

NO DIRECTION HOME: AN NGO PERSPECTIVE ON IRAQI REFUGEES AND IDPs

JOINT HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA
AND THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND OVERSIGHT
OF THE
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THURSDAY, MAY 1, 2008

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST
AND SOUTH ASIA, AND
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND OVERSIGHT,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:11 a.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Gary L. Ackerman (chairman of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia) presiding.

Mr. ACKERMAN. The committee will come to order. Last March, our two subcommittees held a hearing on the subject of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons where a panel of Bush administration officials responsible for different aspects of the crisis assured us that the administration was moving aggressively to assist refugees and IDPs, and would meet the President's announced target of 12,000 Iraqi refugees resettled in the United States during the current fiscal year.

I challenged their ability and the administration's sincerity, and they again reassured me. Well, as of March 31st, only 2,067 Iraqis have been resettled. With 5 months left in the fiscal year, that leaves only 9,373, but the administration, at the current rate, will not even meet half of the President's goal: 43.78 percent, less than 50 percent, another total failure.

That is pathetic, in terms of performance, and embarrassing to us as a nation, and it is only the tip of the iceberg. For the millions of Iraqis who are stranded in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon, conditions are worsening dramatically. By Ambassador Foley's own admission at a press briefing last month, 150,000 Iraqis in Syria who are fed each day by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees will swell to 300,000 by summertime as more and more families run out of resources.

The situation in Jordan, while of lesser magnitude, is equally dire. Current appeals for assistance through the United Nations and other international organizations total \$900 million for this calendar year, and while the United States has provided \$208 million toward this goal, a shortfall of \$400 million is still expected.

There is report after report from the United Nations and from nongovernmental organizations, there are pleas for help from affected neighboring governments, but while detailed descriptions of

the crisis abound, and the need for additional resources is clear, there are two fundamental things missing from the resolution of this crisis.

The two governments who should be most concerned, who have the most responsibility, and who, frankly, have the most at stake are the ones who seem the least interested in helping. I cannot understand why the Government of Iraq cannot or will not do more to assist its own citizens. The cynical view is that Prime Minister al-Maliki does not want the refugees back because they are mostly ethnic groups he does not care about.

Some would cite sheer incompetence, that the Government of Iraq simply does not know how to take care of its own people, or I could cite the fact that the Government of Iraq has its hands full trying to establish its own authority within its own borders and that the affairs outside of Iraq, even those directly affecting Iraqis, are beyond its capacity. It could be all of those things and any of them in combination.

But the bottom line is that, whatever the reason, the Government of Iraq's failure to provide for its own people who have fled their country because of the violence is inexcusable. For the refugees, all that is needed is for their incompetent but cash-flush government to write a check to the UNHCR. The Iraqi Government does not have to worry about how to deliver services to the refugees because there are plenty of skilled and willing organizations willing to step in and ameliorate their sinful failure.

With a projected surplus of \$32 billion this year, the Government of Iraq could cover the \$400 million shortfall and the international appeal and then some, but they have not, and yet the Bush administration has utterly failed to press aggressively for the Iraqi Government to spend more than the paltry \$25 million already allocated but remains largely unspent. That is \$25 million of their shameless \$32-billion surplus.

So, yet again, we return to the Bush administration's own brand of incompetence. As I noted at the outset, a mere 2,627 Iraqis have been settled in the United States, and we are already halfway through the fiscal year.

So, at this rate, a paltry 5,254 will be settled by October 1st. I guess this is progress, given where we have come from, but I keep asking myself why the United States seems incapable of meeting its own pledge targets for resettlement.

What is it about this refugee crisis that has failed to move the Bush administration to be more aggressive in addressing a situation that so clearly is of its own making, and the only answer I can come up with is that President Bush does not care about the refugees. He does not care about the internally displaced Iraqis. He does not lose sleep over the 4 million Iraqis who are now without homes and the 2 million of them who have sought shelter in nations that not only do not welcome them, but are openly hostile to them.

He cares so little that he cannot even bring himself to utter more than a perfunctory mention of the plight of the refugees in public, much less commit himself to the heavy lifting necessary to assist them. He cares so little that he leaves the problem to others within his administration to solve, and because he refuses to lead, the bu-

reaucracy does what it does best: It argues about turf, it debates regulations, it disputes who will pay for what, it obfuscates when clarity is necessary, and it dawdles when action is required. But I am sure that the refugees are in the President's prayers. What they need to be is in his plans.

I say to the President: There is an enormous humanitarian crisis in the Middle East, and it is chiefly of your making because you decided to go to war in Iraq and it is time for you to own up to your responsibility for this crisis. It is what you told us, that people had to take responsibility for their actions.

It is time for you to step in and resolve the bureaucratic fights between the Departments of State and Homeland Security. It is time for you to reach out personally and urge the governments in the region to assist in this crisis. It is time for you to speak directly and forcibly to Prime Minister al-Maliki, who also does not care, to remind him that the Iraqi refugees are his people, and his government is responsible for their welfare.

In short, Mr. President, you broke it, and it is time for you to own this problem. But given the President's track record of accountability so far, I have little hope that this change will take place, but, in the Middle East, sometimes hope is all that there is. [The prepared statement of Mr. Ackerman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE GARY L. ACKERMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK, AND CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

The Subcommittees will come to order. Last March, our two subcommittees held a hearing on the subject of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons where a panel of Bush Administration officials responsible for different aspects of the crisis assured us that the Administration was moving aggressively to assist the refugees and IDPs and would meet the President's announced target of 12,000 Iraqi refugees resettled in the United States during the current fiscal year. I challenged their ability and the Administration's sincerity and they again re-assured me. Well, as of March 31, only 2,627 Iraqis have been resettled. With five months left in the fiscal year, that leaves only 9,373, but at the current rate the Administration won't even meet half of the President's goal. Not even half. That's pathetic in terms of performance and embarrassing to us as a nation.

And it's only the tip of the iceberg. For the millions of Iraqis who are stranded in Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Lebanon, conditions are worsening dramatically. By Ambassador Foley's own admission at a press briefing last month, the 150,000 Iraqis in Syria who are fed each day by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees will swell to 300,000 by summertime as more and more families run out of resources. The situation in Jordan while of lesser magnitude is equally dire.

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There is report after report after report, from the United Nations and from non-governmental organizations. There are pleas for help from the affected neighboring governments. But while detailed descriptions of the crisis abound and the need for additional resources is clear, there are two fundamental things missing from the resolution of this crisis: the two governments who should be most concerned, who have the most responsibility and who frankly have the most at stake are the ones who seem the least interested in helping.

I cannot understand why the Government of Iraq can't, or won't, do more to assist its own citizens. The cynical view is that Prime Minister al-Maliki doesn't want the refugees back because they're mostly ethnic groups he doesn't care about. Some would site sheer incompetence: that the Government of Iraq simply doesn't know how to take care of its own people. Or I could cite the fact the Government of Iraq has its hands full trying to establish its own authority within its own borders, and that affairs outside of Iraq—even those directly affecting Iraqis—are beyond its capacity. It could be all of these things in combination. But the bottom-line is that

whatever the reason, the government of Iraq's failure to provide for its own people who have fled their country because of the violence is inexcusable. For the refugees, all that is needed is for their incompetent but cash flush government to write a check to UNHCR. The Iraqi government doesn't have to worry about how to deliver services to the refugees, because there are plenty of skilled and willing organizations to step in and ameliorate their sinful failure. And with a projected surplus of \$32 Billion this year, the government of Iraq could cover the \$400 million shortfall in the international appeal and then some. But they haven't yet and the Bush Administration has utterly failed to press aggressively for the Iraqi government to spend more than the paltry \$25 million already allocated, but that remains largely unspent. That's \$25 million of their shameless \$32 Billion surplus.

So yet again we return to the Bush Administration's own brand of incompetence. As I noted at the outset, a mere 2, 627 Iraqis have been settled in the United States and we're already half way through this fiscal year. So at this rate, a paltry 5, 254 will be settled before October 1. I guess this is progress given where we've come from, but I keep asking myself why the United States seems incapable of meeting its own pledged targets for resettlement? What is it about this refugee crisis that has failed to move the Bush Administration to be more aggressive in addressing a situation that is so clearly of its own making? And the only answer I can come up with is that President Bush simply doesn't care about the refugees. He doesn't care about the internally displaced Iraqis. He doesn't lose sleep over the 4 million Iraqis who are now without homes and the two million of them who have sought shelter in nations that not only don't welcome them but are openly hostile. He cares so little, that he can't even bring himself to utter more than a perfunctory mention of the plight of the refugees in public, much less commit himself to the heavy lifting necessary to assist them. He cares so little that he leaves the problem to others within his Administration to solve and because he refuses to lead, the bureaucracy does what it does best: it argues about turf; it debates regulations; it disputes who will pay for what; it obfuscates when clarity is what's necessary; it dawdles when action is what is required. But I'm sure the refugees are in the President's prayers. What they need is to be in his plans.

I say to the President, there is an enormous humanitarian crisis in the Middle East and it is chiefly of your making because you decided to go to war in Iraq. It is time for you to own up to your responsibility for this crisis. It was you who told us people had to take responsibility for their actions. It is time for you to step in and resolve the bureaucratic fights between the Departments of State and Homeland Security, it is time for you to reach out, personally, and urge the governments in the region to assist in this crisis. It is time for you to speak directly and forcefully to Prime Minister al-Maliki, who also doesn't care, to remind him that the Iraqi refugees are his people and his government is responsible for their welfare. In short, Mr. President you broke it and it is time for you to own this problem.

But given the President's track record of accountability so far, I have little hope that this change will take place, but in the Middle East, sometimes hope is all there is.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I turn now to Ranking Member Rohrabacher.

The chair will request that our distinguished members of the audience refrain from any demonstrations, signs of approval or disapproval, or, regrettably, we will have to ask you to leave or be removed. But we thank you for being here and your deep, strong feelings on this issue.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I, obviously, disagree with the points that you have made today but appreciate the fact that we have hearings like this in order to examine issues where people can have honest disagreements, and I would suggest that, in this area, it is one of these arenas that we will have to involve ourselves in debate, but also involve ourselves in a lot of soul searching as to what we believe is the best policy and also the most moral policy.

I would suggest that those people who find themselves displaced, those who have left Iraq, are wonderful people. There is no doubt. By and large, what we are talking about are perhaps some of the most moral and admirable people in that country because instead of rising to the occasion of chaos, and mayhem, and bloodshed, they

decided not to participate in that, and there is something to be said for people like that. Certainly, we know that they are good people, and they are in a bad situation.

What should be our policy is not necessarily based simply on these are good people in need; thus, let us do this. We have to figure out what "this" is and whether or not that makes the lives of the people we are talking about better, and whether or not it actually helps create a better situation in Iraq so there would not be more refugees, more people in need in the future.

I would suggest that we need to try to encourage as many people who are good and decent people in Iraq to stay there and become part of a new Iraq. Our purpose in being involved in Iraq, if there is a purpose at all, is to create a society where radical Islam and the thugs of that region do not dominate that country. That is our purpose.

It is contrary to our purpose, then, and contrary to that, what I consider to be a very noble goal, to suggest that the good and decent people of that society should leave, and it is contrary to try to create a better world and a better area there. It is contrary to that goal to facilitate them leaving and coming to the United States of America. In fact, those who would come to the United States of America, while I heartily agree it indicates that they appreciate the American way of life and our fine people, these are just the kind of people that we need in Iraq to help build a democratic society.

We cannot expect, if we are to help the people that you are talking about, and that the word gets out in Iraq that, indeed, the United States is willing to accept us into their country, that there will not be even a greater flood of people leaving Iraq, the very people that we need in order to stop the bloodshed, and mayhem, and to blunt the threat of radical Islam in that country.

So while all of our hearts sighed with those refugees, to which you refer, all of us do, we have to make sure that we use our heads to make sure that their lives are better, their family lives are better, and the lives of all of those millions of people in Iraq are better and that we are not undercutting the chance for peace that we have got.

Now, the number of people killed in the last month has gone up in Iraq. Generally, as compared to 1 year ago, things are not as bad and, compared to 2 or 3 years ago, things are improving. However, those improvements are based on the fact that we have people in Iraq who are wonderful people who are now involving themselves in the system, and who now have rejected radical Islam, and what would it be like had, 2 or 3 years ago, we just decided that those people could come to the United States?

Well, by now, you would have some sort of a radical Islamic government, and there would be much more bloodshed. There would be many more people losing their lives, and that would not be in anyone's interest, except, of course, for those radicals in the Islamic world that want to make war on the rest of us.

So I would suggest that, as we look at this issue, that we seriously consider what these steps that are being suggested will lead to in the long run, and if, in the long run, it leads to lessening the chance for peace in Iraq, lessening the chance that we will thwart radical Islam, that is not the course of action we should take. In

dealing with refugees, it is the hardest issue to deal with because you are dealing with human beings who are in a bad situation at this particular moment.

I certainly have nothing against trying to help the refugees and giving them stipends and giving them everything they need to return to Iraq. I think that bringing them either to the United States or elsewhere will do nothing but create a greater flood out of Iraq of those people who are the only ones that will give us a chance for peace and somewhat of a stable and democratic society in that country.

I thank my chairman, Mr. Delahunt, for the effort that he has put into this issue, and you, Mr. Chairman. Both of you have put enormous effort into focusing attention on the plight of these good and decent people, and I look forward to hearing from my colleague, Mr. Blumenauer, with various thoughts on this issue. Thank you.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Would you yield for one moment?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I certainly will.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I thank my colleague, and certainly we do, and will, cooperatively disagree on this issue, and I appreciate your compassion and concern that you and so many others who disagree with the position that some of us have stated.

But I cannot help but think of, over the years, how you and I, and others, worked together on the plight of Soviet Jews during the time that they had such a difficult time in the Soviet Union. We did not tell them to stay there and become part of the new Russia.

When people left Darfur, we did not tell them they should not go elsewhere.

When President Ford welcomed in hundreds of thousands of mostly Buddhist refugees from Vietnam, we did not insist that they stay there to be part of a new Vietnam; we welcomed them and resettled them here in very quick order.

When Christians and Baha'is found themselves being executed when the shah was overturned in Iran, we took as many of them as we could and placed them here or wherever else they could go.

When Cubans leave Cuba and come dry foot on American soil in Miami, we welcome them here and do not send them back to be part of a new Cuba.

The concern that so many of us have, that these people, who are neither Christians, Jews, Baha'is or Buddhists, but mostly something else, are suddenly told that they should stay and face the consequences in rebuilding a new country when the rules seem to be so different for other refugees is not necessarily the signal that some of us think should be front and center stage in forming opinions of America.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. If the gentleman would indulge me——

Mr. ACKERMAN. It is your time.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay, then. Reclaiming my time, I would just suggest that, yes, I remember very clearly being active with you on the issues of Soviet Jewry and the various issues that you are speaking about.

For example, I have a community in my district made up almost completely of Vietnamese, who came after the war in Vietnam. The difference between what we are referring to is that, in Russia, it

was a fait accompli when these refugees and the Jews were trying to escape. In Vietnam, it was a fait accompli. In Iran, it was a fait accompli. The last thing we should have done, if there was a chance to prevent Russia from going through a period of dictatorship under the Communist Party, was to have those people leave while the issue was still in play.

In Iraq, the issue is still in play. It is very possible that radical Islam will be thwarted in Iraq. It is possible. It will be impossible if we drain these good people out of that country and have them flood the United States or elsewhere.

So your point is well taken, in terms of the moral position of helping people from those countries. The timing is what makes it fundamentally different.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I thank you for that thoughtful response. We will continue to engage down the road, as our colleagues await.

The chair would like to note the presence of Congressman Alcee Hastings, whose insistence that the world adhere to good standards of human rights, compels him to be with us today, and, without objection, we shall treat him as a member of the committee for such purposes during this session.

I turn now to my colleague and partner in this hearing, the distinguished chairman, who has worked together with me on so many issues where our committees' jurisdictions overlap, Congressman Delahunt.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you, Chairman Ackerman. Let me applaud you for your statement. I cannot improve on it. I agree vigorously with everything that you said, both in terms of the Bush administration's stance, action, or lack thereof, and that of the Maliki government in Baghdad.

I also want to acknowledge my ranking member's compassion because he does speak with a good heart. At the same time, I have to—we do this on occasion—vigorously disagree. He does not have to be concerned about a flood of Iraqi refugees coming to the United States. I think there is in excess of 4.5 million so-called "IDPs," internally displaced people, and refugees outside of the Iraqi boundaries.

To think that the authorized level of 12,000 Iraqi refugees coming to this country could be described as a "flood," I think, is indulging in a bit of hyperbole, and we cannot even manage the 12,000. It is a disgrace, and it is not what we are about as a people. It is not American, in full measure of that term, that we so frequently articulate.

The message, I think, is very clear to the Iraqis. They are not even welcome here, if they look at the actions of the Bush administration.

There was a United Nations report out yesterday about why so few Iraqis in Syria plan to return home. Only 4 percent of Iraqis in Syria plan to return home. The report found that 65 percent of the refugees who do not wish to return said they were under direct threat in Iraq. In other words, "Come back, and you will die."

Some 30 percent do not want to return because of the general national security situation in their home country, and 8 percent said their home in Iraq had been destroyed or was occupied by others. I guess we could put that under the rubric of sectarian cleansing.

So they do not have any choices. I have repeated in the past the so-called "Pottery Barn rule" that was alluded to buy the former secretary of state, Colin Powell, in a conversation with President Bush when he was hell bent on war. I am going to repeat it again because I think it needs to be repeated. "You are going to be the proud owner—" this is Colin Powell "—of 25 million people. You will own all of their hopes, aspirations, and problems. You will own it all. You break it, you own it."

Well, we own it. We own it because the proximate cause of this impending humanitarian disaster is the invasion by the United States of Iraq, and we own a desperate humanitarian crisis with profound consequences, not just to the Iraqi refugees but to our own national security.

This is not just simply about humanitarianism, or altruism, or doing the right thing. This is about protecting the United States of America. It was the Department of State's own advisory group on public diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim world that issued this statement: "Hostility toward the United States makes achieving our policy goals far more difficult."

So what we are doing is we are creating, if you will, the conditions for more terrorism, for more terrorists to emerge that threaten our homeland. That is what this is about. We are not simply here to do good; we are here to protect ourselves. They happen to coincide, doing good and protecting ourselves.

As the chairman indicated in his remarks, Chairman Ackerman, and I noted in the testimony of the next panel, that there were appropriate and correct observations regarding the capacity of the Iraqi Government to deliver services. I understand that. I acknowledge that. But they have the money, and they have the capacity, I dare say, to write a check to those NGOs that are doing God's work all over the Middle East to address the needs of those refugees who are Iraqi citizens and the United Nations. The UNHCR is there. They are doing it. They can deliver the services. Just write the check, Mr. Maliki.

