

UPROOTED AND UNSTABLE



MEETING
URGENT
HUMANITARIAN
NEEDS IN IRAQ

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ABOUT REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL

Refugees International generates lifesaving humanitarian assistance and protection for displaced people around the world and works to end the conditions that create displacement. Based on our on-the-ground knowledge of key humanitarian emergencies, Refugees International successfully pressures governments, international agencies and nongovernmental organizations to improve conditions for displaced people.

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A girl stands next to her family's luggage after returning to Baghdad from Syria. With the situation in Iraq still very dangerous for civilians, Refugees International argues that returns are not currently sustainable.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Five years after the US-led invasion, Iraq remains a deeply violent and divided society. Faced with one of the largest displacement and humanitarian crises in the world, Iraqi civilians are in urgent need of assistance. Particularly vulnerable are the 2.7 million internally displaced Iraqis who have fled their homes for safer locations inside Iraq. Unable to access their food rations and often unemployed, they live in squalid conditions, have run out of resources and find it extremely difficult to access essential services. The US, the government of Iraq and the international community must begin to address the consequences of leaving Iraqis' humanitarian needs unmet.

As a result of the vacuum created by the failure of both the Iraqi Government and the international community to act in a timely and adequate manner, non-state actors play a major role in providing assistance to vulnerable Iraqis. Militias of all denominations are improving their local base of support by providing social services in the neighborhoods and towns they control. Through a "Hezbollah-like" scheme, the Shiite Sadrist movement has established itself as the main service provider in the country. Similarly, other Shiite and Sunni groups are gaining ground and support through the delivery of food, oil, electricity, clothes and money to the civilians living in their fiefdoms. Not only do these militias now have a quasi-monopoly in the large-scale provision of assistance in Iraq, they are also recruiting an increasing number of civilians to their militias - including displaced Iraqis.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the Government of Iraq has proven to be unwilling and unable to respond to the needs of vulnerable Iraqis. Although it has access to large sums of money, it is divided along sectarian lines, lacking both the capacity and the political will to use its important resources to address humanitarian needs. As a result, the government does not have any credibility left with Iraqis. The little assistance provided by the government is perceived by most as being biased in favor of the Shiite population, especially when it comes to the delivery of government services such as electricity or food ration cards from the Public Distribution System.

The international community has been largely in denial over the disastrous humanitarian situation in Iraq, and has until recently seen Iraq through the prism of reconstruction and development, and failed to address urgent needs. Only recently has the United Nations issued a common humanitarian appeal for Iraq, recognizing the nature of the situation and the need for all agencies to step up and address humanitarian needs.

Hindered by its political mandate in Iraq, and its lack of access to most of the country, the UN has no other choice than to rely on local partners to reach out to the communities most in need. By taking advantage of the "balkanization" of Iraq to identify interlocutors who can facilitate access throughout the country, the UN can create a larger space to meet humanitarian needs. Identifying and supporting local, non-governmental organizations that are known and trusted by the communities they serve will also be essential if the UN is to take a more important role in humanitarian assistance inside Iraq.

Ongoing violence in Diyala and Mosul, as well as recent events in Basra and Baghdad, have proven that the situation in Iraq is still too unstable and violent for people to return home. Of those Iraqis who have returned from Syria, most were unable to go back to their homes, as they would likely be attacked again, and had to move into homogenous, sectarian areas. Others found their homes occupied, and were unable to recover them.

<p>While everyone hopes that Iraqi refugees and internally displaced people will be able to return to their homes in the future, the necessary conditions for returns to take place in safety and in dignity do not exist. All relevant actors should discourage returns until the violence subsides and people can receive adequate assistance and protection. In particular, the Government of Iraq should no longer use returns as an indicator of success in stabilizing the country. Returns — like the rest of the humanitarian situation — should not be used as a political tool by any of the parties to the conflict.</p> <p>It is also difficult for people to return home because they have minimal access to basic services and the Government of Iraq does not have a clear strategy to handle returns. Moreover, property disputes are already emerging, as many houses of people who previously fled are now occupied by others who will be reluctant to give them up. Disputes are currently settled in an ad hoc manner, by a variety of actors such as the Iraqi army, the Iraqi police, or the militia in control of the neighborhood. For any return movement to be sustainable, the Iraqi Government, with the support and expertise of the international community, must devise a strategy to deal with property disputes, in a larger transitional justice framework. In the meantime, the Iraqi Government must ensure that property rights — and their violations — are documented.</p> <p>Current Iraqi and American strategies for responding to Iraqi displacement assume that security will improve steadily over the next two years. However, the situation in Iraq remains volatile, and the Government of Iraq, the UN, the US government and other members of the international community must develop plans for Iraq based on all possible scenarios, including a deterioration of the security situation. Negotiations must begin with regional and local governments to ensure that people will be allowed to seek asylum in both Iraq and in the region in case violence increases and displacement resumes in large numbers. For Iraq to have any future, international donors must ensure that resources are allocated to the humanitarian response, and that all appeals are fully funded. As for the UN, it needs to develop its network of local actors, and reach out to all vulnerable Iraqis - whether or not they are displaced.</p> <p>Failure to address the needs of Iraqis will have dramatic impacts on security inside Iraq. The hope that does exist lies in the efforts of Iraq's citizens. Iraqi organizations are providing lifesaving assistance throughout the country and the international community must increase efforts to reach out to these groups and provide them with the funds to continue their work. Ultimately, only Iraqis can save Iraq.</p>	
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UPROOTED AND UNSTABLE: MEETING URGENT HUMANITARIAN NEEDS IN IRAQ

INTRODUCTION

Five years into the US military intervention in Iraq, the country is dealing with one of the largest humanitarian and displacement crises in the world. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2.7 million Iraqis are internally displaced, 1.5 million of them after the Samarra bombings of February 2006. The needs of the displaced are not adequately addressed by the Government of Iraq or the international community. This vacuum is quickly being filled by militias and other armed groups, who engage in hearts and minds campaigns and provide assistance as a means of building support for their political and military goals.

In addressing security concerns in Iraq, the US is failing to take into consideration the needs of the civilian population and the consequences of leaving these needs unmet. As for the Iraqi government, it resembles the rest of the country. Fragmented and torn apart by sectarian rivalries and corruption, it is unable and unwilling to use its important

resources to respond appropriately to the humanitarian crisis. The security situation is far from stable, and the likelihood of further displacement is high. In this environment, returns of displaced Iraqis should not be encouraged, and measures must be taken to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to deal with all possible contingencies.

Now more than ever, the UN has an important role to play in Iraq. Its recent focus on the humanitarian situation comes belatedly, but the United States and the international community must welcome and support it. In the face of immense security challenges, UN humanitarian agencies must establish a dialogue with all local actors able to help them access populations in need. Since security will continue to present a challenge in the foreseeable future, working with a variety of local actors needs to be an overarching priority of the UN in Iraq. They must identify and support Iraqi non-governmental organizations, as they are often the only link vulnerable Iraqis have with the international community.

