

Strategic Framework for Humanitarian Action in Iraq

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1. Executive Summary

The civilian population in Iraq currently faces one of the most complex and violent situations in the world. The escalating protection crisis has, over the last year in particular, resulted in increasing humanitarian needs for large population groups. An estimated 8 million Iraqi civilians are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including an estimated 4 million food-insecure resident population, 1.9 million internally displaced and 2 million displaced in neighboring countries.

Since mid-January 2007, a series of high-level and technical consultations have taken place, involving key humanitarian actors, UN headquarters, and Member States, including the Government of Iraq. These consultations have resulted in the broad recognition that a humanitarian crisis is unfolding in Iraq and a broad based multi-sectoral inter-agency response is required. As such the Country Team for Iraq, under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator, has developed a Strategic Framework for Humanitarian Action as a basis for a coordinated response by the international community.

Recognizing the numerous constraints to humanitarian action inside Iraq, the Framework proposes a multi-tiered approach, capitalizing on some of the key opportunities, identifying areas where the international humanitarian community can add value in the immediate term. It outlines measures for strengthening humanitarian presence, improving availability and consistency of data, promoting the rights of the population and adherence to humanitarian principles, promoting increased neutrality of humanitarian action, strengthening capacities of Governmental and non-governmental institutions to provide protection and basic services to the Iraqi civilian population, and establishing appropriate humanitarian coordination mechanisms.

This Framework builds on existing planning and funding instruments, by defining in greater detail the immediate humanitarian priorities and modalities for alleviating suffering inside Iraq. While focusing on interventions inside Iraq, it recognizes the regional dimension and consequences in neighbouring countries, and stresses the need for coordinated action to protect the civilian population from forced displacement, to ensure protection of those already displaced, and promote durable solutions.

This document works on the assumption that, at least in the short term, continued violence within Iraq will lead to insecurity affecting increasing numbers of people already vulnerable due to lost livelihoods, rampant inflation, and lack of access to basic services. It is assumed that humanitarian relief will continue to be problematic due to the low visibility of many aid agencies in Iraq and the dearth of operational partners on the ground. Furthermore, access will continue to be difficult and non-traditional mechanisms for delivering relief will need to be explored.

As such the strategic framework aims at promoting an area-based approach towards enhanced humanitarian presence (security conditions permitting) and the establishment of a centralized information collection, management and analysis system aimed at improving availability and consistency of data in order to establish common analysis and messaging on the humanitarian situation, needs and response.

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It also proposes the development of a targeted humanitarian advocacy strategy aimed at influencing policies and practices of key actors and creating a better understanding of the key humanitarian priorities for the country, as well as greater understanding of the core tenants of humanitarianism. While the Strategic Framework proposes to establish and/or enlarge, as appropriate, a pooled funding mechanism aimed at strengthening the capacities of operational humanitarian actors inside Iraq – especially NGOs – it advocates the allocation of significant Iraqi Government resources for humanitarian programming and aims to strengthen national capacities to address humanitarian priorities.

Also critical will be the promotion of concerted action and advocacy for the protection of civilians and the secure delivery of humanitarian assistance with the Government of Iraq (GoI), affected Governments in the region, military/non-state actors, regional organizations and the donor community. Finally, there is a recognized need to strengthen partnerships between humanitarian organizations including NGOs, UN agencies, and other international organizations and community-based organizations, in coordination with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

While there are substantial constraints to effective and principled humanitarian action within Iraq, there are also key opportunities at present which should be seized. These include an increased recognition of the humanitarian crisis in Iraq by GoI and the international community, the fact that the security situation is not uniform across Iraq, and that within Iraq local communities still have significant capacities and resources that could be better utilized and finally the fact that Iraq is still a relatively wealthy country and has the ability to fund, at least partially, assistance programmes to the population.

The challenges of the political and security environment in Iraq are among the most complex and difficult the humanitarian community has ever faced. The United Nations agencies and partners are conscious of the extreme limitations this poses for their presence on the ground and ability to respond. Expectations should be adjusted accordingly, and the Strategic Framework considered as a statement of intent of the agencies to support those who are able to respond and to strengthen their own humanitarian response to the extent possible.

2. Introduction

Since mid-January 2007, a series of high-level and technical consultations have taken place, involving all the key humanitarian actors, UN headquarters, and Member States, including the Government of Iraq. These consultations have resulted in the broad recognition that a humanitarian crisis is unfolding in Iraq and, as such, a multi-sectoral inter-agency response is required.

The Policy Committee, chaired by the United Nations Secretary-General, decided on 19 January 2007 that in view of the escalating violence and rising numbers of refugees and displaced persons, the UN should publicly recognize that Iraq is facing deteriorating humanitarian and human rights crises. It was further decided that UNAMI and the UN Country Team should work together to develop a policy

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framework to address growing humanitarian needs and human rights violations, including contacts with the donor community.

