

## Human Rights in Crisis: War, Famine, and Refugees

a conversation with

**David Miliband, President & CEO, International Rescue Committee**

*The Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflicts &  
The Institute of Politics*

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*Full transcript*

DAVID AXELROD: Hello welcome on behalf of the Institute of Politics and our partners on this event The Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflicts a great new asset on our campus. I welcome you. I'm particularly enthused about this discussion because I am the son of a refugee. My father came over here from Eastern Europe when he was a boy driven out by violence and persecution. And this country opened its arms to him and made everything possible for me. Today we are facing a global crisis, a humanitarian crisis, a refugee crisis as a result of conflict and war and famine in many different parts of the world. And our guest is as active and important in trying to address that crisis as anyone I know so we welcome him.

I will not do the formal introduction but what I do want to tell you is that we will open the floor to take questions. Raise your hands. Dr. Robinson will call on you in one of our students we'll pass you a microphone as usual we're going to prioritize the first three questions to be asked by students. And I just want to remind you what you I think already know which is that question marks and questions end with question marks. Speeches do not. So please put a question mark at the end of your question and I ask that you make sure that your phones are silent.

And here to formally introduce our speaker is Afreen Ahmed a third year student from Chicago studying economics and comparative race and ethnic studies. She is the events chair of the leaders of color organization at the Institute of Politics. Please join me in welcoming Afreen to the podium.

[APPLAUSE]

AFREEN AHMED: In a time when the entire institution of Refugee Resettlement in America is uncertain global crises are unrelenting and their displacement of millions of people. The UNHCR estimates that 17 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes in 2016 alone. But as displacement numbers reach record highs the volume of refugee arrivals in the United States is decreasing. The new 2018 fiscal year brings a ceiling of

4,5000 refugee arrivals through the annual presidential determination down from 110,000 arrivals under President Obama last year. As debate continues over America's responsibility to assist refugees this conversation today is more important and timely than ever.

We are glad to welcome the Honorable David Miliband who is president and CEO of the International Rescue Committee where he oversees the agency's humanitarian relief operations in more than 40 war affected countries as well as the Iraqi's refugee resettlement and assistance programs and 28 United States cities. From 2007 to 2010, Miliband was the 74th Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom where he progressed human rights and represented the UK around the world. And before that he served as secretary of state for the environment establishing climate change as a policy priority and as Member of Parliament for South Shields for over a decade, and as an analyst at the Institute for Public Policy Research.

Miliband parents fled to Britain from continental Europe during World War Two and its aftermath. As the son of refugees he brings a personal commitment to the IRC's work and I am honored to introduce him to a conversation entitled "Human Rights in Crisis: War, Famine, and Refugees". Please join me in welcoming David Miliband.

[APPLAUSE]

JAMES ROBINSON: Thank you.

So the way this is going to go is give a little introduction and we're going to have a conversation and then we open it up. So what I was thinking about what I was going to say and how could we stop thinking about these issues. You know I'd like to say that you know I think this issue of refugees and migrants is it's intrinsic to the way humans are. You know the way a lot of psychologists and biologists think about humanity. You know why is it that humans are so successful relative to other primates or other species. It's because we're very good at cooperating with strangers. We're very good at cooperating with people who are not genetically related to. And that's the whole history of humanity. Humans have moved around and they've become very successful because they've organized societies that big scale. So the problem of cooperating with people and trusting people and welcoming other people into our societies and building heterogeneous and different societies with strangers.

And this is - this is the whole history of humanity and the reason humans have been so successful is they found ways of doing that. You know whether that's through the invention of language or institutional innovation ideas of fictive kinship institutional innovation in the modern world and this problem has just got bigger and bigger and bigger over history but it's it's

a very old problem. I think you know we were mentioning that Mr. Miliband parents came fleeing persecution in the 1940s in Eastern Europe.

But the Robinsons after all. You know why did the Robinsons Robinson's last Scandinavian name a thousand years ago the Robinsons ended up in England from Scandinavia. Maybe they were that pillaging you know but they might have they might also have been fleeing poverty and violence you know and if you think about the work of Steven Pinker for example we know that violence was actually worse historically than it is today according to some normalization. So a lot of violence and conflict historically including in Scandinavia and a lot of people were fleeing violence and conflict historically as well. Moving around the world. So this is just this is just an intrinsic part of humanity and the success of humanity has been we've been able to come up ways of solving this problem and flourishing in the context of this not as a problem but as a huge advantage of humanity.

So so so I think this is this is an issue set of issues which are just intrinsic to humanity and the history of humanity and how we deal with these issues is critical for the future of humanity and the health of humanity. So after that grand pretentious introduction probably

DAVID MILIBAND: I knew we were dealing with big issues. But this is just gone sort of way beyond this.

