



# Urgent – Protection of Civilians in and from Mosul

Iraq Humanitarian Response – October 2016

*Starting in January 2014, ISIS took over large areas of Anbar and Ninewa governorates, as well as areas of Kirkuk and elsewhere. Operations to clear these areas from ISIS control and prepare for an advance on Mosul – a city 400 km north of Baghdad currently under ISIS control – have been occurring since 2015. On 17 October 2016, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al Abadi announced that military operations to re-take Mosul from ISIS had commenced.*

*It is predicted that 200,000 people will flee in the first weeks of the operation and approximately one million people could be displaced if there is no siege scenario. This is against the backdrop of the fact that ten million people – one third of Iraq's population – including 3.2 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are in need of humanitarian aid.*

*Existing and planned camps will not have the capacity to host this population. Formal UNHCR or Iraqi government camps are likely to shelter only 200,000 to 400,000 (25 to 55 per cent of those in need in Mosul). The rest will have to find shelter elsewhere, including unfinished buildings, schools and mosques. Even those in official camps may be without enough food, water, or blankets, as the International Rescue Committee (IRC) witnessed in Fallujah<sup>1</sup>. Humanitarian actors are in a race against time to ensure critical support is in place.*

*The IRC has been operational in Iraq since 2003, and are planning to reach up to 60,000 people within the first two months of displacement, as well as looking to drastically scale up our operations to reach 90,000 people. Our support is focused on providing multi-purpose cash assistance, protection monitoring and legal assistance including at the security screening facilities, and specialised protection services for women and children.*

## **Urgent action is needed in the following areas:**

- **Out of camp, longer term and sustainable shelter options for displaced people;**
- **Safe routes for civilians to use, and better support for their right to freely move once displaced;**
- **Civilian protection focused security and screening practices;**
- **Flexible long-term funding for the humanitarian response and better engagement with local NGOs.**

## **Applying lessons learnt from Fallujah to Mosul**

Lessons learnt from operations to clear ISIS from Fallujah and the greater Anbar governorate must be implemented in practice or civilians' lives and livelihoods will be impacted on a devastating scale.

In Anbar, past operations to clear the area from ISIS and efforts to assist people upon their arrival to displacement camps – often in large influxes over brief periods of time – have struggled to quickly ensure effective coordination and provision of sufficient water, food, and humanitarian relief items and services. This is why for Mosul, planning and prepositioning stock and resources must take place now as well as an investment in camp and out of camp infrastructure development. Moreover, people have been prematurely encouraged to return to their homes despite heavy contamination of mines and improvised explosive devices in Anbar resulting in casualties, and therefore no premature returns should be encouraged in Mosul.

As was the case in Anbar, conditions inside ISIS-held territory in Mosul are not fully known due to a lack of access. Those who have fled former ISIS-held areas such as Fallujah and Hawija have reported a lack of food, water, medicine and jobs. Those who have managed to escape have spoken of the difficulties of identifying exit routes and the dangers encountered on them; one family who recently escaped Hawija spoke of how they left as a group of 30, but only 25 arrived in Kirkuk due to five fatalities caused by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on the way. One man also described how his brother was caught trying to escape and was imprisoned, with the family now expected to pay a \$1,000 fine.

## **Acting now to save Iraqi lives and livelihoods**

It is unlikely that displacement from Mosul will be short lived. Civilians will be forced to navigate territory riddled with explosive elements in an effort to flee for their lives. Cleared and genuinely safe routes out of the city must be established and effectively communicated so people can make an informed choice about what they should do. Premature returns must be prevented and any return should take place only at a time when it is safe to do so, and should be the result of an informed and voluntary decision by the displaced person.

It is expected that IDPs from Mosul will be able to access “emergency camps”. At the time of writing, the sites have been identified; however infrastructure is not ready and people are already starting to flee. This means that IDPs will be forced to take refuge outside of camps and humanitarian efforts must urgently shift focus in recognition of this reality. This option offers displaced people a solution for shelter, and support that allows them to continue to live their lives in safety and with dignity.

<sup>1</sup> For more information and analysis about learning from Fallujah in time for Mosul see IRC, NRC joint report “[In Search Of Safety](#)”, July 2016.