The latest Consultation of Member States convened by OCHA on 2 March 2007 in Geneva, called on the Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq to develop a Strategic Framework for Humanitarian Action as a basis for a coordinated humanitarian response. The Strategic Framework has been developed through a consultative process with all key stakeholders to provide a common understanding of the priorities, challenges, and agreement on a way forward. While it focuses on the immediate measures deemed necessary to accelerate humanitarian action inside Iraq, it recognizes the tremendous constraints, as well as the regional dimension and significant impact of the conflict on neighbouring countries, particularly Jordan and Syria. While proposing a set of complementary actions focused on humanitarian response inside Iraq, the humanitarian community should also determine how it can approach the regional implications in a coordinated manner, giving consideration to establishing a regional coordination mechanism and developing a regional framework for action as a next step.

The Framework recognizes the increased need to provide basic social services. It also builds on the UN Development Assistance Strategy for Iraq and seeks to link in with the International Compact with Iraq planning and funding instruments, including the Joint Priority Action Plan for 2006-2008 (JPAP) and the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI), by defining in greater detail the immediate humanitarian priorities and modalities for alleviating suffering inside Iraq. In addition, recognizing the regional dimension of the crisis, and the associated consequences especially in neighbouring countries, it stresses the need for coordinated action to protect the civilian population from forced displacement, to ensure protection of those already displaced, and promote durable solutions.

In view of the fluidity of the situation in Iraq, and the consequent necessity of maintaining a flexible response, the Framework is intended to be a working document which will be subject to review as and when required. The initial timeframe is open-ended but will start from April 2007 (acknowledging that some activities are already ongoing).

The Strategic Framework proposes the following:

- **To promote concerted humanitarian action by strengthening coordination or partnerships** at various levels: 1) with the Government of Iraq, including through capacity-building (it is particularly crucial for the Government of Iraq to establish an inter-ministerial coordinating structure, preferably attached to the Prime Minister's Office, to provide leadership and coordination for humanitarian action, in close liaison with the UN Humanitarian Coordinator's office); and 2) among humanitarian organisations including NGOs, UN agencies, other international organizations and community-based organisations, and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.
- **To develop a multi-faceted strategy for maximised operability in an insecure environment**, including through promoting an area-based approach to security regulations and programme planning, thereby

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maximising access opportunities. This may lead to a reconsideration of staff presence in those areas where security permits.

- **To establish a centralized information collection, management and analysis system** aimed at improving availability and consistency of data in order to establish common analysis and messaging on the humanitarian situation, needs and response;
- **To develop and implement an advocacy strategy** aimed at influencing policies and practices of key actors; promoting the rights of the civilian population, particularly the most vulnerable; promoting adherence to humanitarian norms (including international humanitarian and human rights law); ensuring better preparedness; and ensuring a coordinated, effective and adequately resourced response.
- **To promote resource availability for agencies operating in Iraq, especially NGOs** for whom access to existing funding mechanisms may be difficult, through the expansion of the existing pooled fund that allows rapid release of funds for emergency projects.
- **To establish appropriate humanitarian coordination mechanisms** based on the principles of the Humanitarian Reform Agenda, complementary to the existing reconstruction and development coordination system, giving further consideration as to how to improve regional coordination, programming and cooperation.

3. Problem Statement

3.1 *Situation Analysis*

The civilian population in Iraq is currently facing one of the most complex and violent situations in the world. The escalating protection crisis has, over the last year in particular, resulted in increasing humanitarian needs for large population groups across the country and those displaced to neighboring states.

The protection crisis in Iraq is characterized by grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. The increasing sectarian and political violence has specifically targeted civilians, and a widespread disregard for the principles of proportionality and distinction by all parties¹ to the current conflict has also resulted in excessive harm to the civilian population.

The primary protection concern for civilians in Iraq today is the right to life and security. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) reports that approximately 35,000 civilians were killed and approximately 36,000 injured in Iraq

¹ Proportionality: Parties to a conflict do not have unlimited choice of methods and means of warfare. It is prohibited to employ weapons or methods of warfare of a nature to cause unnecessary losses or excessive suffering.. Distinction: All parties to a conflict are required to ensure they distinguish at all times between civilians and combatants.

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in 2006, and the daily average number of civilian deaths rose to 100 by the beginning of 2007. Threats to physical safety stem from suicide attacks targeting groups of civilians or civilian facilities (bus stations, mosques, market areas, etc.) and other attacks aimed at causing maximum civilian casualties (attacks on police recruitment facilities); militia operations targeting individuals for death (“death squads”); deliberate expulsions of individuals and groups belonging to rival ethno-religious and political factions; and hostage-taking, commonly resulting in beatings and/or death, especially targeting professionals and politicians. Violent attacks on civilians in Baghdad account for the majority of deaths and injuries (at least 70%). The majority of fatalities are adult males (traditionally key income providers) which, in turn, have greatly increased vulnerability of surviving family members, particularly women and children.