I, Chairman Ackerman, Mr. Hastings, and nine other Members, both Republican and Democrat, have sent a letter to the Prime Minister of Iraq saying, "Write the check. You have a \$32-billion surplus." Four percent is \$1 billion.

When U.N. Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees Johnstone came before myself, and Mr. Ackerman, and Mr. Rohrabacher to testify about the real need, he said, "It is double what we are asking for." Write the check, Mr. Maliki. You have the money, and the Iraqi Parliament is going to be considering what to do with that surplus this June. It is time for action. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Scott?

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is, I would say, about the third hearing we have had on this subject before the Foreign Affairs Committee. You know, the Bible is very correct when it says, "You reap just what you sow," and this country has sown some very serious mistakes, misjudgments, and miscalculations in the terrible decision to invade this country.

Not a single person in Iraq came over to this country and asked us, first of all, to tear down their government, their structure, and build another. We made this mistake. Nowhere is it more glaring

than the displacement of these people of Iraq. Four million people in Iraq that had a way of life now no longer have that way of life. Half of them, 2 million of them or so, are displaced within the country. Two million or so of them are displaced elsewhere.

The greatest tragedy of all is that the two principal actors in this tragic, classic Greek drama are the Iraqi Government and the Government of the United States. No more glaring example can be made than the fact that the invader of Iraq, the United States, as noble as we intended our actions to be, as noble as the sacrifice of our soldiers and their families have been, yet less than 12,000 or so of these Iraqi people have we accepted here, out of 4 million.

That is a very telling number. Even Sweden, a country that had nothing to do with this, is moving in a much more humane and a much more understanding way.

And then the Iraqi Government itself, with the money, with the capabilities, with record oil profits, and yet it is the militias, it is the Sadr movement that is providing the basic services for the people who are in Iraq; not the Maliki government, not their own government, not the Government of the United States.

It is these very militias that we are fighting. They are the ones that are building the relationships with the people. They are the ones that are building the confidence with the people, and they are using the food, they are using the very services that we should be providing.

This is a very dangerous situation. Militias of all denominations are improving their local base of support by providing the social services just as Hezbollah has done, in some respects.

This presents a terrible dilemma for the future of that region, and we are twiddling our thumbs. We are here just sitting on our hands while these militant groups, these groups that we see as the major agents of instability in the region, but yet, in the eyes of the people of Iraq who need the services, they, in fact, represent the stability of this region.

So it aids in recruiting. That is why this issue is so important. The international community needs to wake up and understand what is at stake here, and the United States has got to change this policy in Iraq to understand this bigger picture. What are we going to do with these 4 million people? What are we doing to help Syria and Jordan, besides calling Syria names? Some of those names certainly may be justified. I do not agree with what is going on in Syria and some of their policies, but I will tell you one thing: Syria has taken in almost 1 million refugees, and the United States has taken in only 12,000.

Now, if we see that, what do you think those people see over there? This will be the greatest way we can win the confidence and win the war, win the battle, win the whole big picture is by finally dealing with this refugee issue and getting a strategy for it.

Mr. Chairman, again, I appreciate this hearing and thank you for allowing me a few words to say on it.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Scott. Mr. Costa?

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Chairman, I want to defer my time, at this point, and I will continue to listen intently to my colleagues wax. Thank you.

Mr. ACKERMAN. As long as we wax and do not wane.

We are privileged to be joined by the chairman of the full committee, who I will call on next.

Mr. BERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is a very important issue. I wanted to be here, but for this moment, I will wane.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Your presence has lent to the weight and importance of this committee's deliberations today. Mr. Hastings?

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I choose to wax, and in light of the fact that the distinguished chairperson of this committee chose to wane, perhaps it is that he and Mr. Costa allow that I bring to this hearing the same perspective, and, hopefully, my brief comments will add to it.

First, I would like to thank the witnesses, Mr. Chairman, particularly our colleague, Earl Blumenauer. I had on a brief opportunity to meet Mr. Torbay, but I appreciate his, Mr. Holdridge's, and Anastasia Brown's, as well as the testimony also by Mr. Keene. I read much of it, and I want to excise just snippets of it.

Mr. Chairman, it is just a pleasure to be back to the Foreign Affairs Committee. You and Dana were here when I left, and, for me, it is a privilege to have the interface. Chairman Berman and I have talked about the Helsinki Commission complementing the work of the Foreign Affairs Committee. I am especially indebted to the chairman of the subcommittee, Mr. Delahunt, for his vigorous and persistent insistence on the right thing being done by the existing government.

I would like to make two corrections. While there is a \$30-billion surplus now, with the cost of oil as it is, the expected surplus for the Iraqi Government is double the amount at present. My good friend from Georgia referred to the United States accepting 12,000. It is the goal of the United States to accept 12,000.

A major stumbling block of the Iraq refugee crisis, Mr. Chairman, is that not enough attention has been focused on the humanitarian calamity unfolding in the region. The NGOs here know that extremely well, and that is why this hearing is important, to have them help us understand what capacity is needed, what capacity they have, and those things going forward that will be beneficial to the refugees.

While there is plenty of fiery, partisan rhetoric by Congress, the administration, and Presidential candidates over the war, the conditions of Iraqi refugees and IDPs continue to deteriorate. This increased deterioration is becoming a recipe for disaster. If Congress and the administration fail to broaden their focus on Iraq, the security implications could potentially further destabilize the region.

As Mr. Scott has pointed to, militia groups within Iraq are providing substantial assistance to displaced Iraqis, and host countries, such as Jordan and Syria, are dealing with an increasingly desperate refugee population. To King Abdullah's credit, in Jordan, he has put resources in trying to make sure to educate the children, something that is critically important for them to go forward.

This increased desperation, combined with resentment among host country populations, could just be the calm before the storm. We must look beyond partisan politics and focus on the real problem at hand: A burgeoning, burgeoning humanitarian crisis.

I have introduced, and all of the members who are here have supported, legislation that is comprehensive. We have written to

President Bush requesting an additional \$1.5 billion in funding to the Fiscal Year 2009 budget that, I might add, includes nothing in it for what we are discussing here today. We have written to Secretary Rice, calling on her to lay out a long-term plan to address this crisis, and this alone, I know, will not solve this problem.

Before this situation further implodes, Congress and the administration must work together to implement feasible solutions, including garnering support from Europe and Gulf states. The U.S. has a moral obligation to lead but cannot go it alone, nor should it.

In closing, I would like to recognize all of the NGOs working with Iraqi refugees and IDPs who are truly the lifeline to those men, women, and children that are suffering.

Mr. Chairman, yesterday, one of our colleagues, Maxine Waters, and a member of this committee at times, I believe, Barbara Lee, and our colleague, Lynn Woolsey, and I sponsored a photographic exhibit of refugees that are in Syria and Iraq. The lady that made that presentation pointed poignantly and put a face on something that I wish—her name is Gabriela Bulisova—I wish everyone could have seen because it brings it all home.

But lest we have our witnesses think we do not look at what they say, please know, Mr. Torbay, that your recommendations in this committee ought to be adhered to in full, to the extent that we can undertake them.

Mr. Holdridge's statement that, long-term, you can expect that the majority of Iraqi refugees living in Jordan will not obtain permanent residence is something that needs to be significantly recognized.

Anastasia Brown pointed to extraordinary recommendations that I commend to this committee, and we will take up many of those matters in the Helsinki Commission and try to put them in legislative form.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the witness—I do not know whether he is here—David Keene, but his testimony has been admitted into the record. He says the following:

“We are not a nation that turns its back on those seeking freedom or who are suffering from a situation beyond their control. We have invested much in blood and treasure in Iraq and must see to it that when we do leave that nation, we leave a stable nation capable of dealing on its own with the displaced, who are ultimately victims of a war fought in their front yards by forces over which they have no control.”

Mr. Chairman, thank you for giving me the extended time. It is deeply appreciated.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you for your abiding interest.

There being no further members who wish to be recognized, at this time, we will move directly to our first panel. Our distinguished colleague, Earl Blumenauer, was elected to the House in 1996 from the Third District of Oregon. He serves on the Ways and Means Committee, the Budget Committee, as well as the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Climate Change. He has been a strong and creative voice, both at home and abroad, for the environment, sustainable development, and economic opportunity.

Representative Blumenauer has been in public service since 1972, when he was first elected to the Oregon House of Representatives and received both his undergraduate and law degrees from Lewis and Clark College in Portland.

Welcome, Earl, and the bully pulpit is yours.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE EARL BLUMENAUER, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF OREGON

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your courtesy, and I appreciate the eloquence and the concern that has been expressed by each of the members. Listening over the course of the last hour or 2, your heart-felt feelings and analysis has been very instructive and encouraging for me. I appreciate the work that you, Mr. Chairman, and Chairman Delahunt, have done.

Congressman Hastings, I went to that exhibit yesterday and was moved. I appreciate your long-term interest and involvement and the assistance of the chairman of the committee, Mr. Berman, in trying to shape legislation, and I know, Mr. Rohrabacher, from our service together on this committee, there are occasionally modest differences of opinion, but I know your commitment to fully airing the issues and being able to put a human face on this is very important.

More important than anything we Members of Congress will say, though, is the testimony that you are about to hear from people who are involved on the ground. I echo what Mr. Hastings said. There is some very strong and compelling advice. I am glad to note that one of them includes representation from the Mercy Corps that I am proud to call constituents at home from Portland. They are doing difficult work of standing between the tragedy facing Iraqis and the abyss of complete disaster.

Last year, I introduced the first comprehensive legislation to deal with this refugee crisis. We called it the "Responsibility for Iraqi Refugees Act." I have been heartened by the reaction, pleased that Senator Kennedy introduced companion legislation that was very similar in the Senate, and that we have actually seen a portion of this to be adopted as part of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008.

I would note the bipartisan nature of the legislation that we introduced, and that the lead co-sponsor was our friend, Chris Shays, who has a slightly different view of the war in Iraq, in terms of its wisdom and what is happening there. But I think it illustrates that there is a responsibility for people, regardless of where they are on the war in Iraq, to deal with the refugee crisis.

Legislation that has passed required us to begin processing Iraqis for resettlement. It increased the numbers of Iraqis who work for the United States who can be resettled to 5,000 a year. It increased the resettlement opportunities for other vulnerable Iraqis and established a senior coordinator at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

I am sorry to say that while I think Congress is starting to do its job, the administration has not stepped up to the plate. Today is 5 years after the President famously declared, "Mission accomplished," and the 4 million displaced Iraqis, the greatest ongoing humanitarian crisis in the world, with the possible exception of

Darfur, is testament to the fact that the mission has not been accomplished. I must say that there is nothing here that is talking about facilitating all of these people to move to the United States or all of them to move back.

You know, our treating these people humanely is not going to cause a greater flood. It has already happened. Four million people or more, almost half, have fled the country. That is a reality. To see women forced into prostitution in Syria, pictures that were on display here in this building last night, is testimony that things are not working, and they are seriously flawed.

If we remain in Iraq to protect the Iraqis, then the lack of planning to provide for these refugees demonstrates how little is being done to accomplish the mission.

Part of it is to stop further hemorrhaging. Ambassador Crocker made the point that if Iraqis who depend on us feel that they cannot depend on the United States, they are much less likely to stay on the job as translators, as guides, providing vital services that make it possible for over a third of 1 million Americans, in uniform and contractors, and civilian employees to stay in Iraq.

Our getting this right is important to stabilize and prevent further resettlement and people fleeing. If we do not step up to the plate, how can we expect others to do so? We are talking about, as all of you have mentioned, a tiny number. Sweden—the Prime Minister mentioned in this room, in another hearing before a different committee—they were resettling 12,000 in a year. They have accepted 40,000. If we do not step up, it is very unlikely that others are going to do this over time.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees has referred almost 20,000 Iraqis for resettlement to the United States, fewer than the 20,000 that we said we could accept each year. Despite this, we have admitted less than 3,500 through February in all categories. Despite the requirements of the law that we recently enacted, in-country processing has not begun in Iraq.

It is amazing. Baghdad has the largest Embassy on the face of the planet, and they have not begun in-country processing, and in violation of every human rights norm, it appears that we are pushing, the United States, the High Command for Refugees to fudge the facts and declare Iraq safe for refugees to return.

Some of us feel that inaccurate information and flawed implementation by this administration helped create this mess, but continuing to misrepresent the situation on the ground will not get us out of it, and it is getting worse. Both Syria and Jordan have closed off their borders, refugees in Jordan and Syria are running out of money and assets, and their condition is only getting more desperate.

What may be most troubling is that, in the absence of a robust, international response, according to recent reports from Refugees International, as Mr. Scott referenced, this is a breeding ground for more terrorism. Providing for the needs of displaced Iraqis by people who would do us harm builds up their power, as we have seen with Hamas and Hezbollah.

In the War on Terror, pretending that things are going well when they do not has real consequences, real consequences for ongoing American operations, as I and Ambassador Crocker have

pointed out. Years from now, I can imagine people pointing to the lack of the United States' response to this refugee crisis as a turning point for a new generation of radicals in the Middle East.

Going forward, just as we planned, for military contingencies, we need the help of your subcommittees to help us plan for humanitarian ones. All of the administration's assumptions for the refugee issue are that conditions in Iraq will improve. I cannot tell the future any better than they can, but certainly we should have plans in place if these rosy scenarios do not come to pass.

The chairman said that he hopes Iraq is in the President's prayers. He said they should be in their plans. We should make sure that they are in our budgets. Congress must step up and provide the funding, funding not requested by the administration in the upcoming supplemental.

I am circulating a letter to the appropriators urging sufficient U.S. funding. I would welcome any support. I will get out of your way at this point. I appreciate your patience in allowing me to testify. I appreciate the opportunity to listen to your expressions, and I hope that we can count on you to continue to put the focus on the need to follow through on our rhetoric to meet the needs for some of the most desperate people in the world, including those whose very lives are at risk because they relied on the United States, and they helped us. Thank you very much.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you, Congressman Blumenauer. You are certainly not in our way. You have been one of the prime engines in moving us forward on this issue, as you have on so many other issues.

Any questions from members of the committee, subcommittees?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Chairman, I would just like to note that Congressman Blumenauer was a leader in the clean water concept of how important clean water is to people's lives around the world, and I respected his efforts in that endeavor, and know that he has got a really good heart in this endeavor, although we have some disagreements. I was able to support you for your clean water efforts, and we will see what happens this time. Thank you very much for your testimony.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Thank you, Mr. Rohrabacher. I appreciated your kind words and working with us on that. I hope we can have the same spirit that allowed us to resettle 1 million Vietnamese in this country; that we can step up and help a few thousand Iraqis.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Scott?

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you very much, Mr. Blumenauer. I really appreciate your passion and your work in legislating law that you have been doing on this issue.

Let us talk for a moment about the militias vis-à-vis what the Iraqi Government itself is doing. Would you agree that if—and as this displaced population of Iraqis grows—would you state with a degree of certainty that this would be an asset to a direct gain in power of the militias?

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Congressman Scott, I think your initial comments about the potential downside of that, breeding more discontent and empowering them, is accurate. I would think there is nothing good that comes from an increase in this population, and

we have every incentive to try and reduce it for humanitarian and strategic reasons.

Mr. SCOTT. And if the Iraqi Government itself stays fractured along the sectarian lines that they are, where are there assurances, or how can we put some assurances, within the government that whatever funds are distributed would be distributed fairly out into the community, if they are broken down and fractured, as they are?

You see, we have got these two problems. We have got the internal fracture that is broken down within the Iraqi Government that is supposed to be delivering the funds and helping. So, on the other hand, on this void, we have got these militias out there that are providing, and it might be noted that, interesting in the report that was submitted, it is not just food. These Shi'a and Sunni militia groups are gaining ground and support through the delivery of oil, electricity, clothes, money. They are doing it all for them.

So I cannot think that we can put enough emphasis on the direct threat to our strategy and why we have to change. Should we change? Is there a point where this balance gets out of place, and if, in effect, we are to win the hearts and the minds of the Iraqi people, do we give any further credits to the militias?

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Congressman Scott, I would think a laser-like focus on meeting our responsibility to displaced people, internally to Iraq and those who have fled the country, would make it clear that we are on the side of humanitarian interest. The extent to which the Iraqi Government is privileged to help finance NGOs and other things, I think, breeds that responsibility in their engagement, and the more that they are a partner with the United Nations, with us, and with the NGOs, I think that is part of the healing and cohesive process and would undercut that dynamic you are talking about.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DELAHUNT. If I may just for 1 minute, I just wanted to note that on your lapel is that bicycle. Your time has come, Mr. Blumenauer.

There was a report today in the Cape Cod Times that the cost of a gallon of gasoline in my district is approaching \$4.59. We are all going to be on bicycles real soon. Thank you for your work.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Hopefully, it is a choice, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Hopefully.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you. Congressman Blumenauer, thank you very much. We appreciate your participation and leadership.

We will now proceed to our second panel, if they would please take their seats at the bench.

Mr. Rabih Torbay is vice president of international operations for International Medical Corps. Mr. Torbay oversees programs in 25 countries and three continents, as well as staff and volunteers numbering in the thousands. Mr. Torbay is IMC's senior representative in Washington and has just recently returned from a mission assessing IMC's programs in Iraq and Jordan.

Raised in Lebanon, he is a civil engineer by profession and worked in that field before joining IMC in 1999. Since then, Mr.

Torbay has worked in Sierra Leone, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, and Lebanon.

Mr. David Holdridge is Middle East regional director for Mercy Corps, a position he has held since October 2005, and prior to that, he served as Mercy Corps' country director in Iraq. With over 25 years of experience in initiating humanitarian relief and development programs and providing executive leadership in nongovernmental, humanitarian organizations in various countries in the Middle East, Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, and the United States, Mr. Holdridge currently oversees Mercy Corps programs in Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, and the West Bank in Gaza.

Before joining Mercy Corps, Mr. Holdridge was regional director for Catholic Relief Services programs in the Middle East.

Mrs. Anastasia Brown is director of the Office of Refugee Programs, Migration and Refugee Services, for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Ms. Brown has held this position since 2002 and has more than 10 years' experience working with refugees, both overseas and domestically. Before her most recent appointment, Ms. Brown worked with the International Catholic Migration Commission. During her tenure there, she assisted with the departure from Vietnam and resettlement in the United States of more than 350,000 Vietnamese refugees. Ms. Brown is a graduate of Sarah Lawrence University.

