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FIVE YEARS LATER, A HIDDEN CRISIS

REPORT OF THE IRC COMMISSION
ON IRAQI REFUGEES



TABLE OF CONTENTS

i	Executive Summary
1	Refugees and Their Conditions—What Do They Need
6	Diplomatic Engagement with Host Country Governments
6	Assistance Programs
9	Resettlement of Iraqi Refugees
12	Recommendations
16	Conclusion
17	Appendices
18	I. Iraqi Refugees: World’s Third Largest Refugee Population
19	II. Steps to Increase U.S. Resettlement of Iraqi Refugees
20	III. U.S. Refugee Resettlement System
21	IV. Summary of Kennedy Legislation
24	V. Stories the Refugees Told Us
29	VI. Meetings Held by the IRC Commission on Iraqi Refugees
31	VII. Members of Commission and VII. Acknowledgements

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The war that was launched in Iraq five years ago has produced one of the largest humanitarian crises of our time. Yet this crisis is largely hidden from the public and ignored by the international community. More than four million Iraqis of different religions, ethnicities and backgrounds are estimated to be uprooted by horrific violence and death and are in dire need of help. About half have fled to Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and elsewhere in the region.

Because they are not huddled together in a camp or traveling as a group across a windswept plain, these refugees are not receiving the attention and help they deserve from the international community. Much of the reporting about them has been wrong, perpetuating myths that they are wealthy or that the crisis is over and that many are returning to their homes in Iraq. The solutions put forward by major donors have been wholly inadequate. Meanwhile, many of the refugees have been severely traumatized and now lead desperate lives in foreign cities such as Damascus, Amman, Cairo and Beirut.

This report is based on the visit of the International Rescue Committee's Commission on Iraqi Refugees to Jordan and Syria in February 2008. During our visit, we met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and other senior officials from the governments of Syria, Jordan, Iraq and the United States. We also met with dozens of refugees in Jordan and Syria and with U.N. representatives.

There is a remarkably wide range of estimates, from 1 million to 2 million, of the number of Iraqi refugees in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and other host countries. Whatever the exact number of refugees, it is substantial – and their experience has been grim. Before leaving Iraq, many suffered torture, kidnappings and the deaths of loved ones. Many are in danger because they have worked for Americans—the U.S. military, media, contractors and aid agencies. Single women with children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable. Others, especially adult men who are unable to work and provide for their families, suffer from depression, anxiety and chronic disease. Many grow increasingly destitute with each passing day. They need health care, housing, jobs and schooling, and safe places for children to play. Instead, they remain isolated, unwanted and insecure, overwhelmed by feelings of hopelessness, paralyzed without prospects for a better future.

The world is unaware of the massive scale of this disaster and the deplorable conditions in which these refugees find themselves. The international response has been completely inadequate. Help is urgently needed.

- Displaced refugees need substantial aid delivered effectively and efficiently. The United States should provide \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion per year toward a global total of \$3 billion to \$4 billion. This may seem like a large amount, but is minuscule in relation to the hundreds of billions of dollars already spent on the war effort. The United States should cover half of the anticipated \$800 million in appeals from international organizations—about \$400 million—in order to help displaced Iraqis inside and outside Iraq in 2008. Host countries also need much more help, beginning with at least \$900 million in bilateral assistance from the United States to Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt in fiscal year 2008. Iraq can provide more reliable deliveries of oil at reduced prices to help neighboring countries that are helping the refugees. The governments of the United States and Iraq have the principal responsibility to assist, but this burden should not be borne solely by

them. European countries and the oil-producing Gulf States can and should contribute. Aid can be delivered directly by nongovernmental organizations.

- The best solution for most of the refugees is to return to their homes in Iraq, but safe repatriation cannot be undertaken now or in the foreseeable future. The international community must work to achieve conditions in Iraq that will allow for the eventual safe, voluntary and sustainable return of many refugees and displaced people to their homes. In the meantime, the international community must recognize that the refugees may have to remain where they are for the medium or long term and require help where they have sought refuge.
- A sizable population of Iraqis cannot return safely under any circumstances and do not plan to repatriate. The international community must work to resettle these individuals in third countries. Again, the United States must take the lead in providing safety to tens of thousands of vulnerable Iraqis. For the current fiscal year, the U.S. goal is to admit 12,000 Iraqi refugees. Through refugee resettlement and special immigrant visas, the IRC Commission on Iraqi Refugees recommends that the president commit to a major effort to increase Iraqi admissions to at least 30,000 per year for the next four years. Other countries, especially in Europe, should also do more.
- A high-level conference of regional countries and interested donors, chaired by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, is needed to examine the humanitarian crisis and develop a comprehensive plan for addressing it in the region. This conference should include government ministers who can grapple with the diplomatic and political aspects of the crisis. The international community needs a better assessment of true needs.

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The information we learned on our visit has also been supplemented by reports by experts; these are indicated in footnotes.

We conclude that the Iraqi refugee crisis is one of the largest humanitarian crises of our time, and much more must be done to respond to it. While it is not the subject of this report, the commissioners also recognize the magnitude and severity of the displacement crisis inside Iraq, which also demands an appropriate response.

Our report comprises five parts. First, we discuss the dire situation of the refugees and their needs. Second, we discuss the need for diplomatic engagement in order to address the precarious existence many of them face and to plan for the future. Third, we outline the assistance refugees and the countries hosting them require. Fourth, we examine the pressing need to resettle some of the Iraqis in other countries. Fifth, we set forth our chief recommendations. Additional information is provided in a set of appendices.

I. REFUGEES AND THEIR CONDITIONS— WHAT DO THEY NEED?

As a result of war, sectarian violence and a complete breakdown of the rule of law, millions of Iraqis have fled their homes and now live precariously as refugees in neighboring countries or as internally displaced persons (IDPs) inside Iraq. Many Iraqis were targeted for persecution because of their political opinions, ethnicities, religious affiliations, lifestyles or professions. Some have been attacked or threatened because they worked closely with or helped Americans such as the U.S. military, contractors, humanitarian organizations and the media.

The total number of displaced Iraqis is estimated at more than four million people, although the number is difficult to calculate with any precision. This report concerns itself with the estimated one million to two million Iraqi refugees who are now living in neighboring countries, especially Syria and Jordan. Many of them fled before the fall of Saddam Hussein; an even larger number have fled since the bombing of the al-Askari Mosque in Samarra in February 2006.

OVER 1.5 MILLION IRAQI REFUGEES

Country	Estimated Iraqi Population	Total Registered	Cases	Average Case Size
Syria	1-1.5 million	165,000	39,096	3.5
Jordan	450,000-500,000	51,559	24,232	2
Lebanon	50,000	9,950	5,418	1.9
Egypt	20,000-40,000	10,633	4,129	2.5
Turkey	5,000-10,000	5,128	2,531	2
TOTAL	1.5-2.1 million	242,270	75,406	2

Source: U.N. High Commission for Refugees, February 2008: <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/joh022608a.pdf>

The table above shows UNHCR’s estimates for the number of displaced Iraqis in the region. “Cases” is a term used by the U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and can refer to an individual or to a family of refugees.¹ As an intergovernmental agency, UNHCR works with the estimates supplied by host governments. The official estimates place the refugees as a sizable proportion of the two major host countries—equal to 6 percent of Syria’s population and 8 percent of Jordan’s.² Other estimates are significantly lower. For this report, we will use a range from the most conservative (1 million) to largest (about 2 million) figures. Whatever the exact figures, this still qualifies as a major humanitarian crisis. The number of refugees who are actually being assisted is far lower than even the most conservative estimates, and the strain on the host societies can be seen in extremely overcrowded classrooms and medical facilities and heavy demands on basic infrastructure. Most refugees live in impoverished neighborhoods in the major cities of the host countries.

1 A case can be a single refugee or a refugee family. Some refugee families have several cases, as adult sons and daughters have their own unless they are somehow dependent on their parents.
 2 Population of Syria is 19.315 million and Jordan is 6.053 million.

Some of the pressing problems the refugees face include:

TRAUMA

The UNHCR reported that the prevalence of depression and anxiety was high among Iraqi refugees in Syria and worse than reported for some other refugee groups.³ A large UNHCR survey of Iraqi refugees found that:

77 percent reported being affected by air bombardments and shelling or rocket attacks, and 80 percent reported being witnesses to a shooting; 68 percent reported interrogation or harassment (with threats to life) by militias or other groups, while 22 percent said they had been beaten by militias or other groups. Results also showed that many reported being kidnapped, 72 percent reported being witnesses to a car bombing and 75 percent reported that someone close to them had been killed or murdered.⁴

In Jordan, UNHCR and the refugees themselves reported similarly high rates of violence and trauma by Iraqis now living in that country.

HEALTH CARE

Although state-sponsored clinics in Jordan and Syria are nominally open to them, there is not enough capacity to provide basic medical care and medicines to many Iraqi refugees. Little health problems can grow big when left untreated. Some of the refugees have chronic medical problems such as diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease and have no or limited access to secondary or tertiary health care. Substandard housing, with leaky ceilings and heating problems, has contributed to health problems.

