

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

**FAILED RESPONSIBILITIES:
REFUGEES IN SYRIA, JORDAN
AND LEBANON**

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JESSICA MATHEWS: Good afternoon. I want to welcome everybody here today in this deep mid-summer. It's a great pleasure to see you all. I'm Jessica Mathews, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. I also have the honor to serve as a trustee of the International Crisis Group. And we are – Carnegie is – honored today to host this launch discussion for one of ICG's most recent and, I think, extremely important new pieces of analysis on one of the most underreported and therefore unattended great issues of our day, the problem of Iraq's refugees.

It is, of course – and I'm sure everybody in this room is already deeply aware of it – an enormous humanitarian crisis. It is also a big political issue that has a great deal to say about the future of Iraq as a stable, functioning state. And we will hear more about that.

The scale of the problem, of course, is startling: 2.5 million refugees outside the country; an equal number inside, displace internally. That translates on a per-capita basis to the United States of upwards of 50 million people. You know, you just stop and think about this country with all of its institutions and all of its resources with 50 million people displaced or outside the country, and you – I think – can begin to get some feel for the enormous dimensions of this quiet and largely ignored crisis.

In a global scale, while it seems almost in poor taste to rank refugee crises in order of suffering, in a sense, Iraq would be the world's second-worst crisis, as the report points out, second only to Afghanistan, and ahead of Sudan. So the strain on Iraq's neighbors, particularly Jordan and Syria, and to a lesser extent on Lebanon is immense. Jordan's ambassador here in town recently pointed out that half a million refugees in his country is the equivalent of 30 million people entering the United States in the space of three years. And given the strains we know that attend our debate about immigration policy, that obviously give you another lens for a feel of how difficult this is.

I've been an admiring consumer of ICG's work on Iraq for the last more than five years. I think, as I've written – I think that it is at the very top rank of the information that we have available in depth, in acumen, in deep, deep knowledge of the political and security developments and economic developments in the country. I don't really think anybody else has come close to the overall oeuvre of ICG from Iraq. And so, it really is a pleasure to be able to host this discussion of this important addition to it.

In addition to our speakers, I want to just mention that we have with us Mark Schneider here who is ICG's senior vice president and Rob Malley who is the director of ICG's outstanding Middle East program. To discuss the report itself and its findings, we are very happy to welcome Joost Hiltermann who is the deputy director of the Middle East program at ICG. And for additional comments on the report and its significance, Michel Gabaudan, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees regional representative for the U.S. and the Caribbean. And we're very glad to welcome him as well.

So Joost will start with the report. Then, we will turn to Michel. Then, we will open this discussion for your questions, both on the report itself and perhaps a broader discussion on the current political situation in Iraq if we have time to get to that as well. So thank you, Joost, welcome.

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JOOST HILTERMANN: Good afternoon. Thank you very much, Jessica. Just before we start, the first time I met Jessica, I remarked on the fact that we've been working on Iraq for several years, six years and putting out reports. And then every so often, I read a piece written by Jessica Mathews and I say, damn it, that's exactly how I would have put it if I had done it. But I didn't do it. So I'm particularly happy that she's joined our board and can infuse us with not only her knowledge but also her way of amalgamating and synthesizing the issues that we produce from the field.

The refugee report that we are putting out is an example of an ICG report, which I guess we don't do very often. It has a human rights and humanitarian focus. I think it's a perfect example of an issue – a crossover issue – where the humanitarian issues have a great impact on the issue of stability and peace, which of course is the crisis group's main interest, crisis prevention. So I think it's a report that can serve the humanitarian community in particular. And in producing it, we also wanted to make sure not to in any way make the work of humanitarian and refugee organizations more difficult but to bundle energies and to reinforce the message that they have already been putting out here in this country about the need to address this crisis, which is a lingering crisis and which could well be compounded by a new crisis. And that's what I will be talking about.

Iraq has had a refugee crisis before; 1991 was a major crisis. Refugees were streaming into Iran mostly, into Saudi Arabia, and trying to get into Turkey. Turkey didn't let them in. And that crisis was dealt with and diffused over time. A number of these people were resettled, a lot of them in the United States and European countries. Many went back eventually. And certainly, after 2003, some of these people were able to resume normal lives in Iraq.

In 2003, humanitarian organizations were pre-positioning for a wave of refugees that was expected at the time. There was going to be a conflict. We didn't know for how long. We didn't know how successful. There was going to be winners and losers and so a refugee wave was expected; it didn't happen. Instead, this wave was deferred. It came later, simply because the U.S. enterprise in Iraq, whatever way you want to characterize it, failed. And it created a situation and civil war conditions that propelled thousands of people, tens of thousands of people – in fact, hundreds of thousands of people – across the country's borders.

The number's in dispute; I want to be very careful, I'm not going to put any numbers to it, except to say that in the report, we mention that sort of the accepted number is 2.5 million refugees and another 2.5 million internally displaced. I think these numbers are probably grossly exaggerated, but I don't want to take away from the fact that we are talking about a very major crisis. There are significant numbers of refugees and internally displaced. And as part of the ex-outflow there were also more sort of – less refugee, in terms of classification, also more economic migrants who were – saw an opportunity to leave.

The situation today is different. The refugee wave ended. It started in 2005, with the onset of the sectarian conflict in Baghdad and other mixed-population areas. It accelerated with the infamous attack on the Shiite shrines in Samara in February 2006 and the sort of revenge killings in the streets by Shiite militias against Sunnis. And it tapered off with the surge, especially after the middle of 2007, when the extra insertion of American

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troops started to have some impact, and froze in place some of the sectarian divisions that had already occurred in Baghdad. People then stayed in place; they were internally displaced, in many cases, but no new – no significant numbers of refugees across the border. This was also the time when the neighboring states started to close their borders, and so it became very difficult for Iraqis to leave.

The situation in Baghdad has been moderately stable since then. We can talk about that later, how sustainable this relative peace that we are seeing today really is. So that's Baghdad for now. We see that many of the internally displaced remain internally displaced; those who went to Kurdistan are still in Kurdistan, very few have returned to their original places, mostly Baghdad. Others who are internally displaced are either inside Baghdad, meaning have come to neighborhoods where they felt that they were safe because their – the community, say, like Sunnis or Shiites, predominated or, you know, where it was homogenized. They felt safe; they went there. But very few people have actually been able to return to their original homes.

