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THE ROLE OF HUMANITARIANS IN GOVERNMENT:

PERSPECTIVES ON ADVOCACY AND IMPACT

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Introduction and Moderator:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. FERRIS: Welcome to this event. My name is Elizabeth Ferris. I'm a Senior Fellow here at the Brookings Institution, and Co-Director of the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement.

And we're delighted to welcome you all to this conversation with Eric Schwartz, the now -- almost four months in office -- Assistant Secretary State for Population, Refugees and Migration.

He's going to talk about the role of humanitarians in government. And as you'll see from his resume -- which is summarized in the materials you have -- he has long experience both inside government and outside government, and I'm sure he has a number of exciting things to say.

Now, the whole issue of the relationship between politics and humanitarianism is a critical one. Certainly on the international level, we see governments who want to use humanitarian response to further their own political objectives. We see the UN increasingly using integrated missions, in which humanitarian policy is one of many tools to support political and peacekeeping objectives. Indeed, many humanitarians would say humanitarian interests are often subordinated to political and peacekeeping interests in those integrated missions.

There are questions about the relationship between humanitarian assistance and the causes of conflicts, with many arguing that humanitarian assistance is used when the international community can't decide to take action to address the political conflicts that cause the need for humanitarian assistance -- you know, situations such as Darfur, or Democratic Republic of Congo, years and years in Bosnia.

As Sadako Ogata, the former UN High Commissioner for Refugees often said, there are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems.

What does this mean for the future of humanitarian work? In the absence of political action, can humanitarian assistance be sustained indefinitely?

I think of Darfur, for example, where the cost of humanitarian assistance is about a billion dollars a year. Does a generous humanitarian response relieve pressure on political actors to take actions to resolve conflicts? We don't have to deal with the main issue of the reasons for the conflict because, after all, the people are being assisted.

Sometimes it seems that humanitarian ideals are under fire from all sides -- increasingly vociferous critics who charge that humanitarians have not only failed to address the needs of people, but have actually made conflicts longer. And day-to-day challenges in the

field, of questions such as how to balance security of humanitarian staff with meeting the needs of people on the ground? How far to negotiate with non-state actors to ensure humanitarian access? How much compromise is needed and acceptable to ensure humanitarian response?

Some have suggested that the days of principled humanitarianism are over, and that a more pragmatic humanitarianism is necessary. And, of course, the international humanitarian community is a diverse and crowded assortment of actors. Not only is the number of non-governmental organizations proliferating every day, but there are increasingly different types of actors.

There are humanitarian arms of militia groups and political parties, military actors, civilians working together with the military, for-profit contractors.

I was in Jordan last week talking with people on Iraqi NGOs. There are 10,000 to 12,000 Iraqi NGOs that have emerged since 2003 -- 90 percent of them linked with a political party, a religious group, a business, a family. And yet the proliferation of these actors make for a very complicated reality.

It's a complicated world to be a humanitarian today -- so I'm glad we have Eric Schwartz here to shed some light on the subject of the role of humanitarians in government. Many of you know him and know

that he is not shy at speaking his mind. And certainly, these are critical issues.

He began his career working with the human rights group Asia Watch, here in Washington. He has worked with staff consultant to the U.S. House of Representatives, National Security Council, various fellowships allowing him a bit of a breather and time to think, before joining the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, where he worked for a short while with Sergio Vieira de Mello and then spending two years as the UN Secretary General's Deputy, Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, and then with Connect USA here in Washington.

It will be four months on Sunday, I figured, since he's been sworn in to his new position as Deputy Assistant Secretary.

And we're very glad to have you with us today. Thank you.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, thank you, Beth, very much. And it's a real pleasure for me to be here. I really appreciate the opportunity to offer some initial reflections on the role of humanitarians in government.

I'll speak probably for about 20 to 25 minutes, so you can time your level of interest. I always like to know how long somebody is speaking when I'm in an audience, so I always start with that.

Let me start by saying the Department of State, where I work, works in close partnership with other agencies in government, in

particular the U.S. Agency for International Development, and its Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance. And that partnership is absolutely critical. The AID and the DCHA bureau plays an absolutely crucial role in everything we do.

Today, though, I want to offer perspectives from the perch that I occupy at the Department of State, and thereby focus in great measure on the roles of the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, and that of the Department in general.

And whatever the rhetoric, national security policy-makers have often viewed humanitarian response as marginal to the international community's involvement in issues of war and peace. But as we all know -- and I say "we all know," because I know about half the people in the audience -- the reality is that humanitarian issue have long affected politics and security. In Pakistan, for example, after conflict in the Swat Valley fueled large scale civilian flight, assistance and support for voluntary return quickly became a political imperative -- for the government of Pakistan, for the government of the United States, and for the international community.

So how do humanitarians operate effectively in complex policy environments? How do we ensure that basic principles, such as protection of civilians, access to populations in need, the security of

humanitarian workers, and the effectiveness and impartiality of aid -- how do we ensure that those principles are vindicated?

I start from the proposition that protection of the most vulnerable must be at the center of policy-making. As I said when I was sworn-in some weeks ago, and as I find myself repeating in many of the presentations I've been giving, there are several reasons why I think this is, and should be, a guiding principle of policy -- that protection of the most vulnerable needs to be at the center of policy-making.

First, there is the moral imperative. And the simple policy goal of saving lives. The people of the United States, as reflected by the Congress and by successive Administrations, have demonstrated unequivocal support for generous efforts to alleviate human suffering. And I think we have a really profound responsibility to make good and responsible use of the resources which are provided.

Second, the U.S. government, I believe, has the strongest of interests in sustaining U.S. leadership on humanitarian response. The benefits of that leadership really are very important. They include enabling us, really, to drive the development of international humanitarian law, of international programs and policy like no other government in the world, and enable us to leverage critical support from others.