We also had originally scheduled Mr. David Keene to participate with us. Unfortunately, he has chosen to submit his written statement, which will be a part of the record, as will the written statements of each of our witnesses today. Mr. Keene is the chairman of the American Conservative Union and was going to appear here in his capacity as the director of the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, and we regret that he is unable to make it today. His testimony is very, very important, and his perspective is well appreciated by the members of the committee.

[The information referred to follows:]

TESTIMONY OF DAVID KEENE, CHAIRMAN,
AMERICAN CONSERVATIVE UNION
TO THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN
AFFAIRS, SUBCOMMITTEE ON MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA AND
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS,
AND OVERSIGHT

May 1, 2008

Chairman Ackerman, Chairman Delahunt, members of the subcommittee; let me begin by thanking you for holding this hearing and for allowing me to appear before you today.

It is an unfortunate fact that modern wars are fought on battlefields on which civilian live, work and, as a result of the battles waging around them, suffer greatly. The Iraq war in which we are today engaged is no exception.

Some two million Iraqis have fled their own country seeking refuge elsewhere. This exodus began before the war as Iraqi who could do so fled the tender mercies of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, but has accelerated dramatically since, creating real problems in neighboring nations.

In addition, there are today an estimated two million people the experts like to refer to as "IDPs" or "Internally Displaced Persons." These are men, women and children who have been driven from homes that have often been destroyed and who are almost totally dependent on assistance from governmental and non-governmental relief agencies for food, water, medical care and schooling for their children.

Our concern for the well-being of these families should cross partisan and ideological lines and should, in fact, unite those who, like me, support the involvement of the United States in that troubled country and those who believe we should never have invaded Iraq or ought to get out as soon as practicable.

It is an issue that unites humanitarian concern for the suffering of the innocent with a concern for the stability of Iraq's fledgling democracy, stability within the region and hence our own national security interests.

I am here today because of my intense personal interest and involvement in this issue, as Chairman of the American Conservative Union and in my professional capacity as a government affairs consultant in Washington, D.C. to the largest Iraqi humanitarian Non-Governmental Organization ("NGO"), the Iraqi Red Crescent Organization ("IRCO").

Mr. Chairman, in this latter capacity, I would like to submit two documents for the record: (1) The Written Testimony of Dr. Said Hakki, President of the Iraqi Red Crescent Organization ("IRCO"); and (2) The Iraqi Red Crescent 32nd Updated Report on Iraqi IDPs. In combination, these documents provide much information of interest on the current situation on the ground in Iraq as well as efficacy of governmental and governmental efforts to alleviate suffering among Iraqi refugees and IDPs.

My personal interest has focused particularly on the issue of Iraqi refugees. For the past few years I have been working with members of both houses, on both sides of the aisle, for changes in U.S. policy toward those Iraqi's who have risked their lives, their families and their future by standing with us in the fight against tyranny and terrorism.

I have been an outspoken supporter of the "Responsibility to Iraqi Refugees Act of 2007" (H.R. 2265), introduced almost a year ago by Representatives Earl Blumenauer and Chris Shays, and I have worked publicly and privately with Senators Edward Kennedy, Joe Lieberman, and Sam Brownback to help them win support for an amendment to the 2008 Defense Authorization Act that allows those Iraqis who can

demonstrate that, as a direct result of their work for us, their lives are in danger to move to the front of the line in applying for refugee status ... and to allow them to do so from Iraq. Fortunately, this amendment was adopted unanimously by the conferees with bipartisan support.

I continue to believe that it is right to fight for those Iraqis who have committed their lives and their families to working with us to build a better Iraq. I got involved in this at the behest of my daughter after she returned from a year in Baghdad with the U.S. Army there. During her tour, she and other members of her unit befriended an Iraqi who served with them as an interpreter. "Timmy," like thousands of other Iraqis, was imprisoned and tortured by Saddam's regime as an enemy of the state. After our arrival and the fall of Saddam's regime, he joined the new Iraqi Army and later signed on with the U.S. Army as a contract interpreter.

Timmy was offered his choice of assignments, but chose the most dangerous bases in Baghdad, where he thought he could do the most good. He continued to serve, despite the fact that his wife had been kidnapped, his marriage annulled, and he had never seen his child.

By the time my daughter was about to leave Baghdad, Timmy had become so well known that it was certain he would be killed within days if left behind. I wrote about Timmy at the time and a few weeks ago received an e-mail from an Army Major who informed me that Timmy is now his interpreter and has saved countless American lives due to his work and courage. He and those serving with him are working as I have been to get the Timmies of Iraq a chance to come to this country.

Don't get me wrong, I don't support an unfettered wave of Iraqi immigration to the United States. I have spoken with many Iraqi leaders on this issue, and agree with their assessment that bleeding their nation of its best and brightest will only result in a brain-drain of those professional Iraqis who are desperately needed if that country is ever going to fully get back on its feet.

I think that it is imperative, however, that we welcome those who, like Timmy, have risked their lives and their families to protect Americans and support our efforts to rebuild an independent and democratic Iraq.

As I mentioned earlier, I am also a consultant to the Iraqi Red Crescent Organization. The Iraqi Red Crescent is the largest and one of the most effective Iraqi NGOs operating on the ground in every province that country. The organization's primary mission is to provide relief assistance to Internally Displaced Iraqis. There are as I said a moment ago currently over 2 million IDPs in Iraq.

Our intervention in Iraq did not cause the IDP crisis in Iraq any more than it caused the beginning of the exodus of Iraqis to other nations. These problems existed even before the first Gulf War. However, since the 2006 bombings of the Holy Shrines in Samara' sectarian and ethnic violence has resulted in hundreds of thousands of new families leaving their homes to seek refuge in more secure areas of Iraq. We have to face the fact that the current IDP crisis is one of the many ancillary effects of the ongoing war in Iraq and, as such, we have a responsibility to deal with it.

We all wish we could fight wars on battlefields where nobody lived. Unfortunately, we do not have the luxury of that choice. Every new terrorist attack and necessary coalition response produces new refugees and IDPs.

It is in our interest to find a comprehensive solution to the IDP crisis. Most experts feel that we won't be able to leave Iraq entirely until the sectarian violence ceases and the country is stable. That day will not come until the millions of IDPs can be resettled in neighborhoods with homes, job opportunities, and access to healthcare, schools, and basic services.

Once this happens, the Iraqi economy will take off. Civilians will return to work rather than face a future defined by despair and violence. Moreover, the system will then be able to absorb the return of externally displaced Iraqis, many of whom make up the intellectuals and trained professionals of the expatriate community. This will not only stabilize Iraq, but loosen the pressure on Iraqi's neighbors, who have been strained by the millions of Iraqis within their borders, and enhance their willingness to embrace the new democratic Iraq.

We have been sending billions of dollars to Iraq for humanitarian assistance and reconstruction projects since 2003, but have failed to produce any measurable results with regard to the IDP situation. As a result, many in Congress argue that we should stop spending our own taxpayer's money and shift the financial burden over to the Iraqis.

While I agree that Iraqis must take increasing responsibility for their own future, a large scale effort to improve conditions in Iraq must be led by the U.S. Government and the international community. Rather than just continuing to send billions of more dollars over there for unarticulated purposes to achieve unclear objectives, however, we must coordinate with the Government of Iraq to build up their long term capacity and with local indigenous NGOs, who have extensive experience and knowledge of what is needed on the ground.

The Iraqi Red Crescent, the NGO with which I am most familiar, for example, has recently unveiled a comprehensive Neighborhood Reconstruction Program (“NRP”) to help Iraqi to take control of their own future. Specifically, the program seeks to normalize 600,000 IDP residents of Baghdad into 120 self sustaining neighborhood units within a year. The program would seek provide unemployed IDPs with the opportunity to construct and service homes, schools, mobile health clinics, water treatment plants, and electrical generators.

This and similar proposals are worthy of serious study. They can provide a unique opportunity for an Iraqi-led and coordinated comprehensive reconstruction and stabilization project for the IDPs of Baghdad. The Supreme Reconstruction Council for the Prime Minister of Iraq has already agreed to act as the lead in overseeing this Neighborhood Reconstruction Program. The Iraqi Red Crescent would provide logistical and operational support to the government, through its existing 44 offices in Baghdad and extensive networks among all ethnic and religious groups. As a recent report by Refugees International points out, for an effective response to the IDP crisis, it will be necessary to “identify and support Iraqi Non-Governmental Organizations (“NGOs”), as they are often the only link vulnerable Iraqis have with the international community.”

Thinking outside the box to find a way to address the IDP and refugee crisis in Iraq is both in our interest and simply the right thing to do. We must put aside the partisan politics of this war, move beyond the many mistakes of the past five years, and look for ways to come together in support of a plan that comprehensively allows the Iraqi people and government to take control of their own destiny.

There has been much progress over the past year. As General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker stated in their testimony to you last month, however, this progress is “fragile and reversible.” The government of Iraq certainly has not done as much as it should to step up to the plate, put aside its own historical sectarian differences, and allocate its resources towards humanitarian assistance and the reconstruction of their country. We must find ways to build up that government’s capabilities and competence through existing indigenous NGOs, such as the Iraqi Red Crescent, who have the networks and capacity to assist with the humanitarian and rebuilding process.

We are not a nation that turns its back on those seeking freedom or who are suffering from a situation beyond their control. We have invested much in blood and treasure in Iraq and must see to it that when we do leave that nation, we leave a stable nation capable of dealing on its own with the displaced who are ultimately victims of a war fought in their front yards by forces over which they have no control.

Mr. ACKERMAN. We will begin in the order in which I introduced you.

STATEMENT OF MR. RABIH TORBAY, VICE PRESIDENT OF INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS, INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL CORPS

Mr. TORBAY. Good morning, Chairmen Ackerman, Delahunt, members of the subcommittee.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Could I ask you to pull the microphone closer? Because we cannot adjust the volume, but you can adjust it by getting closer or further away.

Mr. TORBAY. I hope this is better.

Thank you for the invitation to appear before you today. As requested, I have submitted a written statement, and my oral remarks will constitute a very brief summary of my written statement.

I am Rabih Torbay, vice president of operations for International Medical Corps, a private, nonprofit, humanitarian organization headquartered in Los Angeles, California. My organization is one of the very few organizations that has been in Iraq since April 2003, working in all 18 governorates.

In April 2003, I had the privilege to go to Iraq and establish our organization's programs in the country. Since then, I have traveled more than a dozen times to Iraq, and I have just returned from a 10-day trip assessing our programs there, as well as meeting with the government officials.

The conditions of the 2.7 million internally displaced persons in Iraq are desperate. It is desperate conditions. Furthermore, the conditions of the host community that is hosting those 2.7 million are just as bad.

Failure to increase our efforts to address those needs would not just be morally irresponsible; it would be politically counterproductive.

In November 2007, IMC called for a "humanitarian surge" to increase the boots on the ground to help people of Iraq. Six months later, the need is just as much, if not more.

According to the Iraq Ministry of Migration, a ministry that we work very closely with, 82 percent of the displaced are women and children. More than 80 percent of the displaced are unemployed. More than 34 percent cannot afford medication. More than 14 percent do not have access to any health care. More than 60 percent of the children do not have access to schools and cannot get educated. Between 40 and 50 percent do not have access to clean water. These are the conditions of the displaced in Iraq and the host community.

The population of the displaced; we are talking about 2.7 million people. That is larger than the IDP population in Darfur. However, it is invisible because they are not in tents, they are not in camps, there are no dramatic food drops that we see on TV, but their needs are just as bad, if not more.

I want to talk a little bit also about the minorities. More than 50 percent of the minorities have fled the country. Christians were targeted in Baghdad and driven out of Baghdad. A lot of them live in Ninewa and the Ninewa plains. They struggle to survive. They

struggle to meet their day-to-day needs. The few thousand Palestinians that are still left in Iraq; their only hope is to get resettled in another country. They have lost hope of living in Iraq.

It is difficult to work in Iraq, no doubt about that—security, funding, working with the government bureaucracies—however, organizations like our organization, the International Medical Corps, and a few other NGOs that are working in Iraq, have proven that cost-effective NGO programs can be done, and they can deliver.

We have 11 offices in Iraq, 400 staff, including 11 expatriates in Baghdad. We have been working very closely with the community. Continuity and consistency of our program, of our work, has been the major asset. This has been what has guaranteed our security in all of the areas where we are working.

We have been working with local governments, with tribal leaders, and with religious leaders. We have to work with those communities. We have to accept them for what they are, and we try to deliver the programs based on respect and based on the fact that we can deliver and based on their needs.

The United States Government funding for HR needs in Iraq has been \$254 million since 2003. That is less than 48 hours of United States military spending for Iraq, less than 48 hours, and, clearly, we need more help. The international community, the NGOs, the international NGOs, local NGOs; we need more help. We need more support.

Over the past 5 years, there has been considerable focus on the physical infrastructure, on the repairs of the physical infrastructure in Iraq. It is time now to focus on the humanitarian needs on the human capital in Iraq.

Our experience with certain ministries, especially the service-delivery ministries, they are willing to work. They are willing to work with NGOs, but they do not have the capacity. We are talking about ministries that have suffered 35 years of dictatorship with absolutely no authority to make decisions.

In terms of coordination, the U.S. Government donors, the different arms of the U.S. Government donors, need to coordinate better their efforts. In addition to that, they need to be given the flexibility to address needs beyond their mandate. The needs of the displaced do not fit into tightly defined boxes in Iraq.

Some of our recommendations are in the written statement, but I will just highlight a few. There is an immediate need for an increase for the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance budget. This is the office that is best equipped to address the needs of the displaced in Iraq. Addressing the urgent needs of vulnerable groups, such as the IDPs and the host communities, is critical. It is a humanitarian imperative, but also it is critical for the stability of Iraq.

In conclusion, we need you and your colleagues to support a new level of humanitarian and development assistance to show America's commitment to alleviate suffering, foster self-reliance, and strengthen Iraq and its ability to meet the needs of its citizens.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present our views.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Torbay follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MR. RABIH TORBAY, VICE PRESIDENT OF INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS, INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL CORPS

Chairman Delahunt, Chairman Ackerman and members of the subcommittees, I am Rabih Torbay, Vice President for International Operations of International Medical Corps (IMC), a private nonprofit voluntary organization headquartered in Los Angeles, California that has been working continuously in Iraq since April 2003. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you. We appreciate your leadership in focusing on the needs of over 2.7 million internally displaced Iraqis.¹ I am here today to ask you to support a “humanitarian surge” that can improve the prospects for long-term stability for all of Iraq’s citizens.

International Medical Corps was founded in 1984 by volunteer doctors and nurses to train mid-level health care workers in Afghanistan. We are now a global humanitarian non-profit organization dedicated to saving lives and relieving suffering of those affected by war, natural disaster and disease and to delivering vital health care services that incorporate capacity building of our counterparts. IMC helps people return to self-reliance by enabling the development of essential skills for health, livelihoods, rehabilitation and service delivery. IMC implements major emergency relief and longer term transitional and development programs that deliver comprehensive health and nutrition services, rehabilitate infrastructure, train local personnel and enhance community participation and development in more than 20 countries including Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

Today we are focusing on our work in Iraq. I had the privilege of establishing our mission there in 2003 and have visited more than a dozen times since then. I share responsibility for program oversight and operations with our in-country expatriate director who has been with IMC in Iraq for the past five years, working with national and local Iraqi government officials; various US entities, including the US embassy and US Agency for International Development (USAID); the United Nations; international and Iraqi nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); and local religious and tribal leaders. International Medical Corps has employed thousands of local staff over the years, the vast majority coming from the communities where we work. Currently, we have more than 400 staff members in Iraq, including 11 expatriates and over 40 visiting technical experts, who live and work in the “red zone.” Because of the insecurity and tensions in the country, we depend on building close ties to the communities in the 18 governorates where we work. We vet and hire staff locally and consult and collaborate with Iraqi institutions, officials, local leaders and groups to garner support for the relief, development and training efforts that we implement.

I have just returned from a ten-day trip to Baghdad and would like to share with you my observations about the situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq and efforts to meet their urgent and growing needs.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

At the start of International Medical Corps’ program activities in 2003, Iraq was emerging from a 35-year dictatorship that had sapped local initiative, suppressed opposition or disagreement, imposed highly centralized decision making structures that controlled every aspect of life and brutally punished rule violators. Years of war and heavy defense spending, widespread corruption, ruinous economic policies and the impact of sanctions had crippled the economy and stripped bare budgets for human services and infrastructure. Because of this political and economic history, rehabilitating and revitalizing the economy to one that is more open and democratic will understandably take a substantial amount of time and resources.

When the new Iraqi government came to power in 2004, many of its ministries lacked technical know-how and experience in planning, budgeting and managing or setting standards needed to operate effectively. Heavy levels of bureaucracy and fear of possible negative consequences remained and hindered decision-making. These new ministries were not without serious problems, some of which have persisted. Various officials have misused ministerial positions at the local or national level to punish and wage war on their enemies; to permit and even benefit from corrupt practices; to mistreat vulnerable children and the sick; and to accept nonperformance, shadow employees and interminable delays. Other officials who want to move forward have lacked models and standards. *If the US and the international community do not immediately build the capacity of these ministries and their human capital—insisting on the need to raise standards, performance and accountability within*

¹International Organization for Migration. IOM Emergency Needs Assessments. Post February 2006 Displacement in Iraq. 15 April 2008 Bi-Weekly Report.

these ministries—then Iraq's problems will worsen and the situation of displaced and vulnerable Iraqis will continue to deteriorate.

Vulnerable Iraqis will be impacted the most if the Government of Iraq (GoI) is ill-equipped to operate efficiently and effectively, while ordinary Iraqis may lose hope for any chance of developing a pluralistic, more democratic and modern Iraq. As reported on April 22, 2008 in *The New York Times*, Iraqis tell the US military that “they see their basic needs as being more than food, clothing, shelter . . . They include electricity, water and sewage. And until the Iraqi government provides them with such basic services, they won't trust them.”² IMC can confirm that this is a common sentiment heard repeatedly within the Iraqi communities it serves. *The delivery of services to IDP and host communities is critical to the stability of Iraq.*

FORCED DISPLACEMENT

While there have been large-scale movements of people within the country's borders since the 1980s, the most recent and visible displacement occurred after the bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra in February 2006. Unlike other population movements that occur en masse over a short period of time, this most recent displacement in Iraq has been continuous over many months as individual families' predicaments gradually become untenable due to intensified sectarian conflict. As such, the nature and effects of internal displacement must be considered against a complex background of strong family support structures, a fledgling government and fragile and uncertain security levels.