In the neighboring states, refugees remain bottled up, in Syria and in Jordan in particular, but to a lesser extent in Lebanon, Egypt, and the Gulf states. The problem there is that people are without jobs, so without a steady source of income they may have income through family networks, relatives still in Iraq who are working, families maybe in the United States or in the Gulf states or elsewhere in exile, who are working and making funds available. But overall, family networks' resources are depleting and so you see a growing pauperization of these refugee populations in Jordan and Syria. And I know, I've lived in Jordan for many years, you can see Iraqi refugees, you know, tooting around in very nice cars and I think it's a very deceptive issue. Yes, there are some very wealthy Iraqi refugees in Jordan and also some in Syria, but that conceals the much greater mass of people who are becoming increasingly impoverished, to the extent even that – this is maybe one of those great ironies in history – that you find that Iraqi refugees are now starting to rent houses in Palestinian refugee camps because that's affordable housing.

We've seen no significant returns from these refugee populations in neighboring states to Iraq. For a while, the Iraqi government touted returns, late 2007, when the surge had managed to stabilize Baghdad, to some extent. But what we have seen is two phenomena: One, people left who were the most desperate, who had absolutely no resources left and chose the risk of being in Iraq over total deprivation in Syria, especially. Maybe people realized they had to make a choice between seeing their women go into prostitution, for example, and chose to take the risk of going back to Baghdad. And you see that refugees, in fact, then turn into internally displaced. They are not able to go back, in most cases, to their original homes.

We also see that while the situation is relatively stable in Baghdad, the one problem that we have seen from day one is rapid criminality hasn't gone away. I saw a recent statistic which seems to be supported by the work of our Iraqi consultants in Iraq that, you know, we still have maybe 15 kidnappings a day for ransom. So this affects everyone who has a steady source of income and is seen to be able to pay.

And finally, we see that the international community or the Iraqi government is not doing anything for this refugee population in any significant measure, in terms of financial

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aid and in terms of offering resettlement. The Iraqi government, which is flush with oil money – its budget this year maybe doubled because of the rising oil prices – is not spending much of this money or – can always say any of this money on the refugees in neighboring states. Whatever is spent is a pittance. And it is encouraging certain groups of Iraqis to return to Iraq, including the Shiites – because this is a Shiite Islamist-led government – and Christians, who are no political threat to any of the political parties in Iraq, but not the Sunnis, who were probably the main – from the main group of refugees to Jordan, in any case, and maybe to Syria; a lot of Shiites went to Syria as well.

And the international community seems to have been happy to have these people bottled up in the neighboring states. They don't want Muslims, refugees, coming to Europe or to the United States. Tellingly, Germany is encouraging some asylum-seekers to come to Germany, as long as they are Christian. In this sense, sectarianism that we have seen in Iraq is being translated even into refugee policies in Europe. Of course, there's a long history to that in Europe.

We are, at the moment, in a holding pattern. The capacity that Jordan and Syria have is starting to break down. These countries, for all their restrictive measures that they have imposed through visa regulations and sending whole planeloads back from the airports to Baghdad, for example, they should be credited for having absorbed so many refugees in the first place. Jessica already mentioned the Jordanian ambassador saying 30 million Americans, the equivalent. If you look at the numbers in Jordan – these numbers are in dispute, but let's for the moment say 600,000 Iraqi refugees in Jordan; I think that is a great exaggeration, but that would be 10 percent of the Jordanian population. Hello, how do we absorb 10 percent of the Jordanian population in a span of two years?

Of course, it's a huge strain on the resources of a country that doesn't actually have any resources of its own. It doesn't have oil or gas; it is totally dependent on tourism, which is a very fickle industry, especially when the bombs go off, and it's dependent on American aid. Of course, it has received significant American aid, contrary to Syria, which has not been a beneficiary of that, to cope with the refugee crisis. But it's not just a matter of money.

We see therefore that people – Iraqis with chronic medical conditions are not getting the treatment they need; people with diabetes, with heart problems, et cetera, et cetera. They have, theoretically, access to health care, but effectively this is very difficult to obtain. We see very low school enrollment for children. Jordan recently, last year, opened up its public schools to Iraqi children. This, again – this itself was a great success and a great step forward, but the actual enrollment figures are low. Many refugees are afraid that they will be exposed and there is a lot of discrimination. The refugees are not liked in Jordan or in Syria, or in any host country, probably – a feeling that is totally reciprocated, by the way – and it doesn't make for a very happy situation. We also see already some signs of malnutrition in Syria, among impoverished Iraqi refugees.

The larger issue that is very important is that what once was the Iraqi secular middle class has essentially decamped to the neighboring states and is starting to evaporate. This was a stabilizing factor in Iraq. It is very unclear that there will be anything to replace that. This is not just a middle class that brings its money, its trading abilities, et cetera, but also it's

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the technocrat class; it's the civil service of Iraq. And the country is now without any functioning civil service. To the extent that there are still capable civil servants, they are operating in an environment where most of their former colleagues are no longer there. And this, of course, has a huge impact on the effectiveness of the Iraqi government to govern.

The question is what will the Iraqis – the Iraqi refugees do? They will try to get resettlement through the UNHCR. If they dare to go to U.N. offices and register because there are threats to them, to exposure – there have been known arrests by the police of people seeking to enter the U.N. offices. I think there have been some deportations, but it's done very selectively and it's not a major phenomenon, but I think it is done, in part, in order to scare everyone and to keep everybody quiet. No protests in our country, please, otherwise you are out of here.

But you see people who are trying to get resettlement, but those numbers are very low, still, and people remained bottled up. You see already crime rising, especially in Syria; you see women going to prostitution, children, so you see social problems arising. And people will try to get out by any means, so you've got smuggling rings that start making loads of money with people being victimized, essentially, maybe reaching the distant shores of Europe and maybe not.

Interestingly, that may be the only silver lining I can find, and this is that we have not seen any transfer of the sectarian fighting that we have seen in Baghdad in particular, in the past, to Jordan and Syria. In Jordan, that is difficult because of the refugees, as I said, were Sunnis, so there is no real cause for conflict between the Sunnis and Shiites. There is, by the way, very significant discrimination of Shiites in Jordan, those few who are there and who are known to be Shiites; many try to conceal it, of course.

