

## EXCERPTS FROM OPENING STATEMENT

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SEMINAR ON DISPLACEMENT, PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS AND THE LAW OF  
ARMED CONFLICT IN THE CURRENT MIDDLE EAST CRISIS

15 AUGUST 2006

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In many humanitarian crises, the number of persons killed, injured and forcibly uprooted has far exceeded the number of persons affected in the current armed conflict between Hezbollah and Israel. For example, in Darfur, Sudan, estimates of those killed by violence, famine and disease climb as high as 450,000 people and the more than 2 million displaced are in life threatening conditions. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the total of fatalities and displaced has been even greater. In Sri Lanka, as we speak, a conflict is developing which could plunge the country back into civil war in which tens of thousands have already died. Yet it is the Middle East crisis that captures more attention and arouses more emotion than any other situation I am aware of. While the loss of life and the uprooting of people in the current crisis are deeply disturbing and to be profoundly regretted, one still has to wonder whether the value given to human life in some parts of the world is greater than in other parts.

...The purpose of the meeting is to look at the human dimension of the crisis and help clarify the humanitarian, human rights, legal and ethical aspects of the conflict. Sometimes there has been a dearth of information, sometimes, one-sided analysis, sometimes, knee jerk reactions, sometimes, misinformation. Hopefully this meeting will provide a framework for better understanding the impact of the conflict on civilians on both sides of the border and get people thinking about what needs to be done, what policies to adopt.

...The meeting does not have a point of view. There will be many points of view. Let them be as fair and balanced as possible. I would note that the Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on the Human

Rights of Internally Displaced Persons Walter Kälin who co-directs this project with me has been invited by the government of Lebanon to visit but has been unable to do so to date because of security conditions. He has asked the government of Israel for an invitation to see the extent of internal displacement in that country as well.

... let me reiterate the hope that we will find some common ground by expecting from all speakers, whether they be on the panel or in the audience that they think outside their *own* boxes and allow themselves to listen and feel interest in and compassion for *all* the people involved, in particular for those who they consider “the other.”