

Center for American Progress



SPECIAL PRESENTATION

“IRAQ'S DISPLACEMENT CRISIS AND THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE”

THE CURRENT CRISIS AND RESPONSES THUS FAR

INTRODUCTION BY:

**HELGA FLORES TREJO, DIRECTOR, HEINRICH BOELL
FOUNDATION, NORTH AMERICA**

JOHN PODESTA, PRESIDENT, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS

KEYNOTE REMARKS:

**EARL BLUMENAUER, CONGRESSMAN, U.S. HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVE (D-OR)**

MODERATED BY:

ANITA SHARMA, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS

FEATURED PANELISTS:

**REINHOLD BRENDER, COUNSELOR, POLITICAL SECTION, EUROPEAN
COMMISSION DELEGATION TO THE UNITED STATES**

BILL FRELICK, REFUGEE POLICY DIRECTOR, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

SAID HAKKI, PRESIDENT, IRAQI RED CRESCENT SOCIETY

**VICTOR TANNER, ADJUNCT FACULTY MEMBER, NITZE SCHOOL OF
ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
AND CONSULTANT FOR THE INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE**

9:00 AM – 11:30 AM

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2007

TRANSCRIPT PROVIDED BY

DC TRANSCRIPTION & MEDIA REPURPOSING

MR. JOHN PODESTA: Good morning, everyone. I'm John Podesta. I'm the president of the Center for American Progress. I'm usually standing here complaining about global warming, but I want to welcome you all here this morning on the coldest day so far of the year in Washington and getting through the slick and the ice, so thank you for coming here. It's an important conference. We began with an off the record dinner last night, but this conference is on "Iraqis' Displacement Crisis and the International Response."

We have terrific panels and a terrific lead-off keynoter, Congressman Earl Blumenauer who I'm going to introduce in a second. But first I want to say that – and acknowledge our partner in this, that is, the Heinrich Boell Foundation and Helga Flores Trejo who's sitting in the front, and I'm going to introduce her after Earl speaks, but they've been tremendous partners not only on this but on other work that we've done on energy and climate change and other things. The work that they do in promoting democracy and civil society and human rights is critical, particularly in our current political climate, so I'm glad that we were able to partner on this conference.

The international and external – I'm sorry – the internal and external displacement of Iraqi people is one of the world's great humanitarian crises. The numbers really are quite staggering. Up to two million refugees living in neighboring countries, another two million internally displaced, and yet there's been little success in formulating a coherent policy strategy for this issue, either for the people who are beginning to return home to Iraq or for those who are not yet ready to do so. The United States has had a major hand in creating the conditions of these displaced Iraqis, and as such, I think face a profound moral and strategic call to play a central role in ameliorating the conditions of these refugees.

But as we'll discuss today, the magnitude of this crisis is too large for any one country to deal with alone. By taking bold action first here by the United States, we would acknowledge I think our responsibility and role in the conflict, but I think we would also inspire other countries to follow our example and open their doors. This will be a key step in ensuring that we can have both regional security and begin to rebuild the good will in the Middle East, as well as dealing with a very real humanitarian crisis that exists today. Failure to act will heighten the pressure cooker environment and cast doubt over the reconciliation process in Iraq.

Today we'll explore the unique challenges posed by this crisis and discuss possible solutions. We'll talk about increasing humanitarian aid, resettling Iraqis and supporting Iraq's neighbors struggling to absorb the refugee influx. We'll also discuss the current situation, and in particular the security situation in Iraq. We celebrate the fact that things have improved, particularly in Baghdad, so that people can begin to be thinking about returning home, but we have to also imagine what awaits them when they go back. Just this week we saw the Iraqi government discourage people from returning

home. That's I think a sad reminder of the lack of progress on this refugee issue in particular.

The status quo is untenable and dangerous, but the good news is that the momentum for reform is mounting. A growing group of advocacy, humanitarian and religious groups are calling attention to this crisis. A bipartisan coalition is coming together in Congress to force action. One of the key congressional leaders on that issue is here with us this morning, Representative Earl Blumenauer who represents the third district in Oregon. Congressman Blumenauer has been a progressive leader for establishing a foreign policy that we can all be proud of here in America. He had the wisdom I think to oppose the Iraq war from the start, and at the beginning of this year, he introduced his own plan for a military redeployment from Iraq. The congressman also recently supported key legislation that would increase the time that troops spend at home between deployments and also ban permanent U.S. bases in Iraq, a call that seems that much more insightful given the recent announcements from the White House with regard to negotiations over a status of forces agreement.

Last May, along with his colleagues Jan Schakowsky and Chris Shays, Congressman Blumenauer introduced the Responsibility to Iraqi Refugees Act of 2007 to help address this growing humanitarian crisis. His bill seeks to establish a special visa program to allow 15,000 Iraqis whose lives are threatened due to their assistance of American and international organizations to come to the United States. The bill would also pave the way for an additional 20,000 particularly vulnerable Iraqis to resettle here in the U.S. as refugees and as provisions for people who might otherwise currently be barred entry because under duress they provided ransom payments or other goods to armed groups in Iraq. The bill also authorizes a long overdue study to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of programs intended to protect and assist Iraqi refugees. Coupled with the Senate's Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act, this bill would be a tremendous step forward and real progress.

It's an honor to introduce Congressman Earl Blumenauer. He's a friend of mine, a friend of the Center, so please join me in welcoming Congressman Earl Blumenauer. (Applause.)

REP. EARL BLUMENAUER (D-OR): Thank you, John. This is the first time I have had a chance publicly to thank you for the work that the Center is doing. I first came to Washington immediately after the government shut down in sort of a slightly hyper partisan atmosphere, and I have found in recent years that the contribution that you and your colleagues have done in terms of having real time response dealing in a non-ideological progressive bent but trying to focus on the issues of the day and a broad cross-section of things that we face in Congress. I don't think you fully understand how a much of a difference it makes to those of us who are trying to deal with the wide cross-section, and I think today's conference is an example of the broad ranging issues and the opportunities where people who are focusing on critical issues can find wide range of areas for agreement that can make a difference not just for the Iraqi refugee crisis, but I think it will hold the seeds for broader understanding and progress in the Middle East and in foreign policy.

I think the Iraqi refugee crisis is a perfect example of the issues that you work on. I am someone who, as you mentioned, opposed the Iraqi war from the outset, but my concerns for the refugee crisis are not based on my opposition to the war, but a sense of what we need to do in terms of our stewardship in the Middle East, the consequences of our act, and I have felt from the outset that this was an opportunity for us if we got the issues that relate to the Iraqi refugee crisis properly, it would help guide a broader range of solutions for stability in that region.

As John mentioned, we have over four million Iraqis who have fled their homes, and perhaps half have left the country. Everyone, regardless of their position on the war, should in fact be concerned about this, concerned that the United States has failed to step up to do its part welcoming refugees when we should and providing for their well being wherever they are in the world. It's particularly troubling when we deal with the case of people who are at special risk because they cooperated with the United States, because they believed in us and helped us, guides, interpreters, support personnel.

I see the various faces of this tragedy when I met with the spiritual leader of the Mandaean community of Iraq, one of the ancient peoples of the Middle East who are literally at risk of having two millennia of history wiped out and their culture destroyed. The face of the crisis is the young Iraqi woman having fled ethnic cleansing in Baghdad with her family for the relative safety of Syria forced into prostitution as the only means of helping to support her family.

At the core is a mismatch between the scope of the problem and the limited resources that the United States to this point has seen fit in addressing it. After we won the war and the situation became worse on the ground, we stood back and witnessed the fastest growing humanitarian crisis in the world, and yet we failed to deal with it. When we think about what the United States' response was for 2005 and 2006 in terms of the refugees that we allowed into the United States, the numbers are miniscule: 198 in 2005, 202 I think it was in 2006, and almost entirely people who were reunited with families who were refugees in 1991.

In the last fiscal year, the administration promised first 25,000, and that was about what the – that was the number that the prime minister of Sweden told me that Sweden would deal with in the year 2007, and then it was scaled down to 7,000, and we were only able to admit 1,800 Iraqis, and even this reflected a last-minute rush after we only admitted 69 through April of 2007. We're looking at another \$200 billion request in war funding from the president, but it includes a mere \$250 million assistance for refugees and the countries who are hosting them, and these numbers aren't the full metric of progress or effort, but they hint at how little we are doing.

Make no mistake. There are those who have real problems in the bureaucracy dealing with budgets. They are concerned that there will be a shift out of other categories and increased assistance for Iraqi refugees will be to the detriment of our other humanitarian efforts around the world, but that is a false argument for the policymakers and the administration. Our investment in refugees is literally rounding error in the huge

sums that have been invested that now can barely be accounted for. And the Center has done some good work in exploring the lack of accountability, frankly, in the vast sums that have been expended to this point. This is all about will; it's not about wallet. It is about whether the United States administration and Congress will step up and do the right thing.

At times, I must confess I've been more than a little frustrated, but I get inspired by what happens with people out in the real world who have stepped up to try and deal with the crisis, heroes from the military, young people that I've encountered who are working on their own way to make a difference. I got involved with this issue initially starting to work with a group of high school students in Portland, Oregon, Lincoln High School, who were working with some returning U.S. Guard personnel in Oregon who were fighting to bring their interpreter back, and it was eye-opening for me to look at the problems and the hurdles and frankly, having to respond to the question of these young teenagers about why is it this hard, where is the responsibility, what is going on, and that inspired working in our office on the legislation.

I'm pleased that my colleague Juda Arieo (ph) is here. Many of you know Juda who has really put heart and soul into this. But we're responding in large measure – there's all this Oregon connection that we have and you'll see more of them. I could go on at some length about a young Lieutenant Joe Coon (ph) who was another one who just latched on to his interpreter and followed via cell phone communication the progress of trying to make a difference for him. Amanda Templeton (ph), who spent some time from Portland working on a "60 Minutes" story on the crisis and returned to the United States to basically become a full-time advocate. It has the potential for individuals to really rise to unprecedented levels. Kirk Johnson is one of my heroes. A former USAID employee who's now returned, started to document the refugees who were facing death threats, trying to help resettle them. To date, he's got over 600 people, Kirk's got over 600 people on his list, and I think there are less than 10 that have actually been resettled.

The list of heroes goes on and on. You're going to hear about and from more of them today. But as John referenced, we've introduced the Responsibility to Iraqi Refugee Act which was the first legislation and the most comprehensive legislation to deal with a framework for addressing this crisis. I'm pleased that it had as the primary Republican cosponsor, my friend Chris Shays and an illustration that we don't have to get bogged down on this in terms of our orientation to the war itself because Chris and I could not disagree more about the war in Iraq, but he understood in part because he's been to Iraq, I think more than any member of Congress, the special responsibility, and I deeply appreciate his co-sponsorship and his commitment to this issue.