In Syria, also, we have not seen this Shiite-Sunni conflict. I think the main reason is because the issues, the causes for conflict that existed in Iraq do not exist in Syria. In many ways, the Sunni-Shiite conflict was a fake conflict. The conflict is not between Sunnis and Shiites. It's about power and resources; it's between Iran and Arab states. But it took the veneer of a Sunni-Shiite conflict and in reality, it became one. But those drivers that exist in Iraq do not exist in exile, and so we have not seen that kind of sectarian violence and conflict among the refugee communities.

We are faced now with the absence of international aid and resettlement. Just some figures that are in a report, and I'll just round them off: The government of Iraq has, after the Geneva conference last – in 2007, allocated \$25 million, \$25 million – the budget for Iraq for this coming year, with the oil money, is supposed to be \$70 billion – \$25 million; \$10 million went to Syria, that has been dispersed. Eight million dollars went to Jordan; Jordan refused it as a pittance, it didn't want it. It said give it to UNHCR instead. When we checked a month ago it hadn't been dispersed yet. Two million went to Lebanon; \$25 million in total. The European Union allocated 50 million euro to Syria and Jordan for refugee support. Individual European member states couldn't get more than – couldn't pony up more than 10 million euros, most of which went to Syria. The Gulf states have paid amounts of \$10 million or less to – for the refugees.

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The United States has done much better, in absolute terms, but let's not talk about the relative terms; \$123 million was allocated in 2007 for IDPs and refugees. Another \$18.5 million was allocated to NGOs working in Jordan and Syria for refugee support. And then, an additional \$200 million in emergency funding was allocated for Iraqi and Palestinian refugees. I'm not sure what the breakdown is for those two. And the U.S. claimed in April, I think, of this year that it had spent \$500 million on refugees so far, since 2006.

In terms of resettlement, we're talking about the UNHCR saying that they are up to 100,000 Iraqi refugees that are extremely vulnerable, requiring resettlement; that this year, 25,000 claims will be submitted to potential host countries. Most of these are to the U.S., 24,000 to the United States. The U.S. goal for this year is 12,000. It's very unlikely to be reached because of the many restrictions that exist, including security screening, that no refugees from other countries are subjected to.

Finally – previous page – the prospect: Well, this goes into the whole issue of where we are in Iraq. I don't want to go into it now, maybe in question-answer we can say more about it. In our view, the situation in Iraq is highly unstable, very fragile. Yes, there has been significant progress on the security front, but it is not sustainable without major progress on the political front, major political deals to be cut. Unfortunately there, things are totally stuck. The Bush administration's lame duck; we don't see any serious political initiative. Very little progress can be expected in Iraq without the active or tacit support of Iran. This will not happen without serious dialogue and progress between the United States and Iran, which is obviously also not going to happen any time soon.

So the situation is very fragile, could easily break down; there are a number of spoilers. And if and when U.S. forces start to withdraw, without leaving a stable structure behind, it is very likely that all the Iraqi parties, rather than concentrating their minds, will in fact start fighting each other again. And then, we can expect the next wave of refugees. But this time, they will not be able to enter Jordan and Syria; this time, they will be stopped at the borders and we will see, for the first time, tent encampments for Iraqi refugees in the desert, and this would be a humanitarian disaster.

Is anybody preparing for it now? I think the sense is now that the war is won and that things are going well in Baghdad. I think that is a very dangerous delusion and we should divest ourselves of that, and we should start thinking how to prepare and how to preposition for the next wave, which may well come.

So that's where – on that depressing note, maybe, I want to leave it, and hand it over to my colleague from UNHCR, and later entertain your questions. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MICHEL GABAUDAN: Thank you very much – that's better.

Well, I wouldn't like to be patronizing by congratulating you for an excellent report because it's not our job in UNHCR to pay this sort of compliment to the ICG, whose report we follow with great interest. But I really want to thank you for an extremely profound report, which is well-researched and that comes at an extremely timely moment, I think,

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when discussions have taken place over improvement of the security conditions in Iraq. I mean, welcome news certainly, but that one has to take with a pinch of caution when we look at the implication has over what we have to do, and when one looks at the discussions that have taken place over returns. So I think the fact that you have decided to focus on the plight of refugees in the asylum countries is a very useful reminder that there is a huge humanitarian situation that remains out there and that has not been sufficiently advertised and advocated for. So thank you very much for this initiative and for the depth of the research you present in your findings to this group and to myself today.

We always wonder why such a large crisis that comes in such invisible manner, and I think there is a series of very bad reasons for that. I mean, the fact that the initial movement was by people who came from the middle classes, that many of them drove there, that they did not go into camps, where they could be parked and counted but that moved into the neighborhoods of the city; all these gave the impression that first, it's not very visible, but also these are people who can manage for themselves. They don't really need the assistance of the international community. And then, we took time to try to scratch the surface and to see what is under that.

And when you scratch, you find some pretty dramatic situation. The first one is that on the few surveys we've made – and these are by no means absolutely scientific surveys – but the surveys we've made in the circumstances, when we operate, have demonstrated a very high level of direct violence suffered by the Iraqis who have moved out. People have witnessed horrors, murders, abductions, bombings; people who have been themselves threatened, whose family or relatives have been abducted. People have suffered violence. We had, at one point, I think, 16 percent of the people who came to register with us had suffered directly some forms of torture; an extremely highly vulnerable population that the conditions in which they arrived don't let you think they may have suffered such an extent of violence.

One has mentioned the medical problems. We've always also been extremely surprised at the number of complex, I would say, rich world of disease that many of the Iraqis are exhibiting and of course, that require in the conditions they encounter themselves, treatment and support that is not always forthcoming.

So why doesn't that resonate in the international community? One, well, you can't really run a census in populations who are diffuse like this in the neighborhoods. That would be quite unacceptable to the asylum countries and there would be absolutely no point for us to push that. So we are caught in between, one, using the numbers that have been officially presented by government, which we do in every country as an intergovernmental body, and the other, trying to register those of whom we can target some sort of assistance or some sort of attention, whether it's through counseling or referrals, et cetera.

And we have targeted our assistance on the basis of people who register with us. Now, registration is a fairly thorough process that makes sure that there is no fraud possible. It's a fairly technical process. But because we wanted to be thorough and fraud-proof, it's a process that takes time. So you can only register so many people at a certain time. We've been catching up recently on the lag time people had to suffer before they could be fully registered. It's getting better and the indication we have is that many people want to be

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registered. So we've registered about 300,000 so far; our target for the end of the year would be half a million. And the indication that there are more and more who want to register at a time where we're becoming more efficient at delivering some assistance, does indicate to us the fact that these people are meeting real needs.

