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## Briefing With United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres, and Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees, and Migration Ellen Sauerbrey

**Paula J. Dobriansky, Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs**

Washington, DC

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**MR. CASEY:** Okay. Afternoon, everybody. Thanks for joining us on a lovely snowy day here in Washington. Very glad you are here; I wanted to have the opportunity to have you hear from a couple of very important people. First of all, our Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky and along with her, our distinguished visitor today, Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Obviously, they've met with the Secretary earlier today and one of the subjects of discussion was the issue of Iraqi refugees currently in the region. They'd like to talk to you a little bit, both about their meetings and about some of the things that we're working on to address that situation.

So Paula, let me turn it over to you.

**UNDER SECRETARY DOBRIANSKY:** Thank you. Good afternoon. I'm pleased to be here with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres and my colleague, Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration Ellen Sauerbrey.

Today, we have had constructive discussions on an issue of great concern both to the UN High Commissioner of Refugees and UNHCR and to the United States Government, the situation of displaced Iraqis and Iraqi refugees. Earlier today, High Commissioner Guterres discussed with Secretary Rice our commitment to working together to find durable solutions for Iraqi refugees by providing humanitarian assistance, augmenting the capacity of UNHCR to identify and refer refugees in need of resettlement, and committing additional resources to assist internally displaced persons in Iraq.

Most significantly, the United States and the international community can best help displaced Iraqis by quelling the

violence in Iraq and assisting them in making their country peaceful, prosperous, and secure. We are committed to working with the Iraqi Government to create a stable and secure environment that enables Iraqis to repatriate voluntarily to their homeland. At the same time, we have a responsibility to respond to the immediate needs of Iraqis who have fled violence and persecution. And the United States will provide leadership in meeting those needs.

The Secretary recently asked me to lead a task force and coordinate our efforts to respond to the situation. Members include the Senior Advisor to the Secretary on Iraq, the Director General of the Foreign Service and Human Resources, the Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs, the Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration, the United States Agency for International Development Administrator for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance, the Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, USAID's Senior Deputy Administrator for Asia and the Near East, and representatives of the Department of Homeland Security.

Our key immediate objectives are to assist internally displaced Iraqis and Iraqi refugees by building up the capacities of UN agencies and NGOs. This includes increasing opportunities for permanent resettlement for the most vulnerable Iraqis, to establish specialized programs to assist Iraqis who are at risk because of their employment or close association with the United States Government, to work diplomatically with regional governments through bilateral and multilateral channels to uphold the principle of first asylum.

I am pleased to report that we have made some recent progress in these areas. We will contribute an immediate \$18 million toward UNHCR's recent appeal for Iraq which represents 30 percent of their appeal. This is on top of the more than \$76 million provided by the State Department to UNHCR over the past four years. Additional funding to other humanitarian organizations involved in this effort will be provided upon completion of FY '07 appropriation bills. Total State Department contributions since 2003 for Iraqi refugees and conflict victims total 185 million.

USAID just provided \$5 million through NGOs to assist internally displaced persons in Iraq. USAID's FY '07 supplemental request includes another \$45 million for this assistance. This is in addition to the \$192.7 million previously provided to assist internally displaced persons from USAID.

Efforts to assist and protect refugees include resettlement for the most vulnerable. The United States will do its part. We are expanding our capacity to receive referrals from UNHCR and plan to process expeditiously some 7,000 Iraqi refugee referrals in the near term.

In terms of assisting Iraqis who are at risk because of their employment or close association with the United States Government, first we have activated a procedure to allow Embassy Baghdad to refer cases in need of refugee resettlement consideration. We are also developing in cooperation with other agencies of the U.S. Government proposed legislation to provide additional immigration mechanisms for Iraqis in need of protection due to their employment or close association with our government. We are actively engaging governments in the region through bilateral and multilateral channels, thanking them for their assistance and encouraging them to uphold the principle of first asylum.

We have already had discussions with the governments of both Jordan and Syria this week. I also confirmed today with the UN High Commissioner that the United States will fully support a UNHCR-led donors conference to be held in Geneva in April to secure pledges from the international community to help Iraqi refugees and displaced persons.