Forced displacement, as a result of direct and indirect threats to physical security, has also become a key feature of the current conflict. The UN² estimates that there are approximately two million Iraqis who moved to neighboring countries, approximately 80% in Syria and Jordan where they have not been granted legal refugee status. A further 1.9 million are internally displaced, including approximately 700,000 who were displaced as a result of the sharp increase in sectarian violence following the February 2006 bombing of a Shiite shrine in Samarra. Increasing sectarian violence resulting in displacement is effectively re-engineering the social fabric of Iraqi society; previously ethnically and religiously diverse areas are now becoming increasingly homogenous. This is being compounded by restrictions on settlement of the displaced. In addition, large segments of the population, particularly in Baghdad and other central areas, are at serious risk of forced displacement due primarily to sectarian violence. Many of those who are unable to flee due to financial constraints, insecurity or lack of access are most at risk of grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

Freedom of movement is becoming increasingly restricted in Iraq. Partly as a result of limited absorption capacity, several governorates (Kerbala, Najaf, Basra, Muthanna, Baghdad, Babylon and the three northern KRG governorates) have now effectively closed their “boundaries” or restricted access and movements of civilians who have fled their areas of origin in other governorates as a result of security concerns. Some neighboring countries have also placed increasing entry restrictions on Iraqis seeking safety. This denial of the right to seek safety (including asylum) is a serious protection concern. Moreover, protection concerns during displacement include denial of/obstructed access to basic services, shelter, and livelihoods; threats to physical safety; and forced return. Many of those who have returned to areas of origin, whether forcibly or voluntarily, have been subsequently subjected to a range of human rights violations, including violations of the right to life.

There is discrimination on access to basic services provided by authorities, and some non-state actors, on the basis of religious, ethnic or political affiliation is becoming apparent in some cases. Access to livelihoods has also become increasingly restricted by discrimination on ethnic, political and religious grounds.

² Cluster F, “Refugees, IDPs and Durable Solutions”, is one of the six Clusters established for implementing programmes under the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI)

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The level of violence in Iraq also greatly impacts the access to mental health; millions of civilians have been subjected to severe psychological trauma by direct and indirect violence.

Mines and unexploded ordinance, from previous conflicts as well as the current situation, also present a serious threat to the civilian population. It is estimated that approximately 2.7 million (Iraqi Landmine Impact Survey) people in Iraq currently live in mine and unexploded ordinance (UXO) contaminated/impacted areas. The presence of mines and UXOs also severely affects the delivery of humanitarian assistance and access to basic services.

An estimated 8 million Iraqi civilians are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including:

- estimated 4 million food-insecure resident population³;
- 1.9 million internally displaced (including approx. 700,000 displaced since February 2006);
- 2 million displaced in neighbouring countries.

The 2007 Global Needs Assessment by the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) ranks Iraq as among the 15 most severe humanitarian crises in the world. The current humanitarian situation has arisen from escalating violence (sectarian, political and criminal) and has been compounded by limited access to basic services (due to discrimination, breakdown of service infrastructure and GoI's weak capacity to deliver basic services); loss of livelihoods; high number of main income-providers killed or injured resulting in a high number of female-headed households and increasing inflation. This latest deterioration should also be seen in the context of decades of conflict and sanctions. At the same time, high levels of violence, including targeted attacks on humanitarian workers, have severely constrained access for all humanitarian organisations. Central Iraq is most affected, with severe insecurity, a collapse of basic services, massive population displacement and lack of access for humanitarians. In southern Iraq, the conflict is less intense but the area has also witnessed significant displacement and a collapse of basic services. The situation in northern Iraq, although relatively secure, also has the potential to deteriorate rapidly.

Whilst the most acute needs are inside Iraq, Iraqi populations who have fled to neighbouring countries also have specific protection and assistance requirements. The large and rapid influx of Iraqis to neighbouring countries presents a significant challenge to neighbouring states, many of whom are now increasing restrictions on entry for Iraqi nationals. The impact of this outflow on regional security and political relations should not be underestimated. The measures neighbouring states are adopting to restrict movements across Iraq's borders are inconsistent with the right to seek asylum, and will likely further exacerbate the humanitarian situation inside Iraq. Resulting increased internal displacement may, in the medium and longer term, accelerate collapse and disintegration.

Following the bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad in August 2003, the UN was forced to withdraw most of its international humanitarian staff from Iraq,

³ WFP/UNICEF/GOI VAM analysis of 2006

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significantly curtailing UN-assisted programmes. However, UNAMI re-established its international staff presence in early 2004. Operational modalities have been developed which enable humanitarian, reconstruction and development assistance to be provided by UNAMI and operational agencies and programmes via Iraqi national staff, local civil society organisations and contracted partners. As a result, some delivery of humanitarian assistance, including water, food and non-food items, health services, educational support services, and rehabilitation of basic services has been possible. However, the volatile security situation continues to limit access to many locations and population groups. Many of the resources for humanitarian interventions were mobilised as a result of a Special Appeal, launched in 2003, which enabled the UN agencies to stock warehouses with emergency kits for education and health, and with non-food items such as household and kitchen kits, and tents. As a result, it was possible to respond to localised short-term crises in 2004 and 2005, and to a limited degree in 2006. However, these and other resources are now largely depleted, severely hampering the response to increasing humanitarian needs.