An Iraqi Shiite woman takes care of her sick baby inside a makeshift camp for displaced people in Baghdad. The Government of Iraq must devise and implement a plan to address the humanitarian needs of displaced and other vulnerable Iraqis.

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INADEQUATE ASSISTANCE FOR THE INTERNALLY DISPLACED

Shiite and Sunni Militias: Filling the Assistance Gap

Refugees International visited many locations inhabited by displaced families throughout Baghdad. Many live in makeshift homes, water leaks on them in the rain, livestock graze in mounds of garbage where barefoot children play, dirt roads are flooded with sewage. Many have little access to clean water or electricity. Assistance is scarce.

As a result of the importance of non-state actors in the delivery of assistance and security, civilians are joining militias, whether the Mahdi Army or Sunni militias. Displaced Iraqis are no exception. In need of an array of services, and often led by the desire to “belong” to their new communities, increasing numbers of displaced men are now members of these armed groups.

The Government of Iraq shows little capacity or willingness to deal with the displacement crisis, which angers international governments that provide funding for humanitarian assistance and prevents them from adopting a more proactive approach to the humanitarian crisis. Refugees International met with a representative from a donor government who expressed dismay at the fact that the Government of Iraq has billions of unspent dollars that have yet to be allocated to the humanitarian response. A European donor told RI that the Ministry of Finance does

not want to release funds, and that many Ministries do not have anyone in charge. According to a UN official in Baghdad, “Iraqi Government institutions can’t spend money properly because they have no staff.” One telling example is Iraq’s Committee for Disarmament, which has a 35 million dollar budget, and a staff of two.

Because of the Government of Iraq’s inability to respond to the needs of Iraqis, and the UN’s slowness in addressing the humanitarian crisis in Iraq, a vacuum was created that is being filled by non-state actors. The fragmentation of Iraq and the eradication of any form of real government benefit militias and individual political movements that provide assistance as an integral part of their programs. As a result, non-state actors play a central role in providing assistance to families throughout Iraq. The largest “humanitarian” organization in Iraq is the Sadrist movement affiliated with Muqtada al Sadr, the anti-American Shiite cleric, and his local Offices of the Martyr Sadr, which exist throughout Iraq — from Kirkuk to Baghdad to Basra. Operating on a model similar to the Lebanese Hezbollah, his sustainable program provides shelter, food and non-food items to hundreds of thousands of Shiites in Iraq.

Electricity is an essential service that ends up being provided by armed groups. Because of the government’s failure to provide electricity, particularly in Sunni areas, the US military builds power stations and takes people off the government power grids. Organized

Non-state actors play a vital role in providing assistance to families throughout Iraq.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING ASSISTANCE

- The Government of Iraq must devise and implement a plan to address the humanitarian needs of displaced and other vulnerable Iraqis;
- The United States should provide technical expertise to Iraq’s relevant ministries — the Ministry of Migration in particular — to assist them in putting together a viable humanitarian action plan;
- The United States should consider the security implications of not providing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable Iraqis and make humanitarian response a key element of its strategy in Iraq;
- The UN should improve its access by building relationships and security agreements with local power holders.

crime ends up taking over and ensures that government electricity, if restored, does not get to users. Aid workers are concerned that power should not be supplied by for-profit generators or groups that have an interest in keeping the population dependent on them. According to a UN official in Baghdad, “the US army’s civil affairs section does not understand the long-term effects of its actions. It is weakening government structures further.”

As part of its assistance programs, the Mahdi Army — Muqtada al Sadr’s armed group — also “resettles” displaced Iraqis free of charge in homes that belonged to Sunnis. It provides stipends, food, heating oil, cooking oil and other non-food items to supplement the Public Distribution System (PDS) rations which are still virtually impossible to transfer after displaced Iraqis have moved to a new neighborhood, though it is easier for Shiites to do so. Even when the displaced succeed in transferring them, they find that, because of rampant corruption and banditry on the roads, they do not get more than fifty percent of what the rations used to contain. 80% of the population of Iraq was dependent on the Public Distribution System before 2003.

Refugees International visited an office of the Sadr movement in the Ur district of Baghdad. The office provided locals with

clothing, milk, oil, rice, sugar, clothes and fuel for heating and cooking when supplies are available. The central government does not play any role in that area. Locals even come to the Sadr office for the adjudication of legal disputes. The office also provides stipends to displaced families and the families of slain or imprisoned Mahdi Army men.

Sunni militias play a similar role with displaced and other needy Sunnis. They too settle the displaced in homes that belonged to Shiites. There is less organized help for Sunnis, but the Islamic Party — the main Sunni political Party in the Government — is an important service provider, distributing food and non-food items, providing medical relief and supporting local NGOs. Sunni militias also handle the distribution of key items such as heating gas. As Sunnis in Baghdad get virtually no electricity or other services from the government, they rely on local militias and warlords to secure their areas and manage what services they can obtain.

Refugees International met with members of the Mahdi Army in Baghdad’s Washash, Ur and Shaab districts. In Amriya, Ghazaliya, Adhamiya, Saba Abkar and Seidiya and Dora, RI also met with members of the “Sahwa.” These new US-backed militias, called Sons of Iraq, Concerned Local Citizens, Critical Infrastructure Security Guards and

A policeman stands guard near women waiting for distribution of financial assistance from the local government in Baquba, 40 miles northeast of Baghdad, in October 2007.

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ASSISTANCE FROM THE SADRIST MOVEMENT

In the Saddeh area of eastern Baghdad, Jasim is an Iraqi Army veteran wounded during the American invasion of 2003. Jasim and seventeen of his relatives, including eight children, now live in three adjacent shacks. They are Shiites from Haswa near Falluja.

Jasim's family describes how some 3,000 families from Haswa were displaced, with their homes looted. The Iraqi army told them to leave because it was unsafe. They believe that the Sunni Awakening Council members are the same ones who expelled them and that these same Awakening Council militiamen would threaten them should they return.

Previously Sunnis and Shiites had lived together in their old area. They received a letter from the Soldiers of Monotheism (Tawhid) Brigade, stating that because Sunni families had been killed and expelled in Baghdad, infidel families (meaning Shiites) had five days to leave or face death. Those who ignored this warning were killed, including Jasim's brother in law, whose body was never found.

The Ministry of Migration provided Jasim's family with beds, blankets and a small kerosene cooker, but nothing else. After one year of trying they succeeded in transferring their ration cards from the Public Distribution System. However, they only receive a very partial amount of their former rations every few months.

The Sadrist movement provides them with food such as rice, flour and sugar. They rely on a nearby well for water, because there is no running water in their area. Although they have been connected to the national power grid they rarely get electricity. They had to break apart a bed to use it for firewood when cooking because they had no cooking gas or kerosene. On some days they lack food to eat. When it rains, their roof leaks.

