



Briefing on the Latest Developments in the Iraqi Refugee Admissions Program

Amb. James B. Foley, Senior Coordinator for Iraqi Refugee Issues

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Department of Homeland Security, US Citizenship and Immigration Services, Program Officer, Anne Chirazzi, Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, Director, Office of Admissions, Terry Rusch and Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration Acting Director, Office of Assistance to Asia and Near East, Jay Zimmerman

MR. CASEY: Thanks for being here this afternoon, everyone. I wanted to have an opportunity for Jim Foley to speak with you again, give you another update on the status of our efforts to deal with the situation of Iraqi refugees and other efforts to take on some of the concerns and issues that the Secretary named him to be able to address.

As you know, Jim's been traveling fairly widely around the region, has had an opportunity also to be working very closely with our colleagues over at Department of Homeland Security and elsewhere on these issues. And again, we've tried to make him available to you on a fairly regular basis just to keep you updated on a subject that I know everyone's interested in.

So, Jim, why don't I just turn it over to you, why don't you make some opening comments and see what kind of questions people have?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: All right. Thank you, Tom. Thanks for coming, all of you. I see this briefing as an opportunity mostly to talk about my trip to the Middle East and to Europe, which was almost exclusively focused on the assistance side, the need to meet the needs of the roughly 2 million Iraqi refugees who are in place in the region, in the neighboring countries. But let me just mention, in passing, the resettlement issue. I think you are aware that in March, that we resettled 751 Iraqis and that means that thus far this fiscal year, we are in the neighborhood of about 2,700 arrivals. And together with the figures from last year, from '07, we're currently at a little over 4,300 total Iraqis who have been resettled in the United States as refugees. There has also been a number of special immigrant visa recipients and their family members. So I think the number of Iraqis who have been resettled in the U.S. certainly exceeds 5,000.

Now, if you add the SIVs and the refugee numbers, as you've heard me say on many occasions, though, the numbers that have arrived so far are way -- well below the numbers we expect to arrive in the coming months. I would think that this month, in April, that we will probably be in the neighborhood of the arrival numbers we achieved in March. As you know, this is a question of the pipeline and what is coming through the pipeline. And we have, I can tell you, already about 5,000 Iraqis who have been approved for -- as refugees, who have not yet arrived in the U.S. So, that, you can more or less take to the bank. We have, unfortunately, instances of refugees, approved refugees, who do not actually show up for their departure flights. And we have a certain amount of attrition, but still, that figure -- about 5,000 approved -- we can expect to materialize in the U.S. So, the numbers are big, they're getting bigger, and they'll get bigger still.

We, as we've told you previously, are anticipating Homeland Security Citizenship and Immigration Service circuit riders to be interviewing over 8,000 Iraqis in this quarter of the fiscal year, this third quarter, meaning between the 1st of April and the 30th of June. And the challenge for us will be, frankly, getting down to the wire, of mobilizing these huge numbers of approved Iraqi refugees in the final stages of what we call outprocessing, which involves getting people medically cleared and getting them culturally oriented and getting their exit permits, which, in some countries, can take up to four weeks. And so --

QUESTION: That's the 5,000?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: No, I'm talking about -- it -- 5,000 need to go through outprocessing, but we can break down those figures for you later if you want. The 5,000 I was referring to are those who have already been approved. At this stage, I'm talking about the 8,000-plus who are going to be interviewed in this current quarter. And what I was saying is that -- I mean those are huge numbers. They will translate into huge arrival numbers in the U.S., but we're going to be really racing, as we do at the end of every fiscal year, with refugee populations around the world to, you know, get people outprocessed and on to airplanes and into the U.S. by September 30th.

QUESTION: So 8,000 Iraqis will be interviewed?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Will be interviewed.

QUESTION: By the end of April?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: By the end of June.

QUESTION: Well, that, too. But is there --

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: I'm talking about interviewed in the third quarter, not previously interviewed. But between April 1 and June 30th, DHS will be conducting 8,000 interviews.

QUESTION: Are they already scheduled and that's --

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Yes, yes.

QUESTION: Okay.

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: That's on top of some 6,000 whom they interviewed in the quarter that just finished between January 1 and March 31. See, remember, this is a -- it's a pipeline and, you know, the inputs began long ago and gradually, there's an accretion of cases that include approvals and then outprocessing and finally, culminating in arrivals in the U.S. That's why it's very challenging to take a snapshot at any given time, because this is such a moving picture and a moving process.