Supported by IRC findings in Fallujah, if people are able to get to camps, their freedom of movement is restricted and either their identification documents are frequently confiscated upon arrival, or they need to leave these documents at the gate when exiting the camp. Lessons learnt from Syria<sup>2</sup> show that the lack of identity documents can result in people unable to access life-sustaining services.

In order to access any formal or informal camp, individuals will arrive at the frontline and be screened at gathering points to ensure they are not carrying weaponry or explosive devices and transferred to civilian authorities. These authorities then conduct background checks and confirm identities. This screening process must be transparent and dignified and be conducted with the utmost respect for people's human rights and well-being. It is currently unclear how this screening process will take place in practice. If the authorities conducting screening are not appropriately trained, are not provided with technical support, and monitoring and accountability mechanisms are not available, the results could be devastating for those being screened.

While the funding situation is improving for Mosul and donors have made new pledges – including the Department for International Development (DFID) – available funding and resources do not match needs on the ground. Funding for new camps are critically low despite calls for the humanitarian community to be ready to undertake humanitarian operations by 1 September – well over one month ago. The humanitarian community is expecting that it may take a few weeks for the military to advance through villages on the outskirts of Mosul – triggering smaller population displacements from these largely uninhabited areas – before an offensive on the city itself begins in earnest. Donors should also be as flexible as possible. For example, if 700,000 people start walking, humanitarian agencies will need more emergency funding that cannot go through a full review process as that is time consuming and dangerously slow for addressing immediate needs. Practically this means that funding should be made available upon request based on humanitarian needs on short notice, ideally within four days' time.

***Military operations in Anbar exposed the shocking lack of protection for civilians fleeing conflict and violence and after their flight, therefore civilian protection must be a core component of the Mosul operations and response.***

#### **Recommendations to the UK Government:**

1. DFID and the FCO (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) should **immediately support and encourage all planning operations to move towards a focus on an out of camp response**. Donors and humanitarian actors must prepare for a **highly mobile response** to meet the needs of the population likely to be scattered across northern Iraq.

a. This should include **funding and supporting alternative shelter solutions** such as improvements to unfinished buildings and provision of suitable water, sanitation facilities and protection support. Donors must also be flexible enough to include support to host communities.

b. There should be **no restriction of movement hindering access to basic services** not provided in camps, **or applied on a discriminatory basis and all donors should consider cash assistance as an efficient way to meet these needs**.

2. The FCO and MOD (Ministry of Defence) should **continue engaging with the Iraqi authorities and the humanitarian community's leadership** to prepare for civilian exit from Mosul in very large numbers, including **greater efforts to establish genuinely "safe routes" and consider the modalities of the option of civilian evacuation**. This must be included into Coalition and Iraqi military planning, in order to help populations who are likely to become trapped inside the city or between frontlines.

3. All UK engagement should support **civilian protection focused security and screenings**:

a. The FCO and the MOD should champion the **deployment of an independent mechanism to promote human rights adherence and provide technical support at the screening facilities** and other locations where there may be insufficiently trained individuals tasked to interact with the displaced population. This could be by encouraging the Iraqi government to request the deployment of a civilian police force or better utilising UN Assistance Mission for Iraq.

b. DFID and the FCO should remind Iraqi national and local authorities that **they should not confiscate IDPs' documentation without clear justification**, should swiftly return documentation which is taken during legitimate security checks, and avoid confiscating documentation after such checks are completed. Issuing official receipts to, or photocopying identity documents of, are people undergoing review are simple solutions to address this issue.

c. The MOD through the Coalition should support robust UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs **civil-military coordination** which contributes to improved humanitarian access and safe civilian movement.

d. The MOD through their engagement with the Coalition should **ensure that the principles of distinction and proportionality are followed**, including preventing the **use of explosive weaponry in civilian populated areas**.

4. DFID and other donors should ensure that funds must be as flexible as possible and should support the humanitarian community to **step up efforts to establish partnerships with local NGOs in hard-to-reach areas**. Donors, including DFID, have a role to play in providing the financial support to local NGOs in order to increase capacity to respond rapidly to displaced and vulnerable populations.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information and analysis about learning from Fallujah in time for Mosul see IRC, NRC joint report "[In Search Of Safety](#)", July 2016.