[LAUGHTER]

JAMES ROBINSON: Let me ask about you know let me start by...You're not here to listen to me talk, you're here to listen to him talk. So I thought you know I should start by just you know. Raising the issue that probably is in everyone's mind today which is you know how does the current policies of the government. This restriction on the admission of refugees into the United States the travel ban which may or may not be about to go into operation the general kind of antagonistic attitude towards migration that's now sort of emerged in the United States that has led some of some very old green card holders to recently file for citizenship after all of these years.

How would you think of the consequences of that for the United States. Why should the United States be admitting these people and what are the consequences of not admitting them.

DAVID MILIBAND: Well first of all thank you very much for inviting me. I'm looking forward to that conversation. One of the first things I was always taught in first is always to attack the question. So I'm not going to answer that question in quite the direct way because.

The U.S. is only a part player in this wider question I think you can only understand the role the United States if you understand the nature of the challenge that we're facing. For me we are not living through a migration crisis. I think that's a misnomer but we are living through a refugee crisis. And it's important to understand the distinction between them. More or less two hundred two hundred twenty million people are crossing borders in search of a better life to improve their economic prospects. Twenty-five million people are being forced across borders, to save their lives.

And I think there is a category difference between someone who is a baker in Damascus. Whose bakery is bombed by Asaad who then goes to Jordan. A girl who is in northeast Nigeria who's doing her studies and gets chased out of her country by Boko Haram. A Rohingya Muslim in Myanmar whose villages burned and crosses into Bangladesh. There is a category difference between those people. For whom it's not safe to go home and people who are choosing to come to another country in search of or to take up an alternative lifestyle.

I mean I'm one of those people on a British citizen who's living and working in the United States and the importance of understanding the integrity and defending the integrity and the definition of a refugee is that for hundreds of years that you referred to these people didn't count the victims of war and persecution had no rights at all.

But since 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights since 1951 the UN Convention refugees those people are counted. They do have rights. And states have responsibilities towards them and it is the retreat of the states, not just Western states, in fulfilling those responsibilities and honoring those rights that constitutes the crisis that we're facing today. And that's the context in which to understand the decisions of the Trump Administration both in respect of international overseas aid. Whereas proposing a 30 percent cut in not just overseas aid but in the amount the number of diplomats it supports and having in the reduction in having the number of refugees were allowed to come here. And so the question of the entry into the US is a subset of a wider set of questions. Obviously I would argue that it's damaging for the U.S. and damaging globally for the world's largest refugee resettlement country the US to have the number of refugees who are allowed to come I think it's damaging morally but it is also damaging strategically and damaging in substantive terms for the people who are affected. It also threatens a domino effect because Uganda has welcomed a million refugees in the last year from South Sudan. Pakistan has two and a half million refugees from Afghanistan Iran actually has 900,000 refugees from Afghanistan as well and so there's a danger of a domino effect.

But there's also the fact that refugees far from being a burden to the U.S. have actually been one of the most successful imports into the U.S. from

Albert Einstein who founded the International Rescue Committee. Andy Grove who's invented the Intel microchip that is in every computer that you use. He was resettled by the IOC to New York from Hungary in 1956. We bought him his first hearing aid had scarlet fever as a child and couldn't hear properly and we bought him his hearing aid that allowed him to pursue an education to Madeline Albright and Sergey Brin. These are people who have brought tremendous benefit to this country so my reflections, sorry for the long winded answer, my reflection is that this is both a mistake that's being made but it's also a tragedy that a country that has benefited so much from being a place of haven and a place of safety should be turning its back on those people and it's both a commentary on the state of political discourse in the country that and the substantive harm to the people who are being affected that policy should have gone so badly wrong.

**JAMES ROBINSON:** But is that do you think that distinction is important though. I mean from the point of view of American policymakers you make this very clear distinction between people like you or me you know who came here to the Philippines to follow a career path or whatever other people who were forced from their homes at the end of the day we were we both had the feeling that I've just won that distinction is kind of important for policy.

**DAVID MILIBAND:** I think it's very simple because and I don't just mean it's legally important but obviously there's no legal requirement on any country to have an immigration policy that allows people to come in. I mean Japan famously has refused to have immigrants come into the country. One can agree with that or disagree with that but that's a choice they have. But by being a signatory to the UN Convention on Refugees a state says that it will honor the commitment not to send someone back to a place that's dangerous. I don't think there's just a legal distinction, I also think that if you want to hold popular support both for immigrants for refugees and for immigrants you have to maintain that distinction.

And my argument would be that the way in which refugees and immigrants have been demonized in parts of the U.S. debate is because of a confusion between the two. And it's not that one is good and the other is bad is that they're different. And so the fact that in the same sentence President Trump can say Syrian refugees are a Trojan horse and are a threat to your family. And that's undocumented quote unquote migrants are an economic threat to you. That that confusion is I think one of the sources of the leverage that he's got on the issue. I see. So I think there's a political reason as well as a moral and legal reason to sustain the difference. I mean if you think about it if you sign up for open borders you're never going to win popular support on that basis.



People want to have markets manage they don't want to have them left free. If you say we're going to manage our migration system and as part of that we're going to have the following set of policies towards refugees I think you've got a chance of winning the argument.

**JAMES ROBINSON:** But what are the consequences apart from that. So you're what you're identifying. You know negative consequences for the United States in the sense that historically the US has benefited immensely from this ability to kind of absorb people from all over the world be able to use their talents and skills and those people they might be people like you or me or they might be people who have come as refugees from crisis situations I didn't want to come you know to get a job. They came because they were pushed and that they all come and they get absorbed. But other consequences more broadly for the US's ability to kind of solve global problems or exert its influence globally by this attitude.

**DAVID MILIBAND:** I mean if the US was retreating from its commitments to refugees but engaging globally on climate change and on a host of other issues then you could say well there's limited impact. Obviously there's a wider syndrome. Here and all western countries are having a debate about whether or not they can sustain engagement with the wider world and meet their commitments to their own populations. At the same time now I think that is possible that ignited political argument you can win but it's not an easy one to win. I don't deny that. But I would also argue though is that as the U.S. withdraws from its commitments it does set in train this domino effect. So it's easier to imagine that. I mean it's not just Western countries that are having this debate. Kenya is having this debate. Pakistan is having the debate Uganda remarkably is not having the debate despite the fact that a million refugees have come it seems to me I was in Uganda in June meeting people both at the border where million refugees have come from South Sudan and in Kampala whether refugees from the US but also Congo and elsewhere.

A remarkable sense that these people are our brothers and sisters and we have to continue to welcome them. But I think that when the U.S. resolves on its commitments then that does invite a domino effect. Now it's interesting if you follow the debates in the European Parliament at the moment last week they passed a piece of legislation in respect of refugee resettlement and to Europe. One of the biggest arguments for a higher number of refugees to bail out Europe was precisely that the U.S. was going backwards so Europe had to step forward and actually one, I mean that there is a slight paradox that some notwithstanding the Austrian election. There's quite a lot of evidence that the use of the U.S. administration have been quite a galvanizing force for alternative politics in Europe. I suppose more broadly you describe as more progressive positions.

But I ..I ...my reflection is that this refugee issue in a way is a harbinger for the fate of globalization more generally when the world resolves on its commitments to refugees it's a stepping stone to resolving on a wider set of commitments and if we can hold the line at the baker from Damascus who's been bombed out of the house the girl who's from who's been driven from their school by Boko Haram if you can draw the line at those cases then we're going to end up losing a wider set of arguments to whether about climate or a range of other issues

**JAMES ROBINSON:** That reminds me of the famous argument is that I don't remember the person who made this about Germany in the 1930s when they came for the communists I didn't do anything because I wasn't a Communist or when they came for the Unionists I didn't do anything because I didn't I wasn't a member of the Union.

And when they came for me there was no one left to help me remember who said that. It's a famous saying about the Holocaust. So many issues are interlinked like that. So then there's a there's a there's a you know once you start down a slippery slope you get many. That's a good reason for creating solidarity around this issue. That's what you'll say.

**DAVID MILIBAND:** You know I think I'm also saying that globalization has become so unequal so unstable and so secure that it's become a whipping boy for its own failings and there's undoubtedly a political market in saying that not that globalization needs to be made fairer more secure and more sustainable there is undoubtedly a market for saying we need to go back on globalization and it's become insecure.

**JAMES ROBINSON:** And it's become insecure why? Because of the impact from the quality or...?

**DAVID MILIBAND:** I think partly because of that but it's also that the institutions of global government are not too strong as many of those who are so-called populists would argue because they're too weak. I mean the refugee case is not a case where the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is too strong and too interventionist and wisdom is too slow and too reactive in what he's doing. And I think that's where we're stuck in this halfway house. I mean this is not really my current job. This is really my previous life. But we're stuck in this position at the moment where if you think about it historically the world has been governed either by a monarch an activist global power or by the balance of power or by sharing of sovereignty. Those are only I mean logically if you think about it there's three ways in which the world can be governed.

This isn't an age of empires. It's not an age of the balance of power. It's not like the Cold War and the sharing of sovereignty which some of us thought was going to make quite a lot of strides forward in the last 15 years has not

I mean the European Union has not collapsed but the... the mimicking of it that we anticipated might happen in other parts of the world has at best nascent. And so I think that when people talk about an ungoverned space they're often thinking of a part of Afghanistan or parts of Somalia the ungoverned space is actually the global commons maybe and under government would be a better word than ungoverned and the refugee issue is an example of that.

It's actually a soluble political problem because almost by definition a refugee has moved from somewhere dangerous to somewhere peaceful it is much harder to figure out how do you protect people's lives in Aleppo or in Italy. At the moment the key that it is to figure out how do you educate them. Once they've made it to Lebanon or to Jordan I mean it's a pretty conventional public policy problem to educate someone who's fled into a neighboring country that is itself peaceful.

