



Iraq's Displacement Crisis and the International Response

Conference Summary Report

Co-sponsored by the Center for American Progress
and the Heinrich Böll Foundation

December 2007

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Acknowledgements

Iraq's Displacement Crisis and the International Response is a summary report of a conference held on Thursday, December 6, 2007, co-sponsored by the Center for American Progress and the Heinrich Böll Foundation. The idea stemmed from a desire to inform a larger audience about the Iraq displacement crisis and begin to develop more comprehensive and coordinated strategies to address it.

This report is a product of the ideas of Brian Katulis and Anita Sharma of the Center for American Progress and Adam Hunter of the Heinrich Böll Foundation. The author of this report is Anita Sharma, formerly the director of the ENOUGH, a project of the Center for American Progress and the International Crisis Group.

We are especially grateful to her and all the staff of the Center for American Progress and the Heinrich Böll Foundation who worked hard to make the event possible, among them: Winny Chen, Marlene Cooper Vasilic, Suzi Emmerling, Sean Duggan, Allison Price, Praveen Madhiraju, Alex Pryor, Natalie Ondiak, Kaliope Poulianos, Jack Swetland, Winnie Stachelberg, Mara Rudman, Larry Korb, Brian Katulis, Peter Rundlett, Sebastian Gräfe, and Adam Hunter and for the leadership of John Podesta and Helga Flores Trejo.

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Introduction and Summary

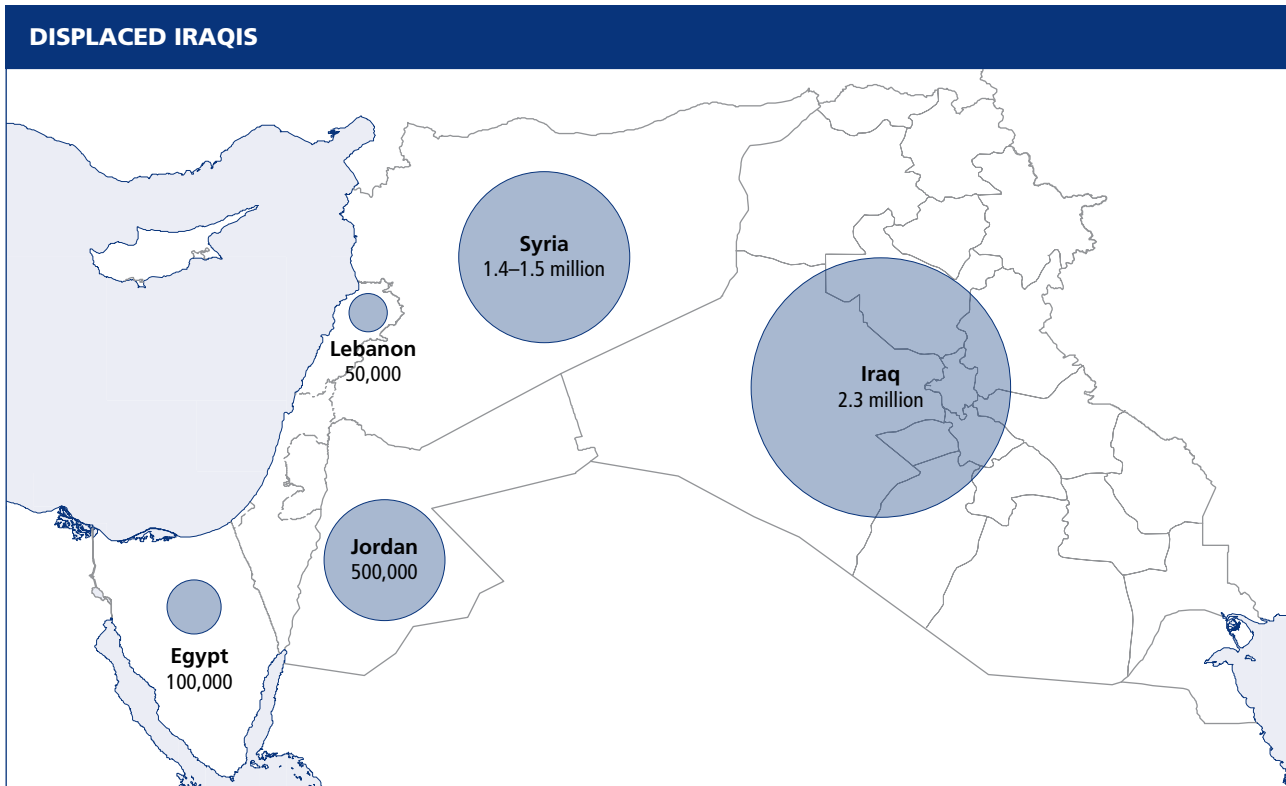
Violence in Iraq and the debate over continued U.S. engagement have overshadowed one of the world's largest humanitarian crises. Since 2006, sectarian fighting, political and criminal violence, lack of basic services, loss of livelihoods, spiraling inflation and uncertainty about the future pushed more than four million Iraqis from their homes, and made another four million dependent on assistance. Neighboring countries, which accepted more than two million refugees, now impose harsher visa restrictions, creating a "pressure-cooker" situation.

Although images of Iraqis streaming across the border have ceased to command media attention, those rendered homeless by the war are often unable to return safely to their homes yet are running out of resources abroad. Indeed, the Iraq war has caused the largest population displacement in the Middle East since 1948. Iraqis who fled to neighboring countries face tremendous uncertainties, including the threat of deportation. None of these host countries are a full signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention, and thus are not obligated to accord to the rights outlined in the convention. Refugees have limited access to basic health services and education and cannot work legally.

