

Center for Strategic and International Studies

Saving Lives in a Time of Crisis: Why the Global Humanitarian System Matters

Featuring:

Mark Lowcock,

UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

CSIS Experts:

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KIMBERLY FLOWERS: Welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. It's great to see a large crowd here to listen and learn from the world's chief humanitarian advocate, Mark Lowcock.

For those of you that don't know me, my name is Kimberly Flowers, and I direct both the Global Food Security Project and the Humanitarian Agenda here at CSIS.

Today's event is a collaboration between the Humanitarian Agenda and the CSIS Human Rights Initiative, and it will highlight the importance of the global humanitarian system. There is no better person to speak about this than Mark Lowcock. So, Mark, thank you very much for joining us today.

Before I introduce our guest, I want to take a moment to share with the audience that the effectiveness of humanitarian aid is very high on the radar here at CSIS. This year I'll be leading a taskforce on humanitarian access. The initiative is co-chaired by Senator Cory Booker and Senator Todd Young, and includes 22 members who are leading experts in the humanitarian field. I'm excited to say that Valerie Amos – who I'm sure you know, Mark – who formerly held Mark's position at the UN is a part of this prestigious group. CSIS will release a report this fall with the taskforce recommendations on how to best reduce access constraints so that lifesaving aid can reach the most vulnerable, particularly in protracted conflicts. And our report is specifically for leaders like Mark or those in his position, so we will be engaging OCHA throughout this process and looking forward to their feedback on our recommendations as well.

One additional update. In partnership with Melissa Dalton from CSIS that many of you may know, as well as her – with her Cooperative Defense Project, we recently had a team from the Humanitarian Agenda go out to Amman, Jordan, to look at cross-border humanitarian access in response to the crisis in Syria. So a CSIS policy brief on the findings from that field research will be published about early March, so be on the lookout for that if that interests you.

There are many reasons why humanitarian assistance has been elevated both within an organization like CSIS, as well as I would say should be elevated as a top foreign policy priority. The instability of fragile states is an obvious and direct threat to U.S. national security. The number of active conflicts has nearly doubled in the world and the average length of these crises have more than tripled since 2005, and the humanitarian resources to respond to them are being stretched further and further.

I'm sure Mark's going to give you a lot of numbers today, but I'll give you the ones that I've been thinking about lately. Between 14 and 20 million people are food insecure in Yemen right now. Over 6 million people are internally displaced in Syria alone. In Venezuela, the political crisis I would say is overshadowing the horrible humanitarian crisis happening there, where nearly 300,000 children were predicted to die last year from extreme malnutrition. All these numbers, they're quite staggering. They're a bit overwhelming. And yet, the humanitarian community remains resilient in trying to meet the needs of those affected by political instability, civil war, terrorism, or all of the above.

In my opinion, the resiliency of the humanitarian system is in many ways quite dependent upon UN leadership and coordination. So the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – or UN OCHA, which I'm sure we'll refer to it as today – is a critical player in this space. The world relies on UN OCHA not only for reports on global humanitarian needs or for trends, but also on their ability

to connect and coordinate this growing global system of donors and of implementing partners. Reforms are never easy, but the global aid architecture has to continue to evolve and adapt to this changing and I would say disordered world.

So, with that, it brings me great pleasure to introduce our guest, Mark Lowcock. He's served as the head of UN OCHA since 2017, and he's pushed for UN reforms both broadly within the system as well as within his own agency. As a(n) undersecretary-general and emergency relief coordinator, Mark has a lot of responsibility in terms of overseeing the UN's many coordination efforts.

I met Mark first when he joined me in 2017 when the Humanitarian Agenda, we held a private event for congressional staff. And he emphasized then that there were three main challenges that he felt like he was going to face in his role. They were addressing the declining compliance of international humanitarian law, or IHL; mitigating famine; and responding to the growing population of refugees and displaced persons. Of course, these challenges persist and will remain long after his tenure.

With more than three decades of humanitarian and development experience, Mark is a top expert in his field. He previously worked as the permanent secretary for the Department of International Development, or DFID, in the U.K. There, he responded to humanitarian crises all around the world and natural disasters, including Libya, Iraq, Syria, Nepal and the Philippines. But he's also had significant field experience in Kenya, Malawi, and Zimbabwe. And all of those shape the leader that he is today. He's an outspoken advocate for peace and for all people's right to humanitarian assistance.

Thank you, Mark, for your hope, your leadership. Let's give him a warm applause. Mark? (Applause.)

MARK LOWCOCK: Kimberly, thank you very much indeed. It's really an honor to be here.

Thank you to all of you for coming today, as well. I know that there's another speech being given here today and you could have made a different choice. I know also that there's a tradition over there for the speech to be interrupted by rounds of standing ovation. I just want to tell you that I have realistic expectations for the next 20 minutes. (Laughter.)

Thank you, CSIS, for the invitation. You have been an influential voice in international policymaking for decades, and your multidisciplinary approach to international affairs is the best one to analyze and tackle the most complex challenges facing the world. I think the work you're undertaking in the Humanitarian Agenda initiative, as well as the important contributions that Amy is leading in the human rights program, Steve Morrison on the Global Health Policy Center, and Dan Runde at the Project on Prosperity and Development are all contributing in significant ways.

In the words of my boss, Antonio Guterres, today's world is one in which "global challenges are more and more integrated and the responses are more and more fragmented." In many places round the world the very premise and value of cooperation to tackle shared problems is being questioned, sometimes by those who had been its most staunch advocates in decades past. But today I want to tell you how the global humanitarian system, which is the bit of the multilateral system I'm responsible for, is a great example for how and why international cooperation can be effective.

Last year, through UN-coordinated programs, we reached 100 million people across the world with humanitarian assistance. We unquestionably save millions of lives every year and protect the most

vulnerable people in the conflict-ridden corners of this Earth. We are not complacent. There's much we need to do to reform and improve our system, and I'm going to talk about that. But I think it makes sense for policymakers in capitals around the world, including Washington, to support the global humanitarian system. Why?

First, it is a moral responsibility. Our basic humanity demands that we act with compassion to reduce suffering among our fellow human beings.

And, second, it's in the national interest of countries like the United States to ensure an effective and efficient global humanitarian system.

These arguments are not mutually exclusive. The two are intertwined with one another. As Kimberly said, in my last job I ran the U.K.'s Department for International Development for six years. And every day in that job I was thinking about how I could justify to the British public and parliamentarians why a growing U.K. aid budget was not only the right thing to do for moral reasons, but also the smart thing to do, as it contributed to their safety and prosperity.

For decades American leaders and the public have understood this well. U.S. leadership on humanitarian affairs has been a constant throughout my 35-year career in this sector. My first job was as an aid worker working on the British government's response to the Ethiopia famine in the mid-1980s. During that crisis President Reagan was unequivocal on the need for a principled U.S. response. "A hungry child knows no politics," he said, and committed U.S. food aid to those starving children even though Ethiopia was run by a communist government at the time.