And I do salute Senator Kennedy who's introduced legislation. It's a little narrower than ours, but I'm hopeful that under the magic of the Senate rules, that something will happen. Certainly that magic of Senate rules enabled them to make an amendment to defense authorization, and hopefully we're going to see something yet this week. That amendment created priority categories for the most vulnerable Iraqis, expanded what has been this miniscule program because of their involvement for Iraqis at risk, because of their involvement in the United States, establishes a way for Iraqis to

apply for resettlement in Iraq and puts people in charge of dealing with the crisis. As I say, I hope that it will be passed this afternoon. This should be something that's signed by the president. It's an important first step for thousands of people, but without a major commitment, it's going to largely be symbolic still. Under the best of circumstances, it's just the beginning.

I am inspired – and Julia Taft is here and can make reference to how the United States has stepped up in the past on an order of magnitude that is many times what we're talking about here, and that's the sort of vision that I think we need to have in terms of responsibility, a “can do” attitude, both from an administration and people within the bureaucracy. We need to expand the limits for refugee admissions to the levels, frankly, that approached what we managed to do after Vietnam. Unfortunately, we still are not admitting even the number of refugees that the president could already authorize.

There is lot of work to do with the Iraqi government, and John again referenced sort of these signals that have been given this week in terms of the inability to welcome people back to their home. I am very interested in being able to take some of the specific elements in our legislation like getting Iraqis out of this Catch 22 situation where if they paid a ransom to be able to free a kinsman, that somehow that is going to be held against them for providing material support to terrorists. We need to get real about the circumstances in this region in no small measure that we helped foster and we need to make our policies one that correlate to the real world situation.

We need to strengthen the policy and program coordination role. I still want to have a senior coordinator or a minister, counselor at the highest political level to be given the authority to coordinate with the different agencies and cut through the bureaucratic red tape. That is still lacking, and that was key to past success it seems to me. And then after, hopefully, after legislation passes, we need to ensure that in-country processing in Iraq and other countries is actually available on the scale that is necessary. I continue to believe that with the largest embassy on the planet in the history of the world, we ought to be able to do more in Baghdad in a secure and efficient manner, one would think.

We ought to be regularly reexamining our priorities for assistance in resettlement to make sure we're focusing on the areas of greatest vulnerability. I plan on asking the GAO, the Government Accountability Office, for an independent assessment of the adequacy and effectiveness of the programs that we've established to protect and assist Iraqi refugees and to make recommendations on improving them. And perhaps most important, we need to – after we establish the framework, we all need to make a commitment on a significant appropriation so that we have the money for admitting Iraqis and helping them in the region, that this money actually materializes. It's the money ultimately at the end of the day that's going to be the true test of our commitment. I think this is also important not just for these thousands of refugees, but I think much of this debate is a proxy for the real action that's needed on a much wider range of issues.

Now, I must confess that I am disappointed that there has been less bipartisan support for this legislation despite Chris, my fellow Oregonian Senator Gordon Smith has cosponsored the Kennedy legislation in the amendment, but it hasn't gone very far and

hasn't spread very fast. I am frustrated in ways that I can't express that this has not found its way into the political dialogue in 2007. We have had 950 debates for presidential candidates, both Republicans and Democrats alike, and neither party has been able to acknowledge the responsibility and talk meaningfully about this. And frankly, this is one of the few areas where I would criticize our friends in the media. The media in the main has been terrific on this. We have seen great expressions of support on the news columns, on the editorial pages, but I would hope that the media, particularly the debates that they are sponsoring, could inject this. It wouldn't take much in Iowa or New Hampshire to be able to avoid the effort – we're in danger of this being the first content-free – (laughter) – presidential campaign in history, and I'm hoping that the media will help correct that.

But this is part of a larger vision of what we need to do in the Middle East to achieve stability. If we get this right in terms of understanding the unique stresses that have been placed on the people in Jordan, for example, with the flood of refugees, if we understand how we are able to link with people in other parts of the world, Europe, if we're able to strike new bargains to deal with the refugees, I think this has ultimately the seeds for what will be a stable exit policy for the United States from Iraq. I think the stakes are very high beyond just the refugees themselves.

I find it somewhat ironic that people in the administration argue against a more rapid phase-out of our involvement because it will precipitate a humanitarian crisis and massive outflows of refugees while ignoring what has already happened. Well, as I say, I think this is the ultimate solution we're going to have. I hope it's an area where our moral responsibility to these unfortunate people could be used to bring together those of disparate viewpoints in a cooperative effort that might serve as a template for how we solve greater problems associated with this war and how to avoid the next one.

One of the burdens of those who would be world leaders and the responsibility of those who make war is to deal with the consequences of their decisions. The innocent victims of war and civil strife are too often the invisible and forgotten casualties. I live for the day when we can avoid this abdication of our leadership by uniting in our responsibility to Iraqi refugees wherever they may be.

John, I appreciate the opportunity to visit here today, and really appreciate more than I can express what this conference represents. We need all the help we can get, and looking around the room, I know there's lots of firepower here that's going to make a difference on Capitol Hill. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. PODESTA: The congressman needs to get back up to the Hill, but he's got time for one or two questions if people in the audience – and we've got one right there.

Q: Good morning. Margaret Besheer, Voice of America Radio. Mr. Blumenauer, the State Department says that they haven't – that they were sort of I guess caught unawares and that they weren't ready for the refugees coming out of Iraq, and they say it really started after 2006, after the Samarra bombing. Do you think that's sort of an excuse? Shouldn't have they been prepared for this? People were displaced within

the country. Isn't the next step – logical step they're going to leave the country? And what's your opinion on them coming late to the table and accommodating the refugees?

REP. BLUMENAUER: Your question almost answers itself. This is not something that was unforeseen or unpredictable. There were growing concerns from the outset of what this meant. Within months after the victory, the seeds were starting to be sown. This isn't something that just happened in 2006 or 2007, but what if it was? What if nothing happened until 2005? How much do we have to go through before we get this right? We have expended hundreds of billions of dollars, we're now into the fifth year of this operation, and we've had this refugee crisis just exploding over the course of the last two years. There ought to have been a sense of urgency. And to this point I'm trying to look forward. There are not more excuses. It's not a lack of resources when we are asking for another couple hundred billion dollars. When we see the work that is being done, as I mentioned by high school students, by returning Guard personnel, by former U.S. civilian employees who take it upon themselves to try and track, to try and facilitate, to try and be advocates, it's a long time past the time where there are excuses. There just is no longer any excuse for our not rising up and doing – matching what Sweden had done as an example.

MR. PODESTA: One more.

Q: Alan (sp) Nichols (ph), *Washington (unintelligible) – magazine*. Could you give us a better sense of the politics of this issue? Congress has the lowest approval rating in history and they're not seemingly doing anything. So why can't they address this issue?

REP. BLUMENAUER: The politics of this issue are I guess a little more complex than I would have liked. Part of it is it touches on notions of immigration which is sensitive in the extreme. This immigration appears to be the one issue that the Republican candidates for president can coalesce around in terms of how extreme we're going to be, and frankly, it's making Democrats apprehensive in terms of the collateral political attacks they're going to see. Part of it is tied up with terrorism. People who don't think it through are liable to fall victim to the argument that we can't move very quickly here because we might be bringing terrorists in this country. I find that particularly ironic because a number of the people that we are most concerned about at the highest level are people that we've relied upon to accurately translate for our soldiers. These are people that we've relied upon to guide us through areas in Iraq. We've put the lives of American military and civilian personnel in that hands of some of these people, and now we're not going to let them into the United States because of concerns about terrorism?

Part of it, frankly, is that if were to acknowledge the scale of this crisis, it would be hard to at the same time acknowledge the failure of planning, the failure of implementation, misplaced priorities. It sort of chips away at the rational for the undertaking from the outset and the rational for staying the course. And it is the international equivalent of a Katrina moment. And I think so there are some people who are apprehensive about moving forward because you have to acknowledge the scale of

the problem, but I do think, candidly, that the flip side of this can be true. This is something that people who fervently believe in what we did in Iraq, they ought to be the first to try and make sure that these people are safe, whether they're internally displaced or they are refugees.

This ought to be something where we're not denying facts on the ground, where we are using this challenge to make sure that we get some performance out of the Iraqi government that we've invested so much to create. This ought to be the test of what we have done and what we are doing, but because it touches on terrorism, immigration and the rationale and effectiveness of what we've done, it's tied into a more complex political equation. But I will say that it goes beyond the Iraqi and immigration politics because we historically have done a terrible job dealing with populations far away who are in crisis. We have one unfolding in the Darfur right now where by no stretch of imagination have we done everything that we could do. It's a continuing failure of the United States but other developed countries to be able to do what we should be doing in a humanitarian context.

I could give my "water for the poor" speech where – it's another example where we could make a lot of progress with not too much effort and it just doesn't get on the priority level. But I don't mean to conclude on a negative note because I am actually more optimistic than I've been. I see this progress in the Senate. I see the energy here. The impact that we're getting on the ground makes me think that this is something that we might get right and it's going to lead to some really good things as a result.

MR. PODESTA: Well, I just want to say that Congressman Earl Blumenauer is a great leader on a range of issues, and we've worked together on a lot of things from development of the resources of this country to foreign policy, but I really want to thank him for his moral clarity here this morning. You've just been terrific and it's a great way to start this conference. So please join me in thanking Earl Blumenauer. (Applause.)

Now, I'd like to introduce Helga Flores Trejo. Helga has been the executive director of the Heinrich Boell Foundation in North America since 2003. As head of the Boell Foundation's North American operations in Washington she focuses her work on global challenges confronting the United States and Europe, primarily regarding energy and climate change, engagement with China and Russia and confronting fundamentalism in the Middle East. She's also an expert on German and U.S. foreign policy, EU affairs, the Balkans and immigration issues. Prior to leading the foundation, Ms. Flores Trejo worked in the Balkans as senior adviser for the Parliamentary Support program of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's mission in Belgrade. There she directed a program to install parliamentary control and oversight of the military and security services in the region. She's also served for the state government of Hamburg in various capacities. Please join me in welcoming Ms. Flores Trejo. (Applause.)

