

FORCED MIGRATION

review

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special issue

Iraq's displacement crisis: the search for solutions



Forced Migration Review

Forced Migration Review provides a forum for the regular exchange of practical experience, information and ideas between researchers, refugees and internally displaced people, and those who work with them. It is published in English, Arabic, French and Spanish by the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford.

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Civilians fleeing from heavy fighting in Basra, Iraq. Elio Colavolpe/Panos

Back cover photo:

A twice displaced Iranian Kurdish girl in Iraq. UNHCR/K Brooks



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from the editors

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, has noted that Iraq is the world's best-known conflict but the least well-known humanitarian crisis. The humanitarian community has only belatedly begun to acknowledge the extent of the greatest conflict-induced displacement in the history of the Middle East. According to latest UNHCR figures, there are now two million internally displaced Iraqis and 2.2 million refugees, mostly in neighbouring states. One in six Iraqis is displaced. Over eight million Iraqis are in need of humanitarian assistance.

This special issue of FMR could not have been produced without the assistance and encouragement of UNHCR and in particular Andrew Harper, Jose Riera, Ziad Ayad, William Lipsit, Ron Redmond and Rupert Colville.

We acknowledge with gratitude financial support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, Islamic Relief Worldwide, the International Organization for Migration and the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement. We are also grateful to all the authors for speedily working to finalise text of articles and to the British-Iraq All-Party Parliamentary Group for hosting a meeting in the House of Commons to launch this issue.

We would be grateful if readers could pass on hard copies of this issue of FMR and refer colleagues and partners to the online editions in English (www.fmreview.org/iraq.htm) and in Arabic (www.hijra.org.uk/iraq.htm). We would welcome assistance from your agencies in distributing multiple copies, especially in Iraq and neighbouring states. Our contact details are opposite.

The International Federation of Journalists reports that since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 at least 204 journalists have been killed, a figure that surpasses the media death toll in any other war zone in history. We applaud the courage of journalists seeking to draw attention to the humanitarian crisis.

The Iraqi Body Count – an independent database of media-reported civilian deaths – reports that a minimum of 64,776 people have been killed as a result of military action since the invasion of Iraq began on 20 March 2003. The number of 'excess deaths' – the

number of Iraqis whose deaths can be ascribed to the consequences of a conflict which has now lasted as long as the First World War – was estimated by *The Lancet*, a peer-reviewed medical journal, to have reached 650,000 in July 2006, and may now have reached a million.

Figures from the US Congressional Budget Office indicate that the Iraq war is costing the US alone roughly \$200 million a day. Every week military expenditure in Iraq thus exceeds the total annual global budget of UNHCR.

'Quality of Life Improving' proclaims a headline from the 4 June issue of *This Week in Iraq*, the online journal of the Multi-National Force-Iraq. It is unlikely that any of the distinguished contributors to this issue of FMR would agree. We hope that these articles – and the strong recommendations they make – will contribute to efforts being made by genuinely humanitarian actors to provide assistance and protection to the growing numbers of vulnerable Iraqis both at home and abroad.

Amidst the constant stream of bad news from Iraq, and reminders of the depths of inhumanity reached by protagonists, we particularly draw attention to the article on pages 31-34 which reminds us that humanitarianism – often derived from deeply-held Islamic convictions – is alive and well in Iraq.

Marion Couldrey and Tim Morris
Editors, Forced Migration Review

It should be noted that any opinions expressed in the articles that follow do not necessarily reflect the views of UNHCR or other UN agencies or of the Refugee Studies Centre or any other part of the University of Oxford. Please also note that all names of Iraqis used in this issue of FMR have been changed for protection reasons. No Iraqis quoted in any of the articles are featured in accompanying photographs.

Foreword

by António Guterres

Alarmed about the worsening humanitarian situation resulting from the continued conflict and sectarian violence inside Iraq, in early 2007 UNHCR undertook a series of consultations with the United Nations Secretary-General, the Iraqi authorities and a number of interested States, to determine how best to alert the international community to the plight of displaced persons and refugees inside Iraq, as well as Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries and further afield. I was concerned that one of the largest forced population movements in the region since 1948 was going largely unnoticed and placing a heavy burden on the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan in particular, as well as on Lebanon, Egypt and Iran.

This is why my Office took the initiative to convene the International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons inside Iraq and in Neighbouring Countries in Geneva on 17–18 April 2007. Attended by more than 200 delegations from over 100 nations, members of the UN family, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movements

and over 60 non-governmental organisations, the meeting examined the humanitarian plight of some two million internally displaced persons inside Iraq and 2.2 million refugees abroad and underscored the urgency of meeting their growing needs.

The conference identified targeted responses to specific problems, such as the need to find solutions without delay for the particularly vulnerable, including the estimated 15,000 Palestinian refugees who believed that they had found safety inside Iraq. It also helped to assure host countries, particularly Syria and Jordan, of the readiness of the international community to work with them in protecting and assisting Iraqi refugees.

Iraq's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Hoshiyar al-Zebari, made a number of welcome commitments to provide relief to Iraqi displaced, including, in coordination with host governments, to Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries. The conference welcomed the approval of the Strategic Framework for Humanitarian Action in Iraq, devised by the United Nations and partners, as it provides

a mechanism to expand and better coordinate humanitarian assistance activities inside Iraq, and encouraged the United Nations to move forward with its implementation.

The conference was, of course, only a first step in what should now become a comprehensive international effort to protect and assist Iraqis in need, in accordance with the basic principles of international refugee and humanitarian law, and to help host countries shoulder their burden. In follow-up to the conference, my Office is already expanding its activities in the areas of refugee registration and resettlement, is working closely with UN and NGO partners to increase the United Nations' humanitarian relief activities inside Iraq, and will continue to advocate for further engagement by the international community. I believe this effort was successful in drawing the international community's attention to the humanitarian dimension of the crisis. The plight of uprooted Iraqis should no longer remain in the shadows.

António Guterres is the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.



UN's role in Iraq

by Ashraf Jehangir Qazi

The UN Country Team and NGO humanitarian assistance to Iraq have so far averted a full-scale breakdown in basic social services. Major disease outbreaks have been avoided and health and education campaigns are being delivered to millions of citizens in partnership with Iraq's government and civil society. Delivery of potable water, emergency food rations, medical supplies and non-food items have provided temporary relief to IDPs and vulnerable neighbourhoods. However, these gains are at risk without additional investment from the Government of Iraq (GoI), as well as the international humanitarian community, to ensure that Iraq's Public Distribution System, healthcare, education, and water and sanitation systems keep functioning.

The scope of the required humanitarian response appears to be beyond the GoI's immediate capacity, and therefore requires sufficient support from the humanitarian community to ensure an immediate response to Iraq's growing humanitarian needs.

Lack of humanitarian space

In order to deliver assistance, a conducive operational environment must be created. As the violence has escalated the humanitarian space has all but evaporated, catching the population in a double jeopardy: just as needs have spiralled, assistance has all but been suspended from most sources. The UN's ability to effectively respond to the crisis has been compromised by the severely constrained humanitarian space and by security parameters, which have led to strong perceptions of lack of neutrality and impartiality of the UN in Iraq. As a result of lack of humanitarian space, the UN has had to resort largely to remote management, with implementation through NGO partners, community structures, as well as governmental partners. Current operations are managed from Jordan and Kuwait, and any larger-scale response could require additional regional

presence. Modalities assumed for development activities can be adapted for delivery of aid, data gathering and implementation of projects. There is a need for greater centralisation of information management to ensure data consistency and credibility, and facilitate appropriate planning and monitoring of the response.

Appropriate resources

Three years ago it was thought that Iraq was on the road to recovery and development. This was reflected in the creation and mandate of the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI)¹, which is primarily a development fund and, as such, not an appropriate or effective mechanism for funding humanitarian projects. Therefore, a separate rapid response funding mechanism is needed.

In the past, Iraq was a donor country itself, and it is largely perceived as a wealthy country. Donors therefore are reluctant to add funding for humanitarian assistance to the funds already allocated to Iraq, possibly preferring instead to channel resources to other humanitarian situations suffering from lack of funds. Regardless of what resources may be at the disposal of the GoI, it lacks the capacity to plan the programming of those resources to address the needs of its population. Therefore, the international humanitarian community requires donor investment in order to meet the immediate and overwhelming needs, in order to provide immediate relief to Iraqis, as well as to provide the necessary support to enhance the GoI's efforts.

Due to the overwhelming need for assistance and the inability of the GoI or the humanitarian community to meet it, armed groups and community leaders (political, religious and/or tribal) have begun to fill the void with their own form of social welfare. While such initiatives address some of the immediate basic needs of parts of the population,

albeit in a sectarian manner, they carry long-term implications. In particular, assistance provided by armed groups may serve to increase their profile and influence among communities, thus further reducing the possibility for future neutral humanitarian space in Iraq.

Access and security

While the UN appreciates the assistance the Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) have provided for transportation and security inside Iraq, the UN cannot be perceived as neutral, as a result. Neutrality is essential for humanitarian operations, and therefore the UN needs to identify independent means of travel that meet security parameters, while affording the degree of access necessary for its activities.

The current UN country team has been providing assistance to the GoI and Iraqis since 2003, despite the constraints imposed by the situation. Working through its national staff members based inside Iraq, the UN has also established functional networks with national partners country-wide, making it possible to consider delivery of assistance in Iraq.

Work is in progress to reinforce operational partnerships with the UNCT and NGOs through shared information management systems, increased coordination and strengthened partnership capacity. International and national NGOs continue to operate inside Iraq and are tested partners in the delivery of immediate humanitarian assistance. However, these NGOs need financial support if their presence and operations are to be maintained. It is also necessary for future assistance activities to identify local actors as a means to provide relief and humanitarian assistance to the most affected and vulnerable Iraqi populations.

The UN will continue to work with the GoI to jointly provide assistance to the most affected Iraqi

populations. However, as the scope of the humanitarian crisis is beyond the current response capacity of the GoI, the UN will increase its current humanitarian activities to match the increasing needs where possible. To that end, the UN is committed to working directly with governorates, districts and community leaders, to ensure that interventions are tailored to the unique circumstances in each district.

On a regional level, the humanitarian crisis has implications in terms of outflow, security and access to vulnerable groups. Therefore neighbouring countries and their NGO communities should be engaged and included in determinations of responses. Humanitarian corridors between these countries need to be developed and preliminary discussions regarding coordination

between sister UN agencies in these countries have begun.

Ambassador Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, a senior Pakistani diplomat and former ambassador to the USA, is the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq.

The web portal for UN agencies working in Iraq is at www.uniraq.org

1. www.irffi.org

Iraq bleeds: the remorseless rise of violence and displacement

by Ashraf al-Khalidi and Victor Tanner

“I will never believe in differences between people,” the young man said. “I am a Sunni and my wife is a Shi’a. I received threats to divorce her or be killed. We have left Dora now [a once-mixed, now Sunni-dominated neighbourhood in central Baghdad]. My wife is staying with her family in Shaab [a Shi’a area] and I am staying with my friends in Mansur [a Sunni area]. I am trying to find a different house but it’s difficult now to find a place that accepts both of us in Baghdad.”

This comment by a young Iraqi artist to a friend in Baghdad last summer captures the essence of the painful paradox that grips Iraqi society nearly four years after the 2003 invasion triggered a colossal upheaval. On the one hand, Iraq is a society where different ethnicities, cultures, religions and sects have mixed and mingled for centuries, where people worked and lived side by side. On the other, it is a country that is now increasingly riven by terrible sectarian violence – violence that has forced millions of Iraqis to flee their homes, either as refugees to neighbouring countries, or as internally displaced within Iraq.

A history of living together

Living together is a natural part of life in Iraq. The Mesopotamian plain

is a historical melting pot. Modern Iraq reflects this. The three great cities – Baghdad, Basra and Mosul – have been cosmopolitan centres of commerce and learning for centuries. There may not be any official statistics but there are large numbers of mixed marriages in Iraq – up to a third of all marriages, according to a March 2007 article in the *Washington Post*. Indeed, many of the country’s tribes – including some of the most powerful ones – consist of both Sunni and Shi’a.

True, the regime of Saddam Hussein played on differences between Shi’a and Sunnis, as well as between Arabs and Kurds, aggravating the tensions that exist in any multicultural society. But when in 2003 the horrors of that regime were swept aside, many Iraqis yearned for a normal life: security, due process and the

rule of law. This was especially true of Shi’a communities, which had suffered so much under Saddam.

Even today, many ordinary people still do not think in terms of civil war. What they see is not neighbour against neighbour but armed thugs on all sides brutalising civilians. People have tried to protect their friends and neighbours. Shi’a displaced from Mosul and Falluja, interviewed in Diwaniya in June 2006, told of Sunni families who had sought to protect them, and who had in turn been targeted by Sunni radicals. Similar stories came from the other side: we heard, for example, from residents of the Hayy al-Jaamia area of Baghdad about an incident in which a local Sunni grocer was killed by Shi’a thugs and when his Shi’a neighbour protested, he, too, was murdered.

But the situation is hardening. Violence is reaching deeper into society. More and more ordinary people have ties to the radical groups. In many neighbourhoods, it is a case of being either with them or against them. And if the latter, the consequence is to flee or, often, to be killed. And once kin and loved ones join a radical group, the whole family is entrapped.



This Iraqi woman fled her home town after a mortar attack killed several children.

UNHCR/K Brooks

The hard-liners

Since the bombing of the holy Shi'a shrine in Samarra's Golden Mosque in February 2006, successive waves of attack and retaliation have washed over the country. The Samarra bombing marked the end of the restraint with which Shi'a had faced escalating attacks against them. Now the violence is from both sides. The weapon of choice of Sunni militant groups is the car-bomb, while extremist Shi'a death squads detain, torture and murder people.

The violence is neither spontaneous nor popular. Whether you ask political actors or ordinary Iraqis in the street, including those displaced by the violence, the view is that more extreme religious fronts drive both the violence and the resulting displacement. These groups are the Office of Muqtada al-Sadr and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)¹ on the Shi'a side, and the Association of Muslim Scholars in Iraq (AMSI)² and the Islamic Party on the Sunni side.

Hard-line leaders on both sides view the violence and displacement as an extension of existing historical trends. Shi'a leaders point to a history of anti-Shi'a repression by

Sunni leaders in Iraq. "The Shi'a are being killed since the death of the prophet. In fact we can't see any difference between the Umayyads³ and Saddam or the current radical Sunni leaders," said a SCIRI official, interviewed in Najaf. Similarly, a Sadrist official in the Baghdad neighbourhood of Shuala declared: "The plan is clear to us. They want to eliminate the Shi'a in Baghdad and Diyala so they can establish their Taliban state in the Sunni areas."

For hard-line Sunnis, the very essence of the situation is sectarian: they see the 'new' Iraq as a creation of US and Iranian interests – a place where Sunnis no longer belong. "The plan for Southern Federalism allows the Shi'a political coalition to control the oil in the south and leaves the Sunnis isolated and poor," said an AMSI official in Mosul. For a Sunni Waqf Committee official in Baghdad, the anti-Sunni attacks are "an organised plan against the Sunni Arabs." "This has led us to question who is really responsible for the Samarra bombing," he added – a fine example of how, in times of extreme violence, a blend of paranoia and bad faith can replace rational discourse.

The violence gives the radical groups their *raison d'être*. The displaced

are pawns they use to further their agendas – which are strikingly similar. They seek to consolidate 'their' territory by expelling the 'others'. They try to keep some of 'their' people in the territory of the 'other' so as to maintain a claim on the local resources. In a context where the central government is facing immense difficulties asserting its authority across the country, the radical groups of all sides are able to pose as both protectors and providers to the most vulnerable. The displaced are also pawns in the internecine struggles between different groups within each of the two main communities.

As the power and influence of the radical groups increase, so too does their tendency to engage in repressive behaviour. In Sadr City, residents say they feel relief when the Mahdi Army⁴ engages in operations outside the area, because when they are not busy elsewhere, they harass people in their own area. In Washash, a formerly mixed area now under Shi'a control, Shi'a households must fly a black flag to demonstrate fealty.

Likewise, in Baghdad's Sunni neighbourhoods of Ghaziliya and al-Khadhra, the Omar Brigades enforce strict *Sharia* law in a fashion reminiscent of the Taliban. Smoking

is prohibited. Women are forbidden from wearing trousers and men from shaving. Penalties for transgressors are brutal – and sometimes final. Recent news from the Dora

*Iraqi refugees
in a restaurant
in Amman.*

neighbourhood of Baghdad, also controlled by Sunni hard-liners, has it that Christians are sometimes forced to make monthly \$100 *jizya* payments – a head-tax that able-bodied non-Muslim males historically paid in Muslim states.

It is, on both sides, typical warlord politics: moderates and people who speak up in opposition to the violence are targeted, intimidated and killed. The only guarantee for survival is silence.

Moderation in decline

Another ominous and ugly development is that these views are bleeding into the general public. The inhuman nature of the violence and its pervasiveness are causing intolerance and mistrust to spread, especially among the youth.

There are few voices of moderation in Iraq today. One of the few national leaders to have spoken out against the violence and specifically against displacement is Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. In July 2006, he condemned “sectarian chaos” (*fitna taafiyiyya*), the “mutual violence” (*onf mutaqaabil*) and “campaigns of forced displacement” (*hamlaat at-tahjiir al-qasri*). But, to the despair of many moderate Shi’a (and Iraqis in general), the influence of moderates seems to be waning as that of radical Shi’a groups and younger, hard-line leaders grows.

In response to the violence, many local communities, on both sides, are setting up vigilante-like defence committees to protect their areas. But they do not have resources: weapons, generators, fuel and so on. So, in order to function, they link

themselves to the bigger groups like the Shi’a Mahdi Army or the Sunni Omar Brigades. This only fuels the problem further, as the radical groups gain in power at the local level.



Adding to the grim picture, tribes on both sides – which were initially playing a stabilising counterpoint to the urban violence, especially in rural areas – seem to be growing restless. If open conflict erupts between tribal groups, the violence will take on an organised, popular and rural dimension that has so far, mercifully, been lacking.

Displacement on the rise

Well before the 2003 invasion, violent displacement was a major feature of the Iraq of Saddam Hussein. Today’s radical groups continue in that vein: using the violent ejection of entire populations as a tool to assert political power. The central pattern of displacement is the consolidation of territory by the radical armed groups. In essence, people flee to areas where they feel safer. Sunnis go to Sunni areas. Shi’a go to Shi’a areas. Kurds – and some Arabs – go to the northern provinces and Christians go to parts of Ninewah province. And most of those who can leave the country do so. The result: the radical groups hold sway over ‘cleansed’ territories, and have steadily increased their power.

Patterns of displacement vary. The more mixed a city is, the more sectarian violence there is likely

to be. Places such as north Babil, Salah ad-Din province, Mosul, Basra and especially Baghdad have been exceptionally violent. In these areas, campaigns to undermine mixed

neighbourhoods proceed in parallel. There tends to be less violence in areas where there is a functioning local authority – mainly the Kurdish North and the southern Shi’a towns (other than Basra).

The number of displaced is hard to estimate. The only official numbers come from the Ministry of Trade, which manages the country’s rations, but they may

underestimate the overall problem. Many displaced people do not register for rations, and all numbers for internally displaced people in Iraq are manipulated, especially those put out by the political parties. The generally accepted figure for the number of people displaced within Iraq in the year following the Samarra bombing is over 700,000. And, by March 2007, UNHCR was estimating that up to two million Iraqi refugees were living in neighbouring countries, especially Jordan and Syria. The pressure on neighbouring countries may increase as most governorates in southern Iraq have begun restricting the entry of displaced people who do not belong to local tribes or do not have kin with whom they can live.

Sectarian violence is not the only cause of displacement. Others include general lawlessness, which is closely linked to the actions of the radical groups, the lack of basic services, delays in the resolution of property disputes, and the fighting between insurgents and multi-national military operations that periodically displace thousands of civilians.

There are different categories of sectarian displaced. Sunni Arabs from majority Shi’a areas are the group that has grown most dramatically since the Samarra bombing. Shi’a

from majority Sunni areas have been under pressure since before the fall of the former regime. Many Sunni and Shi'a Arabs whom the Ba'ath regime settled, often forcibly, in the mainly Kurdish North as part of its aggressive Arabisation programme were forced to leave in 2003 and 2004. Minority groups forced to flee from both Sunni and Shi'a areas include Kurds, Christians, Turkmen, Sabean-Mandean, Roma and third-country nationals, especially Palestinians. The minorities are often prey to criminal gangs rather than sectarian ones, because they are viewed as having little in the way of protection, unlike the Sunni, Kurds and Shi'a.