EDUCATION

Access to education has improved in both Syria and Jordan. But many Iraqi families still keep their children away from schools, fearing that sending them to school will require them to “register,” which might lead to their discovery and subsequent return to Iraq. Some refugees told us that they had no transportation to get their children to school. We also heard stories of Iraqi children being harassed and made to feel unwelcome. Government officials in Jordan and Syria stressed to us that the schools were open to Iraqi children, but there may be a need to send the refugees clearer signals that their children are welcome in classrooms.

JOBS

Although many Iraqi refugees are well educated and a number are professionals, none of the host countries except Lebanon permit them to work. The lack of legal employment leaves many nearly destitute and represents a tremendous waste of human capacity. Men who work illegally fear being caught by authorities and detained or expelled to Iraq. Some Iraqi men who worked despite the risk found that their employers refused to pay them and threatened to report them to government authorities. For this reason, women and children are sent into the informal work force, where they are at risk of exploitation and sexual abuse.

MONEY

The refugees have minimal financial resources. Their savings are dwindling and many rely on remittances from relatives in other countries, including Iraq, and on charity. Poor refugees are unable to afford housing, heat or food.

3 UNHCR convenience sample survey, Oct. 31–Nov. 25, 2007. Depression 89% and anxiety 82% (n=384).

4 Second IPSOS Survey on Iraqi Refugees (Oct. 31–Nov. 25, 2007), Final Results.

CRIME

As in many displacement crises, petty crime, prostitution, domestic violence and forced marriages become more common and strain families that have already been traumatized by violence and torture in Iraq.

LACK OF LEGAL STATUS

Behind many of these problems lies the uncertain legal status of the refugees. Of the four major host countries—Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon—only Egypt is a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Although the convention’s prohibition on forcibly returning refugees to their country of persecution is considered customary international law and therefore binding even on nonparties, there is no formal recognition by the host countries of the refugee status of the Iraqis living in their midst. The UNHCR has created identity papers for Iraqis and issued them to some of the refugees in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. However, these documents offer no guarantee of protection from arrest and forced return and many Iraqis have not registered. In this respect, the very recent decision by Lebanon to offer residency status and work permits to Iraqi refugees must be commended.

THE REPATRIATION MYTH

There is little factual base for the widely held notion that the refugees are returning home. We found no evidence of large-scale return; in fact, most refugees find the idea inconceivable. UNHCR says only two families have returned from Jordan and very few have ventured home from Syria and stayed. In late November 2007, U.S. and U.K. media reported that buses full of returning refugees were traveling from Damascus to Baghdad. The reports came on the heels of an Iraqi government offer to pay \$800 to each returning family, along with declarations by Iraqi authorities that the troop surge was working and communities were growing safer. The number of returning refugees turned out to be very small, according to the UNHCR in Syria, and no buses have run since.⁵ For our part, we spoke to refugees in Syria who had tried to go back to Iraq but found their old homes occupied and their neighborhoods too dangerous. One woman said her husband had gone back and has not been heard from since. Nonetheless, the media and public in the West seem to have accepted the idea that the refugees are going back. We believe it is both dangerous and irresponsible to lure desperate refugees home with misleading statements about improved safety and security. Refugees should be discouraged from returning home to communities where they will not be safe.

5 Jonathan Steele, “Refugees celebrate first bus back to Iraq,” *The Guardian*, Nov. 28, 2007; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/nov/28/iraq.syria> “The government’s widely publicized plan to run free buses from Damascus, Syria, to Baghdad was suspended after just two runs” in Cara Buckley, “Refugees Risk Coming Home to an Unready Iraq,” *New York Times*, Dec. 20, 2007; http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/20/world/middleeast/20refugees.html?_r=1&n=Top/Reference/Times%20Topics/Subjects/1/Immigration%20and%20Refugees&oref=slogin

WHY THE IRAQI REFUGEE CRISIS IS DIFFERENT

While Iraqi refugees share some of the characteristics of other refugee groups, including flight from conflict and an uncertain future, there are differences between the situation of the Iraqis and that of other refugee groups. This table provides a summary of the main differences.

Iraqi Refugees	Camp-based Refugee Situation
Hidden in cities	Living in camps
Living in apartments that are scattered throughout cities	Together in one place
Many get no aid from host countries or international community	Basic services provided by international community, aid agencies
Uncertain legal status	Often given refugee status
Very few registered; refugees must come forward to be registered with UNHCR	Registered with authorities responsible for refugees as part of an organized process
Imprecise estimates of number of refugees that vary greatly	Surveys of refugees can be conducted in camp producing better data
Host governments ambivalent toward and wary of refugees and those interested in aiding them	Host governments welcome help
Difficult for authorities to reach all of the refugees to provide information (although the refugees have their own channels of communication, including cell phones to call back to Iraq and e-mail accounts)	Information programs in camps to inform refugees about their benefits, rights, resettlement options, repatriation, etc.

II. DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT WITH HOST COUNTRY GOVERNMENTS

If the Iraqi refugees are to be helped, the United States, the government of Iraq, the European Union⁶, the Gulf States and other major donors will have to engage proactively with the host countries and leading members of the international community on the full range of issues related to Iraqi refugees and their impact on host countries.

This crisis is not just a humanitarian crisis demanding an international response to reduce suffering. It is also a strategic diplomatic opportunity to constructively engage much of the Middle East around an issue that impacts the region and offers a possibility of dealing with the wider issue of the future of Iraq. Every country in the region has a stake in preventing further displacement and no one wants a long-term refugee crisis. The world seems to be ignoring the crisis, and those that are paying attention treat it as simply another humanitarian disaster. Instead, a major diplomatic effort is needed to deal with the crisis and its underlying causes.

III. ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

A. NEEDS

Jordan and Syria (among other countries in the region) are unfairly shouldering the burden of this refugee crisis. These overtaxed countries, already experiencing economic difficulties, have seen an increased demand for health services, education, electricity and water related to the large influx of Iraqi refugees. This is particularly burdensome in an area where water is scarce and many commodities are imported and expensive.

The government of Syria has stated that the total annual cost of accommodating Iraqi refugees is \$1 billion and the government of Jordan also estimates a \$1 billion cost (sometimes higher numbers are mentioned). In early February, Jordanian Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Suhair al-Ali said that the cost to Jordan's economy of hosting the Iraqi refugees was \$2.2 billion, primarily related to meeting the education and health needs of Iraqi refugees. Minister of Education Taysir Nueimi said that government-funded schools were accommodating 24,000 Iraqi students, causing pressure and overcrowding in the education system and forcing schools to operate in double shifts.⁷

Needs in the region are growing as refugees run out of resources and the cost of living rises. Host countries also fear that as refugees become poorer, they will also become even more desperate, turning to illegal activities for income and presenting more of a security risk.

6 Because of its involvement in the Iraq War, some in Europe would single out the United Kingdom as country that should also lead, along with the United States, in responding to the refugee crisis.

7 IRIN News, "Jordan: Schools creaking under burden of 24,000 Iraqi students," <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=76717>

In Syria, President Assad said that classrooms and clinics are unable to cope with the influx of Iraqis, stating disappointment that the Iraqi and U.S. governments are not doing more to help. He cited the need to construct more schools, classroom space and clinics to accommodate the refugees. He told us that the crisis has not been caused by Syria. He maintained that the United States should take in much larger numbers of refugees and should send money, not troops. He believes refugees will likely be in Syria for a long time (up to 10 years), and this view was echoed in our meeting with the vice president, Farouk al-Sharaa.

In Jordan, the government is adamant that all programs providing assistance to Iraqi refugees should also benefit poor Jordanians, and that no parallel systems be created. Minister for Social Development Hala Lattouf described to us how increasing prices and rents were affecting many in the country. She told us she sees a need for more support for the budget of Jordan and for aid agencies that provide goods and services. She recognized that many Iraqis are highly skilled and educated and could potentially contribute to the Jordanian economy. Cash assistance, she acknowledged, could be used to help the most desperate (the Jordanian ministries provide some type of this aid). She pointed out that a weaker Jordan would not help achieve a stronger, safer Iraq.

B. RESPONSE TO NEEDS (SO FAR)

Last year, UNHCR provided health care to 210,000 cases or families in neighboring countries (out of 250,000 registered cases) and helped tens of thousands of refugee children to attend school. Under the 2008 appeal, UNHCR has set a target of 200,000 children in school by the end of the year.⁸ While the UNHCR's efforts are laudable and deserving of much greater support, they are only reaching a fraction of the Iraqi refugees.

UNHCR is also providing direct aid to vulnerable families through an innovative pilot project that provides cash cards for limited monthly withdrawals from automated teller machines (ATMs). UNHCR and the World Food Program (WFP) will provide food aid for up to 360,000 Iraqi refugees in Syria this year, working closely with the Syrian Red Crescent. In both Syria and Jordan, the refugee agency is distributing items such as blankets, heaters, mattresses and other supplies. Some of us visited the UNHCR center in Damascus that distributes food, cash cards and other items to the refugees.

We were very impressed by the operation and the use of technology (computerized records, secure ATM cards and e-mail alerts). We appreciated the concern and technology used to prevent fraud, such as the paper that cannot be photocopied for identification cards. However, cash cards only cover part of the refugees' needs: the cards provide recipients with about \$100 per month, mostly for widows and women alone with their children. In Syria, Iraqi women told us that minimum rent for a modest apartment was \$110–120 per month and utility costs were an additional \$75.