3.2 Scenarios

Scenario planning is clearly very difficult in the current dynamic environment. That said, some UN agencies, as well as IOM, have prepared sector-specific contingency plans⁴ based on best-case, most likely, and worst-case humanitarian scenarios approved by the UNCT in December 2006. Several Agencies have also begun integrating their contingency planning into country programme plans.

The **best-case scenario**, democratic consolidation, would allow greater access for humanitarian organisations and would actually require, in the short to medium term, increased humanitarian activities to fill gaps in service delivery in the immediate post-conflict environment. The prolonged low visibility of many agencies might initially inhibit effectiveness of these activities while the confidence of local communities in humanitarian actors is re-established.

The **worst-case scenario**, deterioration of the situation, would result in an increase in sectarian, political and criminal violence; the collapse of central and local government authority, with replacement by religious, political, tribal, organised crime and/or warlord structures; the breakdown of infrastructure for basic services including weakening of the already under-performing Public Distribution System (PDS) for food, leaving millions of already vulnerable Iraqis destitute. Such a rapid rise in extreme vulnerability would clearly require a massive humanitarian relief effort, but it is likely that humanitarian access would become even more constrained than currently. It is also likely that some neighbouring states would formally close their borders with Iraq. The humanitarian response would have to retain significant flexibility to be able to exploit access opportunities as they arose.

⁴ Cluster D of the IRFFI has prepared a draft Health Emergency Preparedness and Response plan focusing on all three scenarios while Cluster F has prepared a plan based on scenario B. A strength of the Cluster F work is the detailed Fact Sheets profiling governorates and including information on the displaced, key actors on the ground and possible access routes developed after detailed consultations with NGOs and other partners which are an excellent source of core data which can be used by all humanitarian actors in developing detailed response plans.

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Unless the current political and security situation rapidly improves, the **most likely scenario**, continued violence, would see the current insecurity affecting increasing numbers of people already vulnerable because of lost livelihoods, rampant inflation, and lack of access to basic services. Displacement would likely continue to increase as sectarian violence, in particular, intensifies. Civilians seeking asylum and Iraqis in neighbouring countries would require protection from “refoulement”; determination of an appropriate legal status; and access to basic services. Assistance to IDPs would be even more limited, particularly relating to potable water, sanitation, health, food and non-food items. Humanitarian organisations and the Government of Iraq would be unable to provide adequate protection or assistance. The most affected governorates would most likely be those with mixed populations or of most strategic (economic, religious, political) importance. Closure of governorate boundaries and all international borders would be likely, further exacerbating the humanitarian situation.

Humanitarian relief would continue to be problematic due to the low visibility of many aid agencies in Iraq and the dearth of operational partners on the ground. Access would be difficult – non-traditional mechanisms for delivering relief would need to be explored.

3.3 Key Constraints, Gaps, and Opportunities

Insecurity

Since the beginning of the current conflict in 2003, insecurity has severely affected humanitarian operations. Humanitarian organisations (both international and national) are increasingly targeted by various parties to the conflict. At least 83 humanitarian personnel have been killed⁵, and many more injured. The bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August 2003 left 22 personnel dead and scores more injured. As a result, UN operations in Iraq have since been subject to a range of security regulations. Other humanitarian organisations have also been targeted, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS). Escalating violence since February 2006 has further heightened concerns for the security of humanitarian personnel and assets inside Iraq – insecurity is the primary constraint to humanitarian operations. As a result of both direct and indirect attacks, humanitarian organisations have instituted various high-level security measures, including major restrictions on the number and movements of personnel throughout the country.

Perceptions of Principled Humanitarian Action

Low Visibility: The IRCS has maintained a significant presence throughout the country, with the support of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The NGOs and some national staff of UN agencies have been able to maintain a much more limited presence, conducting priority humanitarian activities where security permits. UN agencies, IOM and many international NGOs, are even more restricted and are now operating primarily via remote management through local partners and GOI. This very limited presence on the ground of international humanitarian

⁵ NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (www.ncciraq.org).

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organisations negatively impacts the ability to ensure provision of assistance on the basis of need, and post-distribution monitoring. More importantly, the low visibility of humanitarian organisations and the UN in particular, has compounded the perception that humanitarian organisations, particularly international organisations, are unable to provide principled humanitarian assistance. For the UN in particular, the very limited presence in Iraq and the necessary use of MNF-I escorts for all international staff movements, has compounded the pre-existing perception of the UN as either unwilling or unable to provide humanitarian assistance or protection to the most vulnerable. This perception greatly increases insecurity for UN and other international humanitarian organisations.