QUESTION: So just to remind everybody, the 12,000 that you said that you hoped to be here is by the end of this fiscal year?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Yes, yes.

QUESTION: So it would be by the end of September?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: September 30, yes.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: You have to have 12,000 in here by the end of this –

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Yes, that's the goal. That's the goal. And it will be – it will be challenging, as I've always said. But we believe strongly that we've put ourselves in a position to succeed, to reach the goal. As I indicated, it will be as it always is for the U.S. refugee admissions program, a scramble at the end of the fiscal year and a challenge.

QUESTION: What's the – given the rejection rate, which I don't know -- don't know what it is, but how many of the 8,000 interviews that are scheduled do you expect to – out of those, how many do you expect to become approved that would go into that category that is now 5,000?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: I'd have to – I'd have to take that question. In any event, there's not really a scientific answer. It's hard to get – to pin down, for example, the number – a rejection rate number. Let me explain why. When DHS interviews a refugee, they can approve the case, they can deny the case, or they can do neither, which is to put the case on hold, because it requires further scrutiny, and I think you're familiar with the material hold issue that requires review here in Washington. So, that is a certain category that makes it hard to determine what the real rate of refusal is. You can only, in hindsight, look back and see how many of those who were on hold end up becoming approved or disapproved.

So, I can't, off the top of my head, give you the figure. But we can probably give you – I don't know if Homeland Security has that? We have somebody here who --

MS. CHIRAZZI: We don't really calculate the denial rates, because as you said, it does fluctuate over time.

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: It's hard to pin down.

MS. CHIRAZZI: Yes.

QUESTION: So just to review, 2,700 have arrived since last – this fiscal year started?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Yes.

QUESTION: Five thousand are set to arrive?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Yes, in the coming weeks and months, yes.

QUESTION: In the coming months, and then 8,000 will be interviewed?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: In the third quarter.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: And how many arrived since the U.S. invasion of Iraq? You gave the figure for 2007 and 2008, so that's 4,235 since then or what about prior to that? I mean, what's the total --

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: As of today, the figure I have – or as of yesterday, when I asked for this figure, 4,357 Iraqis had arrived in the U.S. last fiscal year and this fiscal year. I don't have the figures before 2003. Terry, do you?

MS. RUSCH: It was about 200 a year for fiscal years 2005 and 2006. And prior to that, the numbers were very, very low.

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: For '03, though.

QUESTION: Yeah. Well, no, after – after March – after March '03?

MS. RUSCH: Yeah. Well, not many -- I mean, UNHCR was not referring large numbers of Iraqis for resettlement.

QUESTION: So it would be about 5,000 since the invasion?

MS. RUSCH: Yeah. I mean maybe another hundred or so on top of the 400 I gave you for those two fiscal years and the 4,300 or whatever it is now.

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: All right. I would move on now to talk about my trip if --

QUESTION: When was that, the trip?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: It was in the last few weeks. I left on March the 23rd and returned about a week ago, late last week. Let me talk, first of all, about the context of the trip. As mentioned, we believe there are roughly 2 million Iraqis who had to flee the country, who are living in neighboring countries. The largest number are in Syria, the second largest in Jordan. There are also significant populations of Iraqi refugees in Turkey, in Egypt, in the Gulf, and in Lebanon and, to some extent, in Iran. And the various international organizations, together, have appeals that total close to \$900 million for 2008 to assist displaced Iraqis. So, that does include internally displaced as well as Iraqi refugees, therefore, outside of Iraq.

In terms of the refugees themselves, though, the second dimension to the context that I'm describing is what we see as an emerging trend of impoverishment of the refugees in the neighboring countries. It is important to understand that the Iraqi refugee population is unique in comparison to other refugee populations around the world in several respects; first, because it is an urban refugee population, they are not in camps. They are living in cities. And secondly, because of the nature of the refugees; they have tended, to a large degree, to have come from the middle classes. And therefore, they were people who had some means, however modest, however limited, but they had something that they came with. But whatever those means were, they were certainly finite and we believe they are diminishing, they're being depleted. So you have a trend line that is pointing towards increased needs in the region. And so that certainly underscores the urgency, the importance of fully funding the various international appeals.