There are many nongovernmental organizations working in Jordan, including the IRC. Very few international nongovernmental organizations are operating in Syria, with nongovernmental organizations awaiting registration from the Ministry of Social Affairs. (Three were recently registered. The IRC is now seeking registration to work directly in Syria and in cooperation with the education and health ministries.) A number of international as well as smaller, local Christian aid groups are also active.

8 UNHCR, February 12, 2008, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/iraq?page=briefing&id=47b189032>

Appeals and other funding estimates for displaced Iraqis from U.N. organizations will likely total \$800 million in fiscal year 2008, and a U.S. contribution of at least \$250 million is seen by State Department officials as the minimum the United States needs to contribute in order to be a credible donor (nearly \$200 million has been contributed as of February 2008). The United States traditionally covers 25-30 percent of appeals from international organizations for refugee aid. In this case, more is needed.

We are also concerned that UNHCR appeals may be based on what UNHCR thinks donors will give, rather than on actual needs. UNHCR is understandably reluctant to expand its programs beyond what is likely to be supported by donors. Discussions with donors should clarify true needs and highlight gaps.

In 2007, the European Commission via the European Community Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) and the community's external relations funding mechanisms provided roughly \$60 million for the Iraqi crisis. Through the external relations funding mechanism, the European Commission provided nearly \$40 million: \$9 million to Syria for public health programs, \$27 million euros to Jordan for education, and \$3 million to UNICEF. ECHO has contributed about \$18 million: \$7.8 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross operating in Iraq and \$10 million to UNHCR and the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) for the region's refugee programs. Similar levels of funding are currently planned for 2008.

This is a start but more must be done—by the United States and others—if the burden on host countries is to be lessened. Much more could be done by European countries and oil-producing Gulf States. Their efforts to date do not match their capacity to aid the host countries and contribute to UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations. The debate must shift from arguing about the causes and course of the war in Iraq to helping displaced Iraqis.

The government of Iraq realizes that it, too, must contribute more funding to help the displaced and the refugees. A pledge of \$25 million for host countries that was announced in April 2007 was very slow to materialize; Jordan reportedly refused to accept its \$8 million share and suggested it be given directly to UNHCR, because the sum was perceived as so small relative to the need.

Finally, international donors should explore whether monies contributed to the reconstruction of Iraq that have not yet been spent could be re-allocated to humanitarian needs.

We applaud the sentiments expressed to us by Harriet Dodd, director of CARE International in Jordan, a partner of the IRC:

Families without work are expensive to care for; they represent a waste of resources, could exacerbate security concerns, are more likely to support illegal behavior, and may need long-term rehabilitation after long periods of idleness on their return to Iraq or in a situation of resettlement. A win-win situation is needed that benefits both the Jordanian and Syrian economies using the skills and motivation that is present in these refugees from Iraq. Taking a regional view, if re-skilled Iraqis are able to use their talents, engage in local economies and ultimately return to rebuild their shattered homeland having developed good ties and working relations with the communities in which they now reside, the benefits should accrue to the entire region.

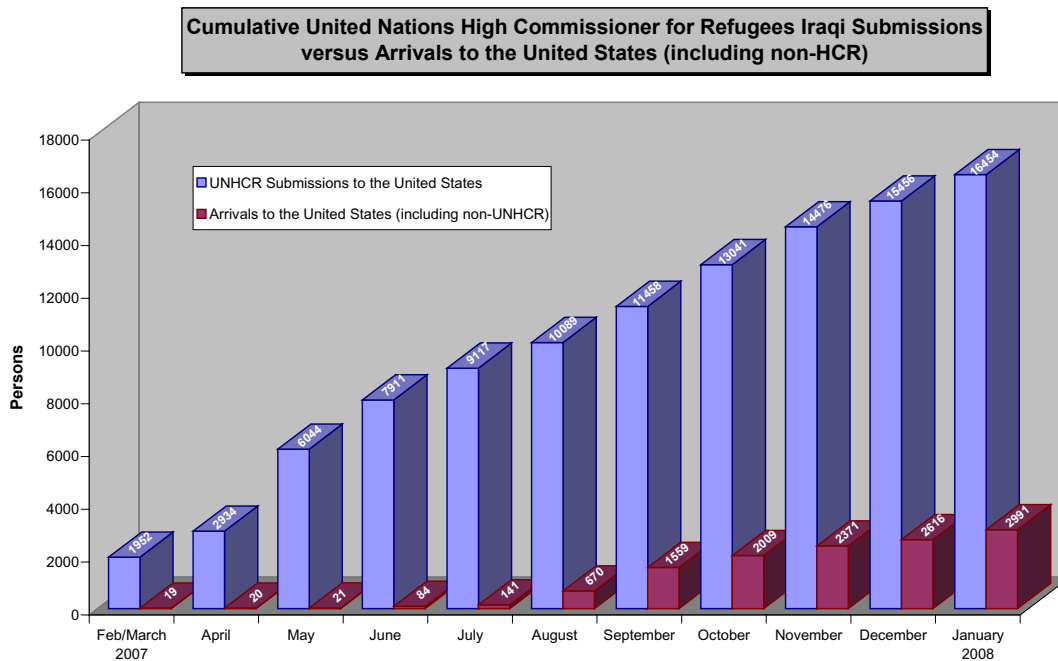
Given the scale of the crisis, donors should contribute to all of the partners currently working in the region: UNHCR, World Food Programme and other U.N. agencies, nongovernmental organizations and local groups. Realistically, needs in the region could total \$3 billion to \$4 billion dollars annually, with the U.S. contribution totaling \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion. This is a large amount of money, but it is quite small in terms of the other costs related to the war in Iraq (roughly \$10 billion per month), and the short- and long-term benefits for Iraqis and the region will be tremendous.

IV. RESETTLEMENT OF IRAQI REFUGEES

A. U.S. RESETTLEMENT AND IRAQI REFUGEES

The number of Iraqis accepted globally for refugee resettlement programs actually fell between 2003 and 2006. UNHCR has referred far more refugees for resettlement than have been accepted.

U.S. government officials have criticized the number of UNHCR referrals as “stagnant” and predict that the admissions program will catch up to UNHCR referrals by the spring of this year. UNHCR, however, has slowed down its referrals process because it does not want to create a large backlog of refugees who have false hopes for resettlement. The chart below shows how UNHCR referrals to the United States currently outpace the numbers the United States is resettling.



The U.S. government fell short of its already modest target of 7,000 Iraqi refugees in fiscal year 2007 and resettled only 1,608. Many of those resettled had been part of earlier waves of refugees—including Christians fleeing the Saddam Hussein regime. For fiscal year 2008 (Oct. 1, 2007–Sept. 30, 2008), the United States has pledged to admit up to 12,000 refugees, a very low number in view of the need. Once again, however, it is off to a slow start, admitting only 1,432 refugees in the first four months of the fiscal year (450 in October–, 362 in November, 245 in December, and 375 in January). Because of the slow start, State Department and Department of Homeland Security officials conceded in early February that they may not meet the goal of 12,000 Iraqi refugees in fiscal year 2008. They continue to have 12,000 as their target, and hope to make up shortfalls with higher numbers in July, August and September, but offer no guarantees of reaching the goal. We recommend that at least twice that number be admitted this year.

Clearly, something other than the normal procedures should be used to respond to this crisis. A major effort on the order of what Presidents Ford and Carter mounted back in the post-Vietnam War era is needed. Between May and December 1975, 131,000 people were resettled, and the United States took in more

than 900,000 Vietnamese refugees overall. Similarly, the United States welcomed more than 600,000 Russian Jews and other religious minorities during the Cold War, and accepted more than 150,000 Bosnian refugees during the Bosnian conflict.

B. KENNEDY LEGISLATION

In January 2008, President Bush signed into law the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2008. A section of this law is the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2007, often referred to as the “Kennedy bill” after its chief sponsor, Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy. The law provides for greater opportunities for vulnerable Iraqis to obtain protection in the United States.

The Kennedy legislation expands the categories of Iraqis who will have priority for admission to the United States as refugees. The Kennedy bill does not specify the number of Iraqis who should come to the United States each year as refugees, but the emphasis on expanded categories could result in higher refugee admissions and more focus on vulnerable groups. The legislation also authorizes a significant increase in the number of Iraqis who can come to the United States with special immigrant visas (SIVs). Under a prior law, a total of 500 Iraqis and Afghans who worked as translators for the U.S. government can get such visas each year and they can bring their family members. Under the new law, another 5,000 Iraqis and their family members (expected to total 10,000 to 12,000 persons) will be able to get such visas for the next five years, and they will be eligible for the same services and benefits as those admitted as refugees. The State Department was already planning to resettle 12,000 Iraqi refugees in fiscal year 2008. The impact of the SIVs and refugee provisions of this legislation could boost admissions this year to at least 25,000 Iraqis—and potentially many more—for whom no other viable solution exists.⁹

C. U.S. RESETTLEMENT CHALLENGES

A major challenge is that a number of federal agencies (including the State Department, Department of Homeland Security and Department of Health and Human Services) have a role in the U.S. refugee admissions program, which is funded through a mix of appropriations to these agencies, visa fees and contributions from voluntary agencies (see appendix). The State Department uses a partner agency (in Jordan and Syria, it is the International Organization for Migration) to run an intake office called the Overseas Processing Entity. The entire program also relies on voluntary agencies (funded largely through the State Department and the Office of Refugee Resettlement at Health and Human Services) to help the refugees resettle in the United States. Scaling up to meet the needs of significantly greater numbers of Iraqi refugees in a manner that does not undermine the flow of refugees from other regions would involve many senior decision makers and require investments within the entire system, and not just to one agency.

