The forthcoming workshop willl explore the nature of security problems in RPAs, by focusing on the wider political, socioeconomic and organizational context in which these problems occur. This paper explains why we consider this focus to be an important task, and outlines a preliminary framework for thinking about the political context of security problems. It also sets out a typology of security threats and summarizes different kinds of explanations (and proposed solutions) for these threats. The paper is not a comprehensive survey of the research literature, but seeks to raise questions and provoke discussion, point out gaps in the research, and provide a framework for the case studies.[4] It is thus a working document and we welcome comments and insights. The Briefing Paper will be accompanied by a separate annotated Bibliography.

1. Why this workshop? A window of opportunity

The need for a deeper understanding of why security problems arise in RPAs is important both for policy and political reasons. Since the 1980s, a number of workshops and conferences have addressed the problem of protection and security for refugees,[5] but after the Great Lakes refugee crisis of 1994-96, these problems became heightened priorities both for host states and for the international relief community. The UN and especially UNHCR, have sought to address security problems directly. Security in refugee populated areas was a major theme in the UN Secretary-General's May 1998 report on the causes of conflict and promotion of peace and sustainable development in Africa. It was also a predominant topic of discussion at the June 1998 ministerial meeting on refugee issues in the Great Lakes region, convened by UNHCR and the OAU. The High Commissioner[6] and the Director of the Division of Protection[7] have made emphatic statements to various UN bodies, including the Security Council, and to host states, about the need for 'mechanisms' to improve the physical protection and security of refugees and camp populations. In July 1998, the High Commissioner proposed a "ladder of options", which set out a variety of options depending on the security problems and needs of the refugee hosting area.[8]

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[4]   Many points in this paper came from discussion with colleagues, especially those on the Planning Committee for this Workshop: Jeff Crisp, Susan Forbes Martin and Sharon Russell.

[5]   See Bibliography for a selection of these conferences.

[6]   See for example the following statements by the High Commissioner, Mrs Sadako Ogata: Statement at the Open Debate on the Secretary-General's Report on the Situation in Africa (New York, 24 April 1998); "Humanitarian Action in Conflict Situations" (Panel discussion organized by Institute of Policy Studies, Singapore Red Cross Society and Society of International Law, Raffles Hotel, Singapore, 9 January 1998); Statement to the Foreign Policy Society, Copenhagen, 20 October 1997; Opening Statement to the 48th Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, 13 October 1997.

[7]   McNamara, Dennis. 1998. "The Future of Protection and the Responsibility of the State. Statement to the 48th Session of the UNHCR Executive Committee." *International Journal of Refugee Law* Vol. 10 No.1/2 pp. 230-235.

[8]   In a statement to the Security Council on 10 November 1998, the High Commissioner reviewed the various options that reflect the phasing of measures that can be undertaken under her humanitarian mandate. "Soft" options include preventive measures and cooperation with national law-enforcement authorities; "medium" options refer to the deployment of international civilian or police monitors; and the "hard" option refers to military deployment – either a UN Peacekeeping Operation or a multinational force under Chapter VI or VII of the UN Charter. For more discussion of these options, see EC/49/SC/INF.2 14 January 1999. See also the report on Protection for Humanitarian Assistance to Refugees and Others in Conflict Situations (22 Sept 1998), which has recommendations promoting accession to international law instruments, mechanisms to ensure compliance with international law, disseminating and advocating