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WHAT'S NEXT FOR PALESTINIAN DOUBLE REFUGEES?

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ANDERSON COURT REPORTING

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. AL HROUB: Good evening, everybody.

Well, first of all, as you can see, this is the place where Salmon Shaikh used to sit, and he has been now overthrown (Laughter), living in the age of Arab Spring in a white lovely school, in fact. He has been overthrown. Well, the good news for the center is that this is only temporary.

Welcome to this evening; to what hopefully will be a very promising, in fact, pioneering discussion with Ibrahim Sharqieh and Salvatore Pedulla. Ibrahim Sharqieh works here, so he holds the position in case anything goes wrong. Ibrahim Sharqieh is a veteran, in fact, researcher. He's a professor at Georgetown University, and he is a foreign policy fellow at the center here. And I keep describing him as, he belongs to this rare breed of kamikaze researchers, where wherever there is trouble, a threat of death, you will find Ibrahim. Yemen, Libya, and then finally, Lebanon.

If you heard the most recent (Inaudible)

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Mohammed Chatah was killed, the following day I got this e-mail from Ibrahim. He said, well, I was just almost next door to that explosion. Well, Ibrahim has been to Lebanon, Jordan and the region, of course, and while researching other stuff, he found this topic, which is the Palestinian displaced refugees.

So, not only the Palestinians -- half of them left their home country about more than maybe 65 years. Half of them left their countries. Now, part of them have been even driven outside of the refugee camps. So, Ibrahim decided to research this and give us his insights, in fact, and his preliminary research into this.

And we are lucky, as well, to have Salvatore Pedulla. Do I say your name right?

MR. PEDULLA: Correct.

MR. AL HROUB: And he is a senior regional advisor to the UN, as well. And he will be sharing with us his ideas and thoughts on this topic, and maybe even unfortunate and sad issue.

Now, without further ado, I'm going to give

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sort of 10, 15 minutes maybe to each of you guys.

Then I'll get on an open discussion. Ibrahim, shall we start with you?

MR. SHARQIEH: Yeah, thank you, Khaled. Is this working over there?

MR. AL HROUB: Yeah.

MR. SHARQIEH: Thank you, Khaled. Thank you, everyone, for coming for this extremely important event about the refugees. And before I begin, actually, just let me share with you that we struggled with the term about the refugees, especially that during my research and my conversations in the region, actually, I met individuals who have been refugees for a second and a third and a fourth time.

So, even the term "double refugees," I don't think it accurately or fully captures the state of affairs that Palestinian refugees are living now in the region. So yes, people with real stories and real faces that I spoke with who have been removed from one place to another, whether in Iraq and Jordan and Kuwait, and also in Lebanon and now from Syria.

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Let me just give you an idea about also, the population, the demographic aspect of who are the double refugees that we are discussing their issue today. Those are the Palestinian refugees that they left Syria after the war. You have about 500,000 before the war began, Palestinian refugees living in Syria.

Today, as a result of the war, there are about over 200,000 of them. They're internally displaced. They're within Syria, but they left their different places and they are living in different places. The Yarmouk camp -- I'm sure you all heard about the tragedy of Yarmouk. The numbers were reduced from -- in Yarmouk, from over 145,000, 150, to now approximately 18,000, 20,000 people only that are left still besieged in Yarmouk. Of those who made it outside Syria, there are 11,000 living in Jordan, and about 51,000 living in Lebanon, 6,000 in Egypt, and others, a few thousand here and there in Europe and elsewhere.

I spent the past, before I came here, three

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weeks of traveling and talking to the double refugees and those who visited the camps in Lebanon, you know, to make sure that you know, we understand the situation as it is on the ground. And let me begin with actually sharing with you, there are many troubling things that I came across. But one major, or one of the most troubling things that I came across was in Ain al-Hilweh.

Ain al-Hilweh in Lebanon, where part of the conversation -- there's a new term that's used in Ain al-Hilweh in the conversation, daily conversation by the people. And the term is the Death of Convoys, Qawafel al-Mawt, which is part of the conversation, the daily conversation that the people use, which was one of the most troubling things. And it captures to a large extent the situation that the people are living in, in that terrible situation.

And this term, the "Convoys of Death," refers to those that they found no place where to go, but finally decided to go through the extremely dangerous and risky trips through the Mediterranean

trying to escape with their lives, you know, to Europe. And I am sure many of you heard about the Lampedusa incident where many Palestinian and Syrian refugees drowned in the Mediterranean as a result.

So, these trips or these convoys, they started you know, to refer to them as the Convoys of Death or Qawafel al-Mawt, as it's referred, which is one of the most troubling things. And describes to a large extent the kind of situation that people -- or the options that are really available for the double refugees the way that they are living there.

As a result of a very brutal war that's taking place in Syria, many of them, as you can imagine, tried to find the places, started going to Jordan. In Jordan, the situation, as you know -- also, Jordan has been flooded with the refugees, Syrians, and also before that, the Iraqi refugees, and Jordan has its limited capacity of dealing with the refugees.

So, Jordan initiated a policy. Actually, it started with a policy of banning or preventing

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Palestinian refugees from entering Jordan. And also, it's not only about the resources, but as you are all aware, of the demographic component of Palestinians and Jordanians within Jordan. So, Jordan, particularly, is a bit nervous about the demographic factor, and led to Jordan preventing any further Palestinians refugees coming from Syria from entering Jordan.

And actually, Ain al-Hilweh released some cases, actually reported some cases, where also, there have been some deported or forced deportation of some Palestinian individuals from Jordan back to Syria. In Jordan, there is some of them living in this cyber city. It's called where -- it's thoroughly monitored by the Jordanian security and entering or leaving the cyber city, this cab goes through some special procedures.

In Lebanon, the situation is much worse, where the numbers are larger, about 51,000. Lebanon, too, began a new policy starting -- actually, it

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started August, 2013, that established a set of policies and procedures that make it impossible or almost impossible for Palestinian refugees coming from Syria to Lebanon to enter Lebanon. And then, of the 50,000 that made it to Lebanon, they are living still under visa arrangements where you have to renew your visa as if you're coming as a visitor, and you have to renew your visa.

And then, after one year, actually, you have to either leave Lebanon or pay a higher amount of money, like \$200 per person, which is for a family of six, seven people. That's almost like \$1,600 U.S. dollars to renew your visa. And of course, this is an astronomical number for Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, to come up with \$1,600 for a family in order to renew your visa and to renew your status.

So, the other option is that you go outside Lebanon and to Syria and then (Inaudible), and of course, you know, starting in August, as we said, it made it almost impossible. If you enter Lebanon, there is no guarantee, or the chances of getting back

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to Lebanon are almost zero.

Then, what happened, of course, you know, that many people, many of the personalities that overstayed their residence there, and they've been there for over a year. So according to the Lebanese system, they became illegals. Now, to be fair with the Lebanese government, they never -- there haven't been any reported cases of false deportation of Lebanese forces deporting or sending Palestinian refugees back to Syria.

However, it's the concept of living illegal, or that you overstayed your residency and you're illegal -- this has subjected Palestinian refugees in Lebanon to serious fear, that living in constant fear about their situation there and trying to manage or to handle their situation there.

The numbers -- and of course, as you can imagine, living in the shadow life -- created this kind of shadow life for the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon that subjects them to have all types of exploitations -- security, economic, social. All

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types of exploitations that can -- this kind of system subjects them to.

And you will be shocked at the stories that you hear at Ain al-Hilweh, where Ain al-Hilweh in the first place, over approximately 70,000 people living in a square mile space. And then, adding as a result of the crisis, 20,000 people -- 20,000 refugees that we have added to Ain al-Hilweh. So, Ain al-Hilweh today hosts over 90,000 Palestinian refugees, which is -- you end up seeing families or like two or three families living in one room; others living in the camps, and like some tents were established in Ain al-Hilweh which is making the situation really disastrous for them.

