



Joint NGO Brief on Humanitarian and Protection Issues in Iraq – UNGA 2015

30 September 2015

Iraq is the only country in the world dealing with two simultaneous IASC classified Level 3 emergencies, as it plays host to more than 250,000 Syrian refugees while coping with the impact of its own brutal conflict.[1] Since January 2014, more than 3.1 million people have been displaced inside Iraq, of whom one-third are children. Over 8 million in total have been affected by one of the most rapidly evolving crises in the world.[2] In 2014 alone, the number of people in need of life-saving assistance doubled – and then re-doubled. Civilians are increasingly unable to cope with the consequences of the crisis, with children, who suffer heightened protection risks and disruption to their education, particularly affected. Movement restrictions have exacerbated the crisis in Iraq. Affected populations are unable to or face challenges accessing safe areas and humanitarian actors struggle to reach people who are most in need. The Federal Iraqi Government and Kurdistan Regional Government are overwhelmed both operationally and financially in implementing the response.

The humanitarian crisis in Iraq is furthermore increasing social tensions that have already been tested by years of political rivalry, disenfranchisement, and ethno-sectarian issues. The international community's counter-terrorism narrative does not address the underlying and pre-existing grievances that have given way to current violence. For the past year, security concerns have rightly dominated national priorities in Baghdad, though this has come at the expense of robust humanitarian assistance and efforts to advance good governance, rule of law, reconciliation, and economic stability. The short-term goal of addressing the threat posed by armed opposition groups has been approached in a way that is ultimately inflaming existing ethno-sectarian tensions and thereby undermining long-term stability. These tensions must be addressed to guarantee future recovery and protect the rights of all Iraqis.

We therefore call upon the international community to:

➤ **Ensure access to protection and assistance for all Iraqis affected by the conflict**

Whilst we commend the Kurdistan Regional Government, Government of Iraq, and host communities for supporting large numbers of displaced Iraqi civilians, we encourage all parties to allow civilians free access to safety across Iraq and to actively work towards social cohesion. Civilians fleeing violence, half of whom are children, continue to be blocked from reaching safety or face threats of eviction, expulsion, and forced return to unsafe areas by various authorities. Since April 2015, half a million people have been displaced from or within Anbar Governorate, yet nearly half of these people remain within the governorate in proximity to areas of active conflict. Moreover, open suspicion of and hostility towards certain population groups by security forces hinder the provision of urgent and timely assistance to some of the most vulnerable conflict-affected groups. This leaves families with little option but to return to unsafe areas or those held by armed opposition groups. With the ongoing conflict showing no sign of abatement, this increasingly restrictive environment is particularly concerning with the expectation of further waves of displacement as hotspots continue to erupt around the country. **Member states should call upon the Government of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government and parties to the conflict to abide by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by Article 44(2) of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution as well as the 2008 National Policy on Displacement allowing all Iraqi citizens the right of freedom of movement, travel, and**



residence throughout the country's entire territory. All parties to the conflict must uphold their obligations under International Humanitarian Law.

➤ **Guarantee the impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian assistance**

Humanitarian actors have struggled to gain access to all areas of the country to provide vital assistance, due to security concerns and bureaucratic barriers including visa and registration issues. In Anbar where half of the population is displaced within the governorate despite ongoing conflict and the deteriorating humanitarian situation, humanitarian actors have scarcely been able to operate and deliver lifesaving assistance. The international community must ensure that all military and security operations in no way conflict with the delivery of humanitarian assistance, infringe on humanitarian space, or put humanitarian actors at risk. Donors should step up their funding and support in a manner that respects the fundamental humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality. **Members of the US-led Coalition should adhere to recently drafted Iraq-Specific Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination Guidelines to ensure systematic coordination between humanitarian and military actors to avoid potential hazards and obstacles and not interfere with humanitarian aid delivery in hard-to-reach areas over the long-term.**

➤ **Speak out publically on human rights abuses**

Numerous cases of human rights violations perpetrated by parties to the conflict have been reported in Iraq and the UN Secretary-General reported 880 incidents of grave violations against children last year, of which 711 were verified.[3] The Humanitarian Response Plan for 2015 points to mass executions, systematic rape and horrendous acts of violence perpetrated by armed groups against populations across the country. **The UNSC should condemn all human rights violations conducted by all parties to the conflict as reported through human rights monitoring mechanisms, including the UN framework for monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children, and hold perpetrators accountable.**

➤ **Preserve civil society space and empower communities to lead local efforts to ensure protection and build peace**

Civil society and community-based structures are essential for supporting long-term peace and protection for civilians in Iraq. This should be a more inclusive process, reflecting the voices of women, children, and youth who make up the majority of the population and have their own perspectives on the issues that they face, and play a vital role to play in achieving peace and stability in the long-term. Authorities across Iraq should encourage and support locally-led efforts towards improved protection and peace building that are fully inclusive. Local actor mapping is a valuable tool to avoid duplication and strengthen these efforts hence likely to be more sustainable. **The UN must step up capacity building at the local level for peace and protection among its staff, as well as ensure all UN operations on the humanitarian and political side include civil society and communities at various levels.**

[1] UNHCR Syria Response, Iraq page

[2] IOM Iraq Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), published mid August, identified 3,171,606 internally displaced Iraqis (528,601 families) from January 2014 through 30 July 2015.

[3] UN Secretary General Report on children and armed conflict, 5 June 2015