Again, I am pleased to be here today with the High Commissioner and with the Assistant Secretary to share with you what more we can do to assist Iraqi refugees and other displaced Iraqis. There is a lot to be done and we are firmly committed to helping those in need.

I'd now like to invite Commissioner Guterres to say some words. He just has returned, in fact, from the region. Thank you.

**COMMISSIONER GUTERRES:** Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, it's a pleasure to be here with you. I first of all want to express my deep appreciation to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, to Under Secretary of State Paula Dobriansky and to Assistant Secretary of State Ellen Sauerbrey with whom I had today very frank and very positive discussions on how to work better in order to alleviate the plight of Iraqis that have been displaced inside Iraq or became refugees outside the country.

I just came from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Syria and Jordan trying to contact the countries that surround Iraq and to see how we can work better with them in order to be able to give protection and assistance to the Iraqis that have been displaced and that corresponds to one of the major humanitarian problems we face at the present moment.

I think it's important to give you an idea, first of all, of the dimension of the problem we are facing. We are discussing about 1.8 million Iraqis inside Iraq and about 2 million Iraqis in the countries around, but mainly concentrated in Syria and Jordan. And my first remark would be that Syria and Jordan have been receiving Iraqis and they've been doing so based on their own Arab hospitality tradition. They are not signatories to the 51 Convention, considering them as guests, as visitors. They've been doing so with a lot of generosity in the past few years, of course, with increasing numbers and more complex situations in the recent past, but with an effort that is becoming more and more difficult to bear in relation to their economies, to their societies and to their security. And it is understandable that countries that have received, as I said, many hundreds of thousands of Iraqis feel the pressure over the economy, over prices, the real estate market, the pressure over infrastructure; namely, the education and the health systems and their impact in the social fabrics and in the security concerns of the governments.

And I do believe it is very important that the international community together can help these countries to sustain their effort of protection and assistance to the Iraqi refugees that seek refuge in them.

We are a humanitarian organization. I usually say that we are not doctors; we are only nurses. We cannot deal with the origins of a problem. We deal with the symptoms and displacement is a symptom of a problem. The solution of the problem is obviously a political solution and it's not up to us to be interfering with that political solution. But one thing I can guarantee to you, after meeting many Iraqis in the countries around, is that the large majority wants one day to be able to be back to their country and to rebuild their lives in their own country. And that's the same I think applies to any other big displacement problem in the world.

In between, I think it is our obligation to do basically two things. First of all to make sure that we mobilize international community in support of the asylum countries and especially at the present moment to Jordan and Syria in order for them to be able to sustain the protection and assistance effort to these displaced Iraqis and this has been a crucial issue of the debates we have today. And at the same time, to try to address specific vulnerable situations that have protection concerns that are very specific and in which the only solution is resettlement to third countries. And I'm very happy that not only we have been assisted in order to increase our resettlement referral capacity, we will be able hopefully to process about 20,000 referrals during 2007 for different destinations in the world. And also I'm very happy

to see that there is a meaningful capacity of the United States in the next few months to be able to consider a relevant number of referrals for the U.S.

But I would like to repeat it and to make it very clear, it's very important to have resettlement opportunities for people that have no other solution: unaccompanied minors, women in very difficult circumstances, people with health problems that have no solution in the countries where they live, people that are particularly vulnerable because they belong to groups that are targeted, more specifically targeted in the present situation. But resettlement as such will never be a solution for the whole of the problem because the numbers we are speaking cannot, of course, be handled only by resettlement opportunities worldwide.

The global number of resettlement opportunities in 2006 for all destinations from all crises in the world has been about 70,000. You can understand, when we are speaking about 2 million people, we must make sure that first of all, we create the conditions to assist them where they are now and at the same time, we hope that the political situation will allow for one day, sooner rather than later, for them to be able to go back to their country and to rebuild their lives, (inaudible), as I said, to their will.