Difficult problem it is not only what we should talk a bit about that.

**JAMES ROBINSON:** It's it's that sense that that was more your previous life so. So one of the things that you've been doing in the see I guess is to try to promote knowledge based research about how to deal with these refugee problems and the kind of life crises know how to help people move on. How do you help people deal with these problems. And so could you say a little bit about what you've learned about you know someone flees from Syria. They ended up in Lebanon. What ... what's the priority what what do we know about what you can do to help them. Well so we're for those we don't know.

**DAVID MILIBAND:** The Rescue Committee is as much an aid organization we work in 196 field sites around the world 30 or so countries with multi mandated so we do health water and sanitation education employment protection of women and girls women kids and we work in 26 U.S. cities resettling refugees here. So that's what the organization does.

The two facts that I think most important in understanding the future of humanitarian action. Are one that the average duration of a... of displacement for a refugee is 10 years and that once you've been displaced for five years the average duration is 21 years. So this is a long term problem not a short term. I don't read the tenure of figure I find very hard to believe as an average because actually less than one percent of the world's refugees went home last year. So if you actually do the math it doesn't it doesn't compute properly. But so the first point is long term displacement and the second point is that the assumption is that a refugee is someone who's being housed in a refugee camp until they go home. But actually 60 percent of the world's refugees are in urban areas not in camps so. Fact number two is that this is an urban experience in which people are part of the market economy not separated from the market economy and



in a camp you're provided with shelter and you are provided with food in a urban environment. Obviously those things are not provided for you.

So when you say what do I learn? I've learned things about how you develop long term solutions for people who are in part of our society not separate from our society and what you learn. Well the obvious thing that people need if there is money I mean it's not pretty complicated if you're in a market economy and you haven't got any money than your stocks are the most effective humanitarian intervention is to give people cash not literally dollar bills necessarily, but to give them financial support. Because it's empowering for them. It contradicts the local economy and it's a powerful force for them.

A second thing that really matters is whether or not they're allowed to work in those countries like Uganda whether or not to work. There's this extraordinary study in Kampala in 2014 not unfortunate done by the IOC but by someone else that Oxford Refugee Studies Center that 97 percent make enormous percentage of the refugees in Kampala had no need of humanitarian aid because they were able to support themselves. So work is and in most countries the refugees are not allowed to work. Which of course drives them. They do work in the underground economy and that creates its own. Syndromes and difficulties.

The third thing that I've learned is so appalling that it makes you want to bang your head against the wall more or less half the half of refugees are kids yet less than 2 percent of global humanitarian funding is on education. So you've got this total crisis of support for the generations that are being born. When I went to the what was then the world's largest refugee camp it's called Dadaab in eastern Kenya it's it was home at the time that 340000 Somalis.

I asked this woman what do you think you'll ever go back to Somalia. And she looked at me and she said What do you mean go back to Somalia. I was born here and of the three hundred forty thousand people living in the camp 100000 had been born in the camp but less than 2 percent of the Global Humanitarian budget goes on education was completely crazy. I mean the European Union to be fair has said that it is not going to target the 8 percent of its budget is going to be on education is still 8 percent which is only about the beginnings of a... of a dent in this. And that's all the more dangerous because actually the research evidence is that. If you give people proper nurturing care you can actually reverse the trauma that they've suffered.

So the third thing I've learned is that the fourth thing I've learned finally is to keep the conversation going is the resilience of these people is absolutely extraordinary. I mean the determination to make sure that the next generation will get an opportunity. That's what drove people in to risk

their lives to get to Europe. And I think that's in countries where refugees are given the chance to contribute they make an entrepreneurial contribution were quite extraordinary.

**JAMES ROBINSON:** So the remark about children suggests you know the burden of this falls very unequally and different people in society are on children and women or like old people or what. What are other things to learn about that?

**DAVID MILIBAND:** The first thing is that I should have said this the top 10 refugee hosting countries account for 2.5 percent of global income. So the quote unquote burden of refugee hosting is faced by countries that are poor not by countries that are rich. And so when people talk if you go to if you go to the Middle East you talk about the European refugee crisis they'll really give you a slap because they'll say look the fact that the issue became a big story in the media when it landed in Europe doesn't mean it wasn't a massive story in the Middle East before that. You know five and a half million refugees from Syria became a media story when a million of them arrived in Europe. And so the fact that it's lower middle income countries who are bearing the greatest share of the burden is I think the biggest part of this story. I mean we can go into it if you like but in a way the Syrian refugee who's got an education in Syria and becomes a refugee in Jordan is the middle class end of the spectrum. If you think about the countries that are in the main spilling out refugees Somalia Afghanistan Congo South Sudan Myanmar. Those are low down the global income spectrum without the kind of primary education systems or others that you might expect.