How do people cope?

The majority of the displaced stay with family, friends or simply people from the same community. Others squat in public buildings. There are far fewer displaced in camps than with host families. People in camps are the worst off because of poor shelter and sanitation conditions. For the most part, families seem to have stayed together but an important social impact of displacement is increased child labour.

To obtain a ration, displaced people must register with the Ministry of Trade. For a number of reasons – lack of documentation, insecurity, lack of trust in the authorities, pride – many displaced apparently do not register. This holds especially true of people who can avoid the camps because they have relatives they can stay with or simply because they can afford to live without help.

The difficult living conditions trigger much anger against the government. Local authorities are acutely aware of this. Local authorities at the provincial and district level are generally more effective than federal ministries. Every province has a displaced committee and an operations room.

The Iraqi Red Crescent is the primary national aid agency dealing with the displaced. They work mostly in the camps and collective settlements – the only non-sectarian group with real structures and a countrywide presence. Local communities sometimes also support the displaced through informal

committees in neighbourhoods and local mosques. International assistance has in recent times been minimal, and also not very visible, because of the security situation.

Dim prospects

It is hard to grasp the impact of the sectarian violence. Neighbourhoods that were once hard to tell apart are now separated by a no man's land of deserted streets and shuttered buildings. Transporters must change lorries and drivers to ferry goods from territory to territory. Roads are closed to one group or another. Worst of all, Iraq's educated elites are fleeing the country – many have given up hope and are seeking resettlement in third countries.

Though it seems unthinkable, many people fear that the sectarian violence may get even worse. There are fears that artillery could be used to target urban areas designated for ethnic cleansing. The radical groups, while becoming more violent, may also be fragmenting, making it even harder to find a political solution.

The outcome of the government's Security Plan and the US surge are still not clear. But few of those interviewed were very optimistic. A young Sunni man from the Shi'a neighbourhood of Shaab told us that the Mahdi Army had made itself scarce of late but "we know they will be back." Ominously, there has been increased intra-communal violence – Shi'a on Shi'a, Sunni on Sunni – as the radical groups splinter and local leaders vie for power.

Across the country, displaced people, Sunni and Shi'a, say that sectarian displacement is on the rise, and chances of returning home are – for the foreseeable future – slim. "The government wants us to go back to our houses in Baghdad," one man said. "I called my Sunni neighbours and they told me the insurgents are still using our house for their operations. How can we go back?"

People are beginning to integrate the violence into how they live. Fear now dictates which market you shop at; where you go to hospital – or even whether you go at all; whether you send your kids to school; what passenger you take in your taxi,

and where you are willing to take him; which friends you see...

There is a new job in Baghdad today. For a fee, certain people will scour dumps and river banks to find the body of your missing loved one. How long can people live with such violence and not be permanently scarred?

"I wish they would attack us with a nuclear bomb and kill us all, so we will rest..." an Iraqi said to a *New York Times* reporter, after a 3 February bomb in a Baghdad market that killed over 130 people and wounded more than 300 others, "We cannot live this way anymore. We are dying slowly every day."

Increasingly, displaced people see what happened to them as a reflection of deep-seated political divisions in the country. The violence is causing lasting change to Iraq's social and demographic make-up. That is what the radical armed groups on both sides seek to achieve.

They are succeeding.

Ashraf al-Khalidi – a Baghdad-based Iraqi researcher who writes under a pseudonym – and Victor Tanner (victortanner@cs.com) were co-authors of 'Sectarian Violence: Radical Groups Drive Internal Displacement in Iraq', published by the Brookings Institution-University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement in October 2006. www.brookings.edu/fp/projects/idp/200610_DisplacementinIraq.htm

This article first appeared, in a slightly different form, in the April 2007 issue of the UNHCR magazine, Refugees, No 146 'Iraq Bleeds' – a special issue devoted to the millions displaced by the Iraq crisis. The magazine can be obtained in hard copy direct from UNHCR, or downloaded in html or pdf formats from www.unhcr.org

1. www.almejlis.org

2. <http://heyetnet.org/en/index.php>

3. The first dynasty of the Islamic caliphate

4. Mahdi Army (Jaish al Mahdi), a military force created by the Shi'ite cleric, Muqtadfa al-Sadr

Iraq: the search for solutions

by José Riera and Andrew Harper

Incessant violence across much of Iraq's central and southern regions is forcing thousands of people to leave their homes every month. The international community is facing a much larger and more complex humanitarian crisis than anyone could have anticipated.

After the military intervention of March 2003 there were hopes that large numbers of Iraqi expatriates and refugees would return and contribute to Iraq's reconstruction and development. Between 2003 and 2005, some 325,000 Iraqi refugees did indeed return. Since 2005, however, the trend has reversed. Spiralling sectarian, political and criminal violence, dwindling basic services, loss of livelihoods, inflation and uncertainty about the future have discouraged many Iraqis from returning and spurred the flight of hundreds of thousands to destinations within and beyond Iraq's borders. The flight of Iraqis has become the largest forced displacement in the history of the Middle East – exceeding that experienced during the Palestinian exodus of 1948.

One out of every eight Iraqis is either an IDP or has fled the country. UNHCR estimates that there are some two million Iraqis displaced internally, over million in neighbouring states and around 200,000 further afield. Iraqis today constitute the largest group of asylum seekers in 32 industrialised countries surveyed by UNHCR. Asylum applications by Iraqis rose by 77% in 2006 – from 12,500 in 2005 to 22,000 last year. Sweden was the top destination with some 9,000 applications, followed by the Netherlands (2,800), Germany (2,100) and Greece (1,400).

Iraqi refugees

Having examined their plight closely, UNHCR has determined that the majority of Iraqis have left the country under circumstances that place them in need of international protection. UNHCR recognises as refugees under

its mandate both those persons who fall within the refugee criteria under the 1951 Convention as well as those falling within the extended definition as persons fleeing generalised armed conflict or civil unrest.

Jordan – with a population of 5.7 million – has an estimated 750,000 Iraqi residents. This would be the equivalent of just under eight million refugees in France or the UK, 11 million in Germany or 40 million in the USA.

The Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan and other neighbouring states have demonstrated generosity and solidarity in hosting large numbers of Iraqis. Undeniably however, their presence, in addition to that of large numbers of Palestinian refugees, has seriously strained national infrastructures, economies and basic services, and, in some instances, raised national security concerns. There are reports that in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon it is increasingly difficult to provide health care and public schooling to Iraqis. The warm welcome previously extended to them has begun to wane and public concern is on the rise. Security considerations have led to increased border controls and the risk of further restrictions on admission.

Iraqis in neighbouring countries are finding it progressively more difficult to sustain themselves. Many have overstayed their visas and become illegal residents, at risk of detention and deportation. Refugee households have limited access to medical treatment. Children are either unable to attend school or

facilities are so overcrowded that they cannot accommodate new pupils. Some host countries allow Iraqis to enrol in private schools but most families do not have the means to do so. Ensuring access to education is critical for displaced children, as it offers structure, stability and hope for the future during a time of crisis, and provides protection against exploitation and abuse. The prevalence of separated families, unaccompanied minors and women-headed households has further exacerbated the difficulties facing Iraqis. There are reports that young girls are increasingly obliged to contribute to family incomes, and some are resorting to prostitution as a means of survival. Consequently, the incidence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is on the rise, as is vulnerability of refugees to trafficking and exposure to HIV. Child labour and other means of exploitation are increasingly reported.

Internal displacement

Acts of terror and intimidation by armed elements in mixed areas continue to force individuals and families to areas where their ethno-religious group constitutes the majority. Armed clashes between the Multinational Forces and Iraqi Security Forces on the one hand, and insurgents on the other, have also produced population displacements, particularly in central, western and north-western Iraq. As a consequence, traditionally mixed areas are becoming demographically more homogeneous, leading to the emergence of sectarian 'cantons' as mixed neighbourhoods and towns begin to disappear.

As well as straining already heavily burdened social services and local infrastructure, IDPs are considered by receiving communities to be competing for scarce resources and responsible for the rising cost of food, fuel and housing. They are also discriminated against since they are perceived to be responsible



Elio Colavolpe / Panos

for an increase in criminality and prostitution. Whether in the Kurdistan Regional Government-administered governorates of Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaimaniya, or in the southern, predominantly Shi'a, governorates of Kerbala, Basrah, Thi Qar, Muthanna, Babylon and Al Najaf, restrictions on the entry of IDPs are being imposed or access to basic services is being prevented. Local authorities are not registering people arriving as IDPs or facilitating their access to documentation. There are indications that other governorates may follow suit. Some neighbourhoods in Baghdad have adopted similar restrictions on who can enter or take up residence.

Three quarters of all IDPs are women (28%) and children (48%). There are significant numbers of unaccompanied children and households headed by women. Many husbands and fathers remain in the place of origin, having sent their

families to safety. There are growing indications of SGBV among IDPs and recruitment of child soldiers by irregular forces. Many IDPs lack stable income, have limited savings and cannot afford rising rental prices. Others reside with relatives and host families, or in public buildings – including abandoned schools – and makeshift accommodation, including tents. Food has become increasingly problematic. We estimate that 47% of IDPs do not have access to the Public Distribution System.

The forgotten displaced

There are an estimated 45,000 non-Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers in Iraq, many of whom live in especially precarious conditions. Of particular concern are the Palestinian refugees, who are concentrated in Baghdad and who have been singled out for persecution and killings since 2003.¹ It is thought that more than

500 Palestinians may have been murdered. In a climate of fear, Palestinians are desperate to flee Iraq. An estimated 1,400 Palestinians are living in horrendous conditions in refugee camps along the Iraq-Syria border. UNHCR is highly concerned about living conditions for hundreds of Palestinians stuck at the Al Waleed refugee camp. Many suffer from respiratory and other ailments but are unable to access proper medical treatment. They have fled death threats and the murder of family members only to face a deadly environment of searing heat and regular sandstorms. Water is trucked to the camp on a daily basis but is rationed to less than one litre per person. Today, Palestinians fleeing Baghdad for the Syrian border have nowhere to go apart from Al Waleed, which lacks the infrastructure to support them.

Enhanced resettlement of non-Iraqi refugees who are no longer safe

inside Iraq, or who are stranded at its borders, must be a vital component of the international protection response. The possibility of the temporary relocation of certain groups of refugees to areas inside or outside Iraq, where protection may be better assured, may also need to be considered as an exceptional measure, depending on how the situation evolves.

Remote management challenges

“What’s the point of going to Baghdad?” asks a European NGO programme manager whose agency works with UNHCR in central Iraq. “You risk your safety and that of your staff, because they have to look after you. And if your operations are in the field, it is no help going to the Green Zone. And asking your staff to come to the Green Zone can put them at risk.”

Since 2003 at least 82 Iraqi and international aid workers have been killed in targeted attacks which have permanently affected the way humanitarian agencies operate in conflict zones. By the end of 2003, virtually all international organisations had withdrawn their expatriate staff from Iraq, either stopping their activities altogether or adopting a new way of working. While many agencies continue to function in the north, most have relocated their international staff based in central and southern Iraq to Amman or Kuwait. The Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS), through its 18 branches and extensive network of volunteers, is the only agency able to openly operate nation-wide. But even IRCS is not immune to the anarchy that plagues Iraq today: on 17 December 2006, 30 of its staff were kidnapped from one of its Baghdad offices, 13 of whom are still missing.

Security concerns have obliged the UN and other humanitarian providers to adopt measures such as primary dependence on local agency and partner staff, the initiation of cross-border activities and other methods for ‘remote management’ of operations from outside Iraq. This has unfortunately contributed to a perception that the international community

has not taken sufficient action to alleviate the suffering of IDPs and the communities hosting them.

New approaches are necessary to alleviate the plight of people inside the country. Our operations must be pragmatic. This may require an increasing reliance on money changers, cross-border operations, working with non-state actors and moving the focus of interventions away from Baghdad to areas where we have access and can operate. UNHCR has eleven partners carrying out protection and assistance programmes on its behalf inside Iraq, including distribution of non-food items, providing emergency shelter and running legal aid and information centres. While monitoring activities are carried out by UNHCR national staff, according to a monthly plan approved by the agency’s offices in Kuwait and Amman, daily contact with international colleagues is mostly maintained through emails and phone calls.

The lack of information available to external managers making security decisions may result in too much caution. “The UN security rules should be more flexible so we can move, as Iraqis living in Iraq,” a UNHCR staffer told me. “I will assess if it’s ok for me to go or not and I will not take unnecessary risks... but these people are our cousins, our relatives – we have to do something.” Humanitarian workers may have to operate at an elevated risk level, until politicians deliver on their duty to do their utmost toward restoration of a safe humanitarian space.

Addressing the plight of displaced Iraqis

Host countries in the immediate region deserve recognition for their hospitality, patience and humanitarian commitment. It is also important to recognise and pay tribute to the untiring efforts of local authorities, national Red Crescent societies, NGOs and charitable organisations, within Iraq, in neighbouring countries and further afield. They have been important sources of support to Iraqis, providing food, water, medicines and shelter to the most needy, in addition to much needed moral support.

It should be recognised that the Iraqi authorities have been doing their utmost in order to reinstate law and order and counter the present culture of violence. Subject to political and security actors ensuring greater safety and access, the humanitarian actors will seek to mitigate the increasingly harsh conditions faced by Iraq’s growing IDP population, through an expansion of direct humanitarian aid and support to them and to their host communities.

UNHCR is sensitive to the specific concerns of countries hosting large numbers of Iraqis. An important challenge is to put in place arrangements that ensure international protection for those Iraqis in need of it, while simultaneously meeting the concerns of governments as regards issues of state security and sovereignty. Building and consolidating a ‘protection space’ for Iraqis, underpinned by international support to the most affected countries, is a major UNHCR objective. UNHCR appeals to the international community to make a strong commitment to support countries that are shouldering the burden of hosting Iraqi refugees.

From UNHCR’s perspective, regardless of the formal status conferred, the most critical elements of protection for Iraqis arriving in neighbouring countries and seeking refuge are:

- access to safety
- guarantees of *non-refoulement*
- non-penalisation for illegal entry
- availability of humanitarian assistance to persons with specific needs
- permission for temporary stay under acceptable conditions
- the search for durable solutions, including through resettlement, until such time as conditions permit voluntary repatriation to take place in safety and dignity.

Registration is recommended as a means of strengthening planning to meet assistance needs and identification of protection

vulnerabilities. Registration greatly facilitates the efforts of governments to better manage the presence of foreigners on their territory. It is also desirable to provide documents upon registration which protect from *refoulement*.

UNHCR acknowledges that the states neighbouring Iraq do not consider local integration of Iraqis to be a viable option and recognises that voluntary repatriation is considered the preferred solution. However, allowing access to basic services, such as education and health, and opportunities for self-reliance is strongly encouraged. UNHCR encourages strong support for line ministries most directly affected by the presence of Iraqis, such as health and education, in order to provide additional facilities that would directly benefit Iraqi refugees and the communities hosting them, and stands ready to contribute to this reinforcement of national capacity.

UNHCR remains committed to supporting the Iraqi authorities in providing assistance and protection to uprooted populations in Iraq, and to helping, wherever possible, to avert new displacement, as well as to achieve durable solutions. Building upon current programmes, and in the framework of its responsibilities under the inter-agency cluster for refugees, IDPs and durable solutions, UNHCR will provide basic assistance for individuals and groups to supplement strained resources. This includes emergency shelter to IDPs; extension, rehabilitation or repair of host-family homes; quick-impact improvements to community infrastructure and public services; and support for IDPs and vulnerable host community members.

In light of the particular protection concerns with regard to IDPs, and complementary to the protection provided by the Government of Iraq, UNHCR will continue to monitor their situation and provide targeted protection interventions by expanding the capacity of its network of Legal Aid and Information Centres, through additional offices, mobile teams, technical support and staff training. These will aim to deliver both direct assistance (on matters including the reissuing of lost identity documentation, civil status, birth and

marriage certificates) and advocacy on behalf of IDPs and others of concern with relevant stakeholders, in order to enhance access to services.

Action at the political level is urgently needed to improve the humanitarian situation and address its underlying causes. Concerted action is required to set in place a multifaceted international approach which:

- enhances respect for human rights and humanitarian law inside Iraq
- strengthens efforts to limit forced population displacement by diminishing the causes compelling people to flee their homes: it is incumbent on the Iraqi authorities and the international community to pursue every opportunity to diminish the imperative for Iraqis to flee their homes.
- guarantees freedom of movement to seek safety
- ensures protection and material assistance for those who have fled the country, consistent with international refugee law, recognising that voluntary return in conditions of safety and dignity is the preferred option whenever possible
- identifies immediate solutions to the pressing humanitarian problems of the most vulnerable
- initiates action to create conditions, including for the socio-economic rehabilitation of affected areas, in order to make it possible for all Iraqis to return when it is possible to do so, and to deliver other durable solutions for those who cannot return
- upholds humanitarian access to populations in need whether in conflict or non-conflict areas
- guarantees non-discrimination in access to state services such as health, food and fuel rations, education and documentation
- recognises the right to return home voluntarily in safety and dignity or to settle voluntarily in the current location of displacement or in another part of Iraq

- provides for a more consistent, favourable approach to adjudicating Iraqi asylum claims in countries outside the region

- recognises that, in the current circumstances, governments should refrain from returning Iraqis to countries neighbouring Iraq or expect Iraqis from the central or southern regions to relocate to the three northern governorates of Sulaymaniyah, Erbil and Dohuk.

Opportunities for humanitarian actors to work in the north of Iraq exist, including the possibility of expanding operations from the north southwards. It is imperative that all actors interested in providing assistance to IDPs cooperate to make the best use of limited resources in the difficult working environment. Security, logistics and communications will be key to the effectiveness of humanitarian operations in Iraq for the foreseeable future. There is a need to maintain dialogue and regular exchange of information on options for concerted action in relation to prevention, protection and voluntary return, as well as to mobilise international assistance and support for humanitarian action.

Many socio-economic indicators are pointing to a worsening situation. It is therefore necessary to plan for a relief effort targeting vulnerable Iraqis, including those who have not been displaced. Although security remains the principal factor inhibiting a more extensive UN relief effort, the time has come to focus on what can be done, not what the international community remains unable to do.

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For latest UNHCR information on the Iraq crisis see: www.unhcr.org/iraq.html

1. See Gabriela Wengert and Michelle Alfaro 'Can Palestinian refugees in Iraq find protection?', FMR26 www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR26/FMR2609.pdf

A tragedy of increasing proportions: internal displacement in Iraq

by Walter Kälin

Almost two million Iraqis have been displaced within the borders of their own country, more than 700,000 of them in the past fourteen months. Reports indicate that internal displacement is continuing and that, unless peace and stability are restored soon, the number of IDPs will increase.

Iraqis are leaving their homes because of violence. According to interviews carried out by the International Organization for Migration, most IDPs said they fled their homes because of sectarian violence, generalised violence and military operations. Minority communities have been particularly at risk and are reported to have left their communities in substantial numbers. While many have sought safety in neighbouring countries – as is their right under international law – many are unwilling or unable to leave their country. As a recent study by the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement indicates, there are different patterns of displacement. In addition to people fleeing to areas where they feel safer, others remain at home but sleep in different places at night (night-time displacement), or do not go to work or school (pre-displacement) or become displaced more than once (repeat displacement).¹ Although systematic data are lacking, it is likely that those who are internally displaced are more vulnerable than refugees for the simple reason that IDPs are closer to the conflict which led to their displacement.

While governments hosting Iraqi refugees are certainly in need of support, the IDPs inside Iraq – though perhaps less ‘visible’ to those outside the country than the refugees in neighbouring countries – have clear needs which must be addressed. However, responding to IDPs is more difficult than for refugees where at least operational agencies have

access and donors are able to monitor implementation of programmes.

In other countries with large numbers of IDPs, international humanitarian agencies provide assistance until conditions change sufficiently for people to return to their homes. But Iraq is undoubtedly the worst place in the world right now for international humanitarian agencies to operate. Most agencies moved their international staff out of Iraq after the 2003 bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad. Assistance provided by coalition military and civilian forces is often viewed with suspicion. International and local humanitarian workers alike have been targeted by armed militias. Indeed the kidnapping of staff of the Iraqi Red Crescent led it to suspend its operations in Baghdad for about a month – at a time when it was providing assistance to almost a quarter of a million people. Local NGO staff are working valiantly to assist needy Iraqis but their ability to move around the communities they serve is increasingly restricted and they are short of funds. There is a very real danger that the vacuum in humanitarian assistance will be filled by armed militias who provide relief as a way of increasing their control over territory.

