

August 29, 2016

The Honorable Chris Murphy
United States Senate
136 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murphy:

As members and friends of the Immanuel Congregational Church in Hartford, CT, we wish to bring to your urgent attention a humanitarian crisis of great concern to us – the desperate plight of tens of thousands of Syrian refugees presently stranded in make-shift, inhospitable desert settlements along the north-eastern Jordan-Syria border. From numerous news reports and eye witness accounts filed by the international press corps, relief agencies and humanitarian organizations, we summarize these salient facts:

- Since late June 2016, when Jordan's government sealed their border on military security grounds, some 75,000 Syrian refugees, the vast majority of them women and children, have lived in crowded tent settlements with severe shortages of food and water, along with a continuing lack of medical supplies and health care. Most of them reside at the Rukban and Hadalat border crossings – a harsh, treeless no-man's land called berm, consisting of dry hillocks of hot desert sand.
- Currently, supply of food rations is being supplied by UN agencies to these refugee settlements only on a once-a-month basis, as reluctantly agreed to by local Jordanian authorities. For instance, on August 4th, these vital food supplies were finally transported and dropped into refugee camps by use of large-scale cranes. Unfortunately, Jordanian government officials have declared the current border impasse strictly a security issue and not a humanitarian crisis.
- According to Benoit De Gryse, operations manager of Doctors without Borders, the present situation at the Jordan-Syria border crossing is "...a massive failure of the international community. This is not just Jordan's responsibility. There are plenty of countries both in and outside of the region who should also step up to offer a safe place for refugees."
- At the present time, because of past relatively open border crossing policy adopted by the Jordanian government, over 650,000 UN-registered refugees from neighboring war-torn Syria reside in camps and other areas in Jordan. Nevertheless, the current closing of their borders with Syria has posed an enormous challenge to those engaged in humanitarian assistance and relief effort, both locally and internationally.

Senator Murphy, in your capacity as member of the United States Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations, we urge you to bring this pressing matter to the immediate attention of your Congressional colleagues and to senior officials of the Obama Administration. In doing so, we wish to suggest the following steps to address this international humanitarian crisis:

- *Provide United States government's emergency aid assistance to UN agencies to rapidly upgrade the current health and living conditions at the Jordan-Syria border settlements.* This would include obtaining medical supplies, opening health clinics, supplying clean, potable water, conducting rodent control measures, constructing sanitary latrines, building secure shelters against desert heat and storms.
- *Transport, including airlift, sick, infirm and vulnerable women, children and elderly individuals to safe and medically accessible refugee settlements in Jordan and other neighboring countries.* Neglecting to do so may result in serious malnutrition and outbreak of communicable diseases, such as childhood diarrhea, cholera and hepatitis, which could quickly spread within the border settlements.
- *Develop and undertake immediate plans to evacuate all remaining refugees, who are adequately screened, from these border settlements.* This requires seeking host countries in the Middle East and in the West that agree to accept displaced Syrian refugees on an expedited basis. The upcoming high level Summit Meeting on Refugees and Migrants, followed by a Leaders' Summit on Refugees (co-hosted by President Obama) to be held on September 19-20 at the UN General Assembly in New York, should provide a timely and appropriate occasion to address these security and humanitarian issues in all their ramifications.

As our Senator in Congress, we hope that you will take a strong advocacy role in resolving this urgent issue. We stand ready to assist you in any way we can.

Respectfully yours,

MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF IMMANUEL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT