

# Center for American Progress



## **SPECIAL PRESENTATION**

### **“IRAQ'S DISPLACEMENT CRISIS AND THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE”**

**AN IRAQI ACCOUNT OF THE SITUATION AND THE  
INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS**

**INTRODUCTION BY:  
LARRY KORB, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS**

**MODERATED BY:  
ANITA SHARMA, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS**

**FEATURED SPEAKERS:**

**AHMED ALI, FORMER TRANSLATOR AND INTERPRETER FOR  
NUMEROUS MEDIA OUTLETS, THE U.S. AND IRAQI  
GOVERNMENTS, RECENTLY RESETTLED IN THE  
UNITED STATES**

**MICHEL GABAUDAN, WASHINGTON DIRECTOR, UNITED  
NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES**

**11:45 AM – 12:45 PM  
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2007**

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MS. SHARMA: Excuse me, if I can get everyone to make their way back to their seats. You are more than welcome to come back with your plates of food. And we're going to hear remarks from Larry Korb, who is a senior fellow here at the Center for American Progress and is the lead author of several studies that the Center has done, looking at the challenges in Iraq, and those are in folders that you have. So if I can just ask you to begin to take your seats, and we'll get started in the next minute.

Thank you.

(Audio break.)

MS. : May I please have your attention? If you do have your lunch, please take your seats. We are ready to begin our luncheon portion of the program. So please take your seats, if you do have your lunch, we will be getting started momentarily.

Thank you.

(Audio break.)

MR. LARRY KORB: Ladies and gentlemen, please continue eating your lunch. My name is Larry Korb. I'm a senior fellow here at the Center, working primarily on national security issues, and it's my pleasure this afternoon, I'm privileged to introduce you to the panel which will discuss an Iraqi account of the current situation as well as the international response to the crisis.

Before I do that, let me try and put things into context by referring to some of the work that we've done at the Center and I know that it's in your packets. Well, certainly the refugee crisis is important and it needs to be dealt with by the United States and the international community. It cannot be dealt with in isolation. And here at the Center, going back to 2005, we talked about a strategic redeployment of our forces, and then earlier this year we talked about resetting our policies not just for Iraq, but all of the region and, in that, we talked about this particular displacement crisis and the response that the United States and the international community needed to take.

We have also argued going back to the first time that the United States invaded Iraq that the situation cannot be solved by the United States alone. It's got to be with the international community, the countries in the region, and certainly the situation with the displacement crisis is one that really has to be done with the international community. You have heard, and I – and many of you heard and I was privileged to hear last night the excellent remarks by Julia Taft about what the United States should be doing, and again, she's one of the heroes of all – in this area, and I think we should keep that in mind that United States has done it in the past and can do it, and it really requires leadership on the part of the United States.

So this afternoon, we're going to have two people discuss the Iraqi account. Our first speaker will be Ahmed Ali. Mr. Ali has a fantastic background as a journalist, a translator, a reporter and a producer of numerous accounts of the situation in Iraq. In addition to his journalistic skills, he is also a medical laboratory technician and he's worked in that area as well. So I think we're really fortunate to have someone who has been there and, of course, who's been a great help to the United States, serving as an interpreter and a translator for people, including the first commander of the multinational forces General Ricardo Sanchez, General Dempsey, who's in charge of the training, General Mark Kimmitt, who was the public affairs officer, and Dan Senor, who was Ambassador Bremer's public relations officer. So – and I want to remind you that please do not take any pictures of Mr. Ali during or after the presentation for obvious reasons.

He will be joined on the panel by Michel Gabaudan – and I apologize if I've mispronounced due to my French thing – and he's been a UNHCR representative, regional representative, and looking through his biography, I found out that he has worked in every continent of the world except Antarctica. So I don't think there's any refugees down there, but he has been involved in this issue for the past 25 years in literally dozens of countries, and as I say, in every continent except Antarctica. So he will bring the international response to the situation.

So if I could ask our panelists to come up here and we can go ahead and start the session. (Inaudible) – and Anita will monitor the panel. I have to go over and testify on this subject before the Congress. So thank you very much for your attention, and I look forward to reading the results of your conversation.

MS. SHARMA: Thank you, Larry.

As Larry has indicated, the Center and through Larry's leadership has really been at the fore – I see my banana hiding under here – (laughs) – it's my lunch – has been at the forefront of these issues, and the Center's report, strategic research did go into some detail as to the humanitarian situation, but Larry's not here, but one of my criticisms, others' report – and was a friendly criticism as colleagues – was that the report, you know, coming in at, I think, 20-or-so pages did not –left only one page to deal with the humanitarian crisis, the displacement crisis, and it was primarily to discuss the U.S. responsibility to those who had – how it works with the coalition. So it is my hope that with Larry and with others here at the Center that we were able to push the agenda forward, hence, the conference.

Now, what I'd like to do is have – we shift it up a little bit and have a conversation with Michel and with Ahmed Ali, and really enable you all to come in as well. I won't tell Michel – well, I will. When we were first planning the conference, we thought through who we might invite – and I don't mean this to say Michel is a poor second – but our first ask relating to UNHCR was Angelina Jolie – (laughs) – who as an UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, has been to my knowledge really one of the only celebrity activists who has taken on this issue. She went to Syria a few months ago and

was working to raise the profile. Unfortunately, she was otherwise occupied and so we asked Michel, who heads up the UNHCR office in Washington.

So I'll just tee it up and ask Michel to give an overview of the situation from UNHCR's perspective. We had talks last night when we had a smaller discussion about the referral process that UNHCR is now doing to assist with resettlement activities, both in terms of referrals inside Iraq and with the neighboring countries. And so Michel, if you could give us an update with the process, what is happening, what UNHCR is attempting to do, and then we'll open it up and we'll have a larger discussion. So again, thank you for coming today. I think it's on.

MR. MICHEL GABAUDAN: Yes. Perfect. Okay. Thank you very much. Well, before, perhaps a comment on the referrals, let me tell you how we have set our presence in Syria and Jordan. Between 2003 and 2005, our funding was very limited in the region and we were mostly involved in repatriating Iraqis to Iraq from these two countries, and in these three years, we repatriated about 300,000 people. That stopped completely in 2006 where only 1,000 people were repatriated and where the movement increased tremendously the other way with, I think, a change in the fabric of the refugees who are moving into Syria and Jordan in that we started seeing people from much poorer strata of the population. This is what generated a little bit the conscience that there was indeed a big humanitarian crisis.

The numbers had been big before, but the people had been quite invisible for a set of reasons. One is that many did not want to appear as refugees, many had initially brought resources with which they were living, the governments were not keen at all to talk about a refugee crisis. We heard references to guests, et cetera, because they didn't want this crisis to recall previous crises in the region that had become quite chronic. And we were shrinking our presence because of lack of funding. So all that was a bad combination to sort of warn the international community what was coming up, and it's only after the Samarra bombing that we sort of woke up to the real nature of the crisis and started appealing for funds to reestablish our presence, which was not implemented before early 2007.

So when we reestablished our presence, one the priorities was to start understanding what are the needs of the people, what are the protection needs, what are the assistance needs, who are the vulnerable, how do to identify them, and at the same time to respond to a major policy change that had happened with the U.S. government, with the change in the number of persons that were prepared to consider for resettlements. Between 2003 and 2005, we had only resettled to the U.S. about 400 refugees from Iraq. So basically, we had given up very much making submissions to the U.S., and the refugees we were submitting were mostly to Australia, Canada, New Zealand – I mean, other resettlement countries.

Now, early next year, with the government, we had discussions on the nature of the crisis and this 12,000 figure came up. Now, that was, as I said, major change in the numbers, which was good news for us, but it also required upon us to review tremendously the way we were prepared to interview people and register them. So one of

our first objectives was to try to relocate our interview areas from our downtown offices, which were not close to where refugees were living, and to have registration centers closer to the neighborhoods where refugees were actually settling and to start registering people. So far, we have registered about 210,000 in the three countries of Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. It's a small proportion of the overall number, but it is improving in terms that the delays that people have between the time they notice themselves to our offices and they have a full registration has now gone down to just a few days in Jordan, and unfortunately still a few months in Syria.

Out of that registration, we tried to identify who are the people who are the most vulnerable and need either assistance or counseling in the country of asylum, and who are those who fit within some 11 criteria of vulnerability we have accepted – we have negotiated with the U.S. and other resettlement countries, that would be the base on which we make these submissions. To date, we had committed ourselves to submit 20,000 people by the end of the year. We have reached that by the end of November. So by the end of the year, we'll be a little bit above that, and people are starting to move.

MS. SHARMA: And, Ahmed, you are one of the people who has decided to leave Iraq. As Larry had discussed in your introduction – excuse me – you worked extensively for Western media outlets and because of that your life was threatened and so much so that you decided to work to relocate your family here to the United States. Can you tell us why, you know, what the specifics were, why you decided that it was so important for you to leave Iraq?