Living conditions for many, if not most, Iraqis are grim. In addition to the IDPs, the UN estimates that four million Iraqis lack food security. In 2006, one third of the population was found to be living in poverty. Unemployment is estimated to range

between 20 and 60%. Electricity and clean water are in short supply. Health services have been particularly hard hit as trained staff have been displaced and supplies are lacking. IDPs, uprooted from their communities and livelihoods, are experiencing particular difficulties and often find it impossible to access the public services which do exist.

Priorities for action

While the IDPs have many needs, I want to emphasise three priorities for action to protect those who are displaced within Iraq’s borders.

First, it is the responsibility of the national government – supported by the international community – to protect and assist its displaced citizens. The Ministry of Displacement and Migration, the Iraqi Red Crescent and a number of courageous Iraqi NGOs have worked hard to assist IDPs but problems persist. For example, there are reports of problems for IDPs to access the Public Distribution System (PDS) on which Iraqis rely for their daily food rations. In some cases, IDPs are told to return to their home communities to register for rations. Even when they are able to register, there may be delays of several months before their rations are distributed.

As a matter of urgency, I would encourage the Iraqi government to take the necessary steps to ensure that people who are displaced from their communities are able to receive food rations in the communities in which they are living. They should not be required to return to their place of origin to re-register for rations and provision should be made for displaced Iraqis who do not have the necessary documentation to have continued access to the PDS.

Secondly, there are reports that some governorates are restricting the entry of IDPs into their communities. While it is true that the arrival of large numbers of IDPs stretches available resources and can create tension with the host communities, I want to emphasise that the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,² which were unanimously recognised by the September 2005 World Summit “as an important international framework for the protection of internally displaced persons”, provide for the freedom of movement of IDPs within a nation’s borders. People have a fundamental right to seek to escape violence by moving elsewhere within their country. Local authorities should consider ways of ensuring that IDPs are not impeded in their efforts to find security and protection within Iraq’s borders. At the same time, recognising the challenges which the arrival of IDPs pose to local governments, the Iraqi national authorities and the international community should find ways of increasing the capacity

of local authorities to respond to the needs of the IDPs and to relieve the pressures on public services in the host community. Local authorities need to be supported to provide for all those who are living within their jurisdiction, rather than turning away people who are desperately seeking safety.

Finally, most of the IDPs in Iraq are renting homes, living with family or friends, or living in abandoned buildings of one kind or another. Some face evictions, some are experiencing rising tensions with family and friends and many are threatened with homelessness. Many IDPs lack access to clean water and sanitation facilities. While most of Iraq’s governorates have set up

some kind of camps for IDPs, fewer than 1% of IDPs are living in them. Camps should be used only as a last resort. While IDP camps may have certain benefits – notably the ability to provide public services to displaced populations – they also have serious shortcomings. Most notably, given the reality of increasing sectarian violence in Iraq, moving IDPs into camps could give rise to security threats or scapegoating of IDPs who are conveniently grouped together. Camps are also expensive to build and to maintain and may create a dependency syndrome which can be difficult to overcome even when conditions improve. Furthermore, the experience to date with IDP camps in Iraq seems to indicate that



UNHCR/K Brooks

camps are not culturally acceptable to most Iraqis and alternative possibilities should be supported.

By allowing IDPs to live within existing communities, their ties with the community are strengthened. Rather than devoting resources to maintaining camps, resources could be given to families to allow them to construct an additional room in their home for displaced family members. Communities could be supported to build semi-permanent structures for the displaced and to expand public services in the communities. Given housing shortages in Iraq, these structures could be put to good use in the reconstruction phase. For IDPs for whom living with family members is not an option, the

possibility of using non-essential public buildings as temporary shelters could be explored. However, if IDP camps are established, IDPs should not be coerced to live there, either by force or as a precondition for receiving assistance. Moreover, all displaced persons should be eligible for assistance and be given access to available services – even if they choose not to live in camps.

There are many challenges in responding to the needs of Iraq’s internally displaced persons. First, and foremost, ways and means to better protect the civilian population in Iraq against the threats of arbitrary displacement and ways to hold those responsible for such displacement

accountable should be found as a matter of urgency. But until the violence ends and people are able to return to their communities or find other durable solutions, the Iraqi government has the responsibility, as is spelled out in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,

This young man and his family fled their home after a spate of kidnappings in their neighbourhood. They now live in northern Iraq where he supports them by working in a local bakery.

to ensure that those who were not able to escape forced displacement and remain in Iraq are protected and assisted. I hope that the international community, including UN agencies and NGOs, will focus their endeavours on the IDPs in Iraq and seek ways of strongly supporting the Iraqi government’s efforts in this regard.

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1. Asraf al-Khalidi and Victor Tanner, ‘Sectarian Violence: Radical Groups Drive Internal Displacement in Iraq’ www.brookings.edu/printme.wbs?page=/fp/projects/idp/200610_displacementiniraq.htm
2. www.brook.edu/fp/projects/idp/gp_page.htm

An unenviable task

by Abed Al-Samad Rahman Sultan

The Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) is responsible for all matters related to migrants and refugees in Iraq, both Iraqis and non-Iraqis.

Displacement and forced migration in Iraq have a long history, particularly under the former regime. Displacement increased after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in April 2003 as a result of the breakdown in security and disappearance of the state's institutions. The situation worsened greatly with the escalation of terrorism, military operations to combat terrorism and the suicide attacks which have afflicted all parts of society – including the Ministry's employees – and which have left tens of thousands of families displaced inside and outside Iraq.

A pressing need emerged to establish a ministry to meet their needs, uphold their rights and coordinate humanitarian responses. Consequently, it was decided in August 2003 to establish the MoDM, a decision ratified by the Coalition Interim Authority in January 2004. Initially the ministry had few staff, a shortage of trained personnel and no opportunities for training. It was short of funds and lacked a planning department.

The ministry persevered, worked closely with such partners as

UNHCR and IOM, and managed to open offices in all of Iraq's governorates, apart from Kurdistan. We achieved positive results in our first year. Cooperation with UNHCR and neighbouring governments enabled the repatriation of thousands of refugees from Iran, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon.

We still have only 650 staff, including guards, yet we are responsible for a wide range of activities. These include: undertaking needs assessments; distribution of emergency relief; ensuring the provision of social security; remedying the impact of unjust laws which removed nationality from citizens; liaising with the Iraqi Property Dispute Authority; working with the Ministry of Human Rights to uphold the rights of displaced people; informing relatives as mass graves or those murdered by the previous regime are uncovered. The Baghdad office alone works with 70 local organisations. We also liaise with other countries – including Lebanon, Russia, Syria and the UK – regarding Iraqi citizens imprisoned as a result of illegal residence or border-crossing violations. We

offer some financial support for Palestinian refugees, using funds provided by UNHCR, and monitor their conditions. We work to settle the problem of statelessness affecting some residents of Kurdistan.

Our ministry, unlike others established when the state of Iraq was founded, is without any administrative legacy or institutional knowledge in the field of migration and displacement. It still needs to strengthen its capacities and to work with civil society. However, uncertainty continues as to the role this ministry could play in Iraq, even for individuals in the government itself. We are in urgent need of transfer of expertise, exchange of information and financial backing from our partners, for without this – and the commitment of the government – the ministry will be unable to adequately discharge its duties.

Iraq seeks the return of displaced families to their homes. This can only be done by enforcing the law and ensuring the security of Baghdad, for if we solve the problem in Baghdad this will to some extent solve the problem throughout the rest of Iraq.

It is important to recognise that it is difficult for Iraq to sustain and support a sudden and considerable

An Arab Iraqi family internally displaced to the north walks through the Kurdish neighbourhood where they now live.



rise in population numbers. Under the current circumstances, it is necessary to refrain from encouraging refugees outside Iraq to return and demand the restitution of their property. It is necessary to provide help to ensure there is shelter and lodging for those who return.

The problem of displacement in Iraq requires a concerted local, regional and international response. It is not simply the problem of Iraq and the Iraqis, for its effects transcend national borders.

*Dr Abd Al-Samad Rahman
Sultan is the Iraqi Minister for
Displacement and Migration.*

“The Government of Iraq embraces its duty towards its citizens wherever they are and we will not abandon them. Iraq has a great investment in our fellow country men and women whose hearts and minds are with us but who have had to leave their country behind. We need to stem the brain drain. Iraq once boasted world-class infrastructure including hospitals, universities, scientific institutions and an accomplished and dynamic middle class. We need to reaffirm national links with this strata of exiled society in order that they will return for the critical task of rebuilding the institutions, infrastructure and civil society of our country. The present situation of so many innocent uprooted Iraqis is an enormous challenge but

a symptom of the difficult transition our country is undergoing. It is also an indication of how the effects of instability in Iraq can spill over our borders. The situation thus reinforces the need for our country to be actively supported in good faith and it reminds the region, and the wider international community, why we all have a vested interest in helping achieve stability and peace in Iraq.”

Hoshyar Zebari, Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs, presentation to International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons inside Iraq and in Neighbouring Countries, Geneva, April 2007

The world must shoulder Iraq refugee burden

by Mukhaimer Abu Jamous

The presence of large numbers of Iraqi citizens is costing Jordan an estimated one billion dollars per annum. Like other neighbouring states, we require urgent assistance to enable our national institutions to continue to provide services to Iraqi citizens residing in Jordan.

Jordan is connected to the Iraqi people by ties of historic neighbourly relations and continuous interaction between the two peoples that we are committed to maintaining. We stand by our neighbouring country, hoping that it will overcome its difficulties, maintain the integrity of its land and people and regain peace so that it may resume its role in building stability and prosperity in the region.

Jordan has been a destination for hundreds of thousands of Iraqi citizens, representing all sectors of the Iraqi population, who have always found it a safe and welcoming refuge over many decades. The developments of the past four years have led to a large increase in the number of Iraqis residing in Jordan. The manner in which Jordan deals with Iraqi citizens

within its territory is based upon the long-standing relationship between the two countries and the Jordanian leadership's political will which believes that the provision of humanitarian services and care to the furthest extent possible is crucial.

However, this is constrained by the capabilities of our country and its resources. The Kingdom faces serious pressures in terms of natural resources, infrastructure and economic capacity, not to mention what it has historically shouldered as a result of the continuous waves of refugee inflow, especially of Palestinians. Jordan has, however, ensured that Iraqis seeking a safe haven are given a preferential opportunity to do so. In practical terms, Iraqi citizens benefit from many of the services which Jordanian

citizens access. One example of many is that Jordanian public schools receive Iraqi children in return for a nominal fee at all stages of schooling. Similarly, Jordan also provides health services to the Iraqi community at all Ministry of Health facilities and even preventative health care free of charge.

The provision of these services has resulted in a great burden being placed on the government budget, as many commodities and services are still highly subsidised by the government. It is worth indicating that a government subsidy to the water and energy sectors does not differentiate between citizen, visitor or resident in Jordan. This pressure is magnified when we recall that Jordan is among the world's most water-deprived countries.

The increasing demand on all services has resulted in the rise of inflation and pressure on our national economy. Such pressure leads to an increase in the cost of living for all Jordanians, particularly affecting the most vulnerable groups in our society.

Iraqi refugees
in Jordan.



UNHCR/P. Sands

care and support for Iraqi citizens. We are hopeful that the international community will stand by our side in this humane cause. We are hopeful that our efforts will be supported with economic assistance that will allow our national institutions, and particularly our education and health services, to continue to provide all types of services to Iraqi citizens residing in Jordan.

We believe that no effort towards easing the suffering of Iraqis living outside of Iraq is a substitute for regaining stability and the national reconciliation of its people. Jordan will continue to cooperate with the Iraqi government to find means for Iraqis residing in Jordan to sustain their relationship with their home country. We continue to look for ways to include these citizens in whatever assistance their government is able to provide while facing these unique circumstances.

Jordan has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to continue its cooperation with UNHCR in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 1998. The international community must take into consideration that fact that host countries have not played a part in the circumstances that led to the current humanitarian crisis.

The deteriorating security conditions currently on the ground in Iraq, in addition to the increasing numbers of people coming from Iraq into Jordan, increase the security pressures on my country. This has led to a great increase in expenditure on precautions and security contingency measures in order to maintain the integral and indispensable element of stability which Jordan seeks to ensure for its people and for those residing on its territory.

Initial estimates indicate that the general cost of the presence of the large numbers of Iraqi citizens on our national economy is no less than \$1 billion per annum. In order to discover the real magnitude of

the pressure to which our national economy is subject, and in order to determine the needs created by the presence of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis in Jordan, the government has contracted the Norwegian think-tank FAFO¹ to carry out a survey. This will determine the number of Iraqis in Jordan, analyse their real situation and assess their needs. We are grateful to the Norwegian government for financing this study.

The government will convey the report's findings to friendly countries, international organisations and all interested parties in order to secure the international community's support and assistance for Jordan in providing the best forms of

We need international political will to support UNHCR to relocate recognised and registered refugees to third countries. Assistance must also be provided to help Iraqis remain in their own country, particularly in areas where security can be provided in cooperation with the Iraqi government. Doing so would encourage Iraqis to remain in Iraq by facilitating their transfer from dangerous areas to safer ones until normal conditions return to their places of residence.

Mukhaimer Abu Jamous is Secretary General of the Ministry of Interior, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

1. www.fafono

Iraqi refugees in Syria

by Faisal al-Miqdad

Since spring 2003 the region has seen a massive migratory movement from Iraq into its neighbouring countries. Syria is the primary destination of refugees due to the historical relations between the two countries, and because the regulations in force do not require them to obtain an entrance visa.

Syria has offered Iraqi refugees care and assistance, and continues to do so, in spite of the limited nature of its material resources. At the start of 2007 UNHCR estimated that the number of Iraqi refugees in Syria exceeded 1.2 million, a huge influx to a country with a population of 18 million. This heavy number of arrivals has had an extreme effect on all facets of life in Syria, particularly on the services which the state offers to citizens. There has been a sharp increase in the cost of living and the unexpected weight of numbers has had dramatic impacts on the infrastructure and the economy.

The sudden increase in the population has led to a rise in costs in all areas of life. The prices of foodstuffs and basic goods have gone up by 30%, property prices by 40% and rentals by 150%.

Water consumption has increased by 21%. The additional cost to the Syrian government of supplying Iraqi refugees with drinking water and sanitation alone came to \$6.8 million last year. There are so many Iraqi refugees that they have become a burden on the labour market. In 2006 Syria's unemployment rate was 18%.

The human health needs of the Iraqi arrivals are mounting, in particular among women, children and the elderly. The Syrian government is endeavouring, with what resources it has, to meet their needs, including carrying out necessary surgical operations, health care interventions, vaccinations against epidemics and childhood immunisations. It should be noted that health services and medical care are

free of charge in all government hospitals and public clinics.

This has led to a health care crisis and shortage of hospital beds. Teaching hospitals alone estimate the costs of treating Iraqi refugees in 2006 at approximately \$163,000. The Syrian Red Crescent spent some \$60,000 on providing treatment and surgery to around 730 Iraqis in 2006. There is a pressing need to equip two 200-bed hospitals and to set up clinics to supply the 1.2 million Iraqis with the necessary medicines and equipment.

Basic education in Syria is free and the cost of higher education is usually nominal. As a result there has been a steady rise in enrolment, leading to school and classroom overcrowding which has adverse repercussions on equality of access to learning and education and on the health of students and teachers. Inability to absorb more pupils is likely to lead to a rise in school drop-out rates. Accordingly there is a pressing need to enlarge the existing schools and build about 100 more schools, so that all these students can be assimilated in order to prevent instances of



Many Iraqi refugees live in the Sayyida Zeinab quarter of Damascus.

An Iraqi family fills out form to register as refugees at UNHCR's centre outside Damascus.



drop-out. The total cost is estimated at approximately \$60 million.

According to UNHCR, the number of Iraqi refugee families in Syria without a breadwinner is estimated to be around 27%. The situation of female-headed households is grave. The war in Iraq has resulted in new circumstances never previously common in Syria or Iraq. Conditions have forced some families to work in prostitution or to encourage their daughters to work in this field – something offensive to the customs of both Syrians and Iraqis.

Harsh living conditions have also led to the spread of child labour and increased drop-out rates. There is an insufficient provision of cultural and recreational centres, nursery schools and playgrounds. There is also an urgent need to provide appropriate care for the elderly and for the very large number of new arrivals with disabilities, more than a third of which are attributable to war injuries. There is a pressing need to support these disadvantaged families, and to create homes to care for the victims of war and displacement, the elderly and children, particularly orphans and people with disabilities. They need physical, mental and social support to prepare them for return to their original

communities once the war has ended and conditions are stabilised.

Overcrowding and the reduced standard of living have brought about a rise in crime of more than 20% in areas with concentrations of Iraqi refugees. We are witnessing kinds of crimes previously unknown in either Iraq or Syria – kidnapping, ransom demands and blackmail, as well as the involvement of organised crime in prostitution, killings and intimidation. In 2006 the Syrian police and security authorities thus had to spend an additional \$15 million on maintaining law and order.

Conclusion

Iraqi refugees constitute a numerically enormous mass of humanity in comparison to the number of the inhabitants of the region. Certain agencies estimate that the number of refugees in states neighbouring Iraq is greater than the total number of refugees in all the countries of the European Union. Syria's economy and infrastructure are buckling under the great weight of the burden.

The relief and aid which Syria has offered to Iraqi refugees in its territory over the past two years (2005-06) alone has amounted

to \$162 million. In light of the continuing rise in incoming Iraqi refugee numbers, it is estimated that the cost of humanitarian, health and education support for Iraqi refugees over the next two years will exceed \$256 million.

It is necessary, in our view, that the international community acknowledge:

- the need to find political solutions to the crisis in Iraq
- the tragic reality that more than four million Iraqis have been displaced and strengthen the international relief effort required to meet the crisis
- the burdens thrust on neighbouring states
- the risk that any further deterioration in the situation will lead to even greater number of displaced people with implications for the entire region
- the urgent need to provide financial support to cover the cost of providing services to Iraqi refugees in Syria and also to build the capacities of governmental and non-governmental organisations such as the Syrian Red Crescent
- the need to provide necessary financing for UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies working to help migrants and refugees in the neighbouring countries
- the importance of offering assistance and funding to support the right of Iraqi refugees and migrants to return to their homes and creating appropriate circumstances for them to do so.

The Iraqi authorities and the foreign troops present on Iraqi territory must urgently shoulder responsibilities placed on them under international law to ensure protection, security and services to all residents of Iraq, including those groups that are weakest and most exposed to danger and persecution, such as the Palestinian refugees.

Dr Faisal al-Miqdad is Syria's Deputy Foreign Minister.

Resettlement

by Vincent Cochetel

Both a durable solution and an instrument of protection, resettlement is available to only a tiny fraction of the world's refugees. UNHCR has launched a large-scale resettlement programme for Iraqi refugees but places are limited and it is the degree of 'vulnerability' that will ultimately determine prospects for resettlement.

In December 2006, UNHCR's revised Return Advisory and Position on International Protection Needs of Iraqis outside Iraq¹ cited extreme tension in central and southern Iraq with a high probability of continued hostilities and increased insecurity. It advised that "no Iraqi from Southern or Central Iraq should be forcibly returned until such time as there is substantial improvement in the security and human rights situation in the country." Voluntary repatriation is not considered a viable option at this time. Given the deterioration of the security environment in Iraq (particularly since the Samarah bombings in February 2006), the difficult protection environment in some countries of first asylum and the fact that the prospect for durable solutions appeared remote or absent, UNHCR strongly encouraged states to consider resettling vulnerable Iraqi refugees and stateless persons stranded in Jordan and Syria.

Resettlement is a mechanism for refugee protection, a durable solution and an important tool of burden sharing. Resettlement is explored when refugees are unable to repatriate voluntarily and their life, liberty, safety, health or fundamental human rights are at risk in their country of origin or in the country where they have sought refuge. Resettlement in no way jeopardises the right to repatriate voluntarily when conditions improve. Given the absence of conditions for voluntary repatriation to Iraq and the inability of host countries to consider local integration, UNHCR is planning to submit 20,000 Iraqis for resettlement by 31 December 2007. Of this number, 7,000 will be submitted to the USA by 30 June 2007.