MS. HELGA FLORES TREJO: Thank you so much. And it's really inspiring to have received – to have heard this wake-up call and call for action from Congressman Blumenauer. I really appreciate. I'd like to welcome you also on behalf of the Heinrich Boell Foundation to the conference. For those of you not familiar with our foundation,

we are a foundation and a think tank headquartered in Berlin in Germany but working internationally through our 24 offices worldwide promoting democracy. So we as a European organization would really welcome the opportunity to partner now with the Center for American Progress on this issue.

I strongly believe that the European nations cannot stay uninvolved when it comes to dealing with the consequences of the war in Iraq. The reality is that the fallout of Iraq will affect not only the region but Europe as well. And, of course, an unstable Iraq would be counterproductive to European interests of a secure Middle East, and this is obvious. So sooner or later, European nations will need to start dealing with the fact that the U.S. will reduce its presence in the Middle East, and we need to start preparing for the consequences.

One, of course, of the most immediate and visible fallouts of conflicts in general is displacement and refugees, and in the case of Iraq, we've heard about the staggering numbers. It is just amazing to think that this is the largest refugee and displacement crisis since the Palestinians in '48. So the flow has been taken and shouldered mostly by the region and very few have come to Europe and the U.S. Very few of those who are fleeing sectarian violence have been received in Europe and the U.S. And Congressman Blumenauer mentioned Sweden, and this is really an example that we need to hear about because they have been the ones in Europe who have shouldered the most. Just as numbers between January and August of this year they took on 12,000 refugees, and they expect by their own numbers to by the end of the year have taken 20,000 refugees from Iraq.

So as you can see, there's also room for improvement in Europe, but I do see also some changes in Europe into looking at the issue and starting to act upon what's needed. The task ahead of us is really to organize an international response to this challenge, and the question for the West is what needs to be done and who needs to do it? And we need to start now. So what are the responsibilities that Syria and Jordan and other neighboring countries have vis-à-vis the refugees, what's the support they need and that we need to provide and who will provide this, how best to coordinate these international efforts between international organizations, NGOs, individuals as was mentioned here, the European Union and the U.S. altogether.

So what are the challenges we face and how best to tackle them, all these are questions, and we have – many of those are very difficult questions too, and so far we have few answers. So I really think the Center for American Progress, especially Anita Sharma who has been moving this issue ahead and John Podesta for really taking on this, on our side Adam Hunter who has been working with them, especially for convening this group of people, everybody that is involved in this, because I'm sure that out of here we can take some ideas and take this wake-up call that we received a little bit further and to a call for action. So with that, I would like to ask our panelists for the first panel to join me, and I'll pass the word to Anita Sharma who will facilitate the next panel. Thank you so much. (Applause.)

MS. ANITA SHARMA: Thank you, Helga, for that very kind introduction and to John Podesta at the Center for American Progress for enabling us and encouraging us to have a conference of this ilk here at the Center. I just want to go through a couple of housekeeping issues first. You might hear a bit of kind of beeping sound, and what that is, is anytime anyone gets a transmission on their Blackberry it interferes with our systems, so I know it might be difficult to turn that off, but if you wouldn't mind doing so, I'd appreciate it and also obviously turning off your cell phones and keeping that on silent.

We have some breakfast over there to my right and the bathrooms are to my left, so feel free to take leave if you need to do so. We have a bit of an early lunch. Around 11:30 we'll take a break and at that time you'll be able to get your lunch, and we'll reconvene with a conversation with UNHCR Michel Gabaudan, as well as Ahmed Ali who is an Iraqi translator who has recently resettled into the U.S., and I think that will be great and intimate discussion, and then we'll reconvene for our second and final panel.

As Helga and John have indicated, what we had wanted to do with this conference is help to move the agenda forward on the Iraq displacement crisis. I won't go into the details because I think this is a knowledgeable audience and a very informed audience. We all know the scope of the problem, but I am hoping that we will be able to move the agenda forward.

When I first conceived of this conference with the Heinrich Boell Foundation a few months ago, there was really only a few organizations, many of whom are represented here, who were thinking about and advocating on this issue the congressional pieces of legislation that we've discussed. They were languishing in committee, and none of the benchmarks that were mandated by Congress looked at the humanitarian issue. And so it was myself and my colleague Brian Katulis, who is actually in Pakistan right now, we started the process ourselves here at CAP by writing an op-ed asking why the benchmarks didn't consider the humanitarian situation.

Now, things on the ground have shifted somewhat. A few months ago, the situation seemed to be spiraling out of control with thousands of Iraqis leaving their homes each day, and obviously as Helga had said, the neighboring countries shouldering much of the burden and NGOs and UN agencies were struggling to meet the ever increasing demands. Part of the advocacy efforts in this country resulted in the naming of Ambassador James Foley as the coordinator for Iraq refugees and the increase in humanitarian assistance to neighboring countries and also the efforts to speed up the processing for resettlement into this country. I don't want to go too much into detail because the congressman has already mentioned this and Ambassador Foley, actually we had the opportunity to discuss the issues with him yesterday at a small dinner that we hosted. And so I just make mention of it to draw attention to the fact that it's really with that sustained pressure on this government that further assistance will be possible.

When I first started thinking through this issue, I was working on another campaign called the ENOUGH project which was created by the Center for American Progress and the International Crisis Group to examine cases primarily in Africa, in

Darfur, Northern Uganda and Eastern Congo to address cases of mass atrocities and hopefully develop a framework to prevent genocide wherever and whenever it occurred, and I wondered, especially after the Samarra bombing in 2006, when massive numbers of displacement had started to come to our attention, why Americans weren't more engaged in this subject. And it's kind of difficult for me to discuss it in the sense that I'm not suggesting that one can only care about one humanitarian crisis versus the other. I think as Americans, as human beings, we have the capacity to care about humanitarian issues wherever they occur. And I'm not suggesting that we create a save Iraq coalition, but thinking through the reasons why there hasn't been a more massive outcry in this country, why there hasn't been more bipartisan support to this issue and definitely the Iraq debate has been so polarized that people either support the troops remaining in the country or they are pushing for their withdrawal, and I'm hoping, as the congressman was saying, that this debate can be shifted and this is something that we can get behind, and I am very hopeful for that.

As I mentioned, things on the ground have shifted and new developments suggest that there is a lull in violence in Iraq and that has encouraged some Iraqis to return to their homes, mainly to Baghdad; but however, as we'll hear, it's necessary to understand the factors for why people are returning home, what has led them to make this decision: Is it a lack of resources? Is it work restrictions that have left many Iraqis impoverished and eager for any chance to improve their lot? And at the same time, we also need to discuss that if people are returning, what we should be planning to assist with their returns. Even if safety is not guaranteed, we have to recognize that Iraqis are returning on their accord and support them to the best extent possible. We have some people in the room and I think others are coming who are actually working to do that. One of my colleagues is just on his way back from USAID where they – he's with USAID, just came back from Jordan where they had a retreat specifically to address this and working with partners in the Iraqi government and with NGOs to address this issue.

So as I was saying, we've assembled a great day of speakers here today. I won't go too much into their bios, you have that in front of you, but I will talk about them for a minute. I also will at some point during the day ask Julia Taft to come up to discuss the situation and her experiences. You may be familiar with Julia's work and op-ed that she wrote this summer. Julia was responsible during General Ford's administration for helping with the Indochina refugee crisis, and it was something in the span of about six months or so that she helped the processing of more than 130,000 Vietnamese refugees and helping them to come to this country. So it is my hope that we're able to use the experiences of Julia's and of others to think through what needs to happen next.

So we can get started with the first panel. I'll just – like I said, just give a brief introduction of their – adding a little bit to their bios and then what I'm hoping that we can do is have a discussion with you all with the panelists and really get kind of a good, provocative discussion going.

So to my right is Vic Tanner. Now, Vic and I first met in 2003 when I was preparing to go to Iraq but however, his knowledge of Iraq stems much farther beyond that back even a decade before. Vic worked with Fred Cuny and Jay Garner, and Jay

Garner was the first retired lieutenant general who was appointed by President Bush to oversee Iraq's reconstruction. I've asked Vic to give us the context of the situation so we understand that displacement in Iraq is not a new subject, that over the past 30 years the government relied on a policy of deliberate expulsion of people from their homes in order to punish and subdue recalcitrant populations, in some cases moving the Kurds and the Shiites, a policy of Arabization in the North, desecration of the marshlands, et cetera. And so prior to 2003, prior to the current Iraq war, some one million people had already been displaced from their homes in Iraq, and Vic has authored a book called the "Internally Displaced People of Iraq" which was published by Brookings and is most recent – report, sorry – and is most recently focused on the sectarian violence in Iraq and how radical groups are driving internal displacement in Iraq and the patterns of displacement outside the country, particularly in Syria.

And following Vic is Said Hakki who is the president of the Iraq Red Crescent Society. And I think few other people can give us such a full picture of what is actually happening inside Iraq and the challenges of the internally displaced and the potential opportunities to assist their needs. Running what Dr. Hakki calls a shoestring operation, the Iraqi Red Crescent has more than 100,000 volunteers all over the Iraq in about 300 offices. They've had their own setbacks as well: 14 of its staff and volunteers have been killed, 45 have been abducted, and I think it's about 12 people who still remain unaccounted for. The Red Crescent has remained operational throughout. It's a Red Cross affiliated nonsectarian humanitarian and health organization that's providing relief and refuge to the refugees and IDPs and is, as I said, working throughout the entire of Iraq. Dr. Hakki is a citizen of both the United States and Iraq. And I had the opportunity to meet his sister, Zakia Hakki. She's Iraq's first female judge, and she returned back to Iraq to be elected to Iraq's parliament and serve as an adviser to the minister of justice. So this family definitely cares very deeply about the future of Iraq.

Now, I've asked Dr. Hakki to comment both in terms of the situation internally, as well as the report that was released earlier this week saying that refugees mainly from Syria upwards of about 25,000 to 30,000 of them had left Syria and are returning to Iraq and what that means for the returns.

And then on to Bill Frelick. And many of you are well aware of Bill's extensive career in support of displaced persons. He's been an advocate for their rights and humanitarian needs for more than two decades, most recently as the director for Human Rights Watch, the Refugee Policy program. Bill is just off the plane, arrived yesterday from Lebanon where the Human Rights Watch just released a report called – study called "Rot Here or Die There: Bleak Choices for Iraqi Refugees in Lebanon," and there are copies in the back of the room. This report documents the Lebanese's government failure to provide for legal status for Iraq refugees in Lebanon and details the impact of this policy on the refugees, on their lives. Now, I've given him the task of discussing the responses of regional governments, as well as potentially the impacts with the developments with the United States, should he wish to take on this issue as well.

