

HEARING OF THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE (HELSINKI COMMISSION) (AS RELEASED BY THE HELSINKI COMMISSION); SUBJECT: "OSCE PARTNER STATES AND NEIGHBORS OVERWHELMED BY IRAQI REFUGEES: BAND-AID SOLUTIONS TO IMPLOSION IN THE MIDDLE EAST?"; CHAIRED BY: REPRESENTATIVE ALCEE HASTINGS (D-FL) WITNESSES/PANELISTS: JAMES FOLEY, SENIOR COORDINATOR FOR IRAQI REFUGEES, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE; LORI SCIALABBA, SENIOR ADVISER TO THE SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY FOR IRAQI REFUGEES, DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY; MICHEL GABAUDAN, WASHINGTON DIRECTOR, UNHCR; ANDERS LAGO, MAYOR, SODERTALJE, SWEDEN; NOEL SALEH, MEMBER, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, ACCESS; LOCATION: 234 FORD HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Federal News Service

April 10, 2008 Thursday

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Section: PRESS CONFERENCE OR SPEECH

Length: 17148 words

Body

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REP. HASTINGS: Ladies and gentlemen, if I could ask you to have your seats, please, it would be appreciated. Thank you all so very much.

I'd be less than candid if I didn't say that this is a real hearing room. Most of our hearings and briefings we don't have all this fine, extraordinary facility here, so I'm very pleased that we were able to get this room for today's important hearing.

I'm also pleased to welcome all of you here for our hearing regarding the plight of **Iraqi refugees** and their impact on the countries that are hosting them, in particular, member and partner states of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey, which host more than a half million **refugees** -- and Egypt. All of these are OSCE Mediterranean partners. Turkey is an OSCE participating state and our NATO partner.

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And I happen to have the distinct pleasure of serving as special representative on Mediterranean affairs for the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and therefore have a keen interest in the partner states, their neighbors and the region. Today's hearing is going to focus on how security, or lack thereof, in Iraq has impacted the people of that country.

Over 2 million Iraqis have fled, primarily to Syria and Jordan and 2.4 (ph) million are displaced within their own country and others are displaced in other areas that we are not certain of their numbers. This is the largest displacement of people in the region since 1948.

I've introduced comprehensive legislation to address this crisis and have continuously called on our administration to commit substantially increased funding to assist displaced Iraqis and to expedite resettlement of those who seek shelter in the United States.

I am just coming from a press conference with Congressman William Delahunt, Congresswoman Laura DeLauro and Congresswoman Jane Harman. We, along with eight others of our colleagues, Republican and Democrat, sent to the government of Iraq, President Maliki, requesting that he and his colleagues in their budgetary framework contribute \$1 billion of Iraqi resources -- and I might add they have a surplus and a projected surplus for the next year -- we are estimating it will be about 4 percent of their total budget -- to take care of their citizens.

Jordan, a small country of 6 million people, has received more than a half million Iraqi refugees. This amounts to an 8 percent increase in its population in essentially a two-year period. To put this in perspective, it would be the equivalent of the United States enduring a stream of 24 million traumatized people across our borders in the same time frame.

Poverty, unemployment and inflation are on the rise in Jordan, making it extremely difficult for the Jordanian government and society to cope with the influx of refugees. Syria, straining under an Iraqi refugee population more than double that of Jordan, faces economic and political challenges as well in its efforts to support displaced Iraqis.

I also personally see this as an opportunity for greater and more sustained diplomatic efforts to work in that area with Syria. The day-to-day needs of Iraqis continue to increase as their resources are diminishing. Multiple families are sharing tents and hovels and dwellings in other places and seeking medical attention and many of them frequently suffer from severe depression and stress-related illnesses.

NGOs are attempting to address this burgeoning medical crisis, but lack the resources to provide comprehensive counseling, leaving increasingly large numbers of the Iraqi refugee population simmering in a cauldron of stress and depression. This situation does not bode well for long-term societal stability and potentially makes the refugees vulnerable to influence by extremist groups who can provide assistance.

I wish to underscore that, because there is a definite security issue of consequence and of importance to this nation. I note that the administration has made some progress in addressing this crisis. It has set a goal of admitting 12,000 Iraqi refugees this year and will increase humanitarian assistance for displaced Iraqis to 200 million in 2008, up from 43 million in 2006.

However, I must say that these are only small steps in the right direction. The increase in humanitarian assistance is a paltry sum compared to the \$338 million our government spends each day on combat operations in Iraq.

NGOs working with Iraqi refugees estimate that \$1.5 billion in humanitarian assistance is needed this year to meet even basic needs. In addition, the United States has admitted only 4,933 Iraqi refugees between April 2003 and March 31st of this year.

My friends in Sweden, and one of them is here that I've known 13 years and is the chair of the foreign affairs of the Swedish Parliament, noted in that, as did Congressman Smith and I, the ambassador -- and I regret very seriously that time constraints have not afforded me an opportunity to meet with the mayor. I hesitate to pronounce the name of the city because I don't want to mess it up.

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But he's doing all right without having met with me. He was on the front page of the "Washington Post" today, and I'm pleased about that.

But, listen, Sweden has about 9 million people, and they have accepted 34,000 refugees since 2003. The city that I referred to has accepted 5,000, a city of 83,000 people.

That has to have an impact on their infrastructure, and I ask, if Sweden can do 34,000, can't we here in the United States do more?

Before I introduce our panel, I'd just like to note that while the media, presidential candidates and many in Congress are focused on the politics of Iraq, whether or not the surge is working and the way forward, I say this: We cannot overlook this humanitarian crisis ensuing in the region. Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons need our help. If we do not broaden our focus on Iraq, the security implications could potentially destabilize the region.

We have before us today two panels of distinguished witnesses that I will come back to. Their biographies have been distributed at our tables outside, so I will not, when I do introduce them, go into great detail. I certainly look forward to their advice regarding how our government and others can address this deepening crisis.

One final note from me, when I was in Jordan in December, I was particularly pleased that the king had taken cognizance of the need to educate the children, notwithstanding limited resources, those children of the Iraqi refugees. I consider that of critical importance, and I applaud the Jordanian government, as I do my colleagues and friends in Sweden for their extraordinary efforts in this regard.

I'd like now to hear from the ranking member of the Helsinki Commission, my good friend from New Jersey, Congressman Smith.

REP. CHRISTOPHER SMITH (R-NJ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Let me just echo your respect and gratitude to the government of Sweden, as well. And if you add all of the number of Iraqis who have emigrated there, many of them being asylum seekers, up to 100,000 Iraqis are in Sweden, again, underscoring I think a very strong sense of generosity on their part. And I think it's important to point that out and hold it up so that others see it, not just in the United States, but also among our European friends and partners.

I do want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this very timely hearing on the deeply disturbing plight of Iraqi refugees and the impact that the crisis is having on OSCE partners, states and neighbors.

The numbers that are associated with this crisis are staggering. One in five Iraqis have been displaced from their homes since 2003. The U.N. high commissioner for refugees estimates that 2.5 million Iraqis have fled the country and some 2.4 million others, almost 9 percent of the population, are internally displaced. And this is occurring in a region that is already beset, as we all know, by a catastrophic series of humanitarian and political challenges.

It is reported that most of those who have fled Iraq are so-called moderates, lawyers, doctors and other working-class professionals. Even though they are not allowed to work legally in their countries of refuge, it seems many, if not most, are saying that they have no intention to return to Iraq. Their resources, to the extent that they were able to leave with them, are quickly dwindling.

Jordan, Syria and other neighboring countries are not state parties to the 1951 U.N. convention relating to the status of refugees, or the 1967 protocol, and these countries refuse to recognize the Iraqi populations as refugees and to accord them the rights and benefits that accompany such a designation, preferring instead to refer to them as "guests."

This refusal is due at least in part to these countries' historical experience and ongoing challenges with the Palestinian refugee population, which is also complicating the Iraqi situation. Syria and Jordan have received the vast majority of those fleeing Iraq. An estimated 1.5 million are in Syria and 500,000 to 750,000 have escaped to Jordan.

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UNICEF reports that half of those who have fled their homes in Iraq are children, and that as many as 320,000 Iraqi children are in Syria alone. Refugee children who are allowed to attend the public schools must try to learn in seriously overcrowded classrooms.

Uncertainty about their residence permits and visas creates another barrier to education, as many parents are reluctant to seek out these and other social services.

Furthermore, poverty is pulling many Iraqi children out of school and forcing to work, placing them in extremely vulnerable situations, in addition to depriving them of the learning that they will need to secure hope for the future.

Women are also being exploited, and many are resorting to prostitution in order to provide for themselves and their families. In addition to suffering and other risks that circumstances inherently engender, I am also deeply concerned as to whether a door has been opened for human traffickers, who would be all too anxious to take advantage of such vulnerabilities.

Not only would they see opportunities within the host countries, but perhaps even more so at the borders, where they could take advantage of the near impossibility of obtaining an Iraqi passport and the refusal of neighboring countries to issue visas, circumstances that encourage human smuggling, which in turn enhance the opportunities for human trafficking.

I look forward to engaging our witnesses in the discussion as to whether or not there is any indication that this human rights violation is occurring.

Another serious humanitarian concern is the health status of Iraqi refugees. It is dismaying and extraordinarily tragic to point out that a surprising number of refugees in Syria, especially children, have various forms of cancer. Others with chronic illnesses, such as high blood pressure and diabetes, are unable to manage these diseases due to the costs of health care and the shortage of humanitarian assistance in this area.

There are organizations that are struggling to address these needs, including the Catholic Relief Services, which is not only funding mobile clinics, kidney dialysis and prescriptions for chronic diseases, but also mental health support groups to try to address the psychosocial consequences of the violence that these refugees have endured.

