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FROM HOMS TO HAMBURG:
REFUGEE MOVEMENTS FROM SYRIA TO EUROPE AND BEYOND

AN ALAN AND JANE BATKIN
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Introduction:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. JONES: Good morning, everybody. Welcome. Welcome, ambassadors, special friends, Brookings colleagues. It's a pleasure to welcome you to today's Alan Batkin Leaders Forum. I think the phrase "International Leader" is precisely the right one for today's guest. I'm delighted to welcome and introduce Filippo Grandi, the new High Commissioner for Refugees of the UN system.

Filippo was born in Milan in 1957 and took his first degree in modern history and then a degree in philosophy. And I was struck reading it; it seems to me that an understanding of history and grounding in philosophy is precisely the right training for the position that you currently hold. Of course Filippo then served in both NGOs and UN agencies, especially in UNHCR, in Asia, in Africa, in the Middle East --these were front line positions -- as well as at headquarters at Geneva before becoming the Deputy Special Representative of the UN system in Afghanistan, and then being promoted to be the Deputy Commissioner General of the UN's Relief and Works Agency that deals with the Palestinian refugees from 2010 to 2014, a total of 30 years of service, most of it focused on helping refugees cope with a range of extraordinarily difficult situations in which they find themselves.

No surprise then that from a very competitive field Ban Ki-moon selected Filippo Grandi to become the 11th high commissioner for refugees, an appointment that was confirmed by the General Assembly on the 31st of December and he'll serve for a five year term at least in this position. He's saying, no, that's enough, right? (Laughter) As high commissioner he heads one of the largest humanitarian organizations, the world one that has twice won the Nobel Peace Prize, 9700 staff that report to him. It makes me feel better about the management responsibilities that we have. Working in 126 countries, providing protection and services of a range of types to refugees and to the governments that host them. It's an extraordinarily important part of the UN system and an extraordinarily important part of the international system for dealing with crises and humanitarian situations. And we are delighted that you took a little bit of time to speak to us today, on a momentous day. This is the fifth anniversary of the beginnings of the uprisings in Syria, the fifth anniversary of the bloodiest crisis in the contemporary period, the fifth anniversary of the largest refugee producing crisis in the contemporary period. Hopefully, hopefully at a moment of some flicker of hope, though I think that much remains to be seen about the

status of the cease fire and the status of the talks, and the status of the so-called Russian withdrawal, but still an extraordinarily difficult and bloody conflict that we're coping with, one that has already claimed more than 500,000 lives and displaced more than 6 million people.

Of course Syria is not the only refugee situation that Filippo and his colleagues deal with. There are many, many others. I suspect you'll spend some time reflecting on those other situations as well as the Syria issue, but Syria I think is much in our minds these days on this fifth anniversary of the crisis.

Following some remarks we'll have a moderated conversation chaired by Robert McKenzie, who is a Senior Fellow here at Brookings whose background is in refugees, works on most of the minorities in the west and many other issues, and will lead the discussion with Filippo, Q&A with the audience.

So, with that, please join me in welcoming Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner for Refugees. Thank you. (Applause)

MR. GRANDI: Good morning. Thank you, Bruce, for this very flattering introduction which raises expectations. You know, this is my first visit to the United States as High Commissioner and I'm telling everybody that I'm here as much to talk and explain as I am here to learn. I'm still very much in this learning process in my job. So I look forward to this exchange, not just to me telling you, talking to you about Syria and we see the crisis and the response there, but also to hear from you, your point of view. And it is a very important point of view, the point of view from this city and this country for all the reasons that you can imagine.

Of course we're here today to celebrate certainly not the word, but to observe, to mark an anniversary which we would have never wanted to observe, the fifth anniversary of the start of the war in Syria. I remember I was in Syria actually when the war started. This is purely coincidental. I was then the head of UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees and we had programs in Syria and I happened to be visiting Syria during the first half of March 2011. I remember that I was in Aleppo in a restaurant and looking at the images of the demonstrations in Daraa, which the government was quite happy to display. The government was quite confident at that point that it would not have to face the

same pressure from the street that other governments in the region had already gone through, namely Egypt, if you remember. So there was a certain self confidence that for one reason or the other Syria wouldn't have to go through any dramatic transition. And this was of course disproven by facts very, very quickly.

