

NGO Statement: Addressing the Iraqi Humanitarian Challenge
August 2008

Since the beginning of the 2003 war, millions of Iraqis have been displaced inside Iraq and throughout the region. The largest concentrations of refugees are in Jordan and Syria. These refugees were forced to flee targeted persecution because they practiced a disfavored religion, were born into a marginalized minority, or agreed to work in support of the U.S. government. Without the legal right to work, many of these refugees are struggling to survive on limited savings. Their stay in neighboring states remains extremely precarious, and many live in fear of being forcibly returned to Iraq, where they face death threats and further persecution. As their stay in neighboring countries drags on without any immediate solution in sight, the protection concerns facing these people continue to rise.

The United States Government has since made some progress in addressing the crisis. To date around 10,000 refugees have been resettled into the U.S. The Government has also increased the level of humanitarian aid to the region. Still, the U.S. response is incommensurate with the scope of the need. Equally troubling is the fact that there seems to be no clear long-term strategy to address the crisis that is likely to become a protracted one.

We, the undersigned organizations, endorse a bolder approach to helping vulnerable Iraqis, especially ones who are displaced. Current U.S. efforts to help Iraqis are a good start, but they don't go far enough. The U.S. has an opportunity to help resolve a difficult humanitarian problem that threatens the stability of an entire region. Dealing successfully with the Iraqi displacement challenge will demonstrate America's dedication to protecting the most vulnerable and our commitment to peace and security in the region. It is a moment for America to lead by vision and example.

Increased Resettlement

While the U.S. may achieve its goal of resettling 12,000 Iraqi refugees here in the current fiscal year, the needs are much greater. *We ask the U.S. to reconsider resettling 105,500 refugees from Iraq and, if necessary, to reassess this number for the next few years.* As part of that request, we ask for U.S. government support, including financial support, to enable the U.S. to build the international and domestic capacity necessary to quickly resettle this substantially larger number of Iraqi refugees.

Here is how we calculated that resettlement need:

1. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that 88,000 Iraqi refugees need immediate protection through resettlement next year. The U.S. generally resettles 50% of all refugees resettled in the world each year, bringing in the U.S. share for 2009 to.....**44,000**
2. Palestinian refugees living in desperate conditions on the Iraqi – Syrian border need immediate protection through resettlement.....**3,000**

3. The most recently available figures show that the State Department is currently processing 7,000 petitions to bring families averaging three people each to the U.S. to join with Iraqis who have already resettled in the U.S.....**21,000**
4. The Refugee Crisis in Iraq calls for admitting refugees who were persecuted due to their affiliations with the U.S. Government and other U.S. based organizations. Many of these refugees have left or are in the process of leaving the country and face an urgent need of assistance and protection as their resources run out. The U.S. should immediately resettle annually.....**37, 500**

We realize that it is difficult to process resettlement applications in Syria, which hosts the largest number of Iraqi refugees, and in Iraq. Therefore, we urge the Department to consider imaginative solutions to this problem, including those already proposed by Foreign Service Officers, such as processing Iraqis with US affiliations at a U.S. base or an alternative location in the region or even further away. In the past the U.S. has moved large numbers of refugees to Guam or even to the continental U.S. for processing. Increased in-country processing of particularly vulnerable groups, based on needs, might also be necessary.

The U.S. is legitimately concerned about a “brain drain” of educated Iraqis needed to rebuild their country. However, many in this group of people have already left—or are in the process of leaving—the country and they need help now. Helping them and their families find safety and security would put them in the best position to return, when they can return safely, voluntarily and sustainably

Increased Assistance to Host Countries and Vulnerable Iraqis inside Iraq

Even the proposed 9-fold increase in resettlement won’t help more than a fraction of the five million displaced Iraqis. Most displaced will remain in Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and other sanctuary countries, where they are facing increased food and fuel prices. They are also placing burdens on local school and medical facilities, if they can get access. *We recommend that the U.S. commit \$1.35 billion in 2009 to help meet the basic needs of Iraqis in Iraq and sanctuary countries as long as the displaced population stays at the current level. Levels of assistance for following years will have to be reassessed according to a reevaluation of needs.* The U.S. should also urge the Government of Iraq to devote much more significant resources to help Iraqi refugees in neighboring countries.

Ambassador Foley has testified based on his conversations with leaders in the region that the cost of offsetting increased spending on social services for Iraqis in host countries currently comes to**\$900 million**

The current annual cost of providing the humanitarian assistance and protection to displaced and vulnerable Iraqis through the UN, other international organizations as well as non-government organizations in Iraq and in the region is estimated at between \$800 million and \$900 million a year. To show leadership that will encourage other contributions, we are asking the U.S. to pay half of this, or up to**\$450 million**

We realize that our proposal will require more money than currently appropriated. We are prepared to work with the U.S. Administration and Congress to secure the funding necessary to respond to the growing needs of displaced Iraqis and to meet other urgent global humanitarian needs.