Another challenge has been that the U.S. resettlement program focuses almost entirely on threats of violence and persecution to refugees in their country of origin, and puts almost no emphasis on threats to the refugees outside Iraq. UNHCR, on the other hand, has several categories for Iraqis who want to be resettled, including severe trauma (including sexual violence and violence against women) in Iraq, medical

⁹ There is an overall target for the number of refugees to enter the U.S. in any single fiscal year. For 2008, the President has determined a target of 70,000 refugees. This number has not been reached since before Sept. 11, 2001 and can be revised to accommodate more Iraqi refugees, should that become necessary.

problems or disabilities for which there is no adequate treatment in the refugee-hosting country, and statelessness. Other groups listed by UNHCR are:

- minorities targeted in Iraq because of their religious or ethnic background;
- women at risk in their host country;
- unaccompanied or separated children and children who are the main applicants for resettlement;
- dependents of the refugees living in potential countries of resettlement;
- elderly people at risk;
- high-profile refugees and/or their family members;
- refugees associated with the multinational force in Iraq, Coalition Provisional Authority, the United Nations, foreign countries, and international or foreign institutions or companies and the press;
- refugees with immediate risk of *refoulement*.¹⁰

D. RESETTLEMENT IN EUROPE

Most European countries are indifferent toward the Iraqi refugee crisis, indicating that those who invaded Iraq (the United States and the United Kingdom) are largely responsible and thus must address the consequences. This indifference can be seen in the treatment of Iraqi asylum seekers. Approval rates for Iraqi asylum seekers in European Union member states vary between 1 percent and 80 percent. Some call this a poor lottery system of approval and safety. There is a need for the European Union to adopt common policies and practices toward Iraqi asylum seekers in order to harmonize protection standards and ensure that no one is forcibly returned to Iraq. Tragically, some EU member states are still sending Iraqis back to Iraq.

In addition, Europe accepts only 5 percent of the worldwide resettlement cases, totaling about 4,400 places a year, with only seven European states currently accepting refugees in need of resettlement. Europe has the capacity to offer sanctuary to many more refugees, and greater international burden sharing would also help ease pressures on host countries. Hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Balkans were offered permanent resettlement or temporary protection during the Balkan wars in the 1990s. But, with the notable exceptions of Sweden and Denmark, we see no political will to open doors wider to Iraqi refugees today.

While the Iraqi refugee crisis will not be solved through resettlement programs alone, these types of programs are an important piece of a comprehensive response, and a potentially life-saving option for the most vulnerable cases. They represent a concrete demonstration of solidarity with refugee-hosting countries, which can provide credibility and leverage to the United States and the European Union when engaging diplomatically with those countries, as mentioned above.

¹⁰ UNHCR, "Resettlement of refugees from Iraq", January 9, 2007

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the preceding, the IRC Commission on Iraqi Refugees makes four chief recommendations as follows:

1.

Displaced Iraqis need more aid delivered more effectively and efficiently. The United States and the government of Iraq have the principal responsibility to assist, but this burden should not be borne solely by them. The United States should provide \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion per year toward a global total of \$3 billion to \$4 billion. European countries and the oil-producing Gulf States can and should contribute more.

INTERNATIONAL APPEALS

Leaders at the U.N. and donor governments must ensure a strong response to the humanitarian needs of Iraqis inside and outside Iraq. In addition to the Consolidated Appeals Process issued for aid to Iraq, the U.N. should issue a complementary appeal for the region. The United States should cover 50 percent of the appeals from international organizations instead of the 25-30 percent contribution it usually makes, thus helping to guarantee sufficient contributions to the current and future appeals of U.N., international and nongovernmental organizations to assist Iraqi refugees and their host communities. The United States should contribute \$400 million of the expected \$800 million in appeals to help displaced Iraqis inside and outside Iraq in 2008 (and assess whether the appeals are sufficient).¹¹

A greater-than-usual U.S. share will demonstrate to other countries that the U.S. is prepared to play a leading role in responding. This may encourage other countries to participate at a greater level than they have to date. The need for better estimates on the number of Iraqi refugees, their needs and their impact on their host communities should not be used as an excuse to postpone helping now.

BILATERAL AID

Aid to Syria, Jordan and other host countries is needed to meet the strain on health, education, electricity, water and other basic services related to the large population of Iraqi refugees. We recommend a U.S. bilateral aid package to key countries in the region to help offset the burden of \$900 million (\$700 million for Jordan, \$100 million for Lebanon and \$100 million for Egypt).

Greater resources can and should be provided by the European Commission and EU member states. The commission and EU countries enjoy stable diplomatic relations with Middle East and can provide more technical and financial aid to Iraq and its neighbors as well as direct assistance to the refugees. ECHO should expand its funding and partnerships with aid agencies working in the region.

Creative approaches, which may involve a distribution of tasks among the international community, need to be found in order to provide some form of bilateral aid to Syria that is proportionate to its share of the cost of humanitarian support.

¹¹ Senior Coordinator on Iraqi Refugee Issues Ambassador James Foley, press briefing, Feb. 4, 2008, <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/100030.htm>

HUMANITARIAN CHANNEL TO SYRIA

The U.S. government will have to seek a dialogue with Syria to discuss the humanitarian needs of the Iraqis and to ensure that U.S. government personnel can obtain the visas and access they need in order to process those Iraqi refugees who apply to resettle in the United States. We do not underestimate the difficulties that now characterize the U.S.-Syrian relationship, but a humanitarian channel between the two countries, separate from political disputes, is needed. (Other countries and international organizations may be better placed to engage Syria on humanitarian issues related to Iraqi refugees. Their involvement should be sought.)

Getting the numbers right. The international community needs to determine with more precision the number of refugees, their needs and the economic burden they place on their hosts. The U.S. government could take the lead on this set of issues and establish a channel for an open-ended discussion on humanitarian issues with the government of Syria in order to ensure that the needs of the Iraqis are met. UNHCR should be authorized and funded to conduct information campaigns among the refugee population to make clear what services are available to them, what the host government policies are that affect them, how resettlement programs work and other relevant information.

THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ

Iraq should contribute more funding to help its own citizens, both the displaced and the refugees. Part of Iraq's contribution toward refugees could go to UNHCR. The Iraqi government could also follow through on pledges to sell reliable supplies of oil at reduced prices to the host countries, thus significantly easing the economic burden and helping Iraqis and host communities who are struggling with high fuel costs. Iraq might also allow donors to free up reconstruction monies and reallocate them to humanitarian needs.

NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Aid can also be delivered directly to refugees by nongovernmental organizations. Host governments need to work with the U.N. and aid agencies to minimize bureaucratic impediments to delivery of aid. For example, employees of aid agencies should receive visas promptly, and registration of aid agencies to work in host countries should be facilitated and expedited.

All of these arrangements should also make it possible for the refugees to be more self-sufficient, contribute to the local economy and rely less on assistance.

2.

The best solution for most refugees is to return safely and voluntarily to their homes in Iraq, but safe repatriation cannot be undertaken now or in the foreseeable future. The international community must work to achieve conditions in Iraq that will allow for the eventual voluntary and sustainable return of refugees and displaced people to their homes. In the meantime, major donor governments must recognize that for the medium or long term, the refugees may have to remain where they have sought refuge.

NON-REFOULEMENT

The IRC supports a policy of voluntary and safe return for the vast majority of the refugees as the long-term solution adequate to the scale of the problem. Even so, host countries should subscribe formally to

the international obligation of non-refoulement, or forced return. While forced returns have been limited so far, host countries should give more explicit assurance that refugees will not be expelled or forced to return to Iraq before it is safe for them to do so. The government of Iraq should not encourage refugees to return home prematurely, as was reportedly done in late November 2007 when money was offered to refugees in Syria who were willing to go back to Iraq. Speaking from Damascus on Feb. 14, 2008, Antonio Guterres, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, said that he did not believe it was safe enough for Iraqi refugees to return to their country because the clear criteria for the promotion of returns are not present in Iraq. Until safe and voluntary return becomes a viable option, adequate financial assistance should be provided to help host countries and Iraqi refugees.

LEGAL STATUS FOR REFUGEES

As part of the discussions with host countries, the United States, the United Nations and the international community should raise the issue of refugee status that satisfies the concerns of, and is formally recognized by, host governments, and that provides refugees a measure of protection. Iraqis must feel safe from detention, forced return and harassment. Perhaps a better arrangement regarding legal status and protection of refugees can be addressed in the context of increased aid to host countries. The best outcome, of course, would be for host countries to become parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

3.