It was very difficult to imagine in those days I can assure you that five years later we would be here commenting on five years of such devastating war. And I think that if there is anything that we should attach to this anniversary is a reflection on the incredible, on the abysmal political failure that Syria represents for the international community. It is a political failure of the parties to the conflict, the government and the opposition to come to an agreement. It is a political failure of the countries in the region that have in various ways supported one or the other of the parties. It is a political failure of the global powers that have tried in various ways to influence the process. I'm not pointing fingers at one or the other, this is a collective failure that we should reflect upon today. And my remarks will be more on Syria, but I think it is very important that at some stage the reflection moves from purely the response in Syria proper to the much bigger and probably more important reflection on what 70 years after the end of the Second World War we have at our disposal to tackle and resolve conflicts such as this devastating one.

Meanwhile -- and this is perhaps not so much my history but my philosophical background that makes me reflect on this, but back to history and back to the facts -- meanwhile the human cost of this failure is becoming quickly incalculable. I think that I'm given every day charts and figures of how many people are displaced, how many people are reached and not reached, moving this way, that way, these figures almost have no meaning anymore because they are so huge, they are all in the millions of people that are affected one way or the other. This is incalculable in the strict sense of the word. And we should never forget that behind those numbers there are individuals how are going through the most incredible, incredible suffering. And it's not just the suffering, the death of maybe 250-300,000 people, it is also the destruction of an entire country, the destruction infrastructure, of the economy, of a society that was in spite of all shortcomings in governance was a very vibrant, diverse, multicultural society. I remember it very well, and of a very ancient culture and its visible signs.

It is a crisis that has drained an enormous amount of resources. Also a way inevitable from many other crises, as Bruce was saying, with which we also have to contend, in Africa, in Central and South America, in Asia, and so forth. Syria has monopolized humanitarian assistance at least for a very long time now. And this has caused problems in other places.

We have often heard that Syria has also represented a failure of the humanitarian system to respond to this crisis, the system has proven inadequate to respond. Maybe, maybe there is some truth to that. The sheer size of the catastrophe has meant that our systems and resources have been stretched, although I do -- let me be frank -- I do resent a bit this comment when it comes on the part of some that actually have been unable on their side to put an end to the crisis. But this is another story. I want to just remember that, you know, we're ready. We, humanitarians working on the response are very ready to admit failures or shortcomings and are working very hard. Syrian crisis has also been an opportunity for in depth reflection on many of our structures and systems and we can talk about that, but I think that we should not forget the thousands of relief workers that have lost their lives trying to help the Syrian people, thousands of people from the Syrian Red Crescent Society, one of the most spread organizations on the ground, dozens of people from NGOs, from United Nations agencies. I have visited Syria many times in my previous capacity and already once in my current capacity. I have seen Syrian and ex patriots at work in very difficult and dangerous circumstances, doing heroic work, risking their lives every day. And in many, many instances this has been, this continues to be the only way that a signal of hope is given to the millions of destitute and desperate Syrians on the grounds. So I think one should never underestimate that.

It is interesting, however, to look at those inadequacies because as I said it is important to try to improve. The situation is still ongoing, it's not finished. The humanitarian crisis is in full swing. And the refugee angle, which is only one of the aspects of the Syria crisis, but the one in which UNHCR is most involved, is an interesting one to look at. Just to recap the figure, you know that we estimate that there is about 11-12 million Syrians that had to flee their homes. That's more than half of the population prior to the war. Six and a half of those have remained inside Syria, are those that we call "internally displaced", and the others, four and a half or a bit more, are refugees that have gone out of Syria, and

most of them have gone to the neighboring countries. Turkey, which has become the largest refugee hosting country in the world, Jordan, Lebanon, both of which are now hosting a huge refugee population which is a huge percentage of their own population, and then Iraq, Egypt, and other countries in the region.

Assistance to those refugees, which UNHCR coordinates, has been forthcoming but inadequate, insufficient I would say. Increasingly, because of the scarcity of resources, every year approximately 50 percent of what all of us collectively demanded from the international community was contributed. Every year we have to narrow down our interventions to the more urgent humanitarian needs, and sometimes not even to those needs, and at the expense of the inevitable requirements that emerge from a protracted refugee situation such as this one. You know, five years after a family has fled from Syria in many cases about fifty percent of the families cannot send their children to school. And that is a different type of needs from the emergency needs, but you appreciate how important it is for children to be educated, especially in a situation of fragility, of exile, of refuge. And this is just an example. The other big areas in which we have not been able to invest because we didn't have enough money, because we didn't have adequate systems as humanitarian agencies, was livelihoods, was jobs. And a very high percentage, I was just reminded earlier of the refugees, especially in Jordan and Lebanon, live well below the national poverty line.