If I can do a little math for you, the United States, thus far, has contributed \$208 million to a number of the appeals. And in the case, for example, of the UNHCR regional appeal for Iraq, we've funded, I believe, about 37 percent of that appeal, which exceeds our normal traditional limits in contributing to these organizations. So the U.S. is far and away the leading contributor. And in this respect, we've, in fact, exceeded what we gave last year, which was a total of \$171 million. And we're, as you know, only halfway through the fiscal year.

QUESTION: When you say this 2008, you mean this fiscal year?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: This fiscal year, yes, yes. And this is money, most of which has already been disbursed. Now, there are additional monies that we already have available, that have already been appropriated by Congress, that will be disbursed. PRM itself has almost \$22 million that will go to fund NGOs working in the region. We're not ready to announce that yet, but the figure already we know, and that's why I'm reporting it. Also OFDA in the '08 supplemental received about \$110 for its emergency needs account -- that all is not certainly for Iraq -- I can't predict to you or forecast what amount actually will go to Iraq, but I know it will be substantial.

So without giving you a precise figure there, I think it's -- we're very confident, though, that as far as the United States Government is concerned, that our contributions to the different international appeals will certainly be in the neighborhood of \$280 million thus far, once we've -- are in a position to announce that specifically. And therefore, we are confident we will be funding at least one third of the total international appeals.

Now, we also are aware that other donors have already given or have certainly pledged about \$51 million in contributions. And finally this last category is a bit imprecise because it is based on our conversations with other governments and not on anything that's been announced, but we have reasonable confidence that other donors are planning to make contributions in the neighborhood of between \$160 and \$185 million. And so for those of you not doing the math, that means that, to one degree or another, it appears to us that the international appeals will be funded to the tune of -- in the neighborhood of \$500 million. So, that means we are dealing with a shortfall of somewhere between \$375 and \$400 million.

So I apologize for the long digression, but that is to sort of define for you the stakes. And the purpose of my trip was to try to encourage contributions, ultimately, to that tune, to that level.

QUESTION: When you say that you expect to fund a third of the total appeals -- for this fiscal year?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Yes.

QUESTION: And then --

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: I'm sorry. Our fiscal year, the appeals are the calendar year, largely, for the international organizations.

QUESTION: And then could you talk about Europe? Most of this trip that you took was to go to donor countries and contribute?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Yes.

QUESTION: You didn't go to Iraq; is that right?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: I did not.

QUESTION: Which countries --

QUESTION: Could you explain -- could you describe from your discussions with people on the ground what the conditions are for people? I mean, when we talk to (inaudible) groups and refugees groups, they talk about a very, very dire situation for the refugees over there.

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Well, I will digress, again, to answer your question and then I'll return to the trip itself and the conversations I had in different places. But -- I can answer a bit anecdotally, but -- and I have colleagues who know better and can give more precise information, if I misspeak. But my understanding is that, for example, UNHCR currently is feeding about 150,000 Iraqis in Syria and they believe that, given the trend I described of people running out of money, running out of resources, that they're going to need to double that by the summertime.

In Jordan, UNHCR tells us they believe that the vulnerable population currently is in the neighborhood of about 150,000, but they see that going to, quickly, to 200,000, roughly, of Iraqi refugees who will be in need of food assistance and, to some degree or another, in need of other kinds of assistance as well. In -- I don't know about in Jordan, but in Syria, UNHCR right now is providing monthly stipends for several thousand families, I believe. So that sort of gives you some sense of what we see as the emerging picture. Now, that's not to say that every Iraqi refugee is vulnerable or is in need. They do run the gamut from the -- frankly, the wealthy -- and in some cases, these would be usually Iraqis who've been in these countries for quite some time, even predating 2003 -- to those who came already poor, if you will. But the trend line is clear for increased needs, even impoverishment, indeed, in some of these places.

Now, going back to my trip, I went first to Cairo to meet with the Arab League because the Arab League was due to hold a summit, I think on the weekend of March 29-30 or so. And I was there in advance of that simply to discuss the situation of Iraqi refugees and to urge the Arab League also to contribute through its member-states to meeting the needs of the refugees and also to meeting some of the needs of hosting countries as well. And from Cairo, I went to Abu Dhabi to meet with Emirates authorities. I went to Qatar -- Doha -- and then finally to Kuwait. So that was it for the region.