The programme is on target. As of 18 May, 5,894 Iraqi refugees had been formally submitted for resettlement. Referrals include 1,599 from Ankara, 1,593 from Damascus, 2,037 from Amman, 523 from Beirut, 93 from Cairo and 49 from Teheran. Resettlement statistics indicate a steady increase in referrals this year, at an average rate of more than 700 referrals per week. This is a striking increase when compared to the resettlement of a total of 3,183 Iraqi refugees in the previous four years.

All Iraqis from central and southern Iraq, with the exception of those who raise serious exclusion concerns at the time of registration, are recognised as refugees by UNHCR on a prima facie basis and countries have been requested to observe flexibility in their resettlement determinations. Eleven distinct eligibility criteria for resettlement referrals have been established. These include victims of severe trauma, detention, abduction in the country of origin; membership of minority groups targeted in the country of origin; women at risk in country of asylum; unaccompanied or separated minors; dependants in resettlement countries; older persons at risk; medical cases without treatment in country of asylum; high-profile cases and/or family members; Iraqis who have fled because of their associations with specific governmental, military or intergovernmental groups; and stateless persons and those of in risk of immediate *refoulement*. This time-consuming, labour-intensive process involves registration and initial screening followed by a one-on-one interview. The resettlement programme is based on individual, rather than group, determination and observes UNHCR's key principles

of non-discrimination and regional consistency, giving no preference to ethnicity, sect or religion.

UNHCR is particularly concerned about some 15,000 Palestinian refugees concentrated in Baghdad who since 2003 have been targets of attacks and persecution.² Many Palestinian refugees in Iraq have lived there since 1948 and consider Iraq to be their homeland but have been left threatened, stateless and largely neglected by the international community. UNHCR has received credible reports that some 600 Palestinians have been murdered in Baghdad since 2003. Of particular concern are the 826 Palestinians stranded in Al Waleed refugee camp, 350 in Al Tanf near the Syrian-Iraqi border, 300 in El Hol in Syria and 97 at the Ruweyshid refugee camp in Jordan. In close cooperation with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), UNHCR has been actively seeking solutions for these vulnerable Palestinian refugees. With restricted humanitarian assistance, health and social services, there is an urgent need to relocate the Palestinian refugees stranded at these border refugee camps, unless other solutions become available to them. These groups have been characterised as the most vulnerable.

The International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons inside Iraq and in Neighbouring Countries held on 17-18 April 2007 in Geneva was organised with the objective of sensitising the international community to the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and further afield as well as promoting concrete actions and commitments to address these needs. Amongst these commitments were improving prospects for durable solutions and increasing resettlement opportunities for the most vulnerable groups. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, "resettlement to third countries is only an answer for the

most vulnerable. Obviously, the best solution for the overwhelming majority of Iraqi refugees will be their voluntary return in safety and dignity – once conditions allow.”

No country is legally obliged to resettle refugees. UNHCR therefore commends resettlement countries, in particular Australia, Canada, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the USA, which are considering or have formally agreed to resettle vulnerable Iraqis.

UNHCR recognises that 20,000 resettlement referrals only amount to a small proportion of the greater Iraqi

refugee population. Nevertheless, in the context of Iraq, resettlement will remain a significant option in protecting women-at-risk and in addressing specific vulnerabilities of a medical or social nature that cannot be addressed effectively in countries of asylum in the region. Since many refugees are not likely to repatriate to Iraq in the mid or long term, given the traumatic events they experienced in their country, UNHCR will endeavour to seek multi-year commitment from resettlement countries to protect vulnerable refugees and to assist host countries (in particular Syria, Jordan and Turkey) in providing them with a durable solution in third countries.

UNHCR will also continue to promote a constructive dialogue with host countries, resettlement countries and NGO partners, on the imperative to protect and assist all Iraqi refugees abroad and to mobilise the necessary humanitarian assistance.

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1. www.unhcr.org/home/RSDLEGAL/458ba66f4.pdf

2. See Gabriela Wengert and Michelle Alfaro, ‘Can Palestinian refugees in Iraq find protection?’, FMR26 www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR26/FMR2609.pdf

The EU should help Iraqi refugees

by Gunilla Carlsson and Tobias Billström

There are strong humanitarian reasons and close ties that underpin a Swedish commitment to Iraq. More than 100,000 Iraqis are living in Sweden and the numbers are rising. Europe could do more to provide humanitarian assistance and assist Iraqi refugees.

Despite political progress in Iraq, sectarian violence continues to claim new victims. While the eyes of the world have been on the conflict, its humanitarian consequences have largely been ignored. For quite some time now, we have witnessed an exodus of Iraqis from their own country as well as internal displacement on an unprecedented scale. The continuing influx of Iraqis to Syria and Jordan puts a heavy burden on their socio-economic structures, particularly in the housing, education and health sectors. A worsening situation would constitute a threat to the stability of these countries and could lead to an increase in secondary movements towards Europe. A collapse of the reception capacity of receiving countries would make the refugees even more vulnerable.

The Geneva conference convened by UNHCR in April has raised wider international awareness of the dire humanitarian situation of displaced Iraqis and, it is to be hoped, galvanised political will to address the situation. The states in the region have committed themselves to greater cooperation to comprehensively address the consequences of Iraqi displacement. Syria and Jordan, which have shown remarkable solidarity and borne a heavy burden, have begun to assess the humanitarian needs of their Iraqi population. The Iraqi government has stated that it will take concrete initiatives, in concert with neighbouring states, to improve access to hospitals and schools for displaced Iraqis. To be sure, the Government of Iraq is responsible for the protection of its citizens, including the internally displaced,

but it needs support and assistance. Addressing the humanitarian needs in Iraq and improving the Iraqi government’s capacity to deliver is also closely bound up with the future stability of Iraq.

The efforts of the states in the region to find solutions to the Iraqi displacement crisis now need to be complemented with a firmer international response. While taking into account the political and security concerns associated with the present situation, we need to find better ways to channel international support to ensure continued protection and assistance for the displaced Iraqis. The newly adopted UN Strategic Framework for Humanitarian Action in Iraq¹ lays the groundwork for stepping up humanitarian aid inside Iraq. In addition, together with states concerned, we should explore mechanisms to also increase aid to those Iraqis who have left the country. This is indeed a situation in which the interests of the region and that of the European Union converge. Further concerted action to improve the situation of the many Iraqis who have fled their homes

will prevent the refugee situation in the region from developing into an outright humanitarian crisis, that could in turn lead to a mass exodus from the region.

The security situation has complicated but not stopped delivery of Swedish assistance. In fact, Sweden was the fourth largest donor of humanitarian support to Iraq and Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries in 2006.² Support has been given through the Swedish Red Cross and the ICRC and through the Swedish organisation, Qandil,³ which is primarily focusing on water and sanitation projects and the primary health care needs of displaced people in the Kurdish provinces. Sweden also supports the work of the Mines Advisory Group (MAG)⁴ to remove landmines and raise awareness of the landmine problem. We have provided considerable assistance for reconstruction, democratic governance, election organisation and infrastructure. We are keen to increase the capacity and organisational development of civil society in Iraq. To this end, the Jarl Hjalmarsson Foundation⁵ is about to start a project in northern Iraq

in order to promote equal and full political participation of women.

Sweden alone receives as many Iraqi asylum seekers as the rest of Europe. Sweden and other member states, as well as the European Commission, have made substantial contributions to UNHCR's work to protect and assist Iraqi refugees but additional burden sharing is required. The strategic use of pooled resettlement capacity would be one way to share the burden and maintain a temporary 'protection space' in host countries. In order to benefit the reconstruction of Iraq, this will have to be accompanied by an active return policy. While the Iraqi diaspora can play an instrumental role in rebuilding Iraq, it is of major importance for the country's future that it is not drained of its most skillful citizens, many of whom have already left Iraq or are about to do so. The Swedish Migration Board and AGEF⁶ have thus entered an Agreement on return to Iraq. The main aim is to facilitate reintegration and support returnees to the three northern governorates of Iraq. The programme consists of assessment and job placement, salary and training measures, as well as qualification courses.

A lasting solution to the Iraqi refugee situation can only come about through a stabilisation of the situation in Iraq and long-term support to the Iraqi government to enable Iraqis to live in peace and security, build democratic institutions, respect human rights and create conditions for the displaced to return. This will not be possible without a comprehensive international response to sustain protection and assistance to Iraqi refugees and IDPs. The European Union should play an important role in this vital humanitarian endeavour.

Gunilla Carlsson is Sweden's Minister for International Development Cooperation. Tobias Billström is the Minister for Migration and Cooperation Asylum Policy.

1. [www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/\(httpDocuments\)/ECE544FA61A7C12572C200375BF5/\\$file/pdf_Strategic_Framework_for_Humanitarian_Action_in_Iraq.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/(httpDocuments)/ECE544FA61A7C12572C200375BF5/$file/pdf_Strategic_Framework_for_Humanitarian_Action_in_Iraq.pdf)

2. OCHA, Financial Tracking Service

3. www.qandil.org

4. www.mag.org.uk

5. www.hjalmarssonstiftelsen.se

6. Association of Experts in the Fields of Migration and Development Co-operation. www.agef.net

Many internally displaced people now live in rough conditions.



Iraqis denied right to asylum

by Bill Frelick

Now that the international community is belatedly paying attention to the existence of an estimated two million Iraqi refugees, Iraq's neighbours are closing off escape routes while the US and UK provide no meaningful support to refugees or the countries hosting them. Millions of IDPs and other war-affected and persecuted Iraqis are trapped and denied the fundamental right to seek asylum.

Iraq's neighbours are refusing entry and imposing onerous new passport and visa requirements for Iraqi nationals. Saudi Arabia is building a \$7 billion high-tech barrier on its border to keep Iraqis out. Kuwait is equally categorical in its rejection of Iraqis. The Egyptian authorities began imposing highly restrictive new procedures for Iraqis seeking entry. There is a discernible hardening of response among all the neighbouring countries, except Syria. In some cases governments have taken restrictive measures based on criteria that amount to particularly odious religious discrimination, and both seriously undermine the right to asylum and violate fundamental principles of refugee protection. Policies of neighbouring states are causing separation of families, deepening the anxiety of refugees and

heightening the desperation of those still in Iraq trying to find a way out.

Jordan left in lurch

Sandwiched as it is between the Israel-Palestinian conflict and the Iraq war, Jordan is bursting with refugees, and now hosts the largest number of refugees, per capita, of any country on earth. The Jordanian authorities regard the Iraqis as 'guests', 'temporary visitors' or 'illegal aliens'. For the first three years of the war, Jordan remained generally tolerant of the large numbers of Iraqis crossing its border and staying in its territory, preferring to benignly ignore the population, essentially looking the other way and letting the Iraqis fend for themselves. Jordan's history and tradition as one of the world's most remarkably generous

hosts of refugees changed after November 2005, however, when three Iraqis set off bombs which killed 60 people in three hotels in Amman.

The Jordanian authorities are now preventing the entry of single Iraqi men between the ages of 17 and 35. They have severely tightened temporary residency permits, almost ensuring that the vast majority of Iraqis will become 'illegal aliens' and subject to deportation to Iraq. There are recurrent reports that the authorities are turning Iraqis away at ports of entry for failure to produce the new 'G series' passports, a more tamper-resistant document than previously issued but which Iraqis can only obtain from the Ministry of Interior in Baghdad by paying large sums of money, putting up with long waits and enduring political and religious scrutiny by the issuing authorities. In other cases, border guards ask Iraqis about their religious identity and reject those who are or appear to be Shi'a. In some cases, Iraqis who had legal residence in Jordan and valid travel documents but who returned to Iraq have been subsequently prevented from reentering Jordan, resulting in separation from their families.

A refugee family in Ruweished refugee camp in neutral territory between Iraq and Jordan.



Jordan has no refugee law to fall back on. It is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and has no asylum procedures. It insists on its prerogative to tell its 'guests' when they are no longer welcome and must leave. Jordan has deferred the job of determining who is a refugee to UNHCR. In March, UNHCR decided that as there are now so many Iraqi asylum seekers – and overwhelming evidence of high levels of threat and danger in south and central Iraq – individualised refugee status determinations are not just unnecessary but an obstacle to providing protection. It started issuing refugee cards to all Iraqi asylum seekers appearing at its Amman office.

Jordan has rejected this exercise of UNHCR's mandate but without exercising its own responsibility in UNHCR's place. It still refuses to call a refugee a refugee. It rejects asylum seekers at the border, and is now poised to deport even more Iraqis back to face risk to life in Iraq's maelstrom of hatred and violence, including those who have been issued UNHCR refugee documents.

Jordan needs international support to care for refugees on its territory. The support should be quick and generous. But it cannot be unconditional. If Jordan wants the international community to help it assist the refugees, it must play by the rules when it comes to protecting them. Allowing UNHCR to perform its functions and abiding by the principle of *non-refoulement* is fundamental to sharing responsibility for refugee assistance and protection.

USA and UK's special responsibility

The countries that are bearing the brunt of the Iraqi refugee crisis are not the ones responsible for creating it. The US and the UK undertook a war which has directly caused thousands of deaths, widespread fear and suffering, and forced displacement, and which precipitated a sectarian conflict that has caused additional violence, persecution and massive displacement. As such, these two countries have a particular responsibility both to refugees and those still seeking refuge.

President Bush has yet to so much as acknowledge the refugees' plight, let alone direct the US government to bring the displaced to safety or even to provide adequate humanitarian aid. In the past the US has often aided those persecuted for supporting it – refugees from the Hungarian Revolt, the Bay of Pigs; since the Vietnam War, a million Vietnamese refugees have been resettled in the US, including tens of thousands of South Vietnamese army veterans. But the Bush administration has been very slow to respond to Iraqi friends whose lives are now in danger. Many of the displaced are the very individuals on whom the administration was relying to build a pro-Western democracy in Iraq. By not acknowledging them, to stave off admitting failure, the Bush Administration shuns accountability for its own actions.

In 2005 the US allowed only 202 Iraqi refugees to enter the country. Under increasing pressure to respond to the refugee crisis and to rescue refugees persecuted for their support of the American initiative, the State Department announced in January 2007 its willingness to resettle up to 7,000 Iraqi refugees this year. As of this writing, fiscal year 2007 is half over and fewer than 100 Iraqi refugees have been admitted to the US, a rate of admission even lower than 2005. Even if the US were to succeed in resettling 7,000 Iraqis in 2007, it would be but a drop in the ocean of two million Iraqi refugees and another two million displaced within Iraq. As minimal as the US response has been, the UK has not even made the rhetorical commitment to admit Iraqis who are under threat for having worked for British forces in Iraq, much less provided meaningful support to meet the humanitarian needs of refugees in the region. The US and the UK are conspicuously failing to provide minimally adequate burden sharing to encourage Jordan and Syria to keep their doors open.

International and regional responsibilities

Jordan and Syria demonstrated tolerance toward Iraqi refugees for the first few years of the war, particularly by allowing asylum seekers to enter and remain. Both

countries have limited resources and competing social needs both from their own citizens and from the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees whom they host. Both have legitimate security concerns and understandable interests and sovereign rights in the management of immigration. Their valid security concerns can be addressed, in part, by registering asylum seekers and providing them legal status, as well as by providing them the means to live in safety and dignity.

As in any refugee crisis, the wider international community has a collective responsibility to share the burden which should not fall simply on those countries that happen to be at the receiving end of a mass refugee exodus. The preamble to the 1951 Refugee Convention notes that "the grant of asylum may place unduly heavy burdens on certain countries" and that refugee solutions "cannot therefore be achieved without international cooperation." The international community must uphold the right, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of all people to seek asylum in other countries by insisting on the right of Iraqis still clamouring to get out of Iraq to reach safety in neighbouring countries.

My organisation, Human Rights Watch, has called on neighbouring states to:

- scrupulously observe the fundamental principle of *non-refoulement* – including non-rejection at the border and ports of entry
- admit at least temporarily all Iraqi asylum seekers, Palestinian refugees and Iranian Kurdish refugees residing in Iraq who are seeking asylum
- cooperate with UNHCR in the registration of Iraqi asylum seekers and refugees
- provide renewable residency permits and work authorisation for Iraqis registered by UNHCR
- ensure the right of all children, regardless of residency status, to free and compulsory primary education, as guaranteed



UNHCR/J Wreford

A refugee woman with her belongings on a Damascus street.

in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

- ensure compliance with the principle of family unity by allowing and facilitating the exit of family members from Iraq and their entry to countries of asylum where their relatives are located.

Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Syria should accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and Turkey should drop its geographical limitation to the Convention and Protocol. In consultation with UNHCR, all countries in the region should establish domestic refugee laws and build infrastructures for processing asylum claims and providing protection for refugees.

The US and the UK should:

- acknowledge responsibilities for Iraqi refugees and IDPs by contributing quickly and generously – both bilaterally and through UNHCR – to meet the humanitarian and protection needs of Iraqi and Palestinian refugees from Iraq in Jordan, Syria and other countries of first asylum, as well as IDPs inside Iraq
- provide substantial financial support for schools, shelter, health care and other social needs in Jordan and Syria
- institute significant refugee resettlement programmes: doing so would acknowledge the needs of refugees of special humanitarian concern because of their ties to the US or the UK and show by example the need to preserve asylum and the right to seek asylum in neighbouring countries
- urgently facilitate the evacuation of Palestinian refugees seeking to leave Iraq
- encourage Israel to allow Palestinian refugees from Iraq to return to areas now administered by the Palestinian National Authority
- urge the governments of neighbouring states to keep their borders open and not to deport Iraqi asylum seekers and refugees and Palestinian refugees from Iraq fleeing persecution and violence.

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For latest information, see HRW's Iraq page: hrw.org/mideast/iraq.php

Delivering is never remote: NGOs' vital role

by the FMR authors

The plight of Iraqi refugees is grave but is the tip of the iceberg of Iraq's gathering humanitarian crisis. The (grossly under-reported) plight of those still in Iraq is even more worrying. Despite the insecure environment and numerous constraints, humanitarian intervention in Iraq is on-going, possible and greatly needed.

Evidence gathered by the NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI)¹ – a network of about 80 international and 200 Iraqi NGOs – shows that Iraq – once the Middle East's most developed country – today has benchmarks and indicators normally associated with developing countries. Personal security, health care, education and public services – including access to clean water, electricity and sewage – are non-existent or, at best, a fraction of pre-war standards. Only 32% of Iraqis have access to safe drinking water. The state health system is collapsing. Attacks on health workers are affecting their morale and commitment and many have fled abroad. Health facilities are being occupied or destroyed by belligerents and drug distribution systems have broken down. The sewage system has almost collapsed and only 19% of Iraqis resident in Iraq have access to a functional sanitation system. Some suburbs of Baghdad lack electricity for days on end, a torment in blistering summer temperatures. In some areas up to 90% of children are not going to school. In February UNICEF estimated that 4.5 million children are under-nourished, one child in ten is under-weight and one in five short for their age. Iraq's Public Distribution System (PDS) – the centralised mechanism which for decades has met the food needs of vulnerable Iraqis – is inefficient and close to collapse in many areas.

Violence is a critical, all-pervasive characteristic in the lives of people in many parts of Iraq, with devastating humanitarian consequences. While attacks by insurgents and counter-

insurgency operations continue and religious, political and criminal violence deepens and spreads, it is civilians who are paying the price. 90% of those who die violent deaths are men, leaving huge numbers of widows and orphans without support. Millions have been injured and psychological trauma is widespread. Exposure to violence, constant stress and lack of stability are compromising the mental health of large segments of the population, especially children. Psychosocial interventions are urgently needed.

The scale of the crisis is belatedly being recognised. The recent UN Strategic Framework² suggests that eight million people – one Iraqi in three – are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, half of them displaced inside or outside Iraq. The remainder may still be in their homes but have become chronically food insecure. Analysis of the humanitarian crisis is constrained by the insuperable difficulties of collecting data that can be vouched for by all parties. The Government of Iraq and those international agencies embedded within the Green Zone have a limited perception of the situation on the ground and have lost the opportunity to access those in need. International agencies have over-focused on building the capacity of the government of Iraq at a time when its ability to administrate and guide the country has steadily declined. In the short term there appears to be no way to address the protection vacuum in much of Iraq. Multinational Force Iraq (MNF-I)³ and Iraqi Security Forces are incapable of protecting

civilians, while the Iraqi authorities cannot access many of those in needs. Most major international agencies – with the notable exception of the Red Cross/Crescent – have failed to adjust their responses to the evolving context. Their credibility with Iraqis is compromised, after years of international sanctions against Iraq, by their dependence on the MNF-I for logistics and security.