What has also been lacking is investments in the local communities that have hosted refugees and investments or support to the governments that have made available very often important structures and resources to host the refugees. Turkey estimates that over these five years the Turkish government has spent more than $8 billion in supporting refugees. I think -- I don't have exact figures, but if you add up all the investments of the international community, I think you barely reach $2 billion, 1 1/2-2 billion. So the comparison is staggering between the resource put in by the government and those put in by the international community. And this situation is even more serious in places where the government cannot afford to pay so much money, like in Lebanon and to an extent in Jordan. Governments that have less resources and therefore depend more on international community, even if they also have paid a very high price.

This situation has lingered for too long. My predecessor, High Commissioner Guterres, many times warned that if it had not been addressed it would generate what we call "secondary movements" of people towards other countries. And this is exactly what has happened; starting in particular from 2013 when a combination of inadequate support in the countries of first asylum and progressive lack of hope in a political solution, the two things go together. Many people started utilizing the many avenues provided by the new mobility opportunities, technological opportunities, cell phones allowing people to connect quickly, internet, but also opportunities provided by vast and well organized criminal smuggling networks. And so people saw that as their only choice, to entrust themselves to these networks to go to try and find better opportunities elsewhere. And this is what over the months and years has developed and has become known as the "Europe refugee crisis". First, as you remember, people chose a path through the central Mediterranean, Egypt, Libya, then into Italy, onwards to Europe. When that became more complicated because of the war in Libya then they started moving more from Turkey into Greece and then the western Balkans route. And interestingly that opened a way for other groups of refugees and people under stress to follow. Many Iraqi refugees, many Afghan refugees followed in that pathway that was opened under the pressure of the Syrian crisis.

Now this is the rather grim picture. As you know Europe took about one million people last year, most of them through the Greek route. So the situation now, I think the title of this event today is "From Homs" -- a city in Syria -- "to Hamburg". That describes well the long route that many people have followed escaping from the situation of unresolved political crisis and inadequate support, trying to reach better places. The situation is grim, but as often happens in crisis, opens up interesting discussions and opportunities for improvements, for solutions. I don't want to say that all is now from on going to be well, but I think that it is important to focus on the opportunities and the possible progress to try and address the situation, even at the very dire point at which we have arrived.

I will give you three or four examples. The first is the international community rose to the occasion of improving the type of assistance it provided to Syrians. In London a month and a half ago there was, as you all know, a big conference of states in which $11 billion were pledged first and foremost for improved assistance inside Syria in particular for those 6 1/2 million of displaced people, but also for

all the others, which is practically the entire population affected by conflict. And then there was another focus on refugees and there was finally a realization that it was important not only to meet the immediate humanitarian need, but also those longer-term needs that I have described earlier, in particular education and livelihoods. That's positive. I think that's a positive step we have to recognize. It's good that some countries took the lead and the U.S. was among those countries, but what is very important now is that those pledges made in London are realized. Some of them, those of a more humanitarian nature, have already been paid and are already available, the money is already available. For example, the World Food Program that had cut food assistance for refugees the year before, one of the main factors for people moving on, thanks to a very generous donation of the German government is now able to restore that food assistance. That's an important signal, but it has to happen in many other sectors as well. And I think it's very important that it happens in terms of support to the education system, in terms of creating opportunities, economic opportunities for refugees, and in terms of guaranteeing that if the crisis goes on for a few more years or at least if people have to stay in those countries for a few more years, that their lives improve. You know, the host countries that really bear the biggest burden have already made some gestures, some of them. Turkey has liberalized to an extent access to the labor market for Syrian refugees. They have 2.7 million -- this is a huge population. And they have done so back in January. Now they need help to match with economic opportunities, that legal openness. Jordan intends to do the same, but it does require help to create, for example, safe economic zones. We, humanitarian agencies, are engaged in a very interesting debate with developmental partners to do that. And actually, as a small aside, that is becoming quickly one of the main elements of a very important discussion between humanitarian actors and development actors on how best to work together in these situations. These situations are not just humanitarian, they have important developmental dimensions. It's a very old discussion. You know, I remember very well more than 20 years ago UNHCR launching with UNDP an initiative called the "Brookings Initiative" right here in this institute on precisely this theme. I was part of that and I'm glad that now after 20 years on the impulse, on the pressure of the crisis, this is giving some fruit.