You have made comments on your report on the attitude of asylum countries, that has been ambiguous. I think we all recognize, as you did, that they have been very generous in tolerating large numbers of people on their shores. While one could regret that they haven't found ways to give to the Iraqis some sort of a status that would give them more confidence that they are staying in this country and safe, I must say that over the last year and a half, we have been quite pleased to see a real change in the attitude, certainly of Syria and Jordan and recently of Lebanon, in a reduction of the number they deport, certainly responding to our request to remove people from detention when they have been detained.

And while I would not certainly say that there's no deportation taking place, by no means is it the systematic policy of these countries and by no means does it affect a large number of people. And if at all, what I would add to your report, is perhaps those countries that should be mentioned for deporting Iraqis are more the European countries who have not had such a generous reaction and who tend – in their majority; there are exceptions – but who tend to want to return Iraqis without much consideration of these returns would mean and certainly it means for certain exposure again to the threats and the risks they have fled. But for many others, it will, for the very least, means that they cannot go back to their home and they would become internally displaced in their own country. So it's not really helping Iraq.

You mentioned the question of professionals. We've been stricken by the number of people who have – who had important positions in Iraq. And as one starts discussing what the Iraq of the future is certainly the question of what will happen to a country whose lost all engineers, doctors, professors, et cetera is a crucial one. And as we discuss in the following months returns, I think some efforts will have to be put towards seeing how we can capture this population and offer them decent conditions to go back.

Funding – and you very kindly advocate for more funding to UNHCR – our budget is still underfunded. We usually establish our budgets ideally on the basis of needs, but more realistically on the basis of the needs that we think we are going to be funded for so that we do not create excessive expectations. We know that we could probably deliver at present assistance in terms of ATM cards, non-food items, counseling, et cetera, perhaps double to what we have budgeted. So we are certainly recognizing, as you imply in your report, that we are barely scratching the surface of the needs at the time, as you indicated, when this population is becoming poorer and poorer. And this is a factor of great concern to us because in the few returns that took place early last year, it was obvious that the main cause for return was not so much that the conditions in Iraq had improved; it's that the conditions in the asylum country were becoming so bad that people had no other alternative.

Now, this is, of course, the worst possible reason for people to return. As I said, they would probably become displaced in their own country and, if anything, it points out to the fact that we have to strengthen tremendously the assistance we are providing. You mention on trying to get funds from the ITF is a very generous one because there are lots of

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funds available there. I think it would be a terrible battle because the ITF has been planned for Iraq and I think the idea to beginning discussion to divert these funds to asylum countries would be quite difficult.

I will just make one or two brief comments to finish and then perhaps take, with you, questions so we can respond to the interest of the assistance here in a much better way. But on the resettlement, I think that the administration is close to get to the target of 12,000 this year. So we are not yet there, but I mean certainly the numbers coming by months is increasing now and I am hopeful they will meet their target. And we are already discussing how to collaborate next year and we're certainly discussing with a view to increase the numbers quite substantially. I cannot tell you exactly how much because we are still in discussions, but the resettlement will be moving in the right direction and has to keep on moving because among the refugees we have, they are – (inaudible) – for whom we know, that return to Iraq even in better circumstances than where Iraq finds itself right now, will not be possible in the future and they will need an alternative solution.

Your concluding word, of course, is one we are extremely concerned with, the idea of tented camps on the no man's land on the – in the border between Iraq and Syria or Iraq and Jordan. It's certainly not the place where we see camps. We have two camps right now which host a small population of Palestinians who have suffered tremendously in Baghdad and who find themselves in absolutely despicable conditions. We're trying to move them to resettlement countries with great difficulties. I mean, the offers have been coming in an extremely parsimonious manner, but they are in an area where it's difficult to provide supplies. There is no water; there is no possible occupation. If you want people who have already been suffering who are a population that has physical and psychological wounds that have to be taken care of, the last thing you want to put them is to isolate them in one of these places. So that would be an absolutely dramatic scenario that we all have to strive to avoid.

But, again, thank you very much for your report. As I said, it lobbies for a position that we have ourselves advocated for and we see it as an effective tool to reinforce our efforts and I'm grateful for that.

MS. MATHEWS: Thank you, Michel. That's very ambitious. (Applause.) Let's open the floor to questions. Please identify yourself. There are some mikes so wait right here.

Q: Hi. Helena Cobban with the Friends Committee on National Legislation and "Just World News." Thanks for a great report, Joost. Just a small gender note and then a question. It's not that people are seeing their women forced into prostitution; people are being forced into prostitution. Women are people, too. (Chuckles.)

MR. HILTERMANN: Sorry. I caught it whilst I was speaking and it was too late. (Chuckles.)

Q: But my question is about the provincial elections and the impact of internal displacement and external displacement on the provincial elections. How can they be organized? I mean, I do remember, for example, in Bosnia, these – you know, it's very

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complicated – and, you know, because people should go to their province to vote and then you have to bus them there. If they're IDPs, if they are externally displaced, that's even more of a problem.

Do you think that provincial elections can be held in this circumstance of massive internal and external displacement?

MR. HILTERMANN: Well, I think provincial elections will be held, at least I hope so. It's unclear because, as you know, the electoral law is stuck right now, but that may still be resolved before the Iraqi parliament's recess that is now I guess delayed by a few days. So the question is, when they take place, what will happen to the IDPs? Where will they vote?

I think they are supposed to vote in their areas of origin and that is going to be extremely problematic for many because that means they would have to go to areas that may be dangerous to them, probably are dangerous to them. And that may mean that they are essentially disenfranchised. So that is an important consideration. For them to vote in the areas where they are located now would be heavily resist – I don't know what the current law says, actually, so I'm a little bit at a disadvantage, but it would probably be resisted strongly by local parties and the governments where the IDPs find themselves because that would be seen as interference in internal political affairs.

MS. MATHEWS: Marina.

Q: Marina Ottaway from the Carnegie Endowment. You have not said much about the Shi'a refugees. You have mentioned that there are more in Syria than there are in Jordan and so on, but given the situation – and I was also looking at the map that you have – presumably, the ones who are going to Iran are all Shi'as. But it seems to be that the number is relatively small. Can you explain a bit what's happening there? Are there more Shi'a internally displaced people or, you know, what is the situation there?