Millions of Iraqis have been forced to flee their homes and properties in mixed neighborhoods or conflict areas to safer parts of the country or abroad. Homeless and jobless, many displaced rely on traditional Iraqi hospitality to survive—family or friends are expected to welcome guests and provide for their needs even if it means struggling to provide for their own families. *With personal and family resources exhausted and government services struggling to deliver, the needy are increasingly turning to non-state actors for assistance.*

Few IDPs in Iraq live in camps or on the street, masking the extent of the displacement. Some two million people were able to flee to neighboring countries, such as Jordan and Syria, but as displacement has continued and neighboring countries have restricted admissions, and pressure on the U.S. and Iraqi governments to respond to the needs of the uprooted has increased, the needs of IDPs and their host families have grown more urgent.

On-going threats of violence have strained families' resources and their physical and mental well-being. Uncertain access to food and opportunities for livelihoods has increased vulnerability. Insecurity and government rules can make it difficult for the displaced to access Iraq's Public Distribution System (PDS) for food and cooking fuel, which, according to the United Nations Development Program, was supporting 96% of the population in 2004. While the PDS rations are delivered on a monthly basis, there are regular reports that deliveries do not always contain all the supplies they are supposed to. Those who work as daily laborers depend heavily upon the monthly PDS to provide the majority of their staple food stuffs. Should they be unable to access work either through imposition of curfews or deteriorating security, they become wholly dependent upon the stockpiled PDS rations. Fighting in certain areas has restricted the government's ability to deliver the rations to the communities affected, and now, rising food prices are threatening to further complicate delivery of the World Food Programme's (WFP) food aid to Iraq.

WHO ARE THE IDPS?

While exact numbers of displaced persons are difficult to obtain, the Ministry of Migration (MoM)³ now estimates that total internal displacement has reached 2.7 million. This includes 1.2 million individuals who were displaced before February 2006 and 1.5 million individuals displaced afterwards. According to the Ministry's statistics, 64% of the displaced are originally from Baghdad. Eighty-two percent of that population comprises women and children, while 58.7% are children under 12 years of age. IDPs face malnutrition, lack of shelter, lack of health services, inadequate water and sanitation, high unemployment, restricted freedom of movement and limited access to training or education. Displacement puts families at grave risk economically, socially, physically and psychologically. The communities that have hosted large IDP populations have become as destitute as the displaced. For exam-

²Gordon Michael. 2008. In Sadr City, Basic Services are Faltering. *New York Times*, 22 April, national edition.

³The GoI is currently in the process of ratifying a change in the name of this ministry from the Ministry of Migration to the Ministry of Displacement and Migration.

ple, several governorates that have received displaced persons from Baghdad, such as Karbala, Najaf and Babel, among others, are saturated, with their already fragile services and communities overwhelmed by the large numbers of displaced.

Displacement rates leveled off at the end of 2007, due in part to the ceasefire announced by Al Sadr and the U.S. military surge. Although levels of violence have decreased, the possibility of a return to normal life has been negatively affected by the continuous threat of insecurity and terrorist attacks, which are still prevalent in parts of Iraq, as evidenced by the recent violence in Basra and Baghdad's Al Sadr district.

The massive movement of IDPs to and from the governorates of Baghdad, Karbala, Najaf, Babel, Al-Anbar, Basra and Ninewa since February 2006 has had a significant impact on the country. This displacement has created a major shift in sectarian demographics. It is clear that the main drivers to return are some confidence in adequate levels of security and access to services in the place of origin.

Last fall, International Medical Corps conducted an IDP survey, "The Socio-Economic Crisis Among IDPs in Iraq," to gain a better understanding of the socio-economic status of IDPs in their new locations. IMC found that while 95.7% of IDP families surveyed were dependent on a breadwinner for income, 85% of IDPs were unemployed at the time of the survey. For 75% of respondents, finding employment was their primary concern, but was complicated by a lack of knowledge of job opportunities in their areas of displacement. Some 28.5% of respondents were illiterate, and 57% had only a primary education, making it difficult for them to find work except as unskilled laborers, which put them in competition with host community laborers in an oversaturated market. *Most IDPs suggested that they wanted to remain in their current secure locations if they could find long-term work.*

This study found that families, which averaged six persons per family, were hard-pressed financially to find and afford adequate shelter. At the time of the survey, 59% were renting houses, 18% lived with host families, 22% were in collective settlements and 1% resided in tent camps. In addition, 40% of the IDPs lacked access to safe drinking water, and 14% had no access to medical care, while one-third were unable to obtain needed medications. While the relatively better-off were able to rent flats or houses, dwindling resources were coupled with rising rents—particularly in areas with an influx of IDPs or refugee returnees. Almost all (83%) the displaced men and women surveyed wanted livelihood opportunities and/or vocational training to help them meet basic needs and to lessen confrontations and social tensions with their host communities.

RETURNEES

At the end of March 2008, the Ministry of Migration reported a total of 13,030 returnee families (approximately six persons per family). Of this total, 83% returned from internal displacement and 17% from abroad; 4,300 of the 13,030 families returned to Baghdad.⁴ The government was offering registered returnees a \$1,000 payment in Baghdad, and the MoM's implementing partners were providing ad hoc food and nonfood items. While it is believed that some IDPs and refugees returned because of perceived security improvements, others returned because they lacked any other options. Mass returns organized by provincial councils or government ministries have been deficient in long-term planning, sufficient reintegration assistance and services needed to have a durable impact. Currently, returnee families who have registered with the government upon their return are offered a six-month stipend of \$150; however, the registration process is complicated and difficult to access.

MoM survey teams interviewed 300 returnee families in five different locations and found that 98% reported they were returning from internal displacement. Only 45% found that their "non-moveable property" was accessible and in good condition. Some returnees are trying to reintegrate into the social and economic fabric of their original areas or into new communities if their community of origin is insecure or has become a single ethnic or sectarian enclave. Returnees suggest that after security, their major concerns are shelter, employment, education and access to utilities including water, electricity and sewage.

Heads of family tend to return "under the radar" to assess their home communities or new ones, before deciding whether to bring their families back. Some returnees do not register, preferring anonymity to the \$1,000 compensation.

Large-scale returns of IDPs are unlikely; instead, returns will probably continue to occur over an extended period of time and in small numbers. Regardless of the

⁴Ministry of Displacement and Migration of Iraq, International Organization for Migration. Returnee Monitoring and Needs Assessments. March 2008.

number, there is a possibility that many of those displaced are unlikely to ever return to their place of origin due to the nature of their displacement and the permanently severed community ties. *Furthermore, both the government and the international community agree that Iraq is not yet ready for large-scale return of the displaced.*

IRAQ REQUIRES A HUMANITARIAN SURGE

The recent improvement in security in parts of the country provides a window of opportunity for addressing the needs of Iraq's displaced populations. International Medical Corps has been advocating since November 2007 for a "humanitarian surge" to improve prospects for long-term stability in Iraq. The continued lack of basic services in Iraq, particularly for IDPs, their host communities and the returnees, should be addressed by "scaling up" NGO direct assistance efforts while concurrently building the capacity of GoI ministries to enable IDPs to more quickly re-integrate into their old communities or join new ones.

More donors and humanitarian actors are needed to fill the relief to development "gap" that prevents so many Iraqis, but particularly IDPs and host communities, from living normal lives with jobs, adequate housing, health care, education, water and electricity. The US, and other donors, should fund their NGO partners to intensify efforts to train Iraqi ministry counterparts at the national and governorate levels so that the GoI's ability to govern responsibly and provide essential services is increased. While the GoI's capacity is being enhanced, donors should continue and increase support to NGOs responding to emergencies and meeting the basic human needs of Iraq's most vulnerable populations.

SECURITY THROUGH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT

International Medical Corps has worked in all 18 governorates in Iraq, operating from 11 offices in Baghdad, Erbil, Nassiriya, Amara, Najaf, Karbala, Babel, Baquba, Anbar, Muthana and Mosul. Having worked in Iraq continuously for over five years and being based outside the Green Zone, IMC operates without the protection of the Iraqi or US military or private contractors. Working and living among the community, IMC has developed a skilled, knowledgeable staff and a support network throughout the country. Operating under a strict model of acceptance, IMC is able to simultaneously respond rapidly to emergency situations and implement sustainable community support programs. With the support and acceptance of local leaders and government institutions that are familiar with our work and recognize the benefits, we operate on a basis of mutual trust and understanding in the most difficult areas. As in any service industry, failure to deliver quality work would reduce IMC's access to communities in the future. In a society that is skeptical of any external intervention, a failure to deliver could have terrible consequences. *Continuity and consistency* have been a major factor in our acceptance.

International Medical Corps maintains a level of discretion in implementing activities so as not to compromise program staff or beneficiaries. Although we have worked in all 18 governorates, we strive to localize the nature of each intervention so that its work in the community is well respected, integrated and appreciated by local political, religious and tribal leaders, as well as governorate and ministry officials. Community acceptance and ownership play a major role in the protection of our staff and assets, as well as the safety of the projects. Effective travel management procedures—from extensive route planning through route reconnaissance and surveys, to convoy integration and low profile movement—have proven to be successful in protecting staff as they travel extensively throughout Iraq. IMC also makes extensive use of photography, video and GPS mapping data and weekly reporting to monitor projects. Recently, in Sadr City, fighting made it impossible to bring civilian vehicles into the area, so we consulted locally and improvised. Wheelbarrows were used to deliver a month's supply of food, water and medical supplies to vulnerable families and institutions affected by an extended curfew and heavy fighting.

IMC MONITORING AND EVALUATION

International Medical Corps holds its Iraq programs to the same high monitoring standards as programs in other countries. Monitoring and evaluation teams are used for tracking progress, monitoring quality and assuring that programs are delivered to international standards. For all projects, there is ongoing monitoring on several levels: institutional monitoring (financial, physical and organizational issues that affect the program), context monitoring (tracking the context in which the project is operating, such as changes in critical assumptions and/or risks, policy changes or other areas that may affect the capacity of the project to respond) and

objectives and results monitoring (assessing whether objectives and strategies developed are relevant to the changing situation on the ground and if the results are on track).

International Medical Corps faces many challenges in the monitoring and evaluation of its activities due to the unstable and insecure operating environment. Security restrictions on travel prohibit many senior staff, and certainly expatriate staff, from accessing many of our project sites. To address this challenge, IMC utilizes staff capacity building for assessment/implementation teams to develop alternative approaches, such as extensive use of photography, video and GIS data mapping to overcome the lack of access to program sites. Additionally, IMC employs a large network of national staff with varied backgrounds, allowing them to reach every corner of Iraq. Through this team, IMC is able to monitor projects through frequent visits and beneficiary interviews, as well as the alternative approaches mentioned above. Additionally, our main donor, the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance of USAID, has contracted a monitoring and evaluation organization, International Business and Technical Consultants, Inc., that independently verifies the delivery, quality and success of IMC's and other NGOs' programs.

COORDINATION

International Medical Corps works in coordination with Iraqi government authorities and local community leaders and other national and international organizations to ensure project sustainability and effectiveness and to help build government capacity. Coordination helps complement and expand, rather than duplicate, existing or proposed relief and development interventions. Coordination with other OFDA NGO partners has helped IMC to achieve program objectives in a timely manner while optimizing the use of available resources. IMC also maintains almost daily contact with USAID, OFDA and the US embassy, updating them on achievements, constraints, issues and plans and coordinates very closely with the different UN agencies.

International Medical Corps has strategic and operational partnerships with three of Iraq's key service delivery ministries: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and Ministry of Migration. We also consult with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Youth and Sport and the Ministry of Women's Affairs to ensure a gender-balanced approach. IMC staff serves on a number of key government advisory committees dealing with health, displacement and community economic development.

WILL AND CAPACITY OF THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT

While the Government of Iraq should do more to assist Iraqis, both the internally displaced and those living as refugees in the region, most of the ministries are not yet equipped to do so. After 35 years of Baath party rule, full centralization of authority, and a reluctance and fear of decision making, many ministries are almost paralyzed by the traditional bureaucracy and a lack of modern know-how. However, through IMC's recent work with the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Ministry of Migration (MoM) and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA), we have noticed a will to move forward, paired with their frustration over their lack of capacity.

International Medical Corps and the MoH are engaged in designing and implementing a new Iraq health care strategy reform and a new continuing medical education and continuing professional development initiative for the country's physicians that will update national standards for the practice of medicine. This effort involves around 45 physicians from the US and the UK from a variety of medical specialties who travel to Iraq to train their counterparts. For the first time, the MoH is co-funding this training program, with the *Iraqi government providing \$6 for every dollar invested by the donor*. IMC and the MoH have also recently launched a national emergency medicine training initiative.

As part of its efforts to build MoLSA's capacity to provide better services to the most vulnerable populations in Iraq, IMC and MoLSA conducted an in-depth assessment earlier this year of all government residential child care institutions. IMC, with MoLSA involvement, renovated and equipped 11 of these residences, and developed and conducted training for the manager and social worker at each facility on modern standards of care, child psychology and case management. MoLSA staff proved not only interested, but also willing to raise their standards of child care to international standards, including the consideration of alternate community child care arrangements, while recognizing their need for additional training and resources for these activities.

International Medical Corps' primary partner in the GoI is the Ministry of Migration. IMC has a team of 17, including an expatriate staff member, co-located at the ministry and working on professional managerial, budgetary and business skills development to enable ministry staff to track IDP movements, develop assessments of IDP needs and gaps in services and create coordination mechanisms that would allow for Iraqi service ministries to aid the displaced, although the ministry lacks the authority to require such coordination.

The same level of cooperation between government officials and IMC occurs at the governorate level. For example, with the support of the governor of Najaf, IMC conducted emergency preparedness trainings for different departments within the local government, with many of the costs covered by the government. A similar training is being planned for the governorate of Karbala.

MINORITIES

Religious Minorities

It is currently estimated that 3% of Iraq's population is composed of religious minorities, including Chaldeans (an eastern rite Catholic Church), Assyrians (Church of the East), Syriacs (Eastern Orthodox), Armenians (Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox), Protestant Christians, as well as Yezidi, Sabean-Mandaeans, Baha'is, Shabaks and Kaka'is (Religious Freedom: Iraq 2007).

In January 2007, the MoM reported that approximately half of the country's minority communities had fled abroad. Many Christians, once numbering 1.35 million of the country's 27.5 million, were forced to flee Baghdad, some seeking refuge in Ninewa and the Ninewa Plains, an area known to harbor many religious minority groups. Like other internally displaced, they have not received proper attention or substantial support, although recently Congress earmarked \$10 million to aid Christians and other minority groups in Ninewa Plains via a FY08 appropriation.

International Medical Corps, given its historical presence and ongoing humanitarian interventions in Ninewa plains, as well as its partnership with the Assyrian Aid Society (AAS), believes that much more support is required. There are an estimated 9–15,000 displaced families in the Plains, 80% of whom are Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriacs. Although this is a relatively small number when compared to other IDP populations, they are more vulnerable given that they are targeted minorities. An AAS survey in 2007 found 70% of the displaced from these minority groups expressing an interest in going abroad, although over 50% would remain in the area if jobs and housing were available. These groups now suggest that to preserve Iraq's pluralistic society, \$100 million in relief and development funds should be invested to provide food and nonfood items, shelter, higher education, water and sanitation, agricultural and economic development initiatives to encourage these religious minorities to settle and effectively integrate into the Ninewa Plains area.

With funding from OFDA, we have continuously provided relief assistance, including non-food items and medical supplies, to those most affected in Ninewa and Ninewa Plains and are currently rehabilitating schools, establishing child friendly spaces and providing activities aimed at revitalizing communities, all of which prioritize social integration and conflict mitigation.

In Southern Baghdad, Sabean Mandeans had to leave their homes and travel to Eastern Iraq for safety, only to find themselves once again close to conflict due to efforts to expel al Qaeda from Iraq. Last August Al Qaeda killed 300 Yezidis in bombing attacks on their villages in northern Ninewa province. IMC, again, with funding from OFDA, responded immediately with emergency relief assistance and supplies.

Palestinians

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Palestinians are the most vulnerable minority in Iraq. Under Saddam Hussein's regime, there were 34,000 Palestinian refugees who were denied Iraqi citizenship, but were treated as a privileged minority and provided with essential subsidies. With the fall of Hussein's regime, many Palestinian communities were attacked and driven from their homes, pursued by Shi'a militias and other militant groups. Many fled to neighboring countries; approximately 4,000 used forged passports to enter Syria, a country that is no longer willing to harbor them and has forcefully pushed them to join Palestinians at Al Tanf camp on the Syrian-Iraq border. They now live in tents and are subject to extreme temperatures and brutal isolation, unwanted in either country.

UNHCR is now seeking resettlement opportunities for these and other Palestinian refugees. The Palestinian population in Iraq has fallen to some 15–23,000 persons. They are still eligible for government rental subsidies, legal representation and

some assistance; however, IMC confirms that Palestinians are still often targeted by insurgents, militants and other criminal groups.

LIMITATIONS AND CONSTRAINTS

Certainly, security is the main challenge for NGOs working in Iraq. NGOs there must adapt to operating through limited humanitarian space and gain acceptance and trust from communities.

Bureaucracy and lack of capacity of the Iraqi government is another challenging issue, especially when work is coordinated with and governed by different line ministries with varying levels of capacity, minimal communication between them and with often times competing agendas. Nevertheless, working closely with these ministries is an important means of building their capacity and encouraging them to take ownership for their citizens' needs.

Adequate and timely funding is another limiting factor to effective, timely and comprehensive responses to the ongoing crisis. OFDA is to be commended for its continuous support and flexibility, but the lack of funding limits what the international community can do to address some of the most urgent and pressing needs. In addition, the lack of commitment from other external donors creates great dependence on the US government as a main source of funding.

Another limiting factor is remote management. Most international organizations, donors and NGOs are present only in Amman or in smaller numbers in the Green Zone. This has created heavy dependence on secondary sources for information related to the on-going crisis, limits their ability to adequately respond to real-time needs and presents a substantial barrier to interacting with and developing trust among Iraqi counterparts.

INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL NGOS

With the exception of the Kurdish north, there are very few international NGOs working in Iraq. Compared with similar humanitarian crises around the world, the number of organizations providing direct assistance in Iraq is small. IMC and the other NGOs in Iraq, however, have proven that it is possible to operate in all regions of Iraq, working with local communities and delivering vital services. *A humanitarian surge, one that brings greater operational presence inside Iraq, could greatly enhance the delivery of immediate and tangible benefits to the displaced and increasingly disillusioned Iraqis.*

Iraqi NGOs are for the most part localized and have limited capacity and access to funds. Despite this, they have strong contextual knowledge of the communities where they work and can be valuable partners. Given the fact that these national NGOs will remain with the burden of supporting their communities long after international players have left the scene, it is incumbent upon the international community to build the capacity of national and local NGOs to be self-sufficient. In doing so, *however, it is critical that the principles of impartiality and non-discrimination be adhered to by all humanitarian actors, and that sectarian agendas or allegiances to one or another political or religious group do not play a role in assistance programs.* Such affiliated national organizations have been growing in number as the plight of the ordinary Iraqi continues. Due diligence is required to ensure that any local partners are unaffiliated and impartial in their membership and mission.

US GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

US funding for services for IDPs has remained relatively modest over the course of the past five years. It has also often been slow in its allocation due to the reliance on supplementals. USAID/OFDA's total expenditure for humanitarian assistance since 2003 should have been far greater than the \$254 million allocated, given the level of need and the importance of reconnecting Iraq's citizens to essential services.

Earlier this year, International Medical Corps joined other NGOs in requesting the President to not only increase US humanitarian assistance, but to also urge the Government of Iraq and its neighboring states to increase their humanitarian aid. In an earlier hearing before your subcommittees in March 2008, USAID testified that it was hoping to assist 500,000 IDPs in FY08 by providing \$63 million to five NGO partners, including IMC, to provide emergency water, sanitation, livelihoods, food, commodities and shelter, as well as slating \$36 million to WFP before enactment of a FY08 Iraq supplemental—a supplemental that many hope the Congress will use to increase urgently needed humanitarian aid.

Since 2003, International Medical Corps has received funding from the US government for its work in Iraq: approximately \$51 million from OFDA, \$10 million from Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, \$2.9 million from the Department of State (DoS) and \$1 million from USAID. With these funding levels—modest

relative to the other US funds dedicated to Iraq—IMC has reached millions of people by rehabilitating over 300 clinics and hospitals; operating 60 mobile medical units; completing over 230 sustainable water and sanitation projects; providing economic opportunities to IDPs to increase their self-reliance and promote social cohesion; and addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, including IDPs, women, and children. Our experience illustrates that by working with and through communities, assistance can and does reach the people. The tremendous need, however, far outweighs the limited resources currently available.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In closing, let me touch on a few recommendations International Medical Corps would offer to better address the current situation and to prepare for the return of the displaced in the future.

Improve coordination mechanisms.

A recent conference hosted by OFDA in Amman highlighted the absence of effective coordinating mechanisms for identifying and addressing the needs of displaced Iraqis. Donor agencies, international NGOs, UN agencies, US government actors, and the MoM all recognized the lack of proper coordination as one of the greatest impediments to providing for the immediate needs of the internally displaced populations. IMC enjoys excellent access to the US Embassy, USAID and OFDA—but notes frustration over the lack of coordination between the different “donor” arms of the US government, including DoS, USAID, OFDA, the Commander’s Emergency Response Program and the various contractors implementing programs in-country.

Compounding this is the limited presence of the UN humanitarian agencies inside Iraq and the inherent weaknesses in trying to coordinate operations from a location outside of the country. A coordination mechanism needs to be established in Baghdad, one that includes all relevant operational and donor agencies and that engages the appropriate government ministries.

Humanitarian and development actors must enhance the role of the Government of Iraq in meeting the needs of the displaced through consultation and capacity building.

What is critical now is a demonstration of political will and a building of practical know-how within the Iraqi government to meet the needs of its displaced populations. The relevant government ministries should be apprised of and consulted on relief and development policy and program work. IMC’s experience is that many of the ministries are willing, but may require help in designing, planning and budgeting, setting standards and training for current and future activities. To effectively build the human resource capacity of Iraq’s ministries and governorate staff requires the will and agreement of the government, as well as utilizing partners with cultural sensitivity, the necessary expertise, collaborative styles and a willingness to invest the time and energy needed to develop solid relationships, gain acceptance of a project and win ministry support. Failing to involve the ministries will retard the institutionalization of good government services and inhibit the sustainability of much of the good work that is currently on-going.

OFDA funding should be increased.

While efforts to improve the capacity of the government of Iraq are essential for long-term sustainability, immediate needs among the vulnerable Iraqi populations must be addressed if a renewed downward spiral of violence is to be avoided. It is critical that the international community respond to meeting basic needs and bridge the service delivery gap until the government bodies are capable of delivering sufficient assistance to their citizens. To date, OFDA has been the most effective donor agency in addressing the urgent needs of displaced and vulnerable Iraqis. It has also been one of the most effective coordinating bodies. Despite its proven track record in Iraq, OFDA remains largely under-funded with respect to the needs on the ground and the capacity of its partners to deliver effective projects.

Donor agencies need to adopt a broader mandate for funding in Iraq.

Donor agencies typically apply a strict mandate for the type of activities and interventions they will support. However, Iraq is a case that requires simultaneous support in a wide range of sectors that span the continuum from relief to development. Given the relatively small number of donors in Iraq, it is important that current donor agencies allow considerable flexibility in the programs they fund. This will give implementing partners the ability to provide comprehensive assistance to Iraqi communities that not only address immediate needs but also build toward long-term solutions.

Invest in human capacity.

There has been a substantial focus and investment on rehabilitating physical infrastructure in Iraq; however, it's time we focus on strengthening human capital. One of the major problems facing IDPs in particular and Iraqis in general is unemployment. There will be no stability in Iraq unless the high levels of unemployment are addressed. It also is essential that key service delivery ministries of the Iraqi government are provided with support and backstopping so that they can assist these vulnerable citizens. While government capacity is developed, it is critical that work conducted by NGOs, contractors and others address the needs on all levels, from the community to the governorate and national level.

We hope this hearing will demonstrate that cost-effective NGO programs can be "scaled up" to provide effective aid to displaced families and their host communities while concurrently building the capacities of Iraq's ministries. We need you and your colleagues to support a new surge, a humanitarian and development surge that will demonstrate US commitment to alleviating suffering, fostering self-reliance and strengthening Iraq's will and capabilities to meet the needs of all of its citizens. This is the time for the international community to focus on increasing human capital in Iraq and on challenging the responsible government ministries to enhance their partnerships with communities and with local and international NGOs to improve access to vital services—shelter, employment, education, health, water, electricity and sanitation. Over the past five years, the Congress has supported a substantial investment in rebuilding the physical infrastructure in Iraq. Now we need a humanitarian surge.

Thank you, Mr. Chairmen, for this opportunity to present our views.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you very much. Mr. Holdridge?

**STATEMENT OF MR. DAVID HOLDRIDGE, MIDDLE EAST
REGIONAL DIRECTOR, MERCY CORPS**

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. Chairman Ackerman, Chairman Delahunt, Ranking Members Mr. Rohrabacher, Mr. Pence, I thank you very much for the privilege of being able to testify here today before you.

I just want to say something parenthetically. Chairman Ackerman, it was about 20 years ago that I had this opportunity to testify before you on the panel on the Ethiopia crisis at that time, so it is a pleasure for me to be able to be back here and try to influence policy again on a critical issue.

Mercy Corps has been working in Iraq since 2003, with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development and other funding sources. Mercy Corps' programs in Iraq meet urgent humanitarian needs, strengthen communities, and promote the rights of vulnerable populations like women, youth, and persons with disabilities. To date, we have invested \$150 million in U.S. Government funds in programs that have reached over 4.5 million beneficiaries. We also have active programs in Jordan and Syria that serve Iraq refugees and other host country vulnerable populations.

I began my work with Mercy Corps in 2003 as the country director for Iraq, a post I held there through October 2005. I lived in Wasit Province and then in Diyala Province during those 3 years.

Since that time, I have been working in the Middle East as regional program director overseeing Mercy Corps programs in Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, West Bank, and Gaza. I have been based in the region since 2003, and I have witnessed firsthand the impacts of the U.S.-led invasion, the Coalition Provisional Authority, and the post-February 2006 sectarian violence that has been a major cause of the dramatic increases in displacement and in flow of refugees, I should add.

My remarks today will focus on the situation facing refugees in Jordan and in Syria and on the long-term challenges this poses for the international community.

I was also asked to just add here that my work overseas began when I was a young man, 22 years old, as a platoon leader in Vietnam. So I also fully appreciate the other Americans that are in Iraq and their challenges there as well, your uniformed Americans.

In Jordan, the situation of Iraqi refugees is well known, in part, due to the very well-developed operations of international NGOs there with full staffs and active programs. Overall, the U.N. estimates place the total of refugees at about 500,000. However, based on data collected in a recent FAFO study and by those NGOs that are providing services to the refugee populations, our best guess is that the total number is actually between 150,000 and 350,000 refugees in Jordan today.

Iraqi refugees in Jordan are not a homogenous group. There is a significant number, mostly Christians, who came to Jordan before 2003 to escape religious persecution, even before the United States invasion.

Another significant percentage in Jordan came during the 2004–2005 time period. These refugees are mostly middle-class Iraqis with college educations, assets in bank accounts, and properties outside of Iraq. They are likely, by all reports and by personal experience, they are likely the net contributors to Jordan's economy since they have invested there. Many of them are Sunnites. Most of them are from Baghdad who saw the political changes taking place in Iraq as unfavorable and, as such, took refuge early.

Since 2006, particularly that start date of February 2006, the Samarra Al-Askari mosque bombing, many more Iraqis have taken refugees in Jordan. Refugees in this last wave of displacement are distinct from the previous refugee flows there. They also are mainly from the Baghdad area, although some come by way of Basra, Diyala, Baqubah, Mosul. They tend to be from relatively poor backgrounds, mostly in Baghdad, and escaped due to sectarian violence and no opportunities for a secure, dignified way of life for them and their families inside Iraq. This group, because they have fewer resources and face more discrimination, has the greatest need.

We have seen significant improvement in the response of the Jordan Government, particularly since the fall of last year, which now allows Iraqi refugee children to attend school, as well as allowing Iraqi refugees similar access to health care that is offered to Jordanians. Largely because of the positive encouragement and political pressure of the U.S. Embassy in Amman, the government has also developed effective means of cooperation with U.N. agencies, which was a problem initially, and with international NGOs.

However, most Iraqi refugees are not in Jordan legally, producing rampant fears among them of deportations, especially of this new wave of poor Iraqis since 2006, this, despite the fact that there has been no organized deportation of Iraqis by the Jordanian Government. This fear keeps many refugees from registering or from accessing services that may be available to them. In short, they live in limbo.

The situation in Syria is remarkably different. There, official U.N. estimates place the total numbers of Iraqis at roughly 1.2 mil-

lion. The Minister of Social Development, with whom I met recently in Diyala, puts the total as high as 2 million. So we have a numbers issue in Syria as well, but I think, conservatively, there are over 1 million refugees, mostly in Damascus.

While all Iraqis living outside of Iraq are suffering, those in Syria are in the most precarious situation. I assure you of that. This is, in part, due to the significant challenges facing aid providers there, where all of us will testify to, and I use the words here, “traffic jams,” in trying to get resources through us, through the government mechanisms, to this million-plus people in need, most of whom are clustered around two neighborhoods 15 to 20 kilometers from the center of Damascus.

There is insufficient local civil society or NGO capacity in Syria, and almost all international organizations operate in conjunction with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. Both Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the High Commissioner for Refugee offices are staffed locally by civil servants appointed by the government. They have not developed the capacity required to effectively provide emergency or long-term assistance to such a large number of Iraqi refugees. Their systems and staffs have been overwhelmed by the magnitude of the current crisis because these systems for aid provision are nascent and sometimes compromised.

Meanwhile, most international NGOs—IMC, Mercy Corps, and others among them—that could effectively deliver assistance have less than needed operational space due to the ongoing apprehension on the part of the Syrian Government. This means that needs assessments in Syria have not been conducted to the level of detail required.

Most Iraqi refugees live with local populations in marginal neighborhoods, making it much more difficult to locate or provide services to them. Mercy Corps recently started up our programs in Syria, about 7 or 8 months ago, and we are now working with the Syrian Computer Society and other vocational training centers to develop courses for Iraqi and Syrian youth, as well as working with the Middle East Council of Churches, to provide humanitarian assistance to Iraqi refugees.

The Middle East Council of Churches works with religious leaders from all groups—Christian, Sunnis, Shi’as—to locate Iraqi refugees and vulnerable Syrians and to prioritize and address their needs. At present, this program has remained focused on providing emergency food aid and nonfood items to the most vulnerable, hygiene items generally.

The needs, in terms of education and health care, remain largely unmet. There are an estimated 34,000 Iraqi refugee children in school in Syria, out of an overall population of over 1 million refugees. Mercy Corps has applied for additional funding to continue and expand programs in Syria.

So where does this leave us? In the short term, it is clear that assistance will need to be provided to many, if not most, of these refugees. Given the historical experiences of Jordan and Syria with accepting and integrating refugees going back to the last forties, they are, understandably, reluctant to accommodate large numbers of refugees on a long-term basis.

Mr. ACKERMAN. If you could begin to—

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. Yes. I will wrap up.

In the long term, it is clear that the majority of Iraqi refugees living in Jordan and Syria will not obtain permanent residence, and an even smaller number will be resettled.

Why don't I just leave it there? You have my testimony, and I know I am running overtime, and, as I said, I really appreciate this opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Holdridge follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MR. DAVID HOLDRIDGE, MIDDLE EAST REGIONAL
DIRECTOR, MERCY CORPS

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

I want to express my appreciation to Chairman Rep. William Delahunt of the International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight Subcommittee, Chairman Rep. Gary Ackerman of the Middle East and South Asia Subcommittee, and to Ranking members Rep. Dana Rohrabacher and Rep. Mike Pence for the opportunity to offer testimony today on the current situation facing the over 4 million Iraqis who have been displaced inside of Iraq and to surrounding countries like Jordan and Syria.

Mercy Corps has been working in Iraq since 2003, with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development and other funding sources. Mercy Corps' programs in Iraq meet urgent humanitarian needs, strengthen communities and promote the rights of vulnerable populations like women, youth, and persons with disabilities. To date, we have invested over \$150 million in programs that have reached over 4.5 million beneficiaries. We also have active programs in Jordan and Syria that serve Iraqi refugees and other vulnerable populations.

I began my work with Mercy Corps in 2003, as the Country Director for Iraq—a post I held through October 2005. Since that time, I have been working as the Middle East Regional Program Director, overseeing Mercy Corps' programs in Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and West Bank/Gaza. I have been based in the region since 2003 and, as such, I have witnessed first-hand the impacts of the US-led invasion, the Coalition Provisional Authority, and the post-2006 sectarian violence that has been a major cause of the dramatic increases in displacement. My remarks today will focus on the situation facing refugees in Jordan and in Syria, and on the long-term challenges this poses for the international community.

In Jordan, the situation of Iraqi refugees is well known, in part due to the very well developed operations of international NGOs there with full staffs and active programs. Overall, official UN estimates place the total number of refugees at 500,000. However, based on data collected in a recent FAFO study, and by those NGOs that are providing services to the refugee population, our best guess is that the total number is actually somewhere between 150,000 and 350,000.

Iraqi refugees in Jordan are not a homogenous group. There are a significant number—mostly Christians—who came to Jordan before 2003 to escape religious persecution even before the US invasion. Another significant percentage came during the 2004–2005 time period: these refugees are mostly middle class Iraqis with college educations, assets in bank accounts, and property outside of Iraq. They have likely been net contributors to Jordan's economy since they have invested there. Many of them are Sunnis who saw the political changes taking place in Iraq as unfavorable and, as such, took refuge early.

Since 2006, many more Iraqis have taken refuge in Jordan. Refugees in this last wave of displacement are distinct. They are mainly from the Baghdad area—although some come by way of Basra or Diyala—and they tend to be from relatively poor backgrounds, and escaped due to sectarian violence and lack of opportunities for a secure, dignified way of life in Iraq. This group—because they have fewer resources and face more discrimination—has the greatest needs.

We have seen a significant improvement in the response of the Jordanian government, which now allows Iraqi refugee children to attend school, as well as allowing Iraqi refugees similar access to health care as is offered to Jordanians. Largely because of the positive encouragement and political pressure of US Embassy officials in Jordan, the government has also developed effective means of cooperation with UN agencies and with international NGOs.

However, most Iraqi refugees are not in Jordan legally, producing rampant fears of deportations—despite the fact that there has of yet been no organized deportation of Iraqis by the Jordanian government. This fear keeps many refugees from registering or from accessing services that may be available to them.

The situation in Syria is remarkably different. There, official UN estimates place the total number of Iraqis at roughly 1.2 million. While all Iraqis living outside of Iraq are suffering, those in Syria are in the most precarious situation. This is in part due to the significant challenges facing aid providers there, where all reports indicate an assistance “traffic jam.” Despite the allocation of resources from the international community to address the crisis, very little is in fact getting spent.

There is insufficient local civil society or NGO capacity in Syria, and almost all international organizations operate in conjunction with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. Both the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the High Commissioner for Refugees offices are staffed locally by civil servants appointed by the government. They have not developed the capacity required to effectively provide emergency or long-term assistance to such a large number of Iraqi refugees: their systems and staff have been overwhelmed by the magnitude of the current crisis because these systems for aid provision are nascent and compromised. Meanwhile, most international NGOs that could effectively deliver assistance have limited operational space, due to ongoing apprehension on the part of the Syrian government. This means that needs assessments in Syria have not been conducted to the level of detail required.

Most Iraqis refugees live with local populations in marginal neighborhoods, making it much more difficult to locate or provide services to them. Mercy Corps recently started up our programs in Syria, where we are now working with the Syrian Computer Society to develop training courses for Iraqi and Syrian youth, and working with the Middle East Council of Churches to provide assistance to Iraqi refugees. The Middle East Council of Churches works with religious leaders from all groups—Christians, Sunnis, and Shi’as—to locate Iraqi refugees and vulnerable Syrians and to prioritize and address their needs. At present, this program has remained focused on providing emergency food aid and non-food items to the most vulnerable. The needs in terms of education and health care remain largely unmet. There are an estimated 34,000 Iraqi refugee children in school in Syria—out of an overall population of over a million refugees. Mercy Corps has applied for additional funding to continue and expand these programs in Syria, and we hope to soon be able to address this dire situation more completely.

So where does this situation leave us?

In the short term, it is clear that assistance will need to be provided to many—if not most—of these refugees. Given the historic experience of Jordan and Syria with accepting and integrating refugees, they are understandably reluctant to accommodate such large numbers of Iraqis on a long term basis. To address these needs, in April Mercy Corps joined a coalition of over 20 humanitarian organizations in calling on the US Administration and Congress to increase humanitarian funding and to make strategic use of international NGOs with the capacity to guarantee effective and accountable delivery of assistance.

In the long term, it is clear that the majority of Iraqi refugees living in Jordan and Syria will not obtain permanent residence, and an even smaller number will be resettled to other countries. However, to date very few Iraqis have returned—and at present the conditions do not exist inside Iraq to promote significant returns. In order to return, refugees would need to feel confident that in Iraq they would not only find adequate security, but also that they would have access to the full range of services required for them to live dignified lives: health care, education, electricity, shelter, and jobs.