Of course, they are unable to work. Of course, there is the substance or the assistance is extremely limited, and you just need to rely on whatever sources in order to survive. So, again, this maximizes the potential for exploitation as it has been, you know, the case.

Then, you have also, probably, the most

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serious or the worst situation -- it's even worse than in Lebanon, is in Egypt, actually, where the situation is also -- comes as a result of the UN system that created -- you know, the system that has in place where Ain al-Hilweh is the agency who is in charge of supporting the Palestinian refugees' education and health, is not allowed to work in Egypt.

And as I said, so I'll let Salvatore talk more about the role of the UNRWA. But Egypt is not allowed to work as a field of operation for UNRWA. And at the same time, UNHCR sticks to its mandate or to its position that the Palestinian refugees are not our responsibilities. So, whose responsibility are they, actually, in Egypt in particular? And add to this, is that actually, the Egyptian authorities refuse to deal with -- or to acknowledge the issue of Palestinian refugees, because Egyptian do not want for Egypt to be treated or identified as a country of refuge.

So, you have 6,000 Palestinian refugees living -- double refugees or triple refugees living in

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Egypt that the UN is not supporting them. UNRWA is not allowed to work there. UNHCR is not stepping in. And then, the Egyptian authorities are not recognizing or refuse to recognize as (Inaudible).

So, there are cases where, in the conversations that we had, some Palestinian families in Cairo are literally living in the streets where no support is given of any sort. And that is how we eventually started talking about the Convoys of Death, where they found not only in Egypt, but in Jordan and also in Lebanon -- found that probably as the best option or available option for them to be actually taking these extremely dangerous trips to Europe through the Mediterranean, hoping to find a better situation. So, we can talk a lot about the UN, but that's where that situation is now. So, where do we go from here?

MR. AL HROUB: Maybe one minute and then --

MR. SHARQIEH: Okay, okay. Well, then talk about the recommendations. Where do we go from here? What should be done in order to fix the situation?

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First of all, and it's extremely important, the responsibility -- who is responsible about this situation? It is not only the responsibility of Jordan and Lebanon to be handling this situation. Lebanon and Jordan do -- they have their own limited resources and their own issues, also, to deal with. So, this issue should not be left only for Jordan and Lebanon.

It's the responsibility of the international community. And yes, the international community who was able actually, to dismantle the chemical program from Syria is able to protect or provide some sort of protection for refugees -- (Inaudible) refugees that they're going through this. So, it's an international responsibility.

Having said that, Jordan should remove the ban on the policy of refugees from entering, because it is also an issue of the policies that they're escaping death from Syria. If you have Yarmouk as an option, then there is -- you know, the policy of banning is not acceptable and should be removed.

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Now, in Lebanon -- Lebanon, too, should remove the policies that were established in August that again, in other words, prevent Palestinian refugees from entering, and also fix the residency or visa residency program that treats Palestinian refugees unlike, by the way, Syrian refugees. Discriminates between two different types of refugees and establishes policies that -- treated that they cannot, you know, come back or pay the high fees in order to fix their residency and be able to act.

Leaving the Palestinian refugees and of course, the Syrian refugees without shelter, without proper shelter, their share of cash assistance for shelters is absorbing what is taking most of that cash assistance that is coming from the international community, because there are no camps. There are no places for the refugees to live in.

So for Lebanon, you need proper registration of the refugees; should provide shelter again, through the international community, maybe on the issue of their policies instead of this visa visitor program

that entering into Lebanon, you can probably create a category where the Palestinian refugees -- they are allowed to stay in Lebanon as long as the problem in Syria exists, or the threat in Syria that exists. And then you can, you know, treat it differently. But it definitely should be dealt with.

The UN, through the Egyptian authority, must fix the situation in Egypt, and then fix the problem or provide assistance and support for the Palestinian refugees living in Egypt. And also, it's extremely, extremely important that we should not forget -- and this is something that I noticed in the debate and in the (Inaudible) about the issues of the refugees, that we start talking about it as if it's only the problem for Jordan and Lebanon. And we tend to forget about the major or the first displacement.

So this is the problem. Who caused the first displacement? It's Israel. You know? It's where Israel is not being part of the discussion. And you can see where Israel is not mentioned as being responsible for the first displacement that happened

or caused you know, those refugees.

Now, actually, this is -- there is no better time for the implementation or for the UN resolutions for the right of return and the protection of the Palestinian refugees than now, simply because this crisis has proved that the Palestinian refugees were not -- for in the long run live in Iraq or in Kuwait or in Egypt or in Jordan or in Lebanon. The Palestinian refugees need to have the implementation of the 194 UN resolution of the right of return.

This makes the right of return as more urgent or more important than ever, and Israel should be equally responsible and part of the debate and (Inaudible) on the table unlike that it's not being mentioned as part of that. And I will end with that. (Applause) Thank you very much.

MR. AL HROUB: Ibrahim, first of all, let's just stay for a second with the whole part of responsibility. Who is responsible? And I think, as you mentioned, at the end of the day, this is the responsibility of the international community. It's

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neither Jordan or Lebanon or Egypt, for that matter.

But don't you think if we say this very general kind of vague entity, which is the international community, as if we're absorbing everybody from that direct responsibility? If you have -- if you are asked to enlist three entities or three players who are the most responsible, we should go to them and say, well, this is that -- the ball is in your court.

MR. SHARQIEH: Yes.

MR. AL HROUB: It's your responsibility.

Who would be there?

MR. SHARQIEH: Thank you very much, Khaled.

Actually, my answer to this is that, yes. There is no one party that's responsible for the whole situation. And this is a big, huge question, actually, that I had so many conversations in the region about whose responsibility of -- is this?

And my answer to this is that, honestly, everyone is, in my view, under my assessment -- everyone is responsible on their part. So, Jordan's

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responsibility is to remove the ban like from entering and to allow them to enter. Lebanon's responsibility is a whole different responsibility. It's about the registration and the visa, and residency and also the state of procedures.

And it's not also -- but Israel's responsibility is about the right of return. No one is talking about Israel as a primary responsibility.

MR. AL HROUB: You need a primary player who says, well, this is my responsibility. Then, they or he or whoever can then coordinate these sub-responsibilities with these states and other players.

MR. SHARQIEH: Well, there's no one better positioned for this than the UN. And actually, it's sadly speaking that the UN is part of the problem. The UN is part of the problem and it created these policies, you know, that they are -- they're discriminating against -- end up discriminating against the policies in the first place.

And also, let me add to this, actually, it's also the responsibility of the countries. Right?

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There are -- so it's not only about refugees and about you know, places that they find you know, a shelter to live in. There are qualified refugees that -- with skills that they can contribute to -- we can work in other countries and other countries can contribute to this and also share the responsibility.

MR. AL HROUB: Okay. Well, before going to Salvatore, let me ask you about Egypt, because Egypt is really -- well, very tragic and very confusing --

MR. SHARQIEH: Yes.

MR. AL HROUB: -- at the same time, because during the crisis, you have two governments in Egypt - - Morsi's and Sissi's. Then during Morsi's time, Morsi even somehow declared jihad against the Syrian regime. So, one would assume that Egypt then was very welcoming.

MR. SHARQIEH: Yes.

MR. AL HROUB: And at that time, I guess some Palestinians started you know, to come in. And then, we ended up with a few thousand. And now we have another regime that wouldn't even acknowledge

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them.

Is there -- during Morsi's time, was there kind of an open door policy for the Palestinians or -- and now it's changing?

MR. SHARQIEH: Thank you, Khaled for this great question, actually. From my conversations with people who visited Jordan -- I'm sorry, Egypt, and they monitored and they saw the situation on the ground in Egypt, they do actually confirm that the policies during Morsi were different; when the policies were not the greatest, but were different and were more acceptable, were more relaxing on the refugees and treating them differently and treating them actually, equally, I should say, like the Syrian refugees.