"My message to the American people after 5 years -- they destroyed us and didn't help us," said Jasim's wife. "They didn't reconstruct the country, they added more destruction. Before there was security and life was going on easily, while now there is nothing. The days during Saddam were better... Now things are getting worse and worse, killing in the streets and there is no life. Strangers come to our homes and threaten us. I feel life is miserable now and our country is destroyed."

They said that when some women returned to Haswa to transfer their children's school papers to Baghdad, they were killed. As a result, no one has tried to return to their homes since.

The Sadrist movement provides the family with food, such as rice, flour and sugar.

Iraqi Security Volunteers — but who widely call themselves “Sahwa” or “The Awakening” — are largely former insurgents who have shifted tactics. In all locations it was found that displaced men have joined armed groups. In some cases locals complain that the displaced are more aggressive and radical than local men who have joined the same groups.

In the Sunni neighborhood of Amriya, Refugees International interviewed the head of a local humanitarian organization. She explained that displaced people from Falluja,

Seidiya, and different parts of Baghdad were members of the local Sahwa group. She believes it was a mistake to let them in, as they did not have the necessary links to the community and were more radical than locals.

In the Dora neighborhood of Baghdad, Refugees International met with two men who had joined the local Sahwa. Both expressed their mistrust of the government and had two reasons for joining the local militia: money and the desire to take action against Shiites.

<p style="text-align: center;">UN support for local NGOs would not only help their lifesaving work, but also counter the increasing influence of armed groups over a vulnerable, neglected population.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Local NGOs: Vital Role Needs Support</i></p> <p>Militias and armed groups are not the only local organizations that are responding to humanitarian needs. Local NGOs are also actively assisting the displaced and other vulnerable Iraqis and delivering assistance to Iraq's neediest. The Iraqi government, the US and the UN should seek to strengthen these groups. This support would not only help their lifesaving work, but also counter the increasing influence of armed groups over a vulnerable, neglected civilian population.</p> <p>The international community is familiar with the largest NGOs such as the Iraqi Red Crescent Organization and the NGO Mercy Hands, but many others operate at a localized level, and accomplish a lot given the security and budgetary challenges they face. These local NGOs provide a vast array of services including schooling for children, foster care for orphans, medical care, public distribution system (PDS) supplementation, shelter and other assistance to the displaced, returnees and indigent Iraqis.</p> <p>Two examples in Baghdad illustrate the prominence of local agencies in the delivery of aid. Palestinian refugees in Iraq are among its most vulnerable population. Refugees International visited the Baladiyat area in eastern Baghdad, home of the remaining Palestinian community of Iraq. According to the Haifa Club, a local NGO, and one of the main service providers, the community has not had an international visitor since 2005. Of the 15,000 residents of the area, there are 347 orphans and 43 children of prisoners. Six hundred have been killed since 2003. There are also 237 Palestinian families in Baladiyat who were internally displaced from other parts of Baghdad. Twenty Palestinians are held by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, which has been persecuting the Palestinian population since it came into existence. Since the government is completely absent in the area, the Haifa Club provides schooling and clothes for children as well as medical care and other aid.</p> <p>In the Amriya district of Baghdad, Refugees International met with the Ethar Association, an important service provider. There are 5,025 displaced Sunni families registered with them in Amriya, mostly living in the former homes of Shiites, and over 1,000 orphans are registered as well. Fifteen to twenty percent of Amriya's residents who fled to Syria returned, mostly because they ran out of money. They received no help from the Government of Iraq but did receive some assistance from the Islamic Party, which also provided some with identity papers. Almost none of the displaced in Amriya receive their government-mandated stipends.</p> <p>Ethar also works in the Tarmiya district, where it helps 5,000 displaced families, most of whom are from Baghdad and now live in tents and shacks. In Taji, they help 4,000 displaced families. In Rashdiye, they help 1,500 displaced families. They receive no help from the Ministry of Migration, formerly known as the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, and little to nothing from the Ministry of Health.</p> <p>The Ethar Association finds its funding from local donors or political parties such as the Islamic Party, but has no ties to organizations outside of Iraq. When Refugees International mentioned the group to UN agencies or international NGOs, it became clear that nobody knew of them, despite the important role they play.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Government of Iraq: A Sectarian Approach to Assistance</i></p> <p>The Government of Iraq is itself a party to the conflict and its security forces have facilitated displacement and sometimes carried it out themselves. Officers in the Iraqi Security forces complain that most of their men are loyal to the Mahdi Army and most of their commanders are loyal to the Mahdi Army or the Badr Militia. They and Sunni groups described incidents where Iraqi Security Forces opened fire on Sunni neighborhoods, protected death squads, or were directly</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">5</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">UPROOTED AND UNSTABLE: MEETING URGENT HUMANITARIAN NEEDS IN IRAQ</p>