The U.S. has a strong tradition as a champion of humanitarian action and human rights. The U.S. remains the largest financial donor to the humanitarian system, and you've been that for many decades. You have unmatched capabilities bringing together financial resources; global presence and influence; research and policymaking capacity and reach; your fantastic humanitarian NGOs; and, obviously, your military strength.

But I do not take U.S. support for granted. In Washington and in many other capitals around the world, tough questions are rightly being asked of the humanitarian system. Is it really in our interest to spend money on people thousands of miles away? Is the global humanitarian system efficient, effective, and well-coordinated? Are humanitarian actors committed to reform and ensuring every dollar is spent wisely?

Today, I want to answer those questions. I'll give you a sense of the scale and complexity of the challenges we're facing. I want to explain how my organization coordinates the system to make it more efficient and effective, and to outline the effort we are making to reform, to cut waste, and to be fit for purpose for 21st century.

Let me start with the humanitarian landscape. This year more than 130 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection just to survive, most of them in places affected by conflict. The pace, tempo, and longevity of conflict, as Kimberly has said, and the displacement that accompanies it today, means that NGOs and UN humanitarian organizations are mounting major responses on nearly every continent.

People describe the current phase in history as a 'chaotic transition.' We are maybe moving into a multipolar world. But we have not reached a new global equilibrium, and the transition process is not

delivering greater peace or security to the world. Regional competition, fragile politics, terrorism, economic inequality, underdevelopment, climatic shocks, and mounting pressure over natural resources have all been factors fueling conflict.

In many contemporary conflicts, fighting parties splinter into dozens – or even hundreds – of factions. That means military victories are harder to achieve and conflict resolution is more difficult to sustain. The result – again, as Kimberly said – is that conflicts last twice as long as they did in 1990. Fighters break international humanitarian law with impunity. Rape, starvation, besiegement, and the targeting of schools and hospitals have been widely adopted as deliberate tactics of war, especially over the last 10 years.

So what does all this mean for the humanitarian system? The most obvious result is the explosion of need in the last 10 years, but it's not just scale. We're increasingly operating in more complex and insecure environments. Too many state-controlled armed forces show scant regard for international humanitarian law. And globally interconnected terrorist groups that explicitly reject accepted norms of behavior in conflict terrorize local populations and commit unspeakable acts of violence and destruction, including against aid workers. That includes the Islamic State's variants in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Nigeria, the greater Sahel region, and elsewhere.

The Africa expert Alex de Waal has identified the emergence of a new political ideology of "counter-humanitarianism." He describes this as "an approach to conflict that legitimizes political and military action that is indifferent to human life." These are worrying trends, especially this year when we mark the 70th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions.

Against this backdrop, I have to say I really welcome the CSIS initiative to launch the high-level taskforce on humanitarian access. We need some political energy behind this issue and innovative ideas to address it, and you have assembled a terrific group of people for the taskforce. And I want to support the group in any and every way I can.

I also understand that there is an initiative by the U.S. Congress – and I've come just now from the Pentagon – to bring greater transparency to reporting on civilian casualties related to U.S.'s own military operations. This is a really positive step, which others should emulate. Although some of these issues may raise political sensitivities, they are issues all nations need to address.

So it's easy to feel pessimistic about the state of the world. But despite the obstacles that we face, the global humanitarian system is achieving remarkable things. And without it things would, I am afraid, be a great deal worse. Humanitarian actors cannot claim to bring wars to an end or to halt terrorism, but we do contribute to global security in other important ways.

My colleague and good friend Governor David Beasley – the head of the UN's World Food Programme – recently observed that his agency was the first line of defense and offense against al-Qaida, al-Shabaab, and ISIS. He tells a story of a woman he met who said her husband joined a terrorist organization because there was no food.

Humanitarian agencies also ensure that almost 9 million children receive education in emergency settings in more than 20 countries. These are children who would otherwise not be going to school. An education gives them a better chance of a livelihood as an adult and arguably also makes them less susceptible to joining radical groups in the future.

The World Health Organization, UNICEF, and others are on the front line of preventing the outbreak of deadly diseases turning into regional and global pandemics.

And when conflict causes people to flee from violence, either across borders or within their own country, agencies like the UNHCR – the UN’s Refugee Agency – and the International Organization for Migration and others are there to provide those people with shelter, protection, and support.

Counterterrorism, economic development, stopping global pandemics, dealing with mass displacement: humanitarian action plays a real role in contributing to solutions to these challenges.

The next question people ask is whether or not the humanitarian system is effective and well-coordinated. In short, the answer is yes, with room for improvement. We are delivering real results in a coordinated way. In the discussion we might perhaps get into some of the details of Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, Venezuela, the Rohingya crisis, and other places, but let me just summarize some key results at the global level.

Every month of last year international humanitarian agencies provided lifesaving help and protection to 8 million Yemenis, more than 5 million people inside Syria, and nearly 5 million South Sudanese. UNICEF provided clean water to more than 32 million people, vaccinated 18 million children against measles, and provided psychosocial support to 3 ½ million children.

The World Food Programme provided food assistance to more than 90 million people – very cheaply, by the way; just 40 cents per person per day in Yemen. And in non-conflict areas, it’s just 30 cents a day.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo and neighboring countries, the UN has vaccinated 60,000 people against Ebola since August last year. The World Health Organization and UNICEF run medical clinics for people with symptoms of Ebola. They ensure that doctors and nurses have the necessary supplies, protective clothing, and pharmaceuticals. And UNICEF go door to door to make sure people know how to keep their families safe from Ebola.

Our main financiers clearly recognize and value these results. UN-coordinated humanitarian appeals – which, by the way, support many NGOs as well as UN agencies – alone last year raised a record \$15 billion, up from 4 billion (dollars) in 2005. The UN has the largest market share in humanitarian action. We have never been better funded, although needs constantly outstrip available resources.

Each agency plays a key role in a response, but the strength of the system is that we ensure that the sum is greater than the individual parts. Effective coordination is key to that. The countries that make up the UN decided, in their wisdom, to create and finance a set of different institutions to support humanitarian action. In the UN we have an agency for refugees, an agency for food, an agency for children, an agency for population issues, and so on. Each is governed separately and seeks money for their activities separately. But no one agency or organization has the mandate, scale, reach, capacity, or expertise to provide all the necessary support in any significant crisis. And that’s why a coordinated response, getting the best from everyone, is essential.

My office – and the clue is in the title of my office, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance – is charged with ensuring the system is well-coordinated. So what in practice do we do? Four main things.

First, assess and communicate the needs of vulnerable people caught up in crises. Some of that's about me briefing the Security Council and others on the big picture, but a lot of it is about detailed analytical work deep in the midst of the crises, gathering and presenting data on what are people's needs. A rigorous assessment of needs means that we're less likely to waste money on low-priority activities. We can make that system even better. I've been discussing ideas on that with Admiral Ziemer at USAID, which I hope we can take forward before too long.