Defending humanitarian space and role of NGOs

A number of organisations are implementing other agendas under the cover of providing humanitarian aid. These are agendas that can be political, religious or military. There are bogus local and international NGOs. The fact that non-humanitarian actors – Coalition and Iraqi military forces, private companies and non-state armed groups – present some of their activities as 'humanitarian' blurs the line between the military and civilians, reinforcing misperceptions and compromising the security of legitimate humanitarian aid workers. It is essential that humanitarian space is maintained and expanded for relief to be provided.

Prior to 2003 the few INGOs operating in Iraq were labelled as spies by Saddam's regime. The concept of NGOs and the culture of a free civil society were alien. In 2003 the arrival en masse of NGOs reinforced the popular perception that NGOs are inextricably linked to the Coalition Forces. In the current atmosphere of mistrust this misperception is still widespread. It must be challenged. NGOs that adhere to the Code of Conduct (CoC) for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief⁴ need to distinguish themselves from other types of agencies and to emphasise their neutrality and impartiality.

It is important for NGOs to remember and to remind others that there is a hierarchy within the principles of the CoC. At the top of this hierarchy is the absolutely non-negotiable affirmation that “the humanitarian imperative comes first”.

The international media often suggest that humanitarian work is impossible and that there are no NGOs present in Iraq. This is far from the truth – there are still 70 INGOs and hundreds of Iraqi NGOs that are active. They are playing a vital role providing support to affected people. NGOs are amongst the only humanitarian actors still able to intervene on the field, sometimes far from international and global standards but always concerned to improve the quality of aid. They are still able to access communities and represent a large part of the last humanitarian actors and witnesses on the ground. Currently, NGOs have adapted to the current climate of distrust and uncertainty in Iraq by being very conservative in the information they share and in being careful with whom they are publicly associated. Aid workers working for or in partnership with international NGOs do not advertise where the aid is being brought from or who their partners are, nor do they communicate information on their programmes or interventions.

NGOs’ ability to respond is often constrained by a lack of neutral and flexible funding that supports their staff and other core costs as opposed to specific time-bound and donor-defined activities. There is a risk that withdrawal of some donors and limited funds may significantly decrease the number of active NGOs at a time when humanitarian needs are at their most acute. The strategies of many humanitarian stakeholders are elaborated at headquarter level without an adequate knowledge of realities on the ground. There are many guidelines, administrative requirements and rigid frameworks which can end up hampering the ability of fieldworkers to devise the creative, flexible and pragmatic interventions which are required.

Insecurity in central and southern Iraq has forced most foreign NGOs to adopt remote programming strategies and complicated the ability of Iraqi NGOs to develop relationships with

international actors. This imposed distance has raised a number of concerns with respect to the quality of the aid delivered, NGO accountability and donors’ ability to appreciate and respond to the needs on the ground.

Once established, humanitarian space cannot be taken for granted but has to be developed and sustained on a daily basis. Most access points have already been identified. Local facilitators have to be helped to improve, create and maintain access. A cadre of talented, creative and adaptable managers able to deal with unpredictable obstacles is vital. They need to have diversified teams but cannot build them without adequate funding.

NGOs are showing that it is still possible to address humanitarian needs inside Iraq through flexible locally-based approaches. NGOs are building a field-based emergency network that will improve the quality of aid responses by centralising and securing information on existing networks, improve field linkages and ease access for aid workers. Despite their presence on the ground and their capacity to deliver, NGOs cannot independently provide all the solutions nor respond to all the needs. A coordinated, global and inclusive strategy with locally-based approaches is needed with all the stakeholders involved in order to provide appropriate responses to the humanitarian crisis in Iraq. NGOs offer a range of recommendations.

The UN, member states and international leaders must:

- acknowledge the challenges of the humanitarian crisis inside Iraq and give increased support to NGOs, as neutral and impartial key actors on the ground
- mobilise qualified senior staff with strong experience in war-torn areas to deal with the complex Iraqi emergency
- provide greater and readily accessible, flexible, neutral and needs-based emergency humanitarian funds
- achieve a better balance of funds for Iraqis displaced outside Iraq and those inside in order to avoid

the risk of creating a pull factor (ie incentives to leave Iraq)

- develop mechanisms to ensure that NGOs, including Iraqi NGOs, can receive funds in a timely manner
- work with NGOs to better understand remote management and mechanisms for monitoring and verification
- investigate cross-border or cross-boundary corridors into areas of greatest need: this may involve non-military air drops of assistance where there is no other means of access
- promote stronger civil-military coordination through a high-level UN Civil Military Coordinator with a civilian and humanitarian background.

The Government of Iraq needs to:

- acknowledge the humanitarian crisis inside the country
- allocate available funds, human and technical resources, and basic goods to meet the needs
- accept and facilitate alternative response mechanisms to compensate for the difficulties that hamper the current centralised distribution systems for food and medicines
- facilitate the movement of aid workers in order to deliver non-militarised humanitarian aid
- support civil society through transparent legislation and processes for registering NGOs which recognise their rights and independence.

All stakeholders need to ensure that International Humanitarian Law is always and fully respected by:

- reinforcing protection mechanisms for Iraqi civilians
- acknowledging that ongoing human rights violations are a crime against humanity
- advocating respect of human rights

- ensuring all allegations of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights are transparently investigated
- ending the state of impunity through adequate judicial mechanisms.

It is vital to increase communication and exchanges of information between the UN, NGOs and other stakeholders. All humanitarian actors must work together to develop indicators and a verification mechanism to identify priority needs

and to ensure that comprehensive mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation are in place. It is vital to develop the capacity of Iraqi aid workers and local communities, especially in the areas of quality of assistance, fundraising, conflict resolution, reconciliation, networking and information sharing. Donors must recognise that coordination of NGO humanitarian operations is neither an add-on nor a luxury.

This is a summary of NCCI's May 2007 report 'Iraq Humanitarian Crisis Situation and NGOs Responses'⁵. For operational reasons, this summary

has been prepared by the FMR editors and does not necessarily reflect the views of either the NCCI secretariat or its members. For further information about the work of NCCI, email: ncciraq@ncciraq.org or contact NCCI's Amman office.

1. www.ncciraq.org
2. www.ncciraq.org/IMG/pdf_Strategic_Framework_for_Humanitarian_Action_in_Iraq.pdf
3. www.mnf-iraq.com
4. www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/57jmnbn?opendocument
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Responding to Iraq's ever-deepening violence

by Robert Zimmerman

Civilians bear the brunt of Iraq's relentless violence. Appalling daily casualties that would be considered unacceptable elsewhere have become routine. The country is confronted with a grave failure to ensure respect and protection for the lives and dignity of millions of civilians not taking part in the ongoing violence.

Since the bomb attacks on the UN office and the delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in August and October 2003 respectively, the ICRC has been one of the few international humanitarian organisations with a permanent operational presence in central, southern and northern parts of Iraq.

The Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS) – with whom the ICRC works closely, especially in the fields of restoring family links and emergency relief response – estimates that approximately 106,000 families have been newly displaced within the country since February 2006. Two thirds are women and children, often living in female-headed households. Thousands of Iraqis continue to be forced out of their homes owing to military operations, general poor security and economic hardship. And the outlook is bleak, particularly

in Baghdad and other areas with mixed communities, where the situation is likely to worsen.

Fleeing the fighting or sectarian violence is often a decision of last resort taken by individuals and families seeking to improve their security. They must receive assistance to meet their basic needs once they have done so. Most of them take refuge with host families, who often struggle to cope with the additional burden on their limited resources. Some find refuge in camps, public buildings and abandoned military barracks. Frequently, both the displaced families and the communities hosting them are badly in need of shelter materials, access to clean water, adequate sanitation, food and other essentials. In 2006, more than four million people benefited from water and sanitation infrastructure projects developed by the ICRC and 69 primary health care

centres benefited from rehabilitation works. Twenty main hospitals received medical and surgical kits for the treatment of wounded patients. In partnership with the IRCS, more than 227,000 people in various locations, mostly displaced families, received food aid and more than 161,000 people received household kits. The ICRC and the IRCS are now planning to increase their distribution of food and other essential items to reach about 660,000 vulnerable people.

Groups of internally displaced have a major impact on host communities, and the ICRC therefore takes care to balance its assistance for IDPs with complementary support for the resident populations among whom they have taken refuge. As a matter of principle, the ICRC does not distinguish between categories of victims of an armed conflict so as to avoid neglecting those not belonging to one or another category. This is more true in Iraq than anywhere else due to the mixing of IDPs with the resident population. However, in conformity with its commitment to impartiality, the ICRC concentrates its efforts on the most vulnerable, who often include IDPs. Assistance must then be extended in such a

manner that it does not create new tensions and possible violence.

In addition to benefiting all those in need, assistance must be extended by neutral humanitarian actors independent from armed groups or any of the parties to the conflict. Being associated with one or the other party – or being perceived as such – may represent new threats for the beneficiaries themselves. The needs are huge and the ICRC seeks therefore

dignity and basic humanitarian principles repeatedly expressed and shown on the ground has reached unprecedented peaks. The protection of all segments of the civilian population and of people deprived of their liberty remains, however, the ICRC's main priority in Iraq where people not or no longer participating in the hostilities continue to be the main victims of repeated violations of international humanitarian law. The protection problems in Iraq are

families often need help to locate loved ones and restore contact.

Persons held by the multinational forces or the Kurdish regional government are regularly visited by the ICRC to assess their conditions of detention and treatment. Findings and recommendations are shared in a confidential manner with the responsible authorities in order to seek the required improvements. The ICRC helps families visit relatives

ICRC collaborates with the Iraqi Red Crescent to enable Iraqis to contact their displaced relatives.



ICRC/GASSMANN Thierry

to work in a coordinated manner with other humanitarian players.

Improving protection for the civilian population in Iraq must be the priority as to prevent displacement. It is a huge challenge due to the intensity of the violence and the insecurity affecting humanitarian actors themselves, to the multiplicity of actors involved and to the difficulty of identifying and developing contacts with armed groups and all parties to the conflict. The blatant disregard for human

numerous and complex. The ICRC is aware that its contribution to solving them remains unfortunately a drop in the ocean in regard of the needs.

The conflict has torn apart many families, with relatives being detained or fleeing their homes to seek safety elsewhere in Iraq or outside the country. Many families remain without news of relatives who went missing during past conflicts or the current hostilities. Dispersed members of

detained at different internment facilities run by the multinational forces otherwise unable to afford long and expensive trips.

Medical-legal facilities are struggling to cope with the rising influx of bodies, contending with insufficient capacity to store them properly or to systematically gather data on unidentified bodies in order to allow families to be informed of a relative's death. In 2006, an estimated 100 civilians were killed every day. Half of them remained unclaimed or

unidentified. The ICRC is assisting these facilities with material support and training in order to allow them to increase considerably their capacity.

“You’re lucky if you get a warning to leave your home. If you do, it means at least you have a chance to survive. You must be ready to flee your place any moment.”
An ICRC employee in Baghdad

The humanitarian situation is steadily worsening and it is affecting,

directly or indirectly, all Iraqis. Protecting Iraq’s civilian population must be a priority, and the ICRC urgently calls for better respect for international humanitarian law. It appeals to all those with military or political influence on the ground to act now to ensure that the lives of ordinary Iraqis are spared and protected. This is an obligation under international humanitarian law for both states and non-state actors.

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the Central Tracing Agency and Protection Division at ICRC. For further information about the ICRC’s Iraq programme, see: www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/iraq!Open. For more information about the Iraqi Red Crescent see the article on pages 48–49.

For more on ICRC’s role in IDP protection, see Alain Aeschlimann, ‘Protection of IDPs: an ICRC view’ FMR October 2005 supplement. www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR24/IDP%20Supplement/11.pdf

Iraqis defend humanitarianism

by Greg Hansen

I have worked with Iraqi colleagues to interview beneficiaries and providers of assistance from all of Iraq’s many religious-ethnic communities. We find firm evidence of commitment to the humanitarian ethos in Iraq but grave concerns over the modus operandi of many ‘humanitarian’ operators. There are few systematic efforts to bridge the ethos-practice gap.

Most of the Iraqis with whom we spoke expressed unequivocal solidarity with the goals and ideals of humanitarian work, sympathy with the efforts of ‘good’ humanitarian work and strong understanding of humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. There is widespread understanding of what principled humanitarian action is – and what it is not. We heard repeatedly that there are strong strains of Islamic teachings and Iraqi traditions in the Fundamental Principles and the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief.¹ Many of the Iraqis with whom we spoke equated specific humanitarian principles with Qu’ranic verses about ‘good’ charity.

Another reason why humanitarian principles are well understood in Iraq is because they are frequently seen in the breach and in ways that engender resentment. We heard a litany of examples of aid being provided in ways that illustrated instrumentalisation,

politicisation and militarisation of humanitarian activity by both local and international actors. It is now often virtually impossible for Iraqis (and sometimes for humanitarian professionals) to distinguish between the roles and activities of local and international actors, including military forces, political actors and other authorities, for-profit contractors, international NGOs, local NGOs and UN agencies. In some of our conversations it was clear that commercial contractors affiliated with the MNF had been mistaken for humanitarian NGOs. In many other interviews it was completely unclear what kind of agency or agencies were being discussed.

The prevailing acceptance of humanitarian ideals is frequently contrasted with the realities of aid and tempered by suspicions about the intentions and motives of agencies. Residents of areas afflicted by intense military activity spoke of being “insulted” by the appearance of aid agencies alongside “those who occupy us”,

or of organisations motivated by a wish to “put a nice face on the occupation”. Others reported how they had rejected any offers of assistance offered by armed forces in the aftermath of military action.

Assistance provided by local religious charities and mosques was often readily distinguished from assistance provided by other actors and, in many of our interviews, was described as vital. In contrast with nearly all other actors, mosques and religious offices are sometimes – but not always – able to provide assistance in relatively more open and visible ways. Local Islamic charities and mosques were identified in many of our conversations as the preferred option of first resort for those needing assistance or protection. However, we heard several examples of ‘pressures’ being exerted on local religious charities to conform more to the wishes and priorities of parties and militias.

Neutrality is not an abstract notion in Iraq. Iraqis are acutely ready to distinguish between aid providers that have taken sides and those that have not. Neutrality is regarded by many Iraqis and aid workers as an essential protection against targeted attack from combatants of all stripes. In most cases, those with whom we spoke did not ascribe impure motives to organisations or aid workers

simply because of their particular national origin. Rather, the affiliation of a person with the 'occupiers', the MNF, the government or, increasingly, with a particular sect, party or militia is intensely scrutinised.

Lack of adherence to humanitarian principles, and blurred distinctions between the range of actors and roles in Iraq, now have serious consequences for beneficiary communities and Iraqis involved in humanitarian efforts. Since 2004, the ability of aid workers to be seen to do principled work has been severely diminished by security threats and ensuing low profiles adopted by nearly all Iraqi and international humanitarian organisations.

Bunkerisation and embeddedness

The Green Zone and all other MNF and government facilities are increasingly inaccessible to all but a chosen few Iraqis, assuming their willingness to risk the dangers involved in being seen to enter. While some Iraqi staff of international organisations opt to take these risks on a daily basis, their ability to continue to do so is increasingly tenuous as the security situation deteriorates. For the international staff of donors, UN agencies and other organisations ensconced within these facilities, there are almost no possibilities for moving beyond their blast walls without heavy MNF or private security escort. As a result,

there are almost no opportunities for key decision makers in the mainline humanitarian apparatus to inform their decisions with first-hand knowledge of conditions in Iraq, and few opportunities to speak with Iraqis who reject entry into such facilities.

There are doubtful benefits to populations in need in Iraq when humanitarian organisations opt for a 'bunkerised' approach to security, or embed themselves with MNF forces. Some organisations that originally accepted protection from the MNF, or appear to have done so by visibly hardening their compounds or using private security contractors, have withdrawn from Iraq on the stated grounds of insecurity of personnel, or insufficient humanitarian impact weighed against high security costs.

There is no evidence that bunkerising or aggressive security postures have been either a guarantor of programme survival or a useful tool to gain access to people in need.

Wholesale reliance for security on the MNF or private western contractors implies or corroborates a commonality of purpose between some aid agencies and military forces. Many Iraqis find such coherence unacceptable. Likewise, there is little doubt among Iraqis as to the political allegiances and purposes of social welfare offices operated by, or under the armed protection of, various militias and parties. However, in many areas such offices are becoming welcome providers of life-saving assistance.

'Acceptance strategies' do not render humanitarian workers immune from targeted attack in Iraq but do contribute to greater adaptability and longevity of humanitarian programmes. Some Iraqi and international NGOs that have taken an independent course in their approach to security, relying relatively more heavily on relationships and acceptance of their work by communities, have also decided to cease operations. However, others have stayed to continue vital programmes. Flexible agencies that have invested considerable time and resources into understanding local (in addition to national) contexts and trends, building relationships and supportive networks, and nurturing

In Baghdad's Saddam City Hospital, a woman comforts her nephew who had to have both arms amputated following a bomb attack.



CICR/SCHAEFFER Benoit

staff professionalism, appear to have a comparative advantage in Iraq over less rooted agencies.

No substitute for presence

Aid workers in Iraq and Amman use the terms 'covert', 'surreptitious' and 'furtive' to describe the extremes to which low-profile humanitarian operations have been taken by international and Iraqi organisations in response to threats and attacks. The low-profile approach provides a greater measure of safety for humanitarian workers, and has arguably bought agencies more time and more access. However, the benefits have come at an immense cost to acceptance. Our research among Iraqis indicates that perceptions of the humanitarian enterprise are far more positive among those who report direct contact with local or international assistance or protection work than among those whose impressions are formed second-hand through

rumour and the media. Advocacy and media campaigns will not be sufficient to convince Iraqis of the humanitarian bona fides of aid agencies: they are looking for tangible results. Iraqis who have received assistance from local or international humanitarian organisations or have seen them at work generally feel more positively disposed toward the humanitarian community than those who have only heard about it.

Low-profile modalities increasingly hinder relations between staff and between agencies. Inter/intra-communal tensions are increasingly reflected within humanitarian organisations, even among staff of different backgrounds who have worked well together for years. Working relationships are under increasing strain as low-profile approaches dictate that staff work from their homes, with less frequent contact with colleagues.

There is an increasing tendency among international humanitarian

staff (as well as among donors and policy makers) to treat insecurity in Iraq as a nebulous, generalised, persistent and insurmountable challenge, rather than as a series of serious incidents, each of which can be analysed, placed into (often localised) context, and used as a spur to adaptation. For some agencies, inadequately nuanced understanding of the dynamics of insecurity has possibly become a rationalisation for reduced assertiveness, creativity and engagement. There has been a sharp decline since early 2004 in the number of international humanitarian workers in Amman with any depth of experience in the country: only a handful remains.

During US military offensives in Fallujah and Najaf in 2004, many Iraqis responded spontaneously to help people in need by gathering truck and carloads of food and other essential goods in their neighbourhoods for distribution through mosques in the stricken cities. Many Shi'a helped out in Fallujah, and many Sunni did the same in Najaf. During this period, international humanitarian NGOs held regular meetings in Baghdad to coordinate their responses and to trade information on needs, stocks and access. The meetings were well-attended, almost exclusively by international staff. One such meeting was attended by a well-educated and traditionally-clothed local Imam with a proven history of defusing tensions between communities and helping international agencies to access conflict-stricken areas. A Shi'a, he offered to facilitate access to Fallujah using contacts among local Sunni clergy, and had been invited to attend the meeting by an experienced international NGO he had worked with. Three international aid workers objected to his presence and he was asked to leave the meeting. Asked after the meeting why they objected, one of the aid workers said: "These are the terrorists that are attacking us."

Ruweished refugee camp in neutral territory between Iraq and Jordan.



IOM 2003 - MJ00063

We heard a remarkably consistent perception that all assistance efforts – international and national – are corrupt. The wealth of riches showered on reconstruction and nation-building efforts since 2003

and the contrast with the immediate hardships of daily lives have left many Iraqis feeling disillusioned and angry. Some with whom we spoke mentioned hearing through the media about the billions of dollars that had poured into Iraq, then raised a litany of complaints about corrupt officials and contractors, inadequate and unreliable electricity supply, skyrocketing costs for cooking fuel, shoddy school reconstruction and a wide variety of (to them) esoteric projects that left nothing tangible in their wake.

Grossly inadequate humanitarian funding.