<p>involved in the kidnapping and execution of Sunni civilians.</p> <p>In February 2008, Refugees International observed close cooperation between the Mahdi Army and the Iraqi Police, Iraqi National Police and the Facility Protection Services that often protect ministries and are notorious for their lawlessness. Visiting Iraqi ministries and government offices in January and February of 2008, during the Shiite holy month of Muharam, there were overt symbols of Shiite tradition, such as flags and banners, hanging on buildings and walls, as well as television and radio stations playing Shiite religious prayers and songs. This lack of separation between the state and the Shiite denomination intimidates Sunnis and creates the impression of Shiite ownership of government institutions.</p> <p>Iraqi ministries are controlled by political parties and the Ministry of Migration is controlled by Iraqis widely reputed to be Sadrist sympathizers, although no accusations were made of ties to the Mahdi Army. As a result, to the extent that the Ministry of Migration provides services to Iraqis, it is widely perceived to have a strong bias in favor of Shiites. Indeed, Refugees International conducted interviews with internally displaced families in the Sunni areas of Falluja, Kirkuk and Mosul and many of the families, interviewed separately, expressed their conviction that Shiites displaced in the south received much more attention from the central Government. "The Government only helps those who have contacts with Shiite political parties," said a woman interviewed in a Sunni neighborhood of Baghdad.</p> <p>Local officials in the Sunni areas of Kirkuk, Mosul and Diyala, also believe that aid is more available in Shiite governorates. However, the situation may change in some Sunni governorates such as Anbar, where security has improved and the Ministry of Migration can now gain more access.</p> <p>The Ministry of Trade, in charge of the essential Public Distribution System (PDS), is also widely perceived as being compromised by sectarianism in favor of Shiites. Meanwhile, corruption, inefficiency and security problems also militate against proper PDS outreach. In the best cases, Iraqis only received fifty percent of the PDS contents and the quality of the contents has gone down. Refugees International interviewed internally displaced people (IDPs) in Baghdad, Diyala, Mosul, Falluja, Babel, Kirkuk and Najaf. Although anecdotal, our evidence shows that few IDPs have succeeded in transferring their PDS cards when they move to new neighborhoods. Of those who were able to, the overwhelming majority are Shiites.</p> <p>Returnees also have a hard time renewing their PDS cards. Although most government bias seems to be in favor of Shiites, aid groups note that in provinces that are in the hands of Sunnis, such as Salahedin governorate, Shiite areas face a sectarian bias against them from local officials and receive an inferior quality of help. For example in Salahedin, the towns of Dujail and Balad are Shiite pockets and receive less assistance.</p> <p>Within Baghdad, government services, always plagued with inefficiency, are distributed according to a sectarian bias. Shiite areas get more hours of electricity than Sunni areas, in most cases. In some cases Sunni neighborhoods have not received any electricity for many months. In Dora and Amriya for example, residents complain that they have not received electricity in over a year. Sunni leaders and American officers assert that installations such as power stations and gas stations are often controlled by the Mahdi Army, which provides services to Shiites only. Lack of government services also serves to discourage the return of IDPs and refugees.</p>	<p>This lack of separation between the state and the Shiite denomination intimidates Sunnis and creates the impression of Shiite ownership of government institutions.</p>
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<p>Unlike in south Lebanon or Gaza where it has failed to act in time, the international community must step in to fill the vacuum created by the absence of the state.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">NO GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE FOR DISPLACED SUNNI WOMAN</p> <p><i>Abasya Aziz is a Sunni who lived for 35 years with her family in the Hurriya district of Baghdad, which was controlled by Shiite militias. One year ago, she fled her home after the murder of her son. Shiite militiamen shot at their house and they fled without most of their belongings.</i></p> <p><i>The militiamen used a Shiite religious center as a base and for two days they attacked her home and called for the family to leave. The men fled and the women stayed in the house alone. “We were very scared alone,” she said. When the men found a house in another part of town they called for the women to come. They now rent the home for a reduced rent from another family who had fled. Abasya says she would like to return and live in safety but they cannot because she fears her other sons will also be murdered.</i></p> <p><i>Abasya’s family received help from the Ethar Association. No other NGO or government agency had provided her family with any help, she said. She had tried to transfer the family’s Public Distribution System cards so they could receive their rations, but she said the officials threw out her family’s papers because they were Sunnis. Abasya also takes care of three children whose father had been murdered. They receive free medical care from Amriya’s Islamic Health Center.</i></p>
	<p>UN Response: Perception and Reality</p> <p>The lack of an appropriate government response and the central role armed groups now have in assisting vulnerable Iraqis make it more urgent than ever for the UN to take a much stronger humanitarian role in Iraq. The humanitarian imperative is real. The security implications of a failure to act are increasingly real as well. Unlike in south Lebanon and Gaza where it has failed to act in time, the international community must step in to fill the vacuum created by the absence of the state. The window of opportunity to do that in Iraq is rapidly closing.</p> <p>The United Nations and other international agencies are perceived by most Iraqis as non-actors in Iraq. Most Iraqis are unaware of the UN’s activities in the country, and think that the UN is only in the Green Zone to support the central government. As the UN operates under the radar, with local employees and unidentified vehicles, most Iraqis believe it is physically not in the field.</p> <p>None of the displaced Iraqis or returnees interviewed by Refugees International, in many different cities of Iraq, knew of any international assistance available to them,</p> <p>even if in some cases, it was — albeit distributed by local actors. Access and perception are and will continue to be issues for the UN in the near future. With the political future of Iraq uncertain at best, it is essential the UN continue creating space to respond to humanitarian needs.</p> <p>In August 2007, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1770 and required the UN to expand its political and humanitarian role in Iraq. Humanitarian agencies operating in Iraq generally agree that the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), which doesn’t separate the humanitarian from the political, is an impediment to the neutrality of humanitarian action on the ground. A key structural challenge is the fact that the humanitarian coordinator position is held by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) of UNAMI, a political mission.</p> <p>Since this is unlikely to change, the UN has no choice but to work within the framework it has been given. The opening of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Amman, as well as the appointment of David Shearer, a man of</p>
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A seventeen-year-old Palestinian girl looks down inside of a tent at the refugee camp in the suburbs of Baghdad in 2003. Palestinian refugees inside Iraq are among the country's most vulnerable populations.

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great humanitarian experience, as deputy SRSG of UNAMI are positive signs and point to a shift in the UN mentality in Iraq. UN staff in the region are determined to give humanitarian issues the attention they deserve.

The ceiling of UN international staff allowed in Iraq at any one moment remains at 35, a low number. Many criticize the Amman-based decision-making process that often seems disconnected from the reality of Iraq. However, despite the commonly-held perception of a UN presence only in northern Iraq and the international zone, many UN agencies operate throughout Iraq with local staff and partners. Indeed, UNICEF has over 100 local staff and facilitators throughout the country who work on both rehabilitation and humanitarian projects. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) operates fourteen low-profile Protection and Assistance Centers (PACS) throughout Iraq, and has six mobile teams as well. The International

Organization for Migration (IOM) — the main international agency dealing with the internally displaced — has forty NGO partners and is able to operate throughout Iraq and respond to any situation. Despite IOM's record in Iraq however, only 25 million out of its two-year 85 million dollar appeal has been funded.

To address funding issues and to build on recent initiatives, the UN issued its first Common Appeal Process (CAP) for Iraq in February 2008. UN agencies, as well as international and local NGOs, devised a document that established who is doing what where, and defined the needed financial resources. This resulted in a 263 million dollar appeal to respond to humanitarian needs in Iraq. This is a key development, as this appeal sends a strong signal to the international community and the Government of Iraq that the UN considers a grave humanitarian crisis to be developing in the country. More than just an operational document, the

<p>Humanitarian actors can now identify local non-state power brokers with whom arrangements can be made and security guarantees provided so that aid can reach the communities in need.</p>	<p>CAP will help the UN and others advocate for a new focus inside Iraq.</p> <p>The CAP has its shortcomings. The process was criticized by many as being very political, with UNAMI ultimately deciding what proposals would go in. The project proposals only focus on immediate assistance, so community assistance programs — essential to alleviating the suffering of communities and promoting durable solutions — were left out. Despite the fact that a third of the participants were NGOs, many civil society members, mostly local organizations, could not participate, as they did not have a representative in Amman, and could not afford sending someone for a month of daily meetings.</p> <p>Still, the CAP comes at a time where there is a window of opportunity for international actors wanting to operate in Iraq. The Sunni and Shiite ceasefires increased the humanitarian space available in Iraq. Iraqis are able to move with greater freedom than they had in much of 2007 and checkpoints, though numerous, are less dangerous. Additionally, as militias and warlords have consolidated control over territory, there is now somebody in a position of power to deal with in many areas of Iraq. As in Somalia, Afghanistan, Lebanon and other recent conflicts in which warlords, militias and other non-state actors play a role, humanitarian actors can now identify local non-state power brokers with whom arrangements can be made and security guarantees provided so that aid can reach the communities in need.</p> <p>This is an important development but it requires a paradigm shift in the way the UN and other international NGOs operate in Iraq. Not only would this allow for increased humanitarian assistance to reach Iraq's most vulnerable, it would also undermine the quasi-monopoly armed groups currently hold.</p>
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NO TIME TO RETURN

Instability and the Threat of New Violence

The situation in Baghdad and much of Iraq remains very dangerous for civilians and is unsuitable for returns. Despite last year's drop in violence, increased levels of violence will resume, and along with them new displacement.