And then last but not least is Reinhold Brender who's the counsel for the political section at the European Commission delegation to the United States. As Helga was

saying, we too often think of this as only an American problem or a regional issue and then after that consider the impacts that it is having potentially on Europe, as well as when we consider the generosity of the Swedish government or the Danish decision to airlift all of their support staff back to Denmark with them. And I wanted to give Reinhold an opportunity to discuss the work of the European Commission, especially the efforts within Europe right now to develop a coherent asylum policy, a refugee policy. And Reinhold will help us better understand the commission's programs and both their efforts currently and their plans to address the refugee situation threatening Iraq and the neighboring countries.

So with that, I will turn it to Vic. And again, I just want to thank everyone for coming and braving the elements outside. So thank you. Vic.

MR. VICTOR TANNER: Thank you. Where do you want me? Here? There?

MS. SHARMA: Either way, but here is probably –

MR. TANNER: Okay. Well, good morning, everyone. Thank you for coming. And thank you to the Center for American Progress and the Heinrich Boell Foundation for hosting this. I think for those of us who have followed the Iraqi displacement problem both internal and refugee, it's nice, it's heartening to see it take sort of a more mainstream center stage, and I guess this is a mainstream center stage if ever there was one. So I'm glad to be here.

As was said, I am going to look quickly at the historical context of displacement in Iraq and that basically means going back to the 35 years of Saddam Hussein's rule, of Baathi rule in Iraq. And I will talk for a few minutes about that and try to refresh our memories on what displacement was under the Baath and then look at some points of comparison with the current crisis, and try to be done within eight to 10 minutes if I may.

First of all, the historical context. Under the Baath, expulsion, the forcible removal, the expulsion of civilian populations was state policy. It was a way to punish and subdue, as Anita said, populations, groups of people who were seen as enemies of the state. It was a way to neutralize political opposition. It was part of the war against Iran. And it was also a way of securing economic gains, and I'm particularly thinking of the draining of the marshes in the south.

And the second thing I'd like to say about displacement under Baath is that the full might of the state was brought to bear in policies of displacement. First of all the full military might including with armor and artillery and indeed with non-conventional weapons in Northern Iraq, in Kurdistan, in Iraqi Kurdistan, bureaucratic measures, ways of forcing people to leave, and that was very much done around Kirkuk in the attempt to Arabize, the attempt by the Baghdad regime, by the Baathi regime in Baghdad to Arabize Kirkuk and the oil that lies under the Kirkuk region. It was also done through large economic development projects and again, I'm thinking of the draining of the marshes, which one can really see as certainly violent displacement but in a way as a violent form of development-induced displacement.

And thirdly, I'd just like to look at some of the numbers. They're not as staggering as the numbers in the current crisis, but they're quite remarkable all the same. In terms of internal displacement in the North, we probably had by the turn of the century, of the new millennium about 800,000 internally displaced people, of which maybe 375,000 Kurds who had been expelled in the campaigns of the '70s and the early '80s, about 225,000 Kurds who were expelled during the Anfal campaign of 1988 which was sort of a ratcheting up of earlier campaigns. I might add, and I think this is important to note, probably about 75,000 Kurds who were displaced during internecine fighting in '84 and '96 between the KDP and the PUK, between the two Kurdish parties in the North.

In the South, probably at least 300,000 displaced – and there are very few numbers, and maybe something to just worth talking a little bit about further on, there is few numbers. The only numbers that we were able to come across in some of the research that I did with John Fawcett for the Brookings Institution, were numbers that U.S. Committee for Refugee – thank you – and Bill Frelick in particular were really the only people who tried systematically in the course of the '90s to track and document a otherwise invisible displaced population in the South of Iraq and there we had perhaps 170,000 marsh Arabs who were displaced, probably upwards of 100,000 people who were displaced during the Iran-Iraq war within Iraqi borders, and other groups, and finally we had anywhere between – probably about a half million refugees, most of them in Iran, both Kurds and Shi'a Arabs from the South. Although there are some references in a document that again USCR picked up five, six, seven years ago, an Iraqi government document that said perhaps up to 1.5 million people were refugees, but the refugee caseload was essentially about half a million in Iran. So it all adds up to what? About over a million internally displaced and a half million externally displaced refugees.

This may not seem as much compared to the current crisis, but if you think that at the time, Iraq was in the hands of a regime that controlled most of its territory, that certainly controlled much of the territory where that displacement had taken place, that it was a politically confident and strong regime, unlike the current government I would argue in Iraq, those are very high numbers of both internal displacement and refugee caseloads. Those are very high numbers, 1.5 million, 1.6 million.

The last point I'd like to make on the historical context is that it was mostly seen as a sectarian problem. It was seen a Shi'a problem in the South. It was seen as a Kurdish problem in the North. It was seen – as various minorities were expelled, it was seen as a problem pertaining to those minorities, when it wasn't. It was a Saddam problem. It was a problem with the policies of the Iraqi state and the policies of the Ba'ath regime. And this is something I think is important to remember when we look at the current crisis.

So let's take a few minutes to make a few points on how these two crises compare. First of all, going back to this issue of sectarian versus political, I think – I believe, I firmly believe, in fact, I ardently believe, that now, as then, displacement is led by political leaders and by political calculations. There comes a time when the violence

goes on when a certain amount of sectarianism or factionalism or indeed popular sentiment bleeds into what's going on and it acquires – the dynamic sort of acquires a force of its own, but originally and overwhelmingly, it remains a political problem. The displacement of Iraqis, internal and refugees is a political problem.

The second point is that because we had an old refugee and IDP crisis we have essentially waves of vulnerability, and ultimately perhaps waves of radicalization or unhappiness or embitterment. I don't want to call it radicalization because it immediately points us sort of down the terrorism line and that's not what I'm talking about. I'm just talking about people who are angry and embittered and therefore ordinary participants in the political processes that go on around them. And I think of, for instance, the people who came back as refugees from Iran, Iraqis who had been refugees in Iran who came back to Southern Iraq and who immediately, because they didn't have networks and connections in Basra and around there, were amongst the first internally displaced in 2005 and 2006, so the two problems build on each other if you will.

A mitigating – and that's my third point here, a mitigating effect there is that many of these people in the current crisis have not been displaced for very long. Now, a year or two years can seem like a long time but we're not talking yet about five, 10, 20-year displacement. So there is still time for people to go home, for people to resume, for old patterns to resume. Now, sort of on an aside there that might not be the case for certain minorities. I'm particularly thinking of the Christian minority or the Mandaean-Sabean minorities that Congressman Blumenauer mentioned, who after speaking to them in places like Jordan and Syria and indeed inside Iraq, see their future in the new Iraq as very tenuous so there might be some of these displaced people who may not go home.

A fourth point in the second part of my presentation is that – and this is something that we mentioned before the war in this report we did for Brookings is that the way the new government of Iraq deals with both the displaced and indeed the returning refugees is a barometer, is a very important indicator of their commitment to a pluralistic and democratic Iraq. And these may sound like far-fetched objectives at this point in the Iraqi history, but I believe and I hope that that's what we're trending to in the long term, just the question becomes how long is that term, of course. But again, figuring out how committed national authorities and government level authorities are to a certain principles that we hope to see them enact. An important indicator will be how they treat displaced and returning refugees.

A last point is that one of the things – last point of comparison between the Baathi displacement and the current crisis is silence. In the '70s, '80s and '90s, there was – some groups spoke out about what was going on in Kurdistan, in Iraqi Kurdistan, Northern Iraq, particularly after material became available following 1991, the establishment of the safe haven and the fact that outsiders could go in and basically do forensic work, but in the South it was silence. Again, apart from USCR and a couple of other specialized groups, no access meant nothing, meant we did not know about it, it means that we in the West did not follow it. And the UN I think failed quite abjectly because it did know what was going on, and despite the efforts of certain high ranking UN officials inside Iraq to try and promote – or promote – to advocate for the displaced

Shi'a in the South, the UN never picked up on this as a wider body. What we have now is an end I think to – or hopefully an end to the silence regarding the current crisis.

And following on what Congressman Blumenauer says, if we can get this current crisis injected into the current political dialogue, then that silence ends, and that is the beginning of trying to address this problem with political solutions, because with all respect for the humanitarian efforts and indeed for the resettlement efforts, if we're looking at the four million plus Iraqis who were displaced either within the borders of the country or outside, their only long-term solution will be a political solution in their country.

So I've probably gone over, and so I'll leave it at that and I'll thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. SAID HAKKI: Thank you. I will try – my name is Said Hakki – I will try and give you what's happening in Iraq. I've been a surgeon for all my life, and death never scared me, blood never scared me, never shook me, but when I saw what I saw in Iraq, it really shook me.

First, I'd like to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to the Center for America for inviting me to speak on behalf of the Iraqi Red Crescent organization to this important event. Also I would like to thank the Center for allowing me the honor to stand before them and provide an update on the humanitarian crisis inside and outside Iraq. We certainly have a humanitarian crisis in Iraq that requires urgent attention of the world community. This humanitarian crisis as you heard is not new. However, the current security improvement in Iraq provides us with a unique opportunity to address this crisis and help keep Iraq moving towards a more stable future. This is our second bite of the apple. We cannot blow it. Let us not drop the ball again.

As of October the 30th, 2007, the number of internally displaced persons inside Iraq has reached a total of 2,100,000. Sixty-five percent of those are children under the age of 12. This number doesn't include those who elected not to register with the Iraqi Red Crescent organization asking for relief. There are over 2.5 million externally displaced people from Iraq that have fled to neighboring countries, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Islamic Republic of Iran, thereby increasing the strain on the resources of these countries. Again, 70 percent of those displaced externally are either women or children under the age of 12.

The number of those individuals recently returned to Iraq is under 30,000, and they came from Syria for many reasons. Unfortunately, 20 percent of them became internally displaced. The humanitarian challenge at hand here combined with the lack of basic services and the steep rise of unemployment is imposing some severe constraint on the daily life of the Iraqi people, and the absence of viable political solution in Iraq is responsible for the shortage of basic human necessities. That is in addition to the lack of acceptable healthcare and deficiency of potable water for over 70 percent of Iraqis. For those externally displaced, their financial resources is depleted, coupled with closing the borders in these countries. The situation among those displaced internally or externally is

growing worse every day as people lose jobs, health services, access to education. The battle for the new Iraq is now a struggle for survival being fought on daily basis by ordinary Iraqis all over the country. The same situation faces the Iraqis outside Iraq.