And the other one, if I may add another question, I have trouble understanding why the government of Syria and Jordan and so on do not want refugees to be registered because in a – it could work both ways. It could work in their interest. Can you explain that a bit more?

MR. HILTERMANN: Well, on the first question, if you recall 1991, the refugee flow was into Iran mostly and they were mostly Shiites, even into Saudi Arabia there were many Shiites and of course into Turkey or into the border area of Turkey were Kurds. That was a different conflict. It was the regime coming back and it was – even though it was a secular regime with mixed Sunni-Shiite commanders and et cetera et etcetera in the army, in the security services, it was still seen as a Sunni regime and the victims were very much not just the Shiites, but the religious Shiites. They are the ones who fled. The current conflict is quite the opposite. It is the Shiite Islamist parties that are ruling Baghdad that made serious advances in the civil war in Baghdad in 2005, 2006, up until summer 2007. The main victims have been the Sunnis of Baghdad. And so the last place they would go to is Iran. And the Shi'as have no reason to flee to Iran; they can become internally displaced in other Shi'a areas where they – in the South, majority Shi'a areas where they feel relatively safe even if they are deprived of many resources.

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So we've seen quite a different flow for that reason. To the extent that Shiites have fled, they are secular Shiites, maybe were linked to the former regime, maybe not in any kind of complicity sort of way, but, you know, including members of the secular middle class. They would have gone to Syria, where they feel more welcome than in Jordan, which is quite anti-Shiite in – not in official policy, of course, but in practice it is.

On the second question, maybe Michel can say more about that. My sense is that in the case of Jordan, at least, which I know better than Syria, the government prefers to keep people as guests because a guest is somebody you bring in warmly and you treat very well and then, after a while, a guest has a way of overstaying his welcome and you can get rid of them. And if you don't get rid of them, at least you can treat them in such a way that they know that they are not welcome and that it's better for them to leave.

The Jordanians very much want the Iraqis to leave, whether to resettlement or back to Baghdad; it doesn't matter to them. But they don't want them to stay for the long term. They already have a serious problem with Palestinian refugees which is upsetting the demographic balance in Jordan. It's the kind of thing you can't even openly discuss in Jordan. This additional crisis – if people get official status, they would get citizen rights – sorry, not citizen rights. They would get certain rights and that could lead to a semi-permanent situation which they want to avoid.

MS. MATHEWS: Michel, did you want to add anything?

MR. GABAUDAN: No, I think you've addressed that pretty well. We are discussing, of course, with the governments the question of –

MS. MATHEWS: Tip that up, tip your mike up.

MR. GABAUDAN: We are discussing with the government the question of documentation. It's a question of principle for us. We have evidence in Jordan – we have lots of refugees telling us that the document we give them is giving them some sort of protection from authority. So at least it's a step in the right direction. But of course what we are arguing with authorities, when you document people, you give a service to the person, but you also give a service to the states because documentation is a control mechanism and therefore governments should have an interest, eventually.

So maybe this discussion will progress as time passes. But I think some of the reluctance you have explained very well, that they feel that this is going to sort of underline the program as something that's going to last and this is not the impression they want to give. On the Shi'a-Sunni thing, it is true that there are more Sunnis among the refugees than Shi'a as compared to the proportion of these groups inside Iraq. But there are still 25 percent Shi'as in Jordan, I think 35 percent in Syria. And in Lebanon it's the opposite: 60 percent of the refugees are Shi'a.

So it's not Sunnis outside, Shi'a stays in. There has been a proportionately bigger exodus of Sunnis than Shi'as, but plenty of Shi'as have gone, including very poor people

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who I don't think have gone for any other reason than that they were escaping for their own lives. So we have to keep this in mind.

MS. MATHEWS: There are a lot of questions. I'm going to take two or three together. So if you guys can take good notes then we'll get everybody. In the back, you had a – there you go. And then right next to you and then come here.

Q: Hi. I'm Jason Gluck from the United States Institute of Peace. I want to thank both of you for speaking today and your remarks. My question is for Joost and, Joost, I was wondering if you could please elaborate on the ways in which the government of Iraq is discriminating against Sunnis in promoting return of refugees. Thank you.

MS. MATHEWS: Right there, yeah. And then let's – yeah, go ahead.

Q: Hi. Mary Beth Sheridan. I'm a reporter at the Washington Post. I was wondering if Joost could comment a bit more on sort of where he expects the situation to go, particularly as, you know, apparently the U.S. troop presence will decline. And what's a bit puzzling to me is that the Iraq government itself seems keen to see the U.S. troop presence decline. So sort of how does that square with the idea that once there is a withdrawal or reduction, that there would be increased violence? Thank you.

MS. MATHEWS: Okay. Let's take one more right here.

Q: Hi, I'm Greg Aftandilian with C&O Resources. My question for Joost is basically on the situation of Iraqi refugee children. Are they being schooled at home now or are they not being schooled? How – you know, they come from, of course, very literate middle-class Iraqi families. How are those families dealing with the fact that there is a lack of education for them? Thank you.

MS. MATHEWS: Okay. So let's deal with these and then we'll take another round.

MR. HILTERMANN: On the discrimination of the Iraqi government towards Sunnis in terms of returns, the current government in Iraq is discriminating generally towards Sunnis. In fact, one of the main challenges we're facing now is the integration of some of the Sunnis back into the state apparatus. We – I think the government is particularly resisting any return of people who would – because of their qualifications and their previous positions – take pivotal positions in the bureaucracy, because these people have not been actively replaced by qualified people. So if these people came back, they would by ipso facto have significant sway within the ministries and within the institutions of state.

So I think – and they fear and it is a very deep fear, maybe justified by the history, among the Shiite Islamists in particular that the Sunnis harbor a hope, an aspiration to come back and return Sunni power or whatever, secular power, at their expense. And so we have seen no active efforts by the government to encourage Sunnis in particular to return to Iraq. We've seen discrimination in many other ways. For example, de-Ba'athification has been applied selectively where Ba'ath Party members were Shiites. If they had a record that the new rulers could live with or integrated back into the system while those among the Sunnis

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who were Ba'aths, regardless of what their conduct used to be, have not been and have been de-Ba'ath – whatever the term is, de-Ba'athified.