A sizable population of Iraqis cannot return safely under any circumstances and do not plan to repatriate. This calls for the international community to resettle more individuals in third countries. Again, the United States must lead. For the current fiscal year, the U.S. goal is to admit 12,000 Iraqi refugees. Through refugee resettlement and special immigrant visas, the IRC Commission on Iraqi Refugees recommends that the president commit to a major effort to increase Iraqi admissions to at least 30,000 per year for the next four years. Other countries, especially in Europe, should also do more.

Many Iraqis feel vulnerable in their current country of refuge. Others will never be able to return to Iraq in safety. Citizens of the United States, United Kingdom and other countries engaged in operations in Iraq owe it to Iraqis who have worked for the multinational forces and have received death threats to help them find safe places to live. We also recommend resettlement for the most vulnerable refugees. These include women at risk, children and adolescents, survivors of violence and torture, the "orphaned" elderly, members of persecuted religious minorities, refugees with close family already in the United States, and refugees with urgent medical needs.

PRESIDENTIAL COMMITMENT

The U.S. Government should increase significantly the number of Iraqi refugees to be resettled to the United States, and should do so without cutting the flow of admissions from the rest of the world. President Bush needs to announce that this is an administration priority and then follow through to ensure that resources are sought from Congress and made available to handle the large increase in admissions. For the current fiscal year, the U.S. goal is to admit 12,000 Iraqi refugees. Through refugee resettlement and special immigrant visas, the IRC Commission on Iraqi Refugees recommends that the president commit to a major effort to increase Iraqi admissions to at least 30,000 per year for the next four years.

FUND AND IMPLEMENT THE KENNEDY LEGISLATION

Timely and effective implementation of the Kennedy bill is critical. As the State Department, Department of Homeland Security and Department of Health and Human Services seek to implement the law, consultation with aid agencies and oversight by Congress must continue. In addition, these federal agencies will require additional resources in fiscal year 2008 to allow full implementation of the bill. IRC and other organizations are recommending that such funding be provided in the fiscal year 2008 supplemental appropriations bill for the Global War on Terror, which will be considered by Congress in spring 2008.

RESETTLEMENT IN EUROPE

Existing resettlement countries within the European Union should expand their quotas, if they are not already doing so. Other EU member states are urged to undertake resettlement programs. All member states, as a matter of urgency, should improve the procedures and access for refugee resettlement and asylum applications. They should halt all forced returns to Iraq. They should ensure that Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers receive appropriate support and assistance in their country of refuge. They should halt all forced returns to Iraq.

UNHCR REFERRALS

UNHCR currently has the capacity to refer around 25,000 of the most vulnerable Iraqis in 2008 and could refer more with better resources. As countries move to resettle more Iraqis, donor countries should ensure that UNHCR has an adequate budget so that it is not handed an unfunded mandate.

4.

A high-level conference of regional countries and interested donors, chaired by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, is needed to develop a coordinated plan to respond to what is likely to be a long-term, large-scale Iraqi refugee situation.

HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE

We propose a high-level conference chaired by the U.N. Secretary-General to examine the plight of Iraqi refugees and the impact on their hosts and the pledge to help both. Conferees could examine the crisis facing Iraqi refugees and the internally displaced, seek assistance for them and consider action that would facilitate the safe, voluntary return of many.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR THE REGION

A conference and planning effort should include government ministers who can grapple with the diplomatic and political aspects of the crisis, and should build on the April 2007 conference in Geneva hosted by UNHCR and subsequent meetings.

PINPOINTING NEEDS

The international community should determine with more precision the number of refugees, their needs and the economic burden they place on their hosts. Getting precise numbers has been very difficult, because these refugees are scattered throughout cities and are not concentrated in camps. Many refugees have been reluctant to register with UNHCR because they fear being arrested and even forced to return to Iraq. Aid should not be delayed while the crisis is assessed and answers for legitimate questions about the number of refugees are sought; there is consensus that there are large numbers of vulnerable people whose basic needs are not being met and increased aid is urgently needed. To help with the assessment and speed the delivery of more aid, we encourage host countries to facilitate the registration of aid agencies.

CONCLUSION

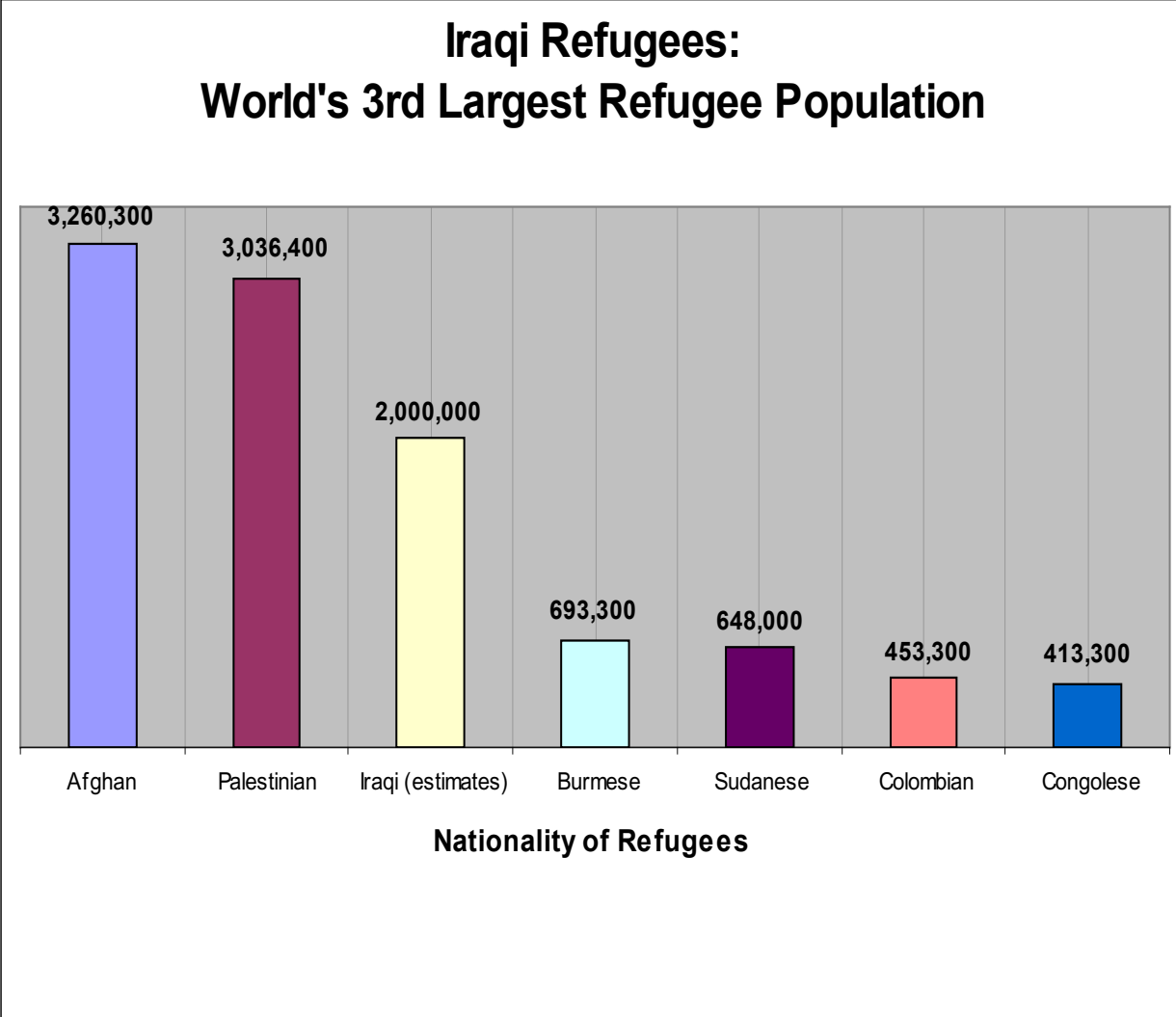
In 1978, the IRC's board chairman, Leo Cherne, created the independent Citizens Commission on Indochinese Refugees and began a 10-year effort to call attention to and gain funding for the plight of refugees throughout Southeast Asia. At a time when the United States was struggling to move beyond the divisive war in Vietnam, the Citizens Commission on Indochinese Refugees successfully influenced public thinking about refugees, which enabled the formulation of humane policies toward refugees in the U.S. and in other resettlement countries. This effort resulted in the Refugees Act of 1980, which authorized the admission of 50,000 Indochinese refugees to the United States per year.

Thirty years later, with a different set of circumstances in a different region of the world, refugees remain neglected and in need. While we do not put our recent endeavors on par with that earlier effort, we were inspired by their example to travel to the Middle East in order to investigate an urgent humanitarian crisis. As Americans, we feel our government and our citizenry bear a special responsibility to Iraqis. As people who are affiliated with the International Rescue Committee, we are mindful that we must continue a 75-year tradition of helping the persecuted, displaced and vulnerable. Now, having witnessed firsthand the suffering of the Iraqi refugees, we resolve ourselves to bring attention to their plight, make others aware, and do our utmost to help them.