MNF-I Escorts: As stated, movement of UN international staff requires MNF-I military escorts, including as mandated under Security Council Resolution 1546. Use of military escorts clearly limits humanitarian space. In Iraq in particular, such close alignment with the MNF-I, a major party to the conflict, has severely compromised the neutrality, impartiality and independence of the UN humanitarian operations. The widely held perception, compounded by concerns about pre-2003 UN operations in Iraq (Oil for Food Programme), is that the UN is biased towards the MNF-I, and the US in particular. This perception clearly compromises the security of UN personnel, but also of humanitarian actors in general, including those working with UN agencies.

Politicization of Humanitarian Action: Humanitarian action in Iraq has become increasingly politicized. A range of political actors (both state and non-state) have become involved in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including armed groups, the MNF-I, and The Government of Iraq military. This has blurred the distinction between humanitarian and political actors, compromising principled humanitarian action. Assistance is not necessarily provided on the basis of need, but rather for political gain.

Political Context

The deteriorating security situation is intrinsically linked to political, social and economic fragmentation in Iraq. Fragmentation in the central and local authorities has hampered GoI's ability to fulfil its responsibilities to ensure protection of, and basic services for, the civilian population. Also on the political level, some senior elements of the government have been, until recently, reluctant to recognize the extent of the humanitarian and protection crisis in Iraq; and even now recognition of the scale of humanitarian and protection needs appears to differ among central, regional and local authorities. The lack of a coherent approach has constrained the allocation of government resources to address humanitarian needs, and has resulted in the lack of centralised data collation and analysis.

Regional Context

The policies and actions of neighbouring states impact not only the refugee populations, but also humanitarian needs and response inside Iraq. Increasing border restrictions severely limit the ability of the affected population in Iraq to flee. Border restrictions also limit cross-border operations which, given the rising insecurity and resulting restrictions on movement inside the country, are becoming increasingly necessary in order to reach some of the most vulnerable populations inside Iraq. At the same time, the impact of the conflict in Iraq on neighbouring states should not be underestimated. A comprehensive approach by the international community is

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needed to address the concerns of the populations displaced to neighbouring states and the host communities, particularly in Jordan and Syria who have received the largest number of displaced Iraqis.

Access to Resources

OCHA analysis indicates that Iraq is the second least funded (per affected person) of the 15 most severe humanitarian crises.⁶ This is largely because since 2003, the focus has been on reconstruction and development; available funding has therefore focused on this agenda. The International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI) is the primary source of funding, and any decision to use the funds for humanitarian programming would require consultations with donors and ultimately lies with the Government of Iraq. Furthermore, NGOs, who are a key humanitarian actor on the ground, cannot directly appeal for funds from IRFFI. Some donors are reluctant to provide funding for humanitarian activities, due in part to the fact that the Iraqi authorities do have substantial financial resources and that currently there is an unutilised balance in the IRFFI. Agencies have funds for limited humanitarian activities but they are currently insufficient. NGOs, in particular, require additional funds to be able to continue or expand their current humanitarian programmes. Some organisations already have agreed country programmes with the Government of Iraq that allow allocation of humanitarian contributions from donors as well as organisational core resources.

Information Management and Advocacy

The humanitarian information management and advocacy environment in Iraq is characterized by deficiencies in information exchange and lack of coherence in advocacy messages, which is primarily determined by the sensitivity of the political context, as well as the lack of availability and consensus on reliable data. There is a clear need for a more centralized information management system that will provide a framework for data standardization, facilitating cross-sectoral analysis; act as a centralized repository and clearinghouse for data and information; and support an information management sub-working group.

Public information and advocacy strategies will be guided by benefits to the Iraqi population, safety of those delivering such assistance as well as the overall integrity of programme delivery.

Key Opportunities

While there are substantial constraints to effective and principled humanitarian action within Iraq, there are also key opportunities at present which should be seized. These include:

- Increased recognition of the humanitarian crisis in Iraq by The Government of Iraq and the international community, and willingness to address it.
- The security situation is not uniform across Iraq; some areas are relatively secure and are, therefore, more accessible for humanitarian activities.
- In some areas, local communities still have significant capacities and resources that could be better utilised.

⁶ Analysis is based on 2006 funding figures for Iraq as reported by donors or recipient organisations (www.reliefweb.int/fts). “Affected people” were estimated at the time as 2.8 million.

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- Iraq is a relatively wealthy country and has the ability to fund, at least partially, assistance programmes to the population.
- Existing presence of and consequent confidence of the population in, a number of UN agencies, IOM, NGOs, and components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.
- MNF-I services such as emergency medical evacuation, quick reaction forces and security/ programme-related information should be seen as key opportunities as they do not compromise impartiality.

4. Humanitarian Priorities

The central component of the humanitarian response in Iraq is to support the GoI in fulfilling its responsibilities to ensure protection of and provide basic services for the civilian population. In light of the enormous challenges facing the GoI in fulfilling these responsibilities, the humanitarian community will also necessarily, within the limits imposed by insecurity, facilitate the provision of protection and assistance to some of the most vulnerable groups in key areas.