Now, what was the response? Frankly, the position of the Arab countries, I think it could fairly be described as (a) very sympathetic to the plight of Iraqi refugees; but (b), and I think this is the point I would underscore the most, convinced that the Iraqi Government has the primary responsibility and has the means to respond to the needs of Iraq refugees in the neighboring countries.

And that is a point with which I did not disagree, and I assured my interlocutors that the United States would continue to engage in a very candid dialogue with the Government of Iraq about both its responsibilities and its means. It would be certainly one thing if the Government of Iraq were bereft of resources; and then, in that case, the point could not be made and we would be talking about strictly international responsibilities to meet the needs of the Iraqi refugees. But that's not the case. I think President Bush himself recently underscored the fact that the Government of Iraq has increasing resources which we believe need to go to meet Iraqi needs and responsibilities, and that most certainly includes the assistance to Iraqi citizens who had to flee the country and are living in neighboring countries.

That said, I did make very strongly the case that regardless of the contributions that we all expected, the substantial contributions from the Government of Iraq, that this was an issue that really did engage the region as well as the broader international community. But what was at stake for the region was clear, and that it was indeed in everyone's interest to contribute on a humanitarian basis to both the international appeals and to the -- alleviating the burden of the hosting countries. And I believe that in the Gulf there was, as I said, sympathy with the plight of the refugees, recognition of what was at stake and, I hope, a willingness to contribute. It would be premature to talk about results from my trip because this was a first sounding and there will certainly be follow-up, but I came away feeling relatively optimistic that these countries would be willing to -- were willing to make contributions.

In the case of the United Arab Emirates, they have already contributed -- the only Arab country that I'm aware of that has in the past responded to the international appeals in 2007. The UAE gave \$10 million to UNHCR for its operations in Syria. In Qatar, I was very pleased to learn about a robust program that is soon to be launched

by a private foundation there in support of the education of Iraqi refugee children in Syria. And it looks like a very impressive program. So there already is, I think, a willingness to contribute, and we hope that will translate into substantial contributions.

Turning to the rest of my trip, I went to Europe. I was in Paris and Brussels and in London. I think I would focus essentially on my meetings in Brussels because that's where the European countries do the bulk of their assistance is multilaterally through European Union institutions. And briefly, it would be fair to say that the European Union has contributed previously, I think last year -- Jay?

MR. ZIMMERMAN: About 140 -- \$120 million, more or less.

QUESTION: U.S.?

MR. ZIMMERMAN: Yes, U.S.

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: -- altogether were provided by the European Union last year. We hope, frankly, that the European Union collectively and through member-states will find a way to contribute more and substantially more in 2008, but that remains to be seen. Again, I found recognition of the challenge and I also encountered the same perspective that I did in the Middle East, which is that the Government of Iraq has responsibilities and resources that it needs to bring to bear to meet these needs. And again, I didn't disagree with that, but I felt and expressed the opinion of the United States that this is a shared responsibility and that the stakes are high and that we all have to contribute and contribute more.

The final point I would make, though, is that to -- somewhat to my surprise in some respects -- I found in Europe a different analysis or a different evaluation of the needs, of the degree to which this situation is evolving in the direction I described. Some of my interlocutors, notably in the European Union, remain to be convinced that the analysis is supported, that the needs are dramatically increasing, and that, therefore, the assistance levels need to keep pace. And there was some open questioning of UNHCR's accuracy or reliability in this regard, which I said, frankly, I did find surprising. And I certainly stated very clearly the strong -- the high confidence that the United States has in UNHCR's analysis of the situation and that, in our view, the trends really are in the direction of increased needs.

So we have, obviously, begun the conversation. It was -- I felt that it was certainly not the end of the conversation. But I think the European Union, European members, I do believe plan to match their contributions in '07. The question is whether they can be persuaded to substantially increase them and that, I think, will require further dialogue and engagement.

QUESTION: So you're \$400 million short of the appeal? Is Secretary --

QUESTION: Or 500 (inaudible) --

QUESTION: Yeah, the -- is Secretary Rice putting this high on the agenda next -- whenever she's -- I guess she's there on the 22nd of the Iraq neighbors conference. I mean, is this something that she's going to directly appeal for?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Well, I don't want to speak for her or anticipate what she might do. But I think you can be pretty certain that this will be very -- an important agenda item in -- at the Kuwait meeting, yes.