Addressing the Needs of Internally Displaced and other Vulnerable Iraqis

2.7 million Iraqis are displaced within their country and need humanitarian assistance, including food aid as well as protection and guarantees of property restitution or compensation. The Iraqi government is responsible for assisting its internally displaced population as well as other vulnerable Iraqis, and all efforts should be made to urge for more action and assist its efforts. Until it shows willingness and ability to do so, it is imperative the US leads the international community's efforts to provide for vulnerable Iraqis in and outside of Iraq. In addition to providing leadership through funding humanitarian assistance and protection mentioned above,

- The US Government must get assurances on the part of the Government of Iraq that it is committed to assisting and respecting the right of its displaced population.
- The US Government should provide financial and technical assistance to the relevant Iraqi institutions and Ministries, particularly the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration, to improve its capacity to track and assist IDPs. Training of provincial officials and strengthening of offices throughout the country is a priority, and would allow the relief activities to be more efficient and reach all vulnerable IDPs.
- All actors recognize that needs are enormous and unmet. The needs of IDPs and other vulnerable Iraqis are extremely difficult to address, as there is generalized lack of information and hard data. The U.S. Government should work with the Government of Iraq, the UN and NGOs to implement country-wide needs assessments.
- Millions of IDPs and other vulnerable Iraqis, depend on the Public Distribution System of Food (PDS). Because of a lack of funding and a lack of capacity, as well as insecurity throughout the country, rations have been continuously reduced since 2003, and authorities have decided to put an end to the program. The US Government should work with the Government of Iraq and the UN to identify the Iraqis who need the assistance provided by the PDS, and professionalize and strengthen the system to make it a safety net for the most vulnerable
- The USG and the Government of Iraq should increase support both for humanitarian relief programs and for sustainable development activities. It is only by addressing the emergency and long-term needs of all Iraqis, including host communities, that Iraq can reach stability.
- The USG should increase financial and technical support to local groups by funding capacity-building projects and encouraging international agencies to work with national organizations. Local organizations are best suited to reach the most vulnerable inside Iraq, as they have the trust of the communities they operate within.

Preparing for Returns

Refugees and IDPs know from their contact with friends and family that it is not safe to go home. Violence is still widespread, and basic services such as access to healthcare, clean water or adequate shelter are unavailable in many parts of the country. As the situation in Iraq evolves, it is essential the US Government, the Government of Iraq and other countries in the region do not encourage returns to Iraq until conditions are met for a voluntary, safe and sustainable return process. A rushed premature return process would have disastrous consequences both for the displaced and for the stability of Iraq.

- The U.S. Government should work with host countries in the region to encourage them to keep providing protection for Iraqi refugees until they can voluntarily return home in safety and dignity. Efforts should be made to develop conditions which permit greater self-reliance activities and education and training programs for the refugees. The U.S. Government should also advocate for the legal right for Iraqis to work within host countries.
- The U.S. and the Government of Iraq should encourage the UN and NGOs to conduct regular assessments missions throughout Iraq to evaluate the conditions for returns in different areas of the country, as security varies greatly from one province to the next. Particular attention needs to be given to access to adequate shelter, essential services, and livelihoods as well as the specific needs of vulnerable or minority groups. The USG and the GoI should support the conclusions that the UN and NGOs reach on whether conditions for returns are met.
- The U.S. should provide financial and technical support for the GoI to track the property rights of IDPs who were either forcibly expelled or who fled because of the violence and develop a system to resolve disputes. Human rights abuses should also be monitored and documented to prepare for post-war justice and reconciliations mechanisms.
- The U.S. Government should provide financial and technical expertise to the Government of Iraq and the UN in the design of a transitional justice framework coherent with the Iraqi judicial system that will be implemented when conditions permit.
- The U.S. Government should encourage the Government of Iraq to support the establishment and implementation of an assistance plan for returnees, once the UN deems that conditions are met for safe and sustainable returns. The U.S. Government should provide financial support to the UN and NGOs providing assistance to returnees.

Arab American and Chaldean Council
Catholic Relief Services
Center for Victims of Torture
Chaldean Federation of America
EPIC: Promoting a Free & Secure Iraq
Episcopal Church
Kurdish Human Rights Watch
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
Human Rights First
Interfaith Refugee and Immigration Ministries/Illinois
International Medical Corps
International Rescue Committee
The List Project to Resettle Iraqi Allies
Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Service
Mandaean Associations Union
Refugees International
Relief International
Save the Children
U.S. Committee for Refugees & Immigrants
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration & Refugee Services
Women's Commission for Refugee Women & Children
World Relief
World Vision