While efforts to encourage the Iraqi government to increase humanitarian aid are positive, this is not just a question of whether the Iraqis have money to contribute—which they clearly do. It is, more importantly, a question of whether the Iraqi government is capable of effectively budgeting and expending resources to meet basic needs and guarantee services to all Iraqis. The international community needs to understand that this capacity in Iraq simply does not exist. Good governance is not built overnight: it requires substantial investments in capacity building over a whole generation. If we hold out any hope at all for a significant return of Iraqis, it is essential that the US prioritize assistance that supports NGO-led programs to assist the Iraqi government and civil society in their efforts to construct systems to guarantee good governance and effective service delivery.

Yet at present, only a very small portion of total US assistance to Iraq supports long term capacity building programs managed by qualified civilians professionals at the State Department or USAID—and even less of that finances NGOs that have decades of experience doing complex development work. The Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq—rather than effectively improving the performance of Iraqi government Ministries or increasing the participation of local citizens—create parallel systems for service delivery that are, at best, a short term fix for ensuring that some assistance reaches people despite the massive bottlenecks that continue to plague the Iraqi government.

The only viable long term solution to this crisis is to ensure that someday Iraqis will be able to return home. For this reason, it will be essential for US policy makers to ensure that the overall policy goals for Iraq include support for robust programs to promote the development of good governance and community participation throughout Iraq.

Mr. ACKERMAN. We just want to make sure we have the opportunity—

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. Absolutely. I appreciate that.

Mr. ACKERMAN [continuing]. To question you and benefit from your complete knowledge. Thank you. Ms. Brown?

STATEMENT OF MRS. ANASTASIA BROWN, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF REFUGEE PROGRAMS, MIGRATION AND REFUGEE SERVICES, UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

Mrs. BROWN. I am Anastasia Brown, director, Office of Refugee Programs for Migration and Refugee Services at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. I would like to thank Chairmen Ackerman and Delahunt and Ranking Members Pence and Rohrabacher for the invitation to speak today on the issue of Iraqi refugees.

Mr. Chairman, my written testimony contains the details of U.S. CCB's concerns on the issues. I would like to submit for the record the written testimony but also a joint United States CCB-ICMC report, which details the plight of particularly vulnerable refugees in Syria, and the report of the U.S. Bishops' trip to the region in July 2007.

I will focus my oral remarks on the issue of United States resettlement of Iraqi refugees, and I base my comments on my work with the United States CCB, my previous experience processing Vietnamese refugees, and the U.S. Bishops' mission to the Middle East last year. On that trip, I observed the systems in place for processing refugees and personally interviewed many families and heard their tragic stories.

Mr. Chairman, the plain and simple truth is that the United States is not doing everything in its power to avert a looming humanitarian crisis in the Middle East. None of the countries where Iraqi refugees are located are capable of supporting this population long term. People are running out of resources, and the situation is deteriorating every day.

In our view, a mere fraction of the money being expended in a military response in Iraq could be used to avert impending disaster by greatly increasing resettlement numbers and identifying and assisting the most vulnerable of these refugees.

Looking at the resettlement numbers to date, the U.S. response has been shockingly inadequate. Between February 2007 and March 2008, the UNHCR referred 24,000 refugees to the United States for resettlement, and, during that period, the U.S. resettled just over 4,000 refugees. In 2007, the mark was set at 7,000 refugees and only 1,608 resettled.

This year, the target is 12,000 refugees arriving, and only 2,627 have been resettled halfway through this year.

Mr. Chairman, many dedicated people are working to reach this number of 12,000 admissions, and we may still approach it. However, admitting only 12,000 Iraqi refugees in 1 year is inadequate to the need. Approximately more than 1,000 Iraqi refugees continue to arrive in Syria alone each month. Moving approximately

1,000 people per month out of the entire region does not even begin to address the problem.

How can this be seen to represent a commitment to share our responsibilities in this humanitarian crisis? We can do better, and we have done better.

Mr. Chairman, this is not the way the U.S. has responded to humanitarian crises in the past. History shows us that we have the capability of responding generously and effectively when we have the political will. At the end of the Vietnam War, for example, the United States resettled 135,000 refugees in 1 year.

In 1992, the Orderly Departure program interviewed 10,000 Vietnamese every month. Our purpose was to try to stop the deaths at sea and prevent the growing burden on asylum countries caused by continued boat departures from Vietnam. That year, I was in charge of out-processing, and over 80,000 people left Vietnam in a safe and orderly fashion for a new life in America.

A more recent example of a more appropriate resettlement response was the Kosovo crisis in the late 1990s, where the United States admitted 14,000 people in a matter of mere months.

There is no reason that we cannot resettle at least 60,000 refugees from Iraq per year. The response, such as this, would save lives, relieve pressure on the struggling host countries, and help the United States assist the most vulnerable Iraqi refugees.

So what can we do to upgrade the level of the U.S. commitment and reach this goal? First, we need a stronger processing infrastructure. We must be more proactive in identifying cases of concern to the U.S. Currently, we are relying primarily on UNHCR referrals, and, despite their best efforts, the UNHCR is limited in what they can achieve on their own.

Also, we need to move and provide more staff to the overseas processing entities, and we need more interviewing officers. The United States CIS refugee officers working on Iraqi cases average only four cases per day. We would need at least 28 officers working every day of the year to meet a goal of 60,000 admissions.

Some might argue that achieving these goals in Syria is problematic because of our strained diplomatic relationship. Once again, I would say there is precedent here. We conducted the Orderly Departure program in Vietnam, and, at the time, we had no diplomatic relations or presence.

In our opinion, there must be a tangible benefit to Syria in order to ensure their cooperation. The current size of the Iraqi resettlement program does not give them a reason to seriously engage with us. The UNHCR could play a negotiating role between the two governments to create an agreement for a larger resettlement program and presence. It has been done before; it can be done again.

Mr. Chairman, my written testimony more greatly details the steps necessary to increase the United States commitment to resettlement and the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi refugees.

The past can lead us to the future, and our past shows that, given the political will, there is no one better than the United States at responding to humanitarian crises. It is our hope that your subcommittees will help create that will so that the United States can respond appropriately to this current crisis. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mrs. Brown follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MRS. ANASTASIA BROWN, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF REFUGEE PROGRAMS, MIGRATION AND REFUGEE SERVICES , UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

I am Anastasia Brown, director of refugee programs for Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (MRS/USCCB). MRS/USCCB is the largest refugee resettlement agency in the United States. Working with over 100 dioceses across the nation, we provide resettlement assistance to approximately 15,000 to 20,000 refugees each year, helping them with job placement, housing, and other forms of assistance to ensure their early self-sufficiency.

I would like to thank Chairmen Ackerman and Delahunt, as well as Ranking Members Pence and Rohrabacher, for the invitation to speak with you today on the Iraqi refugee population. The U.S. Catholic Bishops hold a special concern for the Iraqi refugee population. A delegation of Catholic bishops visited the Middle East in July, 2007, to assess their plight in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. In addition, a member of the Bishops' staff visited Jordan and Syria earlier this year on a project with the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) to identify service gaps for vulnerable Iraqi refugees, including unaccompanied refugee minors, vulnerable women who are heads-of-households, and refugees with specific medical or psychological needs, just to name a few.

Mr. Chairman, I ask that the reports of the U.S. Bishops' mission in July, 2007, and the reports of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) and the USCCB be included in the hearing record.

Mr. Chairman, it is the view of the U.S. Bishops that much more needs to be done to meet the human needs of the estimated 2 million Iraqi refugees and 2.5 million internally displaced. Others on the panel will address the plight of the internally displaced. My testimony today will focus upon Iraqi refugees, the majority of whom are located in Jordan and Syria. In my testimony, I would like to outline four areas that need to be addressed in the immediate future in order to avoid further deterioration of the refugee situation and to alleviate further human suffering:

- The Administration and Congress must increase efforts to deliver basic humanitarian assistance to Iraqi refugees. Not only will this require the provision of more funds, but it also will require more diplomatic initiatives to ensure that the global community also contributes much needed assistance;
- The Administration must step up efforts to make available resettlement opportunities for vulnerable Iraqi refugees, both in the United States and in other countries;
- Special attention must be paid to extremely vulnerable populations, including unaccompanied refugee minors, women heads-of-households, and other groups;
- Specific needs, such as health services (including mental health), education, and basic food and shelter, must be addressed. Protection within host countries is also deteriorating, as refugee families without formal legal status remain at risk.

I. OVERVIEW OF THE IRAQI REFUGEE CRISIS

We are grateful, Mr. Chairman, for the work that your two subcommittees have done to highlight the humanitarian crisis in Iraq. I am sure that you would agree that, despite your efforts, one of the most under reported stories of the Iraq war has been the humanitarian crisis it has spawned. While Washington has debated the "surge" and other aspects of U.S. military involvement in Iraq, the stories of close to 5 million displaced Iraqis have gone largely untold.

It is estimated that more than 2 million Iraqi refugees¹ are located in surrounding countries, mostly in Syria and Jordan. As many as 2.5 million are displaced from their homes but remain within Iraq. In my interviews with refugees I was struck by the high number of Iraqis who have experienced direct persecution or threats to themselves or a close family member.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 77 percent of the Iraqi refugees surveyed in Syria have endured aerial bombardments, 80 percent have witnessed a shooting, 68 percent have been harassed by militias, and 75 percent knew someone close to them who had been killed. Disturbingly, 23

¹Under international law, a person who has fled persecution in their home country and crossed an international border is a refugee. A person who has fled persecution and remained in their home country is an internally displaced person.

percent have been kidnapped, 22 percent have been beaten by insurgents, and 16 percent have been tortured.

Individual accounts of persecution have been harrowing. Former employees of the U.S. military in Iraq, working as interpreters, drivers, or cooks, have fled because of fear of imminent death or because of the murder of a family member. Religious and ethnic minorities have endured similar persecution.

None of the families I spoke with in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey or Syria indicated that they thought they would ever be able to return to Iraq. Even if they do wish to return, prospects do not look bright, as it is unsafe to return to Iraq anytime in the near future. Integration into Syria, Jordan, or other host countries also is problematic. These countries are overburdened with the number of refugees in their cities. A third option, resettlement to a third country such as the United States, has not been offered in sufficient numbers to protect the most vulnerable.

The United States and the global community have been slow to grasp the magnitude of the displacement issue or to respond to it adequately. Politically, the United States has claimed that other countries need to do more to alleviate the suffering; other nations have claimed that the United States and Iraq have not shown enough leadership. The facts demonstrate that neither the United States nor the rest of the world have done enough to address the problem, with the situation deteriorating each day.

According to the Department of State, since 2003 the United States has contributed \$500 million for humanitarian assistance for both Iraqi refugees and displaced. This represents a miniscule fraction of the more than \$500 billion spent on the Iraqi war. In the Fiscal Year 2008 supplemental spending bill, for example, the Bush Administration has requested only \$30 million for Migration and Refugee Assistance supplemental request.

The rest of the world also can do more. According to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Iraq ranks as the second-lowest funded crisis per-affected person. Of the \$261 million requested by the United Nations for Iraqi refugees for 2008, seven countries, other than the United States, have contributed a total of \$10.2 million. Many of the Gulf Arab States have contributed nothing to the effort, explaining that they will not commit funds until Iraq itself gives more help to its own people.

Host countries, such as Jordan and Syria, are showing the strain, asserting that their governments have already spent \$1 billion each on Iraqi refugees. Initially these two countries kept their borders open to the inflow of refugees, but have shut them periodically and at times denied entry to Iraqis. Educational and health care systems have been overwhelmed, partly because of the arrival of new refugees.

More troubling, Iraqi refugees and their families remain at risk in these countries. Families that fled with money or resources are now finding it difficult to purchase food and shelter. Men are not venturing out to find work for fear of deportation, leaving children who otherwise should be in school to scrounge for jobs and money. Health care for mental health problems or cancer—high among this population—is becoming inaccessible.

Some groups are particularly vulnerable. With their husbands either dead or in another country searching for work, women with children are at risk. Orphaned children are susceptible to human traffickers and smugglers. I will speak more specifically to these groups later in my testimony.

The Plight of Religious Minorities

Mr. Chairman, among the most vulnerable refugee groups are the religious minorities of Iraq, predominately Christian groups. Before the war, between 800,000 to one million Christians—Chaldean Catholics, Assyrians, and Armenians—lived in Iraq. A smaller religious minority, the Mandeans, who numbered about 60,000 in 2003, are extremely vulnerable. But now, current surveys show that at least half of the Christian population has fled their homes to other parts of Iraq or to neighboring countries. According to UNHCR, one-quarter of those registered as refugees from Iraq are Christians.

The stories of Christian persecution are chilling. Many Christians in Iraq have been forced to choose between conversion to Islam or death, while converts to Christianity have been killed or tortured. A delegation from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, visiting the Middle East in 2007, heard about one convert to Christianity who was “crucified” on a tree by insurgents. The delegation was also told that any Iraqi who made the sign of the cross in public would receive death threats.

The recent kidnapping and death of Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho, archbishop of Mosul, has only added to the fear of Iraqi Christians, particularly Chaldean Catholics. Such a high profile victim sends a signal that no Christian is safe within Iraq.

Legislation enacted into law in January of 2008 makes religious minorities a special priority for resettlement in the United States, yet to date the Administration has not announced implementation of special processing for this group. Religious communities here have come forward with lists of families known to have fled Iraq, but to date the only processing available to them is either through UNHCR referral or access through lengthy and burdensome family-based procedures.

All of us hope that resettlement to a third country is not the long-term solution for the plight of religious minorities in Iraq. These ancient communities deserve the right to remain in their homeland and maintain their religious identity. The Holy See continues to urge protection for religious minorities within Iraq. There is no doubt, however, that for some, resettlement outside of the region may be their best option.

The Catholic Response

The Catholic Church, both internationally and in the United States, has responded to the needs of Iraqis displaced within the country and regionally. Within Iraq, Caritas Iraq is one of a few nongovernmental agencies working with the displaced and other vulnerable Iraqis. Several religious orders, including the Jesuits, Dominican sisters, and Maronites are serving vulnerable groups, including women and children at risk.

In neighboring countries, including Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) are assisting refugees and processing them for resettlement in third countries. In the United States, Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is working with local dioceses to help resettle Iraqi refugees.

The U.S. bishops have been outspoken in their efforts to win more relief aid and resettlement numbers for Iraqis. Bishops of the USCCB Committee on Migration have traveled to the region to assess the conditions of Iraqi refugees and have reported their findings to Congress and the Bush Administration. MRS also recently produced a report on unaccompanied Iraqi refugee children and other vulnerable refugee groups. Both reports can be accessed at <http://www.usccb.org/mrs/tripreport.shtml>.

In addition, the U.S. Catholic Coalition for the Protection of Displaced Iraqis, consisting of several U.S. Catholic agencies and religious orders, recently was formed to coordinate Catholic advocacy efforts in the United States.

II. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS

Mr. Chairman, Iraqi refugees, especially vulnerable groups, currently have no durable solution available to them. Clearly, more must be done to open resettlement opportunities to them.

Mr. Chairman, the State Department pledged to try to resettle 7,000 Iraqi refugees in FY 2007 and 12,000 refugees during FY 2008. We believe that these target goals are insufficient to the need. We had recommended that at least 25,000 refugees be resettled in 2007 with significant increases for this fiscal year. Unfortunately, the United States has been slow to reach its already modest targets.

As of March, the UNHCR had referred approximately 24,000 cases to the United States for consideration for resettlement. However, to date a little over 4,000 have been resettled in the United States, despite pledges to relocate a larger number. For the first half of the fiscal year, for example, the United States has welcomed only 2,627 of the 12,000 promised to be resettled this budget cycle. Last fiscal year, the United States resettled 1,608 refugees out of a target of 7,000. Clearly, our government must do more.

The arguments heard as to why the process has taken this long is that the US needed to build an infrastructure where none existed, and that the government of Syria would not issue visas for interviewing officers. Both of these statements are true. However it is also true that the infrastructure put in place is not adequate to the need, that the outreach for identification of refugees for resettlement has been insufficient, and that the goals and actual numbers realized are insufficient to indicate any real burden sharing to the countries of first asylum.

In February of 2007 we asked the UNHCR to do the unthinkable, they stepped up to the plate and referred over 15,000 people for resettlement within ten months. This included building an infrastructure where none existed. In the same period of time the US admitted only 2,616 refugees. The attitude appeared to be more 'business as usual' than that of extraordinary operations. In fact, so few people departed that the UNHCR began to question the wisdom of continuing referrals.

Mr. Chairman, the reality is that the needs of Iraqi refugees require that the United States resettle many times the 12,000 pledged for this year. Currently, at

least 1,000 refugees enter Syria each month, so the 12,000 target merely maintains the status quo and does not relieve pressure on the host countries. In our estimation, Mr. Chairman, the United States must resettle, at a minimum, 60,000 refugees each year in order to improve the situation. This is a conservative estimate, as UNHCR called for the resettlement of 80,000–90,000 out of Syria alone this year.

Mr. Chairman, we are capable of meeting this number, but it would require a larger commitment of diplomatic and financial resources. In fact, there is precedence in U.S. history for staging a large resettlement program for specific populations. For example, in 1975, near the end of the Vietnam War the United States resettled close to 135,000 Vietnamese refugees. During the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) in 1992, at least 10,000 persons were interviewed and processed each month. These efforts helped saved thousands of lives. In response to the refugee crisis in Kosovo, the United States processed and admitted over 14,000 refugees within a six-month period.

In order to duplicate that effort, the United States would have to commit at least 42 USCIS officers interviewing 20 days a month, requiring larger infrastructure and facilities for both USCIS and the Overseas Processing Entity (OPE). In addition, UNHCR, with our help, would need to increase their capacity in order to refer 10,000 refugees a month.

It is true, Mr. Chairman, that diplomatic relations between the United States and Syria are problematic, but I suggest that the prospect of a large resettlement program within Syria is not unfounded. Again, the United States was able to conduct a large in-country program out of Vietnam, despite the absence of a diplomatic relationship between the two countries. UNHCR could play a crucial role of brokering “technical talks” between the United States and Syria to negotiate the terms of a large resettlement program.