What a difference a few years makes. In late 2002, the UN issued a flash appeal for \$193 million to prepare for a humanitarian emergency that was thought to be imminent. A few months later, another flash appeal asked for \$2.2 billion for six months' worth of assistance. But now, organisations trying to save Iraqi lives often struggle to remain operational in an unsupportive donor climate. Donors have been slow to acknowledge and respond to the growing humanitarian emergency. For many of them, doing so would be an admission of failure of their investment of careless billions into their Iraq reconstruction and nation-building project. Ironically, they frequently question the operationality of humanitarian organisations – as if the cloistered Iraqi government or some opportunistic war profiteer had better access to communities in need and a better feel for conditions on the ground. Donors impose a shocking double standard, insisting on far greater accountability standards on spending for life-saving humanitarian action than for ill-conceived rebuilding schemes hatched in the hothouse of the Green Zone. Donor credibility is on the line, among Iraqis and globally.

An international aid worker colleague puts the current dilemma this way: "Donors repeatedly complain that the quality of information available about basic needs in Iraq is not good enough. And for that reason we do nothing? When traditional needs assessments are impossible due to insecurity and mobility

problems, how rigorous does the data need to be? How rigorous was it in April 2003? When, if ever, will the start button get pushed?"

Neither the International Reconstruction Facility for Iraq (IRFFI)² – the World Bank/UN-managed fund established in early 2004 – nor the International Compact for Iraq³ – the initiative launched by world leaders at the conference held in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el Sheikh in April 2007 – provides ready access to funds for emergency humanitarian response; they are also both prone to politicisation by international and Iraqi authorities. Our interviews with aid agency staff and with Iraqi communities suggest serious deficiencies in donor behaviour. Aid agency staff in the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, UN agencies, NCCI and international and national NGOs consistently raised shortages of accessible and flexible donor funding as a threat to current and planned humanitarian programmes.

Ahmed works for a humanitarian NGO. He tries to be invisible as he wends his way around car bombs and checkpoints to organise emergency assistance for the stricken and divided neighbourhoods of his beloved city. Even with a young family at home and excellent prospects abroad, Ahmed has decided to stay on in Baghdad, helping where he can to alleviate the suffering when the bombs go off, troops and insurgents open fire, or militias come calling in the night. "I am ready to go to Paradise," he says. For the most part, the people in Ahmed's neighbourhoods aren't internally displaced persons. Mostly they are internally stuck, fearful of leaving their homes to go to the market, clinic, pharmacy or school down the street. Ahmed works alone most of the time. In the current climate of pervasive mistrust and danger, the organisation that employs him has difficulty finding him an assistant. Such is the fear and loathing in Iraq that an aid worker's affiliations and motives are met with acute suspicion. And he works on a shoestring budget that limits his activity and inflicts a tyranny of small economies, increasing the likelihood that he will be killed.

There are quite a few Iraqis like Ahmed. His organisation is one of several, along with the Iraqi Red Crescent and International Committee of the Red Cross, that have adapted and re-adapted their *modus operandi* as security has worsened and as donor support has dwindled. They need to start feeling that the world is behind them. Some 88 Iraqi and international humanitarian and human rights workers were killed in conflict in Iraq between March 2003 and May 2007. The UN's newfound impetus toward a renewed framework for humanitarian action in Iraq provides a solid point of departure for dealing with the human consequences of Iraq's broken life-support systems. It is a remarkable step forward for an organisation that has been deeply chastened by its previous, fatally politicised attempts to assist and protect Iraqis. The challenge now facing the UN's humanitarian apparatus is to operationalise the Framework, without once again becoming a humanitarian fig-leaf for a UN political role dictated by the Security Council.

In the coming months and years, donors would be well-advised to bear in mind the essential role of real and perceived neutrality in Iraq, and the dangers of linking political and military goals to humanitarian action. The evidence shows that humanitarian action that falls short of the principled ideal in Iraq is prone to rejection.

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Hansen and a team of Iraqis conducted a study on perceptions of humanitarian action for the Humanitarian Agenda: 2015 project of the Feinstein International Center, Tufts University. 'Coming to terms with the humanitarian imperative in Iraq' is online at <http://fic.tufts.edu/?pid=32>. A full country study will shortly be available on the Feinstein International Centre website (www.fic.tufts.edu)

1. www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/57JMNB

2. www.irffi.org

3. www.iraqcompact.org

Iraqi refugees in Lebanon: continuous lack of protection

by Samira Trad and Ghida Frangieh

There are no official statistics but there may be more than 40,000 Iraqi refugees in Lebanon. Lebanon already hosts some 400,000 Palestinians for whom no durable solution is in sight. In the absence of a policy response, is there a danger of the Iraqi refugees becoming 'Palestinised' – left in limbo in the Levant?

Most Iraqis have entered Lebanon via Syria. They include large numbers of Iraqi Christians who believe they will find safety among Lebanon's Christian communities. Iraqi refugees find it next to impossible to obtain an entry visa to Lebanon so have entered the country illegally, often assisted by smugglers. They are thus at threat of arrest and conviction for 'illegal entry', regardless of their status with UNHCR. Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and lacks effective legislation regulating asylum. Lebanon has also repeatedly stated that it is not a country of asylum due to its demographic and social composition and to the fact that it already hosts more than 400,000 Palestinian refugees. To make matters worse, the Arab World – unlike Latin America and Africa – lacks regional instruments to provide protection for refugees fleeing from generalised violence and civil strife.

As a result, protection of refugees lies entirely in the hand of UNHCR. In March 2003 the agency called for all Iraqi refugees (including rejected cases) to be included under 'temporary protection' – a regime elaborated by the international community in order to respond to situations of large-scale displacement and to the limitations of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the refugee definition. It is based around four principles: admission to safety, respect for basic human rights, protection against *refoulement* and

safe return to the country of origin when conditions permit. The rationale of the temporary protection regime is to avoid the overwhelming of refugee status procedures and to maintain the possibility of return once there is a political settlement of the conflict in the country of origin. It is premised on the belief that the conflict which has caused the mass displacement is soon to be resolved and it focuses on return as the most appropriate solution.¹

The implementation of the temporary protection regime for Iraqis was based on the belief that the US-led invasion would overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime and speedily restore stability and democracy to Iraq. As a result, Iraqis were left in a state of limbo and legal uncertainty: neither refugees nor non-refugees, faced with voluntary repatriation as the only possible durable solution and denied the chance of settlement in the country of asylum or in a third country. Temporary protection as conceived by UNHCR is not limited in time, in contrast to the European Union which sets a three-year limit for the implementation of this procedure. The absence of a time-frame increases the uncertainty of this temporary status and risks politicisation of the protection of massively displaced persons. As a result, the temporary protection regime of Iraqi refugees that was initially planned for a period of three months was maintained until the end of 2006.

Prima facie refugee status

During the UNHCR Pre-Excom NGOs Consultation Meeting in October 2006, Frontiers Ruwad Association participated in the drafting of an NGO Statement which expressed concern for the indefinite use of temporary protection and called for the recognition of Iraqi refugees on a prima facie basis in order to end the state of limbo and ensure an effective protection for Iraqi refugees in the Middle East. In December 2006, UNHCR issued an advisory return for Iraqis² in which it recommended that states and UNHCR should declare Iraqis as refugees on a prima facie basis except for those who were residing in Iraqi Kurdistan and those who fall under the exclusions clauses of the 1951 Convention.

Like the temporary protection regime, prima facie refugee status determination is based on the idea that a group of people – who share common criteria such as country of origin or date of flight – should be provided with international protection. However, group determination on a prima facie basis grants refugee status to all

Few Iraqis can hope to be resettled.

members of the group. Therefore, a refugee recognised on a prima facie basis should benefit from the rights enshrined in the 1951 Convention unlike a refugee under temporary protection.

The news of prima facie implementation came as a long-awaited Christmas present for Iraqi refugees. UNHCR offices in Beirut

– and in Damascus and Amman – were flooded with refugees asking to receive the refugee certificate which they believed would protect them from arrest in Lebanon and would be their ticket to travel to another country as part of resettlement programmes – the only durable solution for refugees in Lebanon. Around 1,800 Iraqis registered with UNHCR between January and May 2007, 50% more than for the whole of 2006. UNHCR's target by December 2007 is to assist and/or register around 10,000 Iraqis.

Disillusionment

The Iraqis' illusions were soon dashed as it became clear that third-country resettlement would not be available. Few Iraqis can hope to be resettled. The US has announced plans to resettle only 7,000 of the approximately two million Iraqi refugees in the region and the European Union has declared opposition to resettlement of refugees in the EU – but has agreed to donate up to 11 million Euros for humanitarian aid in the region.

Disillusionment set in after Iraqis realised that their prima facie refugee status has not changed government policies regarding their presence in the country. The temporary protection regime and the recognition on prima facie basis were not formally acknowledged by the Lebanese authorities although Lebanon is a member of the UNHCR Executive Committee and is supposed to be bound by its conclusions. As they were under the Saddam regime, Iraqi refugees continue to be treated as illegal migrants by the Lebanese authorities, at constant risk of being arrested for illegal entry and stay in Lebanon and sentenced to imprisonment and deportation.

The Lebanese government has often ignored UNHCR protection guidelines regarding Iraqi refugees and injunctions against *non-refoulement* and non-repatriation. Before 2003, hundreds of Iraqi asylum seekers and at times even recognised refugees were deported back to Iraq. After 2003, voluntary repatriation convoys were organised with the assistance of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Most of these returnees were arbitrarily detained for months after the expiry of their sentence. Prolonged arbitrary detention continues to be an effective coercive policy to force the Iraqi detainees to agree to repatriation. Most Iraqi detainees faced with the choice of remaining indefinitely in Lebanese prisons or returning to Iraq chose to return to Iraq with the intention of re-entering Lebanon illegally.

Returns to Iraq from the Lebanese detention centres are financed and coordinated by the Iraqi Embassy in Lebanon and IOM. UNHCR's role is limited to ensuring the repatriations are 'voluntary'. An interview with the Iraqi Ambassador to Lebanon in February leads us to estimate that around 40 to 60 persons are returned to Iraq each week.

Neglect of vulnerable Iraqi refugees

The illegal status of the Iraqi refugees denies them any form of protection. As they have no adequate assistance, they are forced to work illegally and can readily be exploited – forced to work long hours, denied social security and if their wages are not paid have no recourse to law out of fear of being arrested for lack of papers. Access to education and health care are extremely limited. Many Iraqi teenagers are forced to abandon their studies in order to work illegally in harsh conditions to provide for their families.

There are a few NGOs trying to cover the basic health needs of the most vulnerable Iraqis but their ability to assist is limited: "My wife had complications when she gave birth to our son but we were sent to a hospital that didn't have an intensive care unit. I had to take her to another hospital but I didn't have enough money to pay for it and there were no ambulances to transport her and the baby and give them oxygen. I had to go to a friend and borrow money and then transport my wife in a taxi. By the time I reached the second hospital, my new-born son had died in the taxi", explained Hani.

Another Iraqi woman who could not afford to deliver her child in Lebanon was smuggled to Syria

where access to health care is cheaper. On her way back to Lebanon, she was arrested and detained by the Lebanese authorities along with her new-born child and an older child.

Single men are greatly neglected. As one told us: "I have not seen a doctor for the last seven years. I cannot afford to pay for a consultation. When I go to the different UNHCR implementing partners for medical assistance, they send me back and forth between them explaining either that I am not an emergency case or that I do not fall under their programme. At the end, I still have not got a medical examination."

Conclusion

No protection regime – whether it is individual status determination, temporary protection or prima facie recognition – can be effective when it is solely implemented by UNHCR without the involvement of the Lebanese authorities and in the absence of any national legal framework for refugee protection which would guarantee the right of every individual to seek asylum and to be protected against forced expulsion to a country where his life would be threatened.

The magnitude of the Iraqi refugee influx in the region raises fears of 'Palestinisation' of their plight for the international community is focusing almost solely on humanitarian assistance, rather than the search for durable solutions. Lebanon – like other Arab states – is understandably reluctant to improve the legal status and living conditions of Iraqi refugees for fear they will once again have to carry a hosting burden which will carry on for decade after decade.

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1. Note on International Protection, submitted by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to the UN General Assembly, 7 September 1994 www.unhcr.org/excom/EXCOM/3f0a935f2.pdf

2. www.unhcr.org/home/RSDLEGAL/458baf6f4.pdf

Military-induced displacement

by Dina Abou Samra

Since the fall of the former government, Iraqis have primarily fled their homes because of sectarian and generalised violence. However, counter-insurgency operations by the US military and their Iraqi allies continue to be a significant cause of death, destruction and internal displacement in parts of Iraq.

Population displacements caused by armed clashes and military operations remain largely unreported by the media. Affected areas are often difficult to access. In addition, displacement by armed clashes and military operations has generally been assessed as a short-term phenomenon, while so called sectarian-induced displacement is viewed as a long-term trend.

In the months following the US invasion in 2003, military operations and armed clashes caused extensive devastation and displacement, particularly in western Iraq, in predominantly Sunni areas where insurgents were believed to be concentrated. The largest military operations-induced displacement occurred in Fallujah in November 2004 when the city was besieged for a second time and military operations and fighting forcibly displaced almost the entire population of the city (more than 200,000 people). In addition to Fallujah, several other cities and towns have been regularly targeted by military operations over the last four years, including Najaf, Kufa, Ramadi, Karabala, Tal Afar, Samarra, Basra and Baghdad. Across the country, small numbers of people living in what are evaluated to be strategic military areas have also been forcibly displaced by the multinational forces.

Figures from the UN and the Iraqi government estimate that in April 2007 22,400 people remained displaced as a result of military operations – the overwhelming majority in Anbar province. Military operations, often including aerial bombing, have been led by US-led forces with the stated aim of quelling armed insurgents. Military offensives have forced up to several hundred thousand people to flee

their homes. Most are able to move back when fighting lessens. However, in many cases people are afraid to go back because of ongoing insecurity, or because they have not received the compensation or reconstruction assistance necessary to restart their lives.

There has been limited media coverage but it is clear that in recent months military operations have intensified in Baghdad and Diyala province. In the first week of May US-led and Iraqi troops launched a major offensive in Diyala, forcing around 5,000 people to flee their homes. Military operations against suspected militants caused dozens of families to flee Sadr City, the main Shi'ite district of Baghdad. MNF-I and ISF military operations and movement restrictions also caused population displacements and prevented food from reaching displaced communities in Qadisiya province in April.

While military operations-related displacement has generally been short-term, there is cause for concern that, with rising intensity, military operations may increasingly contribute to longer-term displacement. The MNF-I is increasingly resorting to air strikes which lead to more and prolonged displacement as houses are more likely to be destroyed. Research also suggests that people displaced by military operations have been more likely to be displaced repeatedly, thereby increasing their vulnerability.¹

Human rights violations

Access to internally displaced and other affected communities is often compromised by MNF-I and ISF operations including checkpoints and

movement restrictions. Humanitarian organisations working inside Iraq face a plethora of restrictions preventing them from assisting civilians during and in the aftermath of military operations. In March 2006 the Iraqi Red Crescent Society reported being refused access to the city of Samarra, leaving hundreds of civilians without medical assistance and food supplies. Food and water often do not reach affected populations for days, sometimes weeks, in the course of military operations and armed clashes. This causes immense suffering for families already living on the brink of poverty. Military operations have been accompanied by house-to-house searches and other measures such as the excessive use of force and arbitrary detention of men aged between 15 and 50 to prevent civilians from entering and leaving targeted areas. Families may not be provided with reasonable notice to be able to leave areas before attacks begin. For example, the closures of entry and exit points forced hundreds of families to stay inside their homes during air strikes on villages near the city of Baqubah in Diyala province, near the Iranian border in January 2007. US forces and Iraqi troops have also used hospitals and schools as military bases, in clear contravention of international humanitarian law, blocking access for civilians in affected areas.²

Iraqis may also be unable to access compensation for their losses. Multinational forces have been immune from the jurisdiction of Iraqi courts including in matters of liability for housing and land violations. In certain cases special compensation mechanisms have been created. For example, the Iraqi Central Committee for the Compensation of the People of Fallujah was created by the Iraqi government to compensate people whose homes and businesses were damaged during the offensive against insurgents in the city in November 2004. However, press reports suggest long delays in receiving compensation and that payments are often insufficient to cover the value and cost of rebuilding homes. Property



Abandoned ammunition store next to a football field, Basra.

has also been allegedly damaged and stolen during MNF-I and ISF house raids. Compensation has been paid by the Iraqi government in some cases but the amount is generally less than the actual value of losses.

Confusing the humanitarian and military agenda

Private military companies (PMCs) operate extensively in Iraq, sometimes with highly sophisticated military means. Some 20,000 private security contractors are currently operating in Iraq, the second largest non-Iraqi military force. They, and other non-humanitarian actors, portray parts of their activities as humanitarian. In a critical review of the humanitarian response in Iraq, the Feinstein International Center (FIC) found that the Iraqi population does not distinguish clearly between the roles and activities of local and international actors, including military forces, political actors, commercial contractors, international NGOs and UN agencies.³ PMCs affiliated with the MNF-I are

mistaken for humanitarian workers and there is a common perception that international organisations, including the UN and NGOs, are linked to the multinational forces. The UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI)⁴ relies on multinational forces for mobility and security (as mandated under UN Security Council 1546). This reliance on one of the parties to the conflict has resulted in a blurring of humanitarian and military roles which undermines principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence. In its recent revised strategy, UN agencies and partners address the constraint of the UN reliance on MNF-I escorts and facilities for humanitarian work inside Iraq.⁵

As the new UN strategy recognises, the increased politicisation of humanitarian action in Iraq, where a range of actors – including the MNF-ISF, armed groups and political groups – is involved, is resulting in distribution of assistance often on the basis of political gain rather than need. In order to strengthen the humanitarian response in

Iraq, there needs to be a greater adherence to humanitarian principles and a clear separation between humanitarian/civilian and military activities and actors.

Recommendations

- The UN should appoint a high-level UN Civil Military Coordinator with a civilian and humanitarian background in order to facilitate access to areas affected by military operations and advocate for greater respect of UN guidelines on civil-military coordination.
- In order to ensure the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence, the UN must take immediate steps to move away from a reliance on the MNF-I.
- The UN can also play a more active role in promoting access and protection of populations in need by engaging in dialogue with all combatants, including non-state actors.
- The government of Iraq should support the efforts of the humanitarian community, including by facilitating the movement and the delivery of humanitarian assistance by non-military and neutral actors.

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Tackling sexual violence, abuse and exploitation

by Henia Dakkak

Iraqi women are being attacked in the name of religion. The gendered dimension of sectarian conflict – derived from women's role in cultural and biological reproduction and as symbols of group identity – is exposing them to crimes which constitute an open wound for humanity.

Few now know that Iraq once had the most progressive women's movement in the Middle East, dating back to British colonial rule. Even under Saddam Hussein's despotic rule, Iraq – unlike its neighbours – adopted many international laws pertaining to the rights of women. Iraq ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)¹ in 1986, while the USA – together with Iran – is among the eight countries still to do so.²

Rather than support progressive and democratically-minded Iraqis, including members of the women's movement, the US threw its weight behind Iraq's Shi'ites, calculating that groups long suppressed by Saddam Hussein would cooperate with the occupation and deliver the stability needed for the US to implement its policies in Iraq. It soon became apparent that religious extremists would be the greatest beneficiaries of the US invasion. Already in March 2004, on the first anniversary of the invasion, MADRE, the international women's organisation, issued a report drawing attention to the sharp rise in abductions, rapes, sexual slavery and coerced withdrawal of girls from education. Their latest report, 'Promising Democracy, Imposing

Theocracy',³ shows the remorseless rise of honour killings, torture of women in detention and other forms of gender-based violence. Courageous agencies such as the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI)



and others working to opposed institutionalised, legalised oppression of women and build a democratic secular Iraq free of military occupation and religious coercion are facing unprecedented threats. Armed groups are systematically using gender-based violence to

assert dominance over one another and over the population at large.

Women are beaten and harassed for being 'improperly' dressed. Wearing trousers, appearing in public without a headscarf, wearing lipstick or shaking hands with men can be punishable by death at the hands of the Mahdi Army. Threats against male doctors who treat female patients and female medics treating men have driven huge numbers of health personnel into exile. In the

absence of the rule of law, honour killings are rising. Amnesty International has reported that women detained by US and Iraqi forces have been sexually abused or raped.

Nineteen-year-old Iraqi girl says she was forced to work as a sex worker in order to feed her younger brothers.