But the situation much worsened during or around this current administer or current -- under the coups in Egypt and the government there, where actually, you can easily now see two different systems in place. Syrian refugees, though they're not -- we shouldn't understand that they're in the best

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situation in Egypt, but at least they have some access to health and education, and there are some ways or some policies, while the Palestinians are treated much differently and in a much worse situation than the Syrian refugees in Egypt.

So, this policy under the new government made the situation much worse and much more difficulty, and it encouraged, actually, this -- what we started with the Convoys of Death, Qawafel al-Mawt of people leaving Egypt and going or taking on these risky trips, too.

MR. AL HROUB: Thanks, Ibrahim. Let me turn to Salvatore.

Now, Salvatore has spend maybe more than 14 years in the region in different capacities and different countries. And I'm sure you are kind of in an easy position now, because the responsibility is yours -- the UN's responsibility.

MR. PEDULLA: That's normally what my wife at home would say. (Laughter)

MR. AL HROUB: So this is another

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responsibility for me. And so maybe, of course, I mean, you can start with this or any other issue that you would like to discuss, along with other views that you want to share with us. Salvatore.

MR. PEDULLA: Thank you very much. Well, let me start by thanking Brookings and my friend, Ibrahim, and Salman for inviting us here today. But also for raising the issue that --

MR. AL HROUB: Salman is no longer --

MR. PEDULLA: Hmmm?

MR. AL HROUB: Salman is no longer (Laughter). That's (Inaudible) (Laughter).

MR. PEDULLA: Yes, you conveniently got rid of him today (Laughter). But nonetheless, a thanks to Salman and to Brookings in general, but I think, thanks also for the opportunity to raise the question of the situation, the very difficult situation -- the plight of this community of refugees, Palestinian refugees from Syria.

I think that Ibrahim has already highlighted a number of the challenges in various fields that we

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face, and I would like to come back to that. I don't necessarily -- I may not necessarily agree with every point that Ibrahim has made, but that's the point of a debate.

But before I get into responding or addressing, rather, some of the issues that he's raised, I would like to maybe share with you a very personal experience, and to put a face or a story, a very personal story to some of the numbers that you have heard earlier.

The numbers correspond to -- they are factual. They are factual. They correspond to reality in terms of the number of people -- Palestinian refugees from Syria who have been displaced, who are internally displaced. There are a little bit more than 270,000.

I came to UNRWA eight months ago, seven months ago, and in my first week on this new assignment, I was confronted with a situation that I hope will give an illustration of some of the challenges that we face and how UNRWA is trying to

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respond. And UNRWA, being really the first line of defense, if you like, of the international community in terms of providing assistance and protection to Palestinian refugees across five fields of operation - - Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, West Bank and Gaza.

And during this very first week, I was put in touch on the phone with a lady. Her name is Sarah. And Sarah is a Palestinian refugee from Yarmouk camp, and she's 30 years old. She's the mother of a two year old baby girl whose name is (Nood). And she had managed to, at some point, despite her initial reticence -- she had decided at some point to leave Syria because the situation in and around Yarmouk camp had become untenable.

And partly because as of December -- between October and December, 2012, a number of armed sort of groups had entered Yarmouk, and the situation had deteriorated, so the conflict had come to the Palestinian camp by engulfing an area of 150,000 civilian Palestine refugees and forcing them to seek shelter, as well, and seek refuge, as well.

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Well, Sarah was one of those, and regrettably, she had lost her young husband, so she's now a single mother with a two year old girl. Sarah decides to -- because of the circumstances, that it's better to leave, and she was lucky enough to be able to leave in June, 2013, before Yarmouk became basically inaccessible, and she wouldn't have been able to go in and out freely.

And she manages to get on a plane that from Damascus, takes her directly to Egypt. And it is indeed true, that at the time there were no restrictions in terms of access, and that she could get to Egypt with a tourist visa to start with.

But I think it's fair to say as well, you know, that Egyptian authorities had opened their arms to refugees, both Syrian and Palestinians, and yet, of course, the turmoil and the challenges and the difficulties that Egypt has been facing during this very difficulty period of transition has had an impact on some of the concerns that certainly the Egyptian government has expressed overall to us, but to the UN

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agencies and to the UN family.

But Sarah gets to Egypt. And the reason why she goes to Egypt is because she realizes that first, in Lebanon, apparently, she tells me she doesn't have a lot of relatives. So, her network of support is somewhat weak, and she thinks that with her limited financial resources, being in Egypt -- you know, and Egypt traditionally being cheaper than Lebanon in terms of provision of services, she would be able to stretch her budget a little bit longer for her and her daughter.

Now, at some point, and I think this is one of the issues as a general theme that Ibrahim has already highlighted that we are confronted with on a daily basis -- but at some point, the doubts insinuates in her mind about what is going to happen to her; what the future holds.

And this is at a very deep sense of anxiety, almost an existential anxiety about the future of this community. They're certainly making an assessment that it is entirely possible that this conflict in

Syria will protract, so she doesn't know when she will be able to go back to -- she would go back to Yarmouk, the place of habitual residence for her. She's an engineer. She was working. She was earning a living. She's well educated. She's an active member of the community.

But so suddenly, she's in Egypt and she has a dilemma. She's thinking about her daughter. Her daughter has chronic asthma. So, she makes a very risky decision, and the decision is to put her hands or her fate rather, in the hands of a smuggler. A people smuggler. And she was on one of the boats that Ibrahim referred with her daughter. And I think it's short of a miracle that when the boat capsized, she was together about 120 other Palestinian refugees and Syrian refugees from Syria who were trying to reach Europe.

And when the boat capsized, she was able to hold onto her baby girl, and she was then rescued by the Egyptian Coast Guard. Now, as she was rescued, Egyptian authority applied Egyptian law. And at the

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time, Egyptian law dictated that people would be kept in some sort of administrative detention.

Now, Egypt has not sent people back to Syria against their will. However, they were kept in detention. And it is true that you know, for a period of time, the Egyptian government made a decision not to allow UNHCR deal with Palestinian refugees. However, that is not to say, and truth to be told that they haven't engaged very actively and very constructively with UNRWA on a number of levels.

And the first one is that after a number of discussions, not just with UNRWA, but with humanitarian actors and operators and advocates and some of our donors overall, they decided to release Sarah with her daughter and some other Palestinian refugees who had been kept in temporary detention on humanitarian grounds. So I think, you know, that's a positive response and I think it's a constructive response.

On the other hand, the Egyptian government has now authorized the (Walfred) program to deliver

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monthly coupons for food assistance. It's about \$30 per person, per month that goes to Palestinian refugees. Now, is that enough? Not at all, and which is why as UNRWA, we continue to engage with them, and we are now towards the closing stage, I hope, of a very sensitive negotiation that is about ... a lot of it is about details, rather than the will to act, on how we will be able to provide some health assistance, and hopefully some cash assistance to Palestinian refugees from Syria, about between 5 and 6,000.

So, there has been some progress. And although it is not a field of operation for UNRWA, and certainly, you know, we are limited by the fact that we have a very clear mandate that is given to us by the general assembly, we cannot operate in Egypt, and UNHCR has not been able to assist Palestinian refugees -- we are now getting to a situation where there's been a positive response, and Palestinian refugees are beginning to get the help that they so desperately need.

Now, what happens then is that Sarah and her

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daughter are sent to Lebanon, which is a country that although it has put some restrictions, which we continue to advocate against -- the restrictions that Ibrahim has referred to on the 6th of August where some --

MR. SHARQIEH: Sorry, she was sent --

MR. PEDULLA: She was sent from Egypt.

MR. SHARQIEH: -- by the Egyptian authorities.

MR. PEDULLA: She was sent by the Egyptian authorities. She was given the choice to go back to Egypt. Again, this is an issue with Egyptian law. You know, the Egyptian authorities have repeatedly told us that they have applied Egyptian law. Now, she was not sent back to Syria, but she was sent to Lebanon.