Let us look at the humanitarian agencies inside Iraq since 2004. Regrettably and for many reasons, neither the United Nations, ICRC, International Federation or other NGOs has been able to sustain a significant operational presence inside Iraq. Far too many aid organizations are operating remotely and sporadically without sustained physical presence in the country, the impact of their intervention is unfortunately very much limited.

There are many reasons, but let's try and find a resolution to this work. Who are we? Who is the Iraqi Red Crescent organization? Today, the Iraqi Red Crescent organization is the primary and lead humanitarian provider on the ground in Iraq and has been operating effectively for the past four years. It is a nonsectarian organization and has a track record of working as a neutral partner. We're trusted by all the people in Iraq. It is the only organization that moves freely throughout all Iraq, every village, every city, to provide basic services such as food, shelter, water, clothing, in addition to disaster management, healthcare, psychosocial for those children displaced, information, dissemination, mind awareness, and for those internally displaced.

For those externally displaced, we are working with the United Nations, the International Federation, as well as other NGOs and including the Red Crescent or Red Cross of the relevant country. We have a solution. We are proposing a solution for this crisis, and that's why I came here taking about a 13-hour flight. The solution to this dire predicament facing the Iraqis requires a coordinated, multifaceted response both outside and inside Iraq. Our partners are the Iraqi people, the tribal leaders, the Iraqi government, the multinational force, as well as every NGO, the United Nations, ICRC. We need to include rather than exclude.

Now that the security situation has improved inside Iraq, the Iraqi Red Crescent organization feels the timing is right to move forward and address these challenges and we have a plan on how to accomplish this. We have this plan, and you can see we have a copy of it outside here. This is a rare opportunity to keep peace in Iraq and stabilizing Baghdad which houses about 1.3 to 1.4 of those displaced. They're mainly in Baghdad. If we stabilize Baghdad first, then we can successfully have the key in seizing the opportunity to improve the situation in Iraq.

To that effect, this program we call Neighborhood Reconstruction Plan, it strengthens the peace in Iraq through temporary settlement of the internally displaced Iraqis in Baghdad. Will provide services, job training, housing material, access to education, access to potable water, access to healthcare, and we will be helping organize the community to help themselves. Does the Iraqi Red Crescent organization have this capacity? Yes, it does. It is the only relief agency that can deliver services throughout the whole of Iraq, and we have the capacity to implement this plan. We have 100,000 as you heard from Anita between employees and volunteers. Is that enough? No, that's not enough. We need more. We need more NGOs, we need more ICRC, we need the United

Nations to come with us, we need all those people to help together and work a solution for Iraq. We have hospitals. We have a large capacity of storage in Iraq.

In sum, the Iraqi Red Crescent has the unique potential to ensure a rapid successful response to the present humanitarian crisis facing the people inside and outside Iraq. We need the help of the international agencies, as I said, assembled here, and I acknowledge the help should come first from Iraq. We are ready for this plan. In order to successfully implement this plan, we are asking the help of the Iraqi government, our regional neighbors, the Gulf States, the United States government, the United Nations and all the NGOs, and individuals who can make donations also. The current monetary constraints hinders a greater outreach of the humanitarian assistance to the Iraqis. We need to strengthen the financial base infrastructure and the support system of the Iraqi Red Crescent organization, as well as whoever is going to help us to implement this plan.

Now then, what are we going to conclude when we're going to do this? If we left this humanitarian crisis unattended, the new Iraq will become a tragic and a fatal example of human affliction with far reaching consequences, not only for the new Iraq, but for the entire region and maybe the whole world. So I'm asking in the name of humanity and the name of civilization that we have a moral obligation to come together and help the people of Iraq. United, we can successfully face the challenges that lie ahead.

And finally, I would like to thank all those countries that so generously contributed the humanitarian aid to Iraq in the past and continue to do so. The people of Iraq will never forget those who stretched their hands out to help them in the darkest hours.

Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. BILL FRELICK: Thank you. Well, I wanted to start with what happened last week basically because I think it has changed the color of the debate about Iraqi refugees, and that was when the convoy from Syria sponsored by the Iraqi government took in 20 buses about 800 refugees back. And there was a great deal of fanfare about that, a great deal of media attention, and I think bears some very close examination to see the extent to which refugees are exercising the free choice to go back, whether there are various political manipulations that may be afoot. Because certainly, the implication of seeing large numbers of refugees returning, 30,000, we just heard that number, there have been claims of as many as 50,000, is something that in a sense makes it more difficult to provide assistance, more difficult to provide resettlement for example, durable solutions outside the region and to maintain asylum in the region, which is one of the critical, critical questions that I've been preoccupied with for the last couple of years.

So I think we do need to look at this very carefully. It's certainly been touted as refugees voting with their feet and an indication of the success of the surge and an improved security situation inside the country. It's also the case that the Iraqi government is giving one million dinars which is about \$750 to each of the returnees, and has been actively encouraging the return, although we've just heard some scaling back as of yesterday, some cautionary notes listed because in fact, many of the returnees are

becoming internally displaced people when they return. And the most recent statistics I've seen from the Iraqi Red Crescent which I don't think I just heard in the presentation of the presentation of the previous speaker is that since August there's been about a 14 percent rise in the number of IDPs in the country which I think is significant when you look at the timing of this from the beginning of October which is the point at which Syria, at the request of the Iraqi government, decided to essentially close its border to Iraqi refugees, those that didn't actually have advance visas for commercial reasons and so on and so forth, and imposed a much stricter visa regime for people that had come on essentially tourist visas, one, three-month visas that they have been able to renew before and now suddenly they're no longer able to renew those visas.

So from that period of October when the border basically closed down and then people, within a month starting in November, started to fall out of status and become illegal, I think there was a great deal of fear and trepidation in the community, and it's reflected in an initial survey that the UNHCR has done of 110 returnee families that showed that 26 percent said that the reason for their leaving was because they had fallen out of status, specifically that imposition of the stricter visa regime that I talked about, that 46 percent said that they were leaving because they did not have authorization to work and they could no longer feed their families, they'd run out of resources, and of course, the money that's being offered to them to return is something that they desperately need, and that only 14 percent indicated that they were leaving as a result of the improved security situation inside the country.

This is consistent with what we've seen in Jordan. Jordan actually imposed these kinds of restrictions at the beginning of the year, late 2006, early 2007. I was interested when Vic mentioned silence as the response in the previous crisis, because we wrote a report in late November, 2006 about Iraqi refugees in Jordan and we called it the "Silent Treatment" because at that time, there was no awareness. This was a completely invisible population, very large, half a million people basically, and they were treated as illegal immigrants.

The fact of the matter is when you look at the surrounding governments, when you look at the key governments here, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, which I'll talk about in more detail, none of them are signatories to the Refugee Convention, none of them have refugee laws, and they basically are treating this group of people, whether it's a euphemism that calls them guests, a guest is not someone that's supported under international treaty and with a legal definition, a guest you can tell to leave, and essentially they're treating them as illegal immigrants and are stigmatizing them in that way and are forcing them out.

I want to talk specifically about the report that we just issued this week in Lebanon, which Anita mentioned, "Rot Here or Die There." I think the title probably gives you the basic message of the report, but let me give you a few more details on it.

What actually has happened in Lebanon is that there is a judicial system there which has said that the government would be violating its international responsibilities – (unintelligible) – by returning refugees through deportation directly to Iraq which is of

course a very welcomed development. But what has happened is that the refugees who are arrested, and they're being arrested in increasing numbers – since – (unintelligible) – there's been an increase in the number of checkpoints throughout the country, so the numbers are increasing by about 10 percent every month another 50, 60 people being put into detention, there's currently about 600 that are in detention and that number appears to be growing.

But what happens is they are sentenced to one to three months for their illegal entry or presence in the country, but after they finish their sentence, they're then held in essentially an indefinite administrative arbitrary detention pending a return that cannot be effected by the government itself through a deportation, and they're held there, they're held there indefinitely. A couple of prisons that we had the opportunity to visit are extremely overcrowded, the detainees are mixed in with criminals, the food is terrible as you might be able to imagine, and people become increasingly desperate to get out of there.

The UNHCR has been able to – tried to intervene. Out of say 50, 60 that are arrested per month, they maybe get five or six out of detention, and they can't really pinpoint why some are released to them and others are not. Basically, the only way people can get out is to “choose,” quote, unquote, to return to Iraq. And let me quote you one of the people we interviewed: “no one tells me how long I'm going to be in prison. If I go back to Iraq, I will be killed. I don't want to go back but it is better for me to go back than to spend one more day being locked up with criminals. I don't want to stay in prison. I've never been to a prison in my life. This is the first time I'm in a room with criminals. I suffer so much in prison, I prefer to die.” We had another man who still had the blue ink mark on his thumb from having agreed to the voluntary return who was shaking when he came back. We spoke to him minutes after he had agreed to voluntarily return and he made a sign like that across his neck saying what he thought was going to happen to him when we asked about his voluntary return.

We spoke to officials of the Iraqi Embassy who interview the people, and one of the embassy officials said, and we quote him in the report, quote, “you put them in a corner, either you stay in prison or you go back in Iraq. They have no choice. If you gave them another option, and if they then wanted to go back, that would be voluntary.” Of course, just a couple of days ago, I visited with the same Iraqi Embassy officials and they're now the ones that are facilitating the returns to Iraq.

It used to be up until very recently that the international organization for migration, IOM, was facilitating those returns. As I say, the government couldn't do them directly. They were quote, unquote, “voluntary returns,” so it became part of the Assisted Voluntary Return program for IOM. We've had some extensive discussions with IOM in the preparation of this report, and on September 26th, they wrote a letter to the Iraqi Embassy saying that they had temporarily suspended their involvement and their return program, so since that time, the government has been working hard to find other partners. They've been approaching some NGOs. They've been approaching the Iraqi Embassy. And there were 276 detainees that had signed up for voluntary return as of the time of the suspension. A hundred and fifty of them have paid their own way and have

been returned since that time. The others are still in detention. And there are efforts being made through the Iraqi embassy in particular to fund their return. But I'll leave it to you to decide how voluntary those returns are.

One way you can contrast it is what would happen if they were not in detention? What would happen if they were people that were Iraqis that were living in the country, still illegally, still under very severe pressures? And we did interview Iraqis there as well and we asked the embassy, has anyone come forward to return? A few, there's a handful of people who have said they wanted to go back, and we have no objection in principle to people making that choice as long as it is a free and an informed one.

