile and they have had riots, largely due to frustration with the conditions, and so there is enhanced security, barbed wire, etc. to protect those working for the NGOs.

The French, Italian and Moroccan governments have established military style field hospitals in the camp. We visited the Moroccan hospital, which was highly developed. There were 2 large hospital tents containing about 40 young men recovering from injuries sustained in the fighting in Syria, all members of the rebel militias—their comrades bring their wounded to the border and the Jordanian

police take them to Za'atari for treatment. We also visited a couple of women's tents, mostly containing women giving birth. There are known to be at least 750 pregnant women in the camp, most with other children but without the presence of their husbands.

Many men bring their families from Syria and leave them at the Za'atari camp, confident that however bad the circumstances, at least their loved ones will be safe physically...and then they go back across the border to protect their property, to work or to fight against the regime. In an effort to restrict the movement of these refugees, whenever the Jordanian authorities apprehend refugees coming over the border, they seize their identity papers prior to transporting them the short distance to Za'atari.

Lacking identity papers is a very serious matter in this part of the world and among other things makes eventual resettlement or even repatriation problematic. No one we spoke to knew what was being done with these papers and, more importantly, how the Jordanian authorities would be able to restore these papers to their rightful owners, given the chaotic circumstances and the many thousands of such documents now in their possession.

“David escaped to the cave of Adullam; and when his brothers and all his father’s house heard it, they went down there with him. Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented, gathered to him; and he became captain over them...and David went from there to Mizpeh of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, ‘Pray, let my father and my mother stay with you, till I know what God will do for me.’ And he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him...” 1 Sm 22:1-4

At Za'atari there is also a school tent, where 1,350 girls and 1,050 boys attend school in two shifts, morning and afternoon. They follow the Jordanian curriculum, and the students have already lost so much schooling that they are automatically put back a year.

The 2,400 who do attend school constitute perhaps only about 10% of the school-age children in the camp. The children at Za'atari have been strongly impacted by what they have experienced. Many of the other 90% seem simply to run wild and some with absent fathers have become aggressive. In any event, they have insufficient books even for the 10 % who do go to school (often the entire class is taught from one book), insufficient school supplies, and too few toilets for the students, too little water, and no food for lunch. The Jordanian authorities are well aware of these problems and plans are presently underway to establish a second major camp near Zarqa, which is a somewhat less inhospitable location much closer to Amman.

Iraqi refugees ex-Syria in Jordan. Virtually no Iraqi refugees with a Syrian stamp in their passport are allowed to enter Jordan; they are all turned back at the border unless they have \$50,000 in a bank account in Jordan, of which they will not be allowed to withdraw more than \$25,000—the other \$25,000 must remain in the bank as a sort of “security deposit.”

Some people have managed to enter Jordan by taking the great risk of going to Iraq, getting a new Iraqi passport without a Syrian stamp and then crossing the Iraq/Jordan border. Jordan believes that most

Iraqi refugees ex-Syria are not in immediate danger since they are not parties to the internal Syrian conflict (even though they are often caught in the middle) and that many of those in danger could return to Iraq if necessary, even if perhaps not to the same part of Iraq that previously had been their home. Jordan has no law of Asylum, so refugees there have no legal avenue to prevent the Jordanian government from repatriating them to their country of citizenship, even forcibly, if necessary.

Palestinian refugees ex-Syria in Jordan: While Jordan has opened its borders to receive refugees who are Syrian citizens, it has closed its borders to Palestinians (as well as Iraqis) who had been refugees in Syria and have been forced to flee a second time, mostly from the Damascus area. Of Syria's 450,000 Palestinian refugees only 175 have managed to enter Jordan. They are being housed at the small Cyber City camp.

Jordan fears that any Palestinian refugees ex-Syria it might receive would not return willingly to their previous camps in Syria once peace returns, cannot return to Palestine any time soon, and would therefore stay in Jordan indefinitely...tipping the balance and turning Jordan into a country in which Jordanians are the minority, with all the attendant problems that would present.

