

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 10, 2016

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We would like to express our concern over the humanitarian emergency facing over 40,000 Syrian refugees amassing at an earthen berm inside Jordan's borders. The stranded refugees are suffering from exposure, food insecurity, and risk of disease. We ask that you raise this situation with Jordan's leadership to seek a workable solution that allows these refugees to be properly screened and admitted into available refugee facilities in Jordan.

Throughout the conflict in Syria, the Jordanian government and the people of Jordan have demonstrated immense generosity and compassion in caring for thousands of refugees who have sought shelter within their borders. We therefore respect Jordan's concern that this specific refugee population, which has been fleeing the intensified violence in northern Syria, may pose an increased security risk. Specifically, they are concerned that admitting these persons further into Jordanian territory could allow ISIL elements potentially moving with the refugee flow to gain entry to Jordan.

We support Jordan's efforts to protect its borders from terrorist threats, and believe this risk could be mitigated by deploying a police presence and allowing consistent access to international aid agencies to perform screening and registration of this population. The demographic breakdown of this refugee population suggests that the majority would not in fact pose an increased threat. According to international aid agencies on the ground, over half of these refugees are children under 17, including over 500 infants. There are also over 200 pregnant women and hundreds of persons who are either disabled or have serious medical requirements. We urge you to request the Government of Jordan provide immediate protection to these most vulnerable persons who pose no arguable security risk.

Despite recent efforts to provide some infrastructure for these refugees living in makeshift encampments, conditions are deteriorating as the number of refugees increases. Inadequate sanitation, emergency shelter, and consistent supplies of food and water are of critical concern in this open desert environment, and there is essentially no medical care available. The lack of a security presence means that female refugees in particular are at risk of physical and sexual assault. We understand the Jordanian government believes sending military forces into this "no-man's land" would violate an agreement with Syria, but providing a civilian police presence at the berm would improve security conditions without the introduction of military forces.

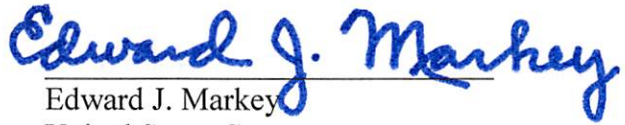
The United States must continue to lead the effort to address the unfolding humanitarian crisis in the region. We therefore ask that you work with our Jordanian partners to formalize humanitarian agencies' access to the refugee population at the berm, improve the security environment by providing a civilian police presence, and accelerate the screening of urgent cases for admission to Jordan.

We know that displaced populations without international protection create instability and are prey for extremist groups looking to exploit vulnerable persons. Urgently providing protection for these refugees is not only a humanitarian obligation, it is in the security interests of both the United States and Jordan.

Sincerely,



Chris Murphy
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator