
Statement of Policy Regarding Iraqis and Others Displaced in and outside Iraq

Prepared on the occasion of the International Conference convened by UNHCR to address the humanitarian needs of refugees and internally displaced persons inside Iraq and in neighbouring countries ▫ Geneva, 17 – 18 April 2007

As an international Catholic organization dedicated to refugees and migrants and providing substantial services to vulnerable refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey, ICMC welcomes this international conference.

Representing 172 members worldwide, ICMC proposes 5 points to the conference:

1. The paramount need is to create conditions in Iraq that will enable people to return. A prerequisite to regional stability, this requires more than humanitarian action: it requires a comprehensive political solution that engages all parties.

2. Humanitarian action is an essential part of a comprehensive political solution. With over 4 million people displaced in unsustainable conditions both inside and outside of Iraq, and as many as 50,000 more being displaced each *month*, it is urgent for the international community as a whole to act—massively—and now.

3. A number of States are already part of the humanitarian response. The people and governments of Jordan, Syria and Lebanon are carrying the greatest share of that response, and we respect and commend them. We applaud the States that have opened and kept their borders open to people fleeing from Iraq, the States that have funded emergency and life support services to the displaced both in and outside Iraq, and States that have begun welcoming asylum seekers and refugees from the region.

4. States with capacity must offer more, and more States must share in the response to relieve the suffering. We urge the conference and the whole international community to:

- **Increase support and possibilities for humanitarian services to those displaced in and from Iraq**, with special attention to the most vulnerable, including education for children and health, psycho-social counselling and other life support services for people who are traumatized, fragilized families, women, children, the elderly, disabled and sick. In this regard, we recognize the United States and the European Union for recent commitments of increased funding for these services, but clearly much more is needed.

- **Ensure access to asylum processes and expanded opportunities of refugee resettlement** for the displaced of Iraq, especially those with special protection needs. Recent increases in refugee processing and admissions by the U.S. are a positive, but small step in this direction.

It is time not only for the US to accept more of the responsibility for the resettlement of refugees from Iraq but for Europe and other States as well. We salute Sweden in particular for its welcome of Iraqi refugees and Chile for its example in recently accepting Palestinian refugees from Iraq for resettlement.

Regarding asylum and resettlement, it is important to restate two fundamental rights:

- **The right of *non-refoulement*.** Given the current situation in Iraq, we believe that circumstances are such that the principle of non-refoulement very directly rules out any form of *involuntary return*, not only to the south and central regions but to any part of Iraq at present.
- **The right to seek asylum.** We must be emphatic about the obligation of States and the international community to ensure that those displaced from Iraq, whether Palestinian, Chaldean or other Iraqi, have *genuine* access to asylum and resettlement processes.

5. Humanitarian organizations are key partners in the overall response, including ICMC.

ICMC has been providing services for many years to Iraqi refugees and others in the Middle East. Together with Caritas partners in Jordan and Lebanon and more recently with Caritas and Terre des Hommes in Syria, ICMC has operated the largest non-government program in the region offering services to extremely vulnerable Iraqis.

Moreover, ICMC and its members continue to be active partners with the UNHCR and resettlement countries in a full range of resettlement programming around the world, from processing to pre-departure cultural orientation to the welcome, employment and integration of refugees in their new countries. ICMC's regional program in Turkey is presently processing several thousand Iraqi refugees for resettlement in the US.

- To contact ICMC: Mr. John K. Bingham, Head of Policy; or Ms. Emma Viaud, Head of Communications, at icmc@icmc.net; tel : + 41 022 919 10 20.
- For more on the Conference itself, see: www.unhcr.org/events/45e44a562.html