But what we've heard, and I'll just give you a few of the quotes, when we asked the question, would you return to Iraq, of people that were not in detention, here's just a sample: no, you die over there. No, I'm very afraid, afraid of the violence. I want to live without nightmares and without fear. No one does not like their own country, but if the situation remains like this, why would I want to go back? And another one, every time I call our family in Iraq, they tell us, don't even think about coming back to Iraq. We tracked a number of the people who had gone back. There was a father and a son who went after being in detention in Lebanon. The son was then kidnapped, the father paid a ransom, they came back to Lebanon, we interviewed them there, and the father said, I don't want to go back to Iraq, I want to stay in Lebanon, even if they break every bone in my body, even if we don't feel safe here because we are illegal.

So that gives you some indication in Lebanon, a country that only hosts 50,000. We hardly ever hear about Lebanon, but even though the numbers are relatively small compared to the 1.4 million in Syria, the 500,000 in Jordan, remember that Lebanon only has a population of 4 million itself, it has 250,000 to 300,000 Palestinian refugees which as any of you that have been following the news either from the civil war or more recently with – (unintelligible) – know has been a huge preoccupation and a real problem for the Lebanese society and its government.

There are tremendous concerns, very, very touchy sensitivities about sectarian demographics inside Lebanon and about security concerns as well. For people that are living there illegally, there's a great deal of the checkpoints that are ubiquitous throughout the country. People are afraid to go out and are scared. What happens, generally, women and children are not arrested, it's the men who are arrested, so they will stay home and in hiding as much as possible. They'll send their children out to work, and as a consequence, children are not going to school and they're subject to exploitation in various ways in the underground economy there.

Not entirely different – I saw the same thing in Jordan – very, very similar experiences for the families that are living there, almost identical in fact. I have not been able to conduct field work inside Syria because I've been repeatedly denied a visa to visit that country by the Syrian authorities.

What we are recommending for the Lebanese government is similar to what we've recommended to the other governments in the region, which is that they do

provide temporary renewable legal status for the people that are living there. And we had extensive discussions with the head of general security in Lebanon just a couple of days ago trying to see whether there is any way that a system of parole of supervised release could be brokered using UNHCR to provide stipends for people, a way to check in and this sort of thing, arguing that from a security point of view, it's better to have people register and come forward and know who you're dealing with and have them want to be assisted and part of a system of counting and control.

That argument didn't go over very well as you might imagine. We still have a long way to go in getting any of these recommendations through. The numbers that have actually been registered by UNHCR relative to the estimated populations of refugees in all of these countries is very, very small. In Lebanon, it was about 10,000 that had been registered out of the estimate 50,000 in the country. So most people are not coming forward. Why don't they come forward? They don't see any reason to register with UNHCR. It doesn't bring them any protection whatsoever. You can be registered as a refugee and you can still be deported, or coerced to voluntarily return to be more correct, and it doesn't bring legal status, it doesn't bring humanitarian assistance for the most part.

So now, we turn to the response of the international community. What can the international community do to provide for a more stable environment for the refugees that are there now living in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan in particular but also think about the people who are internally displaced now that would be desperate to get out of the country but they're not able to. If you look at the way that the movement is being restricted, I think it's 11 out of the 18 governorates internally have restricted entry of internally displaced people. If you looked at a map, you would see that those governorates are all in the periphery basically and the five governorates that are not restricting entry are the ones in the center: it's Baghdad, it's Diyala, it's Anbar, and so people are being squeezed in internally and they're also being blocked externally from leaving the country as well. And our real preoccupation is what to do try to reopen these borders and to provide first asylum.

And I think when we talk about resettlement, one of my concerns about this day today, this conference, is it's perfectly fine to focus on those people who work for the United States or people for whom we have a special humanitarian concern. That's the language of our refugee law and that is a recognized preoccupation of this country and a moral obligation of this country. However, we have to think of resettlement in strategic terms, and we have to think of humanitarian assistance in strategic terms. What are we leveraging? Because we know we're not going to be able to resettle sufficient numbers to deal with the vast numbers of people that are in the region.

We have to convince the surrounding countries that we're doing enough to make a difference. When we resettled 1,608 refugees last year, Syria laughed at that because they were admitting 2,000 people a day. Two thousand people a day were crossing into Syria, and in an entire year the United States takes 1,600. From the point of view of maintaining first asylum in the region, we sent the exact wrong message, and Syria closed its borders and they said as much. When it comes to Lebanon, that number last year was

67 of the 1,608, 67 were resettled from Lebanon, mostly old caseload cases even from before 2003. It made no impact for those people who were in detention.

What we need to do, we need both additional number but also criteria that says for people not just based on the well-founded fear of persecution standards of what their stories are of persecutions inside Iraq, but what is their vulnerability in the countries of first asylum, what is the prospect that they're going to be forced back into Iraq? And we're not even looking at that, and so it's made no impact. You've got 500, 600 people that are in detention for whom resettlement would basically save them, and we're doing nothing about that whatsoever, and that's something that we need to look at very, very quickly and with great seriousness.

In terms of the financial backing, as many of you know, the administration has requested \$196.4 billion in the Iraq supplemental for the war on terror in Iraq and Afghanistan for 2008. Of that, \$196.4 billion, \$240 million is for humanitarian assistance. That is less than 1/5 of 1 percent of the total. It's less than the amount the U.S. spends in a single day to wage the war in Iraq and Afghanistan for the humanitarian side. You could characterize U.S. war spending as profligate, but you'd have to characterize the humanitarian side as penny pinching.

And it's not just a question of a narrow conception of humanitarian need. It's also a narrow conception of what you do with that money to leverage a difference, and one of the things that I would suggest is that the United States work with European partners, work with the Arab League, to try to convince other countries in the region through financial incentives, through per-capita grants, infrastructure support for their health systems, school systems and so on and so forth, to take in significant numbers of refugees from Syria, Jordan and Lebanon in particular to countries that are poor, cash-strapped with fairly large populations already that actually could use some of the very highly skilled refugees that are in the region, the whole middle class, the professional class, has been eviscerated from Iraq. These are really highly skilled people who are being exploited and underutilized where they are.

But see whether Egypt, whether Yemen, whether Sudan, a number of these countries would be willing if they're paid enough to take people in temporarily and provide for them. That we could do in tens of thousands and in the hundreds of thousands in the short term and relieve the particular stresses and strains of the three countries in the region that are totally preoccupied with the long-term Palestinian populations that are already on their soil and their demographic concerns as well, and make a difference for them so that we will be able to maintain dignified first asylum for those who are in the region, but also most importantly, we can open those borders. Because we hope that the situation is stabilizing, we hope that people are going to be able to go home, we certainly want that, but there's no guarantee of that whatsoever, and there may still well be many, many people who will need to flee this country, and they have a right. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights talks about the right to flee persecution, the right to go to another country to seek and enjoy asylum, and that right is being denied to people today. We need to open those borders, we need to leverage all the support that we can to help to maintain asylum in the region.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MS. SHARMA: I gave Bill some (Unintelligible) – so I let him go on a bit longer. Thanks.

MR. REINHOLD BRENDER: Thank you very much. On behalf of the European Union and the European Commission in particular, I would like to join my predecessors in thanking the organizers of this event, the Center for American Progress and also the Heinrich Boell Foundation in making possible this joint reflection, this brainstorming effort which we all hope and are convinced that it can contribute in making us better understand the challenges and also in trying to define the way forward.

Let me say that very generally, there is a very strong commitment from the EU towards Iraq. That is a very important point I want to stress up front. There should be no doubt whatsoever that the European Union has a strong interest in and is strongly committed to supporting Iraq becoming a stable, politically viable and economically prosperous country. Of course, this is a long-term effort, but the European Union, despite divergences of views on the way to the war in Iraq, has a clear commitment and a strong engagement on Iraq and EU-Iraq cooperation.

Let me just mention a couple of figures. The first is the European Union so far has spent for reconstruction in Iraq 800 million euro. This is more than \$1 billion, and it is just one strain because it is the EU – (unintelligible), and on top of this, you have to take the very important contributions of member states of the European Union. Altogether, the amount with which the European Union has been supporting the reconstruction in Iraq and all types of aids and support cumulated, we have a total amount of more than 14 billion euro. This includes grants, this includes loans and this includes also debt relief. And this is a very important observation.

The European Union is very close to Iraq. We have a strong interest in getting this country stable, in having a good and strong relationship. It is a key player in the wider region. And therefore, we are strongly engaged, not just in reconstruction, but also in the wider political context we are about to establish a contractual relationship with Iraq. We are – just last week there was the last round, the third round, of the preparation of a trade and cooperation agreement which would bridge our relationship and make it contractual and also provide a clear frame for our cooperation in the years ahead.

All this is forward looking, it is moving towards a situation where we hope we can cooperate with Iraq as we can with other countries. But presently, the situation is still very difficult, as you know, and our discussion today has made very clear that the humanitarian challenge inside Iraq and also in the neighboring countries resulting from the displacement crisis is huge.

And also on this topic, on the topic of humanitarian aid, there is a very strong EU commitment. Out of the 800 million Euro, to which I referred, 100 million have been devoted to addressing humanitarian issues, the humanitarian crises in 2003, immediately

after the war. And more recently, there has been additional efforts – have been additional efforts to address the displacement crisis, in particular. I will speak about them in some more detail afterwards because the topic of the panel here is the current crisis and responses so far, and you expect me certainly to present the EU efforts in some more detail.

At this point, I already want to flag that for us presently, one of the major challenges clearly is the issue of access in Iraq. I think the president of the Iraqi Red Cross, Dr. Hakki has made crystal clear that it is a huge challenge and he has encouraged us to take it up and not to give up and to be present on the ground. The message is strong and it is clear. Nevertheless, it is indeed a huge challenge to work in Iraq and it is the single major impediment for the European Union to move forward with its assistance on the humanitarian crisis in particular.

The question is what shall we do if access is difficult and blocked? Basically, the key challenge is to raise the awareness of humanitarian access issues and at an operational level, the task is to keep monitoring the situation on the ground as closely as possible and to identify windows of opportunities to get aid to the neediest as soon as it is practical. Let me say that the European Union, as far as this was possible, has been doing precisely this. And in 2007, a budget of 17.8 million Euro, and this is at EU level and you have to see that support from member states comes on top of this. At EU level alone, we have had a budget of 17.8 million Euro in 2007, which has been allocated by the European Commission to help the most vulnerable Iraqis.