And yet the health, educational and other basic needs of this enormous population remain great and current efforts are not sufficient to address them. The situation is also exacerbating the poverty, social services and political tensions among citizens of the host countries, tensions that need to be quelled, before they explode.

That is why, once again, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate this opportunity to hear from our very distinguished witnesses and to explore what measures we ought to be taking in order to mitigate this problem. I yield back the balance.

REP. HASTINGS: Thank you very much, Congressman Smith.

Our first panel are Ambassador James Foley and Ms. Lori Scialabba.

The ambassador and I have had extensive work in Haiti, where he was the U.S. ambassador from '03 to '05 and the ambassador, in addition, has been the deputy commandant and international affairs adviser at the National War College. And he was recently appointed by Secretary Rice for Iraqi refugee issues in September of '07.

Ms. Scialabba has an extraordinary set of credentials as associate director of refugee, asylum and international operations for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and, before joining the Department of Homeland Security, she most recently served as chairman of the board of immigration appeals, without getting the Executive Office for Immigration Review at the Department of Justice. Not going into full curriculum vita, she finished the University of Maryland undergraduate and Memphis State University.

And, Ms. Scialabba, I was pulling for Memphis to win the basketball championship so, like you, I was disappointed, in the for- whatever-it's-worth category.

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But, Ambassador Foley, if you would, sir.

MR. FOLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for this opportunity to appear today before the U.S. Helsinki Commission to discuss the plight of Iraqi refugees and what the U.S. is doing to meet their needs and to alleviate the impact on neighboring countries.

The displacement of roughly 2 million Iraqis in the region and up to 2.7 million internally represents a major humanitarian crisis and challenge to the United States and to the international community. The administration is responding to the challenge in three principal ways.

First, by endeavoring to create the conditions of peace, security and stability inside Iraq that will enable the refugees eventually to go home. In this sense, the security and the humanitarian tasks we face are not alternatives, but instead are inextricably linked to each other.

Second, by resettling in the United States significant numbers of the most vulnerable Iraqi refugees, who cannot go home.

Third, by ensuring that the international community is providing the assistance necessary to support and sustain the refugees in the region until such time as they can go home.

I'll tell you, frankly, that when Security Rice appointed me to the position of the senior coordination for Iraqi refugee issues, she was not satisfied with the pace of our resettlement efforts on behalf of the most vulnerable Iraqi refugees.

The job she gave me was to identify and overcome obstacles to our goal, resettling 12,000 Iraqis in the U.S. this fiscal year. She believed that my appointment and that of my counterpart here today, Lori Scialabba from the Department of Homeland Security, would facilitate the kind of interagency cooperation needed to meet this goal.

I'm pleased to report that we have indeed worked productively together to establish an increasingly robust program of Homeland Security circuit rides or interviews in key locations throughout the Middle East that will keep pace with the referrals we've been receiving from UNHCR and that can produce 12,000 arrivals of Iraqi refugees in the U.S. this fiscal year.

The foundation for this program is the capacity of our overseas processing entities throughout the region. Our key processing entities did not exist in Syria and Jordan at the beginning of 2007 and it took some time last year to put the infrastructure in place. But now that they are able to process efficiently in most, if not all, key locations, and now that our Homeland Security colleagues have been allowed to resume interviewing Iraqi refugees in Syria, our program can operate, and is operating, in a much higher volume.

The result of these efforts is that we move from about 2,800 interviews of Iraqi refugees in the first quarter to 6,000, a little more than that, in the second quarter and, absent any new impediments, the volume will grow to 8,000 or more interviews in this, the third quarter of the fiscal year.

In other words, we built up the pipeline that's going to produce the numbers of arrivals we need to reach our goal. Our monthly arrival numbers now still reflect the capacity that we had to conduct interviews last year, in 2007. But they're moving in the right direction -- 245 arrivals in December, 375 in January, 444 in February, 751 last month. But they're still quite short of where we expect them to be in just a few months.

In sum, 12,000 remains our goal and it can be achieved. We can't guarantee that we can achieve it. We've strengthened every link in the chain, but some links remain weak, notably our processing ability in Syria. But what I can guarantee is that we're doing everything we can to put ourselves in a position to reach our goal.

Turning to the assistance side, the United States believes that the humanitarian needs of Iraqi refugees are indeed increasing, as you have suggested, Mr. Chairman. Many of the nearly 2 million refugees who fled Iraq were of the middle class. In other words, they had means and resources to one degree or another.

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What's happening today is the inexorable depletion of those means and the consequent increase in the international requirements for supporting and sustaining and protecting the refugees in the countries of first asylum. The sum total of appeals by the United Nations and other international agencies, assisting both internally and externally displaced Iraqis for 2008 is almost \$900 million.

The United States has by far played the leading role in responding to these appeals. We've already made available \$208 million, and that, halfway through the fiscal year, already exceeds our total of \$171 million for 2007. And we anticipate making available shortly over \$70 million in additional assistance, thus the U.S. contribution we currently anticipate will fund one-third of the international appeals, well surpassing the traditional ceiling set by both ourselves and the receiving agencies.

Other donors have already pledged or dispersed \$50 million in assistance, and we anticipate from our discussions with other governments around the world an additional 160 to \$175 million will be made available by various donors. In other words, there is currently a shortfall in the neighborhood of around 375 to \$400 million to fund the total international appeals.

Overcoming this shortfall and funding the international appeals was the principal focus of a visit I recently undertook to the Middle East and to Europe. Among Arab governments, I found broad sympathy for the plight of Iraqi refugees and recognition of the regional dimensions of the crisis and the implications for stability. I believe there is in fact a willingness to contribute financially.

But, everywhere I went, there was a unanimous view that the government of Iraq needed to step forward first and itself contribute substantially to meeting the needs of its citizens who have had to flee to neighboring countries. I also heard similar views in Europe.

Let me make clear to the members of the commission that I expressed the agreement of the United States to the premise that it was time for a substantial commitment by the government of Iraq to the various international appeals in support of Iraqi refugees and displaced persons. This is the strong view of the administration. It is being shared with the authorities in Baghdad.

At the same time, in numerous meetings, I stressed the urgency of the situation and the need for all parties with means, responsibilities and interests in regional stability to respond in a significant way to meeting the needs of the refugees and the hosting countries. I'd be happy to amplify on those discussions I had and any other questions you might have subsequently.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. HASTINGS: Ms. Scialabba, before going to you, you will note that we were joined by two of my colleagues and I'd appreciate in the order that they came if they would have any opening comments.

I would turn now to the chair of the Iraq Caucus and vice chair of the Progressive Caucus and one who has spent a career dealing in human rights and humanitarian issues.

My colleague from California, Maxine Waters.

REP. MAXINE WATERS (D-CA): Thank you very much, Chairman Hastings. I thank you for your kindness in allowing me to join you in this important meeting today. This is an extremely important issue and it hasn't been getting as much attention as it deserves, so I'd like to comment you for your leadership in this matter and all that you've been doing.

In fact, with the help of Chairman Hastings, I have recently sent a letter to President Bush, signed by 89 members, expressing our deep concern over the plight of displaced Iraqis.

I'd like to thank our panelists here today, Ambassador Foley, whom I've had the opportunity to meet in some of his other assignments. And I'd like to thank Ms. Scialabba for being here on this panel today.

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I'd like to share with you some of the letter that we all signed that went to the president. That letter said, rarely does confronting a crisis align our moral and national security interests as closely as does providing assistance to the Iraqis displaced by violence.

There are few more important tests of our foreign policy than our leadership in response to the growing crisis confronting the displaced population of Iraq. The displacement crisis will get worse, if ignored, and we look forward to the president's support as we work to address this issue in Congress.

I am optimistic that the amount of support we're receiving on the letter signifies the amount of congressional will we will have to appropriately address these problems.

I hope this letter to the president will continue to the process that we are taking part in, as we are today, addressing the plight of the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons whose lives have been scattered around the Middle East.

I also want to briefly mention some legislation that I've recently introduced which will help to give context to the questions that I will have for the witnesses.

Let me just say that while I recognize the role that you're playing, Mr. Ambassador, in all of this, my bill that asks for -- it's called the recovery and subject of Iraq act, and would address, again, the growing crisis confronting the displaced population by creating an Iraqi displacement coordinator in the executive office of the president to engage U.S. diplomatic resources in addressing the crisis, requiring the coordinator to create a long-term, durable strategy to address the displacement crisis, requiring the coordinator to harmonize international effort to address the crisis, encouraging affected governments to support their own populations and requiring a report from the coordinator on the progress of the strategy and the evaluation of the conditions confronting the displaced.

It is clear that any solution to the problems in Iraq must include an organized effort to return the displaced Iraqis to a safe and stable environment. This bill, of course, will not enforce refugees to return against their will. Rather, it begins a long planning process necessary to prepare for eventual voluntary returns of the Iraqis.

The creation of the high-level Iraqi displacement coordinator would send a strong signal that the United States is committed to working with the governments of the region to address the humanitarian crisis.

I thank our witnesses for being here today and I certainly thank our chairman and I very much look forward to working with the administration in this coming year, as well as with my fellow members of Congress, to appropriately address the Iraqi displacement crisis.

I was not here for all of your testimony, Ambassador Foley, and as I briefly thumbed through it, I see that you do describe the seriousness of the displacement. It was just a few days ago that I got information about the plight of many of the women and the families who are fleeing Iraq, into Syria, and maybe into Jordan, who have exhausted all of their resources and have turned to prostitution. And women and families who are taking turns to go out to prostitute themselves in order to feed themselves.

Also, we have found that, for many who have gone to Syria and to Jordan and have come back to Iraq, they have found that their homes have been taken over and they have no place to live and they're on the streets. So I'm further focused on the proposition that we must do more.

Again, I hope that I can stay long enough to ask a few questions, but I thank you for the testimony that you have given and I yield back to the chairman. And thank you, again.