Secondly, working with the implementing agencies, we use the needs assessments to develop response plans. Every year my office publishes the Global Humanitarian Overview, which is the world's most sophisticated, authoritative, and comprehensive assessment of humanitarian needs and response. One area we are improving is how we monitor the impact and results achieved against those plans.

And that response-planning function links to the role I try to play on getting the humanitarian sector – the UN agencies, but also the NGOs and the Red Cross – better financed so that they can deliver. For me, a crucial part of that is a fairer sharing of the burden. And I am pleased that as part of last year's record fundraising we also saw a reduced share from the traditional donors like the U.S. We saw other donors, including from the Gulf, taking on more. Persuading nontraditional donors to support multilateral humanitarian agencies is a long-term endeavor that takes time. But we must keep investing time and effort into this, and I am doing just that myself.

Thirdly, I attach great importance to the role my office plays in improving access for aid agencies to people most in need. We talk to governments and to nonstate armed groups, and we persuade them to let us safely deliver to people caught in the midst of fighting. That requires my staff to have a mix of local understanding, operational savviness, and the ability to build relationships of trust with everyone from the president of a country to a local-level commander on a checkpoint.

A key part of negotiating access is civil-military coordination. In Yemen, the world's worst humanitarian crisis, my team operates a deconfliction system to ensure the warring parties don't attack aid personnel or facilities or convoys. We provide the coalition with coordinates of schools and hospitals and water points and the like, and we let them know when the humanitarian convoys, the immunization teams, and the other assistance missions will be on the road. This system has proven highly effective in sparing the aid operation from accidental or incidental harm in what remains a very hot war with more than 30 front lines. Without that system, we would simply not be able to deliver assistance safely in Yemen.

Within my office, we are strengthening our civil-military liaison capability and will soon have more than 40 people across the world working on that in the toughest parts of every crisis-affected country. I am very grateful, by the way, for assistance from the U.S. government in staffing up that capability.

Fourthly, I take seriously my responsibility as coordinator for the humanitarian agencies. The UN resolution establishing my position back in 1991 gives me a mandate to coordinate not only UN entities, but also the NGOs and the Red Cross family. All those organizations have their own governance, their own mandate, and their own finances. What I am trying to do is to be a supporter, a convener, an enabler, and a champion for all of them.

There is a strong commitment at the top of all the organizations to working together better in the interests of people whose lives we're trying to save and improve. We can join up more and better. That's reflected in, for example, the agreement Henrietta Fore at UNICEF, David Beasley at the World Food Programme, Filippo Grandi at the UN Refugee Agency, and I have reached to join up and develop a single shared system for providing cash to people caught up in humanitarian crises.

Another example is our collaboration to deal with the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse. We're doing a lot together on that, with excellent contributions especially from NGOs. To give just one example, we are all collaborating to ensure that people guilty of abuse in one organization cannot find a way out through employment in another.

So, as I've said, I am clear that the humanitarian system is a global public good which delivers concrete results, but I'm also convinced that it needs to be improved and reformed. One point often leveled at multilateral institutions is that we're too bureaucratic, too process-heavy, and that we lack innovation, and the UN Secretary-General agrees with that. He's launched a series of ambitious reforms through the UN to decentralize authority and decision-making to field leaders, to simplify processes, to promote efficiency, and strengthen accountability and transparency. And that's all already making a difference. But let me give you a few other areas that I think are ripe for innovation and reform.

First, I think we need to look at the way in which humanitarian action is financed. We need to shift our reactive financing model to one that is proactive and centered on early and in some cases preventative action. With increasingly powerful data analytics, we can now track clearly the early warning indicators to predict when and where crises are developing. If we then have in place pre-agreed financing triggers, we can act swiftly when disaster strikes. And this approach can reduce the humanitarian impact of predictable disasters like droughts. It can cut response times, it can reduce costs, and it can save lives. The UN has a developing collaboration with the World Bank on this, which I hope will yield concrete results later this year.

Second, the humanitarian community must do a lot better on harnessing the role of the private sector. Too often, our discussion about the private sector is focused just on charitable donations from firms. I'm obviously not against that. But we also need a different kind of conversation. Primarily, we need to acknowledge the for-profit motives of private-sector entities and then focus on the comparative advantages of the private sector – supply chains, technological solutions, expertise, R&D – and look for win-win opportunities to collaborate with them. I've had excellent conversations in recent months with Mastercard, Google, Amazon, Salesforce, major insurance companies, and many others on this.

The final issue I want to highlight that requires some innovative thinking is around how humanitarian agencies navigate areas where proscribed armed groups are operating. That includes handling increasingly complex counterterrorism legislation and managing the risk of aid diversion.

We all understand the crucial importance of tackling terrorism. It affects poor people in poor countries more than it affects anyone else. And we also get why measures to manage the risk of diversion are so important. We need to get every penny to the most vulnerable people. But nobody, I think, wants counterterrorism measures to hinder legitimate humanitarian action, either by criminalizing it or by slowing it down or by making it impossible for aid to get to innocent people who just happen to be unlucky enough to be living in areas where terrorist groups are dominant.

For example, in Nigeria some financiers are saying that civilians who have lived in areas under the control of the Boko Haram insurgents for more than six months need to be vetted before receiving help. That means that women and children who have managed somehow to escape the Boko Haram terrorists need to wait for approval before they can receive help with, say, water and health services.

We need to recognize there are risks in what we have to do. The only zero-risk activity is no activity at all. So the question is how we manage risk sensibly.

Let me make one last point. The global humanitarian system is not the answer to all the world's problems, but without it the world would certainly be a much nastier and more dangerous place. The UN's second secretary-general, Dag Hammarskjöld, wryly noted, "The UN was not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell." And that's exactly what thousands of humanitarian workers around the world are trying to do right now.

Being an aid worker in these conflict-ridden crises is, alongside journalism, one of the world's most dangerous professions. A hundred colleagues a year are being killed in the line of duty. Everywhere I go I'm impressed with the courage, commitment, determination, and professionalism of the NGO workers, the Red Cross staff, and my UN colleagues. Most of them are nationals of the countries in crisis, often risking their own lives for their own fellow citizens. We know we can do an even better job, and we seek all of your support in doing that.

Thank you very much indeed. (Applause.)

AMY K. LEHR: Hi, Mark. It's a pleasure to have you here. I'm Amy Lehr. I'm the director of the Human Rights Initiative here at CSIS. Our initiative is quite unique – it's the only standalone initiative of its type at a D.C. think tank – and I think provides a really vital voice at a time when we know human rights are under attack globally.

Thanks, Kimberly.

I'm thrilled to have Mark here. And I'll be asking him a series of questions in a conversation up here on the stage, but we'll have plenty of time for audience questions as well. So rest easy.