I know that we are going to work very closely together in the months to come, both in order to make sure that our conference in which we will have all the countries of the region, the donor community, the NGOs, the major actors in this humanitarian situation in Geneva in order to upgrade the capacity of the international community to act in support of the refugees themselves and in support of the countries that are hosting them. And I also know that we are going to work very closely together both in relation to the improvement of our own assistance programs and in relation to the success of the resettlement program that will be so important, I hope, for the people that really face extremely difficult and vulnerable conditions.

So thank you very much and, of course, I'll be glad to answer whatever questions you have.

**UNDER SECRETARY DOBRIANSKY:** Thank you. Let's open it up and take questions and if you don't mind introducing yourself, identifying yourself.

**QUESTION:** Arshad Mohammed of Reuters. Secretary Dobriansky, just one simple question. You said that you expect to or hope to process the 7,000 in the near term. Sean McCormack told us this morning he thought that would happen by the end of the fiscal year, that is, by the end of September. Other officials have said six to nine months. Can you give us what the near term means, by the end of the year? Second --

**UNDER SECRETARY DOBRIANSKY:** The near term, just to answer it precisely, it is during this fiscal year.

**QUESTION:** Okay.

**UNDER SECRETARY DOBRIANSKY:** And we're talking about actually the interviewing of the various referrals by the Department of Homeland Security.

**QUESTION:** Will those people be here by the end of this fiscal year or not?

**UNDER SECRETARY DOBRIANSKY:** In terms of the number, you have the interviews first and you have to determine who is qualified, who isn't qualified. But we expect to have those and maybe even more. That is an initial figure and our anticipation, it would be actually even more than that.

**QUESTION:** But do you expect to actually have 7,000 Iraqi refugees in the United States by the end of the fiscal year or not?

**UNDER SECRETARY DOBRIANSKY:** I think I answered that question and that is, it depends on the outcome of the interview itself, because an individual would have to qualify and there is a process to that. Would you like to add something further on that?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAUERBREY:** Yes. If I could add to that, the process of processing is a time-consuming one because not only do we have a very intense security screening that is in place, but following security screening, there is another health screening. So it does take a matter of months normally, once we have begun the interview process, before someone is actually travel-ready.

So I think it's fair to say that under the best of circumstances, it will be, perhaps, half of the number that we actually are addressing in the fiscal year that we'll be ready -- travel-ready before the end of September.

**QUESTION:** And the other question was, do you believe the U.S. Government has a special responsibility to try to take in Iraqi refugees, given the U.S. role in leading the invasion of Iraq? And if so, can you explain to us why it has taken until now for the United States to take sort of dramatic steps to try to process and bring in significantly large numbers of refugees? As you're well aware, the figure since '03 is 466 and the figure for the last fiscal year is 2002 -- is 202, excuse me. Why did it take so long for the U.S. Government to perceive that this was a problem that it should act more dramatically on?

**UNDER SECRETARY DOBRIANSKY:** I will comment and then I'd like to invite Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey to comment. First, the numbers reflect those that were in need, meaning the earlier numbers. In terms of our responsibility, I think that today's statement, the steps that we have been -- have taken, that we are taking, and that we will continue to take manifests a concern for helping all those vulnerable Iraqis, all those who are in need, and determining solutions and ways of assisting them.

One of our priorities, as you know and I referred to, is providing for a secure Iraq. There are many who want to return to Iraq. In fact, the Commissioner shared with us some of his conversations and clearly, as you can anticipate, there are those who want to go to their homeland. So we are desirous of doing everything possible to help, given those that qualify as refugees, those who are internally displaced, those that fit in the category who have worked for the U.S. Government or are associated with us.

Our goal is certainly to provide every assistance possible, but I want to underscore the fact that I believe that the numbers before are a reflection of, in many ways, those that were coming out and expressing a need of being resettled. There were many that have not expressed a need to be resettled.

Would you like to just add to that and we'll go to another, I think, question?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAUERBREY:** Thank you, Paula. It should be recognized that a year ago this time, we were still spending most of our effort and resources in helping people to return to Iraq. It really was not until after the Samara bombing in February of last year that the sectarian violence began to reach a level that there was a significant outward movement.