**JAMES ROBINSON:** And so when we started talking you are you're missing a lot of the responsibilities of the U.S. as a consequence of having ratified these treaties. But if the if if these people are in Lebanon do we have any responsibilities for them to have any responsibilities for the Lebanese government or is it only you know is that

**DAVID MILIBAND:** I think it's a good question to ask. But I would argue that we should we do have a responsibility for a couple of reasons. One if you if you see someone else in need and are able to help them but don't then shame on you. I mean there's a moral argument which I don't think we should be afraid to mention even in an institution of rationality and logic like this we can solve this too. We can sell all of your philosophers. But are they not logical and rational?

**JAMES ROBINSON:** They are but but very ethical.

**DAVID MILIBAND:** There are there are reasons of ethics why we should care. I mean there's an argument about this you can say Look humanitarian should only play the ethical card. Because if you play the strategic card it's

dangerous. I'm not inhibited in playing the strategic card the strategic concept. If Lebanon collapses under the weight of the revenues it will affect allies of the U.S. and effectively ultimately if the U.S. itself. Secondly the second strategic aspect of this is that if the U.S. is perceived in this case to be turning its back on Muslim refugees that has its own narrative and dynamic associated with it that is dangerous. Thirdly humanitarian aid cannot make up for foreign policy mistakes. But when foreign policy mistakes are made. Iraq being an obvious example. Then. There is some responsibility to use your word to make good on the failure.

But third but finally - fourthly and finally - I think there is this argument and I haven't completely worked it through but when the convention on refugees was written it brought together all the countries of the world after the UN mentioned that was driven from the west. But nonetheless there were capitalist countries and communist countries there were democratic countries and autocratic countries but written in were individual rights freedoms of religion thought conscience etc. And those are individual rights that are not upheld in dictatorships but almost by definition they do not respect those rights. And Western countries have I think a responsibility to uphold those rights it's not just legal but there's also the essence of what they are doing. If the persecuted Rohingya in Myanmar or the dissidents in Russia or in Cuba cannot look to a Western pluralist democracy is a place that will offer them refuge. Then we have abandoned our own moral high ground in a very dangerous way. And so I think there are strategic reasons as well as moral reasons for thinking it's important that we live by our commitments.

JAMES ROBINSON: So you mentioned Myanmar.

That's a that's a very interesting case in terms of thinking about the politics of refugees and also about the interface between the politics of refugees and the international institutions like the United Nations which could you reflect a little on what what's gone wrong in Myanmar?

DAVID MILIBAND: I'm not the expert on the country is also important to have a degree of humility that may be someone who's from Myanmar who knows it well.

I was there last November. I mean obviously most problems go back to the office I used to hold which was the of course. Britain has its own fair share of history in respect of what we used to call Burma and is now called Myanmar. But it's obviously historically been a very divided country. And for the last 40 years it's been a military dictatorship. And so when you say what's gone wrong on one level it's obvious what's gone wrong there's been a failure to defend the rights of people who look to the States to defend it from defend them from violence. And in fact they've been the object of violence with the connivance of the state. And when you look

deeper you realize that large parts of the state and large parts of the Myanmar population denied that these Rohingya were citizens. It's a very core question and tragically they were denied rights from the Bangladesh side as well who have historically not been willing to let them. Let them in. But essentially there's been a breakdown in the contract between residents if not citizens of the country. I see a breakdown in the country between citizens of that country and their government and the international community is stood on the side and not been able to effect it.

Now the deeper question I think is whether or not it's feasible to envision a different kind of future for Myanmar and because the future is beckoning at the moment is tragically one in which these this whole community is driven out of the country half the population be half the Muslim minority population have been driven out of. I mean how many people would be very questioning whether the 500,000 who left will ever be allowed back. And so the question then becomes who's going to defend the right of the 500,000 who remain not to be driven out themselves. And that seems to me to be the immediate and pressing question beyond the humanitarian aid that we're trying to do in Bangladesh. And frankly we've got humanitarian aid workers in Rakhine state who are not going to do their jobs. But they're not being given permission to go to the parts of the state where the Muslim minority we would live health care for about 120,000 people in that state. And we're not being allowed to do our work by the government.

JAMES ROBINSON: OK so I think we're going to open it up to the floor.

We have some traveling microphones. Who wants to break the ice? Well. Yeah

I think it's better that they're broken here so we can hear. But it's coming.

AUDIENCE: All right so one thing you mentioned was that the crisis today mainly has to do with states not protecting refugees right. So my question is like for example if you have a refugee who's fleeing from Syria to Lebanon which of those states basically has the duty to uphold the rights of those refugees. Is it both. Is it neither. Do they have different duties to those refugees?

DAVID MILIBAND: Actually Lebanon does. I mean it's complicated because not all states to which refugees flee are parties to the UN convention. So if you're not a signatory and that Syria is not a signatory to the UN Convention on Refugees. But if you're not a signatory to the convention then technically you are not bound by it. So for example the refugees who've gone into Bangladesh. Bangladesh is not a signatory and Bangladesh doesn't want to give them the status of quote unquote refugees even those allowing them to be there. Some If you think about

people often say to me Well what about the Gulf countries. Shouldn't they be taking more Syrians which is a good point. They're not signatories to the Refugee Convention so if you Google how many refugees in Saudi Arabia it will say zero. If you Google how many Syrians in Saudi Arabia will say 120,000 because they've been admitted as migrants not as refugees and so they haven't been given protection under the convention. But essentially in answer your question it is the state. That has a responsibility if they're not a signatory then the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees has a responsibility towards them.

JAMES ROBINSON: Do we have the microphone for you?

DAVID MILIBAND: I'm very keen to preserve your words for history's for history and posterity Yes.

AUDIENCE: So you were discussing at the beginning the distinction between migrants and refugees and the importance thereof. Is there a space you think or how can this framework accommodate there is kind of quote unquote economic refugees? And a lot of migration that are now so for example someone in a country that does not have an economic framework that can provide them with the means to a decent life. Are they then refugee. Without. With India conversion. Or would that still be a migrant in this framework.

DAVID MILIBAND: Well look there is a great question. And what I've learned in four years in the United States is that when people say that's a great question they basically don't know the answer. So they.

[LAUGHTER]

DAVID MILIBAND: Were more or less describes the situation today. Just to nitpick just to nitpick a little bit just to just. So to reframe your question in a way that does speak to a genuine gray area because you referred to an economic refugee. There's not really any such thing as an economic refugee because the thing to keep in your head is a refugee is someone who cannot safely return home. But just to slightly we what happens if you're fleeing famine. In a country. And you you're you're driven from your home by famine for the sake of argument. Climate change has affected the crop production you really. There's no state provision and it's for that reason that you've crossed a border. It's hard to say that person. Can be can go back. It's also hard to say that it was a voluntary move. And so there are some gray areas and what's happened over the last 70 years 65 years is that a series of court judgments and then the implementation of the UN Convention and different international law has given a series of case histories as to what counts as a refugee and what doesn't come as a refugee. I think it's important to keep the integrity of the idea that a refugee is someone who can't safely return home.



That's one reason I slightly I'm not just slightly I think this issue of the quote unquote climate refugee needs to be thought of rather carefully. There are many people. There's no question that climate change is both happening and driving people to move is not necessarily driving people to leave the country that they're in. And so I think that obviously. I understand that climate change is real and it's a contributor to displacement. But in thinking through the rights and responsibilities of states I just think we've got to be careful in figuring out what is a global problem that needs a global solution and what is a legal right that can be enforced against the state or against an international institution.

And so I think there are gray areas I mean the famine case is very very difficult gray area. There's also to be honest there's a quite difficult gray area if you think about the person who flees to Jordan is a refugee who then flees to Europe. Because you can't really say well they weren't safe in. So I'm not trying to argue against myself I'm just trying to show that there's a complexity and texture to the issue. Now. Home for them was Syria. And they can't return home to Syria. But what if they were actually not born in Syria as if they were born in you in Jordan. Well they're. A refugee but that definition of whether or not it's safe for them to return home when does it become a home. That you've been living in the country present British time. Now there is a system of adjudication to try and work that through. That's why I don't want to deny that there own gray areas in difficult questions. But I think the fundamental point that there's a difference between someone who is bombed in their bakery in Damascus someone who chooses to move from London to New York.

Those are the polar cases and I think it's important to hold on to the integrity of that definition of refugee. Otherwise we're in a very difficult slide because what we'll find is not that there are more rights for migrants we'll find there are fewer rights refugees.

AUDIENCE: How can you apply that framework that you've sort of talking about some of the issues that the U.S. is facing with people who are fleeing from Central America and Mexico and an orange triangle and looking at that where it's maybe unsafe for them to go home because they face gang violence or issues of economic poverty that have caused that situation where it's unsafe to return home but you don't want to call them economic refugees because the U.S. is unwilling to call them refugees. They don't get to enter into that system that allows them to ask for safety in the U.S. because they're fleeing from something they fear.

DAVID MILIBAND: Well it's also a great question. The ....My view is that if you're fleeing gang violence you are a refugee. And funny enough we've got. Funnily enough ironically we've got a assessment team in El Salvador at the moment precisely for this reason when the flow of unaccompanied

minors in 2015 came through we would clear those were refugees those kids who were fleeing because it wasn't safe for them to go. And I think you're absolutely right. Tereza said that gang violence which I'm not sure has economic roots but it has a range of what a traditional civil war. It's obviously different from the conditions in which refugee status was originally created and conceived. But I think it's undeniable those people are suffering from the same kind of fear of their lives that drives people from Syria or elsewhere. And that's why I would argue that they should be given refugee status and actually the those who do make it through the U.S. court system ...there's massive backlog.... But those who do make it through actually do get the adjudications are often in their favor. Right they might be.