I think it goes without saying that Mark's mandate is directly linked to many aspects of human rights. And, obviously, especially what he was talking about in terms of the trends on respect for international humanitarian law are really, really concerning, both in terms of the impacts on civilians on the ground and aid workers.

I want to start on a slightly more positive note, which is around the point you made on innovation. So one possibility my program's been thinking about broadly is emerging technologies, artificial intelligence. Clearly, this poses some risks for human rights and human rights activists, but also maybe some opportunities to use it for good. And so when you talk about preventive modeling and how we can identify crises before they're coming, I wondered if there was differential utility of that in the sense that I can imagine at least what we historically had at hand in terms of tools might have been decently good for predicting maybe famine, maybe public health outbreaks, but how about conflict? Can it help with all of those problems?

MR. LOWCOCK: Well, I think that's a great question.

By the way, I think the sector isn't static. It is dynamic and there is an interest in innovation. When I – my first job, as I said, was working on the famine response in Ethiopia in the mid-1980s, and you know – (laughs) – there we thought the deal was truck and dump food or drop it from a plane and maybe do a bit of shelter and a bit of, you know, water, and that was basically it. And now in those big crises we know that, you know, you have to protect people; you have to use more innovative technologies like therapeutic feeding programs, which didn't exist back in the '80s; you have to worry about keeping kids in school; and so on. So I think the sector has evolved and developed.

I do think that a lot of the work that is being done to understand the roots of conflict and how things might pan out should be getting more attention than it is at the moment. One of the, you know, facts of life is we never, in fact, know what crises we've prevented because we're never allowed to wander along to the parallel universe where we didn't prevent them. And my guess is we prevent more things that we really tell the story of. And if we understood how we stop some things happening better, we would be able to do more of the things that do stop that.

And the more we have, you know, research and analysis and – I do think the tools of predictive data analytics have something to offer here, actually. I mean, it's very early days and we shouldn't overstate the impact, but it does seem that, you know, some things that happen are correlated with problems later down the road. And if we partner up with tech companies and understand what the correlations are, then maybe we would also get better at understanding the causations, and therefore be able to design interventions.

MS. LEHR: Yeah, no, I think that's potentially really exciting, and I know there are really interesting public-private collaborations on really trying to use all these new technological tools to solve really hard, pressing problems. So I think it's terrific that you're looking at that.

I was really pleased to hear you talk a bit about the impact of counterterrorism efforts and how those can have unintended consequences. My program, we have sort of three main focus areas, and one of them is on – one area is actually on emerging technologies and human rights, and then also global labor supply chains. But one area of our research has been on this issue of closing civic space, so basically the concept that there's less and less space for civil society to operate around the world for a lot of reasons. But it's a significant problem, and conflict zones can be one of the areas this plays out. We really count counterterrorism laws in terms of national laws that maybe were overbroad in their definition of terrorism, and therefore it was easy to paint normal NGOs as – that were critics, maybe, of the government as a terrorist group, also issues with financing and banks de-risking those areas. But I've heard recently that there has been sort of an increased impact I heard from U.S. counterterrorism laws on the ability to deliver aid to recipients, and so I just thought maybe you could dig into that a little more about what changes might be helpful.

MR. LOWCOCK: Well, I think policymakers are aware of this issue and are trying to find sensible ways through. And I think objectives are shared between those whose job it is to fight terrorism and those who want to protect people in crisis. I don't think there's a difference of objectives, actually.

You know, I had a conversation with Ambassador Jeffrey yesterday about how the U.S. is finding its way through the need to comply with your own law while at the same time wanting assistance to get into in this case Idlib, in northwestern Syria, so that people there can be looked after. And it feels to me as though – I understand the secretary has signed something and that's in the public domain – that that needle is being threaded. And, you know, I think it's important that we find ways to

achieve both objectives, and we just need to keep working on that as the agenda. And I – the fact that that's a shared goal ought to make this possible in most cases.

Policymakers in this space are not kind of malign. They're not – they're not trying to make life difficult for the – for the humanitarian agencies. But they are – there's a real problem they're trying to solve, and an open dialogue and working together in a constructive way to find solutions is, I think, the approach we need.

MS. LEHR: And does that tend to be on a kind of a case-by-case basis? Do you find that it's more like managing – like, that the rules of the road need to be a bit different for different crises? How does that play out in practice?

MR. LOWCOCK: So that's a terrific point. I'm not really sure we've got enough cases to generalize. What tends to happen is that, you know, the problem is crystalized in a particular place. I mean, five, six years ago it was about sustaining the financial flow, the money corridor into Somalia. And so it crystalized in a particular place and then – and gets solved there, and then sometimes it pops up somewhere else. So, fortunately, we haven't had so many huge cases to deal with. At some point, probably, if we keep bumping into this problem, we'll have to try and find general solutions. But what's popping up so far is the specific case rather than the generality, I think anyway. I mean, very much, you know, in the market to be corrected on that, but that's my impression.

MS. LEHR: Yeah, I think – I think it's great that you're working on that and thinking on it, and hopefully we will come up with some more systematic solutions.

Another area where I know there's been a bit of a barrier to humanitarian aid – again, where I think there's a bit of a needle to thread – has been with North Korea, actually, which in some ways gets so much attention in terms of the – I mean, obviously, there's a huge political and security problem there, but also an enormous humanitarian crisis in terms of drug-resistant tuberculosis, acute malnutrition. I know there have been some problems in the past both of getting adequate financing for it, for the crisis, and then also just, again, partly because of U.S. laws that may have some very valid purposes, actually getting aid there. So could you talk about where that stands now?

MR. LOWCOCK: Probably you know I was in North Korea in July and there's a real humanitarian need. And I was particularly struck by the TB issue because, you know, the Global Fund, which was providing drugs, particularly against drug-resistant TB, for a period has not been able to do that. And, you know, the thing about – (laughter) – drug-resistant TB is it has the potential to spread. And so I took a decision when I came back from the fund I manage, the Central Emergency Response Fund, we would provide some assistance to provide commodities, particularly anti-TB drugs, just to deal with that bit of the problem. And everybody's accepted that decision and we're in the implementation phase.

There is a sanctions regime on North Korea, and of course there are very good reasons for that. Everybody understands that. But there are also exemptions for humanitarian assistance from sanctions. So there is a process going on at the moment to make sure the unintended consequence of the sanctions is not to unreasonably delay the delivery of these drugs against TB and other key areas. And I think the U.S. – I'm not sure I'm going to get his title right, but the U.S. special envoy for working on these issues has spoken publicly about the desirability there is here to have the sanctions regime do what it's supposed to do and not what it's not intended to do. So I do see a convergence of views on that.

MS. LEHR: That's great to hear. I mean, this isn't the first time, also. U.S. sanctions are really complicated and sometimes there are unintended consequences. But it's good to hear that you feel like there's been some progress on that because the public health crisis is pretty severe.