APPENDICES

- I. Iraqi Refugees: World's Third Largest Refugee Population
- II. Steps to Increase U.S. Resettlement of Iraqi Refugees
- III. U.S. Refugee Resettlement System
- IV. Summary of Kennedy Legislation
- V. Stories the Refugees Told Us
- VI. Meetings Held by the IRC Commission on Iraqi Refugees
- VII. Members of Commission and Acknowledgements

Appendix I
Iraqi Refugees: World's Third Largest Refugee Population



Appendix II

Steps to Increase U.S. Resettlement of Iraqi Refugees

The U.S. government should increase significantly the number of refugees to be resettled to the United States, by taking the following steps:

1. Adopt much more ambitious goals for the number of Iraqi refugees to be resettled in the United States. Through refugee resettlement and special immigrant visas, the president should commit to a major effort to increase Iraqi admissions to at least 30,000 per year for the next four years.
2. Ensure that the Department of Homeland Security has more financial and personnel resources. Locate staff in Jordan and Syria instead of sending them for temporary duty, called circuit rides. DHS staff should maintain an ongoing, full schedule of interviews in Syria and Jordan.
3. Look to nongovernmental organizations and U.S. embassies for referrals of Iraqi refugees, in addition to UNHCR.
4. Fully and quickly implement the Iraqi refugee provisions in the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2007, included in the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2008. Expand admittance of some Iraqis by using the priority two, or "P-2," category of refugees (refugees in a special group of concern) and increase the number of special immigrant visas.¹²
5. Resettle the full range of categories of vulnerable Iraqis that UNHCR has identified, not just people who are associated with the United States.

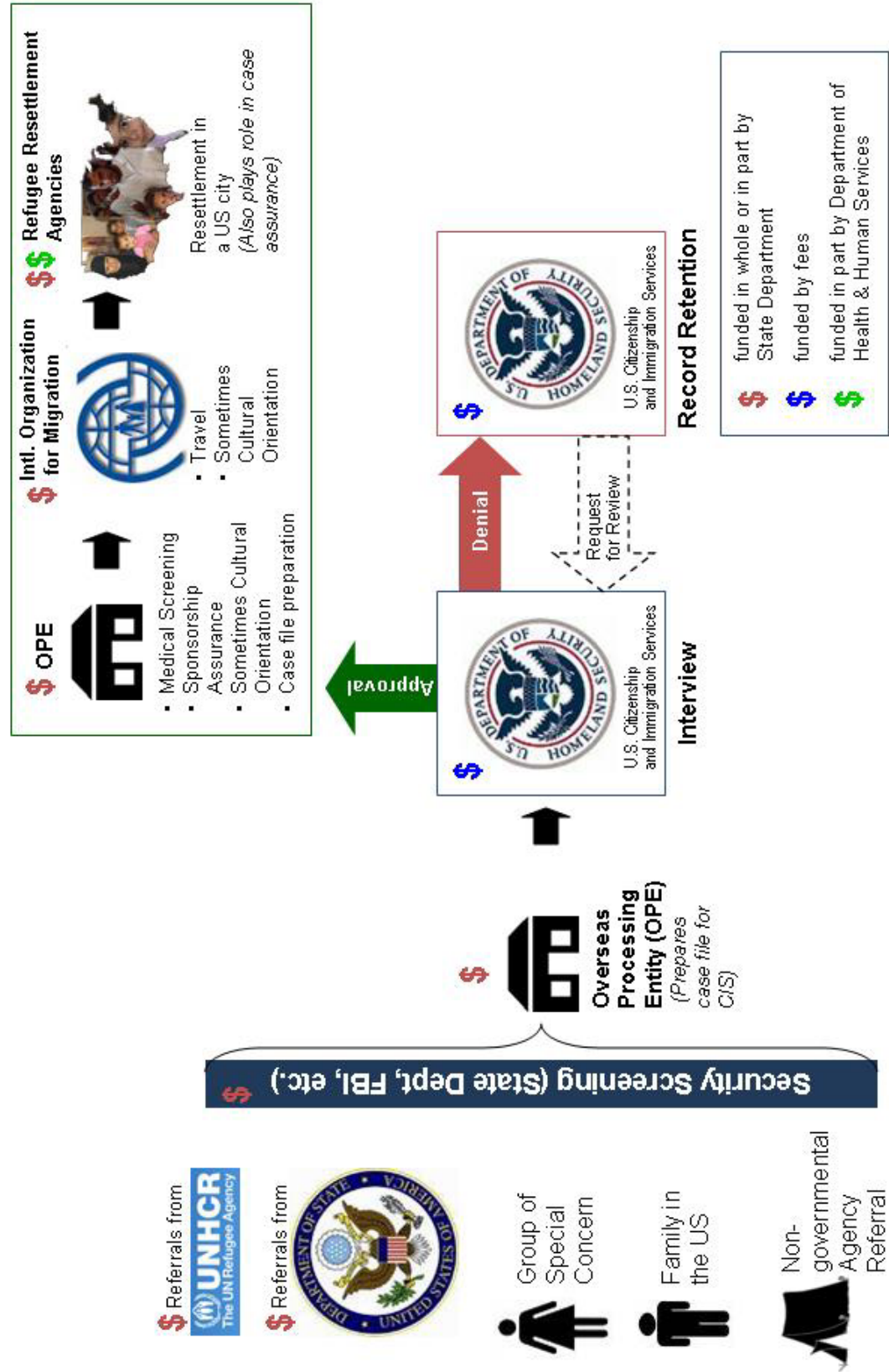
12 According to the U.S. Department of State, new categories of Iraqis in Jordan and Egypt are eligible for resettlement consideration under the United States Refugee Admissions Program. This program is separate from the special immigrant visa (SIV) program. Iraqis in Jordan and Egypt who meet one of the criteria below may contact the U.S. Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) in Amman, Jordan or Cairo, Egypt operated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and seek direct access to the USRAP without a referral from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or a U.S. embassy. The following individuals (and their spouse and unmarried children under 21 years of age) may seek access through this direct program:

1. Iraqis who work/worked on a full-time basis as interpreters/translators for the U.S. government or multinational forces (MNF-I) in Iraq;
2. Iraqis who were engaged as locally employed staff by the U.S. government in Iraq;
3. Iraqis who are/were direct hire employees of an organization or entity closely associated with the U.S. mission in Iraq that has received U.S. government funding through an official and documented contract, award, grant or cooperative agreement;
4. Iraqis who are/were employed in Iraq by a U.S.-based media organization or nongovernmental organization;
5. Spouses, sons, daughters, parents and siblings of individuals described in the four categories above, or of an individual eligible for a special immigrant visa as a result of his/her employment by or on behalf of the U.S. government in Iraq, (even if the individual is no longer alive), provided that the relationship is verified;
6. Iraqis who are the spouses, sons, daughters, parents, brothers or sisters of a citizen of the United States, or who are the spouses or unmarried sons or daughters of a permanent resident alien of the United States, as established by their being or becoming beneficiaries of approved family-based I-130 Immigrant Visa Petitions.

Appendix III U.S. Refugee Resettlement System

US Refugee Resettlement Program* Many Steps, Agencies and Funders

*Under contract with the State Department



Appendix IV

Summary of Kennedy Legislation

Summary of Key Provisions of the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2007

(National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008)

Signed Jan. 28, 2008

SECTION 1241: REFUGEE CRISIS IN IRAQ ACT OF 2007

SECTION 1242: PROCESSING MECHANISMS

- Department of State (DOS) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) shall establish or use existing refugee processing mechanisms in Iraq and countries in the region.
- In-country processing may be suspended for up to 90 days and may be extended if necessary.
- 90 days after enactment of the Act, a report must be issued describing processing mechanisms, use of video conferencing for in-country processing, and diplomatic efforts to improve mechanisms for issuance of exit permits for refugees and SIVs.

SECTION 1243: U.S. REFUGEE PROGRAM PROCESSING PRIORITIES

- General: Refugees of special humanitarian concern eligible for Priority 2 processing:
 - Iraqis who were or are employed by the U.S. government in Iraq.
 - Iraqis who were or are employed in Iraq by
 - A media or nongovernmental organization (NGO) headquartered in the U.S.
 - An organization or entity closely associated with the U.S. mission in Iraq that received official and documented funding.
 - Spouses, children and parents whether accompanying or following to join, and sons, daughters and siblings of all of the above, and of persons described in Section 1244.
 - Persecuted religious or minority communities (as designated by DOS) with close family in the U.S.
- DOS authorized to identify other persecuted groups, including vulnerable populations.
- Ineligible organizations: organizations and entities listed in the Treasury's list of Specially Designated Nationals or any entity excluded by DHS after consultation with the Secretary of State and the intelligence community.
- Persons who qualify for P2 processing must satisfy the requirements of INA Section 207.
- Numerical limits will be determined by the President in consultation with heads of NGOs.
- Person who qualifies as an immediate relative or is eligible for any other immigrant classification may apply for admission as a refugee.