That was certainly her you know, first choice, because she did not have a family. However, let me tell you, while she did not have personal family connections, in a sense, UNRWA, in our responsibility in terms of providing assistance, we

are an extended family. And as a (Inaudible) Italian, I'm entirely familiar with somewhat functional extended families, but extended families nonetheless.

And what we were able to do is to offer Sarah and her daughter assistance in the context of our crisis response; the UNRWA crisis response. And that means that the moment she arrived in Lebanon, she was able to record her presence; she was immediately given access to an UNRWA health clinic so that she could look after her daughter. She was able, not in this particular case, because her daughter is two, but had her daughter been a little bit older, a teenager, she would have been able to go to an UNRWA school in Lebanon.

So, I'm not trying to depict the picture as terribly you know, bright. It is not. The needs are incredible, and the resources are limited. The international community has been very generous towards UNRWA in terms of giving us the resources that are required to provide some measure of support and assistance and comfort and protection to a highly

distressed and vulnerable community.

It is true. You're referring to them as double refugees, and they most certainly -- we have seen that there is this pattern of multiple displacement; whether they are outside Syria, whether they felt that they had no other choice but to leave, but also inside Syria, where they tend to move from one location to another that follows these sort of battlegrounds and the battle lines. So they tend you know, obviously to seek areas where they feel most comfortable and we're able to help them, including inside Syria.

We now have a system in place as an organization of the UN where we can provide cash assistance inside Syria, despite all of the limitations. There is a situation where there are 3,800 UNRWA local staff, primarily Palestinian refugees themselves inside Syria, hence, the reference to a family, who are working day in, day out, putting themselves at great personal risk, exposing themselves at great personal risk.

UNRWA has lost 10 staff in this conflict so far inside Syria. But they're working day in and day out in order to be able to keep health facilities open, in order to be able to keep schools open. And yes, some of the schools have been damaged. Some of the health facilities are no longer in a position to operate. There is a conflict in Syria today.

So, that is just to, you know, put a real face or rather a real story of a person with real needs and some of the challenges that she and her family face today, but also, some of the challenges that we, as UNRWA, are confronted with. We certainly continue to advocated with the Jordanian government and with the Lebanese government that they should not apply discriminatory entry policy.

Now, I cannot speculate as an UNRWA official on the reasons as to why a sovereign country makes a sovereign decision about very specific policies. But we continue to engage with them, and certainly, our partners continue to engage with them. In the meantime, the assistance that we are able to provide,

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although it may not necessarily meet all of the requirements UNRWA needs, but it certainly goes a long way to provide a measure of support. And I think I will stop here for now.

MR. AL HROUB: Okay. Thank you very much.

(Applause) Salvatore, let me stay again, with the whole concept and point of responsibility, because some people would question UNRWA's performance and role in the Syrian crisis and say well, in different places, different refugee camps, and specifically in the Yarmouk camp, UNRWA would somehow -- how can I put it -- maybe approach the whole thing timidly.

And then, they withdrew, maybe fastly, leaving the Palestinians, which is -- the Palestinian refugees which is basically the prime -- should be the prime concern of the UNRWA at this time for their own fate. And now, they are kind of maybe inserted by different either militant groups in the regime itself. And so you are leaving a big part of the refugees, the Palestinian refugees in the hands of God knows who.

MR. PEDULLA: Let me try to answer this.

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For the first answer, it's absolutely not. I mean, in a sense that UNRWA has been very vocal about the situation of Palestinian refugees that are trapped in Yarmouk. As you said, there are about 18,000 that are currently trapped in Yarmouk. We have spoken quite loudly about the situation and the concern we have about this community inside Yarmouk.

And in fact, last December, on the 20th of December, specifically, the Commissioner General of UNRWA, Filippo Grandi, issued a very strong statement with an alarm to the international community. And we have continuously advocated with all the parties involved in the conflict that they have a certain responsibility under international humanitarian law, including allowing humanitarian actors to have regular, substantive and safe access to Yarmouk. This is exactly what UNRWA has been doing.

Now, let me also tell you that in the last two weeks, UNRWA has positioned itself with its own staff on a daily basis or almost on a daily basis with humanitarian supplies, including vaccines for polio

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and food baskets in front one of the entrances of Yarmouk. And we've done so in coordination with the authorities.

Now, we were doing that because we were also -- on the basis of an understanding with the authorities, with the Syrian authorities, that there was a certain willingness and ability and readiness to allow UNRWA as a humanitarian operator of the United Nations to bring this much needed relief assistance into Yarmouk.

Unfortunately, the pace with which we've been allowed to operate has been terribly slow. So, we continued to raise this question. We continued to speak very loudly about this issue. We are raising it discreetly with our partners at the broader UN level, and there are discussions taking place in Geneva today, but we also continued to raise it through social media.

For example, there has been a very successful thunderclap campaign that has had -- you know, it reached 26 million people around the world,

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where all we were saying is that we need urgent humanitarian access into Yarmouk. So, I would disagree quite strongly with you about the fact that UNRWA has given up on its effort to provide assistance to this community of refugees.

There is a conflict going on in Syria, and moving in and around conflict areas is terribly problematic for a number of reasons you are familiar with. But certainly, we are there on a daily basis and we are ready to provide assistance to this community.

MR. AL HROUB: Well, I'm not very sure, Salvatore, that has been talked about in the media, at least. This campaign may be your hidden campaign, quiet campaign, and encouraging Palestinians to immigrate to Canada, to Scandinavian countries here or there from Lebanon, and mostly Palestinian refugees are from Syria.

Does the UNRWA have anything to do with either encouraging or discouraging, or what is the position of the UNRWA on this --

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MR. PEDULLA: No.

MR. AL HROUB: -- if there is any official line?

MR. PEDULLA: No. That's a very interesting point. I am personally not familiar with the campaign you are referring to, so I am not sure. I cannot comment specifically on this campaign. But we've heard these rumors and speculations before.

But UNRWA does not -- it is not mandated as an organization to do any of this, actually. UNRWA is not in a position to resettle Palestinian refugees. I think what we need to look at is the question of a just and durable solution for the plight of Palestinian refugees in the context of a negotiated political solution in the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

Now, UNRWA, again, doesn't get involved with this particular issue. In the sense that we are a humanitarian organization, we provide you know, protection, for protection needs and we provide health, education, social service, microfinance. Our

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interest at this point, our concern and above all, our mandate is for enhancing the protection of Palestinian refugees in this region.

So, I would again, point out the fact that it is in the context of a negotiated solution that the issue of the right of return for Palestinian refugees is going to have to be addressed, and UNRWA is not really in a position to deal with this issue in a way right now.

MR. AL HROUB: The final thing before I move to our friends here. A small point, maybe. When Ibrahim mentions, and yourself as well confirm that we have more than 50,000 Palestinians from Syria now in Lebanon --

MR. PEDULLA: Yes.

MR. AL HROUB: -- how do they live? I mean, do you provide them with the same kind of money say, per day, that is the (Inaudible) allowed that you have mentioned for the Palestinians in Egypt? Is this the monthly circumstance, or is it -- do you provide health, education and --

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MR. PEDULLA: Absolutely. Well, the conditions are different between different fields, and that's for a very simple reason, which is that you know, they're based on needs assessment, as well. And there are -- you know, different countries have different costs of living, they have different costs for medicines and service.

But overall, you know, in Lebanon, UNRWA can rely on its existing infrastructure of schools and health centers. So Palestinian refugees, the 51,000, when they come and they get registered, they do get, depending on the size of their family unit, they get some cash on a regular basis, which allows them, you know, to get some food and to use some of this money for rent.

Now, there is a crisis in Lebanon overall, because it's a small country with a very large population of refugees. You know? And we're talking about, for example, 800,000 Syrian refugees. So, 51,000 Palestinian refugees is a small number in comparison. But of course, they're affected equally.