REP. HASTINGS: Thank you, Chairwoman Waters.

I'd now like Commissioner and Congresswoman Hilda Solis to make any opening remarks she may wish to do.

REP. HILDA SOLIS (D-CA): Thank you, Chairman Hastings, and thank you to the witnesses that are here today.

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It's rather apropos that we're having this hearing just as we had General Petraeus come in and brief members of Congress about the status of Iraq. And we tend to often forget about the plight of the families and I believe it's 4 million displaced Iraqis and, in particular, the children. And my questions would be directed at how we are helping to define their future, because they're going to be the future of that government, and also what kind of treatment, what kind of schooling, what kind of provisions are being made?

I also want to commend those other host countries that have taken in willingly some of the displaced refugees and my questions are for our own government as to why we are somehow cutting back by 7 percent funding in the Migration and Refugee Assistance program and the International Disaster Assistance program by 7 percent.

I don't see any logic there, and I would like to hear from our witnesses when we get a chance. So, with that, I will end my statement. Thank you.

REP. HASTINGS: Thank you very much, and now I'll turn to Ms. Scialabba.

And if you would submit your full statement for the record, and you may summarize as you see fit, in five minutes.

MS. SCIALABBA: Thank you, Chairman.

Good afternoon, Chairman Hastings, members of the commission, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to testify about the work that the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services is conducting to protect Iraqi refugees through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

Part of the refugee program's humanitarian mission is to offer resettlement in the U.S. to especially vulnerable Iraqi refugees who are unable to return to Iraq due to persecution. My office is responsible for interviewing refugee applicants and determining if they're eligible for resettlement in the United States.

I'd like to assure the commission that USCIS is committed to working with the Department of State and other program partners to meet the administration's goal of admitting 12,000 Iraqi refugees to the U.S. this fiscal year. Meeting this goal is a top priority for the agency and our officers are working tirelessly to interview and adjudicate the cases necessary to reach this target.

That being said, there are certain variables critical to the program's success that do lie outside the U.S. government's control. In a relatively short time span the past year, all refugee program partners have substantially increased their capacities to process cases in the Middle East, building the infrastructure to support a large-scale operation where it previously did not exist.

Overseas processing entities collect the basic biographical information from all applicants, including educational, work and military service history and interview the principal application regarding their refugee claim. Prior to O.P. prescreening, the majority of applicants are interviewed by the United Nations high commissioner for refugees.

USCIS's role in refugee processing is to interview and adjudicate the applications for refugee settlement, perform certain security checks, apply the material support exemption authority when necessary and warranted and approve eligible cases once all necessary steps have been completed. The O.P. then completes the resettlement out-processing.

As you can see from this brief description, there are multiple organizations involved in refugee admission process. Today, I'd like to share with you the steps that we are taking to marshal our resources and make our part of the process as efficient as possible. I'll also share with you a few of the obstacles that the program faces.

USCIS is working to maintain current and timely interview schedules in the region. Since the spring of 2007, USCIS officers have interviewed Iraqis primarily in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Turkey and Lebanon. We have teams of adjudicators in the region today and are scheduled to build teams on a continuous basis in the coming months.

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We completed more than 8,700 Iraqi interviews during the first half of this fiscal year. USCIS is fully committed -- and we also conditionally approved over 89,000 Iraqi refugees for admission since the large-scale processing began. Over 4,200 of those people have been admitted to the United States.

We are working with the Department of State to put together a schedule of up to 8,000 interviews for Iraqi refugee applicants during the third quarter. Given the current approval rates, we estimate that achieving this volume of interviews would keep the United States on track to admit 12,000 refugees by September 30th.

USCIS and the Department of State share responsibility for conducting background checks on all Iraqi refugee applicants.

Security checks are vigorous and no case is finally approved until results have been received and analyzed.

Under regular refugee processing procedures, USCIS would not interview an application until the interagency security checks had been completed. Given the desire to expedite the Iraqi caseload, USCIS has agreed to conduct interviews while interagency name checks are still pending.

This has enabled numerous cases to be interviewed and moved more quickly than if we'd waited for the security checks to clear before the interview. Generally, USCIS receives responses to the initiated security fingerprint checks within two to four weeks after the USCIS interview.

This process runs concurrently with other DOS out-processing steps, such as obtaining medical clearances and sponsorship assurances. Because we've been able to institute this process of completing several steps concurrently, on average the total processing time for Iraqi cases is significantly less than for other refugee groups worldwide.

We've exercised the secretary's discretionary exemption authority to admit hundreds of Iraqi refugees who otherwise would have been barred from admission under the material support-related ground of inadmissibility. To allow as many qualified individuals as possible to travel this fiscal year, we have devoted additional resources to reviewing material support cases that may be eligible for the direct (ph) exemptions.

Refugee resettlement is a complex multi-step process involving a large number of players, all integral to the success of the program. We cannot control all the variables in this complex process that can affect refugee admissions.

Factors such as the number of Iraqi refugees coming forward to UNHCR for registration; the desire of Iraqi refugees to resettle in the United States; the overall pace of registration and prescreening; applicants failing to appear for prescreening interviews or USCIS interviews or flight departures; the continued cooperation of host governments to allow us to process in the regions; and other factors, such as background clearances, medical issues and resettlement out-processing all affect the refugee process.

I'd also like to take this time to quickly update you on the progress being made to implement the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act, which was signed into law on January 28th, 2008. In-country processing in Iraq has begun. USCIS and the Department of State have already begun processing locally employed staff in Baghdad, who are at risk for persecution based on their association with the U.S. government, as well as their immediate family members.

We must proceed with the utmost attention to ensuring the safety and security of both the resettlement personnel and the in-country refugee applicants. With this in mind, DHS, the Department of State, Embassy Baghdad and ILM (ph) are seeking ways to increase capacity and efficiency.

USCIS is also working to exercise the expanded discretionary authority in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008. We're considering several groups or categories of cases as possible candidates for the expanded terrorism-related inadmissibility exemption allowed under the new legislation.

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While working to exercise this new authority, USCIS has placed on hold denials of applications of individuals who may be considered for possible exemptions under the CAA. In addition, USCIS is reviewing applications denied on these grounds since enactment of the CAA to determine if individuals should be considered for possible exercise of the discretionary CAA exemptions.

Interviewing and adjudicating Iraqi cases has been and will continue to be a top priority for USCIS. We look forward to continuing our positive and close working relationship with our State Department colleagues and other partners in carrying out the humanitarian mission of admitting Iraqi refugees to the United States.

Once again, I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to discuss this matter and welcome any questions that you may have.

REP. HASTINGS: Thank you very much. I have a lot of questions, and I'm going to exercise a measure that I've utilized in the past, in the interest of time, because our witnesses who came from afar, I want to make sure that we get to them.

So I'm not going to put oral questions now, but I will submit to both of you our questions and would appreciate your answering them in a manner that we could put it on the Web site, and then that would suffice. I appreciate very much both of your testimonies.

At this time, I turn to the ranking member, my friend from New Jersey, Mr. Smith.

REP. SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I too will put most of my questions, but just ask a few and ask that you get back in a written way in a timely fashion.

Just two very brief ones on the money issue. In December, \$150 million was provided for Iraqi refugees. The NGOs have suggested that the supplemental ought to be about \$125 million more. The administration request is for \$30 million, which seems to be inadequate, and maybe you could explain whether or not we could up that amount to get it closer to \$125 million.

And, obviously, the consortium of groups, the partners, if you will, really do know the situation on the ground like you do and I know very often your requests go through OMB and what you ask for isn't necessarily what you get.

And, secondly, Ambassador Crocker this week in his congressional testimony said that UNHCR has returned international staff to assist with the return of internally displaced persons and refugees. And the question there, briefly, would be does the high commissioner believe that conditions in Iraq are conducive to returns, or is anticipatory? Or are they trying to get ready for, rather than to begin, that kind of processing?

And, finally, on the whole issue of human trafficking, which I raised in my opening comments, have we seen any evidence whatsoever on the ground that either such trafficking or labor trafficking has become a problem among the displaced persons or among the refugees?

And, again, I will submit the remainder for your answer?

REP. HASTINGS: Do you want to answer?

MR. FOLEY: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman, yes.

Congressman, your second question about the view of the United Nations high commissioner for refugees, I will give a short answer but note that the panel that follows us includes the U.S. representative at the UNHCR. I'm sure Mr. Gabaudan will be able to address that very authoritatively.

But we in some sense have been collaborating with UNHCR to help produce this assessment that's going to take place jointly by UNHCR, which is going to assist the government of Iraq to do an assessment of returns, not to promote returns or encourage returns at this stage, when conditions probably don't warrant that.

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We believe it's a fundamental principle that any returns have to be voluntary, have to be made by the refugees themselves based on their sense of when it is indeed safe and ready for them to go back. But what is important is that the ground be prepared to enable, really, the bulk of these 2 million people to go home.

And that, certainly, first and foremost involves creating the security environment, but it also involves creating the governance structure, the infrastructure, the resources, the policy, the legislation, everything that will take so that when people go back they can be integrated, they can have housing, they can have livelihoods, they can live in peace and safety. So that's exactly what we're supporting UNHCR to do and they will be conducting that assessment and assisting the government of Iraq, we believe, in the weeks to come.

Your first question, about the assistance levels, as I described in my opening remarks, we know what the basic needs are for 2008. As I said, these needs are increasing. This is a moving picture because, as I think all of you have noted, the refugees themselves are running out of resources and they're becoming in some instances desperate.

You alluded, and others alluded, to some emerging social ills that should alarm us indeed. So the total, as we understand it, of the different, disparate international appeals is about \$890 million. So that, in fact, is our target.

Now, the U.S. has already contributed substantially. We have made available \$208 million. We have another \$70 million or so already appropriated that will be announced shortly. So that gets us to about one-third of that total.