The priorities outlined below are preliminary and need to be further defined. However, from information currently, priority activities are likely to include:

- **Protection** – Wide-ranging protection activities including advocating to all parties to the conflict (including MNF-I) for respect for international humanitarian and human rights law (specifically protection of civilians), legal aid and assistance for victims of human rights abuses, capacity-building for authorities (judicial, police, etc.) and other protection actors, monitoring and reporting.
- **Food** – Rehabilitation of Public Distribution System (PDS) as far as possible, targeted provision of full and partial food rations as appropriate.
- **Water and sanitation** – short-term provision of potable water through water trucking, urgent repairs to infrastructure, installation of temporary systems.
- **Health** – Emergency provision of primary and secondary health services and supplies, particularly ensuring appropriate services for vulnerable populations (trauma victims, etc); rehabilitation as possible of existing health infrastructure; capacity building for healthcare workers, particularly in trauma response.
- **Shelter** – provision of emergency shelter options, including rental subsidies, extension of host family houses, provision of shelter kits and urgent rehabilitation of public buildings / and collective towns as possible and appropriate.
- **Education** – Emergency education support including provision of materials, urgent rehabilitation or extension of schooling facilities as possible, short-term capacity-building for teachers/teacher substitutes, teacher incentives.
- **Logistics/Access/Security** - Facilitating interagency coordination and interoperability by pooling logistics.
- **Early Recovery** – Capacity-building, good governance for central and local authorities, and civil society.

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5. Humanitarian Strategy

5.1 Promote concerted humanitarian action by strengthening partnerships

The humanitarian response in Iraq will be premised on the key concepts integral to the Humanitarian Reform Agenda: accountability, predictability, leadership and, of particular importance in this context, building partnerships. Partnerships with NGOs should be developed with full respect of their neutrality, impartiality and independence. Given the scale of the humanitarian needs (including protection) presently in Iraq, and in light of the enormous constraints in responding to those needs, ensuring inclusion of all relevant partners on equal terms is a priority. These partners require sustained support from the Humanitarian Coordinator and UN agencies in order to be most effective.

While all humanitarian actors face serious access constraints due to insecurity, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs commonly have greater access to vulnerable populations than UN agencies.

Support to Existing Partners: Humanitarian partners operating inside Iraq that could be further supported through UN mechanisms include a range of international and national NGOs, community-based organizations, and civil society organizations. The UN agencies, OCHA and the HC should make available to these partners a range of support services including:

- Financial: ensuring rapid availability of appropriate funding
- Political: interface between NGOs and the GoI, MNF-I, and other political stakeholders
- Capacity-building: provision of technical advice, training (including project management, monitoring and evaluation), tools
- Information: collation, analysis and dissemination, mapping
- Logistical
- Security: advice, training, real-time information

Expanding Partnerships: Ensuring inclusion of all available partners in the humanitarian response is also crucial to its overall effectiveness. Identification of organizations that are able to adhere to the principles of humanitarian action (neutrality, impartiality and independence) in this context can be challenging. However, there is significant capacity inside Iraq, particularly in respect of national humanitarian and human rights organizations, and efforts will be made to ensure as broad a base of partners as possible.

Government of Iraq: As referenced above, the key component of the humanitarian response in Iraq is to support both central and local authorities in fulfilling their responsibilities to ensure protection of and basic services for the civilian population. The humanitarian community will also necessarily seek to directly provide some protection and assistance to the most vulnerable population groups as appropriate. Building upon existing partnerships with the GoI to support and build their capacity to

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respond to humanitarian needs is therefore crucial. Strengthening existing partnerships with the GoI, at the central and local level, should include advocating for and provision of capacity-building support to an inter-ministerial coordinating structure, to provide leadership and coordination for humanitarian action. Security-permitting, deployment of governorate-level UN humanitarian liaison officers to support local authorities should also be considered.

5.2 Develop a multi-faceted strategy for maximizing operability in an insecure environment

Insecurity is the primary constraint to an effective humanitarian response in Iraq. Given the scale of the humanitarian needs, a multi-faceted approach is necessary to operate more effectively under the security constraints. Key to addressing the security constraints are resilience, creativity, and flexibility. It must also be recognized that implementing this strategy will require significant financial and political support from donors, the Government of Iraq and other stakeholders.

The following actions are planned:

- Security Risk Management: Humanitarian operations will be conducted in accordance with the security risk management process, which includes programme, threat and vulnerability assessments, risk analysis and the assessment of all options to enable the effective and efficient conduct of UN activities while ensuring the security, safety and well-being of staff as a high priority.
- Inventory of Means of Access: Identify all possible access routes and transportation systems.
- Stockpiling: When access allows, position supplies in large volumes close to target populations (where secure storage is available), to allow assistance during specific periods of isolation of communities due to localized conflicts. This may include the establishment of stockpiles in neighbouring countries for cross-border operations.
- Delivery during Assessment: Delivery of key relief items while conducting assessments will help mitigate resentment among populations in need that may have arisen following multiple assessments without follow-up delivery; therefore, delivery during assessment should be considered as a possible option in the security risk management process.
- Operational flexibility: In order to achieve maximum operational flexibility, security policy and procedures should be constantly reviewed and modified as necessary to ensure that they are appropriate to each location where humanitarian operations are to be conducted. When the security situation permits and if technically feasible, the UN should work towards re-establishing a humanitarian air service, in order to communicate the neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian action.

