



Release: Relocation of Palestinian Refugees to Sudan is Not a Lasting Solution

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Refugees International Urges U.S. to Resettle Vulnerable Palestinian Refugees from Syria-Iraq Border

Washington DC -- Refugees International (RI) called on the U.S. government today to urgently resettle 3,000 Palestinian refugees from the Syria-Iraqi border in response to announcements that the vulnerable population would be relocated to Sudan.

RI expressed deep concern over the decision taken by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Sudan to relocate this population to pre-fabricated housing in a Khartoum neighborhood, with no path to citizenship. As the three parties prepare to start processing the refugees, Refugees International called for the UN, the U.S., and other resettlement countries to ensure a voluntary, dignified process that allows this vulnerable population to find a permanent, stable home.

"Relocating Palestinian refugees to Sudan does not offer this population a real choice for a permanent, stable home, and simply moves them from one marginalized situation to another," said Kristele Younes, Senior Advocate with Refugees International. "Most of these people are afraid to go to Sudan, especially now that charges were filed against the Sudanese president by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, but they do not feel they have any other options. They are forced to choose between being stranded in the desert or living in a country without citizenship and with the ongoing threat of expulsion and dispossession."

Approximately 34,000 stateless Palestinians have lived in Iraq since 2003. Since the beginning of U.S. military operations in Iraq, many suffered persecution at the hands of the Iraqi government and other armed groups. More than 3,000 fled to the Syrian-Iraqi border, where they live in makeshift tents in the desert with limited access to basic services. Syria refuses to allow them to enter its territory and only a few have been resettled, mostly to Sweden and Chile. Failure to act on the part of the U.S. government and other resettlement countries led UNHCR to sign a tripartite agreement with the PLO and the Government of Sudan that called for the relocation of this population to a neighborhood of Khartoum.

"We must not allow this vulnerable population to be used as pawns in a greater political game," said Younes. "The U.S.

government should acknowledge the vulnerability of this stateless population and resettle them here. It is appalling that Sudan, a country infamous for its violations of international humanitarian law, has stepped in to protect these people when the U.S. would not."

To resettle this vulnerable population expeditiously, Refugees International urged the U.S. State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration to create a special category to process refugee applications. Any process should be held without prejudice to the Palestinians' right to return to their homeland. In FY 2008, the U.S. thus far resettled a total of 35,243 refugees. Only nine were Palestinian from Iraq.

Refugees International is a Washington, DC-based organization that advocates to end refugee crises. Since November 2006, Refugees International has been calling for the resettlement of this vulnerable population. In the last two years, the organization has conducted five missions to the Middle East to identify the problems facing Iraqi refugees and internally displaced people. Read our most recent recommendations at: www.refugeesinternational.org/iraq.