Third, it’s critical that we build sustainable partnerships with key friends and allies, and their populations, as well as the populations of our adversaries. And though public diplomacy should never be the driving rationale for humanitarian assistance, the generous provision of aid can, indeed, help to break down negative stereotypes and images of the United States, and communicate U.S. support for responsible overseas engagement.

And, finally, we have the key goal of promoting reconciliation, security and well-being in circumstances where despair and misery not only threaten stability, but also threaten critical national interests.

But if those are our goals, and the rationale -- and several rationales for our goals -- how do humanitarians go about pursuing them effectively in a bureaucratic environment? How do we promote and sustain a deep concern about victims of conflict and put them at the center of policy? What strategies make the most sense? And what tactics should we be seeking to implement in pursuing them effectively?

Let me state the obvious, because sometimes the obvious isn’t always so obvious -- if you want humanitarian perspectives to influence policy-making, you’d better make sure that cabinet officials responsible for foreign policy are receiving ongoing, frank and informed

information about the humanitarian dimensions of complex crises. That would see self-evident, but it doesn't always happen.

Similarly, we must make sure that at the working level, humanitarian considerations are being embedded into the work of the policy bureaus at the State Department, and other bureaus, from Africa to East and South Asia, to the Middle East, to the Americas. As it happens, the bureau where I now serve -- Population, Refugees and Migrations -- is well-positioned to promote these objectives, as we serve as the principal humanitarian advisors in the State Department, and I believe we owe it to the Secretary and to the humanitarian mandate, to aspire to a broad role in policy formulation and policy implementation on issues

involving complex emergencies.

If the Administration effectively incorporates humanitarian concerns into policy, then we will recognize potential humanitarian crises early on, and we will take preventive measures that may alleviate suffering -- not to mention safeguard U.S. national interests.

And this policy integration increases the chances that strategies designed to deal with man-made crises take adequate account of basic protection concerns, including preservation of humanitarian space that is critical to the functioning -- to the effective functioning of assistance providers.

So if that's our goal -- a robust voice in the policy debate -- how do we achieve it?

Allow me to address this question by offering up seven -- I normally like to have 10, but in this case I only have seven -- basic propositions on which I find myself relying as I begin this new adventure as Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration. I wonder at what point I need to say it's no longer a new adventure. I think less than four months, it's still new, right?

First, I believe that humanitarians must define our mandate broadly, with a willingness to break apart, or merge, traditional issue silos.

I just returned from a trip to Africa, which included a visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo. And I have to be very careful what I say about the Congo, because my friend Tony Gambino is in the audience, and I know it will be heavily scrutinized. But nonetheless, I will plow on.

In the DRC, my focus was the effectiveness of protection efforts in the east, where an ongoing humanitarian crisis has had devastating effects on the civilian population -- more than one-and-a-half million of whom are displaced within that region alone. Solving these daunting problems will require integrated approaches that go far beyond traditional issue areas, and far beyond bureaucratic boundaries. Our bureau -- Population, Refugees and Migration -- will certainly work closely with UNHCR, a major partner organization for us, to enhance its performance in providing basic services to displaced populations.

But that won't be enough. We must promote action on a range of other fronts. In particular, we must promote enhanced coordination and effectiveness among the many players on the ground involved in civilian protection -- from UN agencies to MONUC, the peacekeeping operation, to non-governmental organizations. We must encourage MONUC and the DRC authorities to promote more effectively FDLR disarmament. We must work to end impunity for human rights

abuses, and establish accountability -- work to establish accountability in the DRC. And we have to strongly support complementary and more effective efforts by MONUC and the UN agencies at civilian protection, including efforts to combat gender-based violence and child recruitment.

And we must also continue to look for areas where targeted efforts might make a difference. Even when they are somewhat outside, again, the normal issue areas that our bureau is focused on, such as increased support to MONUC's joint protection teams, which identify vulnerable populations in need of support and protection.

In short, humanitarians must be part of integrated strategies that also address root causes. And we must be prepared to even drive those strategies when necessary.

A second lesson -- humanitarians must not shy away from engagement on political, law enforcement and security issues that may effect the humanitarian agenda. In fact, my own view is that we need to engage deeply in these sorts of issues -- and even be prepared to take the lead on policy development when that is feasible and appropriate.

I was reflecting on this as I was putting my thoughts together for this talk, and reflected back to the Clinton Administration, when I served at the National Security Council and I was asked to manage elements of the Alien Smuggling portfolio. I accepted the assignment ,not

because I had significant background or experience in law enforcement, but rather because the issue was compelling -- to policy-maker, and the portfolio involved key protection concerns.

I hadn’t taken the humanitarian job at the NSC expecting that I’d be helping to devise strategies to protect U.S. borders from unauthorized migration. But so long as I was able to acquit myself on the enforcement side, policy-makers, I found, were prepared to defer to my judgment on many protection issues. We didn’t win every protection battle, but protection equities -- whether they involved Cubans, Haitians, Chinese -- were usually, if not always, part of the discussion.

Similarly, during my recent visit to Kenya, I traveled there to promote agreement on the building of a fourth camp for Somali refugees in the Dadaab area, in the northeast of the country, where the camps built for 90,000 people are now holding more than three times that amount. To encourage government of Kenya agreement on a fourth camp, UNHCR has already offered the authorities a package that includes assistance for security management in the camps, host-community development projects, better registration procedures for asylum seekers, and some limited movement from Dadaab in the northeast, to Kakuma camp on the other side of the country, in the northwest.

During my meetings in Kenya, officials seemed prepared to move forward, subject to additional assistance on border management issues. The Kenyan interest is obviously driven by security concerns, but I believe humanitarians have a deep interest in engaging in this discussion, both to promote the humanitarian alternative of a new camp and more humane conditions, but also to ensure that any additional assistance on border management retains basic principles of protection.