MR. AHMED ALI: Thank you. Hello? Thank you. Well, first of all, I'd like to put an outline for the huge problem that we as reporters, as Iraqi reporters, who are associated with the U.S. media or any foreign media in Iraq, we are actually targeted for being, first of all, associated with the media, and secondly, for being associated with a foreign media, and specifically, if you are associated with the U.S. media, you'll be double targeted.

So there have been many – actually many threats and many dangers that I was facing in Iraq, and starting from 2003, when I started already to work for supporting the communication between Iraqi people and the U.S. officials in the embassy and the high level of the U.S. officers, there was actually from that point that the threats started. I was seen by the insurgency as a U.S. collaborator and later on as for being supportive of the political process and supportive of the U.S. media later on. So that was actually a very big danger for me and for my family, and it was a lot of threats that had been sent to me through the mobile phone, through – by – thrown a flyer in my house, and actually it ended up by putting a black X mark on my house fence.

That was in December, 2006, and that was actually, as we know in Iraq, that was the final alert, as we usually call it, as this is the next target. And it happened – that fortunately, that my wife saw that sign and she called me to NBC News office, where I was working, and she told me about the sign and, fortunately, we already had – you know, had prepared for ourselves for such kind of emergency case. So we had our

security plan, so we just about three months ago, we already packed up our suitcases, so just in such a kind of emergency case, we can just flee all at once, and it really did.

So once she called me, I returned back home and within 30 minutes only, we put all our suitcases in the car and left everything behind, we left our house, we left our belongings, we left our – at the very beginning, we moved from my neighborhood to my parents' neighborhood, just as a kind of – in Baghdad, yes, and that wasn't Baghdad – just as a kind of temporary transaction.

So later, I found out that I cannot keep going on and work for NBC News for the fact that if I'm a man of adventures and I can do that as being committed for the cause, but I cannot keep going on and letting my wife have a kind of heart attack because of the sort of job that I was doing and my two kids were very severely intimidated and traumatized. So at this time, I started to think seriously about moving because I cannot see them just suffering because of staying there, and this is how we decided to move to Jordan, to Amman – and here's another story.

Actually, in Amman, Jordan, there was a very hard for an Iraqi to have an access to get into Jordan. That was actually the beginning of 2007. At the time, many Iraqis were being deported, and at the time, many Iraqis were being returned back to Baghdad. So me and my family were detained in the airport for about more than three hours, just – and at the – (unintelligible) – being returned to Baghdad. And then, you know, finally, we were allowed to enter to Jordan, Amman. And here, at this point, we started to face new kind of challenges and it's a totally new life.

First of all, for a man who spent all of his life as being independent, you know, just all of a sudden, find yourself without a job and not having the right to have legal residency status and in addition to the fact that you have left everything behind, like your parents, your siblings, they are still in danger there, and the fact that I had already been associated with the U.S. media and associated with the Iraqi government and the U.S. officials, that will make the dangers doubled for my parents and siblings and for my wife's parents and siblings too.

So you have many things to worry about, and actually we already – we only had our savings to make our life in Jordan, and that would have run out without the support that I had from my close friend, Amelia Templeton from the Human Rights First, because without her support, and her family's support, I couldn't even been able to stay in Amman. And it was about nine months when I stayed in Amman, Jordan for – waiting for the United States special immigration visa to get it printed on my passport.

In fact, at the early stage of my arrival to Jordan, I already submitted my paperwork to get registered to the UNHCR refugee program and at the same time, I had my paperwork being processed for the special immigration program, so I had both and just, you know, waiting for a better chance to move very fastly (*sic*) to the United States, or actually, it's not the question of getting resettled to the United States. It's the question of being in a peaceful place, because before that we had an attempt to get resettled in Cairo, in Egypt, and I sent my wife and two kids to Cairo, and we couldn't make it there

because – for the same reason, because I haven't had the right to get employed or to get legal residency status. So we were turned back to Baghdad, and then we had all those threats, including the black X, which was the final, and then we moved back to Amman, Jordan.

So I applied for the UNHCR, but finally, I had the special immigration visa paperwork, which was completed before getting the UNHCR program process, so – and in the end, I got my visa on the passport, and then came only one month ago to the United States.

So it was actually very hard for an Iraqi family to do all that long trip. It took us about a year – if you just count it – just about a year to get from Baghdad – all that transition from Baghdad to the United States through Amman, Jordan. And the other thing that we were actually suffering of it's not having the right to get our children to get enrolled in the Jordanian public schools, which was an issue.