Of the possible outcomes to this displacement crisis, a safe return home is most preferred, yet this return must be accompanied by peaceful conditions. The recent flow of Iraqis home is a promising sign, but there may be other factors besides improved security at play here. Interviews with Iraqi refugees seem to suggest that financial incentives by the Iraqi government, alongside free bus and plane rides, play a role. Other refugees add that they have no alternative because their money is running out, their visas have expired, or their living conditions are poor. That means the *safe* return of Iraq's estimated 4 million refugees still rests on a steadily improving security situation that results in the peaceful resolution of Iraq's multiple sectarian conflicts.

While the humanitarian crisis in Iraq will only be resolved through diplomatic efforts to achieve a sustainable peaceful settlement of Iraq's internal conflicts, much work is left undone that can immediately ameliorate the situation. And efforts are underway in Congress. In early February President Bush signed into law H.R.4986, the Department of Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2008. The bill, sponsored by Senators Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Gordon Smith (R-OR), Carl Levin (D-MI), and Sam Brownback (R-KS) includes language on the protection and resettlement of Iraqi refugees. This type of support is sorely needed.

Last year, the United States resettled only 1,608 Iraqi refugees. The United States has announced it will resettle 12,000 Iraqis in fiscal year 2008, too few in the eyes of many.



Source: International Organization for Migration.

Instead, we should be leading by example, following a long-held tradition of welcoming refugees to this country. In the post-Vietnam War era, more than 130,000 people were resettled in five months of 1975 alone, and the United States has taken in more than 900,000 Vietnamese refugees overall.

Indeed, the American tradition of welcoming refugees fleeing war and oppression is admirably broad. During the Cold War, for example, the United States welcomed more than 600,000 Russian Jews. During the Bosnian conflict, we accepted more than 150,000 Bosnian refugees. And 10 years ago, the United States helped airlift 2,000 Kurds out of Iraq.

At the same time, the United States is investing too little money and not enough political will to appropriately address the Iraqi refugee issue. For instance, of the

\$200 billion request in war funding, a mere \$250 million is for refugee assistance and bilateral support to the countries who are hosting them. U.S. presidential leadership is also lacking, with President Bush discussing a potential Iraq genocide and humanitarian crisis only in the context of U.S. troop withdrawal.

The return of Iraqis has been touted as a successful byproduct of the surge, yet the confusion that ensued highlights the lack of planning and coordination to deal with the displacement problem. Newspaper articles quoted U.S. military officials and UN spokespersons voicing their frustration with the Iraqi government's inability to address the issue and asking for guidance.

In the absence of a plan, groups are creating their own ad-hoc arrangements. An informal survey shows five such plans:

from the U.S. military; from the U.S. Agency for International Development; from the United Nations; from the Iraqi Red Crescent; and from several Iraqi ministries. Among these plans, it is clear that the protection of Iraqi civilians from the potential rise of renewed sectarian tensions will fall under the purview of the U.S. military. What is less clear is how this component fits into the drawdown plans of the U.S. military.

The recent fanfare surrounding the return of Iraqi refugees from Syria had been touted as refugees voting with their feet—buoyed by the success of the surge and the improved security situation inside the country. But this assessment is not accurate. Other factors include financial incentives such as the cash payments by the Iraqi government of one million dinars, or about \$750 to each of the returnees. Then there was Syria's decision at the request of the Iraqi government in October to essentially close its border to Iraqi refugees, alongside the imposition of a much stricter visa regime and the resulting fear and trepidation within the refugee community.

An initial United Nations High Commission for Refugees survey of 110 returnee families showed that only a minority of refugees were returning because they thought the security situation had improved in Iraq. The survey revealed that 26 percent were leaving because their status had expired, 46 percent were leaving because they did not have authorization to work and they could no longer feed their families, and only 14 percent were leaving as a result of the improved security situation inside the country.

But there are reasons for hope, too. One mitigating factor is that people uprooted

in the current crisis have not been displaced for very long. They may still be able to return home if the security situation is resolved in the near future. Unfortunately, this may not be possible for some of the minority populations, such as the Christian minority or the Mandaean-Sabean minorities, both of whom face a precarious future in the new Iraq. But for others, the way the new government of Iraq deals with both the displaced and the returning refugees is a very important indicator of its commitment to a pluralistic and democratic Iraq.

To shed much needed light on this tragic situation, the Center for American Progress and the Heinrich Böll Foundation late last year jointly sponsored a conference, “Iraq's Displacement Crisis and the International Response,” in an attempt to address this pressing issue, raise awareness, and offer solutions. While the humanitarian crisis in Iraq will only be resolved through diplomatic efforts to achieve a sustainable peaceful settlement to Iraq's internal conflicts, much work is left undone that could more immediately ameliorate the situation.

Panelists discussed ongoing efforts in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East, and urged better cooperation and information sharing and pressed all to assist the most vulnerable and take full responsibility for the crisis and its response. Specific recommendations from the conference include:

The Government of Iraq

- Work toward a political solution and reconciliation so that peaceful conditions in Iraq prevail, enabling refugees to safely return home

- Encourage the governments of Syria and Jordan to open their borders and allow refugees in as necessary
- Facilitate the return of refugees home only when conditions are safe and do so with protections and guarantees
- Coordinate plans for returns and resettlement within the ministries, with international agencies and donors and the NGO community

Regional Governments

- Allow for access to legal protection and health and education services
- Stop threats of deportation and arrest
- Encourage Iraqi families to register with UNHCR to access services
- Work with the Iraqi government and international community to develop a coordinated return plan
- Allow Iraqi refugees to secure livelihoods
- Create conditions and protections that provide legal protection, access to services, and freedom of movement