The sustainability of the lull in violence that occurred in late 2007 is being questioned, especially in light of the March 2008 events in Basra, Sadr City and other areas of Iraq where Shiite militias battled each other. The temporary reduction of violence in 2007 was a combination of many factors. Muqtada al Sadr's "freeze," or ceasefire, on his powerful militia in August 2007 coincided with a Sunni militia ceasefire of sorts. Sunni militiamen began to cooperate with the American army against Al-Qaeda, because they were tired of fighting US forces with little results, afraid of losing control of all of Baghdad and desirous to counter Al-Qaeda's reign of terror.

Like the Mahdi army, these Sunni militias also have political goals and are attempting to unite to become a larger movement that will be able to regain Sunni territory and effectively fight the Shiite militias and the Shiite dominated government, which they call an "Iranian Occupation." In some ways their attitude is, "The Americans did not buy us, we bought them."

Militiamen on both sides are chafing under the restrictions placed on them and growing increasingly frustrated. Conversations with individuals involved in the issue lead Refugees International and others to worry that absent a real political reconciliation process and an efficient disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program, these groups will remain as armed militias with the same political agenda and strong grievances. In the very violent Diyala and Mosul governorates, this strategy of the US-backed Sunni militias has so far not succeeded.

Political reconciliation is not taking place between the warring factions. Baghdad and much of Iraq resemble Somalia. Warlords and their militiamen rule neighborhoods or towns. In many cases displaced Iraqis are joining these militias. Militia leaders on both sides told Refugees International that they are waiting for the American army to reduce the number of troops in country. If and when this occurs and there is increased space for Sunni and Shiite militias to operate in, they plan to resume fighting for control over Baghdad and its environs. Refugees International is concerned that the Government of Iraq, dominated by sectarian Shiite Islamist parties, is not interested in pursuing political dialogue with Sunni groups or even rival Shiite groups.

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In these conditions, it is difficult to imagine that returns could be sustainable especially since many areas of Iraq are still experiencing severe unrest leading to displacement.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IRAQIS RETURNING HOME

- All relevant actors — the Iraqi government, the UN, the US government, countries hosting Iraqis and the international community — must discourage returns until they can take place in safety and in dignity. Asylum must also be preserved regionally and in safer governorates within Iraq;
- The Government of Iraq, with the help of the UN and the international community, should devise a plan to deal with assistance and protection for those who will return in the future;
- The Government of Iraq, with the help of the UN and the international community, should address the issue of property in particular, by ensuring that property rights are guaranteed. A larger transitional justice framework must be developed.

ing severe unrest leading to displacement. According to the International Organization for Migration, Diyala governorate has seen a significant amount of new displacement but ongoing military activities there make it extremely difficult for humanitarian agencies to access the vulnerable and assess the situation. Moreover, it sometimes takes months before a displaced family settles down long enough to begin the registration process.

The recent fighting between rival Shiite militias and Iraqi security forces illustrates the fragility of the US strategy. With the

recent reports in Diyala of members of the US-supported Awakening militias quitting by the hundreds because of their dissatisfaction with local Shiite security forces, instability seems likely to continue in that troubled province. In Anbar governorate, where security has improved in the past few months, Refugees International is concerned over inter-tribal conflict as well as conflict between Awakening groups and their rivals. According to international and local sources, the potential for violence in Mosul is also high, as a large scale military operation may soon occur and threatens to displace many.

A woman displaced by violence in Diyala province in November 2007 washes cooking utensils outside her shanty in Baghdad's Sadr City.

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<p>If violence resumes massively, there will be fewer options for Iraqi civilians. Syria and Jordan, the main safe havens for Iraqis since 2003, have now virtually closed their borders to new Iraqis. Additionally, eleven of Iraq's eighteen governorates have closed their borders to internally displaced Iraqis. There is now nowhere to run, and as a result civilians are increasingly at risk, protected only by the tall concrete walls that surround various sectarian enclaves.</p> <p>The Reasons for Returns</p> <p>In November 2007, Refugees International condemned the Government of Iraq's request for Syria to close its border and stop allowing Iraqis in. This request was motivated by a concern over the control of the border, but also by a desire to show the world that the situation in Iraq no longer warranted people fleeing. In parallel to this request, the Government of Iraq decided to start promoting returns by providing financial incentives to Iraqis in Syria upon their return home. This</p>	<p>measure was denounced by many refugee rights organizations, including Refugees International, as it was politically motivated and targeted the most vulnerable Iraqi refugees — those who could no longer afford to survive in Syria. The Government of Iraq went so far as to stamp some returnees' passports with a five-year non-exit stamp.</p> <p>The Iraqi government became quickly overwhelmed by the idea of accommodating large numbers of returnees, and stopped actively encouraging returns. The politicization of returns continues however, with both the US and the Iraqi governments using it as an indicator of the success of their strategy in Iraq. Indeed, the Ministry of Migration's return strategy document from late 2007 clearly states that returns, should they occur, would demonstrate the success of the current US-Government of Iraq overall security strategy in Iraq. The return strategy also underlines the necessity for the Government of Iraq to engage in an active media campaign to counter warnings that the potential for</p>	<p>The politicization of returns continues with both the US and the Iraqi governments using it as an indicator of the success of their strategy in Iraq.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">A SUNNI FORCED FROM HIS HOME BY SHIITE MILITIAS</p> <p><i>Saad fled in 2007 with his family from the Amil district of Baghdad, leaving all their belongings behind. He had owned his former home. Iraqi police loyal to Shiite militias used the loudspeakers on their police vehicles to broadcast insults to Sunnis, Saad said, and they warned that any Sunnis seen in the area would be killed. He witnessed one of his neighbors killed in a public square. "Another one was killed with his two little children in his garden. The militias called him by his name and shot him with two or three shots in the head and the family left the house after that."</i></p> <p><i>Saad maintains that before the war relations between Sunnis and Shiites in his area were very good. "We were like one family," he said. "Those militias came from outside, not from our area... They might come from the other side of the city."</i></p> <p><i>Although Saad wanted to return to his former home, he did not think he would be able to, explaining that he feared the Shiite militias. "Some families returned home when they heard there is reconciliation," Saad said. "Then they were forced to leave again. Sunnis can not return to Hai Al-Amil."</i></p> <p><i>Saad now lives with ten other relatives in a house that had been burned after its Shiite residents were expelled. He explained that the tires and other combustibles that had been used to set fire to the house were still inside when they moved in. Saad had been a construction worker, but was now unemployed. He and his family now rely on charity to survive but he has received no help from the Iraqi government. The Ethar Association, a local NGO, provided them with aid such as food, beds, blankets and other essential goods.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">WWW.REFUGEEINTERNATIONAL.ORG</p> <p style="text-align: right;">12</p>	

returns will adversely impact a security situation already extremely fragile.