And the other very – actually sensitive issues is that, unfortunately, the Jordanian government, most of the time, they do not recognize the UNHCR brochure that establishes that this person, Mr. so-and-so is being recognized by the UNHCR as a refugee and he's under the protection of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. I used to hear stories from Iraqis, who were living in Amman, Jordan that many of their relatives and many of their friends had been detained by the Jordanian police, and once they show the UNHCR brochure, very simply, the Jordanian police would not even recognize it or simply ignore it and many of them were deported.

So, in the end, I found myself in a very limited area – moving in a very limited area, and most of the time, I do my communications through the internet that I established in my house in Jordan, and that was very hard, to feel unsafe because you are subject of deportation at any time, not being employed – actually, you don't have even the right to get employed or don't have the right to have the legal status. All that altogether was very hard for us.

MS. SHARMA: Michel, let me ask you about that, particularly, when people are registering or not in these countries. I know that UNHCR, UNICEF, with assistance from the U.S. government was attempting to assist the Jordanian government handle the capacity, the increased influx of children into the schools, and the appeal was not funded to the degree, I think, that that was asked for, and not only that, the numbers of children registering was nowhere near the expectations.

So I think, on the one hand, Ahmed, what you're saying in terms of what UNHCR can and cannot do is also dependant on what the government is allowing people to do once they're registered. Can you address that kind of – that challenge there?

MR. GABAUDAN: Yes, well, someone mentioned –

MS. SHARMA: It will come up.

MR. GABAUDAN: It will come up? Someone mentioned this morning that none of the government where refugees are finding themselves right now has any obligation under international law. So what we are bound to is to negotiate with them on, as things progressed, to try to have as a flexible as possible an approach as they are prepared to give. I think there has been progress in Jordan.

A year ago, we were at a point where we were not even allowed to register, where registration had been shut down, et cetera. That has been completely overhauled where, as Ali had said, you know, schools were not accessible. Now, they are accessible. So the question is to bring enough support so that more classrooms and more professors, et cetera, can be – can be hired, and classrooms built.

So there has been some progress, I would say some flexibilization on the part of the Jordanian government. The appeal we made for education was up to about \$129 million in rounding figures and we barely got, I think, \$37 or \$38 million against that appeal. That was a joined appeal with UNICEF, and about \$99 million of that appeal were for us. So we got about a third of what we asked so far. So that appeal has not been well subscribed. I would say, except for the U.S., who gave us 30 million out of the 36 we received, but other donors have not come forward for the education appeal.

On a more general appeal, the one that we had issued earlier has been much better subscribed and there we are almost fully funded. But on education, there are still lots – a lot of work to be done. So far, I think we are putting about 50,000 children in Jordan to school and about 100,000 in Syria, but given the number of refugees that we have there, it's still below the mark, so we have progress to make.

MS. SHARMA: And so continuing the children theme, now that you've come to the United States, you're living in Oregon, what has life been like for you here? And the reason I ask is you came in under a special classification, the SIV program. There are people in the audience who are much more knowledgeable about this than I. So I might ask some of our congressional liaisons to discuss it with us. But from my understanding, that classification of visas is a fast track that was enacted primarily to reward national staff who had worked with embassies for numerous years and there's not the provision that is associated with the other categories for which you – I don't think you were give a airfare here to the U.S., there's no assistance once you arrive, in fact, there's no tracking. It's just assumed that you will get on a plane, come here and begin your life. So what has life been like for you, and are your children going to school in the U.S.?

MR. ALI: Well, it's a big transition actually and a big change. First of all, it's the difference between the two cultures. And for my kids, one of them has been enrolled already in one of the schools in Portland, and the good thing is that people are very welcoming, which makes it very easy for him and his family to get adapted very easily and quickly in Portland.

But in terms of getting through the SIV program, actually it was simply to get a visa printed on the passport, that's all. We had to do everything by ourselves. We had to fund ourselves. We had to manage everything so that to get to the states here, and that

actually was a very big burden for an Iraqi family that had already spent about almost ten or nine or ten months out of their country, in Jordan, I mean. So that was the big challenge actually.

But finally, getting here, it has also a new sort of challenges, a new sort of life. So in terms of the kids being in the school, well, I think they have to start their new life because that was our target. I mean, me and wife, because we are doing that for them, for their future. And in terms of the life here, we have to go through all the other processes that we have to do, like looking for an employment, like being adapted to the culture, to the community, and especially the fact that I'm the only English speaker in my family, which is also very hard, and my wife is facing the kind of huge difficulties in communicating with the people, but the good thing is that the people here are very welcoming and very friendly, and this is something actually we had already been expecting.