The United Nations

- Assume a stronger leadership role in the coordinating of humanitarian assistance and return policies
- Devise creative solutions for resettlement and return in cooperation with the Iraqi government and international resettlement countries

International Donors

- Encourage a political resolution to the crisis

- Increase humanitarian assistance inside Iraq
- Provide bilateral aid to the neighboring countries, focusing on the increased demands for health, education, and basic services
- Fully fund appeals by the United Nations, international, and non-governmental organizations to assist Iraqi refugees and their host communities, coordinate assistance efforts, and increase the quotas of Iraqis resettled in third countries
- Recognize that the Arab-Israeli conflict and the plight of the displaced Palestinians is a major impediment to peace in the region
- Do not support the involuntary return of Iraqis

The U. S. Government

- The president should immediately recognize the scale and scope of the problem, assign high-level diplomats to the region, and develop a coordinated plan to address the crisis
- Support legislation to increase the amount of humanitarian assistance to Iraq, provide increased bilateral aid to those countries hosting Iraqi refugees, and engage more directly with Syria
- Increase the resettlement numbers of Iraqis, or at the very least meet the stated target of 12,000 in 2008
- Make the process less onerous and cumbersome for Iraqis seeking asylum by allowing for in-country visa processing, less restrictive screening, and provide more financial assistance to those admitted as special immigrant visas

- Begin contingency planning for returns and resettlement in coordination with the Iraqi government and United Nations

EU Member States

- Expand resettlement programs for Iraqis
- Standardize asylum applications
- Increase humanitarian assistance funding and bilateral support in the education and health sectors to countries hosting Iraqi refugees
- Do not force Iraqis to return against their will
- Urge the government of Iraq to create peaceful conditions through reconciliation

Non-Government Organizations

- Share information and attempt to coordinate plans with the displaced and communities
- Recognize the acute needs of Iraqi refugee children and women and tailor programming specifically for them
- Urge the government of Iraq and warring parties to find a peaceful solution to the conflict
- All of these proposals were worked out amid back-and-forth discussion and debate during our conference at the Center for American Progress on December 6, 2007. On the pages that follow, we summarize the dialogue and highlight the key parts of the program.

Conference Introductions

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY

Helga Flores Trejo, Director, Heinrich Böll Foundation, North America

John Podesta, President and CEO, Center for American Progress

KEYNOTE REMARKS BY

Earl Blumenauer, Congressman, U.S House of Representative (D-OR)

Center for American Progress President John Podesta opened the conference by detailing the staggering figures of the crisis—up to two million refugees living in neighboring countries, another two million internally displaced—and then noting that the dimensions of this crisis had yet to result in a coherent policy response for Iraqis who are beginning to return home or for those who are not yet ready to do so. The United States, he said, was primarily responsible for creating the conditions of these displaced Iraqis and thus faces a profound moral and strategic call to play a central role in ameliorating the conditions of these refugees.

Although the magnitude of this crisis is too large for any one country to deal with alone, Podesta said that by taking bold action the United States would acknowledge its responsibility and role in the conflict, and would inspire other countries to follow its example and open their doors. Furthermore, such leadership would be a key step in ensuring regional security and rebuilding good will in the Middle East, while dealing with a very real humanitarian crisis exiting today. “Failure to act,” he warned, “will heighten the pressure cooker environment and cast doubt over the reconciliation process in Iraq.”

One of the key congressional leaders on this issue, Representative Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), provided keynote remarks. Rep. Blumenauer, who opposed the Iraq war from the start, has introduced his own plan for a military redeployment from Iraq and recently supported key legislation that would increase the time that troops spend at home between deployments and also ban permanent U.S. bases in Iraq. Last May, along with his congressional colleagues Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and Chris Shays (R-CT), he introduced the Responsibility to Iraqi Refugees Act of 2007 to help address this growing humanitarian crisis.

His bill seeks to establish a special visa program to allow 15,000 Iraqis whose lives are threatened due to their assistance of American and international organizations to come

to the United States. The bill would also pave the way for an additional 20,000 particularly vulnerable Iraqis to resettle in the United States, and would allow for provisions for people who might otherwise currently be barred entry because they provided ransom payments or other goods to armed groups in Iraq under duress. The bill also authorizes a long overdue study to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of programs intended to protect and assist Iraqi refugees.

Concerns for the refugee crisis are based not on his opposition to the war, Blumenauer explained, but rather from his commitment to strong stewardship in the Middle East, alongside his understanding that proper management of issues relating to the refugee crisis would help guide a broader range of solutions for stability in that region. He added that everyone, regardless of their position on the war, should be alarmed that the United States has failed to step up to do its part welcoming refugees. “It’s particularly troubling when we deal with the case of people who are at special risk because they cooperated with the United States, because they believed in us and helped us as guides, interpreters, and support personnel,” he said.

The core failure of our refugee policy is a mismatch between the scope of the problem and the limited resources that the United States to this point has seen fit in addressing it, he said. After the ouster of Saddam Hussein the Bush administration stood back and witnessed the fastest growing humanitarian crisis in the world, and yet we failed to deal with it, he noted.

Indeed Blumenauer said that the United States’ responses in 2005 and 2006 were miniscule, with around 200 people admitted each year. In 2007, efforts were made

to loosen the bureaucratic hurdles and increase the numbers, yet by the end of that year the United States was able to admit only about 1,800 Iraqis. It also looks unlikely that the United States will meet its target of 12,000 Iraqis this year, he said.

In fact, Rep. Blumenauer in his keynote address noted that of the \$200 billion request in war funding, a mere \$250 million is for refugee assistance and bilateral support to the countries who are hosting them. Ultimately though, “this is all about will; it’s not about wallet,” he said. “It is about whether the United States administration and Congress will step up and do the right thing,” he said.