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- Security Training for Field Partners: Provision of training by the UN for partners, including NGOs, will increase security and consequently facilitate possible expansion of humanitarian operations. The ability to train NGO implementing partners would be determined by the availability of resources.
- Advocacy: Communication of key messages on the neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian assistance to the broader Iraqi population will aim to increase acceptance and build confidence among the civilian population. This may, in turn, influence the actions of some localized armed groups from within populations in need.
- Coordination with Local Actors: Considering the fragmentation of Iraq's political and security environment, establishing partnership, coordination and negotiation channels at the governorate and district levels with local authorities, community leaders and relevant non-state actors who exercise actual control over a given area will be instrumental to developing effective coordination, access and delivery mechanisms. This will be undertaken in parallel with ongoing coordination with the Government of Iraq central authorities.
- MOSS Compliance: All operations should be conducted in accordance with country Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS).

5.2 *Establish a Centralized Information Collection, Management and Analysis System*

Effectively collecting, compiling, analyzing and disseminating timely and relevant information is one of the primary challenges for humanitarian organizations in any response. In Iraq in particular, verifiable and accurate information is a prerequisite to implementing effective relief operations, as well as addressing other longstanding acute and chronic vulnerabilities.

The humanitarian information management environment in Iraq is currently characterised by deficiencies in information exchange, primarily resulting from the sensitivity of the political context, rather than a lack of information *per se*. There is a clear need for a more centralized information management system that will provide a framework for data standardization, facilitating cross-sectoral analysis; act as a centralized repository and clearinghouse for data and information; and support an information management sub-working group. In this regard, OCHA will establish an Information Management Unit (IMU) that will ensure that standardized information management products are developed, maintained and available to the broader humanitarian community. Specifically the IMU's objectives are to:

1. Establish a centralized system for information collation, processing and dissemination to support:
 - Evidence-based advocacy,
 - Operational support,

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- Identification of operational gaps,
 - Development of sectoral indicators, and
 - Development of monitoring tools for trend and gap analysis.
2. Facilitate the development of a common approach to information management, including baselines, indicators and data sets.
 3. Better coordinate information-sharing through establishment of an information management working group and an indicators working group (whose objective is to develop common humanitarian indicators and a classification system).
 4. Apply principles for humanitarian information and exchange (Accessibility, Inclusiveness, Inter-operability, Accountability, Verifiability, Relevance, Objectivity, Humanity, Timeliness and Sustainability).
 5. Coordinate with existing governmental humanitarian-related databases.

5.3 Develop and Implement an Inter-Agency Advocacy Strategy

Advocacy can be defined as using information strategically to influence policies or practices of key actors (relevant authorities, non-state actors, international, regional and national organizations, donors, public at large, etc.). Effective humanitarian advocacy depends on getting to the right person(s)/institution(s) with the right message(s) at the right time, with the goal of effecting a change in behaviour, policies or programmes.

An inter-agency advocacy and public information strategy with clear objectives, messages and time lines for implementation will be developed, targeting Iraqi and regional authorities, MNF-I and Iraqi Security Forces, donors, and other key stakeholders in order to raise awareness and generate support for humanitarian programmes and activities both inside and outside of Iraq. This strategy will build upon the particular strengths and uniqueness of each partner working alone in fulfilling its mandate. In the case of common issues such as scaling up of humanitarian programmes, access, staff security, internal displacement, cross-border situations, humanitarian principles and protection of civilians, all partners must work together for maximum effect.

An inter-agency advocacy thematic working group will be established to ensure consensus within the humanitarian community on key messages and how they can be delivered. This forum should also encourage and support agencies with a specific mandate for particular groups or themes, such as children or human rights, to advocate accordingly.

The objectives of the strategy are to ensure more effective and principled advocacy in support of the rights of the civilian population; promotion of adherence to humanitarian principles, including international humanitarian and human rights law; unimpeded access to populations in need; and a coordinated, effective and adequately resourced response.