And she started to have her ESL courses for English, and I think we have to go forward in this process because there's no way back, because I can't even think about returning back to my country, to Iraq because I was identified, I was threatened, so returning back means death, a death sentence for my family, for my two kids and for my wife. And I cannot do that for the moment, so perhaps I feel like I have to stay here, maybe at least for a decade until, you know, things will get improved in the country.

It's a question of the security. Security is the main issue. So once the country would be very secured for the general citizens of Iraq and for that proportion of Iraqi people like me, who were threatened personally, I think by the time, we'll be thinking seriously to return back to serve our country, because for Iraqis, it's not easy to leave their country. We are a country of very high potentials, huge fortunes there in the country, and we were people who have their own resources, and we are actually – we were very pleased to be in our country, serving our country, and this is actually our mission, and the fact that we are here, we have to start it again, we have to start it from zero point. So it's new challenges, so – but we have to go through.

MS. SHARMA: You, in part, answered the last question I was going to pose to our panelists before opening it up to questions, but I do want to touch on the issue of returns, and obviously that has been something we talked about on the first panel, and the fact that there are people who for a variety of reasons are deciding to return. UNHCR and the UN mission in Iraq recently had agreed with the Iraqi government that it would put something like \$11 million, I believe it is, to assist with the humanitarian situation.

So my question both is in terms of the people who aren't able to return for a variety of reasons, some of which Ahmed has touched on. But the people who are – who are returning, what is UNHCR prepared to do? There's been again some statements by the Iraqi government saying we want you to come, countered by the don't really – you know, don't open the flood gates just yet, don't plan on leaving Europe. UNCHR being willing to assist with the processing, but at the same time, saying that the conditions might not be so for people to be returning home. So again, another kind of contradiction or challenge for your agency.

MR. GABAUDAN: I think there is no contradiction if we take things one step at a time. I mean, any hint, of course, that there are improvements in the security situation in Iraq is good news and we should, you know, take notice of that and see how that affects the capacity for people to come back. So that (despite on return so that he's?) raised that issue and I think it's a call for all of us to try to monitor a little bit what's going on.

I think as long as people decide voluntarily to go back, that there is no pressure exerted on them, is the right of every refugee to decide when to go back. And if some have information that in the area where they want to go back, the conditions are there that they can go, we should respect that right and help them. I mean, the fundamental thing is to make sure there is no pressure. I mean, they were mentioned this morning of the sort of pressure exerted from Lebanon, of course, which is not acceptable to us. We'll have to find a little bit what sort of pressure, if any, was put on refugees who moved from Syria. We don't have such indications as yet.

What for me was more interesting to consider was on the very small survey that we made of the reasons why people were going back, only 14 percent mentioned improved security as a reason to go back. The large majority said we cannot sustain our lives anymore in Syria. And that is quite a severe indictment that our efforts to reach, the people are vulnerable and they are losing their livelihoods, are not developing fast enough to catch up with the degradation of the living standards of the refugees in this country.

So that's a call for even more attention in asylum countries, and I think that's the first lesson I would take from what has happened. But if people go back, we have to give them some assistance. And if, in Syria, people would register with us and sign a paper saying, you know, under no pressure whatsoever, I want to go back, we could even assist them to go back. What happens very often in return movements is that before we say conditions are there, you can go back, there is a small proportion of refugees who decide to go back on their own and – because of particular circumstances.

What is clear to us right now is it's not yet the time for us to promote returns, certainly not, and we're not going to do that. We will try to help those who want to return. But for return to be sustainable, I mean, I think you need a series of preconditions that are not met as yet. I mean, the registration, so far, indicates to us that about 80 percent of the refugees do come from Baghdad. They come from an urban environment, and if we have learned any lesson from the Balkans, is that return to urban environments, where tremendous amount of population shifting has taken place, is that you have to look at issues of ownership of houses, et cetera, or compensation. I mean, you need a fairly strong legal structure that will help people either to receive compensation or to get their property back. I don't think neither the Iraq government, nor the international community are anywhere close to that.

So what we're doing right now is to work with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq, UNAMI, to try to see what are immediate measures we can put in place

to help those who have come back, and this is this \$ 11 million project that UNHRC has put at the disposal of the UN system in Baghdad to try to give an immediate response, and too, to start discussing while – if there are returns – are going to take place, what are the different programs that we have to put in place with the government, and that is going to take some time.