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There is a shelter crisis, so UNRWA provides some cash assistance that cash goes towards food. It goes towards shelter or rent. But also, when it comes to health and education, they can immediately go to an UNRWA facility and infrastructure, and they get provided services. I can tell you, just for example, a ballpark figure, that there are today 7,000 Syrian - - well, Palestinian -- children of Palestinian refugees from Syria in Lebanon today in UNRWA schools. I think I've got that right.

MR. AL HROUB: Okay.

MR. PEDULLA: So it is -- you know, we're able to provide that kind of service and assistance, and you know, we have to be fair as well to the Lebanese who have been quite generous in that sense, despite the fact that they've been overwhelmed by all these number of refugees. You know, they have continued to allow you know, Palestinian refugees to come through with, true, some restrictions that have applied.

But UNRWA's role is also one of monitoring.

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It's also one of being there at the border every day and engaged with the authority to make sure that you know, refugees, especially those who are particularly vulnerable like elderly or women and children; people who have special medical needs, that they can come through.

MR. AL HROUB: Okay, thank you very much.

(Applause) One more time.

Let me just have an idea how many hands do we have? Okay, let's just start maybe with the lady in the back. So ladies first. Then, we'll come back to you.

SPEAKER: Thank you. I have a question for Ibrahim. I wanted to ask you about your remarks regarding other Arab countries being able to contribute. So, I wanted to -- oh, you want me to stand up.

So, if you could tell me what are those other Arab countries doing to contribute? Is it inertia or indifference that stops them from doing more? And what would those contributions look like?

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Is it just a case of handing over a blank check, or should they actually become more involved in what's happening in other countries that don't have the same resources as them?

MR. AL HROUB: Thank you. Maybe I can take two of them, and we can come back to both of you guys. Yes, please.

SPEAKER: What is the --

MR. AL HROUB: Just one second. One second, please, for the mike, because we need it for the translation.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Now, for the Palestinians, having this experience of being double refugees is not a new phenomena. It is not related to the situation in Syria now. Our people experienced this -- it's been several times during the last few decades, and it's going to continue if the problem of the refugees is not treated and it's not solved by the international community, in fact, not by a certain country.

And the first (Inaudible) was in 1948, or

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after the establishment of the said Israel and Palestine. But in 1967, when the Israelis occupied the West Bank and Gaza, tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees who were living in camps in the West Bank and Gaza were pushed out to Jordan. So they had their second experience of being refugees.

And during the reign of Khadafi in Libya in the '90s, after the signing of the Israel agreement -- because Khadafi wanted to prove that what the Palestinians did was wrong, and that they couldn't absorb the Palestinians from outside Palestine. So, he ordered tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees who were working in Libya to be pushed out and sent to Gaza. Of course, they were denied the possibility of going to Gaza or going anywhere, and they were put in the desert and the borders -- Egyptian and Libyan borders for about a couple of years. And it was a big trouble.

And later, also, another problem was when they ordered thousands of Palestinians to go back to Lebanon. They are refugees from Lebanon who are

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working in Libya. And they were in the ship in between them for a couple of months. You know? And then, after the fall -- the collapse of the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, also, we used to have some 50,000 Palestinian refugees in Iraq. They were you know, subjected to death, to killing in Baghdad, and they were pushed to the Syrian/Iraqi borders for about a year. And then some South American countries took them.

So, it is not a new experience. And okay, it is a humanitarian thing, and we thank the UNRWA, the United Nations for trying to help them. But that's not solving the problem, and it needs to be solved as a political problem, because they are used as a political card in the hands of certain regimes or certain powers. You know? Not as only just a humanitarian issue. That's my comment. Thank you very much, indeed.

MR. AL HROUB: Thank you very much. A third question? Yes, please?

SPEAKER: (Inaudible)

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MR. AL HROUB: Yeah, of course. We have translation here.

(Discussion off the record)

(Arabic)

SPEAKER: They're putting the responsibility on some of the neighboring countries and forget to say that Palestinians themselves are also -- I want an answer to this question.

As for the second question, enough to put the Palestinian always -- describe them as refugees all the time. As the doctor said, many of these Palestinians have -- are well qualified and they have helped the development of the neighboring countries. So, don't we have the right, after all, to improve our status, to say that we, our people have faced and suffered a lot. But we don't want to be always qualified as refugees all the time.

MR. SHARQIEH: Okay. Sorry (Laughter). It indicates how difficult the questions are. Thank you very much. Let me begin with the first question.

It's extremely important as -- I mean, to

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really understand the situation, as to understand the situation of the host countries, Jordan and Lebanon. I mean, the countries that I visited and I saw the situation there. I mean, these two countries are overwhelmed with an influx of refugees, and you know, of how much they have to do in order to handle the situation.

The situation in Jordan and Lebanon is incredibly dire, is incredibly difficult. And yes, I mean, to a large extent, it reflects on the refugees themselves. And also, keep in mind that Jordan and Lebanon -- I mean, their resources are limited. So, you understand that we're being flooded with this number of refugees; how the response would be. However, again, as I mentioned before, that does not, in my view, justify you know, as the policies that are in place and should be removed very flatly said.

Now, for that reason, yes, other Arab countries do have a responsibility and they can contribute. And actually, also, they are contributing. You know? So there is financial

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assistance from different sources, from many Arabs, especially in the gulf countries that they're contributing financially to protect. And I'm sure Salvatore can talk a lot more about this, the financial assistance that Arab countries, other Arab countries especially have given.

But that's not enough, also. That's not enough. The issue is that such a crisis of this magnitude, in my view, requires not an action; it requires a strategy. And a strategy that involves a number of actions or a number of things that will have to be done.

And I'll give you an example. In Jordan, the UAE is fully sponsoring and administrating a refugee camp, right, for the refugees in Jordan. So, it's fully financed and fully supported by the UAE, and is taking care of all the refugees that are in the camp. So you need not only the financials. Financials, though important, but it's not everything.

Yes, there are many with qualifications and degrees, and they can contribute. They can contribute

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to the markets of Arab countries, and they can work in the gulf and in other areas, and they can support their families. Because also imagine -- and I'm sure some of you are aware, like a family from Yarmouk or from other residencies, if they have a family member in the gulf or somewhere else, it is definitely supporting their family.

So, this is a major mechanism that can be in place that can contribute, you know, to the support of (Inaudible). The money or the assistance that they're giving is almost -- is nothing. And it is \$35 per person, per month. You know? Who is going to live for \$35 you know, for the entire month? That's what -- of course, it fluctuates, the number of assistance, but that's how much they're given. So if you're providing, if you're opening markets, if you're absorbing some of the skills, I'm sure this is a sustainable way of contributing you know, to the crisis.

Another thing which is major is the issue of the camps. Like most of the donations and most of the

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money that's coming in for the refugees in Lebanon, for example, is being used for shelter. Now, if you saw -- there's nothing left for health or education. Right? Or other things.

Now, if you saw the shelter issue, and I saw in my eyes, you know, how people are living in Ain al-Hilweh of the Palestinian refugees, like under one tent, you'll find a family of 10, 12 people living under one tent. All right? So if you are able to provide some sort of a shelter in some way, so that donations that's coming from the (Inaudible) should be (Inaudible).

So, my answer to your question is, you need a strategy that involves different aspects of assistance including finances that's now happening, but also contributes shelter and contributes labor forces to absorb some of the skills and to try to provide some assistance to each country, and so on.

The political solution? Your Excellency, I cannot agree with you more, because that's the source of the problem. And that is where the problem is, and

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that's where we are today, where we are. It's that for that reason. And for that reason, I think it's that the UN bears a major responsibility as an international organization, is to press on this and to provide for the application of their significant resolutions, whether it's 194 or others, that deal with the refugees' issues, and to provide political solutions.

About the policies themselves, I cannot agree with you more. Yes. The policies themselves are equally responsible, and here I'm talking about the Palestinian authority in the first place. Not only the Palestinian authority, actually. One of the major problems -- I wish we had the time to talk a lot about this issue.