And in the early days, the people that were leaving were people who were, for the most part, people who had resources and they were going to the surrounding countries and they were not being categorized as refugees. In fact, Jordan and Syria do not categorize them as refugees today. They refer to them as guests or visitors. And so there was really nothing that was indicating that there was any significant issue in terms of an outflow until -- I would say the first real indication that we had began to reach us three to four months ago.

And at that point, we began conversations with the High Commissioner about initiating a registration campaign so that we could identify people to consider for resettlement. But as the Under Secretary indicated, we have also been giving considerable assistance for refugees in the region for the last four years, so this is nothing that is a new phenomena this year.

**QUESTION:** A question for the High Commissioner. I'm Anne Gearan with the Associated Press. Can you tell us, sir, whether you think the measures announced today by the United States go far enough and whether you would have liked to have seen them earlier than today?

**COMMISSIONER GUTERRES:** I think they correspond to a very good start in the program that we launched with our appeal in January, so they came close to the appeal. We are now gearing up for the appeal to become a success and after that, of course, we will have the conference in which we'll try to put together all the relevant actors and find a common strategy to have a real international capacity to deal in the best possible way with this problem. I think that these steps now are a very important step in the right direction.

**QUESTION:** So is it enough?

**COMMISSIONER GUTERRES:** Well, as I mentioned, the problem is so huge that nothing is, any time, enough. But I think it's very good stuff -- a very good step in the right direction and also, to deal with these problems, we need to build capacity and that's what we are doing. And I believe that these will make a significant change in the way, together, the international community will be able to handle this problem.

**QUESTION:** Elise Labott with CNN. For the High Commissioner, if I could just follow up and also, if Under Secretary and Assistant Secretary could respond, the numbers that we've heard today, 7,000, as you said, is kind of a drop in the bucket compared to the millions of refugees and internally displaced and, I think by your own estimates, about 50,000 are fleeing every month. Do you think that there should be a larger number of people here in the United States resettled? Do you think that the United States has a greater responsibility to take on more refugees?

And for the Under Secretary and for Assistant Secretary, how did you arrive at the number 7,000? Compared to the numbers that the UN is estimating, the magnitude of the problem seems that it could require a much larger contribution for resettlement. Thank you.

**COMMISSIONER GUTERRES:** I think it's important to understand what's the role of resettlement in a crisis of this

nature. The role of resettlement is not to give an answer to the problems of everybody. We have, today, 8.5 million refugees in the world, 25 million internally displaced persons in the world. It is obvious that resettlement will never be a solution for the bulk of this population.

With resettlement, we need to try to solve the problem of those that have particular needs of protection and in which each, the movement to a third country is an essential element to provide that protection. And this refers to very vulnerable people, I would say. And for this, there is very important work in detecting these people, in referring them, and afterwards, in taking care of the security concerns that all resettlement countries necessarily apply in these situations. That is why we have defined -- as I said, in the framework of a global -- global resettlement capacity in the world that has been, more or less, of 70,000 people from all kinds of origins to all kinds of destinations.

We are trying to build, very quickly, and it will be built entirely at the end of February, a capacity to refer, as I said, about 20,000 Iraqis, which represents a very meaningful proportion of this world capacity in the present year.

Now in relation to these 20,000, the possibility of the United States to consider a first (inaudible) of 7,000 resettlement opportunities until, I would say -- I hope that they will be ready during the summer. It's, of course, a relevant contribution and I think it should be recognized as such.

**UNDER SECRETARY DOBRIANSKY:** Do you want to say, quickly, Ellen, just on the figure?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAUERBREY:** Just to add and reinforce what's already been said, is that there is a perception, I think, that there is a huge number of people just waiting to leave their country, the region, and come and be resettled elsewhere. In reality, this refugee crisis is no different than those that we deal with throughout the world and most people do not want to resettle in another country. Most people want to stay in the region, certainly have their needs met, but they want to go home.