What we certainly do not want is that an initial discussion on return of a certain number of people leads to the notion that assistance in Syria and Jordan is now something of the past, we have to look at return. No. We've just scratched the surface through our registration on what the needs are, and what is certainly coming very clearly to us, is that people's livelihood, as Ahmed has said, you know, after a year or two years, well, they've dried up. And as they live in an urban environment, we don't have assistance program as you have when people are in camps, and I'm certainly not suggesting that we should open camps, but we should catch up with the people who can't sustain their livelihood anymore, and see through which means we can help.

That will bring me to another comment I would like to make before I finish. When we talk about the international response, the fact that people live in an urban environment is now having an impact on prices of current necessities in Amman and in Damask, you know, the price of water, the price of bread, price of transport, certainly price of accommodation, availability of electricity, et cetera. Now, these are not issues that humanitarian aid will be able to tackle. There is a need for bilateral aid that tackles structural issues in these countries to be developed.

When the high commissioner called his conference on Iraqi refugees in April, he was very insistent to say we need bilateral aid to Syria and Jordan to make sure that the tremendous burden they have taken on by accepting these people, with the little problem we've seen with a few deportations here, some detentions there, but in general, the acceptance of this very large number of population, in order for them to stand that pressure, they need support that has to be channeled through development mechanisms, et cetera. We've seen very little of that happening, and if we want in the year to come to safeguard some of the fragile protection atmosphere, we have in these countries, we will need to go beyond humanitarian aid, and that's a call that high commissioner made in April, that has gone fairly unheeded up to now, and it is more crucial than ever that it's being listened to.

MS. SHARMA: I completely agree and I think probably one of the more fragile ecosystems in the Middle East is dealing with water issues and water scarcity and the challenges that it is putting on Damascus, amongst other areas, and I know that the World Food Program recently issued an appeal in Syria to assist – to feed the population.

I'm sure that there are people in the audience who would like to ask questions to Michel and Ahmed. So we have time for a few questions, so if you could rise your hand and per usual identify yourself and I'd be happy to take them. So all the way in the back, Suzie, sorry.

Q: Ellen Duvernell (ph), Catholic Charities. I'm having trouble understanding. If people don't have rights in Jordan and Syria, are unable to work, or forced into hiding, have no resources, how is it that you consider them going back to Iraq voluntary? And then who's tracking those refugees once they return to Iraq to see what's happening to them? I just – it's hard for me to get how that's voluntary return.

MR. GABAUDAN: Well, so far, nothing is voluntary because nobody has sat in front of us and say, I'm returning on my own. So, what we say, is that if we were to help them to leave Syria or Jordan to go back to one of these countries, we would have to be able to sit with them and to make sure there is no pressure. Now, there are indirect pressures as those you have mentioned. They exist in all refugee situations. Even in camp situations, where the assistance program is more structured. After two or three years, the assistance goes down, there is a fatigue phenomenon with the international community and conditions in asylum go down. So you could argue that in most refugee situations, after a while, conditions in asylum can become so precarious that they are in themselves a push factor towards return.

I think in Iraq, though it's difficult, and though more people are falling through the cracks of the net, and we should be able to catch them up through our registration, I mean, large numbers have still managed to survive for quite a few years. And to say that conditions are so bad that they all have to go back, and it's a push factor, would be to me a step I'm not quite prepared to take.

MS. SHARMA: And then, I think in terms of the tracking, I know that the Iraqi Red Crescent is attempting to get a handle on where people are living, the statistics, and then the International Organization for Migration does a survey. They have people working in all of the governance that track. Again, but as Vic was saying earlier on, people are displaced not once, but twice, maybe three times and are moving from neighborhood to neighborhood, in some cases, so the tracking is extremely difficult. Questions?

Q: Hi, I'm – my name is Peter Lems; I work with the American Friends Service Community. And I have a question for Michel, and you mentioned that there's 11 criteria that you use when you're doing determinations and I'm wondering, have you received any explicit guidelines from the U.S. on the type of people that they would be willing to accept, or do you have criteria for everyone and then just assign people to the United States?

MR. GABAUDAN: No, we have 11 criteria. I'm not sure I can recite them all, all the 11, but they include, I mean, women are traced – they include victims of torture, they include family reunification, they include people who have worked for the multinational forces or for foreign press outfits, et cetera. They include all these. These criteria have been accepted by all the resettlement countries with whom we work. There is a slight difference in the way countries respond to our submissions. For example, some countries will be more sensitive to the difficulties refugees face in asylum country, as a reason to move them out, others will be more determined to find out what is the condition in the country of origin that determined their flight and how do they really,

strictly qualify under the convention, as a main reason to take them. So there is where the subtlety in referring this case to this country, rather than this other, will enter into play.