And we believe that traditionally we are normally well under that percentage. If you take, for example, the UNHCR regional appeal, which is \$261 million, we've already pledged, we've already made available \$95 million, which is 37 percent of that total.

There are international agencies that are not comfortable with one country crowding out others, if you will. So, as I was telling it in my opening statement, if you add what has been pledged or dispersed by other donors, if you add what we know from our diplomatic conversations with other governments, what is likely to be given, we figure we're short in the neighborhood of \$400 million.

So the question is, how is that going to be funded? I would say, in answer to your question, the bottom line is it must be funded. But we believe that the U.S. has contributed substantially and that it is now a diplomatic challenge for us to exercise the arts of persuasion and to bring others into the equation, others who have means, resources, interests in the regional stability that really is at stake in this crisis.

Now, I mentioned that I was on a journey in recent weeks to promote contributions to the international appeals and, as I said in my remarks, a refrain, a resounding refrain everywhere I went, is that the government of Iraq needs to step forward, for two reasons. First, because these are Iraqi citizens who are in need, secondly, because the government of Iraq has resources.

It would be different if it didn't have resources, but I heard this message especially in the Middle East, that others are willing to contribute, but they want to see the government of Iraq step forward in a significant and a substantial way. So that really is going to be, I think, our top priority going forward.

But, at the same time, not to neglect what we see as the potential for important contributions elsewhere, including among well- to-do Arab states. And, as I said, I felt that they are willing to contribute.

Last year, the United Arab Emirates did provide \$10 million to the UNHCR, so there's a precedent. I learned when I was in Qatar that there already is a significant educational initiative underway that a private foundation is undertaking in Syria.

So I think that we should not preempt others, and I think the American taxpayers would not want us to preempt others from doing their part. When I was in Europe, I received a somewhat nuanced response. Certainly our European friends have contributed, I would say significantly, in previous years. We hope they contribute

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significantly this year, but frankly we're looking for more than that, given the increasing needs that we all agree we see, given the serious implications of not meeting those needs.

And yet I was somewhat surprised that in some meetings, in some instances in Europe, I found I wouldn't say skepticism, but a desire to be convinced that the situation that we see of an increasingly dire situation is indeed the case. And it was stated to me in more than one meeting that different European donors are looking to UNHCR to substantiate empirically the data concerning the vulnerable population.

Now, I made it abundantly clear that the United States has the highest confidence in UNHCR and in its assessments of the vulnerability that you have stated and that we perceive, as well. But I'm not pessimistic. I believe that actually I heard an opening that, if whatever concerns or questions that were raised are addressed, then we would hope that that would lead to, indeed, substantial increases in assistance.

So I would sum up by saying that our target is to see the international appeals fully funded. We have done a considerable part. We are now in the business of urging others to do their part, so I would say this is something that we need to watch.

I think Secretary Rice in Senate testimony indicated yesterday that we are watching this and we do have a supplemental request, as you indicated, that's there. But we will continue to watch it, and, as she said, we won't be shy to make a different assessment if we see that by virtue of our efforts that there is a remaining shortfall.

Finally, your question, I think I alluded to about human trafficking, I don't have precise statistics, but we certainly have heard anecdotally that there are extremely worrying instances of different kinds of social ills developing. You mentioned prostitution.

Human smuggling, for example, I think our next panel, especially our guest, your guest from Sweden, will be able to speak to that. But our understanding is that to some degree this influx of asylum seekers that came to Sweden came via illegal channels, through illegal migration channels.

So we are seeing different kinds of noxious reflections of the increasing needs of the population. There's no doubt about that, and that's where the trend lines are going, and that's why we have to meet our responsibilities. Thank you.

REP. HASTINGS: Ms. Waters?

REP. WATERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to submit my questions in writing, also.

My questions will relate to the right of the refugees to be able to work in these countries that they have migrated to. I think there's a 1951 convention that mandates that the refugees be able to work. My questions will also include questions about children and their education and the health services that are supposedly available to families that may not be available.

The questions that I will be submitting are questions, again, about the right to work, about education, about health care and basically about the plight of these refugees inside other countries and a lack of enforcement to see to it that their basic rights are met and that they have an opportunity to have a decent quality of living.

I won't be able to stay for the rest of the hearing, unfortunately. I've got to get a plane, if American Airlines has not canceled mine.

But I will submit those questions in writing and perhaps in your discussion with other members here, you may be able to touch on some of that, because I know these are issues that we're all concerned about.

Thank you very much.

REP. HASTINGS: Thank you very much, Ms. Waters.

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Ms. Solis?

REP. SOLIS: Mr. Chairman, I'll also submit my questions.

But just in closing, I wanted to ask both of you that this week, earlier, Senator Kennedy and Biden called on President Bush to create a White House position overseeing policy on refugees and persons who have been displaced in Iraq. Could you give me your response very quickly, for both of you?

Ambassador?

MR. FOLEY: Yes, thank you, Madam Congresswoman. I believe the White House has already responded to that proposal, indicating the position that Ms. Scialabba and I, having been named in September in special capacities to lead the effort on the resettlement side, that the progress that's been achieved and that we anticipate achieving justify continuing in that mode.

It's not for me personally to judge the efficacy of our efforts, but I would say, though, that indeed on the resettlement side, bringing significant numbers of Iraqis to the U.S., which was slow and was criticized, is turning around.

And you are going to see in the coming months, especially in the late spring and early summer, tremendous numbers of Iraqi refugees arriving in the United States.

So the question I think is more applicable on the assistance side, which we're mostly discussing today. And there I think it's fair to say that traditionally it is the responsibility of the Department of State to lead our international diplomatic efforts and that's what we're doing. I've just, as I said, returned from a trip to the Middle East and to Europe to try to mobilize support so that we meet these international appeals, and I feel confident that we can succeed.

We have a persuading job to do, but I think that there's a will on the part of many interlocutors that I met with to contribute, so I think that we're on the right track.

MS. SCIALABBA: I don't know that I have much to add to what the ambassador just said, other than in terms of the resettlement, I agree with everything he mentioned. We've got the infrastructure in place now to actually move large numbers of cases.

We added refugee corps officers to our refugee corps this year. I anticipate adding some more next year, and we're meeting the requirements, the requests that we're getting for circuit rides and for interviews, and we're keeping previous with what is being prepared for us to interview. So I think we are on target to meet the 12,000 admissions.

REP. HASTINGS: I'm waiting for the dean of Congress to get settled. He and I have filed rather substantial legislation that I'm sure that you all are tracking, but in light of his being here, not so much for questions, I know that he has limited time. He's already has informed us that he has another engagement but he took the time to be with us, and I'd like to hear any remarks our Chairman Dingell might have at this time.

REP. JOHN DINGELL (D-MI): Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for allowing me to join you today and to discuss the humanitarian crisis in Iraq.

And I want to thank you and my good friend Mr. Smith and Ms. Solis and to tell you how much I appreciate your leadership in this matter and the outstanding work you have been doing in this matter, in trying to help people who are hurt through the failures of the United States and our policy.

I want you to know that I look forward to working with you in the future and will look forward to continuing our efforts towards both legislative resolution of the questions and also seeing to it that the programs that we have in this area for proper funding of our humanitarian programs to assist Iraqi refugees in this terrible crisis will have the kind of success that you and I and my friend Mr. Smith and Ms. Solis happen to want.

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I want to express my appreciation for the presence of Ambassador Foley and Ms. Scialabba, and I appreciate the work that you are doing and I thank you for your leadership in this matter. And, like my colleagues up here, I look forward to working with you here.

I want to especially welcome and to thank my friend Noel Saleh, who joins us today from Dearborn, where he is a leader in ACCESS, a great organization which does enormous good for the people of Dearborn, Arab Americans and others in almost every area of human activity.

I've watched the organization grow from a small community center serving a small Arab-American population in Dearborn to one of the largest providers of economic and social services to people of all backgrounds, Arab and otherwise, in the state of Michigan.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, my hometown has one of the largest and most vibrant Arab-American communities in the country. There's some argument about whether we have more than others, but we think we not only have more, but we also have the best. And they're some of our finest people in Dearborn and all through the southeast corner of Michigan and the down (ph) rivers.

And in Dearborn, also, there are tens of thousands of Iraqis, many of whom came to this country after the first Gulf War. It is safe to assume that many of the tens of thousands of these refugees will be joined, we hope, by others who will be coming to this country in coming years and that those who will arrive in southeast Michigan will find not only access, but other organizations of similar quality and concern moving forward towards helping them with medical treatment, mental health services and employment training and many, many other needs.

I want to, again, commend you, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Smith and Ms. Solis for your leadership in this. And I want to express to Ambassador Foley my appreciations for his leadership and observe that earlier this year my good friend Chairman Hastings and I sent a letter to Secretary Rice, as you will remember, Mr. Chairman, asking her a number of questions about United States policy toward Iraq refugees and IDPs.

In the response that we received from the State Department, it stated that the long-term objective for Iraqi refugees and IDPs is a safe and voluntary return, something which I'm sure most of them look with great favor upon.

However, we know that for many of the most vulnerable Iraqis, including religious minorities, will never be possible, or at least will be hideously dangerous.

My question to you then, Mr. Ambassador, is what is the State Department doing to ensure that those who have been chosen for resettlement are from the most vulnerable populations?

MR. FOLEY: Thank you, sir. Most of the referrals that we receive of Iraqi refugees are sent to us by the United Nations, the U.N. high commissioner for refugees. And the UNHCR itself has established 11 separate criteria upon which to determine referrals, determine who among the large refugee population is indeed extremely vulnerable and needing resettlement, permanent solution in a third country, in many instances, the United States.