In terms of reduced U.S. troop levels, I'm sorry, I was taking notes, I hope I didn't get the question wrong, but my sense is that, first of all, the Iraqi government doesn't want U.S. troops to leave. Whatever Mr. Maliki is saying in public, he's saying that because he is facing electoral pressure. He cannot afford to be sounding un-nationalistic ahead of provincial council elections.

He's also saying it probably because he realizes he cannot get any strategic framework agreement through the Iraqi parliament at this moment. I think the forces arrayed against him are stronger than the people on his side. And I think Iran probably also is putting quite a bit of pressure on that. So I don't think that is a genuine issue for them. I think they very much – all the ruling parties, including the Sons of Iraq and the opposition, want the American forces to stay for a considerable period of time, much longer than Barack Obama would like and maybe not as long as John McCain seems to think they should stay.

But my sense is that the reduction of troops in Iraq when you have not left behind – when you're not leaving behind a viable government that can withstand challenges from non-state actors like the Sadrists, like the Sons of Iraq, like al Qaeda in Iraq, is a disaster. It will break down. At the moment, the building up of security forces is an ongoing process. It is a time-consuming process. It's still a very weak army and it's still an army whose factions listen to sectarian and ethnic leaders more than to a national leadership which actually doesn't exist.

The question is – and I think that's a much bigger question – you know, when should U.S. troops leave? How long should they try to build an Iraqi state? Maybe it's not going to work ever, so cut your losses. That question is a very difficult one. It's not really for this forum today, but that is what needs to be addressed and that needs to be addressed of course by the future president of this country.

In terms of education actually, I am going to pass that question to my colleague who knows much more about it than I do, I hope, because I don't.

MR. GABAUDAN: We have tried to support both the Jordanian and the Syrian education systems so they can accept more and more children. To date, we have 75,000 children enrolled with our support. We would hope to get to 200,000 children enrolled by the end of the year. There are also children that go to private schools, et cetera, so this is not complete accountability for all of the children going to school. It's still certainly well below the mark. And the problem there is that it's not just a question of money.

I mean, you need to – you know, you need to expand schools, but then you need to find teachers, et cetera. So it's something that can only progress incrementally with time. You can't just guarantee full coverage very quickly. But because we haven't been able to put enough children into school, we have also, unfortunately, evidence that there are an increasing problem with street children and families who send their kids into the streets to try to find out how they can earn their living. So catching up with the schooling is going to

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be indirectly a way to fight some of the criminality that is cropping up and that you have mentioned before.

MS. MATHEWS: Okay. We'll start over here. Oh, there you are.

Q: Thank you, both panelists. Joseph Kassab, Chaldean Federation of America. The Chaldean Federation is a grassroots community-based organization working for the plight of the Iraqi religious minorities, mainly the Iraqi Christians. One thing we noticed throughout the, you know, what we hear, of course, including both gentlemen, is not talking about the plight of the religious minorities – and mainly the Iraqi Christians. And, as you may know, the Iraqi Christians are the ancient people of Iraq and they are at the verge of extinction here.

And the numbers have dwindled almost to half, even less than half. We started with 1.2 million Iraqi Christians before the war and now it's less than 600,000. Two hundred and fifty thousand of them already are IDPs in Northern Iraq and 350,000 of them are refugees. And these people, as Commissioner Gutierrez one time said, these are the most vulnerable people and the international community tends to agree with him, that they are the most vulnerable people, for one good reason, that these people have no militia to protect them, no – they don't have tribal people to protect them. They don't carry arms and they are left alone. So I would like to hear more about what are the programs available for these people and how can we make sure that we – how can we make sure we protect this particular group? Thank you.

MS. MATHEWS: In the back.

Q: I'm Shala Wahli (ph). I'm from Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and I am Iraqi. So first I would like to thank you so much for addressing such important problem, which all Iraqis are suffering from. I think as Iraqis, we are so busy inside Iraq trying to stabilize the security and trying to stop the bloodshed inside our country. But the refugees in Syria and Jordan are really suffering. And I'm so – I'm predicting that there will be long-term blowbacks from this big crisis that we are going to have more problems as outcomes for this crisis, if it will not be addressed very well.

My questions are, first, it will be for UNHCR. I want to ask about what does UNHCR steps to capacity building for the ministry of migration and displaced, which is newly established in Iraq after 2003, because we all know that the capacity building of the government institutions that can address this problem or provide the sustainability and efficiency to address this problem in long term.

So and the second question will be, there are some families in Syria and Jordan, especially after 2007 who decided to go back to Baghdad, maybe because running out of their potentials to sustain themselves in those countries. So what are the steps inside Baghdad to house those returning families, especially most of them, they have their houses; but they lost it – (inaudible). So it's my question, it will be what's going on in Iraq to build the solutions and addressing this problem from inside Iraq toward the international community? Thank you so much.

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MS. MATHEWS: Why don't we tackle these two?

MR. GABAUDAN: Thank you. Joseph first – yes, religious minorities are indeed very serious issues: Chaldeans, other groups also. We have included them certainly among the categories of vulnerability we look at for resettlements. And up to date, they have constituted a much higher proportion of resettled case than other groups, than Sunnis or Shi'as, et cetera. So they have been biased towards the religious minorities in our selection for resettlement cases.

On the long run, of course, we know the majority of refugees will have to go back to Iraq. The rest of the world will not be able to absorb that, nor will the current asylum countries, neighboring countries. And the other question for the religious minorities is will there be in Iraq space for them or no? And today, it doesn't look very positive, to be honest. Whether that changes over the next years, we'll have to see.

So we'll have to keep in mind that the religious minorities will need some particular attention. But I think it's also very important to recognize that as we are trying to provide resettlement with the countries that cooperate with us to the religious minority, we cannot do that at the exclusion of other groups who also have suffered tremendously. And we have to include Sunnis and Shi'as and other religious minorities than the Chaldeans that have suffered violence, torture, et cetera. First, because ethically, it's what one should do – should look at what is the distribution of suffering and try to address the most dramatic cases – but also, because politically, if you are not doing that, you would be at risk to import in asylum countries some of the rifts and factional battles that have taken up in Iraq, and which mercifully so far have not appeared in these countries.

So to respond to you, I think we are sensitive about that. I think all resettlement countries are sensitive – some too sensitive. We heard that some countries were thinking to take only the Christians. But it's clearly one of the groups that will be looked particularly over the years.