MS. SHARMA: I think we have time for one more, if anyone has a question – behind. Thank you.

Q: Margaret Besheer, Voice of America. Michel, how many countries are accepting refugees for third country resettlement programs?

MR. GABAUDAN: Well, the resettlement, as you know, is not something that the country has to do under any international treaty, et cetera. It's purely a benevolent approach –

Q: (Inaudible) – accepted their criteria.

MR. GABAUDAN: Yes. The exact number, I don't have, but I mean, the big resettlement countries, apart from the U.S., are Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Sweden, Denmark and Norway. Now, these are really the major resettlement countries that systematically respond to all our programs. And then you have a few European countries that eventually will make a contribution. Recently, we've had extremely positive development with Brazil, accepting hundred Palestinians, who are stranded on the no man's land between Syria and Iraq and for whom there is no solution whatsoever, because they are not even allowed to move into Syria, and we hope that this move by the Brazilians will elicit some reactions by other countries. We know that Chile is looking into it, and the U.S. has told us they were prepared to consider some cases of Palestinians, so that – just to show you that it's broadening a little bit. But it's a small number of countries altogether.

MS. SHARMA: So the brownies and cookies have not yet arrived. So – (laughter) – rather than make you get up and eat another sandwich, we'd be happy to continue the conversation if there are more questions or comments. Good, I'm glad to hear it. So, in the middle here, gentleman here on the end.

Q: Hi, it's Steve Lord; I work with GAO. I have a question for Michel. I'm interested in better understanding this mechanism you discussed to deal with people who return to their neighborhoods and find someone living in their homes. Could you explain how that would work, who administers it, how much funding it's going to receive, et cetera? And how many cases they have actually successfully dealt with to date?

MR. GABAUDAN: We're certainly not yet there. I mean, we've been taken a little bit by surprise by these return movements. We were not given warning by the Iraqis whom we talked to, or would come to talk to our officers. So this is something we're just looking at right now and I have no figures whatsoever. We'll have to try to find out exactly where do they return, and then what sort of conditions they find. I mean, the last thing you want is that people return to become internally displaced. I mean, that would not be a solution, of course.

MS. SHARMA: Right. And Dr. Hakki was saying that some 20 percent of their returns have been – have found themselves internally displaced. So Ahmed, do you know what has happened to your house and now with your relatives and your family that are still there – they are still living in their original houses?

MR. ALI: Well, that was the issue of my concerns for the long time, for a whole year that I was out of the house and, fortunately, that the people in my neighborhood are just keeping an eye on the house, and, well, in a way or another this is – that won't be enough to stop militia or al Qaeda or, you know, gangs to get into the house, to occupy it and to do whatever. So it's actually a fact that we keep in mind that we are ready for the news of one day to be sent to us that the house is lost and it's been occupied, so – but the good thing for my case, personally, that I have the people in my neighborhood. My parents and my siblings sometimes go there to have a look on the house, to see whether anything happens, and fortunately, it's still empty, nobody's there, but we still do not guarantee what will happen in the future.

MS. SHARMA: In the back there, thank you.

Q: Hi, my name is – (inaudible) – I'm with – (inaudible) – Democracy. I would like to ask a question from the gentleman from Iran. What – (inaudible) – what could you say about who makes up the insurgency in Iraq? As a native of Iraq, would you say this is largely foreign people coming into Iraq to disrupt things? And who supports the insurgents? In your – as I heard that something generally in Iraq, and at some point – (inaudible) – so I'm sure you have a good sense of who is actually the insurgency?

MR. ALI: Well, thank you. That's a big question. Well, first of all, I would like to go back to the history context of Iraq. I believe, as many Iraqis, believe that Saddam's preferential policy was the first seeds for the sectarianism in Iraq. For certain reason, Kurds in the north and Shiites in the south or even in Baghdad, were not allowed to get the high positions in the government or the ministries. So for 35 years, there has been many persecutions and many repressions practiced against the Kurds and Shiites. That was actually, in my point of view, the first seeds for the sectarianism.

And then, there have been also United States administration errors, if I can say. First of all, the dismissal of the Iraqi army right after the invasion, and the dismissal of many of the security forces, Iraqi security forces and Iraqi police from their jobs, and that created, you know, a new population out of jobs, very well militarily trained, and all of a sudden found themselves without their livelihood and they would be very easily be attracted by the extremists or the violent fundamentalists. And the other thing is that some other extremists are coming also – the first part for my answer was from the people who are inside the country.