Thinking about supply chains and things of that sort, one of the aspects of these protracted crises is that the refugee situation really has reached sort of unprecedented scale and that the length of time for which people are refugees is really new. My background is really originally in the nexus of business and human rights, and so I'm aware that in some countries like Jordan there's been an effort to really integrate refugees into workforces, or in Uganda to enable them to have land rights so they can farm and so forth. But what is the role of OCHA in trying to deal with these – like, trying to provide sort of livelihoods and decent circumstances for these refugees who are stuck for a lot longer now?

MR. LOWCOCK: Yeah. So that's a great question. Thank you.

I mean, as Kimberly said at the beginning, I've basically spent my career on development and humanitarian response, and I'm basically somebody who is very keen to try to get to solutions to these problems. I didn't talk about it in my remarks, but one thing we're not doing very well is finding solutions. And displaced people, you know, are right at the top of the people we should worry about for that.

I was very struck going to Darfur about two years ago, possibly three years ago, meeting groups of people who have been displaced for 15 years and had had 15 years of assistance – or, more precisely, had had one year 15 times. And it would be a much better system to invest more in helping people reestablish themselves somewhere else.

And I do see some positive examples of that. I was in Ethiopia and Somalia at the beginning of last year, and the authorities with the support from the agencies are actually working in a creative way to find land for people to be able to reestablish themselves and to think about, well, maybe if we give people a bit more help at the beginning they'd be able to get going faster rather than eking it out over a longer period. And I think we need to do more of that kind of thing and gather more of the lessons.

Lots of us have been surprised by so far how much the new peace deal in South Sudan has begun to stick. And we're starting to think about, well, maybe could there be a chance this year for millions of people displaced inside South Sudan – never mind the people who are refugees; I'll come onto that to your question in a minute – is there something we can do this year to help people, if peace is going to be consolidated, go back home, and how best to help them doing that.

Now, on the refugee thing, I think one thing that's been positive – and you gave the example of Jordan; it's also been happening in Ethiopia – is to try to provide assistance to the refugee hosting countries in a way which kind of recognizes the burden they're sharing and integrating it more into the broader economy. So in Jordan, for example, there was an agreement that companies that hired refugees would be able to have preferential access to the EU market for their products, and I think that's a very smart solution. It supports the local economy, gives refugees an income, but also dignity – dignity's a really important thing that we don't pay enough attention to – and has all sorts of other benefits. And a similar thing happened in Ethiopia. So I think those are the kinds of things which are in the box of solutions, a box we should be playing in a lot more and try to get ourselves out of business a bit faster.

MS. LEHR: Yes. Yes. It is always interesting to have a job where you're trying to work yourself out of business, isn't it? (Laughs.)

On the – on the solutions front, how much of that responsibility for kind of trying to think through what to do with long-term refugees, et cetera, really falls to OCHA? Is there – is this an area where there actually is more need for coordination, or is there a good home for that kind of thinking?

MR. LOWCOCK: Well, the main mandate for refugees, obviously –

MS. LEHR: Of course.

MR. LOWCOCK: – is with the UN Refugee Agency. I do – my office does have a mandate for internally displaced people, and actually the solutions set is similar for both categories. And we do see a responsibility there.

I mean, I do think this is a space, particularly for IDPs, which has not been very heavily sort of populated by the policy community. Over the last few years there's been a big focus on the refugee compact, the CRRF, which you'll be familiar with, and with the migration compact, but that group of people – 14 million or so people who are displaced inside their own country – haven't been subject to the same degree of kind of attention and thought hasn't been given to them in the same way about, well, how can we find solutions for those people. And maybe there's an opportunity in the period ahead to, you know, have some kind of initiative to do a bit better for them. And certainly I'm in the market for that and my office would be engaged energetically with any proposals that come forward.

MS. LEHR: And, obviously, a program like that would have really strong knock-on effects in terms of preventing further conflict, one assumes. Yeah. Yeah, that's really good food for thought. Thank you.

I'm going to turn it over to the – to the rest of the room in a few minutes, but I just wanted to see if you could touch on Venezuela and just what kind of humanitarian aid is going to Venezuela right now. What are the possibilities? Because it's obviously a really rapidly evolving crisis.

MR. LOWCOCK: It's a very substantial crisis with a lot of human need: severe shortages of drugs and vaccines, and lots of malnourished children. Inside Venezuela, the UN has a program we've agreed with the government to scale up assistance in the areas of nutrition and health services. It's a small program initially, \$100 million. It's 50 percent financed, and about 20 percent of what's financed has come from the Central Emergency Response Fund, which I manage. We're moving forward, as is required by our mandate, in consultation with the government. And, you know, it is a fast-moving situation.

I have a few more people on the ground who are working now to build a better picture of what all the needs are in different parts of the country so we can make information available to everybody. And hopefully, you know, there will be successful navigation of all the pressures and all the politics of this so that we do get a stronger focus on people who are suffering a lot and who deserve support.

MS. LEHR: It sounds like that's very much a work in progress then, yeah. OK. Well, I sure – I'm sure we'll all be watching that quite closely.

Actually, one last question, which is again around the role of the business sector and what their role could and could not be. You know, business, obviously, in conflict can play both positive and negative roles. We see in places like the DRC that, you know, business can be involved in looting and other really bad practices. But, obviously, there's also hope that business can be part of solutions in many spaces right now. But as I think you wisely cautioned, right, there's still very much a profit motive and we need to be realistic about that. So where do you see the opportunities, in a more concrete way, for business to play a positive role in these conflicts?

MR. LOWCOCK: Well, I think there's three sorts of things.

I mean, business leaders do say to me they attach importance to their role – their corporate social responsibility role, and there's – that's a philanthropic thing. And that should be valued and welcomed, and more of it would be good. That's the first pillar.

The second pillar is there are places where there are investment opportunities for a social impact type model. They tend not to be the most extreme crises, to be honest. But places like Ethiopia and refugee settings, there are some investable propositions which – there's quite a lot of interesting discussion going on on that. And the World Economic Forum, who, you know, organized Davos, where I was with others two weeks ago, are doing very interesting work on trying to identify the genuinely investable spaces, and I do think that's quite an encouraging area as long as you're realistic about what really will be around it and what might not be.

And then the third pillar is just using the fact that the private sector has all sorts of capabilities to help do things that humanitarian agencies are trying to do, whether it's procurement, supply chain, information, financing platforms, lots and lots of areas. And again, one thing I see is private-sector companies are very interested to put their expertise at the service of humanitarian organizations, and partner and collaborate on that as, you know, part of that third pillar if you like.

MS. LEHR: Yeah, so it sounds like part of it is just business being able to help humanitarian efforts be more efficient and more effective.

I'm really curious about the impact of investing and what that really could look like in practice. It sounds like we don't really have very many concrete examples yet, it's sort of a work in progress. OK.