According to a UN official, the Bush Administration is also putting enormous pressure on UNHCR to conduct a viability survey and declare Iraq safe for returns. Most international actors believe that Syria and Jordan, as well as the US, want Iraqis to return to their country as soon as possible to avoid any potential instability likely to be caused by a protracted crisis.

A lot of attention was initially given to the phenomenon of Iraqi refugees returning from Syria in the fall of 2007, when some 46,000 individuals returned to Baghdad, according to the Iraqi Red Crescent. (The Iraqi government claims figures for returnees in Baghdad are greater.) At the end of 2007, the Ministry of Migration also report-

ed that about 36,000 internally displaced people had returned to Baghdad, out of some 660,000 individuals displaced throughout Iraq after the Samarra bombings of 2006. However, since January 2008 returns have slowed dramatically.

Inside Iraq, the rate of displacement has slowed and a small percentage of the internally displaced are returning, in part because of the ceasefires imposed by Sunni and Shiite militias and the security those militias have established in their fiefdoms for members of the same sect. Also, many mixed communities are no longer mixed and there is essentially no one left to force out. In addition, the conditions for displaced families both within Iraq and in neighboring countries are extremely difficult and continue to deteriorate. Iraqis are returning to "safe" neighborhoods in Baghdad, which is quite predictable. IOM,

An Iraqi child returning from Syria sits with the family's belongings in a vehicle in Baghdad. Iraqis began to trickle home in November 2007, desperate to escape the financial hardships that exile has imposed on them, but most are still too fearful to return.

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<p>along with the Ministry of Migration, is just beginning to do a methodical survey of returns in Baghdad but it will take months before a clear picture emerges, especially given the limitations in funding.</p> <p>According to surveys conducted by UNHCR, 70% of those who have returned to Iraq from Syria have now become internally displaced, unable to go back to their homes. They seek shelter in neighborhoods reflecting their religious sect not neighborhoods where they are the minority and might feel threatened. As a result, some internally displaced families who occupy homes that their owners fled are being threatened by local authorities to make them leave. However, Refugees International hasn't heard of displaced families being forced out of homes so that the original owners can return.</p> <p>Surveys by UNHCR and Refugees International show that the vast majority of returnees from Syria went back to Iraq because their resources were depleted, and not because they felt safe. Almost all displaced Iraqis Refugees International spoke with fear returning because returnees have been killed. American officers and local security officials confirmed that there have been incidents of intimidation or murder, and these stories spread quickly throughout the population. Each community believes it welcomes other sectarian groups, although it occurs extremely rarely either way.</p> <p>Obstacles to Return</p> <p>Besides the fragility of the security situation, there are many other obstacles to return. According to assessments conducted by international and national aid agencies, refugees and IDPs who have returned need shelter, electricity, water, employment and non-food items. Humanitarian organizations have recently designed programs to target those needs. For instance, IOM designed a returnee food and non-food basket, and seeks to assist returning families by including them in its community assistance, water/sanitation, health and education programs.</p> <p>Similarly, UNHCR included assistance to returnees in its 2008 programs, while both international and local NGOs stand ready to assist in many areas of Iraq.</p> <p>Despite this mobilization by the international community, the systems are currently not in place to handle a large number of returnees. In a letter sent to Prime Minister al-Maliki last November, both US ambassador Ryan Crocker and US General David Petraeus expressed their concern over the lack of a unified, government-led approach to returns. Similarly, a draft "USAID Two-Year Strategy for the Displaced and Displaced Returns to Iraq," dated December 14th 2007, notes that "the Government of Iraq has not approved any of the three foundation-building efforts identified and assisted by IOM since 2004."</p> <p>Since then, the Government of Iraq has taken some steps to respond to these concerns, but they have yet to be implemented and are insufficient. The government has issued an executive order to create an inter-ministerial "Displacement and Migration Committee" in charge of identifying safe areas for returns within Iraq, laying out a plan to provide services, and developing a plan to return the displaced to their homes. Despite the creation of this committee, and the pressure exerted by both the US and the UN, the government has yet to adopt a National Policy on Displacement and Returns.</p> <p>In its strategy on returns, the Ministry of Migration recognizes the existing challenges to returns, and notes that the lack of essential and commercial services is a factor discouraging returns. It underlines the necessity for the government and the assistance community to provide an array of services to the returnees and improve the overall infrastructure of Iraq. The strategy also mentions the importance of involving all religious leaders and communities in encouraging returns. However, while recognizing the sectarian divide in many of the displaced areas of origin, it does not discuss political reconciliation or the sustainability of returns.</p>	<p>The systems are currently not in place to handle a large number of returnees.</p>
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<p>Property disputes will linger for many years to come and if not handled properly are likely to be a spark for renewed violence.</p>	<p>Property Disputes</p> <p>There is no unified process to deal with returning internally displaced persons or refugees. In particular, there is no body officially handling property disputes. As in the post-conflict Balkans, property disputes are likely to be a key issue in Iraq, and have already started surfacing, as many returnees were unable to go home since their houses are occupied by others. Property disputes will linger for many years to come and if not handled properly are likely to be a spark for renewed violence. For now, there is no judicial entity mandated with dealing with post-2003 property disputes. Instead, they are being handled on an ad-hoc basis, by a variety of actors.</p> <p>All the Iraqi security forces are compromised by sectarianism but the Iraqi Army is the least mistrusted of the various official bodies. The Multi-National Forces (MNFI) wanted Iraqi ownership of the returnee process so they deputized the Iraqi Army, which has in some cases stepped in to fill the void. MNFI together with Iraqi General Abud, the top Iraqi officer for the Baghdad Security Plan, approved a plan allowing the Iraqi army to handle property resolution mechanisms, even though the Iraqi Army is not legally empowered to fill this role. MNFI regards the Baghdad Operations Center (BOC) as if it were the government of Iraq. The BOC is the joint headquarters for MNFI and the Iraqi Security Forces to implement the Baghdad security plan. The decision to rely on the Iraqi Army is facing objections from the US embassy, which places greater emphasis on rule of law and process, while MNFI places greater emphasis on “metrics” and results.</p> <p>Although in many cases the Iraqi Army is viewed as an honest broker, it is not a judicial body, and this plan has been rejected by the Ministry of Migration and the Iraqi Prime Minister’s Office. Since no other mechanism has been set up, property disputes are now handled by a variety of actors. In some cases, the Iraqi army is</p> <p>working with real estate agents to determine the rightful residents. In other areas it is the Iraqi National Police who handle the issue of returns and property, while elsewhere it is the local militia, whether Sunni or Shiite that determines who gets to live where. Refugees International met with Iraqi police and army generals. They demonstrated an awareness of how politically important and sensitive issues of displacement, returns and property are and a concern over the lack of any mechanism to solve these problems.</p> <p>Officially MNFI policy seems to be to avoid taking part in resettlement activity. American troops Refugees International met with reported being asked by Iraqi National Police to help them resettle Shiites in empty homes. The American response varies by area and commander but it appears they do keep track to some extent of displacement and returns. One American colonel explained that they only focus on abandoned homes and rely on the Iraqi Army to be the honest broker. The Iraqi Army checks if the house is really abandoned and then helps families move into such homes. The American colonel stressed that current residents will not be evicted and only abandoned homes are being dealt with. While this may be important to maintain current levels of stability, it means that the territorial gains made by various militias are being preserved. Another American officer, a captain, explained that most of the aid they provide the displaced is in the form of food and basic household goods. They allowed the local Neighborhood and District Advisory Committees, advisory bodies appointed by the Coalition forces and independent of the Government of Iraq, and the Iraqi National Police to handle property issues.</p> <p>The international community recognizes the importance of establishing property disputes resolution mechanisms. UNHCR has pressured the Government of Iraq to include the issue of property in its National Policy on Internal Displacement. However, until now, the issue is only discussed at higher policy levels, and solutions have not yet</p>
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<p>been agreed to by all parties. A mechanism, created by the Coalition Provisional Authority in 2004 and later endorsed by the Iraqi Transitional National Assembly, exists for the resolution of property right violations perpetrated during the Baathist period pre-dating the 2003 conflict: the Iraq Commission for the Resolution of Real Property Disputes (CRRPD). This Commission has been criticized by experts for its ad hoc character, and most of them believe its mandate should not extend to post-2003 disputes. All agree however on the fact that the Iraqi government must own any future process, with the support and expertise of the international community.</p> <p>Iraqis who have property claims dating after April 2003 have no other recourse today than to turn to the severely deficient Iraqi judicial system or local armed groups. The current situation in Iraq remains too violent to design and implement a large-scale effort to compensate and provide restitution to those who have lost their homes. However,</p>	<p>some measures can and must be taken to ensure that property rights are asserted and documented so as to allow for future resolution of claims. A plan must also be designed to ensure that necessary mechanisms are put in place to inform all displaced persons of their rights, and of the process that will be set up for them to assert them.</p> <p>The Government of Iraq has started to address the problem, by developing a one-page form to be filled in and signed by displaced persons detailing real property and lands they left behind. Most property law and post-conflict experts, such as Peter Van der Auweraert from IOM and Rhodri C. Williams of the Brookings Institution believe that post-2003 property disputes need to be addressed in the wider context of a larger transitional justice framework. It is essential that the government, assisted by the UN, start developing such a framework, or at the very least, ensure that all violations are documented in a way that will allow for future resolution.</p>	<p>“After seven months, we received letters threatening us to leave the area.”</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">MOVING FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE</p> <p><i>Haidar is a young man displaced with his family from Abu Ghraib, a town west of Baghdad. Radical Sunnis began killing the Shiite clerics in Abu Ghraib, he explained, and then distributed leaflets warning Shiites that they had to leave. Haidar’s brother wanted to fight back but their father warned him not to because their children would be put in danger. So, Haidar’s brother found the family a temporary home in the Shaab district of eastern Baghdad. Another brother joined the Iraqi police but was killed by Sunni militiamen.</i></p> <p><i>“The Sunnis are good people. After my son joined the police we were told to leave the area, but there was nowhere to go,” explains Haidar’s mother. “After seven months, we received letters threatening us to leave the area. My two sons came to Shaab and found us a house to rent.”</i></p> <p><i>After moving to Shaab, Haidar’s family had to pay rent for the first two homes they lived in, but eventually the Sadrist movement found them a house that had belonged to a “bad” Sunni who was expelled. They now live in this home without paying rent with three other families. “This house belonged to a terrorist and he was expelled,” he said. Haidar joined the Sadrist movement soon after the American invasion and is a member of the Mahdi Army in Shaab. Haidar explains that there were many radical Sunnis in Shaab and that they killed Shiites until the Mahdi Army got rid of them all. Haidar would like to take revenge for his brother’s death if he could.</i></p> <p><i>“I wish peace will be upon every one,” Haidar’s mother says. “We are getting tired. We just need a decent house to live in and decent food to live off of and America to get out so the Sunnis and the Shiites get back together without any differences. I wish for my sons to get an education and to be teachers or lawyers and for the girls to grow up and get married with a good future.”</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">WWW.REFUGEESINTERNATIONAL.ORG</p> <p style="text-align: right;">16</p>	