Mr. Chairman, it is clear that, given the political will, the United States could significantly increase resettlement numbers for Iraqi refugees. For our part and that of other nonprofit resettlement agencies, we are prepared to handle such a caseload. Without a renewed and stronger commitment to Iraqi resettlement, vulnerable groups, including women at risk, children, and the elderly, will continue to languish in fear, with no hope for the future. Mr. Chairman, I submit the following recommendations to improve the resettlement options for Iraqis:

1. The United States must vastly increase its commitment to resettlement of Iraqis. The number of 12,000 refugees in one fiscal year equals roughly the number of refugees continuing to arrive in Syria. The UNHCR recommendation for resettlement from Syria has approached 80,000 people per year. To accomplish this goal, the US and the UNHCR will need to demonstrate to the Syrian government exactly what is required in terms of infrastructure, including the number of caseworkers and interviewing officers required.
2. The United States must implement more aggressively the authority granted by legislation for refugees that are members of certain groups. A major outreach campaign must be launched.
3. The UNHCR in Jordan should make resettlement available to any interested registered refugees, rather than undertaking an intensive review of cases on an individual basis. With at least 500,000 Iraqi refugees in Jordan, more must be done to relieve the pressure on the government and Jordanian society.
4. Other avenues for refugee identification must be pursued. The U.S. government has held only one training for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) involved in assistance work to help them to refer refugees for resettlement. This method involves taking people who already have full time jobs and asking them to take on another responsibility. The United States should directly fund several NGO resettlement outreach projects designed to help vulnerable refugees, as the current system does not reach these refugees, who are often not able to come to the UNHCR office for multiple appointments.
5. Refugees who have paid ransoms when their relatives were kidnapped should receive expedited waivers for ‘material support’. The process for obtaining these exemptions continues to take too much time and should be streamlined.
6. Attention needs to be paid to each stage of the processing of Iraqi refugees to ensure that all steps are completed as quickly as possible. This includes preparation of cases for interview, fingerprints, medical examinations, etc.
7. Congress should enact into law H.R. 5837, legislation introduced by House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) and Represent-

ative F. James Sensenbrenner (R-WI), that would make technical corrections to two recently enacted laws that provide for the admission into the United States of thousands of special immigrants from Iraq. This measure would facilitate the admission of particularly vulnerable special immigrants from Iraq in fiscal year 2008 than waiting until fiscal year 2009.

8. Congress should appropriate \$345 million in supplemental fiscal year 2008 Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) and \$68 million in supplemental funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in order to ensure that the assistance, admissions, and resettlement needs of Iraqis are taken care of in this fiscal year.
9. The United States should expand "in-country" processing in Iraq to areas throughout the country where large concentrations of displaced Iraqis are located.

III. VULNERABLE GROUPS

Mr. Chairman, I would now like to speak to vulnerable individuals and groups in the Iraqi refugee population who need special attention. As stated earlier, MRS/USCCB staff, in conjunction with the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), traveled to Syria and Jordan on separate occasions recently to assess the special needs of this refugee population.

Generally, the Iraqi refugee population registered with UNHCR has access to basic services, such as non-essential food items, health clinics, and food. As families exhaust their resources and savings, however, these basic items could become more inaccessible. Iraqi children can attend Jordanian and Syrian schools, provided their families register with UNHCR, but there are no after school programs or supplemental programs available. There is a great need for mental health services, as a great number of men, women, and children have experienced mental and physical trauma from the war. Women and children are vulnerable to domestic and other forms of violence, as well as forced prostitution and human trafficking.

Mr. Chairman, during our missions MRS/USCCB paid particular attention to the situation of unaccompanied, separated, and special needs children. As expected, children are extremely vulnerable and are easily manipulated and exploited in this situation. To date, UNHCR has identified over 5,000 children and adolescents at risk in Syria alone, about 4.1 percent of the registered population.

Unaccompanied children make up about 1 percent of the registered population, although the majority of children identified are separated from their parents, not orphaned. Nevertheless, they have varied and substantial needs, including mental health needs, shelter, and basic food and medicine. Particularly troubling are stories of adolescent girls being subjected to sexual and gender-based violence, some as part of the sex trade. Girls who are detained in juvenile facilities are subject to rape.

While UNHCR has established a Best Interest Determination (BID) process to identify and provide solutions for unaccompanied and separated children, the process is slow and has yet to produce durable solutions for these children. More resettlement slots should be made available for them, as well as a wide range of mental health, social, and basic needs services.

Iraqi refugee women find themselves alone or as a single parent with several children, as their husbands have been killed or are in another country searching for work. In Syria, UNHCR has identified single parents and women-at-risk as persons of concern. Single women, either adolescent or young adult, are vulnerable to prostitution rings and human trafficking, while women head-of-households face challenges of meeting the needs of their children.

Mr. Chairman, I offer the following recommendations to meet the needs of these and other vulnerable groups in the Iraqi refugee population:

1. Planning must move from an emergency/ crisis mode of immediate relief to service planning for at least a two-three year period with further emphasis on arrangements for durable solutions within that time frame.
2. Outreach must become more robust and coordinated to include:
 - Information sharing with local NGO and faith-based organizations whether or not formally registered or receiving funds from a UN agency;
 - Increased use of techniques, including public information efforts, to reach all Iraqis, especially extremely vulnerable individuals and their families;
 - Increased efforts to find and inform Iraqis outside of Amman and Damascus area.
3. Service planning must continue to find ways to meet basic needs for food, shelter and medical care.

4. Services must be designed and implemented to address the serious protection needs of extremely vulnerable individuals and their families, including children, adolescents and victims of violence and torture.
5. Mental Health and Psychosocial services must be instituted and designed to reach the standards of the IASC and other international bodies.
6. Attention must be focused on the service needs of victims of gender-based violence, including women and girls forced into prostitution.
7. Capacity building efforts must increase to assist local and international organizations to meet the protection and service needs of the refugees:
 - Coordinated information sharing must be increased;
 - Staff training must be increased; and
 - Iraqi refugees must be included in service design and delivery.
8. Areas outside of Amman and Damascus must be included in protection and service efforts.
9. Resettlement must be increased with greater effort to reach out to extremely vulnerable individuals and families, including unaccompanied and separated children.
10. Efforts must be made to work with national governments to regularize the visa process and requirements to give refugees more predictability and a sense of security in their current locations.

IV. CONCLUSION

The reality of Iraqi refugees can no longer be minimized or ignored. Host countries are feeling the pinch, while the displaced and refugees themselves, having spent what little savings they had, are more in need of assistance. With no possibility of safe return to Iraq anytime soon, and little prospect for resettlement to third countries, the situation could reach crisis proportions in the near future.

The United States, as the leader of the coalition forces in Iraq and as the world's lone superpower, must step up its efforts to avert this impending crisis. Without U.S. leadership, other nations are unlikely to increase their support. More assistance must be provided, resettlement options offered, and diplomacy conducted to ensure that the essential needs of the refugees of Iraq are met.

Mr. Chairman, as mentioned in my testimony, there is precedence for the United States undertaking a larger resettlement processing effort in a situation in some ways similar to the Iraq conflict. Our efforts in Vietnam, in which we resettled well over 100,000 refugees in one fiscal year, is a case in point. The United States was able to set up an in-country processing program in Vietnam, even without a diplomatic presence there. In order to at least approach that effort, the United States will need to establish large Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) operations and infrastructure and commit many more Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officers for adjudications. This can be done, provided that the political will exists to accomplish it.

Mr. Chairman, success in the Iraq war must no longer be measured only in military terms, but by how as a nation we respond to the human misery it has created.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

[NOTE: Additional material submitted for the record by Mrs. Brown is not reprinted here but is available in committee records.]

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you. I thank the entire panel.

It occurred to me, listening to the panel, that solving a crisis is directly proportional to wanting to solve the crisis. It seems to me that we have solved bigger crises before a lot quicker all over the planet. If I did not say it strongly enough in my opening statement, it has occurred to me before that there are people who say they want to help and solve the crisis who really have no intention of solving the crisis.

When we had our government panel at a previous hearing, Congressman Delahunt and I, a month ago, they assured us that they would be able to do it. "Yes, yes, we have figured out how to do it." The numbers were half of what they are per month, and they would have quadrupled or quintupled, and they just insisted that they knew how to do it. It was like listening to the answers to the

questions getting into the Iraq war. Do you have a plan for afterwards? "Yes, yes, we have a plan." Of course, there was no plan.

Is there something about these refugees and their situation, or who they are, that makes them different, as far as not being able to get the leadership of this country, and even some others, to cooperate in the relief effort?

Why don't I start with Dr. Holdridge. Mr. Holdridge, I remember—I guess it was 1984 or 1985—I think you were with Catholic Relief Services, if I remember correctly.

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. You have a great memory. Yes, I was.

Mr. ACKERMAN. And you were less gray, and I had an afro, and Mickey Leland was around providing inspiring leadership. We worked on the African continent with displaced people who were starving to death.

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. That is right.

Mr. ACKERMAN. People saw the dramatic films that the BBC had smuggled out and were absolutely astonished and wanted to do something, people from all over, and everybody stepped up to the plate.

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. Well, we had a great debate then, too, because of some opposition to working at all, no matter what kind of assistance, with the government of Mengistu, and I remember that was quite acrimonious.

Mr. ACKERMAN. There is always a political component to starvation and national disasters and refugees, no matter how you slice it. But this one seems particularly unique. Is it because we are dealing with a Muslim refugee problem? Let me ask it as directly as I can.

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. Well, I do not know the issues on this side because I live in the Middle East, and I have lived there for a long time. What the reluctance is here is to move the application process through faster through Homeland Security and get these people settled.

But in direct answer response to your question, yes, there are some people, particularly early refugees, in Jordan that will definitely opt to stay there. They tend to be registered and have the necessary permits to stay in Amman, and they will wait for a long period of time to go back to Iraq, to Baghdad, for the most part. But those that came in the later wave, after the bombing of the Al-Askari mosque in Samarra, tend to be poorer. They tend to be out of resources, and, frankly, there is no reason for them to leave, right now as I sit here before you, with the March 25th conflict that has begun in the south, from Basra across to Kut.

The problem is continuing in Mosul Sadr City. There is no reason why a mother and a father and their kids would take their children back to those areas at this point.

So they are in limbo, the border is closed, they are not going to get made legal, these refugees since 2006, and no mother and father would bring their family back. The United States, absolutely, should provide these people with refuge. You would know far better than I would what the problem is on this side.

Mr. ACKERMAN. We suspect we know some of them. Do either of the other panelists want to take a shot at that? Mrs. Brown?

Mrs. BROWN. I would say that there is a characterization of the refugees as all being extraordinarily wealthy, middle-class people who do not really need resettlement. I did not find that to be true. Many of the people I spoke to may be middle class in their background and expectations, but they have nothing to survive on. They have gone through any resources that they had.

There is also a characterization of generalized violence and people not needing a refugee definition, and, again, I would say that was not true. Every person that I spoke to had been directly targeted, in one way or another, to an amazing degree. There is, of course, a political issue that you are aware of, I believe.

Mr. ACKERMAN. We suspect there is a political issue involved. Our colleague, Mr. Rohrabacher, raises an important and an interesting question, that if you take the people who are most resistant to the kinds of governments that we may or may not support out of the country, there is less of a chance of the government improving, especially if you have what might be considered a culture drain, or a brain drain, or an asset drain, and the kind of people who have the ability to rebuild are no longer there but someplace else.

We would like to see positive, more rapid change in Iraq, the kinds of changes that we think would be good for the Iraqi people, not just our—but other people have expressed the desire for those kinds of changes.

But from a humanitarian point of view, I think, collectively we are going to have to struggle with that notion. Refugees have rights, I understand—correct me if I am wrong—by definition as to what our responsibilities toward them are. Do we have a right to make political decisions as to whether or not some other motivated picture should dictate that we or the region or someone else would be better off if they stayed where they were or went back to whence they came and suffered and struggled and made things better, or is our sole obligation to refugees legally and, equally, if not of more importance, morally, that we treat them in the way the definition of “refugee” requires? If you come across them, you are going to help them, succinctly as I could state it. Would anybody like to respond to that notion? Mr. Torbay?

Mr. TORBAY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There is no doubt that many Iraqis want to stay in Iraq and are staying in Iraq, despite all of the violence and what is happening. There is also no doubt that many Iraqis that are in the region, in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, want to go back to Iraq, or, at least, want to stay in the region until the situation improves in Iraq so they could go back home.

I think the focus in assistance and resettlement should definitely be around the vulnerable groups, people that know, if they go back, they will be targeted, and they might lose their lives. They have lost their property, and they have nothing to go back to. I think this is the group that we need to pay special attention to, and we need to support.

Meanwhile, until the situation in Iraq is safe enough for people to return, we do need to support the refugees in the region because we cannot encourage return to Iraq at this stage with the security

being as it is, the fighting, and the living conditions in Iraq would not allow for a large number of return.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mrs. Brown?

Mrs. BROWN. I would say, in answer to your question, that the obligation is to find durable solutions when people are identified as refugees. In the context of people losing a particular group of people who may help Iraq, in fact, in the past, we have seen that refugees, once protected, once given the opportunity for their children to attend schools, et cetera, even in resettlement, that, in fact, preserved the brain because when it became safe, they did return.

But if you put people in a situation where they cannot live where they are, and they cannot protect their families in the host countries, their children are not able to be in schools, how are we protecting the brain trust of Iraq in this way?

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Holdridge?

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. Yes. Real briefly, we have just done a fresh survey—it happens to be in Amman, not in Syria—under what conditions that most of the refugees would go back, and it is to Baghdad because about 68 percent of the refugees there are from Baghdad, and the overwhelming majority said that they would not go back if there was a precipitous exit of United States forces or until they were convinced that there was internal capacity within Iraq to establish rule of law and security.

So those are the conditions in the heads of most of those refugees that are in Amman, and, I imagine, if we did a survey in Damascus, it would be similar to that. It is lawless in Baghdad. We were just there 2 weeks ago. You do not move without protection in most of these neighborhoods, and a large percentage of the population has been displaced, and where they used to live, they can no longer go back, and there is a lot of hurt and vengeance because of the types of crimes that have been done to each other's families and tribes and religious sects there. So no one is going back real soon.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Fortenberry?

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all for coming today and for your sacrificial work on behalf of our most vulnerable in the world.

I think to try to continue this line of questioning and parse it a little bit differently, if you look at a continuum of needs, those who perhaps fled early and have established some degree of continuity, economic sustainability, cultural integration, whether that is in Syria or Jordan, perhaps make up a less-vulnerable population. Those who might be capable because of security gains in Iraq and have the established family or ethnic and familial bonds might have communities of support in Iraq that would make it more probable they could return in a reasonable timeline.

I think you, Mrs. Brown, mentioned the large number of people who were fleeing because of threats of death, and perhaps the impossibility, because of some of the other complications you mentioned, Mr. Holdridge, for them to return anytime soon or if ever.

What would be the disposition generally of persons who fall into those categories? Would they wish to return once it settles? You were just touching on this. Once security settles a little bit more, would staying in the region be preferable? Would breaking free into

new opportunities in Western Europe or the United States be preferable?

Obviously, you are going to want to tend to go back to what you know and who you are and the place that formed you, but if you could perhaps parse the percentage of folks who might fall into that last category, who have the ability to move. It is a necessity for them to be moved in order to be saved and would welcome such an opportunity. I think quantifying that number might be helpful.

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. Well, I think that is fairly easy to answer. If you are poor, and that means most of the folks that came after February 2006, the refugees that came out, the majority of refugees in Syria and Jordan and the great majority that came out after February 2006, if you are poor, if you have limited assets there, if you cannot go home to your neighborhoods where you did, and if you were in some way compromised in the sectarian violence—your brother was identified on being one side or the other, or, with the Americans there, or a religious minority, then you long to leave and be resettled.

You do long, and you will long, to be resettled in those categories, and it happens to represent the majority of refugees, right now as we speak, in Amman and even a larger number in Damascus.

Mrs. BROWN. I think you can refer to the UNHCR's statistics of the individuals that they registered to find some alarming statistics, and perhaps identifying those groups that would, in all likelihood, not be able to return. Just as an example, in Syria, of the individuals registered, 5 percent are identified as women at risk. These women have no protector, could not probably return, and are in a dangerous situation in which they are already in the same, within Jordan, 7 percent of those registered.

A point I would like to make is that those registered implies that they had the wherewithal to get to the registration, and, in fact, many of the most vulnerable cannot even make it through that process.

So we are looking at, at least, 7 percent of the population being women at risk, who would be endangered. That type of statistic may help you break it down.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Okay. Thank you. One other question, Mr. Chairman, if I could.

We have talked extensively about Jordan's policies, as well as Syria's. Obviously, those countries are in close proximity, bordering Iraq. It might be the easiest, in terms of cultural affinity, religious affinity, for people to flee there, as well as proximity. What other countries are engaged, particularly in the region, in trying to assist in this question because, again, it was sort of touched on, the political questions earlier?

One large political question that sits out there is multinational and regional cooperation to augment our own sacrificial security efforts on behalf of Iraq by particularly neighboring countries that have the resources to be able to participate in deeper forms of assistance, both economically, politically, in order to help stabilize the country.

So what other countries are willing, actually, to help on this particular question in a significant way? No one?

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. I mean, these numbers issues are very difficult around refugees in neighboring countries, but the commonly used number in Lebanon is 50,000. It is probably a bit high. Egypt: 70,000, which may be a bit high.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Kuwait?

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. Yes. There are some there, but, you know, Kuwaitis have closed the border for the last 2 months, except on a very exceptional basis, because there was some movement of the Shi'as in the south from March 25th on. It is closed off. You cannot come across that as a Shi'a Iraqi into Kuwait now unless you have got some exceptional pull. So that is pretty closed off, too.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Do we have a concept of how many are in Iran?

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. Well, you know, there was an emptying of Iran during 2004–2005, and the State Department provided quite a bit of funds through PRM to resettle those folks in Iraq, most of them along those border provinces and in what is now the Kurdistan regional government. As far as I know, the places in country of sanctuary are in Kurdistan, KRG, and those recently annexed parts of it that are under discussion: Article 140, not necessarily Kirkuk, but down the east coast, the eastern border, as far as Mandali, Qiziljah, and up, that particular area there.

But the Kurds are closing the door, too. I mean, they are afraid of destabilization within KRG, and they have got their hands full with the PKK issue in the north.

Jordan has closed the border. Syria has closed the border, except in exceptional cases. They are pretty locked in at this particular point, I am sorry to say.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Okay. Yes, sir?

Mr. TORBAY. I would like to answer a couple of the questions.

Unfortunately, in the Middle East, the poorest countries are the ones that receive the majority of the refugees. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates did not receive many refugees. If you look at the economies in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, and Egypt, but mainly those first three, those are the ones that received the bulk of the refugees. Historically, the region has not been very refugee friendly. They accept them. There are not many rights that are given to refugees. If you look at the policy on refugees in Lebanon, they have been there for 30 or 40 years, and they still do not have many rights.

