

September 11, 2007

Statement on the Iraqi Humanitarian Crisis

As humanitarian organizations concerned for the needs of vulnerable Iraqis, we urge the U.S. government, Iraqi government and international community to pursue initiatives that will restore security for the people of Iraq and allow civilians who were forced to flee to return in safety and dignity to their homes.

As a result of the violence in Iraq, the UN estimates that more than 2.2 million persons are now displaced inside the country, and an additional 2.5 million have fled to neighboring countries. These numbers continue to grow – according to the UN High Commission for Refugees an estimated 60,000 Iraqis are being displaced from their homes per month, a rate of 2,000 per day. With Jordan and Syria now imposing entry requirements on Iraqis, it is becoming increasingly hard to leave the country. With many basic services breaking down in Iraq – such as education, health, water and sanitation and the public distribution system for food – many “safer” governorates inside Iraq have also closed their internal borders, unable to cope with the large influxes of displaced persons. We are extremely concerned by the growing numbers of displaced Iraqis, as well as by the few options that are available to them. Additional assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development and other international donors to internally displaced Iraqis and the communities that host them is critical.

Displacement is often one of the first signs of instability and lack of security in any conflict, just as voluntary returns are strong indicators of lasting stability. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration keep detailed statistics on displacement inside and outside of Iraq that can be used to add to the effort to assess the current state of security in Iraq. We understand that measurements of displacement are not currently part of the criteria in the Fiscal Year 2007 emergency supplemental for determining the success of U.S. policy inside Iraq. If security for Iraqis is the goal, the level of displacement and voluntary returns should be a primary indicator in assessing success.

We also express concern that Iraqi refugees are flowing into countries which already have millions of other refugees and that assistance from the U.S. and international community has not matched the needs of Iraqi refugees and host countries. There are already 2.5 million Iraqi refugees in the Middle East. Because U.S. and international assistance to Iraqi refugees and host countries is inadequate, there has been greater disruption to the economies and infrastructure of host countries and, increased local and regional tensions. We believe the Administration must begin to develop immediate plans to provide for the humanitarian needs of Iraqi refugees and host countries. By doing so, it will significantly reduce the likelihood of regional instability. Iraq cannot be stable in an unstable region.

We welcome Ambassador Crocker’s concern for Iraqis who are at risk because of their affiliation with the US and we strongly believe a much more robust resettlement program for them and other vulnerable Iraqis is greatly needed. However, resettlement is only one component of a comprehensive response required to address the humanitarian and security crisis in the region. Also needed is financial support to the UN and humanitarian organizations assisting displaced Iraqis and their host communities inside and outside Iraq, as well as bilateral assistance to countries hosting Iraqi refugees. Only with increased, long-term assistance to the entire region will there be stability for Iraq and the Middle East.

List of Signature Organizations

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee Michigan
Arab American and Chaldean Council
Chaldean Federation of America
Church World Service/Immigration and Refugee Program
Counterpart International
Episcopal Migration Ministries
Giving Children Hope
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
Human Rights First
International Medical Corps
International Rescue Committee
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
Jubilee Campaign USA
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Mandaean Associations Union
Mandaean Human Rights Group
Mercy Corps
Open Society Policy Center
Relief International
Save the Children
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
US-Armenia Public Affairs Committee (USAPAC)
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children
World Relief