

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****One Flight Away: An Examination of the Threat posed by ISIS Terrorists with Western Passports***

September 10, 2014 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border and Maritime Security subcommittee hearing entitled “One Flight Away: An Examination of the Threat posed by ISIS Terrorists with Western Passports”:

“I would like to thank the witnesses for appearing to testify regarding the Federal government’s efforts to identify foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq who may seek to travel to the U.S. to do our Nation harm. Since its establishment in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, this Committee has been engaged in helping to address the threats posed by terrorist travel. For example, Members of the Committee advocated for a key provision in the Implementing 9/11 Commission Recommendations Act of 2007 (P.L. 110-53) requiring the implementation of an Electronic System for Travel Authorization to enhance the security of the Visa Waiver Program.

This Committee also examined the lessons learned from the attempted bombing of Flight 253 on Christmas Day 2009 and urged DHS and its Federal partners to strengthen programs aimed at identifying and interdicting travelers to this country who might do us harm. Today, we turn our attention to the threat posed by foreign fighters with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and particularly those holding western passports who could attempt to travel to this country without obtaining a visa. Top U.S. officials have made public statements warning that Syria-based extremists, including foreign fighters linked to ISIL, may pose a direct terrorist threat to this country.

U.S. law enforcement and intelligence officials know that individuals from North America and Europe have gone to Syria and will be exposed to radical and extremist influences before possibly returning to their home countries, possibly with intent to do harm. Recent U.S. government estimates indicate 12,000 foreign fighters have travelled to Syria to engage in the ongoing fighting, including more than 1,000 Europeans and over 100 U.S. citizens. Of those 100 U.S. citizens fighting in the region, about a dozen are believed to be with ISIL in particular.

I hope our conversation today provides insight into the full scope of foreign fighter issues facing the U.S. government as well as how we, along with our foreign partners, can redouble our intelligence, information sharing, and response regarding these individuals. With that in mind, I want to hear from the Department of Homeland Security and Department of State witnesses about their ongoing work to identify and interdict foreign fighters coming to the U.S., and whether they need to increase their efforts in response to ISIL. We know that the threat posed by ISIL foreign fighters is very real and serious. The American people want assurances that our government’s response is and will continue to be equal to the task at hand.”

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FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978