TURKEY

Turkey is by far the largest and most prosperous country bordering Syria, and is different from the other countries we visited in very significant ways that make it quite unique in its manner of handling the Syrian crisis and refugees in general.

Turkish society is vibrant and public policy is thoroughly secular, and is the only country we visited in which it is legal (though strongly frowned upon) to convert from Islam to Christianity--despite the fact that the population is overwhelmingly Muslim and such conversions are prohibited in Sharia law and severely punished in all other Muslim countries in the region. It is, however, illegal to seek converts--they have to seek us out at their own initiative. No religious institution—Muslim or Christian—has juridic personality in Turkey, which is the source of some difficulty for both Christian and Muslim religious institutions. For instance Church or Mosque property must be owned privately. The military is the strongest and most respected national institution and Turkish citizens are accustomed to significant restrictions on their personal freedom.

The Turkish government does not allow foreign NGOs the kind of access to refugees and migrants that would be normal elsewhere. They do accept foreign NGO funding but accept relatively little hands-on involvement by these entities...the military and police are fully in charge. We received a well informed briefing from US Ambassador Francis Ricciardone and his Foreign Service officer Cheryl Fernandes, who deals extensively with matters related to refugees. In Ankara we also met with Archbishop Antonio Lucibello, the Papal Nuncio to Turkey and Turkmenistan; Annika Sandlund, the Senior Protection Officer of the UNHCR and her Deputy Representative Karim Atassi; and Ibrahim Vurgun Kavlak, General Coordinator of the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM). In Istanbul we met with Msgr. Francois Yakan, the Patriarchal Vicar for the Assyro-Caldeans of Turkey; Dr. Rinaldo Marmara, the spokesperson for the Episcopal Conference of Turkey (CED) and Director of Caritas Turkey, along with Belinda Mumcu, the Program Coordinator for Caritas and our host in Istanbul.

We also met with representatives of the International Medical Corps (IMC); with Meliha Hasanbegovic-Guso, head of Resettlement-Turkey of the ICMC and Linda Samardzic, the RSC Director of ICMC. It was noted that the ICMC retains “Catholic” in the Turkish version of its name (International Catholic Migration Commission) but drops “Catholic” in the Arabic version which says “International Committee for Helping Refugees.”

One of the most disappointing things about Turkish policy is the fact that it will grant official asylum or refugee status only to citizens of European countries (despite the fact that most of Turkey is in Asia), which they have now expanded to include some of the countries in the Caucasus, but not any of its Arabic-speaking neighbors or non-Europeans from farther afield. Therefore Turkey uses the euphemism “guests” to refer to the non-Europeans to whom they are giving refuge.

So although the UNHCR records 34,000 active non-Syrian refugee cases in Turkey (mostly from Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran and Somalia), the government of Turkey reports only 47 refugee cases (all from Europe and the Caucasus). There is currently a bill being considered in the Turkish Parliament that would allow non-European “guests” to be reclassified as refugees, with all the attendant benefits of that status, on one condition: that Turkey be admitted to the European Union. Of these 34,000 active cases of non-Syrian “guests” in Turkey, about 12,000 have active resettlement cases with the UNHCR.

Syrian refugees in Turkey. Turkey has established 16 camps (so far) along its border with Syria and now also at locations deeper inside the country. There are presently over 100,000 people in these camps, another 40-50,000 residing in local communities called “Satellite Cities,” and still others are living with relatives or friends. Turkish authorities approved allowing this number to rise to 400,000 by the middle of 2013 and some even predict that the actual figure will increase to as much as 750,000. Turkey will have a very hard time providing for so many people and expects other countries to help financially.

Compared to what is found in Lebanon and Jordan, the Turkish camps are the “Cadillac” of such camps, for which the Turkish government has received deserved praise. These camps are run directly by the Turkish military and access to them is quite restricted—foreign NGOs contribute money, but do not have a presence in these camps. By all accounts Turkey has responded with great generosity to these “guests,” spending \$300 million on the refugees to date, with little or no financial support from the international community, but maintains much stricter control than elsewhere.