And so when you look at this number of 7,000, put it in the context that the United States regularly resettles more than half of the refugees that are resettled around the world in any given year and that there is a capacity need on the part of UNHCR in order to be able to process. And there is not a limitless capability right now to process 20,000 -- hundreds of thousands of people.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible). Can we get those figures? What is the number that are resettled annually and how many Iraqi refugees have come here over the years? I mean, we know what it was for last year, but what about the previous years?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAUERBREY:** The numbers that we normally have resettled in the past few years has been lower than some earlier years because of the more intense security screening following 9/11. And the number -- the total number last year of refugees resettled into the United States was over 41,000. More than half of the refugees resettled anywhere in the world came here.

Now the number that we hear of the 400 and why is it so small; following 9/11, the security screening that was put in place by the Department of Homeland Security in response to the concerns of the American people made it very, very difficult for people from this region to be screened to come into the United States. And in fact, the numbers dropped off so dramatically that UNHCR found it not a very attractive destination and were making very few referrals to the United

States. But in addition, I go back to what I said before, conditions in Iraq were such that there was not a huge desire for a resettlement into the United States. Most of the people that we were helping were resettling back to their homes in Iraq.

**QUESTION:** But the numbers in the first couple of years -- if it was 202 last year, what was it in '05 and '04?

**QUESTION:** Do we have those year by year or can somebody get them to us?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAUERBREY:** We can get them to you, yes.

**COMMISSIONER GUTERRES:** If I may just say something about this because it's a very important note. It's a very important note. Resettlement is very relevant. It's very important. And for the people resettled, it has a lot of meaning. If you are very vulnerable, if you are afraid for your life, if you have no other chance to be resettled, it means the difference between life and death. It's very important.

But resettlement cannot be used as the solution for all problems. And resettlement will never be used by us as an excuse not to address the problem of the refugees in its global dimension. And when we look at a problem of this dimension, it is obvious that the need to assist the people in the countries of the region, namely, because the bigger numbers are in Syria and Jordan but also in Egypt, in Lebanon, in Turkey and in Iran -- to assist the people, to give them conditions to have a dignified life is also a common responsibility of us all.

And hopefully, as I said, hopefully one day, helping them be able to return, because everywhere in the world, the large majority of refugees want as a solution for their lives to be able to go back to their countries and to help rebuild their countries. And I think that we should never forget these responsibilities because resettlement is very important, but it's not the beginning and the end.

**QUESTION:** Libby Leist from NBC News. I wanted to ask you about the Iraqis that have worked for the American Government. Do you keep -- do you have any numbers on those people that are trying to resettle elsewhere, that have worked through the American Government in Iraq and may be under threat? And also, are they receiving special priority? I know that that was a large concern for lawmakers as to whether these people that have helped our military and otherwise -- are they getting special priority to come to the United States?

**UNDER SECRETARY DOBRIANSKY:** Let me take the last part of the question, if you'll take the first part.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAUERBREY:** Okay.

**QUESTION:** And is it part of the 7,000 that you mentioned?

**UNDER SECRETARY DOBRIANSKY:** On your question, specifically, I referred in my statement to the fact that we are considering and developing specific mechanisms relevant to legislation that would address these areas and these concerns. For example, one of the areas is looking at specialized immigrant -- special immigrant visas and the terms of special immigrant visas. That's one example. So that is one of the specific actions that we are actively pursuing.

Would you like to comment on the first part?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAUERBREY:** Yes. The numbers of those that have actually been seeking either movement out of the country or requesting assistance have been from -- our own Embassy's indication, they have said that it is a very small number. However, those that are under threat, whether it's a small number or not and their lives are endangered, we take that very seriously and that's a very significant issue.

At this point, what we have done has been to say to the embassies if the person has already left the country and is in Jordan or Syria, we want to know who they are and we want to give their names immediately to UNHCR. And we have spoken to UNHCR about prioritizing -- immediately getting those into the stream for resettlement.

The longer term solution, as the Under Secretary said, some of it will require legislation. And one of the elements is that we don't want to take people who have helped the United States Government, who we bring in on parole and just dump them. And currently, there are no benefits attached to parole. So one of the elements of this is to create a system where there will be refugee status benefits applied to people who come in on a parole situation.