QUESTION: Can you talk about the high prices of food and how that might -- have the numbers (inaudible) rise, the cost of all of this aid, whether that's a concern?

And then, secondly, if you're still in the shortfall of several hundred million dollars, whether you feel the U.S. has a moral obligation to even increase the aid beyond the one-third that you're already pledging?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Well, we have contributed substantially, and to some degree, we have contributed well beyond what our normal, sort of -- I wouldn't call it a quota, but the traditional level of U.S. assistance is, and we are certainly aware that in the case of some international organizations -- because we're talking about their appeals -- they would not necessarily want us to bust through those levels because it has a disincentive in terms of other potential donors and they like to ensure that there is wide participation in the donor community in these appeals.

It is, at the end of the day, important that the appeals be funded, and that will be of high concern and priority to the United States, but (a) we feel that we are contributing substantially; (b) we feel there are others who also have to contribute substantially: first and foremost, the Government of Iraq. There are other donors who could do more. And finally, I would say that the Administration does have, you know, a supplemental request still pending with the Congress and we look forward to Congress acting on that request.

QUESTION: And the food prices, do you expect the appeal to have to --

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: I wouldn't want to sort of make up an answer to you on that. It's not something that I've studied. It was actually mentioned, though, in Brussels that -- certainly, that Europe -- the European donor agency, ECHO, is starting to feel the pinch in budgetary terms. But I wouldn't want to speculate on that.

Matt.

QUESTION: Who doesn't believe the UNHCR, naming names if you will?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Look, I wouldn't say so boldly -- those were your words -- who doesn't believe, but --

QUESTION: Well, it's pretty close. They didn't say --

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: -- was explained to me -- let me be a little more precise, is that donors --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: -- in Europe need to -- yes, remain to be --

QUESTION: Convinced.

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: -- convinced and are asking for more feedback, more empirical data -- that was the term that was given to me there -- in order to assess the needs. And so --

QUESTION: Was that on numbers of --

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: On numbers and particularly on numbers of vulnerable Iraqis. That really is a different issue, how many refugees are there, that people can debate. But in our view, that's not as relevant as how many vulnerable people -- how many people needing assistance there are. And so, we are certainly alerting UNHCR to this view, and we are confident they will be able to answer those questions. And we feel that -- actually, that since the concerns were raised, that once the concerns are satisfied, that that really does indeed open the door to more significant contributions on the European side.

QUESTION: Who is it that's asking the questions?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Well, I would not want to characterize people's views that were given privately, except to say, certainly, that European institutions in Brussels expressed that view.

QUESTION: All right. And one last one, when you went -- when you talked about the meetings in the Middle East and then in Europe, you said that, one, everyone thinks that the Iraqi Government has the means, they should be doing more and that two -- and that you did not disagree with this. Is there also a sense that they have a responsibility for these people? Are you hearing from anyone that any of these people that you go to, are they saying to you -- or is anyone saying to you, well, this is your fault? You, meaning the U.S.?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: United States?

QUESTION: Yeah, it's your mess and you clean it up.

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: That was not -- that was not stated. That was not stated and --

QUESTION: Explicitly.

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: It was not stated. And I think, on the contrary, our European friends have been contributing over the years. I went to push for --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) in the Middle East.

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: -- increased contributions. I think that, you know, we're not in 2003. We're in 2008. And whatever views and feelings that countries and governments may have had five years ago are not particularly relevant to the challenge we all face now in the region.

QUESTION: Do (inaudible) realize that, too?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: And I think there is -- there was indeed recognition of that, that we're dealing -- we're all dealing with now and the next few years. And that the challenge that this population of refugees poses to the region, to the international community -- their needs must be met.

We still firmly believe that the solution for the overwhelming majority of the refugees is to be able to go home to Iraq, that -- which has been restored to peace and stability. And that's why there is, you know, an inherent link between our security endeavors and our humanitarian endeavors. But until that day comes, they have to be -- their needs have to be met. And those needs are increasing, and if they're not met, the consequences will be felt more broadly in the region. And I think there was a very mature and realistic understanding of that.