But one of the major issues of -- the major causes of this problem, as you know, is that you have the PFLB general commanders still allying with the regime. So, some people treated -- in Syria, treated the policy as part of the regime. But at the same time, you have also Hamas that was part of the

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alliance with the regime -- withdrew, left the alliance after like one year of the war in Syria. And then, the regime started treating the Palestinians as part of the revolution or as part of the rebellion.

So, this position, this divergence of positions within the Palestinians themselves, within the partners, has contributed actually, to the problem. And the Palestinian authority is trying -- or you have mentioned Madjalani who is in Syria, in Damascus is trying to help.

MR. AL HROUB: Who is Majdalani?

MR. SHARQIEH: Majdalani is the Minister of Labor. But how much Majdalani was able to solve or to contribute to a solution of the problem? I guess if you read the news today, actually, you will see that three additional Palestinians in Yarmouk died today as a result of starvation to death. So, this is a testimony as to how effective Majdalani or the Palestinian authority is in contributing or in solving -- in contributing to the solution of the problem.

So, the Palestinian authority needs to be

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more active, needs to be more involved and needs to develop solutions. So they bear part of the responsibility, as well.

MR. AL HROUB: Thanks, Ibrahim. Salvatore, any comments on --

MR. PEDULLA: Maybe just a few comments --

MR. AL HROUB: -- on this issue?

MR. PEDULLA: -- maybe on some of these issues. Yeah, well Arab countries and GCC countries have been very generous with UNRWA in terms of providing financial resources. Now, they don't necessarily provide financial resources for UNRWA's general budget or general fund, which is the core of the budget through which UNRWA can pay salaries to teachers and nurses and social workers, and you know, engineers, et cetera.

But they've been quite active over the last few years to the point where UNRWA has established a unit that deals specifically with engaging GCC and Arab countries in general, providing assistance for infrastructure projects for schools, for example. And

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Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and others have been quite generous. Of course, we would want them to do more.

But as we've said, you know, this is a palliative, almost. It's a necessary requirement for the time being, until that time when there will be a political solution. And most certainly, the international community, in whatever way we define it, you know, should encourage the parties to come to an understanding and to come to a negotiated solution, because that would be the way through which the question of Palestinian refugees can be addressed in a fair and stable and durable way.

Now, when we're talking specifically about Lebanon and the question of existing Palestinian camps who are over-populated, the shelter problem, et cetera, I think -- and I don't want to misinterpret my friend, Ibrahim. And please, but when we refer -- when Ibrahim refers to camps, et cetera, I think that's a question that in Lebanon is being debated as a policy choice.

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But that is a question that really is primarily addressed to Syrian refugees, given the very large numbers. The 51,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria who are in Lebanon today, they're overall roughly split between some of the existing camps and some of the local communities. So, I wouldn't necessarily get into the question of camps specifically for Palestinian refugees. And certainly, that's something for which UNRWA has not advocated any specific action.

But I would like to go back to Sarah, the lady I've mentioned at the beginning of my intervention. I think it's very important because it's illustrative. You know, one of the things that Sarah said to me at the end of one of my last conversations with her was, you know, it's not about where I get the most cash or the most assistance. It's not about more money coming through you know, UNRWA or NGOs or other international organizations.

It's a question of dignity. It's a question of agency. It's a question of choice. She said, I'm

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a young and able Palestinian refugee from Syria, and I've worked very hard to build and to get an education and to build a better life for myself and my family in the future. And I think you know, that the question of dignity for refugees -- the question for working to ensure that their rights are respected, that's a question that is certainly on UNRWA's agenda as our daily motivation, our daily effort of our -- and all of our undertakings.

But I think it's something that once again, can only be addressed over time in the context of a political solution that will make the situation for Palestinian refugees you know, resolved in a durable way. The region is going through a tremendous amount of changes and turmoil.

So, even our human development work as UNRWA, when we built on you know, very innovative ways to provide health and education, again, human development. Even that, it's constantly destructed by a series of repeated and dramatic upheavals that are cyclical in the region. And part of -- you know,

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clearly the long-term solution for that is a political solution to the conflict. And that's something that the parties would have to negotiate amongst themselves.

MR. AL HROUB: Thank you very much, Ibrahim. In fact, you know, I wanted to thank you early on for sharing with us Sarah's story, because again, it gave this human face to the place figures and the statistics --

MR. SHARQIEH: Absolutely.

MR. AL HROUB: -- on the silent ones. So, this is a belated thank you. Thanks again. And yeah, the young lady there?

SPEAKER: Thank you. My question is actually to Salvatore.

And I've seen firsthand some of the work that UNRWA does, and I have a lot of respect for it. It provides a lot of assistance and I've seen that multiple times. However, given that it's been set up since the Nakba, since '48, in your personal opinion and your professional experience, do you feel that

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UNRWA plays a role in kind of normalizing the situation and in extension, normalizing the occupation?

I mean, given that it's been there for so long, do you think it's more of a band-aid solution? And is there really a real long-term goal that UNRWA works towards? Or is it simply providing assistance when it can? Thanks.

MR. AL HROUB: Thank you. Any more questions at the front? Oh yes, please.

SPEAKER: Can I ask about the situation in Turkey? Are there many --

MR. AL HROUB: If you could please stand up.

SPEAKER: I'm sorry.

MR. AL HROUB: Thank you.

SPEAKER: Are there many Palestinians who have gone to Turkey? And if not, why not? And what are the trends and flows there? About maybe 15 percent have left Syria now? Maybe 400 or more thousand still in Syria? Is there a continual flow?

SPEAKER: Yeah, thanks.

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MR. AL HROUB: Yes, please. A hand over there?

SPEAKER: Yes, I just have a quick question. This continuing you know, waves of displacement of Palestinians everywhere, you know, and the fact that representatives of the Palestinians tend to be somehow concerned by survival -- so for example, the authority is you know, thinking about staying or dissolving the authority.

Are we going to help these? Are we not going to help these? We have a lot of constraints on us, so we are not really able to help. And then, the people in Hamas, again, they have their problems and they are trying to survive and so on and so forth. Is there a need for some representation of the displaced people, of the refugees that actually has as its main, you know, one goal to actually help the refugees and help them go back to Palestine?

Because actually, their problem is different. They are not just refugees like the Syrians. It's not like a temporary situation -- you

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go out and then come back a few months later. They're actually victims of ethnic cleansing. There was ethnic cleansing that continued over a very long period of time.

There was a whole entity with international support that actually was -- you know, existed on the premise of actually displacing these people from their country. So, there is more needed to actually help these people to go back. So, what mechanisms -- I mean, I just -- I'm not sure if a quick question -- a quick answer can be --

But I think it's very important to think about this, that there is a need for some -- is there a need for some entity that actually works on this specific issue of alleviating the suffering -- I mean, is it moral to not help victims of ethnic cleansing?

Everybody in the world should feel guilty, as you know, especially the UK. And of course, number one, Israel, and now the U.S. Is it moral to see this wave after wave, every couple of months, every couple of years -- what is this nonsense?

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MR. AL HROUB: Okay.

SPEAKER: Anyway, thank you very much.

MR. AL HROUB: Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. AL HROUB: Let's go to our speakers.

Then I'll come back to you. Yeah? Pick and choose

(Laughter). And we'll start -- maybe we can start

with the nonsense or any --

MR. PEDULLA: Well, perhaps if I could -- you know, you ask a very direct question, and I think I need to give you a very simple, direct answer.

And for me, what perpetuates the situation and the plight of Palestine refugees is not the existence of UNRWA as such. What perpetuates the plight of refugees is the perpetuation of a conflict that has not found a political solution. And I don't want to repeat myself, but I think that's the -- you know, that's at the heart of the problem.

What UNRWA does is, UNRWA is a humanitarian organization that is mandated you know, until a solution is found -- a political solution is found.