Third, our protection strategies must include active humanitarian diplomacy and robust humanitarian advocacy. For years, experts -- at least some experts -- have referred to a conflict between the imperative of human rights advocacy and the imperative of humanitarian access. The notion was that groups like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International could criticize governments for denying their citizens basic rights, but humanitarian organizations -- no matter what they might witness -- needed to stay silent to preserve their ability to operate, to feed and clothe people, and to save lives.

In fact, as I think we know now, the reality is not that simple. And silence by donor governments in the face of humanitarian deprivation not only risks implicating the donor in abuses, but often represents a missed opportunity to promote positive change.

In addition, governments that might reject out of hand the complaints of human rights advocates, may well have a little bit of a harder time when doing so -- might have a little bit of a harder time doing so when it is the humanitarian organizations that are providing critical resources.

As the work of Médecins Sans Frontières has so clearly demonstrated over the years, there is no necessary conflict between engaging in advocacy, and securing critical access. And in some circumstances, I think, we have to consider seriously whether continued and possibly compromised access is worth the cost of staying silent.

In short, if pressing the case with governments, the media, and civil society can impact the situations of vulnerable populations, then we have an obligation to press. In Sri Lanka, for example, nearly 200,000 Tamils remain in camps in the north of the country. And the government has thus far failed to meet the majority of its stated targets for permitting them to have freedom of movement which, of course, is their right under international law.

At the same time, we have, in recent weeks, seen that the pace of releases has picked up quite considerably. Whether this pace will continue remains to be seen. But there's no question in my mind that the government's recent more positive actions have been influenced by the

strong expressions of concern from donor governments, including the United States.

Let me offer one more thought on this issue. Humanitarian advocacy also keeps faith with the victims of these conflicts, and keeps the news of their suffering in the public eye. For example, in Burma a recent regime offensive caused large-scale displacement of civilians, but information on their plight had not captured significant world attention. Humanitarians can play an important role in bringing forgotten ore neglected crises to light, and helping to craft solutions.

So those are three lessons. I have four more to go.

Fourth, humanitarians in government, I believe we must raise the profile of our work -- among our colleagues in government, within the Congress, and among civil society and the public at large. Public awareness of our issues is a critical prerequisite to political support for international humanitarian objectives. We must engage in more vigorous affairs and public diplomacy, information-sharing with Congress and the NGO community, and travel to regions of the world where key humanitarian issues are implicated.

I'm now in the position of not only articulating my views of what I think should happen, but actually having some capacity to do what I

think should happen. And so I'm acutely aware of this new reality, which imposes some stresses.

But with this in mind, over the past four months, my senior bureau colleagues and I will have traveled to Sri Lanka, to Pakistan, to the DRC, to Rwanda, to Kenya, to Southeast Asia, including Thailand and Laos, to Iraq, Jordan, Ecuador and Colombia. And each of these visits -- most of which have already taken place -- has substantially enhanced our capacity to engage credibly in policy debates in Washington. No question about it.

Fifth lesson -- we must strengthen the human resource capacity of humanitarians in government so they can effectively play a stronger policy role. Even as the staff at the bureau I serve, PRM -- it's an extraordinary staff -- even as they are engaged in policy initiatives and debates involving Kenya, Somalia, the Congo, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, refugee admissions policy -- and on and on and 0 -- they have, at the same time, been expected to manage an increase in assistance to refugees and conflict victims of nearly 60 percent over the past three years.

In 2009, our bureau will have programmed nearly $1.8 billion, which requires that enormous human resources be devoted to management, to monitoring, to programming and evaluation. Even for

those as talented and committed as the team that serves at PRM, augmenting efforts on policy engagement is an enormous challenge. And we are now actively looking at ways that we need, actions that we need to take, to strengthen our institutional capacity to play this dual role of programming assistance as well as engaging in the policy debate.

Sixth -- and related to the prior point I just made -- I think we must sustain the high quality, effectiveness and magnitude of the assistance we provide. While my colleagues and I are very eager to play a key role in critical policy debates, we're also well aware that our credibility and effectiveness as policy advocates come very much from the program expertise of the bureau, and the effectiveness of funded programs.

That expertise essentially credentials the humanitarians in government in the policy discussion. Moreover, policy -- as those of you have served in government know, and probably those who haven't served in government know -- policy without resources to implement it rings very hollow in policy debates. And the bureau's ability to bring resources to bear helps to guarantee a seat at the policy-making table.

Seventh, and finally -- and I think perhaps the most challenging -- we won't be effective in the policy debate if we advocate for everything at the same level of intensity. We must choose priorities.

In our own bureau, that creates some exquisite challenges, because our bureau does really have global reach. If there's a complex humanitarian crisis anywhere in the world, chances are that the resources of the bureau and the State Department will be engaged, in some way, in efforts to alleviate suffering. But I don't think that frees us from identifying some key areas of focus.

We've worked closely, in our bureau, over the past couple, few, months in identifying priorities based on several factors, including the magnitude of the humanitarian challenge, the stakes for U.S. national interests, defined broadly, and the degree to which responsibility and accountability for effective response lies primarily with the U.S. government.

While our priority-setting process is not quite complete, it's clear that areas of great regional focus will have to include Central Africa, the horn and Sudan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Iraq and the Middle East, Palestinian refugees. And our functional priorities will have to include enhanced protection through more effectively addressing issues like protracted refugee situations, improving our refugee admissions program, and highlighting and moving on the problem of statelessness.