An important element of this is that if there are more resources -- the resources that are

pledged for inside Syria, as I mentioned, now have a space to be deployed because they match fortunately with another result of this increased realization of failure of the international community, the so-called cessation of hostilities. You know that the day before the anniversary, yesterday, there was a resumption of talks between the parties to the conflict. This follows by about three weeks, I think two or three weeks, a declared cessation of hostilities, which is not complete, does not encompass all of Syria. Some of the actors on the ground, notably ISIS, are not included in this cessation of hostilities, but certainly what we have observed from the ground is a respite for many people in Syria and greater access to groups, to communities, to people, including displaced people that previously we could not reach. So it is very important now to put those resources in so that at least for those people we can stabilize the situation. You know I often, even yesterday in another place here in Washington, I cited the example of an old lady that I met in Damascus in January displaced inside Syria. And she told me a couple of interesting things. She told me one, I said where are you from and she said oh, I'm just from three blocks away. So she is displaced three blocks away. She cannot go back because three blocks away there is fighting. You know, the war in Syria people have strange notions, but it's very, very localized. It's almost street by street in the urban centers, in some urban centers. So she could not go back. Then she told me, I don't want to go any further, especially I don't want to become a refugee abroad. I want to stay here so that a soon as there is peace in my neighborhood I can go back there. But meanwhile I need more help because if I don't get that help I'll move on to where I can get the help. So the London conference that allocated important resources for inside Syria is also very important in that sense.

The second block of issues that is developing is of course the European Union, the European dimension of the crisis. When Europe started receiving people in large number through the Greek route, finally the European Union made some good decisions that borders had to be managed in a better way, registration, the famous hot spots where people would come, be registered, be determined whether they were refugees or not, refugees would then be relocated across Europe. Those were good decisions that we of course supported, but they were never really implemented mostly because I believe -- and I don't say anything that others haven't said yet -- there was not enough solidarity cooperation

between European states to implement them unanimously. And therefore the result was disorder at the entry point, especially in Greece, and imbalances among the countries receiving refugees with the overwhelming bulk going to Germany and Sweden and Austria, more than in other countries. There was then a reaction to this situation, a reaction that was very much country by country, with a focus much more on national borders than on the borders of the Union, culminating a few weeks ago with the virtual drying up, closure of the Balkans route, and accumulation of refugees, half of whom are Syrians, in Greece. Greece today hosts almost 50,000 refugees that cannot go any further, although they try as you may have seen on TV yesterday.

Now we are working of course with the Greek government in trying to address that situation. Meanwhile, the European Union has shifted its focus away from its border to Turkey and is trying to craft an agreement with Turkey that is very complex, but which includes important elements regarding the management of the refugee flow. Some are very important and positive I think, like additional resources to be given to Turkey to deal with that, and resettlement of people from Turkey -- I'll talk about that in a moment. But there are other aspects that are more complex, such as refugees and others being returned from Greece into Turkey, or when they arrive in Greece into Turkey. There has been a lot of speculation in the media that UNHCR has condemned this as illegal. It's a bit more nuanced than that. You have to understand, readmission -- this is the technical name for such an operation -- is sometimes possible, provided that it is done in the full respect of the rights of the refugees and in the full provision of protection guarantees for those refugees that are readmitted in this case into Turkey. We are providing detailed advice to the European Union, to Turkey, to Greece in this respect.

Finally, the third block of important issues, positive issues that I think are being discussed, concerned resettlement. And resettlement means bringing people from a country to asylum to another through legal ways, through flying them instead of asking or instead of compelling them to go on unsafe boats and, you know, in the hands of dangerous criminal smugglers. We actually talk more about legal pathways for admission of Syrian refugees because we want to add to resettlement other options, scholarships -- maybe more temporary ones, but important ones -- scholarships, job schemes, family reunification, humanitarian visas. There are many options that could be offered to people to get a legal

