

**STATEMENT OF  
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FOR POPULATION, REFUGEES, AND MIGRATION  
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

**BEFORE THE  
COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE  
JULY 22, 2010**

Chairman Cardin, Co-Chairman Hastings, and distinguished members of the Commission, it is an honor to appear before you today to discuss our commitment to finding solutions for Iraqis who have been displaced by violence and sectarian conflict. I welcome the opportunity to describe for you the ways the Administration has significantly expanded U.S. resettlement opportunities for Iraqi refugees, and how we continue to provide robust humanitarian assistance and protection to displaced Iraqis still in neighboring countries or inside Iraq. We agree with the Commission that there are still significant needs on both fronts, but there also has been significant progress in both our assistance and resettlement efforts over the past two years. As President Obama has stated, the U.S. Government has a moral obligation to sustain assistance to displaced Iraqis, and we take this responsibility very seriously. We also believe our programs of humanitarian assistance contribute to the process of reconciliation that is so critical to the future of Iraq.

The Administration's long-term strategy for Iraq's displaced is to help the Iraqi government promote stability and thus the capacity to reintegrate returning Iraqis; in pursuit of this objective, we will sustain humanitarian assistance for displaced Iraqis who have yet to return to their homes, and maintain refugee resettlement as an option for the most vulnerable who are unable to return. We believe it is important for the long-term stability of Iraq and the region for Iraqis to return home to communities that can welcome and support them. We are working hard, together with the international community and the Government of Iraq, to make that happen. At the same time, we are maintaining significant levels of humanitarian assistance inside and outside of Iraq—almost \$400 million in FY2009—while maintaining very generous levels of U.S. resettlement.

I will first review the current status of displaced Iraqis, both inside Iraq and in neighboring countries and then discuss our efforts related to returns, humanitarian assistance, and resettlement. There are 207,000 Iraqi refugees

currently registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in neighboring countries and an undetermined number of unregistered refugees. UNHCR has sufficient data to allow it to target the neediest refugees through outreach programs and delivering appropriate assistance and protection services.

Seventy-three percent of all registered Iraqi refugees live in Syria, while 15 percent live in Jordan and 12 percent live in Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, and Iran. In general, the governments of Syria and Jordan have been generous hosts to Iraqi refugees. Both governments have opened their crowded public school and health care systems, permitting Iraqi refugees to access free or low-cost primary health care and education for their children. They have allowed Iraqis to remain within their borders and have said they will not force Iraqi refugees back to Iraq. Both countries also allow Iraqis to travel to Iraq on a short-term basis to experience first-hand conditions in their areas of origin and to then return back if they determine conditions are not yet suitable for permanent return. We continue to work with Jordan and Syria on efforts they can take to do more for the Iraqi population within their respective borders. I was in Jordan and Syria in November and was able to meet with officials from each government to discuss how we can strengthen efforts to ensure that Iraqi refugees and their families receive adequate care. These discussions have been productive.

The number of individuals fleeing Iraq has decreased significantly over the past three years. Between 2007 and 2009, there was a 70 percent decrease in new Iraqi registrations with UNHCR. It appears that this trend is continuing in 2010. From January to June 2010, 10,257 Iraqis registered with UNHCR, a 40 percent decrease in new Iraqi refugee registrations from the same period in 2009. Although the number of new Iraqi refugees has been lower, the needs of Iraqis living in neighboring countries continue to increase. UNHCR has found that the percentage of registered Iraqi refugees with serious needs, such as those with medical conditions, survivors of torture, and women-at-risk, has increased since 2007 to approximately 35 percent of the overall registered refugee population. For the majority of Iraqi refugees, personal assets are being depleted and they can no longer afford to pay for their basic needs from their own resources. The vast majority of Iraqi refugees do not have permission to work legally and although many work in the informal economy, their jobs tend to be marginal and wages minimal. As their needs increase and basic survival becomes the major preoccupation for families, the number of Iraqi children enrolled in public schools has diminished and those in school are often unable to keep pace with the national curriculum. Children and parents struggle with disabilities and the aftermath of

trauma, and some parents are forced to make the difficult decision to pull their children out of school to contribute to the family's income. We are working with our partners to support innovative programs to address these needs, including the provision of cash assistance to the most vulnerable refugees, tutoring and remedial education programs and vocational education programs to provide practical skills to Iraqis who had their education interrupted, and intensive mental health care to victims of torture. Our sustained assistance efforts are essential.