SECTION 1244: SPECIAL IMMIGRANT STATUS FOR CERTAIN IRAQIS

- General: DOS in consultation with DHS may grant special immigrant status to persons who:
 - Submit a special immigrant visa (SIV) petition.
 - Are otherwise eligible to receive an immigrant visa.
 - Are otherwise admissible to the U.S. for permanent residence.
 - Have cleared DHS background checks and appropriate screening.
- Qualified individuals must meet all of the following criteria:
 - A citizen or national of Iraq.
 - Was or is employed by the U.S. government in Iraq on or after March 20, 2003, for not less than one year.
 - Provided faithful and valuable service which is documented in a positive recommendation or evaluation by a supervisor accompanied by approval from Chief of Mission or designee, who shall conduct a risk assessment and review of records.
 - Has experienced or is experiencing an ongoing serious threat as a consequence of employment by the U.S. government.
- Includes spouse and/or children if accompanying or following to join.
- Includes treatment of surviving spouse or child—if a petition was approved for an accompanying spouse or child and, due to death of the principal applicant, the petition was revoked or terminated, and such petition would have been approved if the principal applicant had survived.
- Numerical limits—5,000 per year for the five fiscal years beginning after date of enactment of this Act (FY2009–FY2013), remaining carry forward for FY2014.
- DOS shall make reasonable efforts to ensure those who are issued special immigrant visas are provided with the appropriate series Iraqi passport necessary to enter the U.S.
- DOS shall consult with heads of other Federal agencies to provide individuals applying for special immigrant visas with protection or the immediate removal from Iraq if DOS determines they are in imminent danger.
- An individual who qualifies as an immediate relative or is eligible for any other immigrant classification may apply for admission as a special immigrant.
- Eligible for resettlement assistance, entitlement programs and other benefits available to refugees admitted under INA Section 207.

SECTION 1245: SENIOR COORDINATOR FOR IRAQI REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

- DOS shall designate in U.S. Embassy/Iraq a Senior Coordinator for Iraqi Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons.
- Responsible for the oversight of processing for the resettlement of refugees of special humanitarian concern, the special immigrant visa program and the development and implementation of other policies and programs concerning Iraqi refugees and IDPs. May also refer persons to the U.S. refugee resettlement program.
- Additional Senior Coordinators in U.S. embassies in Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.

SECTION 1246: COUNTRIES WITH SIGNIFICANT POPULATIONS OF IRAQI REFUGEES

- With respect to Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Turkey and Lebanon, DOS shall:
 - Consult with government officials of such countries and other countries and UNHCR regarding resettlement of the most vulnerable members of the refugee population.
 - Develop mechanisms in and provide assistance to countries with a significant population of Iraqi refugees to ensure the well-being and safety of such populations.

SECTION 1247: MOTION TO REOPEN DENIAL OR TERMINATION OF ASYLUM

- An Iraqi citizen or national who applied for asylum and withholding of removal, and whose claim was denied on or after March 1, 2003, by an asylum officer or an immigration judge solely or in part on the basis of changed country conditions, may file a Motion to Reopen such claim not later than six months after the date of the enactment of this act if s/he has remained in the U.S. since the date of such denial.

SECTION 1248: REPORTS

- Not later than 120 days after enactment, DHS shall submit a report to the Committee on the Judiciary (House), Committee on Foreign Affairs (House), Committee on the Judiciary (Senate), and Committee on Foreign Relations (Senate) containing plans to expedite processing of Iraqi refugees.
- Not later than 120 days after enactment, the President shall submit an unclassified report to Congress.
- Not later than 120 days after enactment, DHS in conjunction with DOD, DOS and USAID shall report on Iraqi citizens and nationals employed by the U.S. government or federal contractors.

SECTION 1249: AUTHORIZATION OF FUNDS

Such sums as may be necessary.

Appendix V

Stories the Refugees Told Us

REFUGEES IN AMMAN, JORDAN

Seated around a table in UNHCR's office in Amman, Jordan, Iraqi refugees told compelling stories. Mr. E. listened as other refugees talked, but when asked to share his story, he did. (No refugee wanted his or her name used out of fear of deportation, a fear palpable in virtually every meeting we had with refugees.)

About 30, Mr. E. was fluent in English. He'd been well-educated in a not particularly religious family. He worked in Baghdad as a logistician for a nongovernmental organization. After the bombing in Samarra of the Shiite mosque, the NGO was attacked. Three staffers were killed and the rest threatened, so the organization closed its doors, leaving E. to work his way to Amman, where an uncle has a house he's been staying in.

When asked why he doesn't return, he said, "Why? I'll just be kidnapped and killed. I get death threats on my phone." He shares that he has a wife in Britain, but "the Brits won't even let in their translators. It doesn't help that I'm here in Jordan illegally." In this he has lots of company—probably over 80 percent of the half million Iraqis living in Jordan never had a visa or else hold one that has expired. The taxes and penalties that are accruing for visa violations can be waived, but only if the refugees return home.

Mr. E. has a sister in North America, but he can't get an interview with the Department of Homeland Security officials who are screening former employees of the military and contractors. He's not certain that the NGO will qualify him, even though he has letters of recommendation from his former boss (who left Iraq shortly after things closed down). She sends him some money now and then, but the trauma of his friends being killed at work, the fear of being targeted by the militias, the frustration of not being able to work, and his long-term uncertain future weigh heavily on him. This bright, strong young man ended up in tears.

Mr. A. met us on a rainy steep-sloped street. We had been driven to see him by staffers with CARE, an implementing partner with UNHCR in the effort to register Iraqi families so they can be considered for resettlement. Refugees often hesitate to register, fear that it will lead to their deportation; it would emerge that Mr. A. had been convinced to start the process for the simple reason that his family was running out of money.

Mr. A. led us down 40 or so steps to several cinderblock houses and flats clinging to the steep hill. This was the old, poor part of town. As we entered his tiny flat, there emerged a young son, aged 19, four daughters ranging from late teens to mid-twenties, a young grandson of three, and his wife, who was draped in black from head to toe. The son was dressed in shorts that covered his knees and a short-sleeved shirt and baseball-style cap. He was barefoot on a cold, dreary day.

There was much ado about who should sit on the three plastic chairs that surrounded a table. The son was dispatched to borrow some other chairs as we sat down for the interview. The place was dreary and tiny. A broken cabinet was bursting with clothes and bags. Bulging suitcases were stacked in a six-foot-high pile in a corner, covered with splotches of threadbare cloth. A small gas heater, the only heat source in the entire home, took the edge off the chilly day after the door was closed. Tea appeared from the kitchen, where the women had all repaired after our arrival. Mr. A. lit the first of many cigarettes and began to recount their story.

He had been a singer, he told us. He sang everywhere in the Middle East. He had sung even for King Hussein of Jordan, and he had traveled throughout Europe and North America. He was “famous” in Baghdad.

Mr. A. revealed that he had three other sons, one of whom was working as a policeman in Baghdad in 2004. He told us that his son had been accused of collaborating with the Americans (as many police were). At this point, his wife came into the room carrying a picture of their son in uniform, as well as one of his uniform shirts with the epaulets in place. Tearfully, they told the translator that their son had been brutally killed by the militias. Even worse, if possible, was that they had not heard from their other two sons, missing since 2005.

Following the murder of their son, the family packed up quickly and departed, leaving behind a beautiful home which was soon taken over by a militia group, making it unlikely they will ever get it back or receive compensation. They arrived in Amman with about \$21,000. Like all asylum seekers, Mr. A is not permitted to work in the formal economy. Anyway, he couldn't bring himself to sing in bars and no one could pay him if he could. Now, four years after he and his family fled Iraq, his money is running out (as it is for many, many Iraqis). The psychological straits of this family were transparent, and they talked about it frankly. The wife “cries all the time,” and Mr. A takes medication to manage his depression and PTSD. His son has not been able to attend school since he was 15. (This is changing now, but there is still a great deal of fear associated with schools and difficult social dynamics with poor Jordanians who see Iraqis as taking their places).

The last, terribly sad thing about this experience was learning just how isolated this family felt. They are fearful of their Jordanian neighbors (though reports of neighbors “squealing” on refugees are almost nonexistent, the fear is high). In addition, they are uncomfortable with their Iraqi compatriots, not trusting that they share the same affiliations and/or experiences. Left in urban isolation, these families are shattered and frozen out of opportunities to come to grips with their grief.

Mrs. T. is a widow with a large family. Her husband, a pathologist, was kidnapped, tortured and murdered. One of her daughters was tortured and sexually assaulted. The family fled Baghdad for Amman with few possessions. Two years later, Mrs. T., her two daughters, their husbands and several grandchildren are crowded into a small, frigid apartment in Amman. They survive on handouts from aid agencies. The children are in school, but Mrs. T. has not been able to access proper medical care and has gone blind from untreated high blood pressure. No one in the family is legally allowed to work.

REFUGEE FAMILIES IN DAMASCUS

We visited the B. family living in the Al Yarmouk neighborhood of Baghdad—a Palestinian refugee “camp” (really built up to be part of the city) still heavily populated by Palestinians. Many of the services, such as schools and clinics, are run by UNRWA. The Bs are a young couple with five children ranging in age from about 12 to 4. The eldest is a girl; all the rest, boys. They are living in a bare two-room apartment with two beat-up divans, thin mats on the floor, and a small television.