So there are, as I said, 11 criteria or categories, including victims of torture and violence and female-headed households and Iraqis associated with the coalition who were targeted for that. There is also a category for religious minorities and other minorities who may be targeted. So we take these referrals and that's the basis, really, of most of our adjudications and admissions.

And apart from that, we have in December -- we have reached out to Iraqi immigrants or citizens in the U.S. who have filed immigrant petitions on behalf of relatives in Iraq. And we've granted direct access -- in other words, they don't need UNHCR referrals, for Iraqis in that category.

It so happens that when Congress passed the Iraqi Refugee Crisis Act of 2007, it was enacted in January, it created a special category for direct access to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program for Iraqis who worked with the U.S., were associated with the U.S., but also for minorities and religious minorities who had relatives in the United States.

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So we kind of anticipated that by a few months by offering direct access to any Iraqis who had relatives in the U.S. So we've begun that outreach. We wrote to, I think, 8,000 people in that category in the U.S., encouraging those who have filed petitions or could file petitions for relatives in Iraq, for them to do so.

REP. DINGELL: I'm asking how they're doing on getting (OFF- MIKE).

Mr. Chairman, that's a very valuable answer.

Mr. Ambassador, I thank you.

I note, Mr. Chairman, you had asked about the success and the progress of the programs we have now, and I'd like to echo not only your concern on this matter, but that of literally thousands of Americans, Iraqi Americans, and just ordinary citizens. That I'm troubled that the program has not been moving forward as fast as we would like, not only are we not putting enough money into it, but that I have the apprehension that the money is not being spent fast enough to accomplish our purpose.

And I hear constant concerns from my constituents about those Iraqis who have gone to Jordan or to Syria and to the misfortunes that are befalling the families who have done this.

And I'm even hearing questions of women who are being forced into prostitution to support their families. This tells me that it is of urgent need that we should move with great vigor to address the problems, particularly of those who are in Syria and Jordan, so that this kind of situation not obtain any further.

Can you give us a comment on that, please, Mr. Ambassador?

MR. FOLEY: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I in some respects spoke to that earlier in the hearing, but I think it certainly bears repeating that I fully share your sense of urgency and concern.

We see this as an evolving situation in terms of the needs of refugees, evolving in an alarming direction. This is not a static picture. The numbers of refugees actually are not increasing, because largely it's no longer possible for Iraqis to get access into neighboring countries. So that is somewhat static, the number itself, but the number of those falling into the needy category, the increasing needs themselves, I think is something that we don't dispute.

On the contrary, we see an evolving, alarming picture. And therefore it underscores the urgency that you note. I share it completely. We need to fund these international appeals.

Before you arrived, I talked about what the U.S. is doing, the significant funding we're providing. We have a shortfall and we need to get it funded and we need to get it funded now.

I've just returned from a trip and this is not the end, by any means, of U.S. diplomacy in this regard. It's the beginning that you can expect at different and higher levels vis-a-vis other partners with means and interests in this region. So we're going to do everything we can to get urgently the international appeals funded so that the needs of this population are met.

Thank you.

REP. DINGELL: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your courtesy.

REP. HASTINGS: Thank you very much, Chairman Dingell. I appreciate it very much.

I do have a significant amount of questions that I will submit and I'm determined that we hear from our second panel. We expect that votes are going to occur at 4 o'clock, and toward that end I would appreciate very much if the second panel would come forward.

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Ambassador Foley and Ms. Scialabba, thank you all so very much.

And if I could invite to take their places Mr. Michael Gabaudan, the Washington director for the United Nations high commissioner for refugees, Mr. Anders Lago, the mayor of Sodertalje.

Ervin (ph)?

All right. I also had invited Mr. Saleh. OK.

I was asking my friend, Ervin Awling (ph), who is here, Mr. Mayor, and when I talked with you about people that I knew in Sweden, I didn't know that he was going to be here. But I told him that I didn't want to run the risk of saying the name of your city, but now am I correct, it's Sodertalje.

Yes, thanks to Ervin (ph), I got it closer to correct. And, again, I apologize to you. I'm fond of saying, the staff gets tired of hearing me say it, it's hard to apologize for working, but so help me, the time constraints have been extraordinary in these last two days. And I'm deeply appreciative of your patience in that regard.

Let's begin, and I'd ask you all to submit your full statements for the record and try, if at all possible, to summarize your comments in five minutes.

And I'd like to now start with Mr. Gabaudan, if you will, sir.

MR. GABAUDAN: Thank you very much, Chairman Hastings and other members of Congress. I'm very grateful for the opportunity you gave the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees to bring to your attention how we assess the Iraqi situation, how it has impacted the neighboring countries and the response we try to give to that crisis.

I will cover briefly of the nature of the crisis, the response of neighboring countries, what we did and then touch at the end briefly on returns. The Iraqi refugee crisis is characterized by its huge scope. It's now the third refugee crisis in the world. It's very particular in that it is essentially a refugee population of urban origin -- about 80 percent of those we have registered do come from Baghdad -- and a population that had relocated itself in asylum also in an urban context. There are no Iraqi refugee camps.

Most of the refugees have entered neighboring countries legally, with their passports and with a period of stay that was granted by these authorities. Perhaps most importantly, these Iraqi refugees are in the overwhelming majority not fleeing persecution by their government, but by other entities and what they see is the incapacity of their government to protect them, but not persecution by their government.

And I think this is important, because it certainly should facilitate discussion with the Iraqi government in bringing their interest in bringing out securing (ph) Iraqi refugees and eventually solutions.

And the last aspect of this crisis that has really stunned us is the very high percentage of Iraqi refugees who have been heavily traumatized by their experience. People are not fleeing because they heard a bomb or because they fear violence. They flee, the overwhelming majority, because they have been direct victims of bombings, of shootings, of abductions, of torture, or they have witnessed it among their very immediate relatives, a very high proportion, if we compare it with our experience with other refugee populations.

Designing (ph) countries, essentially, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, but also Turkey and Egypt, have responded, I think, given the numbers essentially in a very positive manner. It's important to note that neither Syria nor Jordan nor Lebanon are signatory to the refugee convention. Therefore, they have no obligation towards refugees. They do not wish to consider these people as refugees, as we understand the word. And they have received them as guests.

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We had some concern because that does not entitle to a particular status. The high commissioner in his recent visit to the region was satisfied that in general he found that over the last year what we call the protection space for Iraqi refugees has definitely improved.

As you know, borders are more difficult to cross now. There has been certainly almost a closure in Jordan and a near closure in Syria, with still some movement taking place, but it's difficult to cross the borders. And I think, as Ambassador Foley said, that we now deal with a population that is rather stable in neighboring countries.

The impact in neighboring countries has been of two kinds. One, it has been an impact on the cost of living, particularly in the rental of low-scale apartments, in which refugees are seeking to house themselves, and a tremendous impact on services, in particular, education and health. And, recently, we were very pleased that both Jordan and Syria have granted access to their schooling system to all Iraqi refugees. How we put this practice, of course, quite a challenge, given the numbers.

How do Iraqi refugees live? Mostly from their savings. The myth that all those Iraqis who left are wealthy, et cetera, is wrong. We have seen since the Samarra bombing an increasing pauperization of the Iraqi population and their savings are obviously dwindling.

Many still receive remittances from Iraq. It's one of the odd refugee crises where people had to flee because of threats, but they survive because some of their relatives are still able to send them some funds.

Few are able to work.

Our response has been in two ways, Mr. Chairman. First, we have started in early last year, when our funding became more forthcoming and we could spread our presence in the region, to boost certainly our registration effort and we have so far registered a little over 250,000 refugees in these different countries. The purpose of registration is to assess their needs better.

I repeat, these people are in an urban environment. It's difficult to know where they are as they come to you and identify themselves. It helps us to identify the degree of vulnerability and what sort of answer we should give to this vulnerability.

It allows us to give them documents which we hope will increasingly offer some protection in their relation with the authorities of these companies, and it allows us to determine what sort of assistance they need, whether it's in food, non-food items, or, for the most vulnerable, as we are doing particularly now in Syria, through cash assistance through a credit card system.

And, finally, this registration also identified those who would fit into our categories of vulnerability that determine we can present them for resettlement. And, so far, we have submitted for resettlement to the U.S. and other countries about 12 percent of the whole number that we have registered.

Resettlement is important, not only because it addresses the most vulnerable, but also because it is a demonstration of burden sharing to the countries who are hosting these large numbers. And the second aspect we try to respond to the crisis is support these governments in boosting to a certain extent their capacity in the health and education services to respond to the demands of refugees, and particularly in health where there is a high number of extremely serious diseases that need very sophisticated treatment. And it is a heavy burden for these countries.

The high commissioner has however insisted that what we can do in health and education through the humanitarian channel is going to be limited and bilateral aid is required of a more developmental nature to help these countries.

We do expect the needs of the population to increase as time passes, not because the numbers are increasing, but because their coping mechanisms are going down because of basically the drying up of their savings and the increase of the cost of living in these countries. So we expect that as we keep on registering and we estimate now that we probably will be able to register up to 500,000 by the end of this year -- that's doubling the numbers we

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have now -- that we will find an increasing number of people who do need assistance and this is certainly reason to keep on boosting our presence and our support in these countries.

Finally, yes, we're engaged in trying to look at what the requirements for return will be, because it's obvious that for the majority of the population the long-term solution will be to return to Iraq, and this is why we are now establishing representation to Iraq, which initially was raising amounts (ph) back into Baghdad so we can begin discussions with the government. But this is going to be a long discussion to establish all the prerequisites for return.

And I'll be happy to answer any questions you might have on this regard. Thank you very much.

REP. HASTINGS: Thank you. I note that we've been joined by my good friend and the co-chairman of the Helsinki Commission, Senator Ben Cardin.

And, Ben, do you wish to comment now?