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It's mandated to ensure that the rights of Palestinian refugees are you know, protected, and that those rights, which include the right to health and education, are maintained and supported. So, that's the essence, in a way of UNRWA's work.

In terms of the trends, we haven't really recorded a presence of Palestinian refugees from Syria in Turkey. And I think that you know, when you look at the map of Syria vis-à-vis its neighbors, I think the answer is almost self-explanatory, in a sense that the large -- the majority of Palestinian refugees in Syria are dotted around Damascus and reef Damascus. So it's all around Damascus.

And there is a small camp in Dara, in the south towards the border with Jordan. There's a small camp south of (homes), and there are two camps, relatively small, also, in the area around in Aleppo and one in Latakia. So in a sense, in the midst of a very active and dynamic conflict on the ground, it would be very, very difficult for Palestinian refugees sort of -- who are primarily around Damascus to move

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north. I think the easier way for them is to move east, or eventually, to move south. Now, let's not go back to all the limitations that we have discussed earlier. But I think these are the trends.

The numbers that Ibrahim provided at the beginning of his presentations are correct. Now, what I would say is that in our assessment at UNRWA, of those who have remained inside Syria today, which is about 440, 420, 440,000 Palestinian refugees, about 270,000 are internally displaced. So that means that if you were living in Yarmouk before, at the beginning of the conflict, then you have moved to another area, but inside Syria.

And what we have also observed is that there are -- the pattern of displacement is one where people move multiple times, several times. And of course, they tend to move in a way where they look for safe areas or areas where the conflict has temporarily abated, or they look for areas where they can get access to services. So, these are just to give you, again, an idea of the trend you referred to.

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MR. AL HROUB: Yeah, Ibrahim, please.

MR. SHARQIEH: Thank you.

Let me get into the view on issue over here. And I understand that my friend, Salvatore, is in an official position, so -- over there. So I can talk more freely as an independent scholar (Laughter). And I can talk more openly (Laughter).

So, the very short answer (Inaudible) of the UN is this: I think the UN has failed representing refugees on multiples levels. On the political level, and I don't have to tell you much about this. You know this. But also, more important -- or equally important, actually, is the UN's response to the double refugees that we are talking about today.

And here, there is nothing I can -- or counts as more relevant that I remember as always you know, (Banki Mun's) statement, work as a UN. Work as an agency. Work as a -- you know, not individual programs like whether it's under this mandate or under this program or under this department. And at the end, you know, or during in the cracks of -- you know,

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between these different mandates and different departments and different agencies, with different budgets, by the way, then who is suffering and who is (Inaudible) of the refugees themselves?

And I can give you a small example, actually, where -- yes, the cash assistance changes from one month to another. But in December, at times, the Palestinian refugees in Jordan, what's identified as a vulnerable refugee was receiving \$35 per month, per person under UNRWA. And then, a Syrian refugee under UNHCR, another UN agency, a vulnerable refugee -- as defined as a vulnerable refugee was receiving \$70. Right? Under the same UN system, under the same agency.

And this door, of course -- you know, both is not enough -- neither for the Syrians nor for the Palestinians. And the Syrians are suffering enough. But this has caused issues within the Palestinian refugees there where this (Inaudible) maybe it's better for them to be supported by another department.

So, it's this system of the UN -- I think

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UNRWA has done great work and continues to do great work, as well, in many different places. But also, UNRWA works within a mandate and within a budget, you know, of what it's able to run. My problem is with the UN, where, for example, why UNRWA needs to rely for its survival on support from Arab countries in order to survive. The Arab countries you know, have to pay for the survival of UNRWA.

And why isn't the UNRWA more integrated within the UN system, whether we're talking about the budget or about you know, some other aspects, as well? And then, you end up having you know, this limited protection and limited budget. Since I came to realize about these issues, constantly, the only thing that I have been hearing about UNRWA is struggling with its financial resources.

I never heard about UNHCR struggling with its financial resources to survive. But this has been constantly the issue with UNRWA, struggling with the financial issues and with (Inaudible). Why is UNRWA not receiving, you know, its budget or its following

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as a UNRWA agency? Why are the Palestinian refugees in Jordan, for example, not part of that needs assessment plans that another UN agency like UNHCR is conducting? And then, UNRWA will have to do its own.

In Lebanon, who is doing the needs assessment for the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon? It's ANERA. It's not even -- it's an NGO that is doing -- and I can show you the ANERA in Beirut. They gave me, you know, the needs assessment that they produced which is one of the best. It's outstanding. It's an NGO that is providing the needs assessment. Why the UN system is interesting.

And again, my problem is not with UNRWA. It's not with UNHCR. It's with the system itself, with the UN system itself and how it is you know, establishing all these mandates. And then agencies and support and financial -- and this has -- UNRWA has to get some money from (Inaudible) and so forth. So, that is that issue on the UN.

On Turkey, there hasn't been any statistics to support -- maybe they're on a very small case. I

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think the only explanation -- I asked this question, and the answers that I got -- it's a matter of geography; that Yarmouk is much closer to Jordan and to Beirut and to Lebanon.

So, just from a logistical point of view, they're able to get into or to reach (Inaudible) and Beirut, while going throughout Turkey, while going through (Hems) and (Edlib) and all those tough areas. So, that's the only thing -- I can be wrong, but that's the only answer I was able to get on the issue of Turkey.

Whether there is a need for a special agency or representation, I think there needs to be a solution on the political level. Again, now whether this comes from a special level, it comes from the UN or it comes from the -- I think if we are able, you know, to resolve this, I think that's where the issue is.

I don't think it's a matter of a lack of parties whatever are sponsoring or taking care of this issue. I think we have plenty. But unfortunately,

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altogether, you know, (Inaudible), independent. You know? And each parties are driven by its own policies and agendas and budget and all of that. And you know, the refugees are -- then, they are paying the price for this.

MR. AL HROUB: Thank you, Ibrahim.

I think Salvatore needs to delve into this (Laughter), I guess. I've been receiving signals you know, all the way through.

MR. PEDULLA: No, I mean, I don't want to sound defensive in terms of you know, the UN. But you know, I'm sitting here as UNRWA (Laughter), so you have to forgive me if I make a couple of comments in relation to what Ibrahim has said. Now, you know, I'll be as sharp and as quick as possible.

Now, in terms of UNRWA's survivability, in terms of budget, I think it's not true that UNRWA has to rely on gulf countries in Arab --

MR. SHARQIEH: It points (Inaudible) from Arab countries of its budget.

MR. PEDULLA: No, but what I can -- No, but

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see, UNRWA's primary donors, UNRWA's largest donors consistently over the years have been the United States and the European Union. Now, Arab government are very generous donors, and they have become more and more so over the last few years. But as I pointed earlier, they're focusing on infrastructure projects. So, outside sort of the general fund of UNRWA. But in terms of you know, who are the top supporters and you know, financial supporters of UNRWA, I would say the UNRWA and the European Union would come first.

Now, in terms of some of the discrepancies that you pointed out between the amount of cash that UNHCR is able to provide as opposed to UNRWA in different countries, there are some discrepancies. What I can tell you, though, for example, is that not all UNHCR -- not all Syrian refugees who register with UNHCR actually receive a blanket cash assistance.

In Jordan, only 19 or 20 percent, therefore, the most vulnerable, are entitled to receive cash assistance. Now, for UNRWA, those Palestinian refugees from Syria registered with UNRWA in Jordan,

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they receive a hundred percent. I mean, all of them. And it's a very small number. Admittedly, it's not as -- you know, the 500 plus thousand that UNHCR has to deal with. But all of the 11,000 that are registered with UNRWA receive this cash assistance.

It is also true that they are able to get health and education support through UNRWA facilities, which is not necessarily the case for -- regrettably, for Syrian refugees that are registered with UNHCR.