**AUDIENCE:** So you did mention that and 60 percent of the refugees are living in urban environments and you did mention that you do have generations of refugees coming through now and I know that's considered a grey area but has there been any policy that's been written for where does that person see home if they were never born in the place that they're seeking refugee status?

**DAVID MILIBAND:** And what will them obviously the most controversial aspect of this is something which we probably don't want to get into because it will take up the rest of the day.

But obviously the most famous example would be Palestinian refugees who have who have not given up the desire to quote unquote return home. That's the most contested example of that. And that applies across generations not just to those from 1947. I think that the and that is interesting in the case of I mean the most sort of the tightest and the quote unquote easiest case with the refugees from the Balkans in the eve of the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. About half of whom did return actually.

But if your question is when do they get to call a new country home?The answer is when that new country grants and citizenship and the tragedy for many of the Palestinian refugees is that even if they're not in even if they're in other Arab countries I think given the which is all part of a fiction whether or not of what their status is. Interestingly a lot of the ...the other gray areas about the stateless position of the children who are born for example to Somali parents in um Kenya because they're not given Kenyan citizenship either.

If you look at what's happening in Turkey at the moment and President Erdogan is saying that he's interested in giving citizenship to some of the Syrians, he rather wants them to vote in Turkish elections. So there's quite a lot of I mean there's a lot of politics in it. Obviously in the U.S. if you're a refugee resettled here after a year you can get a green card and after five

years you can become a citizen.

And one thing I haven't said and it's maybe worth saying is that the numbers who are resettled into Western countries are relatively small but the symbolic value is quite high. So if you're the king of Jordan who's telling his own population that we've got to put up with 650,000 registered refugees. And you can say well look and the U.S. is taking we would argue 110,000. That's a symbolic stand with countries that are on the receiving end. If your own population is able the richest countries in the world. It's extraordinary that in Uganda they don't say this in Uganda the average income I was told when I was there in June has 952 pounds to an average of... two dollars per person per year. You're inviting a pushback really from people who can say well hang on. The US has average income of \$57,000. Why are they not taking more refugees? But the simple fact is that in the US it's it's a five-year journey.

**JAMES ROBINSON:** Isn't that something you do with the different nature of identities in Africa compared to other parts of the world. I mean in Africa you have many ethnic groups that straddle borders that speak the same language on different sides of the border and I don't I mean I don't do any research on this but it seems like it might be that there's just a different notion of what Ugandan may mean. You know as opposed to what English means.

**DAVID MILIBAND:** I mean my, my anecdotal report would be that actually a much bigger driver is less an ethnic identity than Uganda saying hang on we were refugees 30 years ago 40 years ago from Idi Amin and neighboring countries looked after us. And so it's right that we look after them when people come into our country. So it was less of an anecdotal less an ethnic than a historical expert on the question of historical experience.

**JAMES ROBINSON:** You know it's an interesting thing to investigate I think trying to run through a lot of questions.

**AUDIENCE:** Don't know if you go back to the comment you made about the role of Gulf countries because just given regional proximity and relative and their higher status. I'm curious what your thoughts on the role they play they play or should play even regardless of whether or not they've signed the U.N. treaty.

**DAVID MILIBAND:** Look they are developed economies. They shouldn't be both international humanitarian aid donors through the multilateral system. And they should be welcoming refugees into their own countries. I feel that strongly now they would say in return they are big donors that often aid donors through their own organizations rather than through the multilateral system. But that would be my answer.

AUDIENCE: So you mentioned that in Europe there's been sort of a reaction to the reaction in some sense a favorable reaction but in many European countries there is some decentralized nationalist sentiment for example in the UK. It was very potent in the Brexit campaign in Austria yesterday with the election. If you particularly with your background had the opportunity to sit in front of the European Council and give them as a collective body a piece of advice given that that in some cases their own careers which may be effected by these issues. Is there a piece of advice from an imperative that you would urge on them if you have the opportunity?

DAVID MILIBAND: Well the best advice I can give them isn't very helpful which is that it's better to tackle a problem before it gets big. And it's I don't just say to duck the question. But in 2013 there was a small number of refugees fleeing the Middle East going to Europe and in 2014 still relatively small though about two and a half thousand died on the way. But the European Council missed a massive opportunity then to try and put in place the systems for distributing refugees around Europe processing the cases and then paid the price in 2015 when you had this massive pent up demand.

Given where Europe is today and the locus of refugee flows shifted from the Middle East now to North Africa. I think it's obviously very, very difficult but some things immediately become necessary. Europe does need a system for tracking everyone who comes in. Everyone who goes out is called the entry exit system and those by the way who refused entry. And that has now been established because if your own population think you're not able to control your borders then you're in trouble.