SEN. BENJAMIN CARDIN (D-MD): No, I would prefer the witnesses to complete their statements. I just wish to apologize for the United States Senate, but since I'm in the House I do not dare apologize for the United States Senate having dared to have votes during this hearing. But that's the reason for my delay.

REP. HASTINGS: Thank you very much, Senator.

Mayor Lago, please, if you would proceed.

MAYOR LAGO: Thank you, Chairman Hastings, members of the congressional commission, ladies and gentlemen.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the commission for your invitation. Allow me to be totally frank: I'm not a president, a cabinet minister, an ambassador or even a member of the Swedish Parliament. I'm the mayor of Sodertalje.

Mr. Chairman, I understand it's hard to pronounce Sodertalje. I can tell you that Sinato Boma (ph) had problems to pronounce Sodertalje when I met him some days ago.

Sodertalje is a small town with slightly more than 80,000 inhabitants. I'm here today as the representative from a small country on the northern edge of the European Union. But I can say with both pride and disappointment that when it comes to refugees I come from a great nation.

The United States is the country in the Western world that accepts the largest number of refugees. Directly thereafter comes Sweden, and according to census statistics, it is my hometown that receives most Iraqi refugees in Sweden.

Many Iraqi refugees have sought shelter in Sodertalje since the start of the war in Iraq. Almost all belong to the Christian minority. Sodertalje accepts approximately 5 percent of all Iraqi refugees who come to Europe.

To illustrate this even more dramatically, my little town alone receives more Iraqi refugees than United States and Canada together.

We did not start the war in Iraq. However, we assume a huge responsibility for those people who are affected. Last week, I met with seven Iraqi pupils at a local school. Meena (ph), a girl in fifth grade, had a tear in her eye when she said, it is nice here in Sweden, but I miss my father. Her father is still in Iraq.

Another little girl, Meryem (ph) said with an edge to her voice, if the war continues, the doors must be open for the refugees. All the children I met have relatives left in Iraq.

When I asked these children what they wanted to be when they were older, they brightened up and competed with one another to tell me. Renza (ph) wanted to become an artist. Steve wanted to become a policeman. Meena (ph)

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said shyly that she wanted to become a doctor. These children, in spite of all they had been through, have not let the circumstances diminish their ability to dream of the future.

In Sodertalje, we face three problems. Firstly, our schools and preschools are full. Of the town's 8,000 people, 500 are enrolled in the special preparation classes we have for newly arrived refugees. We cannot hire teachers or build schools fast enough to take care of all these pupils.

Secondly, there is a lack of living accommodations. A great many of the refugees lodge with relatives or friends. We know of cases of 15 people sleeping on mattresses in a two-room apartment.

And, last but not least, we have a shortage of job opportunities. A small town cannot possibly produce jobs for 1,000 refugees each year. Here, the United States could really help Sodertalje. American companies looking to set up businesses or expand in Europe are most welcome to visit my hometown.

I'm in awe of the refugees' ambition and will to make new lives for themselves. Many of those who come to our town are well educated and motivated to start a new life in a new country.

We need immigrants if we are to manage the demographic challenge we face. Despite the fact that we need immigrants, Sodertalje has become a town that must now say, stop, stop, stop. Do not misunderstand me. We will always help others when we can. We must act when the lives of our brothers and sisters are in danger.

It's imperative that we have a humane refugee policy worldwide.

The millions of refugees in the world must be a concern for us all, not just for those areas bordering on the breeding grounds of war or for a small number of countries and cities such as Sodertalje.

Sodertalje works hard to spread the reception of refugees equally over the whole of Sweden, to all cities and towns. Internationally, we must find a model for the equal and more responsible reception of refugees. We must also have special support for the refugees on site in Iraq, in Jordan and in Syria.

Most of all, we must put an end to this and other ongoing wars. The children I met last week have cousins and friends who are left behind in Iraq. Those children are trying to lead a normal childhood in a land where uneasiness and fear are always present.

I'm not a president, I'm not an ambassador, but I know that we must create a new future for the children fleeing from war, and I know there is no time to lose.

Thank you for your attention.

REP. HASTINGS: Mr. Mayor, with your permission, when we transcribe your remarks, I'd like very much to put them on the Helsinki Web site and to have them placed in the Congressional Record.

In sum, in a very poignant fashion, you have put forward the sum total of why we have this important hearing today. And I just, as one member of Congress, would add that your country and you and your city and its citizens are an inspiration. And I offer my heartfelt thanks and deep appreciation for all you do for all of us.

Mr. Saleh, if you would proceed, sir.

MR. SALEH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the commission.

The purpose of our testimony today is to assist you in your comprehensive review of the Iraqi refugee crisis by sharing our experiences and our strategies at ACCESS that we've employed to assist Iraqi and other refugees transition into the American society.

ACCESS, or the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, has been around for 37 years, and I'm going to leave Chairman Dingell's comments to serve as a statement of the efficacy of our services.

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ACCESS, our trademark of our services is the cultural sensitivity and the coordinated manner in which we have wraparound or holistic services. We have a one-stop shop, providing a seamless point of entry and a unified needs assessment for all persons who seek services in our institution. That's even more true when we are dealing with refugees.

We've heard about the huge number of refugees created by the 2003 Iraqi war, and I won't go over those statistics again. But I think it's significant to note that the U.S. has received a rather minuscule amount of refugees.

In fiscal year '05, it was 198. In fiscal year '06, it was 2,002. In fiscal year '07, it was 1,608 and this year it's been 2,627. I was heartened to hear the testimony of Ambassador Foley and Ms. Scialabba that they actually hope to meet the target of 12,000 for this year.

But, again, this is totally inadequate to address the needs of this needy population. A significant number of the refugees who do make it to America will end up in southeast Michigan.

And just as an aside, Mayor Lago, we're actually looking to you in southeast Michigan for Europe to be investing and building businesses in our end of the community. We're suffering a little bit in that area ourselves.

But the population that will end up in southeast Michigan will be as a result of both primary and secondary refugee placement. Primary are those who are originally settled in our area. But what we've learned from our experience in the 1991 Gulf war is that we will have a substantial increase in actually secondary resettlement.

Following the '91 Gulf war, 3,000 Iraqi refugees were settled in southeast Michigan. Within one year of that settlement, that population grew to 14,000 as a result of secondary resettlement. Secondary resettlement results because refugees are placed with good agencies, but they're placed in St. Paul, Minnesota, and Lincoln, Nebraska, and they find themselves in a totally culturally vacuumed environment.

As Congressman Dingell indicated, southeast Michigan, metro Detroit, is recognized as the heart of the Arab-American community, where we have the highest concentration of Arab-American first, second and third generation outside the Middle East. And, as a result of our having established institutions, both cultural, political and economic, once refugees hear of that, they learn of it quickly and then they are drawn to our area.

Refugees present a distinct set of service needs and problems in resettlement. First and foremost is that these persons are not voluntary immigrants. So while they present with many of the same needs that regular immigrants present, they also have substantially more severe needs for services.

Through a contract with the Michigan Department of Human Services, ACCESS is designated as the provider of mandatory medical screening for all primary refugees arriving in southeast Michigan.

In a recent screening of 554 recent refugee arrivals, we not a substantial incidence of health problems significantly larger than that of the general immigrant population. Similarly, refugees in general suffer more from mental health issues than the general immigrant population. And I was heartened to hear -- not heartened, but most significantly, what we find is a substantial incidence of post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Consistent with this finding, it's my understanding that the UNHCR did a report in January of this year where they interviewed 500 and some Iraqi refugees, representing some 3,000 different family individuals and they reported a 100 percent finding of some significant experience of trauma, that one in five of Iraqi refugees are registered with the U.N. as classified as victims of torture and/or violence.

The testimony from a client of ACCESS who receives assistance from our Psychosocial Rehabilitation Center for the Victims of Torture, one of five such centers recognized by the U.N. and the United States: My name is Intessar Naser (ph) and I'm a 34-year-old female refugee from Iraq. I came to the United States in 2007 with my three children in the hopes of finding a better life for us.

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I was subjected to an enormous amount of suffering in Iraq, including the witnessing of the death of my husband. After arriving in the United States, I am faced with many obstacles, which I did not expect. Living cost, financial support barely cover my necessities.

Since I have few family members in the United States, my support system is extremely lacking. I have searched for a job, but due to the few skills which I have, my lack of education, language and other things, I'm unsuccessful. I struggle on a day-to-day basis to keep my family alive, and this has added to my grief and to my stress.

I know that I am not alone and that there are many others who suffer the same, if not worse. I am grateful for the United States in providing me safety, but I hope that through my testimony someone will acknowledge that more assistance is urgently needed for refugees coming to this country.

As with all newcomers, those who have immigrated to the United States from the Arab world come with dreams and hopes of establishing a better life for themselves, their families and their future generations. Unfortunately, this is a much more daunting task than any of them had anticipated.

Iraqi refugees face challenges in meeting their basic needs. Many refugees struggle with poverty after they exhaust their eight months of social welfare benefits that are allotted. After eight months it stops, unless you're a family. And then -- this is a result of the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act of '96.

It made available for refugee families an extension or a seven- year limit for the receipt of social services, SSI and related benefits. This seven-year period was intended to allow these individuals to have a sufficient opportunity to become U.S. citizens, and then they'd be able to retain their eligibility.

However, many, if not most, are unable to complete their requirements for citizenship within these seven-year periods. It's anticipated that by the year 2010 there will be an additional 48,000 refugees who have lost their eligibility for supplemental security income benefits.

Now, ideally, refugees would learn English, pass the citizenship examination and become U.S. citizens. But, for a traumatized population facing the multiple barriers, especially the limited English language proficiency, chronic illness, mental impairments, the path to citizenship is just fraught with too many obstacles in their way.

For those that are able-bodied and capable of applying for citizenship, the current backlog in processing by USCIS and the FBI has resulted in even that path to citizenship not being able to be accomplished within the seven-year period.