Accurate statistics are hard to come by but there are estimates that nearly 3,500 Iraqi women have gone missing since 2003 and that there is a high chance that many have been traded for sex work. Thousands of Iraqi women are being taken advantage of by unscrupulous sex worker traffickers. Iraqi women are being sold as sex workers abroad, mainly to the illicit markets of Yemen, Syria, Jordan and the Gulf States. Victims usually discover their fate only after they have been lured outside the country by false promises.

Sex traffickers are targeting Iraqi

families who are vulnerable as a result of insecurity, economic hardship, displacement and social disintegration. Collapse of state authority and the rule of law make it easy to trade girls by paying a small amount of money to the family and deluding them with

promises of respectable domestic employment in the Gulf.

Proliferation of weaponry has intensified domestic violence. There are reports that the US has failed to keep track of hundreds of thousands of pistols and assault rifles it has shipped to Iraq. Weaponry is freely available and virtually every Iraqi family is now armed. As tensions escalate within households the presence of weapons increases the risks of injury for women.

Another lesser-known aspect of mounting violence against Iraqi women involves encouraging or forcing young girls into what is euphemistically called a 'marriage of pleasure', a form of temporary marriage (*muta'ah*) traditionally practiced by Shi'ites. In effect, it involves providing a form of cover for prostitution. Women are offered in short-term marriage contracts, often during a trip to another city or pilgrimage to the holy cities of Najaf or Kerbala. It is not officially binding and can be terminated at any time. There are no consequences for the male partner but girls are

often left more vulnerable and emotionally traumatised. Some find themselves pregnant or succumb to a sexually transmitted infection, while their families have made only a modest financial gain.

How many more women and girls need to be killed, trafficked and raped before the Iraqi authorities and the international community take note?

A new inter-agency initiative, 'UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict', aims to support country-led initiatives that mitigate gender-based violence. UN Action brings together DPKO, OCHA, OHCHR, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIFEM, WFP and WHO to advocate at a global level for more resources to address sexual violence and to provide technical and strategic support to joint efforts at a country level. In the spirit of this cooperation, UNHCR and UNFPA are developing a programme to work with the Syrian Red Crescent and Ministry of Health to address sexual violence against Iraqi women and girls residing in Syria. It is to be hoped UN Action can become active inside Iraq.

Promoting change requires an understanding of the role of violence against women in a particular context – its origins, how it operates, the myths associated with it, and the mechanisms and attitudes that perpetrate it. It is important to explore how the victims themselves perceive this violence, and the consequences – if any – for the perpetrator. This evidence base has proved to be the most effective 'kick start' for UNFPA programmes aiming to combat the tide of GBV against Iraqi women. In this regard, UNFPA will work with partners in Syria, Jordan and hopefully inside Iraq to collect qualitative and quantitative data on sexual and gender-based violence to help formulate appropriate responses and programmes to address this violation of basic human rights.

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Iraq's women under pressure

by Nadjie Al-Ali

For years the lives of Iraqi women have been framed by state oppression, economic sanctions and three wars. US-led calls for liberation may in the long term serve to further oppress them.

There is a pervasive myth that Iraqi society is just another Muslim society and similar to Afghanistan. Saddam Hussein was a cruel authoritarian dictator but his largely secular regime opened spaces for women to become educated and enter the workplace – especially when labour was in short supply during the economic boom in the 1970s and during the long Iraqi-Iranian war (1980-88). Today, four years after the US invasion, we see Iraqi women not being able to leave their homes, being very restricted in their movement and having to observe certain dress codes, and

Iraqi girls not being able to go to school. The very large number of Iraqi women who are educated are particularly being targeted. Under the auspices of the American and British forces we see women now suffering from a situation very similar to the one that women suffered in Afghanistan during the Taliban.

There are two predominant media images of Iraqi women. One is the Iraqi woman as heroine, symbol of the new Iraq, a Member of Parliament fighting for her rights. The dominant image, however, is the

poor oppressed women, veiled from head to toe. Now, of course, reality is more complex and nuanced. It should be noted that those women who are part now of the political process and who live in the Green Zone are very remote from the rest of Iraqi society. A quarter of parliamentary places are reserved for women but most of those in parliament are not the least interested in women's rights. They are the sisters, daughters and wives of conservative male political leaders. There are only five or six female parliamentarians who are seriously interested in politics and gender equality issues.

Many Iraqi women activists in the US have been working closely with the US government. Women for a Free Iraq, which then formed the

Women's Alliance for a Democratic Iraq, represented an important support for US war efforts, and subsequently received US grants to build organisations on the ground. Since April 2003, women's organisations and initiatives have been mushrooming all over Iraq. Many organisations – such as the National Council of Women (NWC), the Iraqi Women's Higher Council (IWHC), the Iraqi Independent Women's Group and the Society for Iraqi Women for the Future – have been founded by prominent professional women with close ties to political parties. Many were initiated by returnees, Iraqi women activists who were part of the diaspora before 2003. While mainly founded and represented by elite women, some have broad memberships and branches throughout the country. Their activities revolve around humanitarian and practical projects, such as income generation, legal advice, free health care and counselling, as well as political advocacy. There has also been a flourishing of locally based women's initiatives and groups, revolving mainly around practical needs related to the escalating humanitarian crisis, as well as the need for education and training. Many of the initiatives fill gaps in state health and welfare provision. The key issues that have mobilised women politically, mainly from educated middle-class backgrounds, are the attempt to replace the relatively progressive personal status law governing marriage, divorce and child custody with a more conservative law and the debate over the Iraqi constitution, mainly with respect to the role of Islam and personal status laws.

There are clear tensions between women returning from the diaspora – especially those with US backing – and those who stayed put under Saddam's rule. As one told me: "I participated in a workshop on the constitution. There was a big problem: most of the women who participated are women who have lived outside for 40 years. I was surprised to hear what they were saying. They said women had no rights before. They have not been to school, nor to university. I told them: "Look, all the women here are over 35 years old. We all have college degrees. Our education was free. I was in the college of pharmacy.

In that college, women were in the majority." They were saying all the bad things about Saddam. I said: "We have to tell the truth. Not everything was bad." "Some of the assertions made to the US media by Iraqi women's organisations in support of the invasion – including the claim that women were denied access to tertiary education – are patently absurd.

the role of women in the diaspora is of enormous importance for the future of the country

It is unfortunate that, except for a relatively small number of secular activists inside Iraq, many Iraqi women construct their differences with the mainly secular diaspora activists as a contestation between 'authentic' culture and values on the one side and the imposition of foreign values and political agendas on the other. The trend to associate feminism and women's rights with western agendas is, of course, not unique to Iraq. However, the polarisation and construction of difference is particularly detrimental in the context of war and occupation.

I follow closely the work of the network Women Living Under Muslim Law¹. Iraqi women would benefit greatly from an exchange of experience with women in places such as Bosnia who have gone through a comparable situation. Unfortunately donors show little interest in enabling them to get together. Iraqi women are being brought to London or to Washington to receive training by US or British 'gender specialists' yet there are no governments or NGOs willing to facilitate encounters for women who have actually already undergone very similar traumatic experiences.

Post-2003 experience in Iraq shows the shortcomings of UN Resolution 1325², the attempt to mainstream gender into post-conflict resolution and reconstruction. If implemented at all, UNSCR 1325 frequently means simply appointing a few women to governments and ministries. In Iraq, and elsewhere, it should involve the appointment of women to interim governments, ministries

and committees dealing with all aspects of local and national governance – the judiciary, policing, human rights, budget allocation, defence of a free media. It should also aim to encourage independent women's groups, NGOs and community-based organisations.

It is all too easy in post-conflict Islamic societies to depict the stress on UNSCR 1325 as part of a 'Western plot' to destroy traditional culture and values. This is particularly the case in the context of US-led military intervention, such as in Iraq. Those who might otherwise be sympathetic to issues pertaining to women's rights and women's equality may well express strong opposition to women's inclusion in post-conflict reconstruction when this is declared to be one of the main aims of the occupying powers. Ironically, the louder political leaders in the West shout about women's rights while Iraq is occupied, the bigger the backlash against women's rights might be in the long run. Widely circulated images of the female soldier, Pvt Lynndie England, sexually abusing Iraqi male prisoners at Abu Ghraib can only worsen this backlash, as Iraqis ask themselves: "Is this what women's rights means?"

Vital role of diaspora women

Now that so many educated people have left – to join the progressive Iraqis already in exile as a result of Saddam – the role of women in the diaspora is of enormous importance for the future of the country. Since 2003, Iraqi diaspora women have been actively involved in debates about the political future of Iraq, the role of the US and women's place in the national fabric. My research amongst Iraqi women activists in the UK, the US and Jordan has looked at the different levels of political spaces and resources available within these three sites.

Not surprisingly, Iraqi women in Jordan are most limited in terms of their transnational activism because of the restrictive political spaces for civil society and the difficult economic, legal and political conditions facing refugees within Jordan. Yet, more astonishing to me have been the limitations and restrictions circumscribing the

activism of Iraqi women residing in the US in comparison with those based in the UK. Aside from the scarcity of independent women's organisations in the US – independent both from the US government and from Iraqi political parties – what has struck me most so far is the relatively narrow political spectrum of Iraqi activism within the US in contrast to the far ranging spectrum both in terms of political views and forms of mobilisation and activism found in the UK. While ethnic and religious divisions exist in both the US and Britain, the large presence of secular political parties in Britain, such as the Iraqi Communist Party and Iraqi National Accord, have contributed to the building of more non-sectarian alliances and organisations. Moreover, the post-September 11 climate in the USA has limited the political spaces and resources available for those not in agreement with US Middle East policy. Several Iraqi women interviewed in the US mentioned their fear of expressing dissent from US policy, even more so following the stringent Patriot Act of 2001. By contrast, a thriving civil society of Arab dissidents and intellectuals as well as a strong anti-

war/peace movement and a diverse women's movement have constituted the backdrop against which Iraqi women's organisations and individual activists have flourished in Britain – where there are up to 300,000 Iraqis.

The threat of Islamist militias now goes beyond dress codes and calls for gender segregation at university. Despite, indeed partly because of, the US and British rhetoric about liberation and rights, women have been pushed into the background and into their homes. Women with a public profile (doctors, academics, lawyers, NGO activists, politicians) are threatened and targeted for assassination. There are also criminal gangs who worsen the climate of fear by kidnapping women for ransom, sexual abuse or sale into prostitution outside Iraq.

It is no surprise that many of the women I interviewed remember the past nostalgically.

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Iraq's children pay the price of war

by Leila Billing

Iraq's ruinous wars, crippling sanctions and ongoing violence have had a devastating effect on children. Shootings and bombings have killed, injured and orphaned thousands but the biggest killer is illness transmitted through unclean water and exacerbated by under-nutrition.

In a statement made on the eve of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Olara A Otunnu, the then Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, stressed that "the children of Iraq are innocent, and all parties must make their protection an absolute priority ... we must now begin to put in place plans to ensure that the well-being, rehabilitation

and development of the children of Iraq will constitute a central aspect of any programmes for post-conflict recovery and reconstruction."

This has not happened. One in eight Iraqi children dies before their fifth birthday. Nine per cent are acutely malnourished – double the number prior to 2003. Hundreds of schools have been attacked and teachers

killed. Unexploded ordnance and mines litter the country. Children are injured on dumps looking for metal to sell to help support their families. Thousands of homeless children survive by begging, stealing or scavenging in garbage for food. There has been a marked increase in rates of childhood leukaemia as a result of exposure to radiation from cluster bombs, the high use of chemicals in agriculture and water contamination.

The NGO War Child recently interviewed some 400 children in southern Iraq. Research also involved talking to the children's families, to local community members and to those working with vulnerable and

marginalised children. Role-playing, social-drama activities and drawing encouraged children to map out their daily lives. Asked to rank their problems, they cited poverty, family breakdown, terrorism and lack of security as their primary concerns.

Our results showed how conflict is leading to the increased criminalisation and stigmatisation of children. We are witnessing high levels of family breakdown and an increase of female-headed households. Children are being forced to assume income-generating roles because their families are suffering from acute poverty. That means children leaving school, going out on to the streets in search of work and becoming exposed to illegal livelihood activities. Boys and girls are engaging in sex work, selling weapons, alcohol, drugs and pornography. Out of economic necessity children as young as eight are becoming involved in such enterprises. Branded as 'bad children' they are stigmatised and subject to

social exclusion. Many are dependent on marihuana or inhale solvents.

Many of the families we spoke to during the course of this research wished that they had another option and did not have to put their children in danger. But some children we spoke to said their families have been the primary perpetrators of abuse against them. Some young boys and girls said that parents or members of their extended families had forced them to engage in sex work. The family, as well as being a force that protects, can also be a force that causes extreme forms of abuse.

Children are surrounded by violence and insecurity on a daily basis which has an adverse effect on their behaviour and psychological development. It is quite common for Iraqi kids to be playing with guns and to demonstrate the violent behaviour they see about them on a daily basis. Quite a few of the children that we spoke to, particularly the boys forced to engage in sex work, carry knives to protect themselves. Some of them

display aggressive behaviour as a kind of protection mechanism. They are trying to say: "Look, don't mess with me; I'm capable of defending myself." But, deep down, I think we are dealing with quite scared children.

War Child has existed since the war in former Yugoslavia. Our experience shows us the way forward is to first involve communities in trying to break down the stigma that these children have. If the community is on board, you can really help to promote a protective environment for the children themselves. The key to community involvement is reaching those community leaders, mullahs and other authority figures and using them as a way of mobilising the rest of the population.

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Testimonies from marginalised Iraqi children are at <http://streetkidnews.blogspot.com/category/1/europe-streetkid-news/iraq-streetkid-news>

Iraqi girl displays scar from a wound received during a mortar attack.



The plight of the Iraqi Christians

by Nineb Lamassu

The Assyrians, the last concentrated pocket of Assyrio-Aramaic-speaking people in the world, are the victims of a systematic religious and ethnic cleansing which is going largely unnoticed.

Iraq's Christian population, which numbered over a million at the beginning of the war, has been increasingly targeted by extremists and insurgents. Church bombings, kidnappings, extortion, beheadings, rape and forced taxation for being non-Muslims have forced hundreds of thousands of Assyrians – together with other Christians – to abandon their ancestral land and flee to Jordan, Syria, Turkey and Lebanon.

Known also as Chaldeans and Syriacs, the Assyrians are the most educated of Iraq's many minorities. The Assyrians are singled out for retribution because many worked for the UN prior to 2003 and because the Americans have made use of their skills. Assyrians have worked as interpreters, construction workers, contractors and maids and many used to commute to the Green Zone and to US bases. Many Assyrian liquor

storeowners, hairdressers and music storeowners have been murdered.

Dora and other Assyrian neighbourhoods of Baghdad have been emptied. There could now be up to 150,000 Assyrians refugees in Jordan. The exact number is impossible to determine as a result of Jordan's refusal to acknowledge and register refugees. After at first saying there are no refugees, Jordan has now commissioned the Norwegian research institute Fafo to investigate how many Iraqi refugees there actually are. It is far from certain that the Fafo investigation will find out. Many Iraqis are afraid of being repatriated and will therefore not meet Fafo's personnel.

This Christian woman fled from Baghdad to Kurdistan in 2007 with her husband and children.



UNHCR/K BROOKS

Sargon ran a music shop in Baghdad. The Shi'ite Mehdi militia forbade all music and sent a threatening letter to him. He ignored it, but when they put a bomb in a wheelchair by his shop he knew he had to leave. He arrived in Amman having abandoned everything. Money from a sister in Australia pays his rent and Caritas pays for his wife's post-natal care. Like so many refugees, they hardly ever leave their apartment as they are afraid of being arrested. UNHCR have given them protection cards but they know of others forcibly repatriated to Iraq despite having them. He has sought a visa for almost all European countries without success. He feels the entire refugee situation is yet another show for the galleries – like Operation Freedom, the Iraqi government and the Jordanian refugee policy. The Americans, he says, allowed them to become sitting ducks for the criminal gangs and fundamentalist Islamists.

A relative is even more bitter. "The US went to war with a Christian rhetoric but they left Iraq's Christians to die. The war has developed into a war of religions; everything else is a manipulation of the reality. In the apartment next to ours lives a young Assyrian man whose father was killed in a Hummer along with American

soldiers. He has become an orphan because of the Americans but when he applied for a visa to the US he was turned down. He lives on gifts from us others who lack food ourselves. That is America's way of saying thank you."

"They do not call us Christians, they call us crusaders! But we Middle Eastern Christians have never been crusaders. On the contrary we have always taken the consequences of the West's crusaders."

Saddam Hussein changed the Iraqi constitution in 1978, establishing that there were only two peoples in Iraq: Kurds and Arabs. The Assyrians, the indigenous population of Iraq, were thus to be called Christian Kurds or Christian Arabs. Those who accepted it were tolerated, allowed to exercise their religion, culture and language freely. Those who opposed and wanted to maintain their Assyrian identity were accused of treason and risked death penalties. Assyrians in northern Iraq therefore joined the Kurdish opposition and

fought together against the regime. Today the Assyrians have no allies and are safe nowhere in Iraq.

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This article draws on testimonies in 'By God: Six Days in Amman', by Nuri Kino www.aina.org/reports/bgsdia.pdf

Education crisis for Iraqi children

by J R A Williams

Displaced Iraqi children – both those inside Iraq and in neighbouring states – are being denied their right to education. It is vital to gather accurate data on displaced children and to engage children and adults in displaced communities in pragmatic ways to provide education despite the current circumstances.

In 2005 UNHCR reported that in Lebanon, 55% of Iraqi households do not send their children to school; a further 25% of households reported that some of their children were missing school. Syria allows Iraqi children access to school but the Ministry of Education found only 26,124 children enrolled, some 13% of the estimated population of 6-14 year-olds presently in Syria. While no quantitative information is available in Jordan, anecdotal evidence suggests that substantial numbers are out of school. Within Iraq, enrolment of children in urban areas is estimated at less than 78% (68% for girls).

There is massive pressure on schools in host areas. Some schools in the northern provinces in Iraq are running four shifts in an attempt to accommodate displaced children. Shifts have been introduced in host schools in Syria where class sizes have increased from 24 to 44 students, and in Jordan there

are up to 60 children in classes in refugee-hosting areas. The foreign ministry in Syria estimates it has had to spend an additional \$60 million to provide education for Iraqis.

Poverty and uncertain legal status appear to be the main reasons for families not enrolling their children in school. Children stay home to look after their siblings or generate additional income. Where children have access to school, families have to pay school fees and for school uniforms, books and school materials. There may be little money left for education after paying rent and for essential food, medicine and basic household items. With the ambiguous legal situation of many refugees, children may not be registered or may be withdrawn from school in case their families are identified as illegal residents and deported.

The situation inside Iraq is similar. Save the Children's recent survey of

barriers to attendance and enrolment in primary schools – Out of School in Iraq – observes that while findings cannot be generalised for the whole country, it is clear that the appalling security situation in Iraq is not yet the main factor excluding children from basic education. Reporting from settled communities, the survey notes that the high cost of schooling in terms of uniform and transportation keeps children away. Demand for children to contribute to the household economy is identified as the major factor causing drop-out and non-enrollment. Only improvements in family living standards will provide the necessary economic security to ensure that children enter and stay at school.

Challenges facing those in school

Displaced Iraqi children face challenges in the classroom on a daily basis. Teachers cannot provide the psychological support the children need and schools are not able to accommodate children from different learning systems, with different languages, accents and abilities. Children out of school in Iraq cite a long list of concerns including poor educational methods, violence

in schools, lack of extra-curricular activities, no consultation with children and an irrelevant curriculum.

For those children outside Iraq who are enrolled in school it is not clear whether they are receiving host-government certification or whether their attainments will be recognised by resettling or Iraqi governments. Children complain that there is no provision for non-Arabic speaking children. Some

students have been expelled because they were too old to be in the class appropriate to their level of learning. Children can face considerable discrimination where they are perceived by schools as 'a problem'. Displaced Iraqi adolescents repeatedly mention discrimination based on their legal status, ethnicity and religion.

Both inside and outside Iraq, children are suffering from the effects of a long-term crisis in education. Forty-three per cent of parents interviewed for the study had no education. Fewer than 40% had completed primary education. This limits the support these parents can give their children in their education.

Response

Host countries need funding and resources from the international community and from the government of Iraq. The first need is for numerical and qualitative data on the scale and nature of the problems facing those displaced and the host communities that are welcoming them. Save the Children UK is proposing to work with communities, local NGOs and Ministries of Education to implement a regional education initiative building on existing education programmes with vulnerable children and youth in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Our initial target is fewer than

25,000 children, so this can only be a small part of what has to be a broad and imaginative response on the part of governments, donors and agencies. In Iraq, Save the Children is supporting the Iraq Children's Rights Network to collect data on the effects of violence on children's development, health, education and social welfare.