Urging a “can do” attitude from the Bush administration, Blumenauer recommended several creative solutions to help break the impasse and lead to change. Among them are strengthening the policy and program coordination role by naming a senior coordinator at the highest political level with the authority to coordinate with the different agencies and cut through the bureaucratic red tape to ensure that in-country processing in Iraq and other countries is actually available on the scale that is necessary.

“I continue to believe that with the largest embassy on the planet in the history of the world, we ought to be able to do more in Baghdad in a secure and efficient manner, one would think,” he said. Furthermore, he said he intends to request an independent assessment from the Government Accountability Office on the adequacy and effectiveness of the programs that we’ve established to protect and assist Iraqi refugees and to make recommendations on improving them. There ought to be a sense of urgency, Blumenauer stated in closing. “It is the international equivalent of a Katrina moment.”

Helga Flores Trejo, executive director of the Heinrich Böll Foundation in North America, then introduced the first panel by saying that European nations cannot stay uninvolved when it comes to dealing with the consequences of the war in Iraq. It is obvious that an unstable Iraq will be counterproductive to Europe's interest of a secure Middle East, she explained. To

date, the refugee flow has been shouldered mostly by countries in the immediate region, with very few coming to Europe and the United States. Determining what needs to be done, who will do it, organizing an international response to this challenge, and coordinating these efforts will not be easy, but it is in the world's interest to get it right, she said.



Ismaail Ahmed Hamed, left, Avin Ibrahim Yousif, center, and Sedim Ibrahim Yousif wait at the Detroit airport after arriving on a flight from New York in August 2007. Hamed, who left Iraq for Turkey in 2005, is among the first of an influx of Iraqi refugees expected to resettle in the United States area after escaping the continued turmoil in their home country. By the end of 2007, the United States was able to admit only about 1,800 Iraqis and is unlikely to meet its target of 12,000 in 2008. (AP Photo/Carlos Osorio)

Panel One: The Current Crisis and Responses Thus Far

PANELISTS

Reinhold Brender, Counselor, Political Section, European Commission Delegation to the United States

Bill Frelick, Refugee Policy Director, Human Rights Watch

Said Hakki, President, Iraqi Red Crescent Society

Victor Tanner, Adjunct faculty member, Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University and consultant for the International Rescue Committee

MODERATED BY

Anita Sharma, Center for American Progress

When she first conceived of this conference with the Heinrich Böll Foundation, there was very little attention to the issue, said Anita Sharma of the Center for American Progress. Only a handful of organizations were advocating on this issue, the few congressional pieces of legislation were languishing in committee, none of the benchmarks that were mandated by Congress looked at the humanitarian issue, and on the ground the situation seemed to be spiraling out of control—with thousands of Iraqis leaving their homes each day with the neighboring countries shouldering much of the burden and NGOs and UN agencies struggling to meet the ever increasing demands.

Violence levels have recently decreased somewhat, allowing some people to gingerly return home, Sharma noted, yet the panelists discussed how necessary it is to understand the factors for why people are returning home. She raised several questions. “What has led them to make this decision: Is it a lack of resources? Is it work restrictions that have left many Iraqis impoverished and eager for any chance to improve their lot? Do we also need to discuss how to assist those refugees who are now returning? Even if safety is not guaranteed, we have to recognize that Iraqis are returning on their accord and support them to the best extent possible,” she said.

Displacement was used as state policy in Iraq for the 35 years of Saddam Hussein’s rule, said researcher Victor Tanner. He provided a brief history of displacement under the Baath party and drew some points of comparison with the current crisis. Under the Baath party, he noted, expulsion of civilian populations was state policy and was used to punish and subdue populations who were seen as enemies of the state, neutralize political opposition, wage war against Iran, and secure economic gains.

Secondly, Tanner described how the full might of the state was brought to bear in policies of displacement. This included military might such as armor and artillery or non-conventional weapons, as were used in Kurdistan in Northern Iraq. In addition, coercive bureaucratic measures were also used to force people to leave as was accomplished in Kirkuk in the attempt to Arabize the city and gain control of the oil that lies under the Kirkuk region. It was also done through large economic development projects such as draining the marshes in southern Iraq.

Thirdly, Tanner explained that even though the numbers of people displaced during Saddam's reign were not as staggering as the numbers in the current crisis, they are quite remarkable all the same. As of 2000, there were some 800,000 internally displaced people in the north, of which 375,000 were Kurds who had been expelled in the campaigns of the '70s and the early '80s. About 225,000 Kurds were expelled during the Anfal campaign of 1988, and about 75,000 Kurds were displaced during internecine fighting in 1984 and 1996 between the KDP and the PUK, the two Kurdish parties in the north. While figures were much more difficult to document in the south, displacement also occurred, with half a million people displaced from the marshes during the Iran-Iraq war and other conflicts.

In sum, there were more than a million internally displaced and a half million externally displaced refugees, during a time when this strong regime controlled most of its territory, he said.

Tanner added, though, that it is a mistake to believe that displacements are a sectarian problem or the result of conflict

emanating from the minority populations. "It was a Saddam problem," he said. "It was a problem with the policies of the Iraqi state and the policies of the Baath regime. And this is something I think is important to remember when we look at the current crisis."

As such, these two crises compare in that they are both politically driven and politically motivated problems, said Tanner. The two crises are also layered so that there exist waves of vulnerability, and ultimately varying degrees of waves of misery or embitterment. For example some of the first people internally displaced in 2005 and 2006 had been uprooted because they were refugees from the earlier expulsions and lacked the resources and networks and became especially vulnerable.