QUESTION: If you can go back to the UNHCR, you said that the Europeans are -- remain to be convinced, but that U.S. has a high confidence in --

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Yes.

QUESTION: -- UNHCR. What makes you believe that the figures of UNHCR are true? Do you have empirical data or figures to confirm that?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Well, we believe that UNHCR has data to confirm that. And we are in very close touch with them, both at the country level, the regional level, and at UNHCR headquarters in Geneva.

QUESTION: So you rely on their figures?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Largely, but not -- certainly, not exclusively. We, as I think I indicated, fund a variety of NGOs and work with even a broader array of NGOs, and they are grassroots organizations that have a direct connection to the refugee communities, which are harder to reach than a traditional refugee community that's in a camp and that can be identified and counted. So, yes, to some degree, it is inherently murkier and ever more challenging than a traditional refugee situation. That is a reality about this situation. But we don't underestimate the needs or that they're growing.

QUESTION: What is your -- what is the reason that the Iraqi Government is giving you for not being able to contribute more to its own refugee population?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: I have not had extensive contact with Iraqi officials in this regard. But I did have one meeting late last year with the Iraqi Foreign Minister and he was in complete agreement with the premise that this was an Iraqi responsibility and that they had sufficient means to contribute substantially.

QUESTION: So how much money does --

QUESTION: I'm sorry, but just a quick follow up. So what do you attribute to this?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Well, I can't -- frankly, I can't explain it, because it is not, I think, explicable. It therefore needs to be really addressed by the Iraqi Government. This -- these are their fellow citizens, these are Iraqis. Again, it would be a different case if the Government of Iraq were bereft of means, but because they are not, and because these are their citizens, they have a -- the clearest responsibility to help alleviate their needs and the needs of the hosting countries. They're really --

QUESTION: Has the 25 million gone in yet? Have they delivered it?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Twenty-five million, we believe, that has been dispersed to some degree; \$15 million was dispersed in Syria. \$2 million was in Lebanon. But we think that the \$8 million that was pledged to Jordan has still not actually changed hands. But in any event, the \$25 million has been described, we think accurately, as a symbolic amount.

QUESTION: So how much are you looking for?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: I wouldn't put a precise figure on it now. But substantial is substantial; look at the outstanding needs for the '08 appeals.

QUESTION: But how come you went to Arab capitals and to Europe? Why weren't you banging on Iraq's door?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Well, I had intended to visit and was unable to because of the problems that arose.

QUESTION: What problems? Security issues?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Well, the security problems, yes. I mean, I think it's probably not -- I hope it's not news that visitors, temporary -- we call them TDY visitors, were not exactly high on the Embassy's agenda a couple weeks ago. But, you know, we have ample opportunity to discuss this with the Government of Iraq and I think it's going to be -- going to be discussed in the short term.

QUESTION: What about the displaced Iraqis within Iraq? Is the government improving the situation or do you have --

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Obviously, the government is -- we need to be fair, that the Government of Iraq faces monumental challenges and its ability to meet many governance challenges is limited. In the case of supporting refugees, we're not placing demands on Iraqi institutions or infrastructure or governance. This is a question of the capacity, really, to write a check. But in terms of internally displaced, they are facing very, very big challenges and they do need assistance. Our Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance is providing significant funding inside Iraq in support of the internally displaced.

One thing that we are emphasizing is the need to prepare for the return of the refugee population, which, you know, is not about to happen, obviously, but as security conditions are improved or when they do improve and reach sort of a turning point, then the Government of Iraq is going to have to be ready to efficiently and productively receive this population. And so we've been talking to the UNHCR and the High Commissioner Guterres has authorized an effort on the part of UNHCR to work with the Iraqi Government to develop a returns policy. And we look forward to that. It is supposed to begin this month, and that's going to be a very important development to lay out the necessary policy, resources, legal framework, infrastructure that's going to be needed to accommodate large-scale returns.

QUESTION: At the end of last year, there was a brief wave of return of refugees to Iraq. So that is not continuing, not in any considerable numbers?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: We're not aware that it did continue after that sort of spike that did occur in late last year, yes.

QUESTION: Do you think -- is the European reluctance more about past views, as you said, and you know, it's 2008, not 2003; or is it more about their questioning the UNHCR reliability? I mean, is there a sense that this is America's war and --

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: You'd have to ask them that.