way out of the countries of first asylum. We believe this is very important. You know, I always say here in Washington because, you know, America has a lot of experience of resettlement, it is still the largest resettlement country in the world. Resettlement for many years was considered a solution for only a few people, but it is becoming again in situations of mass movement, a solution which is perhaps more substantial and more important. But it has to be rethought. First of all it has to be rethought in its various aspects, not just resettlement. And then in terms of numbers, you know, if you wanted to offer a solution to two host countries, you cannot just take a thousand people or two thousand people, you have to go to six digit resettlement figures, collectively, not one country alone, collectively. That's why on March 30 I am chairing a meeting in Geneva that will focus essentially on this issue, proposing to all states in the world to take Syrian refugees, to relieve some of the responsibility carried by Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, and to share it more widely. We hope that, you know, because I know the question is always asked, we hope that also the United States as a lead country in resettlement in general will also become a lead country in resettlement Syrian refugees. We are fully aware of the complexity of the debate around this issue this year here, presidential election year, but we also want to stress one important reassuring point, remember, resettlement is one of the safest ways to move people from one place to the other because the quality and type of checks that these people are submitted to is greater than any other people on the move around the world. So really it is a very safe way to get people inside one's country. So we are promoting this notion.

I'll conclude with two points. One is a completely separate one, but I did make a small reference at the beginning. The so-called global refugee crisis on which there is so much attention in the world today -- you know, everybody talks about refugees -- it makes things much easier for me, but also sometimes a bit more difficult because everybody wants to say something about refugees these days. But one thing that is important, it's great that everybody has become aware of what is really one of the big global problems of today's world, it is not just Syria, it is not just Europe, this is a much bigger crisis. Our biggest headaches are still around four-five intractable conflicts in Africa that are displacing millions of people in situations of extreme deprivation and poverty and in situations worse than that that attract zero political attention, and whereby the level of hope of the people that flee is below zero, even worse than

Syria. Because in Syria at least there has been some political agitation, even if not very productive, over the years. And some of the crises are very near Syria. Iraq is one of them. You know, Iraq is one of the most underfunded UNHCR operations and one in which we deal not only with hundreds of thousands of people from Syria, but also with millions, more than three million displaced people within Iraq, which is still a country at war in many ways. So it's not just Syria, it's well beyond that.

The second and final conclusion is that let's go back to the fundamentals here and back to Syria since it's the fifth anniversary. It is very good that this terrible anniversary coincides almost with the resumption of political talks yesterday in Geneva. Now as my friend and dear colleague, Steffan di Mistura, the UN mediator for the talks keeps repeating, you know, he's very good in managing the expectations, this will go on for a long time, it's very difficult. Even the cessation of hostilities is one of the most complex such agreement that has ever been reached. So everything is very fragile, but it is important that the political will of all the players seemed to be staying the course. And this will require huge leadership. And may I say here at Brookings in Washington that it is very important, perhaps the most important is that the United States continues to show leadership in staying the course. In itself that's an act of leadership even when there will be difficulties, shortcomings, setbacks, violations. It is important because the price that has been paid is already too high.

Thank you. (Applause)

MR. McKENZIE: Let me extend a very warm welcome to you today. And thank you for your very powerful remarks.

I'd like to just start with a figure. 2015 captured and magnified the crisis in Syria with the arrival of a million refugees in Europe. You've mentioned today about the London agreement with $11 billion that has been earmarked to support humanitarian aid in Syria and around. You've also mentioned the crafting of the recent EU agreement with Turkey. Are you optimistic that the situation will improve this year? And I ask that because I juxtapose that with the crisis that you sort of sketched out for us with half of the Syrian population has been displaced, 4.6 million Syrian refugees, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey are overwhelmed with the number of refugees that are not only there but arriving by the day. Do you think that's what in play here will help mitigate this ongoing crisis?

MR. GRANDI: I'll repeat one point, but maybe emphasize it a bit more, that if the London conference pledges the $11 billion -- and perhaps also let me add now, the funding, the financing which is underpinning the Turkey-EU deal, another minimum 3 billion euros, so we're talking here almost about $15 billion. If this is realized, that is the pledges materialize and they are implemented -- that's very important, it's not just money but money that is then spent, and spent in the way that it is meant to be spent, especially on education and jobs, I think that that can be maybe a bit provocative, a very useful but still a major stopgap waiting for the real solutions. The real solutions will be when peace comes and people can go back. But until that time, and it will take time because first you have to reach a political solution and that's not around the corner. Second, even when that is reached there has to be a complete cessation of hostilities, and that is not yet there because, remember, this is a partial one.