<p style="text-align: center;">The US and Iraq should plan for responding to more displacement, both inside Iraq and in the region, and for improving the protection of civilians throughout the country.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THE WAY FORWARD: ADDRESSING HUMANITARIAN NEEDS IN IRAQ</p> <p>Contingency Planning</p> <p>Since the security situation inside Iraq remains volatile, and the conflict is ongoing, it is essential that all actors involved plan for all possible scenarios. In both the draft USAID Two-Year Strategy for the Displaced and Displaced Returns in Iraq, and the Ministry of Migration Strategy on Returns, the assumption is that security will improve steadily during the next two years, and that displacement will decrease and returns will take place on a larger scale.</p> <p>These assumptions reflect a politically-driven agenda rather than a real humanitarian assessment of the situation. Both the US and the Iraqi Government are operating under the assumption that their security goals will be met, and that the displacement crisis will be resolved, or at least decrease in numbers and gravity. This is one possible outcome. There are many others, and they need to be envisaged, planned for and addressed if they occur. In particular, the US and Iraq should plan for responding to more displacement, both inside Iraq and in the region, and for improving the protection of civilians throughout the country.</p> <p>One particular issue of concern is the fact that most of Iraq’s governorates have closed their borders to displaced Iraqis. Overwhelmed by</p> <p>the number of displaced, their infrastructure unable to cope with the increase in population, and concerned about safety, eleven Governorates inside Iraq, as well as neighboring countries Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt no longer admit displaced Iraqis. In the event of an increase in violence, vulnerable Iraqi civilians will have nowhere left to go. One imperative for the international community is to consider such a scenario, and start planning for it. Negotiations should take place with the governments involved to get assurances that they will reopen their borders should the situation worsen.</p> <p>The UN must also engage in a large, thorough contingency planning exercise and work both on its capacity to mobilize resources and to access populations in need. Discussions need to be undertaken with all stakeholders at all levels to ensure that access is improved and to obtain guarantees of safe passage should the situation further deteriorate. The UN must take advantage of the current decrease in violence to identify local power holders and develop local networks throughout Iraq. These relationships and networks will be essential should the situation further deteriorate.</p> <p>The UN and International NGOs’ Approach</p> <p>The Common Appeal Process represents a major shift in the UN approach to the Iraqi</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WAY FORWARD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All actors — the Iraqi Government, the US Government, the UN and international donors — must devise contingency plans to address the needs of the displaced and other vulnerable Iraqis in all possible scenarios; • The UN and international NGOs must build larger, stronger local networks by identifying, partnering with and funding a wider pool of local organizations that can intervene at a very localized level; • The UN must address the needs of all vulnerable Iraqis, not only the displaced; • Donors must fully fund the CAP, the IOM appeal, and other appeals addressing the needs of vulnerable Iraqis.
<p style="text-align: center;">17</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">UPROOTED AND UNSTABLE: MEETING URGENT HUMANITARIAN NEEDS IN IRAQ</p>