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Initial key advocacy actions identified include the following:

- Advocate for The Government of Iraq to allocate more financial resources for humanitarian purposes and to take concerted action to ensure the protection of the civilian population, including physical security. Advocacy efforts must take into account the enormous challenges currently facing The Government of Iraq.
- Continued humanitarian diplomacy with member states in the region on key humanitarian issues (refugees, cross-border operations, etc.). Support from neighbouring states (on the macro level, government authorities; on the micro level, refugee host communities) will be essential to sustain humanitarian responses, and will require delicate advocacy that is publicly spearheaded by respected leaders from the region, in addition to UN officials. The humanitarian community will also need to develop communication strategies with populations across the region with clear, consistent messages on the neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian work.
- Advocacy is required in order to correct existing misperceptions of the UN and other humanitarian partners. Two key objectives include;
 - Pursue efforts towards greater self-reliance from the MNF-I on security, so as to facilitate acceptance of UN humanitarian operations in Iraq; and
 - Targeted dissemination of information to the Iraqi population on the principles that underline humanitarian action.

5.4 Promote resource availability for agencies operating in Iraq, especially NGOs

In order to ensure availability of sufficient resources to enable an effective response to identified humanitarian and protection needs, a range of actions are proposed as follows:

Promoting the Allocation of Significant National Resources for Humanitarian Programming: Encouraging the allocation of GoI's resources for humanitarian programming in Iraq will be pursued through advocacy and capacity-building with central and local authorities. The primary source of funding will need to come from the Government. However, there will be a need to complement these resources.

Coordinated Fundraising: To increase resources for humanitarian action, the Humanitarian Working Group (HWG) will explore coordinated fundraising, starting with this document. It is expected that this document will stimulate donor willingness to provide financial support for humanitarian action. It is also hoped that the coordinated, strategic approach that this document seeks to outline will increase donor confidence in the overall response. As the humanitarian situation unfolds, the HWG

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may consider more traditional resource mobilization instruments such as a Consolidated Appeal, to enable agencies to respond.

Establishment and/or Expansion of Existing Pooled Funding Mechanisms: A rapid response pooled fund (building upon the experience of the OCHA-funded NGO Humanitarian Response Fund), to be disbursed under the authority of the Humanitarian Coordinator and in consultation with the HWG, is proposed. While targeted at international and national NGOs, it will be accessible to UN agencies and IOM as well, in accordance with clearly established criteria. The UN may request additional funds from the CERF if required. As NGOs do not have access to CERF funding, the enlarged pooled fund will still be necessary.

Reinforcing Basic Services Support through IRFFI: While it has been established that re-allocating some of the remaining funds for humanitarian programming will be difficult, efforts will be made to ensure, to the extent possible, that projects in support of basic services, particularly in the JPAP, are designed and implemented in such a way as to address pressing humanitarian needs.

5.5 Establish appropriate humanitarian coordination mechanisms

Coordination of humanitarian affairs is the responsibility of the UN Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), who is also the UN Resident Coordinator (RC), and the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) in the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI). He is based in Amman with frequent missions to Baghdad. The Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator (DHC) is based in Baghdad.

Current humanitarian coordination mechanisms and capacities are not well adapted to the scale of the crisis in Iraq. This applies both to Amman and Baghdad UNAMI offices, which respectively have only four and two resident international professionals at present (including the HC and DHC).

The existing UN coordination structure for humanitarian activities is currently limited to the Humanitarian Working Group (formerly the Emergency Working Group). This is chaired by the HC and members include UN humanitarian agencies and NGOs. Members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement participate as observers. This mechanism has facilitated coordination of humanitarian response in localized intense conflict areas but generally is more focused on information sharing.

Currently, the NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI) provides a forum for coordination among most international and Iraqi national NGOs complementing UN efforts. This forum, and the NGO community at large, has been critical in responding to humanitarian needs in Iraq since 2003. In addition, NCCI and its members have established an emergency field coordination structure through area focal points to enable rapid response to identified needs, particularly during periods of intensified localized conflicts.

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The existing UN Country Team cluster system⁷ (not to be confused with the Cluster Approach established under the Humanitarian Reform agenda) is primarily focused on reconstruction and development and does not lend itself easily to the effective implementation of humanitarian action or to the introduction of the required partnerships.

In light of the scale of the humanitarian crisis and in keeping with the Strategic Framework, it is recommended that an appropriate coordination mechanism be established for the humanitarian response, based on the concepts of partnership, accountability, leadership and predictability, in accordance with the principles of UN humanitarian reform, and in a way which complements existing coordination mechanisms.

In order to facilitate humanitarian coordination and ensure linkages with existing systems, OCHA will establish an office for Iraq (initially based in Amman), to support the HC, UN Country Team, NGOs, and other partners. OCHA's role will focus on building the capacity of the HWG and the sector working groups, supporting the implementation of measures outlined in the Strategic Framework. It will provide a range of coordination support services to the broader humanitarian community, including UN-NGO coordination, advocacy, civil-military coordination, information management (through the establishment of an Information Management Unit), and protection, including specific support to the designated lead agency for protection (as per OCHA's Policy Instruction on Protection, September 2006).

⁷ Cluster A – Agriculture, Food Security, Environment and Natural Resources Management, Cluster B – Education and Culture, Cluster C – Governance and Human Development, Cluster D- Refugees, IDPs and Durable Solutions, Cluster G – Support to the Electoral Process.