And I also believe that, as many Iraqis believe that, some others are coming from outside the country. Unfortunately, they are crossing the borders, I would say, the unsecured borders of Iraq with the neighboring countries, and they are extremists coming from some of the neighboring countries, like Saudi Arabia, Iran, some others are coming

from Syria, whatever, actually there are many of them – are coming to destabilize the country also for different sorts of goals. And there are others who are the – you know, that they call themselves the honorable resistance against the invaders. And they truly are – I mean, in any country, who would be invaded by any occupier, there should be a resistance.

So it's all actually mixed up by all those notions, and that has created the complicated situation in Iraq for people to understand what is the insurgency, and some other people do not actually understand who are the real resistant people against the occupiers. So, all that terrible mess, you know, put Iraq and Iraqi people especially under the hammer of the killing, beheading and explosions everywhere. We are blowing up in the people in the markets, in the streets, schools, churches, mosques. You know, there are different goals for that, and it has already been started by the explosion that happened in Samarra in February 2006. That was the spark for sectarianism, but it also been supported by the infiltrators and by those people that I already explained to you.

So, for all those reasons, I think the insurgency, as a term, it has a lot of meanings in Iraq and the complex situation in Iraq that are coming from the people inside and people coming from outside the country.

MS. SHARMA: I think we'll just have time for one more, but before I do, I just want to ask a question about the – what's the so called Anbar Awakening and the decision with some of the Sunni sheikhs to join with the coalition, and the lull in violence, potentially because of the positive effects of the surge.

Now, in your mind – and again, I apologize for putting you on the spot kind of politically to talk about that situation – if – to expect you to answer it – but at the same time, I mean, is that a fragile peace? Do you think that this is something that can actually take hold, and if so, should we not be working what Dr. Hakki was saying, that we have the second bite at the apple at this time, it is now time for a humanitarian surge, a diplomatic surge to take advantage of this particular moment in time, the space that we have, to really work toward a political reconciliation in Iraq?

MR. ALI: Well, the Anbar Awakening actually, it's a – well, we need Baath. We need the political process of reconciliation and we need also the – if I can say, the military strike against those who are trying to destabilize the country. Anbar Awakening is part of what I tried to do in the past, and I tried to do that in 2003 and 2004 with the U.S. officials. I personally coordinated with 20 senior tribal leaders from eight different provinces in Iraq – that was in the beginning of 2004 – to get them to meet with high officials of the U.S. Embassy, like Ambassador Jones at the time, and get them to meet with General Martin Dempsey and General Sanchez. It was also to layout the Iraqi vision of how to stabilize the country, how to play a major role to secure the country by Iraqis and in cooperation with the multinational forces.

And I think, for the Anbar Awakening, it has come too late, but it's also good that it turned out the strongholds of the insurgents in Anbar into a very secured area for Iraqis. And – but at the same time, we actually in a very great need for the interventions of the

NGOs, for the interventions of the UNHCR, for intervention of the international community to support the Iraqi people, because Iraqi – you know, Iraqi people suffering now a great suffer of – there is a lack of humanitarian services, there's a lack of public services. There's a kind of, you know – it's a kind of annihilation, that Iraqi people are talking now about killing Iraqi people or annihilating the Iraqi people.

So, we need Baath, we need political reconciliation, we need intervention of the international community and the NGOs, but we also need to push the insurgents out of the country or to push – I would rather change the term of insurgency into the killers of the Iraqi people, whoever they are.

MS. SHARMA: Michel, do you have any final comments before I – okay – (laughs). This has been, I think, a really provocative and informative discussion getting an insider view as to what is happening on the ground from someone who has lived through it, and then as well as Michel who is working very diligently with UNHCR to try to assist Iraqis, who are applying for refugee status, as well as helping them begin their new lives wherever that may be.

Please do join me in thanking Michel and Ahmed for their presentations. (Applause.) And I timed it just right as the – our staff is frantically wrapping the Saran Wrap, by taking it off of the cookies.

So we're going to take a 15-minute break for – I believe, right – 15 minutes for some – so you can get your coffee and cookies. Then we will reconvene for our second panel, which is going to try to set the – what we've discussed today thus far, taking all of it into account and setting the stage for what comes next, what are both the challenges that we will be facing and potentially working towards some solutions, so that we can address this problem in a more coordinated fashion. And that will be with Elizabeth Ferris, John Merrill, and Kristele Younes, and moderated by Mara Rudman. We do need to change out the table here, so I'll ask the speakers to come up in just a few minutes, and like I said, we've got 15 minutes for coffee and tea.

Thank you.

(END)