Now, I have mentioned earlier, the sort of -- you know, I've made reference to the metaphor of the dysfunctional the family. And I'll be the first one to admit, or sometimes in my sort of private moment, to complain about the fact that sometimes the UN can be quite dysfunctional, because there so many different agencies and mandates and procedures, et cetera.

But I can tell you that there is growing and growing cooperation and coordination. Certainly, there is unquestionable protection between UNRWA and UNHCR. We work very closely with UNICEF when it comes

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to protection issues for miners across our fields of operation. We work very closely with WFP, with the World Food Program.

I have mentioned Egypt before as an example, but we do that also in Lebanon and we are doing that in Jordan, as well. WFP is helping us with the needs assessments that we are conducting in Lebanon. And we're you know, looking at ways we can best and more efficiently provide cash assistance -- you know, leveraging the experience in the mechanism, for example, of the WFP, as well.

So you know, as UNRWA, we are part of the bigger picture and the bigger conversation. It is a dysfunctional family at times. It is in best of cases. But, I think it's fair to say that the Secretary General, as you mentioned, has repeatedly urged the different funds and programs and agencies to do more. And that's a process that has been set in motion.

Now finally, if I may, you know, you refer to the responsibility of the UN. May I perhaps, just

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say that the UN -- you know, there is -- you know, when we talk about the UN, it's a constellation of bodies and organization. I think when you're talking to the responsibility of the UN at the political level, perhaps -- again, correct me if I misinterpret you, but you're referring, you know, to the Security Council, which has a responsibility at the political level to look at questions of conflict --

SPEAKER: Of course.

MR. PEDULLA: -- and peaceful resolution of conflict.

SPEAKER: Yes.

MR. PEDULLA: Then, there is the UN -- us. There is the agencies. There is the UN staff who are humanitarian operators who are on the ground, who are in difficult fields. We're working very every day. And you know, to try to mitigate some of the impact of these conflicts.

And I think here I would say that you know, although it's not a perfect picture, but every day, we do our best. And based on the resources that are

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available, and you know, given the financial constraints of a growing economic crisis over the last few years across Europe and North America and other parts of the world -- given the resources that are made available to us, that we strive on a daily basis to try to at least provide that measure of support and assistance that is required to mitigate the impact of crises that require a political solution. And we most certainly urge a political solution to this and other crises. Thank you.

MR. AL HROUB: Thank you, Salvatore. I'm going to take maybe the very last round of questions, if there are any. A gentleman there? Any others? Okay, I would like this -- inquire at the front of you guys.

(Discussion off the record)

MR. AL HROUB: Yes, please. Go ahead.

(Arabic language)

SPEAKER: The Palestinian identity -- most refugees have become now immigrants, and there is a change in their identity. So the hundreds of

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thousands of Palestinians in Brazil and Chile who are -- have become immigrants now. In Jordan, there are thousands of Palestinian refugees who have been naturalized as citizens of Jordan.

So, can we say safely that now, Jordan is becoming the alternative homeland to Palestine? Because nobody in the international community is using the very word Palestine. Anybody in Australia or western countries, when they open any map to look at, they do not find the word Palestine, even. They only find the word Israel. So therefore, they can only Palestinians either as refugees or immigrants who have gained the nationality of the host countries. So, what is the best solution to confront this ethnic cleansing? This is the first fear of my question.

The second fear -- I'll repeat the question by my colleague here. What have the Palestinians done for themselves? Some, or a large number of Palestinians view Palestinian refugees as people who are trying to escape their responsibility towards their own cause. And some dictatorial regimes are

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trying to exploit that towards their own political ends.

Online, on the Internet, I keep seeing a campaign by some Jordanian personalities calling for stripping the Palestinians of the Jordanian nationality and add them to the list of refugees. This is a very long and complicated issue, of course. But we want to focus on the Palestinian refugees from Syria, and I'm -- yes, I agree with Ibrahim when he says these are complex questions.

So please, allow me to interrupt you and ask Ibrahim kindly to respond to the first fear of the question.

(Arabic)

MR. SHARQIEH: No, the refugees is extremely difficult. And here, I would like to remind everyone is just to remember that you're dealing here with a vulnerable community. A vulnerable community that doesn't have a land, doesn't have a citizenship, doesn't have a passport, doesn't have anything.

And here, yes, there are (Inaudible) in

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Latin America, but I'll tell you something. If you're all aware, and that's -- we're seeing here history repeating itself. And I'm afraid that this will be the case after this war in Syria ends.

When the war in Iraq ended back in 2000 -- the U.S. invasion in 2003, the Palestinian refugees who were in Iraq, they found themselves in the desert in refugee camps on the borders between Iraq and Jordan and Syria for three years. For three years, living in a refugee camp in the desert, not even one single Arab country accepted them to take them. And then, who took them after three years? It was Brazil and Chile.

So, that is how (Inaudible), you know, ended up -- after spending three years in the desert, the refugees again, in some vulnerable community, some vulnerable refugees after three years to find them in resettlement programs in Chile and in Brazil at the same time.

Again, the issue is a political problem. How do you resolve it? Now, whether -- most of the

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refugees -- of those that they left or they were forced to leave in 1948, 750,000 -- that's the (Inaudible). Today, we are talking about five million refugees, meaning 4,250,000 were born outside Palestine; that they were living here and there.

I mean, how would you expect from someone who was born in Brazil or in Chile or in any of the other countries, to be able to go back and live there in Palestine? So, we're talking about over 85, 80 percent of them. So, that is why I'm not comfortable actually with the issue of even -- on top of the life of refugees -- the suffering that they're having, also, you know, blaming them for not returning or for not being able (Inaudible).

Now, if you talk about the Palestinian authority, the Palestinian authority is also in a very weak position. I mean, what is the -- the Palestinian authority is under occupation. But I don't believe in all of the arrangements that followed (Inaudible) '93, the Oslo Agreement. I mean, it's an authority. It's an administrative authority that ended up being a

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(ramala), and even the prime minister or the president of the (Inaudible) needs permission in order to move between one city to another.

So, there is no doubt that you know, they're in an extremely weak position, vulnerable position. And that is why, actually, we talk about the issue of refugees. And again here, I'm not talking about -- I'm not advocating any aspect of nationalism here. The issue of refugees all over the world is a humanitarian issue, and it's an international and it's a global issue.

And that is why you have the UNHCR in place as part of the UN, is dealing with the issue and is dealing with the issue (sic). And they show the humanitarian issue -- there is an international humanitarian law in place in order to deal with the refugees and the vulnerable refugees.

The refugees all over the world are in similar or worse conditions than probably the Palestinian refugees. So, you cannot or should not, or I don't expect much, actually, from someone who

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left Yarmouk camp or was born in Yarmouk camp within the existing systems, and now is under -- besieged by -- and being starved to death, and is trying to escape to Jordan, and Jordan is not allowing that. Lebanon is the same, and Egypt -- the Egypt (Inaudible) is not providing -- not allowing even the international organizations, unless some of the progress has been made, as my friend started mentioning, is even to provide to the level of support to them.

So, that's where the complexity of the problem as a humanitarian is a vulnerable community. And that is -- you can't expect much, in my view.

MR. AL HROUB: Ibrahim, thank you very much. I think this has been very informing, enlightening and exciting. The credit goes for Brookings Doha Center for taking us to this, I think pioneering, somehow, discussion. And the credit goes for both of you, our friends, Ibrahim Sharqieh and Salvatore Pedulla.

MR. SHARQIEH: Thank you for having us.

MR. AL HROUB: Thank you very much for coming and sharing with us your views. (Applause)

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And thanks to all of you for coming. And let me end by kind of passing on a friendly note to my friend, Salmon Shaikh (Laughter), while I voluntarily step down. So, handing over (Inaudible) peacefully, so you can come back to the country and will come back to Doha. Thank you very much, guys.

MR. SHARQIEH: Thank you, Khaled.

MR. PEDULLA: Thank you, Khaled for all the great --

(Applause)

* * * * *

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