We know that the situation is extremely difficult because more than two million Iraqis have fled to Jordan and Syria, which places a huge burden on local services. And the commissioner responded in February with humanitarian assistance worth 6.2 million, which was channeled through its operational partners, namely, UN agencies, the Red Cross, or the Red Crescent movement, and NGOs. This was our effort in Jordan and Syria, 6.2 million out of the 17.8, which I mentioned, and inside Iraq, we have been able, despite all the difficulties, to bring to the neediest our assistance amounting to more than 10 million Euro in 2007. Some agencies are able to deliver, we have noted, with the help of courageous and dedicated local staff, and four million has been provided so far out of the more than 10 million and an additional 7.6 million have been earmarked for further actions, both inside Iraq and among the refugee populations.

And I want to be very clear in this respect, if access improves making it possible to extend the reach of humanitarian assistance inside Iraq, the commission is ready to play its part in line with the needs-based principle, which says that our humanitarian assistance addresses those who are most in need. Need is the only criterion, and reaching those who are most vulnerable is the top priority.

This was the more immediate response in terms of humanitarian assistance, but it is very important to mention also that the European Commission in its response to this crisis has also sought to gear its development instruments to help address Iraq's displacement crisis. From the beginning, it was clear that the emergency in humanitarian support should be followed up by an approach that looks at immediate and midterm

institutional needs. And not surprisingly, the analysis identified children and the elderly as the most vulnerable refugees, and education and health services as the most required and under pressure.

And, therefore, the commission has in addition to the humanitarian assistance, as I have just been saying, tried to gear its development instruments, which are other instruments, towards the displacement crisis, and a two-way approach was considered the most viable, and that was to strengthen existing projects, and secondly, to contribute to appeals of the United Nations. As you know, the background to this approach of the commission to focus on existing projects and to support, to reply, to respond to UN appeals, the background is that the policy of the recipient countries, namely, Jordan and Syria so far has been to avoid the creation of parallel structures by strengthening existing services in order to accommodate the new users, and therefore, we have had to come in with our assistance in this general context where the governments in Jordan and Syria did not want to see the establishment of parallel structures.

And let me just say what we have been doing in both countries more specifically. In Jordan, we considered that the most efficient and rapid channel to deliver support was to strengthen the ongoing budget support program on educational reform. Therefore, until recently, the Jordanian government had not allowed Iraqi children to attend public schools in Jordan, and the only solution for Iraqi parents had been to try to enroll their children in private schools and this was a costly solution and private schools tried to contain the influx of children by restricting access.

This year, and in view of the aid expected from the international community for the education system, including the commission's additional budgetary support, the Jordanian authorities have decided to allow the enrollment of Iraqi children in public schools. There was, so to speak, a basic deal where the commission assistance was made available to the education budget of Jordan, which in return made it possible for the Jordanian government to accept refugee children in Jordanian schools.

In Syria the problem was different. Iraqi children have free access to the Syrian schools, but enrollment rates remain low. And the commission had, therefore, approached UNICEF to find a possible response. It was decided that a commission instrument, an already commission instrument, would support a program to increase the school attendance during the school year 2007 and 2008, and expected results include the increase of the enrollment rates of Iraqi children in Syria by at least 100 percent in the areas where this project is being implemented.

Therefore, we have – as regards the development track of our assistance, have had activities and engagements both in Jordan and in Syria, and as regards Syria, it was also decided in parallel to expand an ongoing program in the health sector so as to accommodate part of the needs of the refugees in healthcare. To mention among the expected results that 50 primary health centers in 13 governorates and eight hospitals will be upgraded with medical equipment and other necessary material.

For both Syria and Jordan, in total 36 million from the development and cooperation instrument for Iraq was allocated to the extension of ongoing programs, and an additional three million through the stability instrument, which is a new instrument, which the commission has at its disposal to support the UNICEF program. Therefore basically, we have had a humanitarian assistance activity which up to now in this year amounts to more than 70 million, and we have had on the development side, a total budget of 36 plus three million Euro.

This is broadly where our efforts stand today. I said before that we are well aware of the needs of the necessity to make further progress and it is important to take work forward in 2008 and we have work underway to identify clearly what can be done in the years ahead. Therefore, we have clearly a midterm perspective which we try to identify more clearly and we expect that more funds should be available in 2008. All additional measures will be designed in close cooperation with all our partners locally, including national institutions, member states, UN agencies and other potential donors.

However, whatever our efforts, we also need a stronger mobilization, and I think this ties in with what has been said before, we also need a stronger mobilization from the broader international community in parallel with the necessary progress in settling the key political challenges faced by the Iraqi government. I think the latter point is really very important. All our support to addressing the displacement crisis ultimately is only useful to the extent that we can hope and be sure and be confident that there will be a political settlement of the overall problems faced by Iraq. Therefore, in no way humanitarian assistance and assistance on the development side of our instruments for addressing difficulties and challenges faced by Iraqi displaced people should divert attention from the overarching need to have a political solution of the problems faced by Iraq.

And while our efforts continue, we all hope that the recent downward trend in levels of violence in Iraq, reflected in growing reports of refugees returning home is not just a statistical blip. Perhaps more than any other country in the world, Iraq needs to be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Thanks. (Applause.)

MS. SHARMA: Thank you. We've about a half an hour, a little less than that for discussion amongst the panelists and the audience.

I just would like to – Julia, if you don't mind, teeing it up with you to give you the prerogative of the first response, because we've heard that there are financial commitments, there are organizations willing to work, but I think again, as we were talking last night, it really boils down to the question of leadership, and especially in this country, leadership from the administration has come not at the senior levels – only during a speech this summer to the veterans with foreign wars did the president talk about humanitarian crisis, but it was in the context of the troops leaving and what would happen in terms of a Pol Pot-like situation or a Saigon, you know, the Cambodian killing fields.

So Julia had been tasked by President Ford to address this issue with the Vietnamese crisis, and so yesterday, you were talking to us about why it could – why it is so imperative, and then getting toward the how. So would you mind if I put you on the hot seat to talk about how we might actually get to helping to solve the crisis?

MS. JULIA TAFT: Great. Well, there are some similarities between what happened in 1975 with the Indochinese program and what is happening here. The most important point is that in 1975, we had a president who said he wanted the final chapter of Vietnam to be one of hope for the people and that he wanted to make sure that we opened our borders to allow the evacuation and resettlement of as many people as we could get. And at that point, he established an interagency task force. I was not the first head of it. It was a very senior person from the State Department for the first six weeks, and every agency that was affected, 15 agencies sent at least an assistant secretary to be part of the task force with fulltime staff, operating in the State Department to sort out how we were going to evacuate and assist the maximum number of people. Within six weeks, Vietnam had fallen and State Department said this is now an HEW problem, I was working at – I was the rep from HEW and so I ended up being the director. (Laughs.)

The critical issue was how do you get 15 federal agencies and scads of voluntary agencies – we had a number of, I guess, almost 15 resettlement agencies – how do you get them to actually work together? And the only way we had it was that we had the president of the United States say this was going to work, and at three different cabinet meetings he said, this is going to work. You make sure it works. And you support – I was only 32 years old. Now, don't figure out how old I am now, but – so only 32 years old, but I had the force of the president of the United States. Interestingly enough, I also had some godfathers. The first chief of staff was Donald Rumsfeld, who was very supportive, interestingly; the second one was Dick Cheney, who was very supportive. But they made sure that the president was out in front, and he spoke passionately, he went to Fort Chaffee. He was really great.

What have we heard from President Bush? You see, I think what we need to do is help Bush figure out he's got to say something and be committed to this humanitarian crisis. Why did we presumptively go into Iraq, except for to help the Iraqi people? Nobody says it was for oil. It was to help the Iraqi people to get out from the Saddam regime. Well, we are not helping the Iraqi people now who are most in need. So I think we should find a way to shape this as a legacy issue that people who have been loyal to us, and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis came forward to work as contractors or with the government are working with the NGOs, with the media or whatever, they put their lives on the line.

We should make this a loyalty issue. He should make this a loyalty issue. They were with us, and we're going to help them when we best can and we help them humanitarily in the country, if we can, and we resettle those that are most in need. This, to me, is something that this conference can perhaps figure out how you make that case about a legacy issue. It was a Ford legacy issue; it can be a Bush legacy issue. But he's got to say something, he's got to tell homeland security to get off the (duct ?) and let these through, and he's got to make sure that all the agencies that are engaged in the

processing – excuse me – in the processing are working together and have benchmarks for movement, and I think that if we get the leadership from the top, we've got it made.

MS. SHARMA: We'll take a couple of questions and comments from the audience. If you can raise your hand, Suzi will call on you.

So, Elizabeth, yes.

Q: Sure. Elizabeth Campbell with Refugee Council USA. I have two questions. One is for Mr. Brender. By all accounts, the Palestinians from Baghdad are probably the most vulnerable group of people who are languishing in no man's land, basically, with no protection. Just last week, we heard reports about children dying after multiple appeals by UNHCR for countries to take them in, if only on a temporary basis, on a humanitarian basis. So I'd like to know what the European Union or European countries are doing to address this problem.

My second question is for Bill. It regards your recommendation about trying to open up first asylum. I'm wondering why we wouldn't also consider perhaps your proposal, your recommendation thinking about doing it for those who are still within Iraq, rather than those who have already sought asylum, but maybe thinking about that recommendation in terms of helping those who are trapped inside, facing imminent danger to also find asylum in other countries.

MR. BRENDER: As regards your question, what does the European Union do to help these people, but also other people more generally that are interested in trying to get shelter in view to move to the European Union? Let me say that, as you may know, we have a common European asylum system in principle. There is a political commitment towards this, towards reaching a common approach towards asylum issues. Nevertheless, at the same time, I want to be crystal clear this is clearly a topic where the commission has a certain role, but the lead is with the member states in many respects.

Therefore, it is an issue where we presently, at commission level, try to work with the member states to get a clear picture. That is the first step, and it is a process, it is not satisfying in a moment where you want to get people out of a situation as you have it in Iraq. I admit this. But, nevertheless, it is work in progress, trying to identify what the practices are, how this is handled in various countries, and there is a divergence of approaches which is obvious on this specific issue, and the intention clearly is to move forward to a streamlining of the approaches. This is all I can say on this. It may not be satisfactory for you, I notice.

Thanks.

MR. FRELICK: Elizabeth, I would just have to say that, as it is, my proposal has been rejected by many as being overly ambitious and idealistic, and I think that it would be a hard sell in addition to the over two million people who are refugees now and in those surrounding countries to have a resettlement plan, a general – a massive

resettlement plan of the kind that I was suggesting that would also involve a massive evacuation from within the country. I guess let's take one step at a time.