MR. LOWCOCK: It is. And I think we're in a – in that sort of discovery phase, where what would be good would be to try lots of experiments and then report faithfully on what's worked and what hasn't worked. My colleague Lisa Carty, who's in the front row here, is the director for humanitarian financing in OCHA, is just setting up a team who is going to as one of their jobs look at all of these experiments that are being run and try to offer a commentary on the ones that should definitely be upscaled and replicated and taken forward.

MS. LEHR: Well, I'm really glad to hear you're taking a pretty – I guess a critical approach to that in the sense that it will be really important to understand what's realistic and what's not.

MR. LOWCOCK: Yeah.

MS. LEHR: Great. Well, thank you.

I do want to turn to the room now. I'm going to take three questions at a time and then Mark will respond. So I see a question right here in the middle. And someone will come to you with a microphone.

Q: Hi. Teresa Welsh with Devex.

I wanted to ask a little bit more about Venezuela and how you are navigating working with the Maduro government versus Interim President Guaido, which the United States, many other governments, Lima Group have all acknowledged as the legitimate president of Venezuela, and sort of how, you know, from a humanitarian perspective you navigate what is obviously a political issue in terms of getting humanitarian aid to people that need it and, you know, who on the ground it is that you're working with, and who you recognize essentially as the government. Thank you.

MS. LEHR: There's a question right across the aisle.

Q: Thank you, Mr. Lowcock, for your remarks and your leadership.

I had a question that I think will draw on both your current experience and your previous experience at DFID. I'd like to know your views on ideas that are going around about donors' conditionality for aid, particularly to promote reforms in the – in the months after the Grand Bargain of 2016. DFID took a lead on this and now there are discussions here in Washington about how we can best condition at least part of our aid to the humanitarians to promote implementation of the Grand Bargain and other reforms. And I'd like your take on that from both your previous perspective and your current perspective. Thank you.

MS. LEHR: Are there any more questions? Oh, sorry, I just – let's start in the aisle. There's a gentleman right here.

Q: Yeah, hi. Paul –

MS. LEHR: Can you wait for the microphone? Thank you.

Q: (Comes on mic.) Hi. Paul Spiegel from Johns Hopkins University and the Center for Humanitarian Health.

A question, Mark, about the future of coordination. I was previously with UNHCR for many years and I'm curious to see how you see cash-based interventions; the Grand Bargain, where we're moving more towards national and governments; and the cluster approach in the future. And my question is premised on the issue of – that international agencies and international NGOs may have quite a different role in the future than they currently do now.

MS. LEHR: Great. Mark, I'll hand that to you.

MR. LOWCOCK: Thank you very much.

On Teresa's question, the – you know, the deal agreed by all the member states of the UN is that the UN has to operate in a member state in consultation with the authorities of that state. The member states can, if they want to, in particular circumstances change that deal. That normally requires agreement in the General Assembly and/or the Security Council. But that's the fundamental principle

on which we operate. And so we do, in Venezuela, operate with the consent and cooperation of the government. At the same time, it's part of our mandate to talk to lots of other people. And so my colleagues also talk to, for example, the president of the National Assembly and lots of other people.

So, you know, the basic construct within which we operate is that we're forever sort of threading a needle between on the one hand the fact that we're required to consult with the authorities, and we can only do things to the extent that is possible through that consultation, and on the other hand we can only do things if someone will give us the money to do them. And a lot of our lives are spent in that lane, if you like, which typically is on the one side a rock and the other side a hard place. We're just used to that. That's just what we do.

And, of course, it's guided by the humanitarian principles, which are the fundamental set of values, if you like, that everybody's signed up to: that humanitarian assistance should be on the basis of need and need alone, and no other consideration; and that it should be delivered in a way which is neutral and impartial and independent. And we know from hard experience over decades that if we operate in a way which is not consistent with those principles, we quickly run into trouble. And we understand that what we do is not always a popularity contest, but we've learned that those principles are very important to us. So we do everything we can to stick to them. So that's basically the framework which we are navigating through at the moment.

On the question of – thank you for your question on conditionality and reforms and so on. I don't think that anyone needs to put conditions on the sector to deliver the Grand Bargain. I mean, there's a lot in implementation of Grand Bargain commitments for the implementing side of the house, as it were. I think we've made quite good progress, actually, since the Istanbul summit on quite a lot of what's in the Grand Bargain.

My general experience over several decades with these initiatives is that you get a burst of energy in the first phase and then they have a certain half-life. I certainly think that there's a series of things in the Grand Bargain where there are still plenty of energy around them. And I've been talking, actually, over the last couple of days here about some of those which I think we can move forward on. Cash is one, actually.

Which brings me onto Paul's question. The use of cash in humanitarian settings is one of the transformations. You know, I worked on the 1992 famine in Somalia and I worked on the 2011 famine in Somalia, and it was not a good day for me when I saw the at end of 2016, early 2017 that we could have another famine in Somalia in 2017. I hoped never to – (laughs) – see that again. And the reason – the single most important reason in my opinion, having worked on the 2017 response, that we didn't have a famine in Somalia was because we were able to put in place a huge cash program to reach people all over the country – 600,000 families, 3 million people – transferring purchasing power through text messages. And we couldn't do that in 2011, and that meant that we were running a lot of convoys into south-central Somalia, too many of which were being stopped and looted by the al-Shabaab terrorist organization. And it turns out it's much harder to stop and loot a text message. And so we found it easier to get purchasing power to people, and we found markets worked all over the country in 2017. It's not the only reason why we did – had a more successful response, but it's one of them.

Cash does have, as it's used more and more, big implications potentially for the coordination system and the future of the cluster system. We need to work that through as we implement what I hope will be looked back on as an important agreement that Filippo and Dave and Henrietta and I reached

that I talked about in my remarks, which by the way is an inclusive – what we're trying to do is set up an inclusive system which is open to everybody. And one of the things we're doing at the moment is talking to lots of other agencies who run big cash programs about how they'd like to be included in that.

Cash is not the only thing that needs to happen. I do believe that the more people are given purchasing power to solve their own problems the better, broadly speaking. And the quality of – people generally take the right decision for their own livelihoods if they're given the opportunity to do so, and that there's also the dignity and other arguments. But there are other things that need to happen alongside cash, which, you know, are necessary for an effective, and sensible, and comprehensive response. So cash isn't a panacea, but I do think it's a massive opportunity. And the more it's used and adopted the more the implications for how we think about the whole system will be.

MS. LEHR: Great. Well, thank you, Mark. I'm going to take some questions from this corner of the room now. Are there any questions over there? Silence. All right, any more questions? I see one over here. We need you to wait for the microphone. So please wait for just a second.

Q: Hi. Brian Blonder with IMA World Health in Washington.

I was hoping you could touch for a moment on the humanitarian system is changing and will continue to need to change to meet the needs concerning climate change, because that's going to impact and magnify all the sectors already being impacted with humanitarian issues.

MS. LEHR: Thank you. I see a question – two questions back in the back.