When we present currently with a limited number of slots for resettlement, first for resettlement, you have to look among a community who perhaps all qualify under the criteria of vulnerability. Which are those that should get out this year? And then, who can wait, if you want? And if you look at women head of families, people who have suffered tortures, people whose particular medical needs – you've got to make a selection. It's not a very pleasant one to make, but you've got to make some sort of selection to try to move first the most vulnerable.

Relationship with the ministry of displaced – MD or I forgot how you – ministry of displacement and migration – it's essentially relation in capacity building we have. I mean, as has been mentioned, Iraq is a country that has financial means. We are not sponsoring projects through the ministry. But we are trying to help the ministry set out policies for assistance to IDPs. And now, we are working with them to try to set up what would be a blueprint for return and please don't interpret that as saying that time is right for return. It is not right for return. We are certainly not advocating for return.

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But for returns to take place, you will need to have a lot of preparation taking place in Iraq, looking not only at services, guarantees that people will not be discriminated for having left the country, et cetera – but also looking at the restitution of property whether through compensation or the mechanism. And that will require quite a sophisticated policy that is then filtered down to the judicial system, the governorates, et cetera. It's going to be complicated. And unless we have a blueprint for returns that can assure people in exile that if they come back home, they don't come back to another experience of misery, but to a real future. You need to prepare that. And that's part of the work we are doing with the ministry of displacement. Mostly, it's a relationship that deals with capacity-building and training, not in the support of projects for which the Iraqi government is putting its own funds.

And your last question was about those individuals in Syria and Jordan who want to go back. In any refugee situation, return will take place through a series of different phases. The first phase is usually a few individuals say, well, I know where my home is. I know that in my village, things are safe. And I want to go back before anybody says that returns should take place. Now, these people we can help on an individual basis, which means if they approach us in Syria or Jordan or they approach us in Iraq, it's a bit more difficult in Iraq, because we are based in Baghdad and we have only some NGOs working on our behalf in the governorate. But if they approach us, we can try to give them spot assistance, if you want.

At the later stage, when certainly we are happy that there is a master plan from the government and that security conditions have improved to such a level that we can facilitate returns, we would then really help people in groups, as of Syria and Jordan, to move back and then receive them and help them inside Iraq. And then, the last phase is when we go into an advocacy mode where we say conditions are now perfect. You should not stay in asylum. And we are going to give you six months or a year to decide to go back. And after that, there won't be anymore program and you have to discuss with the country of asylum on your own what sort of migration status they want to give. So it goes by step.

We are now at the very beginning of the beginning of the first step, if you want, where we can respond to individual demands, and that by no means is an indication to our donors that it means that they should relent on supporting programs to help refugees in asylum countries.

MS. MATHEWS: If I might ask a – come back to these two – as I listen to both of you, I had this sense that the prospects for return of a substantial number seem pretty dark and at the same time, an astonishing, to me, lack of support and concern and sense of community, brotherhood on this issue from the other Arab countries. And it feels to me like the beginning of the Palestinian crisis. And I just wonder whether that's a fair reaction, whether you can talk a bit about why there hasn't been more financial support, if nothing else, or even resettlement support from our other Arab countries?

Let me take Karim, and then up here.

Q: Karim Sadjadpour from the Carnegie Endowment. Thank you very much. I just actually wanted to follow up on Jessica's question, because it's quite remarkable when you

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look at the tremendous oil surplus in the Gulf right now. Abu Dhabi has a nearly \$1 trillion sovereign wealth fund, hundreds of billions of dollars oil surplus – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, elsewhere. And Joost, I think the figure you said is \$10 million from Gulf countries? Correct me if I'm mistaken.

MS. MATHEWS: That was the number you –

MR. HILTERMANN: One country and then another country another 8 million (dollars) something like –

Q: But still, I mean, again, when we look at a trillion-dollar sovereign wealth fund and we're talking about tens of millions of dollars from the Gulf, why hasn't there been more assistance from the Gulf?

Q: Thank you so much. Lina Omar (ph) from the Iraqi Embassy. I really appreciate your comments on your report. I just want to – I don't have a question; I have a clarifying issue. When you comment about the – that the Iraqi government has done nothing for the refugees, this is not true. As you know, the government has built the whole ministry taking care of this issue. And there is no one single meeting that the Iraqi officials have and everywhere that they go outside Iraq, don't discuss this issue.

And if you go to the ministry's website, you will see the activities and the programs that the ministry is planning for coordinating with the other Iraqi ministries to take care of this issue. And also, sir, that – for everyone else too – the country went through so much. We went through dictatorship for 35 years. We are building a nation and the government has so much to deal with. But I can assure you this is one of the top issues that the government is working on. Thank you.

MS. MATHEWS: Thank you. Joost?

MR. HILTERMANN: Yeah, Arab countries. Well, I can only speculate, but there seems to be a pattern, which is that the Arab countries say this is a problem created by the government in Iraq and by the United States, of course. We advised against this mad adventure in the first place. There were other ways of dealing with the Saddam problem. We weren't listened to. Here are the consequences. We don't want to pay for the fallout. This is a Western and a coalition responsibility.

As for the Iraqi government, they're basically Iranian proxies. I'm talking from the Arab perspective here. And so they should be spending their money. We're not even going to cancel the debt that the Iraqi government has with us. So this is not something we want to do. Maybe if we get some accommodation from the Iraqi government, maybe in terms of integration of Sons of Iraq into the Iraqi security forces, for example. Then, as a quid pro quo, we can also, you know, send our ambassadors to Baghdad, cancel some of the debt, and maybe pay some for the refugees. I think it's all part of an overall package of deals between Arab countries that are deeply suspicious of the government in charge in Baghdad and that also feel completely not responsible for the original endeavor.

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On the issue of the government you only give a clarification. So whenever you give a clarification, I have to then give a clarification on the clarification. It's good to have a ministry and a website and all that. I think very little funding has been disbursed. But you raise one issue that is very important, which is the government capacity. And I think this is a really serious problem. This government is a new government, is a weak government. It's not a government that enjoys a great deal of popularity. I should say that. But it's also a government that doesn't have a lot of governing capacity, mostly because the civil service are the refugees. So it is very difficult to spend money. Even before the recent oil glut, the government was not able to spend its budget.