The international community was generally silent on the treatment of displaced Iraqis during Saddam's regime, said Tanner, who urged the participants to break the current silence of the crisis. "If we can get this current crisis injected into the current political dialogue, then that silence ends, and that is the beginning of trying to address this problem with political solutions," he said. "With all respect for the humanitarian efforts and indeed for the resettlement efforts, if we're looking at the four million plus Iraqis who were displaced either within the borders of the country or outside, their only long-term solution will be a political solution in their country."

The battle for the new Iraq is now a struggle for survival being fought on daily basis by ordinary Iraqis all over the country and for Iraqis displaced outside the country, said Said Hakki, the director of the Iraqi Red Crescent Organization. The current security improvement in

Iraq provides us with a unique opportunity to address this crisis and is a “second bite of the apple,” he added.

Hakki provided an overview of the needs, stating that nearly 70 percent of those displaced are either women or children under the age of 12. Many of them lack basic services including access to clean water and other basic necessities as the steep rise of unemployment severely constrains the daily life of the Iraqi people. Those displaced externally face harsh living conditions, fear of displacement, and depleted financial resources.

Nearly one-fifth of those who returned recently from Syria found themselves internally displaced inside Iraq, Hakki noted. Unfortunately, he added that many of those in need cannot be reached by humanitarian groups operating sporadically without sustained physical presence in the country due to security constraints.

Hakki explained that for the past four years the Iraqi Red Crescent Organization has provided basic services, such as food, shelter, water, and clothing, in addition to disaster management, healthcare, information, and psychosocial assistance to those internally displaced throughout Iraq. It has 5,000 staff and 100,000 volunteers working from over 300 offices. Hakki’s organization has proposed a “Neighborhood Reconstruction Plan” to stabilize Baghdad by providing temporary settlement through the establishment of 120 reconstructed “neighborhood units” in Baghdad, each with a population of about 10,000 people.

This plan would also include the construction of schools and water treatment plants via local materials and labor and would aim to give every family a home with running water and electricity, a functioning local school providing K-6 education, job training for adults, and access to



Iraqi women carry humanitarian aid packages distributed by the Iraqi Red Crescent Society in eastern Baghdad. (AP Photo/Karim Kadim)



Sisters bathe at a camp for Shiites who have fled sectarian violence near the holy city of Najaf in July 2007. About 8 million Iraqis, nearly a third of the population, are in urgent need of water, sanitation, food and shelter. (AP Photo/Alaa al-Marjani)

healthcare. The one-year goal would be to normalize 600,000 internally displaced persons, or IDPs, currently based in Baghdad at the cost of about \$500 million. This goal requires the help of the local populations, the Iraqi government, regional neighbors, the Gulf States, the U. S. government, the United Nations, all the NGOs, and individuals who can make donations, said Hakki.

“If we left this humanitarian crisis unattended, the new Iraq will become a tragic and a fatal example of human affliction with far reaching consequences, not only for the new Iraq, but for the entire region and maybe the whole world,” Hakki concluded. “So I’m asking in the name of humanity and the name of civilization that we have a moral obligation to come together and help the people of Iraq,” he said. “United, we can successfully face the challenges that lie ahead.”

Bill Frelick of Human Rights Watch next spoke about the plight of Iraqi refugees in Lebanon. Frelick recently authored a report on the Iraqi refugee situation in Lebanon entitled “Rot Here or Die There: Bleak Choices for Iraqi Refugees in Lebanon,” which documents the Lebanese government’s failure to provide legal status for Iraq refugees in Lebanon and details the impact of this policy on the refugees.

Although the numbers of Iraqi refugees, estimated at 50,000, are small compared to those in Syria and Jordan, Lebanon is shouldering a big burden when one factors in its small population of four million people, its existing responsibility of hosting more than 250,000 Palestinian refugees, and the current political instability and sectarian tensions. Frelick explained that with only limited protection granted by UNHCR, those who enter illegally seeking refuge from persecution, or who

enter legally but then overstay their visas for the same purpose, are treated as illegal immigrants and are subject to arrest, imprisonment, fines, and deportation. The UNHCR is unrecognized by the Lebanese government because the country is not a party to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or to the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees,

About 580 Iraqi refugees are in detention in Lebanon, many of whom are being held indefinitely, said Frelick. As a result, most Iraqis do not leave their homes unless absolutely necessary, and often do not approach UNHCR or the authorities for fear of exposing themselves to arrest, he noted.

Their lack of legal status in Lebanon also means that they are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation by employers and others who know that the Iraqis have no recourse to the Lebanese authorities, Frelick explained. Those who are imprisoned live in crowded conditions, are mixed with criminals, and are becoming increasingly desperate to leave. One way for people to leave is to “chose” to return to Iraq.

Frelick relayed an interview with an Iraqi in which he said: “No one tells me how long I’m going to be in prison. If I go back to Iraq, I will be killed. I don’t want to go back but it is better for me to go back than to spend one more day being locked up with criminals. I don’t want to stay in prison. I’ve never been to a prison in my life. This is the first time I’m in a room with criminals. I suffer so much in prison, I prefer to die.”

Frelick noted that Human Rights Watch asks that governments throughout the region provide temporary renewable legal

status to refugees, not engage in deportations, and reopen their borders and provide first asylum. In addition, Frelick said that the international community needs to recognize that it will not be able to resettle sufficient numbers in third countries and thus should increase its humanitarian assistance to the region to help neighboring countries cope with their burden.

“We have to convince the surrounding countries that we’re doing enough to make a difference,” he said. “When we resettled 1,608 refugees last year, Syria laughed at that because they were admitting 2,000 people a day,”

In terms of the financial backing, the Bush administration has requested \$196.4 billion in the Iraq supplemental for the war on terror in Iraq and Afghanistan for 2008, but only \$240 million of that money is for humanitarian assistance, he said. This is less than one-fifth of one percent of the total. “It’s less than the amount the U.S. spends in a single day to wage the war in Iraq and Afghanistan for the humanitarian side,” Frelick said. “You could characterize U.S. war spending as profligate, but you’d have to characterize the humanitarian side as penny pinching.”