In closing, we are attempting to define tangible progress in each of these areas, and to put in place dedicated processes that will help

us to monitor our performance and accomplish our objectives. I look forward to working with all of you in the months and years to come, as we seek to use the tools at our disposal -- both to safeguard our national interests through smart incorporation of humanitarian issues into foreign policy and national decision-making, national security decision-making, and to promote a brighter future for the world's most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. FERRIS: Well, thank you very much, Eric.

We have time now for some questions, and there will be somebody with a mike. And if you could identify yourself before you make your question that would be great.

We'll start here in front.

MR. KOETTL: Hello, my name is Christoph Koettl from Amnesty International. Thank you very much for your talk.

I found it very interesting that you especially raised the issue of like strengthening protection of vulnerable people, promoting reconciliation as a key goal. And I was wondering if you could talk about that a little bit more specifically related to Sri Lanka.

As you mentioned, there are still 20,000 people currently locked up by the Sri Lankan government -- people that are released, we

hear reports that they're resettled in other camps. We have reports of abuses. There are not enough sanitation facilities, which gets exacerbated now by the coming monsoon season.

So I was wondering what else could be done -- if you could talk about that a little bit more.

And, connected to that, I heard reports that you were planning to go back there, and I was curious -- to Sri Lanka -- if that's still going to happen?

MS. FERRIS: Thank you.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, let me answer your final question first. My principal deputy, Sam Witten, whom many of you know -- Sam served as Acting Assistant Secretary for, I think, a year-and-a-half at PRM -- will be traveling to Sri Lanka on our behalf next week to address the very issues that you've described -- the continuing internment of Sri Lankans against their will.

And as it happens, I've got to travel to the Middle East, so we've decided that Sam will take this trip. And we're very hopeful that we'll see progress.

I think your point about -- and I think we have to continue to press the authorities in Colombo. We really have seen, in recent days, significant increase in releases, and that's encouraging. At the same time,

they're still well behind any schedule that they had established for themselves, and there are still upwards of 200,000 people who are interned against their will.

I think the way we address that is we communicate to the government -- which we have -- that, increasingly, our assistance, our humanitarian assistance, will be directed outside of the camps towards areas of return. But it's important that as we provide this assistance to areas of return, to those who are -- we make sure that the conditions for people who are leaving the camps, you know, meet certain basic guidelines. That people are released to areas where they have freedom of movement, where they have some say in the assistance programs that are going to be offered to the international community, what the content of those programs look like. And that humanitarian assistance providers continue to have access to areas of return.

So I think those are all issues that are very high on our agenda.

The other issue that you -- the other term that you used was "reconciliation." And, you know, I think there -- you know, reconciliation involves a process of give-and-take between two sides. Reconciliation does not involve one side determining completely the terms of the new dispensation. And I think in our discussions with the government of Sri

Lanka, I think that's a point that we, you know, are making and need to continue to make.

MS. FERRIS: All right. Thanks.

And right behind him. And then we'll move to that side.

Why don't you stand up. I think it's a little easier to hear.

MR. KOONS: I'm Adam Koons from International Relief and Development.

From the policy perspective, from where you sit at State, what do you think the humanitarian policy or relationship should be between PRM and the Department of Defense, or our U.S. military?

MS. FERRIS: Well, that's an easy one for you.

(Laughter.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, I mean, I think I can answer. I actually think that there is a broader consensus on this issue than most people would think. I mean, I believe that, in principle, there are certain functions that the military, by its very nature, is more equipped to carry out than civilians. They're few, but they can be essential -- in terms of, in some cases speed of response, in some cases the ability to operate in security environments that are extremely difficult, where provision of assistance has become an imperative. And the ability to respond in a magnitude that can dwarf civilian capabilities.

So I think that there are -- and I think that -- I know that civilians in government and the military are involved in a continuous process of dialogue where those kinds of principles, I think, increasingly are accepted.

The issue is not -- I don't think the issue is where do those -- how do you draw those lines in principle. I think the issue is where do you draw those lines in practice? And the fact of the matter is that when senior policy-makers need a capacity that the civilian agencies of government don't have, they're going to turn to whatever parts of the government have that capacity.

And so I think the challenge for the civilian parts of our government is not to develop guidelines that the military is going to agree on in principle. I think the challenge is for us to enhance our capacity, you know, to respond more effectively to a wide variety of contingencies.

And that's what this QDDR process -- has anyone not hear of the QDDR process? It is a State-USAID process initiated by the Secretary of State, and it is co-chaired -- there must be folks in the audience who are involved in this, so if I get anything factually wrong you can raise your hand and correct me -- by Deputy Secretary Jack Lew, and Acting AID Administration, Alonzo Fulgham, and it is a "Quadrennial

Diplomacy and Development Review Process," in which we're looking at all of these issues -- and more.

As it happens, a working group -- one of four or five or six working groups -- in this process called "Preventing and Responding to Conflicts and Crises" -- did I get it right, Anita? Yes. -- is dealing with the cluster of issues to which I was alluding today. And Susan Reichle from USAID and I are the co-chairs of that working group.

MS. FERRIS: Okay. Next question?

How about the woman here. Okay. Stand up.

MS. FAGAN: Patricia Fagan, Georgetown University.

At the very outset, Eric, you said that you saw PRM as having a global reach and a global agenda. And you also said something about overcoming or going beyond -- I'm not exactly sure what -- "silos." You used the word "silos."

And so what I'd like to ask is, what silos did you have in mind, and can you elaborate how that might work?

Thank you.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, I mean, I'll use the example, I'll just elaborate on the example that I gave during my talk.

I mean, over the past couple of weeks, we had -- I invited Tori Holt into our office. Tori is the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for

International Organization Affairs. And if anyone knows Tori -- and I'm sure half the audience does -- she's, you know, a great -- an expert on peacekeeping and civilian protection issues.