The Government of Iraq reports that approximately one and one-half million Iraqis displaced by sectarian violence following the Samarra Mosque bombing of February 2006 remain internally displaced in Iraq. The majority of these individuals are from the governorates of Baghdad, Diyala and Ninewa. New displacements have fallen significantly inside Iraq; in the latter half of 2006, nearly 15,000 families were displaced each month, whereas in the latter half of 2009, estimates are that an average of 35 families were displaced each month. There is no doubt that IDPs, like Iraqis displaced outside of the country, remain vulnerable. Assessments by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) show that over 60 percent of post-Samarra IDPs require assistance with basic necessities, including shelter, food and employment. With State/PRM and USAID/OFDA support, our partners are assisting these individuals by providing food and relief items, livelihood programs, and assistance with accessing public benefits such as education and food assistance.

As security has improved inside Iraq, the international community has developed a deeper understanding of the needs of the displaced. We are particularly concerned about the approximately 500,000 people, the majority of whom are IDPs, currently residing in squatter settlements throughout Iraq, including approximately 260,000 individuals living in more than 116 squatter settlements in Baghdad. The majority of these IDPs are living in squalid conditions with minimal access to water, basic sanitation, medical services, and food. Urging strong leadership from the Iraqi Government, we are collectively working to develop a comprehensive approach to providing assistance to these IDPs, including durable solutions such as the provision of land grants to the most vulnerable IDP squatters.

Providing assistance and ensuring protection is the cornerstone of our programming. We believe that safe, voluntary, and sustainable return will be the durable solution for the majority of refugees and IDPs, and that returns and reintegration are critical to the long-term stability of Iraq and the region. Therefore, we are working closely with the Iraqi government and our international

partners to support conditions for the sustainable return and reintegration of displaced Iraqis.

Let me be clear: while we seek to work with the Iraqi government to create conditions that will support returns that are sustainable and that stabilize communities, we also believe that returns must be voluntary. In fact, UNHCR has determined that, at this time, security conditions in central Iraq are not sufficiently stable to actively promote facilitated returns. That being said, there have been a significant number of voluntary returns already. From 2008 through May 2010, there were nearly 500,000 voluntary returns of Iraqi IDPs and refugees. IDP returns continue to outpace refugee returns, with IDPs comprising approximately 85 percent of all returns. We are supporting these returns through activities such as rehabilitating homes and water and sanitation systems in communities of return, providing short-term employment for returnees through cash-for-work programs, and providing business start-up training and materials to help returnees achieve long-term employment.

One initiative to facilitate returns deserves special mention. In Diyala province, which experienced some of the most severe violence in 2006 and 2007 and that has one of the highest levels of both displacement and returns in the country, we are working closely with the Iraqi Government and the United Nations to target assistance for returnee communities. Through this initiative, the Iraqi government has pledged \$32 million in compensation for those whose houses were damaged and has pledged to provide six-month contract jobs for returnees and local residents. The international humanitarian community is partnering with the Iraqi Government to provide targeted assistance for returnees in this province and is exploring options for expanding this type of initiative to other provinces. As part of this initiative, UNHCR has built more than 3,100 one or two-room shelters, IOM has provided hundreds of small business grants, and the World Food Program has conducted an income generation project that has employed more than 1,500 people.

Last November, I traveled to Iraq with Samantha Power, the National Security Council Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights, who is also the White House Coordinator for Iraqi refugee issues. We had the opportunity to visit a village in Diyala where we are working in coordination with the Iraqi government and the UN to support voluntary returns and reintegration. Most of the village was destroyed in 2006 and 2007 and village members had just started to return. During my visit, I had the opportunity to see homes that were reconstructed with funding from the U.S. Government and learn about the vast

needs of these returnees. Kelly Clements, a PRM Deputy Assistant Secretary returned last week from visiting the same village and reported on the progress that has been made in the last eight months. Out of the 300 families previously living in this village, 270 have now returned. With U.S. Government funding, 110 community members have received small income generating grants, others have received relief items, and homes have either been rehabilitated or rebuilt for 219 families. The U.S. Government is also funding an irrigation project and providing agricultural assistance that will revitalize farms in the village. This type of targeted assistance is occurring in more than 100 villages in Diyala and will sustain returns by providing lasting benefits to individual returnees and their local communities. It will also contribute to the overall stability of Iraq.

We are also focusing on local integration inside Iraq as a durable solution for a portion of the internally displaced. IOM surveys show that while nearly 50 percent of post-Samarra IDPs would like to return to their places of origin, 30 percent would like to integrate locally – that is, where they are now residing -- and 20 percent want to move to another location. We are encouraging the Iraqi Government to provide a local integration stipend to the displaced who want to remain in their current location. We are also encouraging the government to seriously consider providing land grants to the most vulnerable Iraqis who do not want to return home, but would rather integrate either in their current location of displacement or a different location. Discussions on these initiatives with the central government are promising, though still in the initial phases.