And third, then some conditions have to be put in place to reassure people because return can be only be voluntary, remember? So that will take time, therefore that's why it's so important to have those pledges realized. And I can venture a forecast here that most likely next year we'll have to meet again and continue to invest resources in shoring up the people until there is a political solution.

MR. McKENZIE: I ask because as we discussed earlier in Jordan, 87 percent of Syrian refugees live below the national poverty line. In Lebanon it's worse, at 93 percent. And the situation in those two front line states is getting worse. So the $11 billion is a mind boggling large number, but it's not when we think about the 4.6 million refugees who are living in front line states and the extreme and grinding poverty that they experience on a daily basis. And so it's not just access to healthcare and housing and healthcare, it's also a lack of access to the labor market and education as well.

MR. GRANDI: And that requires much more complex investments. That's why I spoke earlier of the necessity to link up with development partners that have the tools to address those needs. You know, UNHCR is an agency that can do a lot of things, and it’s partners with partners, NGOs, other UN agencies, it can do much more, but we cannot create economic zones in Jordan. This is a very easy example. We need specialized actors to do that that work with the government to do that. But that's the only way to create jobs in a country that frankly has already an employment problem.

MR. McKENZIE: Sure. And to your point that UNHCR is both enabled and constrained

by the support it gets from the international community, in terms of burden sharing, you know, we read and hear a lot in the media that EU is at a breaking point, you know, a million refugees in 2015. But it would seem to me that part of the issue is that many of the refugees are concentrated in a certain number of countries. I mean the EU has over 500 million people. If we wanted to take that million refugees, we're talking about one refugee per two thousand people if there was true burden sharing.

And also to your point, in terms of burden sharing, the U.S. since 2011 has taken 2500 Syrian refugees. So if you juxtapose that number to what the EU is dealing with it just seems like there needs to be a healthier and more robust discussion within the international community about burden sharing.

MR. GRANDI: Definitely. You know, the refugee protection regime as it was conceived after the Second World War, and as it is embodied in the 1951 Refugee Convention, which is really the fundamental treaty on how refugees should be handled, that regime was founded conceptually on the idea of burden sharing. That this would be a responsibility even more than a burden, a responsibility shared globally between responsible states. And over the years that of course has been implemented in many ways. We've seen very good examples -- I gave the example of the Indochinese refugees in the early '80s. That was a very great example of how a peace agreement was accompanied and strengthened and supported, or a series of peace agreements were supported by a sharing of responsibility for a very large caseload of refugees globally. I think the same is needed now. I think the Syria crisis has put back on the table this need, that refugees are a global phenomenon, they can reach anywhere. And therefore the responsibility to respond should almost also be global, and it isn't at the moment, so this discussion has to happen.

To add very quickly that we have some important opportunities this year to do that. There is the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May and there is a General Assembly event in September that will be complemented by a U.S. led, President Obama led, summit on refugees and the theme will be responsibility sharing.

MR. McKENZIE: In terms of responsibility sharing, of the 4.6 million refugees in the front line states, 10 percent are extremely vulnerable. These would be the individuals that would be most

eligible for resettlement if that were possible. In today's environment, I mean 10 percent of 4.6 million refugees is almost 500,000 people who are living in urgent need of potential resettlement. What can be done to help them when the EU is already overwhelmed with the refugee situation, and countries like the U.S. are only taking 2500 over 5 years from Syria?

MR. GRANDI: I think the industrialized world all together, the rich world, can take more refugees. The matter is how to do this in a manner that is well managed and doesn't send to public opinion the impression of chaos that is now conveyed by the images that we see on TV of Greece and other places. That's why resettlement is a good tool, because resettlement has many advantages. One, you target those that really are in most need, the vulnerable. And, two, you do it in an orderly way. But the conference that we are organizing at the end of March proposes exactly that. Take 10 percent, 10 percent is a bit of an arbitrary figure, but it is based on the vulnerability estimate. So take the 10 percent of the people -- now can I give a complicating element? We're also actually saying take the most vulnerable, but to other legal pathways, for example, scholarships, take actually people with potential that could eventually go back and reconstruct Syria. So it is actually a tool that has many advantages in different ways.

MR. McKENZIE: To that point you had made a very important comment earlier about UNHCR. It's not only involved in protection, it's also involved in identifying solutions, and you talked historically about the work with developmental partners. Are there any creative ideas that are being discussed right now with the private sector? I mean how can we better engage with say universities to provide educational platforms on line that are accredited to help Syrian refugees so that they can go home at some point? Or other sorts of creative solutions.