The story of Hassan (ph), another Iraqi refugee, who resettled in Dearborn in 1998. He came to access and we initially helped him with his refugee assistance application with the Department of Human Services. That was valid for eight months, and we assisted him with job training and job placement, but the job placement lasted for two months, because Hassan (ph) suffered from a severe psychiatric schizophrenic disorder and he was unable to maintain his employment.

With that, we were able to get him onto the SSI rolls and we were able to advocate for him. And then, when he became eligible to become a citizen in 2004, we did his citizen application.

Now, we could apply for a waiver of his English language requirement because of his documented medical condition, which prevented him from learning the English language, but that's an exception. But even with all of that, the delays in the background and security checks where the citizenship application required four years from the filing of his application until he was ultimately approved.

During this four-year period, he lost his SSI benefits and there were no benefits available for him. There was no safety net until he actually became a U.S. citizen.

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Similarly, there are -- in addition to the employment, or I'm sorry, the health and mental health issues, employment is a substantial issue, if someone's going to be integrated into the American society, into any society in which they're living.

But the traditional employment and training programs are not equipped to respond to the refugee population. These state and federal programs are generally not bilingual and the eligibility requirements and the benchmarks for success make it adverse or preclude, actually, refugees being welcomed into these job training programs, because they get benchmarked by how many people have they trained, how many people have they placed. And these are people that lack any great skills in terms of employability.

So the traditional programs don't like refugees to come into the job training programs. ACCESS we believe is unique in our ability to provide culturally sensitive services for these refugees. But for those who do not end previous in southeast Michigan, it is unlikely that they will be able to receive the broad variety of welfare assistance and program assistance that we're able to provide in our agency.

Our agency is a model, I believe, for the providing of effective human and social services. And, as Congressman Dingell indicated, we do this not just for the Arab-American population, but for the total population in southeast Michigan. But especially with our refugee applicants, and they're not all from Iraq, we have a model of having an individual case manager for each refugee family. That case manager ensures that all of the programs that are available through our organization or that might be available in the other state or local agency are made available to those members.

We believe we're unique. We believe that it is only through such aggressive treatment and services that refugee populations are going to have any chance of integrating themselves, becoming engaged in the society which they will now be living in for the rest of their lives. And there is just a paucity of resources available, nationally or locally, to meet the demands that even the limited number of Iraqi refugees being admitted to the United States have.

Thank you very much.

REP. HASTINGS: We'll begin our questioning with Mr. Smith, and I think you all heard that bell. That signifies that, on the House side, we're going to be doing some voting.

REP. SMITH: Mr. Chairman, thank you so very much.

And, Mr. Gabaudan, if I could ask you on behalf of the audience here, yesterday, General Petraeus, and the before, Ambassador Crocker, testified before the House and the Senate. And Ambassador Crocker, and you probably heard me say earlier, when quoted him, said that the UNHCR has returned international staff to Iraq to assist with the return of internally displaced persons.

And, obviously, we all see that and greet that with a great deal of hope and optimism. And I'm sure it's not to the point where, and you can tell us, doing much processing in and of itself. But I would ask, if you could, tell us about the conditions on the ground.

One of the things that General Petraeus emphasized was that there are now some 91,000 what they're calling sons of Iraq, who now, acting out of self interest and enlightened self interest, who now understand that Al Qaida and other militants don't mean them well -- they are a lethal threat to their families and to their communities -- are now joining a growing number of the police battalions, as well as the military battalions and acting in a way that you would expect a security force to do so.

And I wondered if you might shed some light as to whether or not that's creating some of the space that we're all hoping for for that return.

Secondly, along the same lines, the surge was and is controversial. I happened to have supported it. Nobody likes the fact that our military men and women are deployed there. The sooner they get home the better, from all of our points of view, because we have lost so many lives. But it seems to me that if the surge has created a space that

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will allow repatriation to help and to assist the internally displaced, that needs to be said. And we need to know whether or not that's accurate and whether or not reality and perception are meshed as one.

On the mental health side, and I appreciate the good work of UNHCR and ACCESS.

Mr. Saleh, thank you for your statement. I was struck by your comment that 100 percent of those interviewed experienced at least one traumatic event.

I sponsored the Torture Victims Relief Act, and we have a reauthorization now that is pending in the Senate, has been pending for months, is being held up by one particular senator. And I have talked to him several times asking him to lift his hold.

We need to provide, I believe, the additional resources that legislation would push us towards, both in terms of the U.N. voluntary fund and the torture victim relief centers here in the United States and abroad. So your point is well taken and I will talk to him about what you've told us today. But we need to push to get that out as soon as possible.

And, finally, two things. On trafficking, what are you seeing, particularly on the ground with regards to trafficking in country, in Iraq, as well as outside? And the Chaldean Christians, I held a hearing on their plight and their very unique circumstances that they suffer in Iraq and I think disproportionately to their number they make up the refugee population. Obviously in raw numbers they don't.

But maybe you could speak to that issue, as well, as to whether or not, because many of those individuals have been killed, kidnapped and suffer immensely, and I don't think many of them can go back.

MR. GABAUDAN: Thank you very much, Congressman.

First, in return, following Security Council Resolution -- I think it was 1570 or 1670, I'm not quite sure, that called for greater U.N. engagement in Iraq, every U.N. agency is trying to see how it can increase its presence in Baghdad. For the time being, we are essentially talking about either Baghdad or the northern governorates.

So, as part of this effort, the high commissioner decided to put some of his staff back into Baghdad. We are talking about very few slots. The U.N. has so many slots and each agency has to find out how many it gets. So we're not talking about a major return of plenty of staff. We're just talking about putting a representative and some other immediate colleagues to try to begin a discussion with the Iraqi government about what are the prerequisites for returns.

Now, obviously, any news that security is improving is a view (ph) that goes in the right direction and every news that there are some attempts at reconciliation is of course news that brings us closer to looking at the possibility of return. But I think so far the high commissioner has been quite clear on that. The improvements in security are not certainly wide enough, broad enough and certainly not sustainable enough for us to advocate for returns.

And the attempts at reconciliation, we have just seen the beginning. And I think we need much more reassurance that it's a very lasting process that takes place before we can advocate for return.

Other issues will have to be looked at for return. This is a population which is essentially urban. They will hit (ph) houses and flats. If you look at the way Baghdad is distributed between different groups now, as compared to what it was before the war, there is a complete redistribution of religious groups in the different neighborhoods.

We will have to know what the government intends to do in terms of compensation or restitution for people who have lost their property. All these things, all these systems, need to be established before we can really advocate that people can go back.

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And, finally, I would say that there is still some work to do with different ministries in the Iraqi government, all of whom do not have exactly the same views on the refugees. And I think there is need to bring a sort of consensus between the different ministries to have a national policy on how we are going to address returns.

So it is with these challenges in view that we are reestablishing our presence in Iraq. I think it's to say we have to start looking at how to prepare for return. It's not going to be a complicated process, and let us not forget that as we discuss about the return of the perhaps 2 million people who are outside, we will also have to discuss about the return of the 2 million people who have been displaced within Iraq, most of whom also come from urban centers.

CHAIRMAN: Mrs. Solis?

REP. SOLIS: Mr. Chairman, I apologize. We have a vote on the floor and I have to also take a plane ride, but I do personally want to thank these witnesses in particular and to Mr. Lago in particular. Although you said you're not a president, you indeed are a humanitarian ambassador.

So I want to personally congratulate you, because you have shown a light on humanity by taking in -- your city as welcomed so many Iraqis. We know that you are overburdened. We see that very clearly and I know many of us here in the Congress will work very hard to see that we try to provide enough funding so that we can adequately process these refugees and provide the tools that are necessary. But, more importantly, those that are going to be re-placed here in the United States.

And to Mr. Saleh, thank you for your comments and the type of wraparound services that you currently provide to Arab refugees. I hope that we can work with you in other parts of the country where we have large segments of Arab populations, for example, in southern California, in Orange County, which I am very familiar with, and know that we need to provide essential tools so that our CBOs that are also similar to NGOs, provide assistance on the ground in a multicultural setting that is familiar to these refugees.

We did this when we had refugees from Vietnam. We should be able to do it for the Iraqis that will be coming here, as well.

So, with that, it's more of a comment, and I just want to personally thank you and I want to thank our Chairman, Mr. Alcee Hastings, for having this very, very important hearing. And I look forward to working with all of you.

SEN. CARDIN: I know my House members have to go for a vote, but if you would like to respond to the trafficking issue, the status of trafficking in Iraq.

MR. GABAUDAN: Trafficking can take many different aspects. I mean, one aspect we are the most worried about is the one that leads to sexual exploitation of women and young girls from families who are seeing their living conditions drop dramatically.

This is an issue that you do not address through the registration. People will not come forward with these stories. You have to do a lot of outreach, which we are trying to do right now by working with refugee workers in other communities and try to convince slowly that we have something to offer.

We have opened a series of safe houses for women that we can extract from that. Some don't want. Some families are reluctant to have working on that.

I am less aware of what are the networks of trafficking from Iraq into neighboring countries or even further away. We know it probably happens, but we don't have information of how they work.

SEN. CARDIN: Let me first make a comment, and then I will have a couple of questions. This morning, in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that I serve on, we took up the long-term relationship between the United States and Iraq.

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The administration is in the process of negotiating a strategic framework agreement without the consent of the Congress. I expressed at that time my deep opposition to that plan by the administration.

I think that they will enter into an agreement that's contrary to the majority members of the United States Congress - and I don't mean from a partisan point of view, just the numbers are opposed to this administration strategy in Iraq -- and to the sentiment of the American people.