There is, as many of you know, the discussion about special immigrant visas and we did hear last night of some progress, which I'm very grateful to have heard on that front, that it looks as though from what— I think we were told off the record — (laughs) — (unintelligible) — that there may be some internal — that there may be some direct processing from in-country processing to the United States of some small number of people that have been selected, and I don't actually disagree with that as an approach at this stage. I think it makes more sense for us to try to find ways to encourage Jordan and Syria in particular to open their borders for people who would want to leave and to make sure that the people are not being pushed back at the border or being deported against their will.

MS. SHARMA: Nathaniel there, right there. Nathaniel, yeah.

Q: I'm from the International Rescue Committee. Two questions for Mr. Brender. Thank you, by the way, for the overview of the EU spending. That was very helpful. First question, on the issue of spending. As you look ahead to 2008, what do you project the balance is going to be between funding for reconstruction and funding for humanitarian needs? Obviously, up until this point, the vast majority of the money has gone to reconstruction, which as we all know has been a very sort of slow and at times bureaucratic process. So how do you see that balance in future?

And then just — (inaudible) — picking up on Elizabeth's question about admissions, we have a contrast between the response of the Swedes, to a certain extent the Danes, and then the rest of Europe on the issue of admissions. In your opinion, why have so many member states been so reluctant to take in large numbers of Iraqis?

MR. BENDER: On — should I go? On the first question, the balance between what will be devoted to humanitarian assistance proper and assistance under the development umbrella towards addressing the displacement crisis, let me say it's very difficult to make a forecast because a lot will depend also on how the situation will evolve in Iraq. As I said before, we have a big problem of access and to the extent that the situation would — which seems at this point, at least in my own view, rather unlikely — let's assume for one second there would be a major change and things would be much easier, then there would, of course, be a response from the EU side.

As I said before, we have strong commitment and we will certainly react if and when the opportunity arises, there can be no doubt about this. My own sense is — but you know, take it really with all the caution you have to — my own sense is for the time being that, and I said before also that on the midterm prospects for development, work is underway to identify the needs. Therefore, I cannot predict the balance, but I still sense that we will probably have more funds available on the development side than on the humanitarian aid side proper. That is the answer to the first question I can give and I can't go beyond because the work is really underway and just being — yeah, it is underway.

The second question: how to explain the differences, how to – how come that we have a situation where some countries apparently or seemingly are more generous than others? It's a very tricky question in particular for somebody from the commission to answer it because, clearly, asylum policy and refugee policy is very much at the heart of national sovereignty. There can be no doubt about this. And ultimately, these are national decisions, still, to a high extent. Therefore, it is a variety of approaches within the European Union. There are different political decisions being taken with regard to the same challenge. That is obvious. And I don't want to speculate about what the motives of this or that country are or may be or may become. There are representatives of member states here also, and if I think colleagues would wish to join on this topic, I think their comments would be most welcome.

Let me just say that obviously once you have a situation where one country is seemingly rather generous in its approach towards this question, it is obvious that it attracts immediately higher attention, it has an effect of a kind of magnet, it has a push, there is a push factor then. You see it in the case of Sweden. It's very clear that there are the high numbers. You know, I fully agree with what has been said before. Ultimately, the numbers are not high compared with the situation on the ground. But still, looking at the total numbers, Sweden is on top, and it is very clear that Sweden this year most likely will have 20,000 people seeking refuge in Sweden alone, which is half of the expected number for the whole of the European Union.

This reflects also the fact that once a country is more generous, it immediately gets the attraction – becomes the focus of attraction for other people who try to join Sweden. This is not a criticism. I just want to highlight this challenge which implies secondary movements also. You see, once you have a country which is more generous, there is a possibility that people also who are at a certain place in the European Union try to get to this place even though, you know, we have in principle an approach which clearly says that somebody has to seek asylum in the country the person entered first. Therefore, that is another issue then.

Thanks.

MS. SHARMA: We've got time for a few more. Kathleen right here in there middle, and then to Amelia.

Q: Thank you very much. I'm Kathleen Newland from the Migration Policy Institute, and I would like to ask Dr. Hakki how he and his colleagues in the Iraqi Red Crescent feel about the prospect of a much larger resettlement efforts to countries outside the region of Iraqi refugees and IDPs. Thank you.

MR. HAKKI: Thank you for the question. I was actually going to sort of volunteer this question. Iraq is twice as rich as California. Iraq up to the 1980, Iraqis used to hate leaving Iraq. They count the days that they are outside Iraq. I used to earn – I hope the tax man is not here – \$1,000 net a day as a doctor in Iraq where I can spend not even \$2,000 in a month. Iraq is rich in resources, Iraq is rich in oil, phosphorous,

minerals, and the people, and also the heritage of Iraq. Iraq is the cradle of civilization. It's Mesopotamia. If we can work on the internally displaced people, and they're wounded, they're on the floor now, they're on the ground. Let us heal them and let them stand on their feet and work, make Iraq another – a sweet pot so that the external ones will come in.

Majority of those displaced externally are middle class, 65 percent are middle class. That's the generation that runs Iraq. If we encourage everybody to go out and be settled somewhere else, what's going to happen to Iraq then? What's going to happen to the new generation? Sixty-five percent of the children are displaced. They need psychosocial, they need – we need the international community to come and make Iraq a donor again, a real donor. Iraq's budget is \$48 billion, with all the corruption happening around – \$48 billion. And if we have a government which is really working hard, and I think they are trying to, that 48 could be doubled and tripled.

At the moment, we need to concentrate on the internally displaced, make the pot sweeter inside Iraq rather than outside. If we do make it outside sweeter, I will be leaving Iraq myself. If you give me a house in California and a place I can live, I wouldn't stay in Iraq. We need to work on the internally displaced people. And I hope I have answered your question.

MS. SHARMA: Amelia up here, the second row, right up front. Thanks.

Q: Amelia Templeton, Human Rights First. I think my question, in some ways, really builds on that response. One of the sort of conflicts that I've been hearing just in this panel, but also very consistently for the past six months, has been people who really believe we need an approach that's focused on returning political stability to Iraq and we've heard that from the administration. I think we've also seen that from the Iraqi government, and people who believe that we need to try to preserve asylum for those people who are fleeing and not necessarily assume that stability is achievable.

And I guess my question is why – and to some extent, I think there's been some counterproductive conflict, including the Iraqi government's decision to encourage Syria to close its border to prevent people from fleeing. So why, in this particular case, are people seeing such a conflict between preserving asylum in the region, or even making resettlement an option, and also attempting to improve conditions in the country so that people may someday be able to return? Why is this such a sort of fundamental division?

MR. : It shouldn't be. (Laughs.)

MR. SHARMA: Yeah, exactly. It shouldn't have to be a series of hard choices. I would think it's something that Bill had touched on is that resettlement is going to affect such a small percentage that it's something that we've been focusing on, but maybe to the detriment of actually enabling the political conditions so that people can return home. But I don't know if our panelists want to address that other than what I have just said.

MR. HAKKI: Well, here we go again. I mean, as I said, Iraq is very wealthy, yet there's malnutrition, there's strife, we have cholera. A guy came to me from Sadr City with a glass of water from the tap. There were worms in it, live worms. I said, what is this? He said this is from the tap water. And Iraq shouldn't be like this. We need to straighten it out and we need to help the fledgling Iraqi government. We need to work with them.

Q: We need to work with them, but I think the other half of my question is why are they not working with us in terms of the protections – (inaudible)?

MR. HAKKI: Did you try?

Q: It's a valid point.

MR. HAKKI: Thank you.

MR. FRELICK: Well, I think we have – you know, I would have to say we've – I was just in the Iraqi Embassy in Beirut yesterday – the day before yesterday, and you know, I'm very sympathetic to the – in a sense a moral dilemma that they have. I mean, for example, these people in detention, they're stuck in detention, their choices are bleak, as we've said. You know, do you facilitate their return when at the moment the only option is indefinite detention, or do you push for a policy change? You know, it's a dilemma.

I don't – in a sense, I don't fault them for facilitating these returns. I do fault the Iraqi government for asking the Syrian government to close its border, and I think that we've now seen and I'm very pleased to hear – I was having a conversation with a person, who's in the audience today from the Iraqi Embassy here last night, who was saying in a very thoughtful way, in a very compassionate way, you know, how the government's looking at the returns and recognizing that there are a lot of people who still can't go back to their places of origin, and that they are – you know, despite the fanfare of a week ago, there are cautious notes that are being sounded within the Iraqi government today. So it's not a monolith in any sense.

So I think we do need to work with them, and you know, there are going to be some policies that we agree with and some that we disagree with, but I would certainly join with you, Dr. Hakki, in saying that, you know, our first choice certainly would be that people return and that they return with safety and dignity and with a voluntary choice. You know, we may disagree on whether the time is right for that at this movement, but that's certainly a goal that we would certainly support.

MR. BRENDER: May I just – I would like to ask a question, and you were referring to this amount of more than \$200 million for which the administration has asked for humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan and Iraq, if I understand correctly. How do you see the absorption capacity? Do you think it is likely that this money can be spent properly? I would be very interested in getting your views on this.

MS. SHARMA: Is there anyone here from the U.S. government who would like to discuss the absorption capacity? That is a big question. One of our colleagues from USAID was just – as I had mentioned, was just in the region and hopefully he'll be here at some point this afternoon to discuss it because that is something that he's been talking with his partners, many of whom are doing the best that they can to work in the region and that would be primarily to be providing the humanitarian assistance that people will need to survive during the winter months, which is, you know, water, food and shelter, so basic survival needs.

One of the – and I've asked that question with a question. One of the things I've been thinking through and hopefully we can get to this throughout the conference is what is the policy now as people return, whether they are returning under very stable conditions or in secure living conditions. Dr. Hakki has posited, I think, through what the Iraqi Red Crescent could do in terms of temporary resettlement. But in terms of what does that mean? Does that mean what has been proposed, in some cases, by the Brookings Institution, not by Beth (ph), but by others in terms of catch basins? What was done in 1991 in terms safe havens? Are those viable options? We know in Iraq, there are – people are displaced in urban situations, both internally and externally. We don't have camp-like situations, so there are pluses and minuses there. They're not as easily reached, but we – most experts would caution against creating camp-like situation just because of what can occur within them.

So I didn't want to necessarily close off the discussion, but I do think that we are running late right now and I want to give people an opportunity to stretch their legs and get lunch, and I'm sorry I didn't get to the people who had remaining questions, but hopefully, we'll be able to discuss these throughout the course of the day.

So please join me in thanking our panelists, and we will reconvene at 11:45. Thank you.

(Applause.)

(END)