The camps are located in much more amenable surroundings than that of Za’atari, Jordan and these camps include kitchens, air conditioning, and other amenities not usually found in a refugee camp. Turkey has an open border policy and requires no visas or exit documentation of Syrians, but there is a long back-log of people waiting to be processed to enter the country and go to a camp. Syrian refugees are currently being held at four points along the Turkish border, with some refugees waiting a month or more to be processed and allowed to enter. In the meantime, they have no services and must find shelter where they can, some sleeping outside in the elements or under a tree or some sort of makeshift shelter.

Those who have no papers are sent directly to the camps, while those with passports are permitted to reside in local communities and rent houses, but are quickly spending down their savings. There is no entry delay for those who have valid passports and do not want to go to the camps.

HATAY, TURKEY. While in Turkey, one part of our delegation visited (but were given no access and were not allowed to enter) three Syrian refugee camps in Hatay province while the rest of the delegation visited Iraqi refugees ex-Syria at the Yalova satellite city--I was in the latter group. Those who went to Hatay report that most of the camps in Hatay province and elsewhere are “open” camps in the sense that these refugees are allowed to come and go from the camp during daylight hours, though exit and entry to these camps are tightly controlled—especially in the camps near the border.

Two of the camps they viewed from a distance were very near the border and featured rows of tents and Turkish guards, but no refugees were visible from the road. The third camp was near the edge of a town and had more permanent structures, but did not have an apparent military presence outside the camp. All three camps were surrounded by high fences.

These refugees are largely Sunni and opposed to Assad, among whom are some very committed insurgents of a very conservative religious bent, with the result that serious problems have emerged between these Sunni refugees and the religiously more liberal Turkish Alawite residents of Hatay province--partly due to the immense numbers of these refugees and their impact on the local residents and the local economy, including an increasing crime rate, in part because local prices for commodities are increasing as the refugees consume more resources, and in part because of a certain attitude of arrogance and sense of entitlement among some of the Syrian refugees in this area. For instance, there are stories of young men ordering meals in restaurants and then when the bill came the men would say “*Charge it to Prime Minister Erdogan*” (of Turkey--since he’s providing everything else in the camps).

For this reason, some of the more recently established camps are further from the border (as far away as the city of Gaziantep, about three hours away) and three of these function as “closed” camps to minimize conflicts with the surrounding Turkish community.

There has been much publicity about conflict along this border, including the shelling of a Turkish village in Hatay province and the death of 5 Turkish citizens there, and more recently an exchange of mortar fire which hit an area about 30 miles from Antakya, the ancient city of Antioch in which followers of Jesus were called Christians for the first time. The border itself has a strong Turkish military presence, with a border station high on the mountain with a tall lookout tower and armored vehicles on the road. The delegation did not see any Syrian military presence on the Syrian side of the border.

Iraqi refugees ex-Syria in Turkey. The UNHCR only has access to Iraqis ex-Syria in Turkey after they have gone through the government's registration process, and if they are involved at all with a family, it is an extremely slow process. It appears that those Iraqi families that were in (or very near) the resettlement pipeline before leaving Syria are now totally stalled.

Unlike Jordan and Lebanon, which in practical terms refuse to accept Iraqi refugees ex-Syria, Turkey will receive them as “guests,” though only under harsh conditions and not directly across the land border with Syria. Because all air transportation between Syria and Turkey has been severed as a consequence of the conflict, to make it to Turkey thousands of Iraqi refugees ex-Syria have returned to Iraq at significant personal risk and then paid \$4,000 to fly from Bagdad to Istanbul (which includes 2 nights in a hotel while Turkey determines which Satellite City to assign them to). Upon arrival in Istanbul they are assigned to one of more than 50 Satellite Cities, mostly in relatively remote areas, pending resettlement.

The Turkish government is planning to designate one Satellite City in each province. The movement of these refugees is restricted and they must pay their own way—they receive no public benefits. They cannot travel from their assigned Satellite City without Turkish government approval and must sign in at the local police station at least once a week (although some Iraqis with extreme medical conditions have been granted sign-in once a month or every few weeks). If they miss reporting, they are considered escapees and lose their protected status as “guests.” Since only refugees from Europe and the Caucasus are eligible to petition asylum in Turkey, those Iraqi “guests” who “escape” their Satellite City become subject to immediate deportation to their country of origin, the very country they had fled.