As I have outlined, the needs remain large and the international community must continue to work together to address them and to seek durable solutions for the displaced. We are grateful to Congress for generously funding the State Department and USAID to continue U.S. Government support for displaced Iraqis. The U.S. Government's support for humanitarian assistance to displaced Iraqis and conflict victims is unprecedented. In FY 2009, the U.S. Government contributed \$387 million in humanitarian assistance for Iraqi refugees, conflict victims, and internally displaced persons. Our funding to international and non-governmental organizations supports a range of services including education, health care, food assistance, livelihood programs, water and sanitation programs, and home rehabilitation. To date in FY 2010, the Administration has contributed over \$200 million for assistance to Iraqi refugees, IDPs, and conflict victims. We plan to provide additional contributions before the end of the fiscal year and will likely reach funding levels similar to FY 2009.

The U.S. Government will continue to fulfill our obligation to assist displaced Iraqis. Additionally, the international community needs to increase support in order to meet critical needs. Most importantly, the Iraqi government must do more to assist its displaced citizens. We are encouraged by several steps being taken by the Iraqi government, and we urge the new government to keep up the momentum. Over the last year, the Iraqi Government appointed a Senior Coordinator for Displacement, increased the budget for the Ministry of Displacement and Migration by 250 percent, and has increased the returnee grant from 1 million dinar (\$800) to 1.5 million dinar (\$1,200). The Iraqi Government has also begun to disburse the \$32 million it pledged for compensation to displaced persons in Diyala province. Although the GOI has made progress in assisting displaced Iraqis, we continue to urge them to do much more, including providing land grants to the most vulnerable IDP squatters, providing a local integration stipend to IDPs who choose not to return home, and providing greater assistance to its citizens who are displaced in neighboring countries.

The United States also continues to urge other governments to increase, or at the very least sustain, their assistance to displaced Iraqis. To date in 2010, UNHCR has received \$181 million toward its \$508 million 2010 appeal for displaced Iraqis, of which the USG has contributed \$150 million. We plan to make an additional contribution to UNHCR in FY 2010 and encourage other countries to do the same. In an effort to bolster contributions from other donors, Samantha Power and I hosted a meeting at the State Department last December with representative's from 16 embassies to discuss the significant humanitarian needs that we observed on our trip to Iraq as well as ways in which other countries can assist in meeting these needs. Since that time, I have met with representatives from multiple countries to provide specific examples of programs in which their respective governments can assist in these endeavors. We will continue to press other governments, but I must say that it is an uphill battle.

The most appropriate durable solution for the vast majority of Iraqis will be to return to a safe and stable Iraq. We recognize, however, that some vulnerable Iraqis will never be able to return and that third country resettlement will need to remain an option for these individuals. As you know, we have established a robust U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). Three years ago, we had virtually no refugee processing infrastructure in Syria, Jordan, or Iraq. Today, the United States admits nearly 1,200 Iraqis per month from these three countries alone. The two Overseas Processing Entities (OPEs) operating in the region employ a total of 250 staff members with permanent offices or sub-offices in six countries and they conduct "circuit ride" processing in an additional eight countries throughout the

region. Since 2007, these OPEs have prepared and presented more than 77,000 asylum seekers to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (DHS/USCIS) officers for interview. As of June 30, 48,124 Iraqi refugees have been resettled in the United States.

While the U.S. receives the majority of its refugee resettlement referrals from UNHCR, our program also provides access to vulnerable Iraqis through other mechanisms. In the early stages of the program, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad referred Iraqis working at our Embassy or as interpreters with the USG or Multi-National Force-Iraq to the refugee resettlement program. They were able to access the USRAP directly in Iraq, Egypt and Jordan. Department of State and DHS staff also trained 17 NGOs in the region to enable them to refer particularly vulnerable cases to the USRAP for consideration. In December 2007, we established direct access (that is, access without the need for a UNHCR referral) for Iraqi beneficiaries of approved I-130 immigrant visa petitions, even if they were not current. The January 28, 2008 enactment of “The Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act,” included in the FY 2008 Defense Authorization Act, created new categories of Iraqis eligible for direct access to the USRAP, including direct-hire U.S. employees, employees of certain entities receiving U.S. funds, and employees of U.S.-based media organizations or NGOs, as well as certain family members of those employees. While the majority of resettled Iraqis are still referred to the United States Government by UNHCR, we have made serious efforts to provide access to resettlement to those Iraqis who may face persecution due to their association with the U.S. effort in Iraq.

