

## NGOs Call on Authorities to Meet Obligations for Protection and Access in Iraq

30 October 2017

The NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI), a forum of 159 nongovernmental organizations working to provide aid and protection for civilians affected by the conflict in Iraq, notes the announcement by the President of the Kurdistan Region that he will step aside from 1 November 2017. We call on all parties to continue to prioritize protection of civilians and humanitarian response and to engage in an inclusive and peaceful dialogue for all Iraqis.

Following this event, along with recent developments in Kirkuk, Salah-al-Din, Diyala and Ninewa governorates, NCCI members share the following concerns and recommendations: We have witnessed how increasing political tensions and sporadic use of force in contested areas of Iraq have instilled uncertainty and fear in citizens. According to UN OCHA, in Kirkuk and the surrounding areas alone, over 100 000 people have fled their homes, and thousands more were displaced from disputed territories in Ninewa and Erbil governorates<sup>1</sup>. Many are highly vulnerable individuals, including women and children, who were already displaced and whose lives are again being uprooted by conflict. As the situation unfolds, we remind all sides of their obligations to:

- Respect the right for people to move freely and access safety and assistance;
- Respect the laws of armed conflict and to avoid any attacks on civilians or civilian infrastructure;
- Refrain from any escalation of violence and pursue a peaceful resolution for the contested areas of Iraq which is inclusive of all citizens.

Unfettered humanitarian access must be prioritized to enable humanitarian organizations to continue to reach the newly displaced and estimated 11 million<sup>2</sup> people in need across Iraq. NGOs face increasing access constraints as control lines shift, jeopardizing our ability to provide uninterrupted, timely and needs-based humanitarian response for people affected by conflict. We are concerned about restrictions on the movement of humanitarian workers – both international and national – and our ability to procure and transport humanitarian supplies. It is imperative that all actors actively facilitate comprehensive and safe humanitarian access, including through the implementation of transparent and consistent legal and official procedures for NGO operations. We call on the Government of Iraq (GoI), Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and all military actors and local authorities to:

- Support NGOs to obtain the appropriate documentation required to deliver lifesaving humanitarian assistance, including: NGO registration, residency and visa permits, and access letters;
- Consolidate NGO registration and accelerate the process to obtain long-term visas and residencies for staff;
- Facilitate the procurement and movement of humanitarian supplies, including medical supplies, to reach those affected by the crisis.

The NGO community is committed to serving people in need in all areas of Iraq as they continue to face ongoing threats to their safety and well-being. While we continue to work collectively to reach the most vulnerable, we remain mindful that a peaceful end to the conflict remains the only meaningful end to humanitarian suffering in Iraq.

**For more information, or any media related inquiries, please contact: Richard McLaverty, Advocacy Coordinator, NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI) [advocacy@ncciraq.org](mailto:advocacy@ncciraq.org)**

<sup>1</sup> <http://iraqdtm.iom.int/IDPsML.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unocha.org/iraq>