MR. GRANDI: There is a very active discussion with the private sector, or at least some representatives of companies, some business leaders. You know, emergencies, especially very visible ones, always trigger the interest of the private sector for many, many reasons that you can imagine, especially nowadays. And especially when the Syrian crisis moved to Europe this was certainly the case. We saw a spike in financial contributions of the private sector. But what you're saying I think is more important. That is important of course, we do want those contributions, but it is very important that the

private sector engages more in solutions like offering jobs or training schemes or vocational training and not necessarily in the industrialized countries where the companies are based. They could fund jobs or training schemes in those countries of asylum where these opportunities exit.

MR. McKENZIE: Sure. You had also made the point that four or five intractable problems get zero political support. I mean in fact 86 percent of the world's refugees live in the developing world. To this point, are you concerned at all that the Syrian crisis will overshadow some of the other intractable problems where there are people who are in immediate need on a daily basis?

MR. GRANDI: It has already overshadowed. You know, I made the point in my first month as High Commissioner, last January, not only to go and visit the countries affected by the Syrian refugee crisis and Syria itself, but to go to Africa where I attended the African Union Summit. And I saw many leaders there in Addis Ababa. And that was actually the first thing they all told me. They said, you know, we appreciate that you have to pay so much attention to the Syrian refugees and we sympathize. Some of them like Sudan even host many of them, but what about our own crisis, and our own humanitarian issues? So my answer is that unfortunately this has already happened, but it is incumbent on all of us to redress that. This is a point that I have made in my meetings with the administration and I will continue to make, the United States is a very important contributor to humanitarian responses in Africa, for example. And I think it's important that remains. And that happens with all donors, that resources put in to address the Syria crisis, because it has a more immediate interest and concern do not overshadow also in financial terms the assistance given to other crises.

MR. McKENZIE: You mentioned a number of major conferences that are on the horizon here and you mentioned the summit that President Obama is going to be hosting on the margins of UNGA in September. A lot of this focuses on the immediate term as it rightly should, but if we wanted to think over the horizon, and if we wanted to think about support to Turkey, to Lebanon, to Jordan, because as we very well know in these sort of refugee crises no one goes home immediately. I mean many of these individuals will be in these countries for a decade or more. Any ideas or suggestions now that you're here in D.C. that we should be collectively thinking about as we think over the horizon?

MR. GRANDI: I think let me repeat point and add another. Repeating the point that it is

important to think of how to engage developmental actors. And it's easy to say that we have to support the education system in Lebanon to allow the hundreds of thousands of Syrian children to go to school. It's much more difficult to do it in practice. Lebanon is a complex country with economic, political, and infrastructural fragilities that exist and that are aggravated by the presence of the refugees. So how do you address that? It goes well beyond making sure that there are places in schools for kids to go or enough teachers. It needs an overhaul probably or a huge support for many years of the education system. And this is just an example.

The other point that I want to add is although you're right that it will take a long time, reconstruction may be not so far away if -- I am an optimist -- if this process goes on, it will take time I think, but if it goes on then we may be faced -- fairly quickly because these things sometimes happen more quickly than we expect -- with the need for a very good reconstruction plan. And there we have to do it properly. Remember, between 2001 and 2004 I was the head of UNHCR in Afghanistan, and in that capacity I coordinated an operation of return, of repatriation, of three million people to the country after the end of the war. Now Afghans are 30 percent of the people that nowadays arrive in Europe. What has gone wrong in these 15 years? We know the complex factors of Afghanistan, but we have to make sure that the reconstruction of Syria when it happens, hopefully soon, is a durable one and not just for the refugees that go back, but for the stability of the entire region.

MR. McKENZIE: Do you think that that should be integrated into the discussion in September at the summit that it shouldn't only be on the immediate focus of refugees, but also thinking about not only reconstruction, but also the return of Syrian refugees from Europe or other front line states when the time is right?

MR. GRANDI: Provided that we all stick to the principle that return will have to be voluntary, because that will be a big issue, I think it is important to focus on that. In fact remember also that the summit in September and the event chaired by President Obama will not focus just on Syrians, but will be global. So I think to look at repatriation, return, durable return as a fundamental solution will very much be one of the issues in focus. Should be anyway.