Reinhold Brender, counselor, political section, European Commission Delegation to the United States, then told the audience that there should be no doubt that the European Union has a strong interest in and is strongly committed to supporting Iraq becoming a stable, politically viable and economically prosperous country. The European Union, he explained, spent €800 million. If important contributions of member states of the European Union are added, plus loans and debt relief, the figure amounts to more than 14 billion euro.

The EU, he added, is strongly committed to providing humanitarian assistance, and in 2007, the European Commission allocated €17.8 million to meet the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable Iraqis. For those displaced inside Iraq and in desperate need of basic services, such as water, sanitation, and health-care, the Commission adopted a funding package of €7.8 million. This assistance, implemented by the International Committee of the Red Cross, provides protection and relief to displaced persons and other vulnerable populations, including the host communities affected by the conflict.

In 2007, Brender said the Commission also allocated a funding package of €10 million in refugee assistance for basic healthcare and education, food, essential household items, and support for the UNHCR refugee registration system. One day after the conference's completion, the Commission announced an additional grant of almost €50 million in humanitarian and structural support for the provision of basic health and education services for Iraqi refugees in Syria and Jordan.

During the CAP conference, Brender noted that the Commission realized that extreme burdens were placed on the host countries' basic services, and that the public education systems were in desperate need of reinforcement. These programs were intended to facilitate the integration of Iraqi children into schools. The main challenge ahead is ensuring access into the most vulnerable

areas, coordinating with other donors, and engaging in sustainable solutions, Brender noted.

This approach by the Commission focuses on existing projects, supports UN appeals, and avoids creating parallel structures by strengthening existing services, said Bender. One example of this budget support program is educational reform in Jordan, he noted. Until recently, the Jordanian government forbade Iraqi children to attend public schools in Jordan, forcing Iraqi parents to enroll in expensive private schools, many of whom tried to contain the influx of children by restricting access. Aid from the international community enabled the Jordanian government to increase its education budget to hire more teachers, increase facilities, and accept refugee children in Jordanian schools.

In Syria, Bender noted, similar efforts are underway to help maintain the quality of the health public system in areas where there is a strong presence of refugees. Ultimately, though, a stronger mobilization from the broader international community must be taken in parallel with the necessary progress in settling the key political challenges faced by the Iraqi government, Brender said. "All our support to addressing the displacement crisis ultimately is only useful to the extent that we can hope and be sure and be confident that there will be a political settlement of the overall problems faced by Iraq," he concluded.

Luncheon Address: Iraqi Accounts of the Situation and the International Response to the Crisis

INTRODUCTION BY

Lawrence Korb, Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress

PANELISTS

Ahmed Ali, former translator and interpreter for numerous media outlets, the U.S. and Iraqi governments, recently resettled in the United States

Michel Gabaudan, Washington Director, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

ADDITIONAL REMARKS BY

Julia Taft, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration

MODERATED BY

Anita Sharma, Center for American Progress

In his introductory remarks, Lawrence Korb, a Senior Fellow with the Center for American Progress, noted that the Center had been long advocating for a responsible end to the Iraq war. The Center has called for a strategic redeployment of U.S. forces and a resetting of policies for Iraq and the region. These plans stress that the United States, the international community, and regional countries must work together to ameliorate the displacement crisis, he added.

These steps, he noted, are required to bring a peaceful settlement of the various civil wars now simmering across Iraq. Only then will Iraqi refugees be able to return to their homes, including those inside and outside the country.

Michele Gabaudan then addressed the audience. Although the number of people displaced inside and outside Iraq increased steadily in the years following the U.S. invasion of Iraq, people were “invisible” for several reasons, explained Gabaudan. Most people did not want to be seen as refugees and lived in urban areas, supporting themselves. The host governments preferred not to talk about a refugee crisis because of the chronic refugee history of the Palestinians.

Gabaudan explained that it was only after the Samarra bombing in mid-2006 that the international community woke up to the real nature of the crisis and UNHCR began

appealing for funds to reestablish its presence, which was not implemented before early 2007. He said that among its priorities have been to understand the needs of the people, including the humanitarian and protection concerns, identify the most vulnerable, and respond to the policy decision by the United States to resettle more Iraqis.

UNHCR has so far registered about 210,000 Iraqi refugees in the three countries of Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. While it's a small proportion of the overall number, Gabaudan said the delays in processing are down and more people are being identified who meet the criteria of vulnerability, including minorities at risk, the elderly, vulnerable women, unaccompanied children, victims of severe trauma, and those who are at risk because of the association with the U.S.-led military forces or Western organizations. The United States had pledged to admit 12,000 this year and to date UNHCR has submitted a list of 20,000 for consideration, he added.

The reality, however, is that most people will not be resettled and thus the agency is working to ensure that living conditions in the host country are bearable, Gabaudan explained. The UNHCR has issued several appeals for funding in the education and health sectors in Jordan and Syria, and is very cognizant of the pressures that are placed on the host countries.

The flow of refugees returning to Iraq has also been a topic of much debate, said Gabaudan, who then detailed UNHCR's role in the process. He said it is a person's right to decide to voluntarily return, yet that person should not be pressured to do so. Gabaudan relayed information from UNHCR's survey in

which only 14 percent of returnees said that improved security was the reason to go back, and said that now is not the time to be promoting returns, given the continued insecurity, and population shifts in urban areas such as Baghdad.