And the peacekeeping operation in the Congo is coming up for renewal at the end of the year, and I -- there's absolutely no question in my mind that PRM and other humanitarians in government need to be involved in discussions with IO, and with the International Organizations Bureau, with the U.S. Mission to the UN on what a renewed mandate is going to look like, what our expectations are -- because of the critical role that MONUC is playing in civilian protection.

To me that seems self-evident -- right? It seems obvious. But apparently it's not. And so when I suggested it, there was, you know, "Why do you want to go to New York to meet with the Under Secretary General for Peacekeeping? That's not your issue."

But happily, I think it's also self-evident to people like Susan Rice, right? So if it's self evident to Susan Rice and Tori Holt, that's all that matters.

And I think so there's an understanding within, I think, this Administration that these issues all connect. And without stepping on anyone's toes, we have to be engaged, you know, in these issues in a broad way.

MS. FERRIS: The woman over here?

MS. ROBERTS: Hi, I'm Michelle Roberts, Advocates for Environmental Human Rights. And I apologize for my sinus -- not H1N1. For real.

MR. SCHWARTZ: That's good to know.

MS. ROBERTS: I just wanted to make that statement.

MR. SCHWARTZ: I appreciate it.

MS. ROBERTS: So I want to thank you for your talk, but I'd like to know, on half of the many who are still internally displaced from the Gulf Coast, what can we do, now that we're in our fifth year and we have a tremendous amount of people still displaced, and people struggling with the various agencies -- what can we do to be sure that this beautiful policy, the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, is actually utilized here on domestic soil.

Thankfully, you're all over the place, internationally. But, you know, we have people who are vulnerable and suffering right here in this country, and who desperately need it -- and, in fact, to the point that we have civil society organized and strategizing to hold our U.S. government accountable to even scrap this disastrous disaster policy. We have no (inaudible) staff for that, to take on the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

So what can we do bring that mechanism here at home, and make sure that the over, now, 400,000 people still displaced can get home?

MR. SCHWARTZ: It's a very good question. And let me give you the answer that I can give you from -- you know, from the ground that I occupy. And I don't know if it's -- it won't be a complete answer to your question, but it's as close as I can get.

I think that nobody would dispute the notion that the United States has a fundamental obligation to practice at home what we preach abroad. And I have been struck, in my first months in the job, by the number of circumstances in which this issue has arisen. And in my own thinking about the work of the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, that observation has had several effects on me, in terms of what I want to focus on.

First of all, I am spending an enormous amount of time on our refugee admissions program, because we can't preach to UNHCR that they have to do a much better job in resettlement, and go around the world and talk to other donor governments about what they need to do about resettlement and resettle, and then at the same time be resettling people in this country in conditions that we don't regard as adequate. And

so we have taken aim at that in a big way. And there will be changes. There will be changes.

Secondly, I think that -- we have an office called Population -- what do call it? PIM -- Population -- you probably know better than I do -- Population and International Migration. Thanks, Beth.

I think that office has to play a role in -- we go out in the rest of the world and talk about migration best practices to the rest of the world. But I think that if we're talking about best practices with respect to rules relating to asylum seekers, detention -- all kinds of issues -- I think we -- smart immigration policy -- I think the bureau that I run has got to have a dialogue with the domestic agencies of government on these very issues. And we will be putting in place personnel and procedures so that we can, you know, have such a discussion and dialogue, so that we can play a role on this issue of helping to ensure that what we practice at home -- what we preach abroad is not so different than what we practice at home.

So -- how does that answer your question? Well, I think that if we are promoting these international, these principles or guidelines or norms overseas, and asking others to comply with them, then we probably should be complying with them ourselves.

MS. FERRIS: Okay, thank you.

Let's have the woman in the back there.

MS. YUNG: (Inaudible) Yung from Radio Free Asia. I have two questions for you.

One is, is the United States willing to help North Korean Refugees that are detained or forcibly sent back to North Korea?

Another question is -- you mentioned that you traveled to Thailand and Laos. Is the North Korean refugees in Thailand and Laos that has -- the increasing number of north Korean refugees are crossing the Mekong River these days. How -- is the United States willing to take action to help the North Korean refugees, both in China and Laos and Thailand?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Let me just say on that question that people who are fleeing persecution anywhere in the world are of concern to the United States government. And with respect to the North Korean refugee issue, we work with both international organizations and other concerned governments to do what we can to ensure all forms of protection for this population.

MS. FERRIS: Thank you.

Yes?

SPEAKER: (Off mike) -- what you think about -- your position on the situation in Gaza, particularly as you've pointed out the need to talk about both the human rights and the humanitarian imperative.

I'd be interested if you could elaborate on the U.S. policy, and what you are doing internally (inaudible)?

MS. FERRIS: A couple of things. First of all, the United States is the world's largest supporter of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine. In 2009 we provided UNRWA with, I believe, $267 million of support. And they are playing a critical role in ensuring basic humanitarian protection in Gaza and in other areas where UNRWA operates.

And that assistance is not without -- we get lots of questions and expressions of concern from various constituencies about that assistance. For us, it's critical. And it is an important expression of our humanitarian, international humanitarian commitment, and we're proud to be the world's largest supporter of this institution.

Secondly, we have expressed -- continually and quite strongly -- concerns on issues relating to humanitarian access and protection of -- and the safeguarding of international humanitarian principles in Gaza, and we will continue to do so. It is an important part of our dialogue with the government of Israel and, you know, I've raised it at

senior levels, and people in our government much higher than I -- including our President -- have raised it. And we will continue to do so.

MS. FERRIS: Thank you.

How about this gentleman here.

MR. GAMBINO: Tony Gambino. I'd like to take you to the Congo and go a little beyond the defense question that was asked earlier.