This is part of the problem, in terms of what would they do? What would the Iraqis do eventually? Of course, if there are economic opportunities, everybody, not just in Iraq but all over the world, would want to have better economic opportunities. But in terms of staying in the region or going back to Iraq, if those are the options, chances are that the majority of them would go back to Iraq once the situation stabilizes rather than staying in the region.

On your question on Iran, we are working along the marsh areas in the south, and that border is so porous that it is really difficult. One day, they go to Iran; the other day, they come back to Iraq. It is really difficult to know who are refugees and who are traveling there for economic or for family size.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Thank you.

Mrs. BROWN. Just to add, in the context of resettlement, other countries have received numbers. Sweden, as we say, has received a tremendous number. Australia and Canada are also engaged. In terms of direct assistance, the European countries have been slow but, I understand, are beginning to contribute, and the UNHCR did get some assistance from the United Arab Emirates, I believe.

Mr. DELAHUNT [presiding]. Thank you. I am not Mr. Ackerman, in the event that there is any confusion, and he asked to be excused. He has other commitments.

Let me begin my round of questioning by expressing my gratitude to the work that you, as individuals and the agencies which you represent, have done. It is extraordinary, and we all owe you a deep debt of gratitude.

Let me just make a note. Mr. Torbay, I really do embrace your suggestion about a "humanitarian surge." I think it is extremely timely, and, Mrs. Brown, I think your suggestion that rather than 12,000, 60,000 Iraqi refugees could be accepted here in the United States makes a statement to the rest of the world, that we are the kind of people that we know we are and that the rest of the world remembers the United States being.

I want to follow up on the line of questioning that Mr. Fortenberry was talking about because he asked you, what other states have made contributions? Really, it seems that the state that has made the most significant contribution is Syria and then Jordan. I will not speak to those ironies, in the sense of Syria. That should be the subject for a whole other conversation.

However, in your statement, Mrs. Brown, you say this: "Many of the Gulf Arab states have—" I cannot read my own handwriting now—"have indicated, have refused us and are waiting before they make any effort until Iraq itself gives more help to their own citizens."

That seems rather reasonable. As I indicated in my opening remarks, we have a moral responsibility, we, the United States, and we have to do what we are talking about here because it is our moral obligation. At the same time, we have talked about the surplus, the estimated surplus, that exists, or is estimated to emerge, or is emerging as we are having this conversation.

I have expressed, in my own way at different times, my incredulity that the Iraqis, the Maliki government—I want to be very specific about that, the Maliki government—has done next to nothing. I understand there are capacity issues, and I respect that. I have witnessed it in other nations where I have had an involvement. Haiti comes to mind immediately. It is a failed state, and it takes time and patience.

Where the money exists, has there been an effort by the United States Government, by the Bush administration, to influence the Maliki government to take 4 to 5 percent of the surplus and distribute it? If you do not have the capacity but have the asset or the wherewithal, distribute it to groups such as those groups whom you represent or to the United Nations that, I know, are prepared to do something with it in a way that is effective in terms of its delivery. Can you help me, Mrs. Brown?

Mrs. BROWN. I cannot speak to how much effort, et cetera. I do know that the Iraqi Government pledged \$25 million to assist Syria and Jordan. I am not sure that it has ever actually been delivered.

Mr. DELAHUNT. But just think of what you said, \$25 million, and we are talking tens of billions of money just sitting in a bank, and we are hearing the desperate conditions from those of you who understand the realities on the ground. I mean, is there anybody other than some Members of Congress that are saying, "Where are you?" Is there anybody in the Middle East, Mr. Holdridge?

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. There are some political difficulties for the current head of state in Iraq to be publicly announcing assistance to refugees in Syria and Jordan. That said, if the United States State Department and Department of Defense decided to make it a priority issue in their discussions with the government, I have no doubt that the \$25 million could be 10 times that much.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Can you educate me as to what those political difficulties are because maybe the United States Congress, rather than the Department of Defense—if it is not a priority for the White House, it ought to be a priority for the United States Congress. We have a supplemental budget that is coming up.

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. Well, it is the perceptions. There would be the public announcements. These are perceptions. These are not what are in my—

Mr. DELAHUNT. I understand.

Mr. HOLDRIDGE [continuing]. Of providing incentives for people to leave Iraq while you have so many internally displaced in such a tragic situation on the ground. Those would be some difficulties the current administration might have.

You will remember, it was not too long ago when there was a short and aborted effort to bring returnees back and to herald it as a clear sign that the surge was working, and now Baghdad was safe. That was stillborn, as you know.

Mr. DELAHUNT. That was a total failure. Let us just put it out in pure English.

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. It was a failure. There are those sorts of difficulties, Mr. Chairman, but they are surmountable, with the proper pressure from our Government.

Mr. DELAHUNT. But what is the reluctance of the Maliki government of just to take the money, simply out of humanitarian reasons, sign off, and distribute it to, you know, groups such as yours and/or the United Nations and have this money distributed so that this humanitarian crisis will not continue and, in fact, stabilize the region and, hopefully, stabilize Iraq so that the Iraqi people can get on and nurture this very incipient democracy? What is the problem with the Maliki government?

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. Just to conclude, there are difficulties. As I have stated, there are some political issues there in doing that in a public way, but they are very easily surmountable with the right amount of pressure, it would seem to me, from the international community and, in your words, to say, "Just write the check." I think it is a mistake on the part of the Iraqi Government, and I do not see why it is not being done, and maybe it will be done now.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Torbay?

Mr. TORBAY. I do not think I can answer your question, but I think there are a few issues with the Iraqi Government from what we see, working with the different ministries, be it the Ministry of Health, or the Ministry of Migration, or the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, which is a critical ministry, given the high unemployment in Iraq.

Looking at their budget for last year, putting aside the supplemental, they only managed to spend 25 percent of their budget, without the surplus, 25 percent. I think there is an issue of priorities of the Iraqi Government, as well as competence, in terms of knowing how to go about it, but also their priorities. What is their priority?

I cannot speak to whether the United States Government or any other government has put pressure on the Iraqi Government to start spending some money. We have not seen any indication of that. I think there is a need to put more pressure on the government, but also, at the same time, there is a need to show a willingness to support them technically, in terms of showing them how to go about these things because that is the major problem that—

Mr. DELAHUNT. I have no reluctance in providing the know-how, the technical knowledge, the ability to develop these institutions, but, by the time we get there, given the conditions, as you describe them, it is going to be too late, and we will have achieved a situation that, in many respects, I believe, and this is just guesswork on my part, that will be comparable to what we see in the camps in Darfur, and the implications for the entire Middle East are such that what we have witnessed the last several, 3, 4, 5 years; that will be nothing compared to what disaster is looming, in terms of the entire region, when you have millions and millions of people who are dispossessed.

My friend from California speaks about radical elements within the region. Well, if you were sitting there in those conditions, that radical appeal, I dare say, would be something that would be inviting. If we do not intervene soon, I dare say that we are going to find ourselves regretting, I think, the inertia that we are going through now, and, hopefully, these hearings, and there will be more hearings, and there is a supplemental budget coming up, this issue will, hopefully, receive the attention from the administration that it deserves, and, hopefully, those in power currently in Iraq are going to understand that they are going to have to share this burden because they do have the assets. They might not have the capacity, but they have the assets, and, with that, I will call on my friend from California and ranking member, Mr. Rohrabacher.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me add that I certainly am in complete agreement with the chairman in his efforts to convince the Iraqi Government to start picking up the cost of this burden of refugees, as well as, I might add, we have an agreement that the Iraqi Government perhaps should start picking up the costs for everything else as well, considering that it is going to be a very wealthy, wealthy government as the oil production continues to expand and as the price of oil, unfortunately, continues to expand with it. So we do have those areas of agreement.

When you were talking about the internally displaced populations, how many of those people internally displaced in Iraq were internally displaced prior to America's intervention?

Mr. TORBAY. The number that the international community agrees on is 1 to 1.2 before the invasion, and the majority of the 2.7, after the invasion, especially after the bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So it is 2.7 now, and it was 1.2 before. When you say, "the bombing of the mosque," it was the bombing of a mosque not by American airplanes but by fellow Iraqis of a different sect that decided that they were going to bomb somebody else's mosque.

The 1.2 million displaced people in Iraq that were there before our American intervention; let us just note that they were displaced basically, sometimes purposely, by the Saddam Hussein regime. Earlier on, we heard lots of claims that no one ever wanted us to go in, and no Iraqi was ever on our side.

When you take a look at that number of 1.2 million displaced people, and you see the mass graves that we have uncovered that were left over from Saddam Hussein's era, it becomes very clear that this is not a situation where the United States entered a tranquil region and turned it upside down. This is a case where hundreds of thousands of people were being slaughtered by the regime and where 1.2 million of his own people were internally displaced by that dictatorship. Our intervention, of course, was aimed at eliminating that particular dictator, which we did.

I visited Iraq a few months ago and went to northern Iraq, went to Erbil, and visited an encampment of internally displaced Iraqis. They happened to have been Kurds who had been displaced from some other part of the country who were now in an encampment that was paid for as a refugee encampment in Erbil, but they were Kurds. I found it very fascinating, and I interviewed a number of them. What I found fascinating was why they were still in that encampment, even though the Kurds had made it very clear that any Kurdish people would be perfectly accepted as now residents and citizens of this Kurdish autonomous area.

The refugees I spoke to suggested that they wanted to stay there because if they did not, they might lose the opportunity to be seriously considered to be brought to the United States as refugees, and the other answer which was previous was, While we are in this camp, we actually have subsidized housing, which we will not get if we simply become part of the overall Kurdish community.

It seems to me that the promise that there might be a chance for people to immigrate to the United States and perhaps other European and Western countries is something that creates refugee problems rather than solves refugee problems. Now, I know that we have to deal with people who are in desperate circumstances.

It seems to me that there is plenty of money available, as I say, especially if the Iraqis would step up, to handle emergency situations, but the long-term issues that we have been discussing today—I think sometimes you can help somebody to the point that they want to stay in a refugee camp like the ones I talked to in Erbil.

Am I just being totally heartless and off base here, or do you think there is some validity to this concept that sometimes, by helping people too much, you create problems that would not exist otherwise? Please go right ahead.

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. I would just say, it was a very unrepresentative sample that you visited. I can give you countless examples. I could give you a town called Khanaquin that was basically almost destroyed by Saddam Hussein. It is about 3 hours south of Sulaimaniya. It was 35,000 to 40,000 when I arrived there in the spring of 2003. It is 140,000 now, and it is returnees from Iran, Kurds. It is Kurds that have left Baghdad and other cities, Baqubah, to come back because it is a relatively safe area.

The vast majority—I am talking about hundreds and hundreds of thousands of Kurds—that have returned from inside Iraq and from Iran to the area controlled by the Kurdistan regional government nowadays have sought to make a new life for themselves with cinder blocks, some zinc roofs, a bore hole, looking for some jobs, et cetera, and the two political parties there, the PUK and PDK, not as much as they could have, but they have definitely facilitated that process with humanitarian assistance.

So while I would not at all question what you saw as being true because there is a camp like that as well outside of Sulaimaniya, I would just say it is very unrepresentative of the majority of the people going back to KRG.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. However, what you are verifying is that there has been a situation where people who were displaced have actually found refuge and a new life inside Iraq, which, had we, for example, set them up like we did the other refugees, like the Palestinians, who have had to end up in camps for decades, and decades, and decades, which I do not think has served them, nor served the cause of peace. Unfortunately, I guess, the Israelis, of course, would not be taking them back. There is a complication to that particular example, which we understand.

First of all, let me just say, I appreciate all of the work, and I know about the work of each of your organizations that you have done over the years, and I have seen the work that you have done in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and even in conflict situations where people's lives are at stake of your own people. So I deeply admire that.

Just because I simply think that, right now, in terms of what we should be doing in Iraq, has to have a long-term perspective does not mean that I do not deeply appreciate the humanitarian endeavors, and not just good-heartedness, but also the impulses that you are following, the positive impulses, human impulses, that you are following are very admirable, and I respect them very much, as well as the skill and talent. I have met your people in the field. They have all been very professional. I met the people in Jordan.

You know, Mr. Chairman, I hate to say this, but I do not want to see people doing these hand gestures when I am talking. This is rude and disruptive. I am not asking them to be removed, but let me just note that while we have been trying to have this discussion, there has been someone putting fingers over your head, as if you have something on your head, and making these gestures. It

is rude, it is disruptive, it is a violation of other people's rights, and just a disgusting display of bad values.

But, anyway, let me just note, you guys represent the best of the humanitarian instincts of humankind, and I think America has to always be sympathetic with what you are telling us is right for those people in an emergency situation. I am going to try to use my head to make sure that we have policies that, in the long run, will not elongate a situation, but I sure appreciate everything you have said today and the good work you are doing, so thank you very much.

Mr. SCOTT [presiding]. Thank you, Mr. Rohrabacher, and I certainly repeat your concern about our guests in the audience, that if they prevail in the remaining moments, we will ask the police to escort you out. But you are welcome. Please do not make any hand gestures.

As you note, I am a new chairman coming forward, and I would suspect that as soon as I get my chance at the big chair, the bell rings. But, anyway, we will take as much advantage as we can. I want to ask one quick question, and my colleague is here, so I will not be very long. I want to give her a chance to ask a question as well, Ms. Sheila Jackson Lee from Texas.

First of all, let me just get your thoughts on this because I think we need to get an answer to this particular question, and that is this: How is it that these militia groups, especially Sadr's group, they are fighting us, they are running, they are hitting, they are dodging, and they are scoring on the ground, yet, at the same time, they are delivering services for these refugees, not just any kind of services.

They are not just bringing food; they are bringing clothes, they are bringing oil, electricity. They are setting up operations. They are settling legal disputes, property disputes. They are doing what the Iraqi Government should be doing and the United States but are not, and I am wondering why and how this is being accomplished.

I think this is the most dangerous situation facing us. Could you all just comment and just explain how they are accomplishing all of this, these militias, and we are not able to do it? Mr. Torbay?

Mr. TORBAY. I agree with you that the Martyr Army, or the Southern Militia, is actually providing services that the government and the international community are not providing, although they should be providing. People always look for alternatives. People always look for basic services. People need to feed their children. People need to care after their children and wife and siblings. If the government does not provide, then they do look for other people.

I do not know where the funding comes from, but it is not strange to the region. You mentioned Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas. That is something that has been happening there for quite a while, and, unfortunately, this started in Iraq in 2003. It did not just start now. It is now that we are seeing it.

In April 2003, when we went to Nasiriyah, there was a symbol of this, where there were religious men in clinics asking for the aid to be given to them so that they would distribute it to the people. This is how they win the hearts and minds of people.

Mr. SCOTT. Mr. Torbay, let me just ask—time is short, so I wish I had a little bit more time—I can understand that with clothes and food and tangible things you can hand over, but these folks are setting up and providing electricity, legal apparatuses. How is that? Mr. Holdridge?

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. Well, down in the south and south central, electricity is, for the most part, generators, and they are providing the fuel. An awful lot, you know, is being smuggled. So that is how they are able to do that.

Mr. SCOTT. Let me ask one other thing. I hate to be quick, but I want to get it in.

Do you think that we should have a White House-level, top-of-the-level position to deal with this humanitarian effort, and would that help kind of spur us along? I think that it is very hard for other nations to look and buy into this when they see the Iraqi Government itself is not doing it. The Iraqi Government is almost like an extension of ours, and here we are, as I alluded to earlier, 12,000 that we have set as a goal that have not even gotten in. That does not even make any kind of a dent into 1 million.

So it just seems that we are not setting that proper example. Would us having a high-level, White House-level appointee heading this effort up with the energy, and we give him the resources he needs, would that be helpful? Either one right quick.

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. Are you talking about the situation inside Iraq?

Mr. SCOTT. Where each of you feel we need a White House-level appointee.

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. The situation inside Iraq, you are talking about, with the displaced there?

Mr. SCOTT. Yes.

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. I am really happy to have this opportunity to make this point. One of the best opportunities missed over the last 5 years; there have been American NGOs at work that have provided a tremendous amount of assistance and are an alternative to the types of assistance going through Jaysh al-Mahdi.

We have been starved of funds, and it is the organizations like IMC, and CHF, and ACDI, and Mercy Corps, we have been starved of funds because it is going through DoD, it is going through PRTs, and it is going through CERP funds, and you are never going to basically use those effectively for sustainable development inside Iraq and as an antidote to what the Sadr people are doing there.

Mr. SCOTT. Let me ask you this. What I am trying to get at right quickly is, yes or no, do we need a White House-level position? Would it help?

Mr. HOLDRIDGE. It would help get the attention needed to reconfigure foreign assistance inside Iraq.

Mr. TORBAY. I think there is a need for leadership, whether it is the White House or Congress, there is a need for leadership that would coordinate all of the United States humanitarian efforts in Iraq.

Mr. SCOTT. Mrs. Brown?

Mrs. BROWN. I do not think it would hurt.

Mr. SCOTT. Good. Let me go to my colleague. We have got about 4 minutes before we vote. Ms. Sheila Jackson Lee, do you have a question from Texas?

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me just put on the record several brief points because the time is flowing very quickly.

I believe that Iraq's internally displaced population, more than al-Qaeda, more than the Iranian influence, is the primary threat to the country's stability. Having been in Iraq just recently, I want to applaud all of the witnesses because the cry was for more humanitarian aid, in particular, to the U.S. Conference of Bishops and your refugee efforts. I have worked with you—come from the territory of Bishop Fiorenza and now Cardinal Dinero, and, obviously, we are well recognizing your call.

Isn't it ridiculous that the militia can now provide the basic humanitarian aid to these displaced persons, or internally displaced persons, and we cannot find a structure? My basic question is, are we at a point of no return, Mrs. Brown, in relation to our refugees?

Mrs. BROWN. Let us hope we never reach a point of no return. The idea is eventually people will be able to return, but what we have is a situation where people cannot return now and cannot continue to exist in the situation that they are in. We need to protect those people now and hope that sometime in the future they have the ability to return.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. I am not going to exclude the other witnesses. Time moves on the clock. What I will say is that I believe that we are at a point of national disgrace. It is dual, both in terms of Iraq and the United States. I think the Maliki government is equally at fault, and I think that, as we raise this as a crisis, that there should be this greater focus on giving the humanitarian aid with the NGOs, not through Defense but through the Department of State.

I thank you for that. We will work with you on that. I chair the Congressional Children's Caucus. I welcome a further discussion, and you can count on this committee, I believe, to push this issue because it is the right thing to do. With that, I yield back.

Mr. SCOTT. Mr. Torbay, Mr. Holdridge, and Mrs. Brown, we thank you for your testimony. This meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:30 p.m., the joint subcommittees were adjourned.]