QUESTION: But I mean, what --

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: It wasn't said.

QUESTION: It wasn't said. I know you said that. But where are you putting the sort of reluctance? Where are you -- how are you, I guess, attributing it?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Well, I think, as I indicated, we take their concerns seriously. We think that the answers to the questions that they have should be provided. We think that they can be provided and will be provided. And once those concerns are addressed, that would seem to logically mean that there will be indeed a willingness to contribute more substantially.

QUESTION: Is there any thought about having the President make an appeal? He's never talked about the refugees.

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Well, I don't know if that's the case, but it's certainly not for me to say what the President does or doesn't do. I think he did speak to the issue when the King of Jordan was visiting, so I don't believe that actually is what you say is the case. But the President has defined our goals for the year in terms of admitting a sizeable number of Iraqi refugees this year. Those were his goals he set.

QUESTION: I think what you're saying is that King Abdullah had mentioned it. (Quoting) " He pointed out -- which I knew, but I wasn't exactly sure how it was affecting his country that there are three-quarters of a million Iraqi citizens who moved to Jordan."

QUESTION: Yeah, and I don't know if you'll respond to that.

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: I did.

QUESTION: Well, but the President was saying he didn't really know. That was how it was mentioned. But any --

QUESTION: Well, yeah -- what's your response to that?

QUESTION: So --

MR. CASEY: Well, guys, look, I think Jim is the representative of the Secretary on this issue. You guys know that if you want to talk about the President's particular views or comments, you can address those over at the White House. It's unfair to put Jim --

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Yeah, I think that's correct. I mean, you should ask the White House. But I did say that the President has set the goals for us. Those are his consultations with the Congress to set our admissions goals for the year.

QUESTION: This is to pay for the people that you're talking about in desperate straits --

QUESTION: Have you heard -- have you met with the President on any of this?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Not in this capacity.

QUESTION: How about the Secretary? Has she ever asked anybody?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: I have to take the question. I don't know, Tom, what you would say.

MR. CASEY: In terms of which?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Well, what's the question?

QUESTION: Seeking money from other countries or from Iraq to support the Iraqi refugees.

MR. CASEY: Well, again, I think as Jim has just said, this is an issue that is discussed regularly with our Ambassador and with our Embassy there. It's a subject that has come up and has been discussed by her and by others in, as I understand it, in the two meetings in the Iraq neighbors conference and I expect will be a subject that will be addressed in the third one that's coming up on the -- well, the trip we just announced, the 18th, 19th and 20th. So it's part of the agenda with Iraq. It's part of the agenda with the neighbors.

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Let me put it this way, Walter. I was named by the Secretary because she felt that this issue of Iraqi refugees, both in terms of our effort to resettle large numbers in the U.S. and to meet the needs of the nearly 2 million out there, was a high priority and needed extra attention. And of course, my counterpart was named at Homeland Security to ensure that our two Departments on the resettlement effort cooperated to the maximum extent. But I report directly to the Secretary of State and meet with her fairly regularly, and I can assure you that this has her high commitment. And therefore, I am pleased with the amount of high-level support that exists behind both facets of the effort that I'm involved in.

QUESTION: What King Abdullah said or what he told the President -- how much of it -- there seemed to be -- I was just in Jordan with the Secretary last week -- well, I don't know when it was, ten days ago or whatever. There seemed to be some widespread skepticism among non-Jordanians there about the figures, about the numbers of -- the numbers of -- actual number of refugees in Jordan and the numbers who are vulnerable, and some suspicion that the Jordanians were kind of cooking the books on this to make -- for whatever reason. Is that an issue with the Europeans? Is that -- the Jordan numbers, is that what they're worried -- concerned about?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Well, that didn't come up. As I indicated before, there's a lot of speculation about the number of refugees in both Jordan and in Syria. And the reality is, as I mentioned, that this is inherently difficult to pin down because of the nature of this uniquely urbanized refugee population. It doesn't strike us as the critical metric, though. We are concerned and we know UNHCR is concerned about the most vulnerable, those in need of humanitarian assistance. And we -- and this is not really a -- and we don't depend on bilateral interlocutors for that assessment. We work with and through UNHCR, and we have confidence in their assessments.

Anything else?