One of my difficulties in judging what the administration is doing is that we need to have an honest assessment of what's happening on the ground. And that's why I was particularly pleased that the Helsinki Commission is holding this hearing, to get a better assessment of what's happening in regards to the displaced individuals within Iraq and the neighboring countries, what's happening to the refugees, so that we can better understand how Iraq will look in the future.

The testimony here indicates that the United Nations has been able to register about 260,000 of the refugees. We know that there are close to 5 million Iraqis that are displaced within Iraq and neighboring countries and throughout the world. So that's a small fraction of the total number of people who have been impacted.

We clearly want to resettle. I agree with your testimonies, that resettlement is by far the best policy. But according to the United Nations high commissioner, in the reports that I have seen, and I am going to ask shortly Mr. Gabaudan whether this is accurate or not, the conditions on the ground do not warrant the resettlement of the vast numbers within Iraq.

And in response to Mr. Smith's comment, quoting Ambassador Crocker, he had quoted Ambassador Crocker accurately, but it's my understanding that the U.N. mission is not to assist in resettlement within Iraq but to assess the conditions, as to whether it's feasible and what is necessary in order to resettle. So I'm not sure that was an accurate portrayal by Ambassador Crocker.

We desperately are going to need humanitarian programs.

If it's not safe to resettle within Iraq, if there are not enough -- if the surrounding countries cannot and should not be able to permanently house the refugees, if the international community is not prepared to accept the vast numbers, humanitarian programs both within and outside of Iraq are going to be necessary. We also need to assist in resettlement in other countries.

And, Mayor Lago, I want to thank you particularly for your extraordinary efforts. You put us all to shame, other countries to shame. If your small city can handle that many refugees, more than Canada and the United States, I think that speaks volumes as to what we should be doing here in the United States.

We have Iraqis that assisted the United States that must leave Iraq because of their helping us, and we're not providing the means for them to resettle. I have joined my colleagues in requesting \$68 million during this appropriation process to deal with Iraqis with special immigrant visas, those who helped the United States, in order to try to start making some progress in this area.

So, Mr. Gabaudan, let me just start with you, if I might, and see whether you agree as to -- I heard Mr. Smith asked this question, but I want to try to get a more direct and focused answer.

The United Nations high commissioner for refugees, can you tell us what their current assessment is in regards to the safety within Iraq for a significant number of refugees safely returning to their communities in a safe resettlement plan?

MR. GABAUDAN: My apologies, Mr. Chairman. We don't have direct information because we are not circulating within Iraq, except in the northern governorates, so I cannot give you the results of direct assessment by the high commissioner for refugees within the country.

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But, certainly, from the interviews we made with those refugees who returned in December and who were given some incentives by the Iraqi government to return, we found that the large majority had returned, because they had depleted the resources in their asylum countries, not because they thought security was better. A large proportion of them were eventually displaced within Iraq. They could not go back to their homes.

That already indicates that for a small number who went -- I mean, Iraqi government was talking about perhaps 30,000. We don't know the exact figures. But for a small proportion of the whole number who are out, this attempt was not very successful.

When you talk to Iraqis in asylum countries, most of them say that the conditions are not right. And let's not forget, again, it's an urban population. They all have cell phones. They call back home all the time. They know the conditions back in their country perhaps better than we do. And I think we have to take their word for that.

What we do plan to do with the Iraqi government is to set what are the preconditions to start talking about returns. And I think this will be a long discussion. I think it will have to address lots of issues, and it's not exactly wrong to start now.

But starting to discuss return, by no means in the mind of the high commissioner, is equivalent to say, I think it's time to return. It's a different proposal. It's going to be a complex plan of repatriation and we need to start looking at what it means and discuss with our partners.

SEN. CARDIN: I appreciate that answer. The administration's own testimony indicated that one of the reasons -- not the sole reason -- but one of the reasons, according to the administration, that there's less violence in Baghdad is that the neighborhoods have been more ethnically cleansed.

And therefore those who have been displaced from certain neighborhoods in Baghdad, it would not be safe for them to return to their former neighborhoods. That issue has not yet at all been addressed by the Iraqi government, and it's sort of being pushed aside, where I think ultimately we're going to have to pay attention to that.

But, at this moment, with security still, according to the administration, being so fragile and certainly reversible, there is no plan by the Iraqi government to facilitate the return of large numbers of refugees within Baghdad, and I would suggest, probably within the entire country.

Mayor Lago, let me just come back to you for a moment, if I might. Again, I had a chance to meet with you and a chance to understand a little bit more about what you have to go through as a mayor with such a large number of new residents.

Can you just share with us the impact it has on the infrastructure, on your schools, on your housing and how you're dealing with that from the point of view of a mayor of a municipality?

MAYOR LAGO: Yes, thank you. Before I do that, let me tell you something about the situation of the refugees' children, only a moment.

I can tell you that it's not uncommon for children in our schools that they cry when it's time for vacation. I was surprised when I first heard that, but imagine the difficult housing situation with 15 people in a small apartment, sleeping on mattresses on the floor, the difficult housing, who have no corner in the house where the children can sit down and do their lessons.

So it's a very hard situation for the young children of the refugees. I understand them and I understand why they are crying when it's time for vacation, because it's much better in our school or in the flats.

So one of the big problems for the infrastructure is the shortage of accommodation. A lot of people are living in the same flat, so then that's one big problem.

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The other problem is for the children, it's a very hard situation in our schools. I said before that we have about 8,000 pupils totally, but now we have 500 pupils that is newly arrived refugees, so that's a very hard situation.

And we have a system in Sweden for the first two, 2.5 years, the government takes care of the economic situation for the refugees, but after that it's the municipality that takes the responsibility. So, after a time, it will also be an economic problem for the municipality.

SEN. CARDIN: How is this being received by the greater population of your city? Is there resentment with the large number of immigrants? Have they integrated well into the municipality? Is there a form of segregation where they are not able to interact with the rest of the community?

MAYOR LAGO: I think I would say both Sodertalje and Sweden in common are very open and friendly for people coming from other countries and for refugees. In my town, about 30 percent is people coming from abroad or have relatives from abroad, so we are used to meeting people in that situation.

But, of course, when it's coming a lot of people in a short time, then it's a problem for a small town. So both ethnic Swedes, and also people just arrived from Iraq, are telling me, now we must stop up and we must spread the refugees all over Sweden.

I think the big problem is the concentration to some areas and some cities. It's not a problem for Sweden to take care for about 20,000, 30,000 refugees per year, but we have a national problem that we must have new legislation so it's possible to spread the refugees to all municipalities and all cities in Sweden. But that's our problem.

SEN. CARDIN: Well, I appreciate your testimony. I think you are just a prime example of how a community can accept a significant number of immigrants and yet it does not impose insurmountable obstacles. And, if we had a better sharing, a better responsibility for more countries that are capable of accepting refugees for resettlement, particularly where these refugees would prefer to go to some of these countries, that there is an international responsibility here and it is not being met.

I could also talk about the humanitarian assistance.

I know the United States is paying a little bit more than its traditional share, but the need for humanitarian assistance is dramatic, and we have not yet seen the international community step up, either to accept refugees or to assist in the way they should with humanitarian aid.

Mr. Saleh, I want to ask you a question about the children, because the mayor just had me interested as to how you see the children who have come to the United States, how well they have been able to adjust to the United States, whether there have been any special problems and whether government policies here could help make it easier for young people, through our schools or through other programs, to adjust to the United States?

MR. SALEH: Thank you, Mr. Cardin. The children have suffered generally. On the first arrival, the biggest problem that they're facing is obviously they're also traumatized, being dislocated at a young age.

They've been interrupted from their educational system for substantial periods of time, and then they're coming to the United States and they are behind in their educational training in their native language. They don't have English language skills and there has been an increasing trend to do away with ESL, to do away with funding for ESL. And this is obviously placing a great challenge.

I think what draws the refugee population to Michigan is that they are able to have this sort of extended family. There is a large concentration of Arabic speaking and Iraqis in our community, and so they're to have at least some feeling of an extended family support that perhaps in Mayor Lago's city they don't have that same support.

But that doesn't mean that their transition into American society isn't fraught with all of the difficulties that Mayor Lago has identified in the children that he's visited with.

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SEN. CARDIN: Well, let me thank you for that. And I thank all three of you for your real leadership. The United Nations has played an extraordinary role historically dealing with refugees and it's certainly again being challenged in Iraq.

And all three of you have presented, I think, information that's extremely important. This is a very important part not just of the humanitarian agenda internationally, which it is, but stability within that region of the world. If we're going to be able to bring about the type of Middle East that we think is important for U.S. interests and for the international community, then we certainly need to deal with 5 million people today that are living in a different location than they did just a few years ago, many of which are living under extremely difficult circumstances, once which should not be maintained the way it is today and need to give them hope for their future.

I think this hearing has provided us in Congress with a better understanding of the issue. I thank you all for making the effort to testify before us.

And, with that, the commission will stand adjourned.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Transcript

Subject: US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (90%); REFUGEES (90%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (89%); DISPLACED PERSONS (89%); US DEMOCRATIC PARTY (89%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (78%); NATIONAL SECURITY (78%); STATE DEPARTMENTS & FOREIGN SERVICES (78%); SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE FORCES (73%); BOARDS OF DIRECTORS (70%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (70%); PRESS CONFERENCES (50%)

Organization: US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (94%); US DEPARTMENT OF STATE (91%); ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY & COOPERATION IN EUROPE (54%)

Person: ALCEE L HASTINGS (76%); NOURI AL-MALIKI (58%); JANE HARMAN (56%); WILLIAM D DELAHUNT (56%)

Geographic: DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, USA (79%); IRAQ (98%); UNITED STATES (95%); JORDAN (92%); FINLAND (92%); EGYPT (92%); TURKEY (92%); EUROPE (92%); SWEDEN (79%); SYRIA (79%); MIDDLE EAST (79%)

Load-Date: April 15, 2008