Your response, Eric, was couched entirely in the context of humanitarian emergencies and the useful role that our military and others could play. And that was fine.

But to go back to what was said at the beginning -- "you can't solve humanitarian problems with humanitarian tools" -- the Congo is as clear an example of that in the world today as you see.

And we are in an argument right now about what to do about protection, with many -- Human Right Watch just released something the other day -- arguing that the international effort this year has been a failure. The United States has been part of support for that effort that they think -- and I agree with them -- has failed.

And I want to ask you about two aspects. One is AFRICOM. In a speech given across the street by the American Ambassador to the Congo, the AFRICOM issue was discussed in the context of minimizing

AFRICOM's engagement in the Congo, and not at all in the context of any role that it might play relating to civilian protection in the east.

And as of today, as best as one can tell, AFRICOM is running around talking about building health clinics in the Congo, jobs that have been done amply well by USAID for many years, and not talking -- again, as best as one can tell from the outside -- about anything relating to core military functions, about military issues that could help protect people.

In her, I believe, first major speech at the Security Council, Ambassador Rice said the United States takes the responsibility to protect seriously.

Could you link these concepts somehow?

MR. SCHWARTZ: I thought you were going to ask me an easy question, like should MONUC sever its relationship with the FARDC. So, thankfully, you didn't ask me that easy question. I want to know your views on that, actually.

I haven't heard -- I mean, I haven't heard the -- I'm just not familiar with the discussion of bringing to bear AFRICOM military resources in a protection role in the Congo. So I'm not really -- I'm not begging the question, I just -- you know, if there has been a conversation about it, a discussion about it, I'm not familiar with it.

And it would raise all the same issues that are raised anywhere in the world about, you know, the deployment of that kind of military combat capacity of U.S. troops overseas.

My instincts tell me that, for better or worse, Western national deployments to the east of the Congo are not going to be the answer to the protection issue. But that doesn't mean that the issue is insurmountable.

I think that my own visit there convinced me that there's a whole hell of a lot more we can do that we're not doing. The return of all those people from -- there's, internally, about 60,000 or more internally displaced people who were returned -- I don't know where they were returned, but they were returned somewhere from camps. And it was not the international community's finest hour. And you don't need the deployment of troops to at least deploy a modicum of protection for people who are in need of it.

So as soon as, when we get back to my office, as it happens, at three o'clock we have a meeting on these issues. And it seems to me that the subjects that we're going to be dealing with are, number one, making the -- what we can do to make the international community's effort more coherent and well integrated.

What do I mean by that? Well, you've got MONUC doing civilian protection, of some sort, in deploying these joint protection teams. And then you've got all these UN civilian agencies. And there's admittedly some concern about how, you know, intermingled they need -- they should be getting it from MONUC. That's a fair enough concern. But I was struck by the kind of the lack of communication and contact between these two parts of a protection equation, both of which are very important.

So we're going to talk about, well how can we press the UN system, writ-large, to better integrate its efforts? Is there more that we can do, the United States, maybe by additional support for the joint protection teams?

And then, is there more that we can do on the -- or that we can talk to our colleagues about doing? For example, we heard, I heard out there, I met FDLR disarmed combatants in Rwanda who said, you know, "Many more of our colleagues would like to disarm, but we can't. Because we're going to try to get through the lines and we're going to get killed by the FRDC." So they can't disarm. So there are ways that we can get at that, that problem.

So there's no silver bullet. But I'm absolutely convinced that there are a combination of efforts that we could be taking that could at least make more progress than has been made so far.

But I'll go back and look at the AFRICOM questions that you've raised.

MS. AZAIEZ: I'm Sue Azaiez from ADRA International.

I'm wondering -- you mentioned --

MR. SCHWARTZ: From what organization?

SPEAKER: ADRA International.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Uh-huh.

SPEAKER: It's good to see you. Thank you for being here.

You mentioned that one of your priorities for the future is tackling the issue of protracted displacement. And I wonder if you could elaborate a little more specifically on how you plan to go beyond the status quo with these situations, and really change the situation for these populations?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yes, I mean it's good -- well, I'll just tell you what I've asked my colleagues at PRM, and then you can go to them and ask them how they're going to do it.

But I think in general -- I put this in the same category as statelessness. And I think there are wholesale -- and I'm repeating what I said on the statelessness issue.

I think there are "wholesale" efforts and there are "retail" efforts. And "wholesale" is about, you know, creating norms that affect

governments over time, and in both on the statelessness issues and the protracted refugee situations issue there are ways that we can promote best-practices, et cetera, et cetera.

But I also feel like, you know, I would like to take aim at two or three or four, you know, specific issues in each one of these categories, where my colleagues (inaudible) feel that a heightened effort at very senior levels in the bureau, and maybe elsewhere in the government, to try to really, you know, chip away at a particular case might make a significant difference.

One example of where we’ve tried to do that -- I don’t think with complete success yet -- is the issue of Bhutanese refugees. And the reason I think not with complete success is because, yeah, we’re resettling a whole lot of them, but I think the other side of that is getting the government of Bhutan to recognize some of its responsibilities here, and accept back those with the greatest claims to -- you know, to citizenship in Bhutan. And that’s one of the vehicles for this strategy. How can we use, for example, our refugee admissions program, you know, strategically to get at some of these issues.

So the short answer to your question is, I’ve asked my own -- you know, our team, to come back to me with three or four cases where we can make retail progress as well as wholesale progress.

And, you know, that's the best I can do.

MS. FERRIS: Noam, here in the front, and then the woman behind him.

MR. UNGER: Noam Unger, with Brookings.

You mentioned the QDDR working group, Eric, that you're leading with Susan Reichle, that focuses on prevention and response to crisis and conflict.