QUESTION: When was the last time you spoke with the Iraqi Foreign Minister?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: I was there in late October. But we continue to meet with the Iraqi Foreign Minister and Iraqi officials at levels below and above me.

QUESTION: What does an Iraqi refugee, say in Jordan, you know, get on a monthly basis when it comes to assistance? I know it probably varies broadly, but do they get, like, a sort of a pack with, I don't know, high-protein cereal if they have kids and, you know, some special peanut butter mix or something? I don't know. I mean, what are they getting?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: I've not seen the ration. I couldn't answer you, except to say that it depends. It depends on what the identified need is. There are different kinds of assistance that the international organizations and that the NGOs are providing. A lot of what we have funded thus far has gone into the health and the education sectors, and that certainly has generated efforts in international spending. But what we're seeing, though, are new needs that had more to do with subsistence, and we see those increasing. And that's what UNHCR has been highlighting to us recently.

QUESTION: Can I turn back to the admissions for one second? If all of these 5,000 who are approved, who are in the pipeline and are approved, if all of them actually show up for their flights and there's no glitches, how long before all of them -- how many can you take in? How many can you literally absorb per month? I mean, can you take 5,000 in one month, or would that have to be spread out over --

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Well, that's -- it's not going to happen in one month. It is the nature of --

QUESTION: When will all these -- if all these 5,000 do come, by when will they be here?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Well, again, you've noticed this in previous briefings, because this is a long pipeline and it's a moving process, it is very difficult to get a snapshot, let alone a projected snapshot, of -- because these are, you know, these are human beings with free will and the ability to determine themselves when it is that they want to move. And we have encountered, as I said, cases of refugees who simply don't -- who decline the ticket and don't want to travel to the U.S. Among the referrals we've had from UNHCR of Iraqi refugees, there have been a sizeable number of what we call no-shows, over 1,300 -- people who never showed up for the pre-screening interview.

So we've also, as I said, found that refugees sometimes can't travel as quickly as we'd like because they have to get exit permits. In Turkey, for example, they have to get an exit permit -- I believe it's from their point of entry in Turkey. So if there are -- and then -- and they, in most cases, will have been moved to a different part of Turkey after they've arrived, so they have to journey back and it takes weeks and weeks.

So just to say that this is very hard to pin down. And the category "approved" means, yes, they have been approved by DHS, which is good, but there are other steps that follow in the post-interview process, what we call the outprocessing -- include getting medically cleared and having their cultural orientation and -- am I leaving anything out, Terry?

MS. RUSCH: You said weeks to months.

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Yeah.

MS. RUSCH: Several weeks --

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: I think -- I'll give a general assessment. Those 5,000, we anticipate, will be moving to the U.S. in April, in May, June --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) few months?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Yes, yes. Whereas, the 8,000 to be interviewed, however many end up being finally approved, interviewed in the third quarter, we hope, will be able to arrive in bulk before the end of the fourth quarter, before September 30.

QUESTION: Okay. So by the end of the third quarter then, if all goes well and, you know, there are not massive boycotts --

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: I'm not going to accept your premise, Matt --

QUESTION: Yeah, but that'll bring us to about 5,627 by the end -- by the end of June, and then you'll still have another -- what -- 4,000-something to go to reach the goal.

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: That's your math. Your math, Matt. Not --

MR. CASEY: Or your Matt math. Whichever one.

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: That's not ours. There's no way of predicting that precisely. We believe that, look, 5,000 approved that most -- that nearly 5,000 of them will come to the United States, unless they change their minds. But I can't tell you exactly by when they will.

Are we done?

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: I have one more question.

MR. CASEY: Oh, we can do one last question.

QUESTION: I know on your trip -- was there any question when you visited the other countries that the money that they're donating is not actually going to humanitarian aid? I know you talked -- you don't know the actual -- the packs people are getting. Is there any fear of that?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: That -- no, but I do think that the European Union wants to be assured that, as I said, that UNHCR has the firmest, most scientific understanding of the specific number and nature of vulnerable Iraqis before it is willing to contemplate increased assistance. That's how it was stated.

MR. CASEY: Thanks, Jim.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: When did the Iraqis make their \$25 million pledge?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: April of '07.

QUESTION: And that's the only pledge they (inaudible) made?

AMBASSADOR FOLEY: Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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