Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Senators.

I am going to concentrate on the humanitarian activities in the

north Caucasus, particularly in Ingushetia. This is where UNHCR

works with a number of U.N. and voluntary agencies to provide assistance

and protection to Chechens outside Chechnya, mainly in

Ingushetia, where we have about 200,000 persons, but also in

Dagestan and in Georgia.

Seventy percent of these displaced persons and refugees are in

host families. Twenty percent are spontaneously settled, and only

ten percent in camps set up by the international community.

Around 100,000 of those displaced have returned to Chechnya,

though many are shuttling back and forth.

At this time, about twice as many people are leaving than those

returning each week. And only a quarter of those who go back into

Chechnya are remaining there for good.

On the assistance side, emergency needs are being met outside

Chechnya, but there are sectoral and locational gaps. Our movements

are escorted for security reasons, and at our own insistence,

by Russian security forces.

Since mid-September UNHCR has delivered 5,000 tons of aid

worth $4 million on 42 convoys to the North Caucasus, 34 to

Ingushetia; 5 to Dagestan, 1 to North Oseetia, 1 to Karachaevo-

Cherkessia, and 1 yesterday finally, 29 February, to Grozny itself.

Yesterday’s ten-truck convoy provided and escorted by our Russian

implementing partner, EMERCOM, arrived in the center of

Grozny at midday and offloaded for distribution today through local

hospitals, soup kitchens and bakeries.

Three UNHCR local staff, Chechens, accompanied the convoy

and will monitor the distribution of the 45 metric tons of food, as

well as plastic sheeting, soap, mattresses and blankets.

The convoy is something of a pilot project to allow us to evaluate

security and logistic possibilities for a future aid operation. We also

hope to get a better idea of how many civilians remain in Grozny,

estimated now at between 10,000 and 20,000.

We did have a first report back from our monitors who are having

to use the telephone of the Russian general who runs the

EMERCOM office in Grozny, and this is as much as he has been

able to tell us so far. When we get more information, we will provide

it to you as we are updated.

In terms of our protection concerns, our immediate concerns

come from the accounts from displaced persons who report widespread

displacement from the villages in the Argun Valley, the site,

we believe, of continuing military activities.

Some reports say that thousands of villagers are fleeing in advance

of the military offensive as it moves southward. Accounts describe

direct shelling of some villages and intense fighting around

others. There are maps attached to my testimony that you can see.

According to the Ingush Migration Service, some 1,800 new internally

displaced people arrived in Ingushetia last week from

Chechnya, and 763 returned for good.

Most of the new arrivals are women and children from some of

the most heavily destroyed locations in Chechnya. Many say they

would like to return home, but are afraid to do so, because of lawlessness

and reports that all males are being temporarily detained

for identification purposes.

The internally displaced persons told UNHCR monitors that in

the Argun district, all males aged 15 and older are detained by the

local police, the Ministry of Interior Affairs, for purposes of establishing

their identity. And they said that some of these men remain

in detention.

Additional protection concerns outside Chechnya for us are the

lack of legal status and necessary documentation for IDPs to access

state provided assistance and to be able to move about freely; and

the continuing fear that in some instances, IDPs are being forced

to return to Chechnya against their will. We have been working on

this problem, and we think we may have it solved.

Persuasion to leave Ingushetia is accomplished sometimes by refusal

to register new arrivals, particularly those from the Russian controlled

areas of Chechnya, for assistance, by de-registering

them, or by cutting the levels of assistance provided to them.

Reports by human rights organizations—which we will hear

more later—and from journalists about atrocities and gross human

rights violations in Chechnya, both in the detention camps set up

by Russian troops and in the towns to which Chechens have tried

to return, appear to be corroborated, at least in part, by the daily

interviews carried out by UNHCR monitors. We are putting some

mechanisms in place to check out the reports more systematically.

An officer devoted entirely to what we call protection issues was

sent to the area last week and is in the process of training 18 protection

monitors to be able to tell us what is really happening.