"For return to be sustainable you need a series of preconditions that are not met as yet," he said. "Registration indicates to us that about 80 percent of the refugees do come from Baghdad. They come from an urban environment, and if we have learned any lesson from the Balkans, it is that return to urban environments, where tremendous amount of population shifting has taken place, requires a fairly strong legal structure that will help people either to receive compensation or to get their property back. I don't think either the Iraq government or the international community are anywhere close to that."

To address this challenge, UNHCR has pledged \$11 million toward the development of a resettlement program with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq, Gabaudan noted in conclusion.

Ahmed Ali then detailed his firsthand experiences to highlight the challenges and issues of being displaced in Iraq. Ali was a journalist, a translator, a reporter, and a producer of numerous news agencies in addition to working with the U. S. government. He was accused of being a Western collaborator and forced to flee Iraq with his family after their lives were threatened. In December 2006 the family fled to Jordan where they spent nine months waiting for resettlement.

Ali told of a stressful and difficult life in Jordan. "First of all, for a man who spent all of his life as being independent, you know, just all of a sudden, to find

yourself without a job and not having the right to have legal residency status is hard,” he said. “In addition, you have left everything behind, like your parents, your siblings, and they are still in danger there. I had already been associated with the U.S. media and associated with the Iraqi government and U.S. officials. That will make the dangers doubled for my parents and siblings and for my wife’s parents and siblings, too.”

Ali applied for resettlement with UNHCR, but was actually processed through

an American program called the special immigrant visa program, which is a fast-track program for those who served as translators of the U. S. Armed Forces. The program provides no support for the families once they arrive in the United States. Ali said he and his family relied on the goodwill of supporters to help them adjust to their new life. Although he hopes for the day that he and his family can return to Iraq and he can assist in the rebuilding of his country, he will not go back until there is increased security.



Thousands of Iraqi refugees gather outside the offices of a U.N. refugee agency in Syria's capital city Damascus in February 2007 to register their names for obtaining a refugee status. Some refugees also demanded that the Syrian government revoke restrictions on their residency in Syria. (AP Photo Bassem Tellawi).

Panel Two: The Next Challenges of Iraq's Displacement Crisis

PANELISTS

Elizabeth Ferris, Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies, and co-director of the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement

John Merrill, Director for Refugees, IDPs, and Parole Programs, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Middle East - Iraq Office

Kristele Younes, Advocate, Refugees International

MODERATED BY

Mara Rudman, Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress

Displacement has been both a cause and a consequence of the sectarian polarization, with people moving from mixed neighborhoods into neighborhoods where their particular sect is in a majority, said Elizabeth Ferris in her overview of the internally displaced persons, or IDPs, in Iraq. Ferris is a Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies, and co-director of the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement. She pointed to the estimated one million IDPs in Iraq before the U.S.-led invasion, and about 1.2 million to 1.3 million more recently, for a total of about 2.2 million to 2.3 million in total.

Ferris said that IDPs who have remained in Iraq tend to be those with fewer resources or the ability to travel or get out of the country. They tend to have fewer language skills or professional skills, making them at least as needy or as vulnerable as the refugees in surrounding countries. The caseload is urban, with most of the IDPs in Baghdad and the rest in other cities. Less than one to two percent of IDPs are in camps, which, in part, explains why they've been invisible until the past year, she said. The serious humanitarian need for shelter, food, and health services is one of the causes of displacement and has forced many to seek better care outside Iraq, she added.

Ferris outlined the dissonance between the security and humanitarian communities and their inability to recognize the linkages posed by the displacement crisis. Rather than fear that all IDPs or refugees are potential terrorists or threats, Ferris suggested understanding them as people who have lost nearly everything and might be vulnerable or politicized if they become targets for sectarian violence or recruited into various groups.

The lack of job security causes people to take desperate measures, including resorting to violence or turning to prostitution, so Ferris recommended that the Iraqi govern-



An Iraqi family is seen near their tent at the refugee camp they have called home for the last year in the Shiite holy city of Najaf in July 2007. Shiite families driven out of their homes by sectarian violence are resettling in Najaf. (AP Photo/Alaa al-Marjani)

ment and international organizations provide livelihoods. “One of the reasons that people are joining insurgent groups is because they’re getting paid for it,” she said. “They’re saying, ‘I’m not joining for ideological reasons, but I cannot feed my family any other way and here people are offering money and cash.’”

A suitable program of voluntary returns that enables those displaced to resume their lives must accompany any peaceful resolution in Iraq, Ferris argued. Respecting property titles could facilitate this by documenting property losses, she suggested, so that people have a right to return to the property, or if this is impossible, be compensated for it. Ferris also provided a cautionary note for future challenges suggesting that future flashpoints could include the delayed referendum on

whether the oil-rich city of Kirkuk joins the semiautonomous region of Kurdistan or remains under Iraqi central government control and the increasing friction between Turkey and the PKK.

John Merrill then explained why the challenges of understanding and addressing the displacement crisis are immense and will likely create additional security demand for U.S. forces. Unfortunately, he noted that the Iraqi government does not seem to have the capacity to accept the refugees back to Iraq and provide services. And the U. S. government, he added, has made progress but is not fully prepared for the challenge.

Merrill discussed his program that assists foreign nationals into the United States if they need immediate access, such as



An Iraqi refugee who has just returned from Syria covers her face with her passport as she waits to collect government aid in Baghdad in November 2007. About 20 buses carrying hundreds of Iraqi refugees returned to Baghdad from Syria. (AP Photo/Hadi Mizban)

emergency medical care. This parole program is temporary, however, he added. He noted that it can succor to a limited number of people, lacks funding, does not convey immigration status, and is entirely voluntary.