The family was targeted in Baghdad because they are Sunni and the father worked for the Saddam regime, for the military. They lived in a mixed neighborhood, and their house was bombed “by the national guard” (we think he meant the Mahdi army). The second youngest son was wounded in the blast—he proudly lifted his shirt to show us a scar from his abdomen to his breast-bone. The family tried to stay

in Baghdad for a while, moving from house to house, but eventually left for Syria in 2006. Some of their neighbors were kidnapped and killed. A friend's brother was kidnapped and tortured, and his disfigured body dumped back in the neighborhood. "How can we go back and live there, after what we have seen?" he asked.

All of the children except the youngest have health problems. The girl and one boy have congenital heart problems and the second youngest son still suffers from the trauma of his wound. Another son has diabetes and his medication is very expensive. (The father tested the boy's blood-sugar level while we were there; it was high despite the medication he had taken that morning.) The Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society subsidizes the cost of the medicine by 50 percent, but the family still has trouble affording it.

The father works selling gum and cigarettes 11 to 12 hours a day (we visited on a Friday, which is the day off for most residents of Damascus) and earns an average of about \$4.00. He had a regular job for two weeks, but the boss didn't pay him, so he quit.

He said that they are pursued here by Iraqi agents, who are attempting to develop weapons-smuggling charges against him. He was detained for 82 days and they attempted to get him deported to Iraq. He appealed to stop the deportation.

The children don't play out of doors. They have been beaten up by the neighborhood kids. In general, the father said, Palestinians and Syrians harass and insult Iraqis. "It's too much," he said. "We are honorable people, we have our dignity."

The family is registered with UNHCR, although many refugees don't trust the interviewers and translators at UNHCR, suspecting they are Iraqi agents. So they don't tell them everything. The family hopes to resettle abroad so that they can get medical care for the children.

Mrs. M. is a widow whose husband was a Sunni imam. He was kidnapped and tortured horribly, then killed and dumped on their doorstep. She has cancer which has metastasized, and she is not getting treatment. Her married daughter has come from Baghdad to be with her.

She has two sons, 15 and 18. They all live in two tiny, dilapidated rooms. The younger son has problems with his eyes. The older one is disturbed, angry all the time, refuses to cooperate, and can't hold a job. Occasionally, he breaks things in the house in a rage. Nonetheless, his presence disqualifies the widow for the UNHCR-administered ATM-card income support. Any family with an adult male is ineligible. (Asked about this, UNHCR says it does make exceptions, but word had not reached this lady.) They survive on loans from friends and neighbors (including the UNHCR outreach worker). Neighbors have given the family furniture for their two rooms.

We next visited Sheik H, a religious leader, and his wife, daughter and three sons. The children were between eight and 14 years old. The eldest, a boy, had lost a leg below the knee during a gun battle at his school in 2004. He was using crutches and had no prosthesis.

The sheik was a convert from Shi'ism to Sunnism, and was therefore a target of violent attacks. His mosque, where the family also lived, was attacked 10 times. Finally it was bombed by "the government" (Shia forces). Six bombs were placed in the mosque (he had pictures of them). The minaret fell when they exploded, but the family had left for Syria by then.

The family is living on savings now, but soon the money will run out. The sheik said, "We will have to go back to Iraq. What else can we do?" They use the UNRWA clinic in the neighborhood, which gives them a 30 percent discount.

Our final visit was to a 37-year-old woman with a two-year-old daughter. She had arrived in Damascus in November 2005 with her husband, who owned a publishing and distribution company in Baghdad. In November 2007, he went back to liquidate some assets to supplement their exhausted savings. She has not heard from him since, or anything about him.

She is often insulted by young men in the neighborhood, and receives threatening messages under her door or on her mobile. The sheik and other Iraqi neighbors try to keep an eye on her, and help her. She is living in one room with a foyer and small kitchen. The rent is \$160 a month, including electricity and water.

Both her parents are dead. She has one brother still living in Baghdad, but he is mentally handicapped. She registered with UNHCR after her husband disappeared, but she cannot prove she is a widow. This was three months ago, but she still hasn't received any assistance. "We are lost here," she said

WHY DID THEY LEAVE?

A young woman: "My sister was killed last year by the militia. Then my uncle was killed because my mother worked at a munitions plant during the Saddam era."

A young man: "My brother was kidnapped, and then killed, because we couldn't raise enough ransom. Then I got a letter with a bullet saying I would be next. Finally, four 'bad guys' forced their way into our home and beat everyone up. I left the next day."

A former professor and mother of a young child: "My husband was a Baathist and then worked for the Americans in 2003. The Mahdi army targeted us basically because we were seen saying 'hi' to an American. My husband went to Baghdad to sell our property and was caught by the Mahdi army. That was four years ago. I have never heard from him since. The Canadians accepted me for resettlement, but they require proof that my husband was in the Saddam army. I can't go back to Baghdad to get the papers from the government, so I'm stuck."

A professional soccer player: "We played a game here in Jordan and I stayed behind. I'd been targeted because our team had both Sunni and Shia players. The militia killed one of our teammates, so we were really scared and became refugees. I was falsely accused of my teammate's death. The 'other' militants grabbed my brother and killed him in revenge. Now my family blames me for my brother's death. I can't go anywhere. Single young men are being ignored."

A middle aged woman: "My husband was a journalist. The militants killed my son, and our house was burned down."

Appendix VI

Meetings Held by the IRC Commission on Iraqi Refugees

Jan. 30, 2008—Washington, D.C. / New York, N.Y.

Andrew Harper, Geneva-based Senior Iraq Operations Manager for UNHCR

Feb. 1, 2008—New York, N.Y.

Meeting of Commissioners at IRC headquarters to briefly review the major issues, go over trip logistics and follow-up, and meet with and listen to Fuad Kadim Jawad, Maysoon Jaber Khafaji and Reem Fuad Jawad, a recently resettled Iraqi family now living in New Jersey.

Feb. 8, 2008—Washington, D.C. Briefings

Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM): Sam Witten, Acting Assistant Secretary; Ambassador James Foley, Senior Coordinator on Iraqi Refugee Issues; Theresa Rusch, Director of Admissions; Lawrence Bartlett, Deputy Director, Asia and Near East Assistance Office; and Hilary Ingraham, Program Officer, Asia and Near East

Bureau of Near East Affairs, State Department: Allison Monz, Syria Desk Officer and Stephen Newhouse, Acting Director for Egypt and Levant Affairs

Bureau of Near East Affairs, Department of Homeland Security: Barbara Strack, Chief, Refugee Affairs Division, U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services

Feb. 15, 2008—New York, N.Y. / Washington, D.C.

Sharon Waxman, Office of Senator Edward Kennedy, and Perry Cammack, Office of Senator Joseph Biden

Feb. 18-20, 2008—Amman, Jordan

Meeting with U.N. Deputy Special Representative to Iraq David Shearer

Meeting with UNHCR Representative Imran Riza

Visit to UNHCR Registration Center

Meeting with Iraq's Ambassador to Jordan Sa'ed Jasim Al Hayiani

Home Visits with Iraqi refugees

Note: A small group also visited the Overseas Processing Entity run by the International Organization for Migration

Group Discussions with Iraqi refugees at CARE center
Meeting with head of UNHCR Iraq Marco Roggia
Briefing with U.S. Ambassador David Hale and U.S. Embassy team
Meeting with Minister of Social Development Hala Lattouf

Feb. 21, 2008—Damascus, Syria

Meeting with U.S. Charge d’Affaires Michael Corbin
Meeting with President Bashar al-Assad
Meeting with Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallim
Meeting with Vice President Farouk al-Sharaa
Meeting with UNCHR Outreach Workers (all Iraqi refugee women)
Meeting with UNHCR Representative Laurens Jolles

Note: A small group also met with Syrian officials from the Ministries of Health, Education and Social Affairs.

Note: A small group remained in Damascus for three additional days to meet with more Iraqi refugees in Syria, visit the UNHCR food distribution and registration centers, and meet with colleagues from other organizations

Appendix VII

Members of the Commission and Acknowledgments*

Morton Abramowitz, IRC Board Member, The Century Foundation; former Assistant Secretary of State and Ambassador to Turkey and Thailand

Susan Dentzer, IRC Board Member; Health Correspondent, The Newshour (PBS)

Kathleen Newland, IRC Board Member; Co-Founder and Director, Migration Policy Institute

Drummond Pike, Founder and President, The Tides Foundation

George Rupp, President, IRC; former President, Columbia University

Jean Kennedy Smith, IRC Board Member; former Ambassador to Ireland

Maureen White, Co-Chair of the IRC Overseers; former U.S. Representative to UNICEF

John Whitehead, IRC Chair Emeritus; former Deputy Secretary of State

James Wolfensohn, IRC Overseer; former President of the World Bank

IRC SENIOR STAFF

George Biddle, Senior Vice President

Robert Carey, Vice President, Resettlement and Chairman, Refugee Council USA

Anne Richard, Vice President, Government Relations & Advocacy

Michael Kocher, Vice President (Acting), International Programs

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Herve de Baillenx, Makenzie Brookes, Amany Michael Ebye, Chelsea Kinsman, Jana Mason, Shannon Meehan, Elissa Mittman, Nathaniel Hurd, Rama Shahin, Hasan Bahjat and Melissa Winkler.

*Affiliations given are not exhaustive. Listed are those most relevant to work of the International Rescue Committee and the IRC Commission on Iraqi Refugees.



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