UNHCR, however, as in similar conflict situations has certain reporting

constraints in order to preserve its impartial presence, protect

the IDPs, our staff and the assistance program itself.

We deal with this by sharing verified reports with those agencies

whose mandated task it is to monitor human rights conditions.

The appointment of the former head of the Federal Migration

service to investigate alleged human rights abuses in Chechnya

and the opening up of a passport service in Chechnya, which has

not been available for the past four years, has given rise to some

hope that the situation may begin to improve shortly.

In terms of the future of the operation, following an inter-agency

assessment mission to Ingushetia and just inside the northern Russian-

controlled Chechnya, in the first week of February, which

found conditions in the established camps reasonable, but much

below standard in the spontaneous settlements and only slightly

better in the host families, an appeal for funds should be issued

later today or tomorrow covering the period through 30 June.

Continuing emphasis will be placed on water and sanitation with

the intention to upgrade and rehabilitate a failing Ingushetia infrastructure.

Much more emphasis will be placed on shelter, with the main

aim being to repair and improve the host family living compounds.

In addition, some food assistance will be required for the host families.

For the first inter-agency appeal the first part of this year was

for $16.2 million and we raised a total of $14.1 million from the

United States, Canada, European governments, Japan and the

Czech Republic.

Particularly since the fall of Grozny, since when the Russian

claim to control the major part of Chechnya, we have been asked

whether we have an intention to function inside Chechnya.

Our opinion is that the situation is not safe yet for the majority

of Chechens to return and we would, therefore, not encourage them

to return at this stage. The recent human rights reports make us

even more cautious.

The second concern is that we cannot yet mount an assistance

operation of significant scale, since we cannot send international

staff into Chechnya yet, even on mission, to ensure proper control

of the implementation of such an operation—due to the omnipresent

and undiminished security risks, not only as a result of the

war, but also from criminals.

For the time being, UNHCR and its partners are setting up a

system to provide assistance in Ingushetia for those who elect to

return. And we have developed plans to run our convoys across the

borders into Chechnya, depending upon the feedback in the coming

days from yesterday’s first convoy.

The U.N. Office of the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs is

also sending a mission to Moscow this afternoon to enter into discussions

about setting up a possible assistance operation in

Chechnya. I thank you for your time.

Well, from the humanitarian side, I have to say

that we have very good support from the U.S. government, both in

terms of the things that they give us for our program, but also the

pressure that they put on the Russian government for us to have

access in Ingushetia and inside Chechnya.

That being said, I think we should acknowledge that this is often

the easier part, and something that we have to go beyond, because

we often feel, as the humanitarian actors, we are put out in front

to say we are doing something, salving the conscience of people

who want to do something, so that they do not have to attack the

real political problems and the real root causes of the problem.

So we very much appreciate what we are able to do, but it is not

enough. It is addressing the symptoms, and the other actors have

to be there to solve the other problems.

I would just add, as I mentioned in my statement,

that we have had dealings with the new appointee, who is the director

of the Federal Migration Service, which is our main interlocutor

in Russia, and we are hopeful that he might do some of the

right things, if, as you say, he gets an adequate staff, and the independents

still need to be added to this whole process, as Mr.

Bouckaert said.

I do not know about the capability of the Russian

military. I would say that we need, as Peter has said, independent

people looking at this. We have put human rights monitors in, we

hope. We hope that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

will now take this on as well, and try to get to these people.

Just to say, though, even with our work, with our humanitarian

work, we are truly well escorted at all times, and there are places

we never are shown—

We have asked for that ourselves, but we are not

sure, even in Ingushetia, that we really have reached all the people

there, because our movements are controlled. Yes. Yes.

Yes. This is outside my humanitarian scope, your

question, but I certainly would say that Islam is not the main feature

of the problem, and that we all have to watch our governments on satanizing Islam.

I think even when Peter spoke about the Chechen fighters, the

ones he was saying were the worst were the Muslim Chechens.

Well, they are all Islam Chechens. So it is something we all need to be aware of.