The delegation heard that it is believed that the reason Turkey structures in this way the help it affords to refugees from Iraq, including those ex-Syria, is that it wants to minimize conflict with the local population--receiving Iraqi refugees in such a way that the conditions are sufficiently burdensome to eliminate any desire on the part of the refugees to remain in Turkey long-term. These people are dispersed among the larger Turkish population of those Satellite Cities, not grouped together in refugee neighborhoods.

Once the refugee population in established Satellite Cities reach a certain size, they are not allowed to expand further—new Satellite cities are established instead. These Iraqi refugees have to pay for all the benefits that refugees receive routinely elsewhere, especially in Syria. Turkey sees itself as providing “refuge” to these refugees, not “welfare.”

SATELLITE CITY: YALOVA, TURKEY. Yalova is the nearest Satellite City to Istanbul and is anomalous in that it is fairly large, economically advantaged resort city and not as remote as other locations, being about a two hour trip from Istanbul. Indeed, people we spoke with were shocked that the Turkish government had designated Yalova as a Satellite City, given how expensive it is with regard to the cost of living: it is a high-end resort city of almost 100,000 residents across the Sea of Marmara from greater metropolitan Istanbul.

Most of the “guest” population is Iraqi, but there are also some Iranian and Syrian families from urban areas, as well as one family from Kazakhstan. Many of the Iraqis are either Chaldean Catholics, largely from Mosul or Sunni Muslims, largely from Baghdad. The closest Church for Catholics is in Istanbul, a round trip that costs about \$70 and involves at two hours of travel each way.

In Yalova we visited with six Iraqi families ex-Syria, two of whom were Chaldean Christian and the others Sunni or Shia Muslim. They are all educated people who had been living well enough in Damascus, but were then forced to flee when family members were injured or otherwise felt their lives were in jeopardy. Four of the families had members with special medical needs—including kidney disease, neurofibroblastoma cancer (which was being treated in Syria but not now in Turkey), chronic situational depression (which is very common among the Iraqi population in Yalova), a girl with an amputated leg and a 7 year old prosthesis that no longer fits (she has grown) causing chronic back pain and severe pain at the site where the prosthesis attaches, mental retardation, chronic thyroid disease, heart disease, high blood pressure requiring daily medication and serious plaque-psoriasis left untreated because the needed ointment is cost prohibitive in Turkey.

The four families with invalids in the home do not leave their homes much, except to register at the police station and buy food. Five of these families were in the pipeline for resettlement in the United States, Canada or Australia and expected that their stay meanwhile in Turkey would be brief, but as the months go by they are becoming frustrated, fearful and even frantic.

They reported that while in Syria the UNHCR provided all of them with rental assistance, free medical care and very inexpensive prescriptions, and other benefits, including even a small stipend of \$200 per month. Turkey provides none of these things and there is no foreign NGO aid being provided to these populations in Satellite Cities. Instead these “guests” have to pay for their own rented lodging, which is high in this resort town—to which they were assigned by the Turkish government. They must also pay the going rate for medical care and prescriptions, all out of pocket—one family reported being charged more than \$2,200 for medical visits and having to decide to use their scant resources to pay for basic needs instead, foregoing medicine for chronic medical conditions, which are therefore worsening.

The Turkish government does provide free vaccinations for children and hormone treatment for women. And not only do Iraqi “guests” in the Satellite Cities not receive the small stipend of \$200 per month from the UNHCR, they are not authorized to work. They are living off residual savings, some funds sent from family elsewhere that makes it to them, illegal employment, bartering and selling off remaining possessions. They said that as “guests” they are typically hired illegally for 10-15 days and then are sometimes “fired” without getting paid. The financial situation is critical for the more vulnerable families.