Q: Hi. So I'm Ana-Sofia. I'm with Refugees International.

And my question you touched on briefly. It's about IDPs. So why do you think that IDPs have not been given the same attention as refugees? And what do you think can be done to change this in order to find solutions for them?

Q: Hi. My name is Dina Esposito and I'm with Mercy Corps.

I have a question about the new way of working, and if you could comment on the progress that we're making in terms of relief development and, to some extent, even peacebuilders coming together around a common solution set, and where you see the continued challenges in that space.

MR. LOWCOCK: So, on climatic shocks, I mean, you know, I think it's – it is pretty clear to me, at least, that more and more of the problems that we're dealing with, for which the symptoms are often conflict and displacement, have as among the underlying causes resource pressures exacerbated by climatic shocks and climate change. It's just what it looks like to me, in lots of the places where we're operating. And as I was – I was sort of try to allude to in answer to one of Amy's questions, we're actually spending as a global community a lot of time and effort actually on dealing with symptoms – terrorism, you know, military conflict, humanitarian response – and not enough total effort, in my opinion, on trying to get to the underlying causes, which are – you know, are a mixture of governance systems that are not sufficiently accountable and responsive to the systems they're supposed to serve, resource pressures, shocks of various sorts, and development failures.

And I think that if we don't – particularly in, you know, some of the regions like the Sahel from west to the Horn of Africa, like Afghanistan, where I've been recently where they, you know, just had a very bad drought which has caused hundreds of thousands of more people to be displaced – if we don't find a way to accelerate development progress, which will mean dealing with resource pressures, we're in for a difficult time over the next couple of generations, I think. And that is why, from our point of view, to jump to the third question, we have such a big focus in the UN on trying to join up our effort between humanitarian response, peace and security, and development. Again, David Beasley puts it very well, where he – where he talks about, you know, one of the things we need to do is make humanitarian dollars – of which we have more in the UN than we used to, 15 billion (dollars) last year, as I said – work harder for other benefits, development benefits and development gains.

And actually, there's a lot we can do there. I think that some of the divides between humanitarian community and development community which I've observed for a long time are a bit self-defeating, actually. And I think joining up the sector is the smart thing to do. And that is what we are trying to do in the UN at the moment, through our own governance structures and the way we're organizing ourselves, and especially by the what the – what we're trying to do as leaders. So I've been traveling quite a lot with my colleague Achim Steiner, my colleague who's the head of the UN Development Program, to talk about the real opportunities in places where we work to join up better to get faster to solutions. And we will be doing more of that. We have got – we've got a few good examples of it happening, but we need a lot more. And we need actually more help from the financiers to allow us to join up better as well.

So why is it that IDPs have not been given the attention that the grand case load would imply they should have been? I think – I mean, there's a couple of reasons. Firstly, people have been doing other elements of the people movement issue – so refugees and the Migration Compact. I mean, that is a reason. One of the scarce commodities in the world is bandwidth of the policymaking and the implementing communities. So that is one of the reasons. The other reason though, if we're going to be candid with each other, is that IDPs are an internal issue. And so you bump straightaway into sovereignty and governments. And that, I think, has been – has given some people pause before getting into this issue a bit more. I think there are actually quite a few countries with big internally displaced populations who would like a bit more of a discussion and would like more help with it. So I do think there's a window of opportunity to engage in a constructive way. And I hope we'll be able to do that.

MS. LEHR: Fantastic. Thank you. I'm going to take my prerogative as a moderator to ask one more question I should have asked earlier, which is really around this issue of international humanitarian law, the Geneva Conventions, and just the fact that we know respect for them is on the decline, to the extent we can measure these things, with really abominable things happening to both citizens – civilians and aid workers. One of my colleagues here actually, Steve Morrison, did a great film called "The New Barbarianism." If you have the opportunity to watch it it's compelling and disturbing.

So you've talked about this problem before, and the need to convince I think both states and nontraditional actors that they have a stake in international humanitarian law. Have we actually made some progress on having those conversations? And what are the kind of arguments you're making, if so?

MR. LOWCOCK: Well, you sort of nail it, really. We're living in an age of impunity. And I think one useful thing to do is to go back to why in the middle of the 19th century countries decided it would be a good idea to have laws for war. And the core reason was not to do with the moral compass,

actually. The core reason was to do with interests. Battle of Solferino in 1863, which spurred the first international laws, concluded with a recognition by the generals on both sides that neither of their interests were being served by huge number of both sets of soldiers ending up on the battlefield with atrocious wounds. And they concluded both sets of – both had interests in finding a way to do better. And that led to the creation of the Red Cross and so on.

So I think taking a perspective on interests actually is a useful prism that our community doesn't always – doesn't always start with. I think there's also a set of things to do with knowledge gaps. There's quite a lot of evidence that quite a few groups of people committing abuses don't know you're not supposed to do that. Some of my colleagues report conversations with field commanders from armed opposition groups in the back of beyond who ask questions like: So where is The Hague and how do I avoid going there? (Laughter.) And that knowledge gap itself is quite revealing.

I do think there's quite a long list of things we can do on this agenda. And I gave a talk, actually, in Berlin on this in October. And we're trying to use the opportunity of the anniversary to build further on this. The French government and the German government, when they consecutively hold the presidency of the Security Council in March and April, have got a series of events on this planned as well. And I think a first step would be just to be talking about it more. And then I think there's quite a range of things that can be done with both the willing and the less-willing to turn things around a bit. And we need to do that. We really need to do that.

MS. LEHR: I'll be keen to see how that progresses because I think within this building it's certainly an issue a lot of us are really concerned about it and makes the civilian impact of all these conflicts so much worse.

I can take one or two more questions from the room? OK, there is a question in the front here, and then one in the back. And I'll try to get to you too.

Q: Sure. Hi. Hi. Bill Deere with UNRWA. I feel like I'm talking to my boss's boss.

But you talked – I think you talked about the need to comply with the law, but also get the aid to the areas where it needs to go. Do you have any additional information about what might be going on with Ambassador Jeffrey? And you mentioned that he may have signed something, and I was just wondering if there was any additional detail.

MR. LEHR: I think there's a question right next to him, and then we'll go to the back.

Q: My name is Vidya Mahadevan. I work on the health side of humanitarian aid or have in the past. I've gone back and forth between humanitarian and development.

I have a follow-up question about impunity and the knowledge gap. So in a lot of places it's – even if it isn't about knowledge gap, how do you address that? So, like, Bashir, after his ICC indictment, nothing happened. And how do address that growing impunity? And how do we actually enforce this, when there is so little regard – or growing disregard for these laws that have been in place that we used to respect?

Q: Hi. I'm Abby Bruell with Concern Worldwide.

You spoke a lot about – at the beginning of your speech – about the support that the U.S. gives to the humanitarian system, and how that needs to be continued, and, you know, how that has been changing in their thinking. But just wondering what you think the U.S. government can be doing better, even though we're one of the biggest champions of humanitarian response.