To better meet the needs of those U.S.-affiliated Iraqis still supporting our efforts in Iraq, in April 2008 we opened an OPE at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. Since then we have greatly expanded our direct access program in Baghdad. In spite of serious space limitations in the International Zone, we have quadrupled the number of OPE staff working in Baghdad over the last two years. We have relocated twice to accommodate the growing in-country caseload. Our current processing facility is located on a Forward Operating Base in the International Zone, thus providing easier access for refugee applicants to attend interviews. This fiscal year, we expect departures from Iraq to exceed 4,500, more than will depart from Jordan. While in the region in November of last year, I visited our processing locations in Baghdad and Amman. They are both impressive operations, reflecting the Administration’s commitment to helping vulnerable Iraqis, including those who have assisted the U.S. mission in Iraq.

Due to host government policy or regulations in Syria and Turkey, we are only able to process individuals in those countries who have been referred by UNHCR. This has not, however, limited our processing in those countries as they will account for the largest and second largest number of Iraqi departures to the U.S. this fiscal year. We work closely with UNHCR offices in Syria and Turkey to ensure that all vulnerable Iraqis who would benefit from resettlement in the U.S. are referred to us by UNHCR.

The Commission is no doubt aware of the restrictions the Syrian Government has placed on our USRAP operations in Damascus. We have experienced problems obtaining the visas required for OPE staff and USCIS interviewers to enter the country. I have personally raised the need for better cooperation with Syrian government officials, and the U.S. Embassy in Damascus has engaged Syrian officials at the highest levels on this issue as well. In the case of our USCIS interviewers, Syria has made modest progress by issuing their visas on a more routine basis. We are hopeful that, regardless of problems that may arise elsewhere in our bilateral relationship, the shared desire to assist Iraqi refugees will allow for a continued high level of U.S. resettlement operations in Syria.

The successes that we have experienced in our resettlement program are a direct result of cooperation among the many actors involved in the processing of refugees. UNHCR increased their operations in the region to provide a consistent level of referrals to the U.S. and other resettlement countries. DHS/USCIS has consistently made its officers available to interview whenever and wherever needed. We have worked closely with other agencies to improve the security clearance process and collectively and continually monitor it to ensure that the checks are completed in the most expeditious manner possible. We have also worked to improve information sharing with the refugees themselves, so that they can make better informed decisions about their futures.

One challenge we have continually faced is attrition among Iraqi applicants at various stages in the resettlement process. This includes individuals who cancel or do not appear for their pre-screening appointment, their USCIS interview, their medical appointment, or their departure flight. In Baghdad in particular, the percentage of cancelled or no-show appointments has consistently been upward of 25% at various stages of the process. While most applicants seek to reschedule missed appointments, the high level of attrition means that predicting the number of successfully processed cases has been difficult and more cases must be scheduled and processed to ensure full utility at each processing stage. We have

begun providing information on U.S. resettlement to refugees at earlier stages of the process and have also provided training to UNHCR staff so that they can better counsel refugees who may be unsure about whether resettlement to the United States is in their best interest. We are confident that this will decrease attrition at later stages and allow us to concentrate our efforts on refugees who want to resettle in the U.S.

We also want to ensure that those refugees that choose to pursue resettlement have realistic expectations of life in America. We have assessed the cultural orientation being provided to refugees in the region and have taken concrete steps to improve it based on feedback from resettled refugees, UNHCR, and domestic resettlement agencies. We are currently revising the three-day orientation programs in Syria, Jordan, and Egypt to better fit the needs of Iraqi refugees.

It is not enough that we now have the capacity to process large numbers of Iraqis overseas. It is vital that Iraqis -- like all arriving refugees -- are provided sufficient support to allow them to become independent, productive members of their new communities. The White House is leading a full scale review of refugee resettlement policies that has already led to improvements in the process, including the way in which medical and other information is shared among service providers. Recognizing our critical obligation on these issues, in January PRM doubled the onetime per capita grant that we provide to refugees to address the challenges refugees face during their first 30-90 days in the United States. We will continue to engage with our federal, state, local, and private partners to ensure that refugees are resettled in the United States in a way that reflects our commitment to resettlement as a durable solution.

Iraq is at a critical moment in the development of democracy and stable social and economic institutions. This process will only be strengthened through the effective management of the challenging humanitarian issue of displaced Iraqis. We are making steady progress in achieving durable solutions for this population. As the President pointed out in his February 2009 Camp Lejeune address, "there are few more powerful indicators of lasting peace (in Iraq) than displaced citizens returning home."

Chairman Cardin, Co-Chairman Hastings, and members of the Commission, in closing I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued interest in the plight of Iraqi displaced and for your support for the programs and activities that assist and protect this vulnerable population, particularly those who have

worked closely with the USG in Iraq. I would be happy to respond to your questions.