And I didn't hear you talk about the Presidential Study Directive, but I'm interested -- and I think a lot of people are -- in the relationships. And I imagine that preventing and responding to conflict is something that is of interest to the Presidential Study that's looking at development policy and implementation just as much as it is of interest to your working group, as well.

And if you could talk about the relationship there, how involved you are with the White House interagency effort? And also what's the top one or two or three key questions that you're wrestling with and that you're trying to answer as a part of that working group?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, I can tell you what I think. I mean, this is such a fast moving train that -- and I was just going to ask you, Noam, if you could take the last 10 years of studies on this question, if you could give me a two-pager on it, that would be great.

(Laughter.)

I mean, the reason I'm saying it, it's just hilarious. I mean, you know, those of us who have seen -- I've said this many times -- many forests felled in pursuit of humanitarian reform, with all the proliferation of papers coming out of Brookings, coming out of Stimson, coming out of the Center for Global Development, the Council on Foreign Relations. I mean, it would go from here to the ceiling, all the papers. And yet we're involved in this rapid-fire exercise. And unless you have a fair amount of stored knowledge -- which, happily, for better or worse, I do -- you know, the pace is so accelerated.

So to answer, what are the key issues we're focusing on, you know, it depends on who you talk to. But I will address that.

In terms of the Presidential, your first question, there is -- the idea a the State Department is that these two should feed into one another. And our point, at State, because I'm so immersed in the QDDR process, at State our principal point of contacts to the White House process, as far as I know, are Anne-Marie Slaughter and, I think, Jack, as well -- Jack Lew. So we haven't been, you know, those of us who are deeply engaged in the QDDR process, we haven't been deeply involved in the PSD. I mean, I've had lunch with Gail Smith and we've discussed it.

But in terms of the actual, you know, work on the project, it's really been through Anne-Marie and Jack and, I think, the policy planning team.

In terms of what I think the most important issues are in the QDDR process, you know, I think -- I think that we need to do a lot of work in defining what our interests are, what our national interests are, in establishing capacities in this area. And then we have to determine, you know, what kind, what the magnitude of capacity we need really is.

And I think there is -- let me put it this way, there's got to be a lot more hard thinking about this issue than we've done so far. Because I think everything flows from that, so we have to avoid the temptation to descend very quickly into a discussion of, you know, detailed capabilities, before we sort of ask some basic questions about what are our interests, and how are those reflected in the capacities that we need.

The other issue that I've been just reflecting on is, you know, what do we mean by policy integration, and what does that look like, and what is it that we're trying to achieve when we talk about policy integration? And that will have very significant implications for organizational recommendations that we make.

And we don't -- and I don't think, we're not yet at answers to those questions. We're really still kind of in the process of asking them.

MS. FERRIS: Right here? Then jump to the back.

MS. RIDLEY: Thank you. Krista Ridley, from Oxfam America. Thanks very much for your talk. I think you touched on all of the major issues we as humanitarians are facing today.

And I wondered if you could elaborate on your thoughts on, sort of, the issue you brought up of human rights and international humanitarian law versus access and speaking out. Because many of us are facing that, and I don't think it's been a good year for that, for humanitarians, in terms of our access to affected populations -- I'm not going to mention the cases, but you probably know them -- of being able to actually talk about the violations that are there, while still being able to provide assistance to people on the ground.

And I feel like our access, our humanitarian space to work is shrinking further and further. And I don't know that policy-makers at a senior around the world, from governments around the world, are really taking that on and thinking about what that means for the future.

You see humanitarian workers who are being killed, repeatedly, and kidnapped, and at risk in many, many places around the world, and I don't see a way out of it at this point in time.

So I just wondered what your thoughts were on that.

And then a quick question, since you did mention -- what are your thoughts on MONUC support for the FARDC and the DRC. I think

the humanitarians have made their voices heard about that, and feel that the operation is causing more harm than good, in terms of the huge humanitarian fallout of the military operations. And I'd like to hear your thoughts -- and do appreciate the fact that you are making your voice heard in those debates about the MONUC mandate, et cetera.
Appreciate that.

Thank you.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Two easy questions.

Those are two very hard questions. They're just really hard questions.

On the first one, the reason you're not hearing a lot from governments on this issue is because we don't have -- I don't think we have very many answers.

It is true that the ability of humanitarians to operate is being circumscribed, compromised in many, many parts of the world. And in many places, it doesn't matter what humanitarians say. You don't have to say anything. In other words, you don't have to be speaking out. That's not what puts you in jeopardy. Your work puts you in jeopardy. So it doesn't matter whether you advocate or don't advocate, you can still get killed.

And we don't have -- I mean, we don't have great, you know, answers to this question. I think, in the short term, the two ways that the system, that our systems deal with it, and people in charge of our systems deal with it are, number one, you know -- and the two ways to deal with it are in conflict with one another.

One is that you create greater physical protections, which inevitably -- or you just, you know, the easiest way to deal with is just get out (laughs). But short of that, you create greater physical protects, which inevitably result in barriers between you and the affected population.

And the other way is to try to think -- and I know that the guy who's running DSSS at the UN is thinking in these terms, a former State Department official whose name escapes me now, at UN Security -- you try to figure out, the goal is not to protection that, you know, physical protection at all costs and getting people out, but rather figuring out how to operate effectively in dicier and dicier environments. And a lot of time and attention is being devoted to that issue, not only in the UN system but, I also think, by non-governmental organizations.

I think we have to continue to promote a normative structure which kind of shames perpetrators of these kinds of abuses, that punishes them. But for many of, you know, the militants involved in areas where humanitarian assistance is being given, they don't care.

And so I don't have an easy answer to your question, other than to say it's something that we have to, you know, focus a great deal of time and attention on -- and we are.