MS. LEHR: Thank you.

MR. LOWCOCK: Well, on the – on Bill's question, I think, my understanding is, I think arising from a report by the inspector general, there was an initiative created about – because of the – you know, the prominence of al-Qaida affiliates in Idlib, and anxiety about whether providing assistance across the border, which is mandated by a Security Council resolution which was just renewed in December, would run into U.S. counterterrorism legislation. And my understanding is that following legal review and so on it's been concluded that those programs remain permissible and, indeed, are important things the U.S. government want to pursue. And I know that other governments have, you know, asked the same question, given they've got legislation in the same space.

You know, the reason why the Security Council decided that we should have a cross-border operation into Idlib is because there's 3 million people, a million children, a million of them displaced from other parts of the country, caught in that part of Syria. And the government of Syria are not willing for aid to be delivered to them from Damascus. And I know that because I've repeatedly asked the government at the top level in my interactions with them if there's any chance of freeing things up a little bit. So the only way those people can be helped is through a cross-border operation. And I think, you know, the world's decided, notwithstanding all the difficulties, the huge majority of people we're talking about are civilians. They're mostly women and children, actually. So the world's decided the right thing to do is to help them. And that's a legal way of doing that, as I understand, that's been found in the U.S.

On, you know, dealing with impunity and the knowledge gap, I mean, there are different things. There's actually the ICRC and other organizations do, when given the chance, do quite a bit to try to educate local-level commanders and groups on what the deal is supposed to be, and why they might think it's in their interest to comply with the deal. On the impunity issue, there's a range of things that, you know, could be done to a greater degree or with more finance and more energy. And I've given a – you know, I could give you a 20-minute version of this answer. But let me just give you two or three examples. If you'd like to pursue it further I'm going to advertise again my speech in Berlin in October, which gives you the longer answer.

I mean, one thing you can do is gather evidence of abuses. I worked on the Balkans a lot in the early 1990s. And we were all then tearing our hair out about the prospect of whether there would ever be any accountability for people doing the atrocious things that were done. And, lo and behold, a few decades later, Mr. Milosevic and Mr. Karadzic and Mr. Mladic found themselves in The Hague. That only happened because evidence was gathered. At the moment, I think people are doing really, really important work on gathering evidence of what has happened to the Rohingya. And who knows, maybe – it feels a long way away now, I know. Who knows, maybe one day in the future we'll see something, you know, come out of that.

I think there are roles for commissions of inquiry. I think are international accountability mechanisms that could be made more use of. I know not every country agrees with that, but my observation is that policy thinking evolves as time passes. So I do think there's quite a range of things that could be done. Some of them, whether there's a high appetite for new action in this area at the

level of governments or not. So I don't think we should be despairing. I think we should do what we – what we can do.

In terms of the question on the U.S., I've been following closely the organization reform in USAID, with the creation for the Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs. I think that's really a really, really interesting initiative. And the more those things can be joined up, I think the better really. And so I'm, you know, keen to follow the implementation of that decision. But, you know, you shouldn't underestimate the extent to which there is – there continues to be a loss of U.S. leadership in this space. I see that in lots of places I go. And I see it not just from the official sector, but from the policymaking community, the NGOs. You know, you have many of the world's leading NGOs, and their umbrella groups, here. I see it in academic institutions. I see it in lots of places. And I think it's part of the global public good that is the humanitarian system.

MS. LEHR: Thank you. And that's encouraging to hear. I think obviously U.S. leadership has been really vital to this space for a long time and hopefully will continue to be. We have time for about two more questions. So, any more? There's one right there, thank you.

Q: Hi. I'm Katie Pickett with Cadasta Foundation, a global land rights foundation that's co-funded by DFID and Omidyar Network.

And this question is not about land, but – (laughs) – you spoke to the future use of predictive analytics. And those, yes, of course, you will have to – you and your organization and other organizations will have to tap into the private sector in a lot of ways. But in which ways are you building the capacity and the foundation at a data level within your own organization, within your own information management offices around the world at your regional levels? And how are you supporting those staff and bringing in more staff that have those capabilities?

MS. LEHR: Are there any more questions? OK, one back here.

Q: My question is about increasing young population in Africa. There is a clear correlation between youth bulge and civil conflict, as we know. So what risks do you see and as well what opportunities? What could governments do to mitigate that?

MS. LEHR: All right, Mark.

MR. LOWCOCK: OK. On predictive analytics, I have an office in The Hague which is called the Center for Humanitarian Data. And one of the things they do, as well as trying to think about the ethical issues on, you know, privacy, and, well, you have to think about – if you're going to use lots of data – about people. And they're also – got a capacity to think about the use of predictive data analytics in decision making, essentially. And we have a fellowship program, actually, where we bring young people – typically with training – postgraduate training in statistics and high-level math and economics – to do modeling exercises for us. We've done a very interesting first modeling exercise, trying to identify the things that are correlated with an upcoming food crisis in Somalia.

One theory, which we're trying to test out a little bit which has been put to us, is that one thing that you might see is a declining use of mobile telephone, especially declining use in text messages, as people run out of money, and therefore become destitute. And so that is an example of, you know, something that's correlated with something else, that if it is substantiated might be usable for decision makers. Now, I don't know if that example is going to work or not, but what I'm interested is what are

the – what are the set of things you can look at and study? And we are hiring in this space at the moment – Lisa’s hiring, building a team in this space. And we’re keen to collaborate with others. It’s not going to be – you know, my office has lots of things to do and a limited resource base.

But as the coordinator, we have a sort of dispassionate position that enables us to experiment with some things and try to build capacity in some areas. And a lot of humanitarian specialists are maybe not the most skilled in this area I’ve just described. So – and what is not a very good idea is to pretend that people who don’t have a skillset can be put to work on this particular thing. So we are hiring new people in this area. And, you know, we’ll see what we produce. And I do think it’s an interesting area. And time will tell whether my guess is right or not, I suppose.

I think – I’m not sure I fully understood your question, so I apologize if what I’m about to say is not responding to it. But I am very interested in – and talking to them a lot – about the fact that the African Union is building its own capacity for its members to engage on humanitarian issues with each other. They’re talking about an agency. They’re talking about information exchange and collaboration. They’re – I mean, we’re working with them a lot. The UN has an incredibly important, to us, partnership with the AU, with multiple dimensions. And this is an area where we’re trying to support the AU to play a stronger role in the future than maybe it’s been able to do in the past.

MS. LEHR: Well, I really want to thank Mark for what I think was a really interesting, in-depth discussion that covered a huge amount of territory. And I’m personally really thrilled to hear just the extent to which you’re looking at sort of being more proactive and preventive, and also trying to think about innovative ways of doing things so that we do them better. And really appreciate your time. Just want to give Mark a round of applause. Thank you so much. (Applause.)

MR. LOWCOCK: Very good questions. Thank you very much.

(END)