**QUESTION:** One follow-up. What is "very small number?" I mean, what are we talking about here? Can you give a little bit more specific --

**QUESTION:** Hundreds, thousands?

**QUESTION:** Right.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAUERBREY:** No, no. There are only -- in terms of foreign nationals working in -- excuse me, in terms of Iraqis working in our Embassy, I was told that the number is less than 50 and most of them are still there working and have not sought --

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) worked with U.S. military (inaudible).

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAUERBREY:** No. If you start looking at the broad category, I think we're talking about several thousand people who have been translators, worked for the military, worked for various parts of the government. I cannot give you a specific number if you look at all of the people who have worked in some way with the U.S. Government. I can't give you a number.

**MR. CASEY:** Let's move around and let's go back here.

**QUESTION:** George Packer from the *New Yorker*. I mean, isn't it possible to refer not through UNHCR, but through the U.S. Government, which would speed it up and give them a Priority 2 status, especially if you're referring from the Embassy in Baghdad, which means they would not have to go to Amman or Damascus to the UNHCR offices there? Wouldn't it just speed up and streamline and also make safer the entire process if you would refer them from the U.S. Government?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAUERBREY:** We have been in touch with our Embassy and we have made

recommendations to the Embassy that they can make direct referrals without going to UNHCR. The answer is yes.

**COMMISSIONER GUTERRES:** If I may just give information on that. Of the total number of U.S. resettlement cases, UNHCR refers a little bit -- about half. So when we speak about resettlement, we have not a monopoly of referrals and it doesn't make sense to have that monopoly. And as I said, the U.S. has been accepting, more or less, the -- double than the referrals that are given through UNHCR.

**MR. CASEY:** Let's go back here.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) of the *New York Times*. I was wondering if there was a timeframe on the legislation that you were talking about in terms of a special type of visa or --

**UNDER SECRETARY DOBRIANSKY:** We need to have an interagency process and discussion on this and so we are embarking on that. Also, clearly, as part of this process, it will involve a budgetary component as well as discussion with members on the Hill. So our expectation is to move very quickly on this. I can't estimate, but I could say to you that we are going to -- we are moving very quickly on this. We want to -- on this option, we want to propose some changes.

**MR. CASEY:** Let's go down here.

**QUESTION:** My name is Munir Mawari (ph). I am with Asharq Al Awsat daily Arabic newspaper based in London. My question to Under Secretary, as you heard the High Commissioner he has a relative point of view of the role of the neighboring country, especially Syria and Jordan. Do you share with him this point of view and are you willing to work with Syria regarding this refugee issue?

And my question to the High Commissioner about the displaced Iraqis inside Iraq, do you consider them full refugees and what can you do for them among the security issue?

**UNDER SECRETARY DOBRIANSKY:** As to your question, we have valued and we appreciate the assistance that has been rendered in the region by these countries. As I indicated in my opening statement and let me restate it, our diplomats just went in days ago in Syria and also in Jordan to specifically discuss the situation and to try to ensure first asylum -- the upholding of first asylum policy here.

Let me add that it's been just in recent days -- I believe yesterday we got word that we already have 100 referrals in Damascus and we also have literally the beginning of interviewing, based on referrals, as well in Jordan which will start on February 26th. I don't know if you have anything to add on that portion.

**COMMISSIONER GUTERRES:** Thank you very much. Well, we have seven offices in Iraq: Sulaymaniyah, Arbil, Dahuk, Kirkuk, Baghdad, Nasiriyah and Basra. We are not allowed, according to UN regulations, to have international staff there so we are working based on our own Iraqi staff. I had the opportunity to meet in Kuwait our people that is working in Basra, Nasiriyah and in Amman with our people that is working in Baghdad and I have to pay tribute to their work. It's a very courageous, very brave work and I am very proud of what they are doing. As a matter of fact, they are not only trying to assist refugees inside Iraq and we have still some very difficult groups. I would raise your attention for the plight of 15,000 Palestinian refugees in Baghdad that are becoming targets. Six hundred of them have been killed

and this is a very difficult situation we face. But they are working also more and more with people internally displaced in Iraq.