In terms of the issue of MONUC and its relationship to the FARDC, I mean, we have a Council Resolution. I'm speaking to you as a U.S. Government official. And I try to be very, very frank, but our policy has been, you know, pursuant to this resolution is that we want MONUC to work very hard to help to ensure an end to impunity, and the engagement with the FARDC is designed to enhance their performance and their behavior. That's the objective.

You raise the question of whether it's achievable. I think, for the time being, our effort has got to be to press the UN and the peacekeeping operation to do better on these issues.

There will be a mandate review over the course of the next several months, and I think all of these issues will be part of the discussion.

MS. FERRIS: Okay, I think we've got time for just a couple more questions.

There in the back? And then (inaudible).

MS. WINTHROP: Hi, I'm Rebecca Winthrop from Brookings, from the Center for Universal Education. And I have a sector-specific question for you, which obviously is around education.

And obviously PRM does a lot of work in education, and in general education can be, when it's done very well, a very important strategy for civilian protection -- especially for young people.

And my question for you is really around how the broad principles around foreign assistance reform and aid effectiveness, and some of the broad issues that you'll be looking at in the QDDR, would potentially in the future translate down to sectors?

Specifically, I've been very interested in how, within the -- you know, what would some of these broad principles mean for the education sector? And looking specifically at education in humanitarian and conflict and post-conflict contexts, I found there is nine different U.S. government agencies which do education in these contexts, and that PRM is actually one of the bureaus that are in the forefront of this -- in many ways because you've signed up to some of the global accepted standards for education in these contexts, whereas your other government counterparts in other agencies haven't. So I was very pleased to hear you would be interested in being an advocate within State and perhaps outside of state -- on broad issues, a humanitarian voice in broad contexts.

But, you know, do you expect being engaged, either now or much later on, in some more sector-specific issues, like education?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, you've asked a great question. I don't know -- PRM is a lot like an NGO. And your question, you know, brought that point home to me. In the sense that I am continually impressed by the extent to which the people at PRM with whom I am working -- when I leave -- we have a policy planning process which is, I don't know if it's unique to PRM, but it's pretty unusual in that it's a very deliberate, careful process in which all of our budget and policy initiatives go through a very dedicated process which results in -- comes after meetings among all of our assistance offices, all of the offices of equities, and a paper ultimately, as a result of a whole series of meetings, comes up to me for my approval.

And I've been continually impressed by the extent to which the people who work these issues feel obliged, you know it's second nature for them, to make reference to these international standards. When we measure our results, we measure them based on a whole range of best-practice instruments, some of which have been generate by the NGO community itself -- whether it's the sphere standards or the -- just any number -- but also the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative.

So there is really this kind of fidelity to, or commitment to ensuring that our sectoral programs -- I just reviewed a huge health strategy, PRM health strategy in the refugee context for 2009. The same sorts of thing, making reference to, you know, to internationally-accepted standards, and how our program is designed to try to meet those expectations.

So I think, you know -- so what you said rings very true to me. And I think, in some respects, I hope that the work in our bureau is to be a model for other parts of the Department and elsewhere. And I hope -- and I certainly hope -- don't, would not like, this process that we're engaged in, the QDDR process, you know, to result in somehow that element being diminished. That's critical.

My hope is -- the goal of the QDDR process is -- to the extent that we're encouraging much greater policy integration, is that these nine disparate programs that you're talking about, if they don't become more of one program, at least there will be a greater degree of integration among these programs.

So the ultimate objective of the QDDR process would be, you know, to get away from having lots of different programs on similar issues in lots of different places in the government -- or, if you do, at least they're better coordinated.

MS. FERRIS: Okay, and Robin?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Did you have a question, Robin? I didn't -- yes. Okay. I didn't want to --

MS. FERRIS: You don't want to get on the wrong side of the (inaudible) Committee?

MR. SCHWARTZ: No, your Congressional supporters, you've always got to turn to first.

MS. LERNER: I'm Robin Lerner, with SFRC.

Well, I just wanted to follow up on the issue of reconciliation, because in previous work that I've done in post-conflict, I noticed that there isn't really usually a very strong or systematic approach from the beginning of operations, post-conflict operations, on reconciliation between factions that have either been fighting or displaced in host communities or, you know, however it goes.

And I just -- what is your view on how that should be done, and who should be responsible -- or who should be planning that? And do you think the U.S. government or the international community does place enough emphasis on reconciliation from the beginning?

Because we jump in there, and we want to start rebuilding institutions and governance, but we really deal with the actual conflict between the people before we do that.

MS. FERRIS: That's a good question to end the session, talking about reconciliation.

MR. SCHWARTZ: It is a good question. It's another easy one.

(Laughter.)

No, I mean, the short answer is I don't think that we do enough, and I don't think the UN does enough.

And I think that -- you know, I think efforts to enhance capacity, for example, in the UN's Department of Political Affairs could go a long way to improving the UN's ability to address issues like reconciliation.

I think that we certainly need to do more, as well, on those issues. I think when we talk about enhancing our own capacity, much of the discussion has been focused, over the years, on issues like security sector reform, justice, education, governance -- and maybe not so much on processes of reconciliation. So I think that's something that certainly will be, is part of our review.

But I would also make a distinction between that -- I think that's very important, I think that the challenge where this issue arose, in the Sri Lankan context, is a little bit different. There, I think you're dealing with one actor that has all the power, and another actor that doesn't. And

true reconciliation will require an act of grace that -- well, let me put it -- the evidence hasn't yet indicated that is forthcoming from the government. I think, you know, we need to see more in that respect.

But I think the direct answer to your question is that, yes, I think we need to do more, both in terms of the international community's capacity, international organizations and the UN, and also in our own government.

MS. FERRIS: Thank you.

And please join me in thanking the Assistant Secretary.

(Applause.)

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