The second thing is I do think if you don't offer people a legal route to hope they will seek an illegal route. And so the refugees a proper refugee resettlement route is important. And we've calculated that if the U.N. says there are 1.2 million refugees who are the most vulnerable who need resettlement. And Europe's share we've calculated about 540,000 over five years. So I think a refugee resettlement route that was the European parliament vote, that I was referring to.

Third, Europe is going to get much better processing asylum plans. There's still 40,000 people in Greece waiting for their asylum claims to get processed. It's a nightmare. They've been some of them been there now for 18 months or two years. And you....both it's a nightmare for them but it's also a nightmare for the policymakers. The fourth thing - don't worry there are sort of 14 points on this list...

[LAUGHTER]....

but if they are the fourth thing is that a problem shared can be a problem to solve. And Europe has to insist that if it's going to remain the case that people have to claim asylum in the country to which they first landed which is more or less Greece and Italy those countries don't just need help in processing the cases but successful cases need to be distributed around Europe. It's called a relocation. Scheme. And if countries are willing to accept relocation refugees and they have to pay for them.

To create some kind of incentive system so I don't pretend at all that is an easy answer. The biggest problem obviously is that you've got massive flow of people through North Africa. Libya is in an impossible state and you've got unspeakable conditions for people who've made the journey. We've got team we got a team of about 300 in Libya and we got people down the route through Niger and down as far south as Sierra Leone in West Africa. And there's no question that the old migration routes that used to take people to Libya for work and then back down from North Africa and into Central Africa. The world has not got out about the state of. The danger to people in Libya and I think we're doing a humanitarian duty actually but explain to people what further south what's going on there.

JAMES ROBINSON: I think we have time for one more question. Sir?

[inaudible]

DAVID MILIBAND: I think that in the U.S. my perspective as someone who's living and working here is that frankly it's been less a race issue than a religious issue. In respect of refugees I mean the demonization of Muslim refugees and the equation of the word refugee with the word terrorist is what struck me about the debate here over the last few years.

I mean President Trump talks about Trojan horse that's coming from Syria and that's speaking very directly to. And he says you know these people are our quote unquote threat to you and your family. And I think that is let it feels like it's playing off a deep fear of what Muslim refugees might represent and mine portend. In defiance of this extraordinary example of this is a country where we are thousand Muslims in the American armed forces and you know the story well about contributions of different races and religions play to this country. You might be able to advise me about the extent to which the categorization, demonization of undocumented immigrants has a racial as distinct from a religious component.

But maybe to end on a note that will start from just going out and sort of drowning their sorrows. People often say to me what's it like to lead a humanitarian aid agency a refugee resettlement agency at a time of backlash against them and I always say look the most important thing to understand about working in this country is that for every person who's afraid of a refugee either someone else who wants to say hang on my



family's got refugees in my neighbors or refugee my work as a refugee.

It's part of the identity of this country to stand up for people who are fleeing from prosecution and we've found you know there was a terrible case of the FBI in such an attempt to blow up an apartment block in Kansas that was a refugee apartment. And there have been Facebook posts and calls to our offices that have been full of vengefulness and hatred. But actually for every one of those there's another group of people who want to stand up and say hey we want to welcome these people or communities and it's not as simple as big city, small city it's not simple as coastal vs.... In Midland Texas we've got an office where refugees are being welcomed in Boise Idaho, refugees are being welcomed as well as in New York and L.A. and we don't actually do refugee resettlement in Chicago it's done by the Catholic resettlement agency. So I think that it's important for those of you who have voices as citizens or as residents there are other people like you it doesn't need to be feel like you're just on the receiving end of the backlash.

JAMES ROBINSON: OK thank you. So to close the events.

[APPLAUSE]

DANIEL DIERMEIER: Thank you. I'm Daniel Diermeier, I'm the Provost of the University of Chicago.

First of all, I want to thank you David very much for joining us here today. It was a privilege to have you to hear the thoughts of all this foreign policy topic today. (inaudible)

It was in 2015, right after the influx of refugees happened in Europe when we announced the creation of The Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflict.

And many people at that event remarked that the refugee crisis was arguably the most important foreign policy challenge of our time.

Sadly, we're not in a position today to say that that this situation is any less serious and ending this fire. If it's broken the work of the International Rescue Committee globally is inspiring and much needed. We appreciate your insights and the energy that you brought to the University today and the critical work that you are leading today around the world.

I'm hopeful that through this talk our University of Chicago students will be motivated to find solutions to the significant challenges that we've been discussing. I'd also like to extend and a special thanks to David Axelrod and the Institute of Politics and James Robinson and The Pearson Institute for Study and Resolution of Global Conflicts for coordinating today's event.

These two institutes are emblematic of what we value at the University of Chicago. Each in their own way seeks to challenge conventional wisdom, facilitate debate and dialogue, and inspire the next generation of leaders to make a difference. Thank you all for joining us today and thank you again David Miliband for important work and for spending the afternoon with us.

[APPLAUSE]

End of Program.