MR. McKENZIE: All right. Thank you. We have time for a few questions. Please raise

your hand; someone will come to you with a microphone. State your name and questions only please, no statements. The high commissioner's time is very short so we want to try and get in as many questions as we can.

The woman in the front here.

SPEAKER: Hi, my name is Minal Lamy; I'm a non-resident fellow at the Atlantic Council. I've worked on refugee crisis in Lebanon and one issue that I haven't seen addressed is that in Lebanon between 60-75 percent of Syrian refugee households are headed by women. A lot of these women come from rural areas and they weren't allowed to leave the house and they've been thrown into Lebanon where they have to head their household and bring money, work, and provide for their families. Is there any training program for these women to learn how to cope with such a foreign environment? Are there any studies on that?

MR. McKENZIE: You want us to take two more questions and the we can --

SPEAKER: Yeah.

MR. McKENZIE: Right here. Over here. Why don't we take three and then --

MS. POSTEL: Thanks so much. Hannah Postel with the Center for Global Development. I was just wondering how you might respond to those within the refugee establishment who have resisted opening other legal pathways for refugees, such as work visas, since they fear it might undermine the traditional definitions of people who deserve humanitarian protection?

MR. McKENZIE: Anyone else? The gentleman in the back.

SPEAKER: Ken Marco at Worldox. If Tunisia becomes a failed state do you foresee an influx of immigrants through the central Mediterranean route?

MR. GRANDI: On women I'll broaden a bit. I think your question is important and of course there are programs in many cases done by community based organizations or NGOs, but there insufficient. You know, overall I think that the attention, the support given to groups in particular need of assistance and protection, like women, but not only women, has been inadequate because of the lack of resources that I was talking about. That's why I think that an added benefit of applying the principles of the London conference, that is to invest more development resources in areas of which we can only

scratch the surface, like education, but in which nevertheless we do put resources, will allow us to save resources for areas that are more germane to our protection and immediate assistance role, such as helping vulnerable groups. You see what I mean. I think that development assistance should look more at the macro problems, which by the way will help everybody because if their children can go to school this will be a great help to the women. But we can then zoom back on those areas that we have left behind. And I feel very strongly about what you said and I think it's very important and there are many variations of that. Imagine, for example, all the women that have been left alone because the husbands have gone on to Europe. I met many in Turkey. And now there are stark choices between very bad ways to earn a living, exposure to all sorts of exploitations, and going themselves on the boats. So either you have legal pathways out for them or you have some targeted assistance. But that has not been adequate so far, so we need to open up those possibilities.

I'm not sure I fully understand that question on legal pathways. I think that at this point with the need to offer more solutions to people we have to explore all avenues. And I don't think that those avenues jeopardize their rights as refugees. We shouldn't be too perfectionist in that and avoid the possibility of embracing some solutions that are very practical for people. Not every country has a resettlement program and the resettlement program is rather challenging for some countries. So we are proposing other legal pathways, including job schemes or resettlement. Some that are more similar to pathways that you would offer to migrant workers. But I think it doesn't matter if it can distribute that responsibility more and especially offer alternatives to people.

And in terms of Tunisia, you know, I do hope that Tunisia will not become a failed state. I think that the chances are still that it won't, but I may be wrong. I think what Tunisia is very worried about, this is nothing to do with the discussion today, but still I'll say it, is that in aggravation of the situation in Libya could cause an influx of people into Tunisia. That's what the Tunisians are very worried about. Now if god forbid the situation deteriorates in Tunisia, which was the question, then I don't know if that will cause more people to move to Europe, maybe people from Tunisia. But actually the deterioration of the situation in Libya has had the contrary effect, that people that used to go through Libya when it was more stable have stopped going through Libya. So it's a complex situation there. But what is important is that

Tunisia is supported to the maximum extent to stay the course in its recovery and consolidation of democracy, of its quite extraordinary political processes. And let's hope that the peace process in Libya can avoid making Libya even more of a failed state than it already is so that there is at least one less risk of forced displacement there.

MR. McKENZIE: Let me end by thanking you for coming out today and sharing your views with us. We know that you and your colleagues at UNHCR have an extremely difficult job trying to provide protection and solutions to 60 million refugees worldwide and we thank you for that. And we certainly hope to have you back here again in the not too distant future.

So please join me in thanking the high commissioner. (Applause)

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