

Ongoing Syrian Refugees Crisis – US-EU work together on the ground & share best practices

TRANSCRIPT PODCAST INTERVIEW AMY WILSON – U.S. MISSION TO THE EU – 29 JULY 2015

Hello my name is Amy Wilson and I work for the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration at the State Department and I am here at the U.S. Mission to the EU to coordinate on humanitarian and migration issues.

Syria is a very important issue these days and right now we are coordinating with the EU on Syria on a number of different issues. Of course funding large, international organizations, UN, World Food Program, those are all important. But we are also working together to coordinate activities on the ground and share best practices on how to organize these programs in such a dangerous situation.

For some people Syria might not seem like it would be of great concern to the United States and perhaps of a bigger concern considering the situation in the EU right now, the United States is definitely concerned about the crisis in Syria. Maybe the easy part of the answer for that is simply we are living up to our international obligations as members of the UN and as signatories of a number of conventions and agreements but perhaps a better explanation is just the U.S. culture. I have a quote from President Obama from last year's World Refugee Day that really sums up my feelings. He said: "This country was built by people who fled oppression and war, leapt at opportunity and worked day and night to remake themselves in the new land. The refugees who arrive today continue this tradition, bringing fresh dreams and energy and renewing the qualities that helped forge our nation, our national identity and make our country strong." I am a grandchild of immigrants and I believe wholeheartedly that this is part of our national identity: assisting those in need.

The United States has a very strong refugee policy and as part of that policy we have already begun to take in Syrian refugees. So far this year we have taken in over 1100 and we expect by the end of the fiscal year – so September 30th - for that number to be closer to 2000. This is part of our overall package of taking in approximately up to 70000 refugees each year. Next year we expect that the number of Syrian refugees will increase as well.

The Syrian refugees crisis is not just about the U.S. taking in refugees and indeed that is impossible because there are more than 4 million refugees. In addition to taking the few thousands refugees that we have already taken we are also processing applications for approximately 15000 more Syrian refugees. And we have also committed since 2011, 4 billion dollars in humanitarian assistance to the refugee crisis.

Perhaps the biggest crisis in trying to deal with the current Syrian refugee crisis is just the sheer numbers so as I said there are more than 4 million refugees right now and this is the biggest crisis that we have seen in decades and the largest number of displaced persons.

The hope is that eventually the majority of these people will return to their home country when the crisis ends, when the fighting ends but the more protracted that becomes the more difficult it will be for the refugees to return. Infrastructure will be destroyed, property will be destroyed and frankly they will have nothing left to return to. So an end to the crisis is really the main focus and that is not a simple answer. But a diplomatic and a political solution has to be our main goal. In the mean time we will continue our humanitarian assistance and encourage others to do the same.