We believe that directly or indirectly through our action that, of course, has many security limitations as you can imagine, we have been able, in 2006, to be of some kind of assistance. I'm not going to say it was much but it was some kind of assistance to about 400,000 Iraqis displaced inside Iraq, which is, in any case, much smaller than the number of Iraqis that have been displaced. It's not easy to work in that environment. But as I said, our staff is doing its best in order to be able to provide the maximum amount of assistance we are able to do so.

We have 20 partners, NGOs -- Iraqis and international -- working with us. And I'd also like to express to them my deep gratitude and appreciation.

**MR. CASEY:** I think we've got time for one more. So, Michele, why don't you --

**QUESTION:** Michele Kelemen with National Public Radio. I wondered -- first of all, Mr. Guterres, if you could talk a little bit about the conditions that Iraqi refugees are living in in Syria and Jordan and places that you visited. And whether or not the 60,000 million is even enough given the fact that -- I don't know if it's 50,000 or 100,000 coming out every month, if you could give us a sense of that.

And then I have a technical question for the U.S. side. There's other troubles that Iraqi students and business people have had, that they have old passports that they can no longer get U.S. visas for. And I wonder if this is part of your taskforce, if you're addressing that question.

**COMMISSIONER GUTERRES:** First of all, the two communities are not identical. The community in Jordan is, as an average, of higher income than the community in Syria, even if today, we also have in Jordan a meaningful amount of poor people. In Syria, you have basically middle class and poor people. But even middle class that left Iraq some months or one or so or two years ago, now their income -- they have no jobs so they are becoming poor. And the number of people poor in both -- especially in Syria, but in both Syria and Jordan, is becoming very worrying and we have several situations that are absolutely dramatic. And (inaudible) some of them in absolute dramatic situations, even women having -- being forced to -- well, use so-called survival sex and things of this sort that are really very worrying and that's why it's absolutely crucial to increase the capacity to assist this group of people.

At the same time, I must say I'm particularly worried with the evolution of the public opinion in these two countries. Listening to cab drivers, to average citizens, people are feeling more and more that many of the problems they face because of inflation, because of difficulty to find flats if they want to marry a daughter or a son are due to the presence of Iraqi refugees. So there is a risk for the protection environment of the Iraqis there and that's why I appeal to a massive support to these countries. Now that massive support is not only through UNHCR. We have a limited role to play and we are going to play it very -- in a very committed way. But it is necessary to understand that the dimension of the problem requires the mobilization of all UN agencies and all forms of bilateral aid to these countries in order for them to be able to cope with such a huge pressure over their economies, their societies, their infrastructure and even their security concerns.

**UNDER SECRETARY DOBRIANSKY:** Let me respond to your question and then I wanted just to add one thing to your question earlier because you focused specifically on two countries. And I think it's important to also mention,

although the numbers may not be as great, there are a number of countries in the region involved.

On your question, the answer is yes we have the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs who is part of the taskforce. We are primarily focused on refugees, internally displaced persons, and as I indicated, those who have had an association or an affiliation with the U.S. Government. The category you mentioned that could fit in the latter, but we do have and we work closely on the taskforce with our Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs who with our Embassy and our consular apparatus is very engaged in this.

I wanted to add a footnote because I think it's also worth noting that although there are smaller numbers, as we believe, in other countries in the Middle East we are reaching out to all. There are a number in Egypt, in Lebanon, Turkey and also, needless to say, we're working very closely with the Iraqi Government in terms of -- especially internally displaced Iraqis. So I would like to say that the involvement of all and the engagement and the support matters greatly to this effort in helping those in need. Thank you.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) Iran, follow up. The High Commissioner said that there was also a refugee population in Iran. So when you talk about that outreach is the U.S. Government doing the outreach or is the --

**COMMISSIONER GUTERRES:** In Iran we have now about 50,000 Iraqi refugees. There has been no meaningful number of new arrivals. This corresponds to a traditional old population that was in Iran that reached 200,000 at a certain moment and they have been very effectively assisted by the Iranian Government. And of course we have long-standing cooperation with Iran about refugees, both Iraqis and Afghans. And they will be part of the conference that will, of course, be held in Geneva in April.

**UNDER SECRETARY DOBRIANSKY:** Thank you.

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