There is an immediate need to respond to the rights of children

may have little relevance and must be evaluated for their appropriateness, feasibility and cost-effectiveness. Care is needed to avoid adding to already overburdened curricula: informal approaches may be better for imparting 'life skills' and peace and human rights education.

Host populations tend to suffer when taking in displaced people. The small budgets allocated to education rarely extend to the local population. There needs to be full cooperation between humanitarian and development agencies, and within agencies between relief and development staff, so that local populations are assisted alongside the displaced. In countries surrounding Iraq, the early response of hosts has been to extend traditional hospitality and

take the newcomers into their homes. Some see a benefit for children learning alongside others from different cultures and backgrounds.

Security issues are certainly problematic for interventions to ensure the right to education in Iraq – and are indeed the cause of displacement of so many people – but they themselves are not the cause of children's exclusion from school. Although it is an absolute necessity to overcome the violence and insecurity that presently blights life in many parts of Iraq, this in itself will not be sufficient to deal with the problems that lead to drop-out, non-enrolment and educational failure that characterise so many Iraqi children's experience of school.

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already in school for psychological support and inclusive services. Particular issues to be addressed are:

- support for host educational systems
- reducing barriers to access such as cost, certification and documentation
- regularisation of the status of families
- assuring the quality of education on offer.

Expanding educational provision on the scale needed will have to include a number of options beyond enlarging the capacity of existing schools and building new schools. These may include popular education and new technologies, home-based schools, informal and non-formal education, adult and literacy education, early childhood care and development services. In addition, it is important that caution be exerted in introducing western pedagogies: some creative or child-friendly learning approaches

Insufficient world focus on Iraqi IDPs

by Peter Medway

The neglected humanitarian crisis of internal displacement requires a renewed commitment by donors and an immediate and robust intervention by the international community.

As Iraq news dominates the world media, it is all too easily forgotten that internal displacement is not new. Iraq has a history of forced migration that precedes the onset in 2003 of fighting between the Iraqi government, the US-led Multi-National Forces/Iraq and insurgent groups. Population flux actually began during the Iran-Iraq war (1980–88), during which civilians fled conflict or were forced to move within the country for other reasons, particularly as a result of Saddam Hussein's *anfal* campaign to relocate hundreds of thousand of rural Kurds. As a result of such disruptions, Iraq already contained pockets of displaced when multinational forces entered the country four years ago, sparking the most recent wave of movement and compounding what was already a significant problem.

Today all major population groups are affected by displacement. As armed groups intimidate Iraqis on the basis of sect or ethnicity, displaced families flee to areas where they can feel welcome. While some of the displaced come from agrarian backgrounds and have chosen to move back to rural areas to be near family, it is clear that Iraqi cities – where there are more services and sources of income – now host the majority of IDPs. However, even the most economically stable regions of Iraq offer few employment or educational opportunities to newcomers. With entire groupings being forcibly displaced into locations markedly defined and divided by sect, the International Medical Corps (IMC), one of the few international agencies to remain operational across the country, is particularly concerned about the increasing isolation of communities along sectarian lines and their resulting vulnerability to large-scale external threats.

Based on focus group discussions with thousands of families representing a wide range of socio-economic levels, religious beliefs and regions in Baghdad, as well as information acquired from community leaders, religious leaders, relevant members of Iraqi government organisations, and other observers, IMC estimates that as many as 200,000 more IDPs from the Baghdad governorate may flee during the course of the next few months. The effects of this crisis on education, livelihoods and freedom of movement for the entire population will be devastating.

Funding constraints

Resources currently available to address this crisis are inadequate. Relief agencies operating in Iraq face severe funding constraints for the coming year and will not be able to fully respond to humanitarian needs. The recently announced UNOCHA-managed NGO Humanitarian Response Fund is welcomed but at \$5 million is too small. Setting the size of each grant at \$100,000 is short-sighted and does not account for the high transaction costs of operating in highly insecure environments. In any case, at the time of writing the Fund has not been fully supported and is not yet able to disburse funds to agencies operational inside Iraq.

It may be a legitimate development strategy for the international donor community to target its assistance at the Iraqi government. However, in the current circumstances this, alone, may not necessarily be the best way to rapidly respond to the IDP crisis. IMC and other NGO teams on the ground note that the government's capacity to deliver assistance in a

timely, needs-based fashion requires hands-on support in many areas. Operational NGOs currently in Iraq are in a position to partner with local institutions to meet needs but are constrained by the reluctance of donors to provide sufficient resources.

A fundamental reassessment of the international agenda for Iraqi governance around the issue of humanitarian assistance is required. It is all well and good to support government capacity from the top down but international assistance should also aim to address the needs of Iraqi service providers at the grassroots level.

Massive displacement is stretching the already fragile economic and social fabric of countless Iraqi communities. IMC calls on the international community to plan humanitarian interventions which recognise that:

- Unlike previous waves of displacement, many Iraqis now fleeing their homes and livelihoods do not plan to return but hope to build new lives in their host communities.
- Short-term emergency interventions will not be sufficient: any lasting solution must be comprehensive and include conflict resolution efforts and support for host communities and for IDPs.
- Access to health services is increasingly difficult for IDPs: the loss of health care professionals due to the risks to personal safety must be addressed.
- Action is needed to prevent food insecurity and malnutrition, particularly if the Public Distribution System is further disrupted.
- Coordination mechanisms and the capacity of responsible government ministries such as

the Ministry of Displacement and Migration need to be strengthened.

- Shelter strategies must be put into place as the number of IDPs increases: host communities alone will no longer be able to absorb IDPs in existing homes and public buildings.
- Employment opportunities must become a major focus of a response to the needs of IDPs and to communities as a whole.

- The forced return of IDPs to their original homes in neighbourhoods or areas dominated by members of other sects could spur additional violence and a new wave of displacement. Reintegration remains a valuable political goal but IDPs should not be returned to their place of origin without mechanisms in place to ensure their safety and protection from potential harm and abuse.

The phrase 'humanitarian crisis' may be often over-used but it does accurately describe

conditions unfolding inside Iraq. Without a comprehensive large-scale intervention, the risk of regional destabilisation is real. Support for Iraq's growing IDP population must be robust and geographically widespread to anticipate and ease burdens on struggling host populations and on the stressed infrastructure.

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The Iraqi Red Crescent

by Jamal Al-Karboli

The Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS) is among the few organisations working to assist displaced persons throughout Iraq.

The IRCS is an independent national humanitarian society. One of the oldest Red Crescent societies in the region, it was founded in 1932 and recognised by the International Federation in 1934. We uphold international humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and non-

discrimination on grounds of religion, denomination or political belief.

The IRCS has 15 administrative, financial or operational divisions and branches in each of Iraq's 18 governorates. There are 135 branch offices offering humanitarian

services. We have a staff of 3,200 and 100,000 volunteers – 10,000 of whom are active. The society owns four hospitals – including maternity, surgery and children's hospitals in Baghdad – with a total of 300 beds and runs an artificial limb centre in Mosul and two centres for the rehabilitation of war casualties in Basra. Storage facilities are available in all governorates and we have three large strategic warehouses. The IRCS works in close cooperation with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and with UN agencies, especially WHO, UNICEF and UNHCR.

Our activities, like those of other National Societies, are, of course, not confined to responding to wars or natural disasters. At times of peace we focus on such activities as attracting young volunteers, youth camps, first aid training, seminars to increase awareness of how to reduce road accidents, vaccination campaigns, blood donations, water and sanitation and provision of medical supplies and services in remote areas of Iraq.

Sadly, as a result of the tragic circumstances in Iraq, most of our activities, attention and resources are today directed towards emergency response to the needs of Iraqis at home or in neighbouring countries.

Family from Fallujah at Al-Khadraa' displaced persons camp (established by the Iraqi Red Crescent), near Baghdad.



CICR/ALRAWI Ahmad

Among the activities we undertake are:

- evacuation and rescue services and first aid to victims of violence and explosions
- establishing emergency camps for those displaced by conflict or whose houses have been destroyed and providing them with food parcels, hygiene kits, blankets, kitchen sets and jerrycans
- organising blood donation campaigns to support acute-care hospitals
- exhuming and identifying bodies discovered in mass graves
- providing artificial limbs, wheelchairs and other equipment for victims of conflict
- provision of emergency first aid kits, blood bags, body bags, blankets, bed sheets, and stretchers, painkillers and anaesthetics
- food assistance packages: with support from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Red Crescent Societies of Kuwait, Iran and the United Arab Emirates we have distributed food to over 700,000 vulnerable families.
- provision of drinking water to displaced people
- liaison between families and the estimated 18,000 prisoners currently being held by the occupation forces and the roughly 34,000 detained by the Iraqi authorities: we have facilitated exchanges of tens of thousand of letters and arranged phone calls, thus reassuring relatives – in Iraq and abroad – that their loved ones were alive and well.

Red Crescent workers and volunteers have paid a high price as they carry out their duties. They have been exposed to death, injury, kidnapping and imprisonment at the hands of armed men, militias

and terrorists. Our aid convoys have been attacked on 30 occasions and 13 Red Crescent facilities have been attacked – and damaged or destroyed – by occupation forces. We have problems with some Iraqi insurgents, but in general most of them respect our work and understand our role. We face far greater problems with the American forces as they, often aggressively, search our premises and damage our facilities. We have to spend much time explaining about the Red Crescent. Many US soldiers fail to realise that we are recognised members of the international humanitarian movement, despite the fact we use the Muslim Red Crescent symbol. In spite of these difficult circumstances, however, the Iraqi Red Crescent Society remains committed to assisting our fellow Iraqis to the best of our abilities.

Dr Jamal N Al-Karboli is the vice-president of the Iraqi Red Crescent Society. For information about the work of IRCS, email: ircs_amman_office@yahoo.com

Vital role of legal assistance for displaced Iraqis

by Olivier Beucher

Given the dramatic deterioration in the situation in Iraq over the last four years, the British NGO Ockenden International has had to re-design its legal aid and protection activities in order to target the displaced Iraqis who have been fleeing the sectarian violence since February 2006.

We started work in Iraq in May 2003, with the objective of addressing needs resulting from the US-led war and the previous regime and then contributing to reconstruction. Ockenden established with the support of UNHCR its first legal aid centre in the city of Amarah in the governorate of Missan in southern Iraq in December 2003. Initially providing support to refugees returning from Iran, the centre has progressively had to address the needs of huge numbers of IDPs

arriving in the governorate. The same is true of Ockenden's two other Legal Aid and Information Centres (LAICs) in the cities of Karbala and Kut. Legal assistance in Iraq is vital for refugees and IDPs. It allows them to recover the basis of a well-organised life, whether waiting to return or trying to integrate into the host communities.

The majority of Iraqis fleeing to the southern governorates come from Baghdad and surrounding areas. In the three governorates where

Ockenden work, IDPs (new and old) represent 61% of the population, while returning refugees represent 16% and the host community 23%. Newly displaced people face a constant struggle to meet daily needs, and represent around half of those seeking legal advice or representation in court or to administrative bodies.

Possession of legal documentation – particularly birth and marriage certificates – is essential. Without ID a family cannot register their children in school or access health services. Recovery of land confiscated by the previous regime requires a certificate of ownership that is often very difficult to obtain. For many displaced Iraqis, recovering documents which may have been confiscated by the Saddam regime,

destroyed or lost in the chaos of violence and displacement is a major challenge. Most IDPs face difficulties in getting ration cards or in transferring ration cards issued to them in their places of origin. Without them they are hardly able to access the Public Distribution System (PDS) – the system established by the Iraqi government in 1990 to provide monthly food rations at subsidised prices. The PDS is under great strain in many areas and is highly inefficient. Many Iraqis have seen cuts

Female outreach lawyer collecting information on newly displaced family, Al Eyog village, Kerbala governorate.



in their food rations. Lawyers at the legal aid centres help recent arrivals cope with the registration procedures – and obtain replacements for lost IDs – in order to access their entitlements.

The 17 Ockenden-supported legal advisors represent displaced Iraqis in court: most cases involve marriage conflicts, inheritance, property disputes and (re)issuance of documents. Since 2003 they have dealt with more than 21,000 requests for assistance. We have helped IDP and ex-refugees achieve successful outcomes in 99% of cases. Efforts are made to ensure, whenever possible, that half the members of legal teams are female. The centres work in close partnership with local women's and human rights groups. Ockenden has also been implementing a human rights awareness campaign to promote tolerance and acceptance. We have facilitated workshops at which large numbers of people have discussed culturally sensitive topics such as gender and children's rights.

We have worked with partners to successfully overcome difficulties. Occasionally some local government bodies have proven incapable or inefficient and associations of lawyers have sometimes seen the LAICs as potential competitors. Courts have a huge backlog of cases in front of them and this breeds frustration.

We liaise closely with the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR. Our legal advisors follow UNHCR criteria when we take on cases:

- The beneficiary must be a person of concern to UNHCR and/or needy.
- The legal issue in case involves a serious breach of a fundamental right.
- Prima facie evidence exists of a violation of the beneficiary's rights.
- The court or administrative body is likely to reach a positive verdict for a beneficiary or a decision could strengthen an interpretation of a law relevant for the resolution of similar cases.
- Court or administrative costs can be kept to a minimum.

Promoting self-reliance of Iraqi refugees and displaced people in southern Iraq has been at the heart of Ockenden's programme since 2003 and will continue to shape our work in legal aid, human rights, development and income generation.

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IOM – building Iraqi capacity and assisting IDPs

by Dana Graber Ladek

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been assessing IDPs in Iraq since 2003. IOM is a member of the UN Country Team for Iraq, and works closely with the UN Cluster system and the Iraqi authorities.

As the article on page 16 indicates, the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) is responsible for playing the lead role in addressing the consequences of mass displacement and eventually facilitating the

potential return of large numbers of displaced Iraqis. IOM's assessments of IDPs complement the registration work undertaken by MoDM. Templates used – as approved by Cluster F, the Cluster for Refugees,

IDPs and Durable Solutions, of which UNHCR is Coordinator and IOM Deputy Coordinator – address multiple issues and needs, including food, health care, water and sanitation, documentation and property, as well as the IDPs' future intentions. IOM monitors coordinate with MoDM, local government bodies, NGOs, tribal and community leaders and individual IDP families

to locate and gather information on displaced populations.

Building the capacity of MoDM is one of IOM's key activities in Iraq. In coordination with UNHCR, we provide active support to enable the Ministry to become a self-sufficient organisation, with an increased capacity to protect and assist IDPs, refugees and other populations of concern. This support includes clarifying departmental and individual responsibilities within the Ministry, establishing operating procedures and work plans and drafting legislation designed to clarify and strengthen the Ministry's mandate.

Among IOM's other activities are:

- providing emergency distributions and implementing community assistance projects (CAPs): In response to the needs identified by IOM's needs assessments, we distribute emergency food, non-food items and water. CAPs address the basic needs of IDP and host communities, such as water and sanitation, health care, and education. IOM also provides vocational training geared to income generation activities to reduce dependency and ensure the sustainability of project outcomes.
- providing technical assistance to government ministries with migration and border management responsibilities: IOM has assisted the Government of Iraq to review migration functions and structures, draft national migration policy and establish an immigration training centre that offers language, human rights, managerial development and IT skills. Stability cannot return to Iraq unless it builds a functional, effective and integrated system of border management with a common goal of creating open but controlled and safe borders.
- training for staff of the Iraq Commission for the Resolution of Real Property Disputes (CRRPD): Given the large number of property restitution claims – a result primarily of the forced relocation programmes implemented by the former regime but also a consequence of the current conflict – IOM trains Iraqi officials on relevant international best practices based on its experience with international and national claims programmes.
- providing Iraqi NGOs with training to enhance their capacity to assist IDPs, including emergency preparedness, disaster management and best practices for camp management. IOM believes that supporting local communities to accommodate IDPs is the best solution. However, camps may have to be a last resort and IOM works with UNHCR, the Iraqi Red Crescent and MoDM to ensure best practices in camp management.
- encouraging return of educated Iraqis: Skilled Iraqis are in desperately short supply now that some 40% of professionals have left the country. The Iraqis Rebuilding Iraq (IRI) Programme – jointly implemented with UNDP and the Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation – is helping the government to recruit and place qualified nationals for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the country. Over sixty Iraqi experts currently living abroad are undertaking short- to long-term deployments to enhance the institutional capacity of the Iraqi civil service and public sector institutions.
- helping third-country nationals (TCNs) stranded in Iraq: Since 2003 IOM has facilitated the evacuation of over 7,000 migrants from Iraq. IOM continues to receive frequent requests for assistance from TCNs, many of whom have been deceived into coming to Iraq and are exploited for little or no remuneration. IOM has resources to provide stranded migrants with voluntary return assistance to their

home country. However, the choice to do so remains a difficult one for individuals who have contracted significant debts at home and often have little to go home to.

Amen (not his real name), a graduate from Sulaymaniyah, taught art for five years. In 2002 he left Iraq and landed in the UK in search of a better life. While in the UK, he chose to improve his education and enrolled in English, IT and photography classes. In addition, he became an active participant in many art exhibitions. Most of his art focused on expressing the plight of migrants. After his asylum request was rejected, he requested IOM's assistance to return to Iraq. Soon after his return in December 2005, IOM assisted him to find a job with a local implementing partner. Amen is now able to support his family and pursue a promising art career.

In August 2003, following the bombing of the UN Headquarters, international IOM staff were transferred to Jordan. International consultants now support IOM's many qualified national staff to further strengthen our capacity on the ground. IOM, like other agencies, is forced by the security situation to function under a low profile to avoid endangering the lives of its staff and implementing partners. IOM has been able to widely share its experience of ways to minimise operational risks in humanitarian operations through the Security Awareness Induction Training course provided for all UN agencies and NGO staff prior to deployment to Iraq.

IOM has worked to publicise the scale of Iraq's displacement crisis, and we are pleased that the alarming increase in people fleeing their homes is finally reaching international attention. Much more needs to be done. With no cessation to the ongoing displacement, IOM Iraq is dedicated to continuing to inform the public of the conditions of IDPs and to advocate for increased assistance and funding.

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Humanitarian situation in Iraq

by Rianne ten Veen



Increasing violence is severely constraining the humanitarian space and making it next to impossible to deliver emergency relief to many vulnerable groups in the worst-affected areas of central Iraq.

The good news is that the first quarter of 2007 has witnessed vigorous joint efforts by the UN Country Team (UNCT) in Iraq, the Humanitarian Coordinator and NGOs to address the neglected humanitarian side of the crisis in Iraq. These concerted efforts have been accentuated by the new UN Secretary General, Mr Ban Ki Moon, who declared that there is a humanitarian crisis in Iraq and that there is need to sustain the UN existence and humanitarian activities in Iraq.

However, the situation is getting worse and there is not enough media coverage to expose what is really going on. What is being reported is only a tiny fraction of the horrors taking place, especially in Baghdad.

The humanitarian needs arising from the heightened sectarian, political and criminal violence are being compounded by poor or non-existent basic services, loss of livelihoods and rampant inflation. According to a recent report by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), 54% of Iraqis now live on less than \$1 per day, including 15% who are forced to live on 0.50 USD per day – and this at a time when annual inflation rate jumped to an estimated 70% in July 2006.

Islamic Relief is continuing its efforts to support those in need but this is becoming increasingly difficult. With different players playing different roles, it is hard to tell who the genuine aid workers are. Our staff are at increasing risk of being mistaken for other actors. International workers, journalists and aid workers are still targeted and kidnapped. We face a constant dilemma: giving more details on what humanitarian work we do could help our fundraising with the public and our donors but it could make it impossible to continue our work. A complete media 'black-out'

would greatly hurt us and hamper the sustainability of our efforts.

And even when implementing our work, we face numerous difficulties. For example, continual mass displacement of our beneficiaries makes it difficult to sustain our support. Due to the security situation beneficiaries are becoming increasingly scared to even tell us their new address. Three orphans that donors were sponsoring via Islamic Relief were recently killed in separate barbaric incidents. Drivers regularly refuse to go to emergency-affected areas. Our staff are queried when doing their work and they risk their lives passing through checkpoints and exposing themselves to bomb blasts.

Hopefully, Iraq will return on the radar screen of donors and peace will come quickly. For now it's only thanks to the grace of God that we're able to continue.

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