So I think it is part good intentions and part – but matched by an inability to actually spend the money. It should be very easy to allocate additional money, additional funds to the host countries, for example. But I think also, as I said earlier, there are some political considerations that may complicate that.

MR. GABAUDAN: Yeah, just very, very briefly on the general Arab Gulf state, the contribution. I mean, apart from the very generous contribution we saw recently from Saudi Arabia to the World Food Program in the food price crisis context, Gulf states have traditionally not been supporters of the multilateral system. So it's not that they stopped funding; it's that they've never been part of the multilateral reaction. And actually, what we got were fairly good surprise, because it was much more than we have gotten in the past, you know, in the context of Bosnia or the Somali crisis, et cetera. So that was good news.

But certainly, one of the arguments they bring to the fore is that Iraq should be contributing more if they want the rest of the Arab states to come to step to the plate. This is something we hear. Whether it's an honest or dishonest response, I don't know. But it's something we do hear. And of course, substantive contribution from the Gulf states would go a long way to meeting some of the needs that we are now not able to meet for Iraqi refugees. I would like to confirm that we did get the \$8 million from the government of Iraq, that they have been paid, so I would like to put this issue to rest at least.

One point perhaps I would like to raise with the government of Iraq refugees present a rather unusual circumstance in the refugee world. It is a very large refugee population by very large are not fleeing discrimination and persecution by their governments. In most refugee situations, refugees flee persecution by the government.

In the case of Iraq, we could say that in the worst of case, what they flee is the inability of the government to protect them from some of the unpalatable groups that are creating havoc in Iraq. And that to me would argue very much in favor for Iraq being much more forthcoming in talking to refugees and addressing them because we feel in Syria and Jordan an increasing resentment from the refugees that they are not being sufficiently attended by government. And in most cases, we would be the first one to say government, please don't talk to refugees. You know, you can't look at them, you've persecuted them. Until things change, you can't get in touch with them. But in the case of Iraq, I think it's a completely different one, and I think this would perhaps be a road and advantage that the Iraqi government could be considering.

Thank you.

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MS. MATHEWS: Thank you. Joost, let me put on the spot again. Are we looking at a population whose children and grandchildren will still be lost outside the country? Is that what we take away.

MR. HILTERMANN: You know, all of the Iraqi refugees I've met want to go back to Iraq, but I think many of them don't feel welcome because they feel that the current government doesn't represent them. It's an Islamist government, it's a partly Kurdish government, and the refugees are secular Sunni. They I don't think have the expectation of going back any time soon. And if my fear is realized that there will be another wave, then this will only solidify the current situation. I think this is a long-term situation; this is not a situation where we're going to see any significant returns in the next 10 years.

And so that already means that you have a new class of people, not people who just stepped out for a while and then were able to come back and resume their normal activities, but people who are fundamentally different from the people who were still in Iraq. And you get maybe a replication, if there is an opportunity to go back, maybe because of differences in the political situation in Iraq, where you have former exiles, not refugees today – former exiles coming back into Iraq who are distrusted, disliked, resented for all of the same reason that the current former exiles that are ruling Iraq are resented and distrusted and disliked by the Iraqis who never had the chance or never wanted to leave Iraq in the first place. So I'm very worried about that particular cycle as well.

MS. MATHEWS: Any more questions? Yes, sorry.

Q: (Off mike) – is this on – Georgetown University. I had one question about U.S. immigration policy or policies vis-à-vis refugees, and I guess it's to you, Michel. The report outlines a number of recommendations that all deal with getting rid of some of the impediments that refugees currently face. But I'm wondering whether there are issues in addition to just getting in the door, the way refugees, once they get here are supported. And the question comes because we hear stories about the refugees that have made it through the door having trouble finding a place to live, finding jobs. There is maybe one month of support and then they're on their own. And I wonder if you can comment on that.

MR. HILTERMANN: Well, I – there I'm a bit surprised. Conditions for refugees who come to the U.S. are pretty standard. I mean, they have a set of rights. They are assisted by I think there are eight or resettlement NGOs who work with government funds. And finding a house, finding a job is not easy. There are sometimes difficulties. But for – I visited a few of these areas, you know, in Kansas City, in California, et cetera, and all of the refugees, whether they come from Iraq or from Nepal, or from Somalia, et cetera, do meet the same sort of difficulties.

I don't have an impression that there is a particular issue for Iraqis. There has been with Iraqis, perhaps at one point, a tremendous amount of expectations, and I think this is where, perhaps, the difficulties come by, where these expectations were not about the sort of housing they find and the sort of jobs they have to take in the first year. So there are issues there, perhaps, that have to do more with proper counseling before they arrive than with an

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element of discrimination which I thought perhaps could come out of your question and which I'm not aware of and I haven't seen personally.

MR. GABAUDAN: Let me just add – just the last couple of evenings, I met with refugees from the 1996 very brief refugees from Iraqi Kurdistan, after the Iraqi Army teamed up with one of the Kurdish parties to go into – (inaudible). And these were uneducated people – very low, just a few years of primary school. And so when they arrived, when they were resettled here, there was an NGO that was helping them, and it's tremendously important to them. But essentially they were paying a thousand-dollars rent with a month and they had no jobs. So they ended up running to McDonald's to work. And they have actually done extremely well.

The problem I have heard is from the professionals who have come with professional degrees from Iraq which do not translate to the same professions in the United States. The credentials just don't work. And they become very frustrated, very angry. Some try to go back if they can, or at least to the Arab world.

But that said, I found – and this is one of these strange things to me, anyway, that people come to the United States – they sink or swim, and they end up swimming in most cases. I have friends who fled Iraq also in the 1990s and went to Europe, and they got all of the benefits, all of the money and all of that. But they were never accepted. And they were sitting at home being – you know, just simmering, very unhappy and alienated. And if you look at alienated Muslim youth in Europe, you can only think of 9/11, at least that's what I do.

So I think in terms of that the United States in a way does things – does it right despite the problems that do occur. This is anecdotal but it's an interesting difference between the two situations.

MS. MATHEWS: Thank you. I want to close just to emphasize how important a contribution I think this report is. As Michel has made clear, this is an issue that none of us I think fully appreciates the dimensions of and ICG has really laid it before us in yet another important contribution. So you thank you, Joost. Thank you very much Michel. Thank all of you for joining us.

(Applause.)

(END)