One thing we noted was that these families seem to have put their lives “on hold” indefinitely. Most of the 850 Iraqi children in Yalova are not in school because they do not know Turkish—and apparently do not want to learn it. Bishop Taylor pressed one family on this point, saying that learning a new language is always beneficial and their children are at an age when they could learn Turkish quickly.

One father who is a medical doctor said that only English is important, in addition to their native Arabic, and he did not want his children to associate with the Turkish children—so they just sit around the house. Bishop Taylor challenged him on this as well, but added that that he could at least network with other Iraqi families to provide home schooling in Arabic or English for their children—many of the

adults in these families are educated people. He also told them that English-language curricula for home-schooling are available online.

CONCLUSIONS

The international community, led by the United States, must do more to provide assistance to these refugees in order to avert a further deterioration of what is already a grave humanitarian crisis. The level of human suffering in the four countries we visited is extreme and no person with a human heart or clear conscience could fail to be deeply moved by the plight of millions of people in the Middle East today.

While charitable organizations are undertaking a heroic effort to meet the basic needs of the most desperate and most vulnerable, the need far outstrips the human and material resources presently available to migrants and refugees in this region. The Catholic Church is one of the largest providers of services to this vulnerable population and the United States is by far the country that accepts the most refugees for permanent resettlement, two facts of which American Catholics can rightly be proud—and proud of local Catholics in the region who do a remarkable job of serving the most needy, despite the very small number of Catholics in these countries.

The most intractable underlying problems in the region—reflected clearly in the Syrian crisis—are political and economic, of which the national paralysis of Lebanon is the worst example.

Politically there will be no long term solution until each of these countries develops a healthy democratic system in which human rights are fully protected and respected. By not providing birthright citizenship and by making the acquisition of naturalized citizenship extremely difficult, every one of these societies is creating an immense underclass of stateless persons who live their entire lives without the right to participation in the exercise of power or to their share of the goods and services of society.

The social stability of the United States and most European countries is due in part to our recognition of *ius solis* birthright citizenship, and has much to recommend itself to the four countries we visited—and their failure to recognize this basic human right bodes ill for their long term future. This is especially the case with Palestinian refugees, some of whom have resided for more than 60 years in their “host” country, and the millions of stateless Palestinian refugee children who know no other country.

One can only view with special dismay the plight of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees who have been effectively trapped in Syria by the closing of the Jordanian and Lebanese borders to them. Even though there will be no lasting peace in the Middle East until there is a just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is undeniable that these vulnerable people have become the pawns in a much larger conflict between states, a conflict into which they were simply born and have no voice.

The “host” countries say they will not extend citizenship to these refugees because they want to keep pressure on Israel and support the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to establish a fully independent state—laudable goals; but they do so by suspending the legitimate aspirations of individual Palestinian refugees, some of whom may want simply to move forward with their lives without waiting for a still elusive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It is clear once again that violence only begets more violence and that the only durable solution to any of the conflicts in the Middle East, including the Syrian Crisis, will be through peaceful negotiation and not armed conflict. In this, the example of the United States is especially poor, as are the evident results in Iraq and Afghanistan.

It is tragic and a great failure of the United States that we have not provided the people of the Middle East with a better example of how to resolve conflicts peacefully, both internally and externally, especially since we have over 235 years of experience with a political system that is based on compromise and negotiation. It is also tragic that the sectarian and partisan activity of some leaders of the Catholic Church in the region make it more difficult for the Catholic Church to assist with mediation of this conflict, which would otherwise be a real possibility given the high esteem in which the Catholic Church is held even among many Muslims in the region due to our schools, hospitals and other charitable work in which all are served regardless of religion.

Economic disparity is the most overlooked dimension of the crises we encountered in the Middle East. Human trafficking and migration are driven by extreme poverty and oppression, especially in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan. One of the largely unrecognized grievances underlying the conflict in Syria is the economic disparity between the impoverished rural Sunni of Syria and the more prosperous urban people, many of whom are Christian or Alawite, plus many prosperous Sunni. The same perceived struggle between the haves and have-nots also occurred in Egypt and other countries of the Arab Spring, but seems to be especially pronounced in Syria.

+ Anthony B. Taylor
Bishop of Little Rock

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