He then said that a better understanding is required of the conditions causing people to leave and why they are returning, alongside the recognition that some people will not be able to return home. The more important question, he said, is “what are we going to do about it?” Merrill said that, “The U.S. military may indeed be called eventually, when a plan is devised for this and that the DOD will be tasked by one means or another, since we do have all the airplanes and all the people, to assist greatly, but we hope it’s in an organized fashion, rather than a conflict situation.”

Kristele Younes, Advocate for Refugees International, warned that the displacement crisis has created numerous challenges for individuals and countries alike. Iraqis face persecution or deportation, host governments eye their fragile states warily, and a new generation may become disenfranchised and dependent on more radical elements for their security, she said. This recipe of uncertainty, fear, and apathy, if combined and left to fester, will not bode well for the region, she warned.

Younes outlined the responsibilities of the main responders of the crisis and the challenges for the coming years. The United Nations, although slow to begin working on the crisis, has become engaged. But in order to be successful, it must have the commitment and support of the international community. She

said that, just as UNHCR has underlined over and over again, the UN, the international community, and international organizations cannot address the full scope of refugee needs without the assistance of governments who would provide bilateral assistance to the host countries and who would enable them to strengthen their own systems to be able to respond to this adequately.

Unfortunately, this hasn't happened yet, she said. Furthermore, the UN's role within Iraq should be clarified. The political and humanitarian mandates are increasingly blurred, making either job more difficult, she noted. The United States should also admit the scale of the problem and actively seek solutions to resolve it. If President Bush publicly addressed the issue, "It would go a very long way in restoring U.S.'s credibility in the region," she said. "Acknowledging the fact that the whole region has suffered the impact of the war would go a long way toward reconciling with the region."

Younes also urged the audience to move beyond polarizing debates that are pitting resettlement versus assistance and Iraqi allies versus the rest of the refugees. She said that Refugees International notes that resettlement has received tremendous media attention even though it would only assist a fraction of the population. The same goes for the Iraqi allies versus the rest of the refugee's debate.

In Younes' view, this creates an "us versus them" distinction which is unhelpful to the debate. "I feel very strongly that those who have worked for the U.S. should, of course, be resettled to the United States, but so should the people who are part of the 11 criteria of vulnerability that UNHCR has determined," she said. Younes suggested that there should be two separate programs, but that admitting former Iraqi allies should in no way impede the numbers of Iraqis that the U.S. government is willing to admit on its normal resettlement program. Because resettlement is a small component, one of the main focuses should be bilateral and direct humanitarian assistance.

Ultimately, Younes concluded, Iraq, neighboring countries, countries comprising the multi-national forces, and the international aid community must all recognize that this is a crisis of epic proportions and commit themselves to working together to resolve it. The current message being sent to the region is that it is not a priority of the top governments. She suggested that the best way to get Jordan and Syria to reopen their borders, and to get Lebanon to consider granting Iraqis some type of temporary status, is to start looking seriously at solutions for the people who were made refugees 60 years ago and still haven't had any durable solution offered to them. Until the Iraqi crisis is linked to the Palestinian one, she said, results in the region will be difficult to come by.

Program of Events

8:30 a.m. A light breakfast will be served

9:00 a.m.–
11:30 a.m. **INTRODUCTIONS**

Helga Flores Trejo, Director, Heinrich Böll Foundation, North America
John Podesta, President and CEO, Center for American Progress

KEYNOTE REMARKS

Earl Blumenauer, Congressman, U.S. House of Representative (D-OR)

PANEL ONE: *The Current Crisis and Responses Thus Far*

Reinhold Brender, Counselor, Political Section, European Commission
Delegation to the United States

Bill Frelick, Refugee Policy Director, Human Rights Watch

Said Hakki, President, Iraqi Red Crescent Society

Victor Tanner, Adjunct faculty member, Nitze School of Advanced
International Studies, Johns Hopkins University and consultant for the
International Rescue Committee

Moderated by Anita Sharma, Center for American Progress

11:30 a.m. A light lunch will be served

11:45 a.m.–
12:45 p.m. **INTRODUCTIONS**

Lawrence Korb, Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress

LUNCHEON ADDRESS: *An Iraqi Account of the Situation and the International Response to the Crisis*

Ahmed Ali, former translator and interpreter for numerous media outlets,
the U.S. and Iraqi governments, recently resettled in the United States

Michel Gabaudan, Washington Director, United Nations High
Commissioner for Refugees

ADDITIONAL REMARKS

Julia Taft, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees

Moderated by Anita Sharma, Center for American Progress

1:00 p.m.–
2:30 p.m. **PANEL TWO: *The Next Challenges of Iraq's Displacement Crisis***

Elizabeth Ferris, Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies, and co-director of
the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement

John Merrill, Director for Refugees, IDPs, and Parole Programs, Office of
the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Middle East—Iraq Office

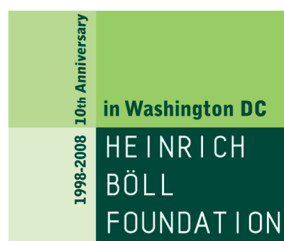
Kristele Younes, Advocate, Refugees International

Moderated by Mara Rudman, Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress

Conference Participants

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 Nadia Abuzaineh, Relief International
 Eleanor Acer, Human Rights First
 Thaira Al Hilli
 Thabit Alfalahi
 Faiza Ali, State Department
 Anas Al-Naimi, Embassy of Iraq
 Charles Balogh, Freelance
 David Beraka, House Committee on Foreign Affairs
 Margaret Besheer, Voice of America Radio
 Lea Bou Karam, Amnesty International
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 Elizabeth Campbell, Refugee Council USA
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 Sharita Gruberg, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children
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Center for American Progress



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