situation. Two years after the Samarra bombings, and after the failure of the Iraq humanitarian plan, the UN finally took a common approach to addressing the humanitarian needs in Iraq. Even though the security situation remains a major obstacle for increased international UN presence inside Iraq, the CAP seeks to increase the possibilities for UN humanitarian agencies to extend their operations through local partners. The CAP embraces partnerships between the UN and NGOs. The UN needs NGOs to implement programs, and NGOs need both the resources and the diplomatic support of the UN.

Since international NGOs are also limited in their access inside Iraq and work through local partners as well, the UN and other international agencies need to engage in identifying reliable partners that are operating on a localized level throughout the country. In their plans to implement the proposals they out-

lined in the CAP, UN agencies overwhelmingly rely on the same two or three partners. Most UN agencies now have agreements with the Iraqi Red Crescent Organization (IRCO) for the implementation of their programs, some of them extremely large-scale, such as WFP's proposal to feed 750,000 internally displaced people throughout Iraq. When asked about the capacity of the IRCO to undertake these projects, all expressed concern. Many were also frustrated by the fact that some of their colleagues from other UN agencies engaged in agreements with the Red Crescent without consulting them.

With the fragmentation of Iraq, it is more essential than ever to work at a very localized level, with agencies that both understand the context and are known and respected by the community they seek to serve. It can be difficult to identify reliable non-political NGOs in Iraq, but they exist, and are doing the bulk of the work with limited means. The CAP



A woman receives humanitarian aid distributed by the Iraqi Red Crescent organization to poor families in Baghdad's Sadr City in February 2008.

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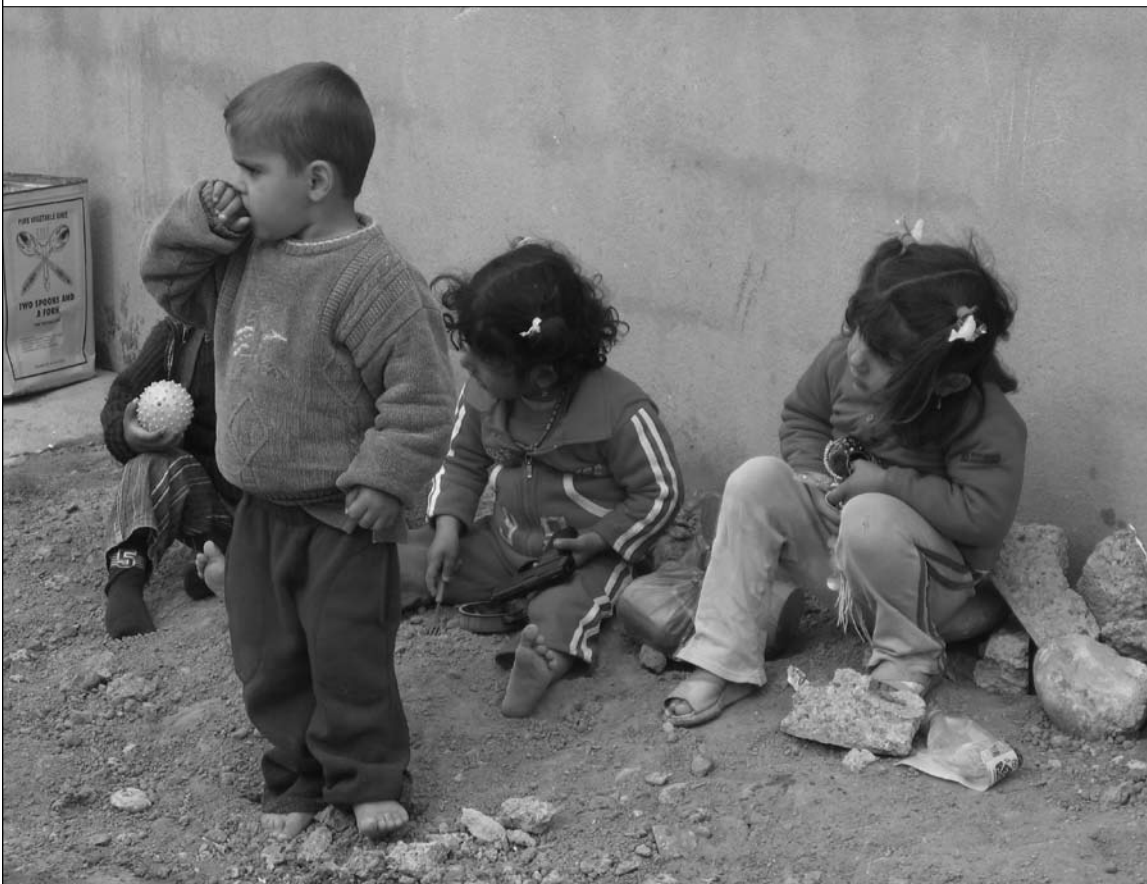
<p>Only by extending their local networks... will UN humanitarian agencies be able to gain more ground in the country.</p>	<p>process is designed in such a way that any local agency seeking UN funding needs to be referred to the UN by an international NGO. Given the challenges in obtaining access to many parts of the country, finding new partners is not necessarily a priority for international NGOs operating in Iraq. To continue creating humanitarian space in Iraq, the UN must focus its efforts on identifying local partners, Governorate by Governorate, and district by district. Only by extending their networks and diversifying their pool of implementing partners will UN humanitarian agencies be able to gain more ground in the country.</p> <p>It is also important the UN constantly reassess the vulnerability criteria it is using in allocating its assistance. In deciding who would benefit from its programs, WFP decided to focus on displaced Iraqis that were displaced into another Governorate, assuming that it is harder for them to transfer their PDS card. In reality however, most of the displaced in the Baghdad area are displaced within the city, and many have found it equally challenging to access their food rations. Although there are many logistical and budgetary reasons to limit assistance to a particular group, it is important that UN agencies assess vulnerability in the specific context of Iraq, and leave space for exceptions to be included in their programs.</p> <p>Humanitarian agencies in the UN are also critical of what they perceive as an over-emphasis on displacement as a vulnerability criterion. It is undeniable that the displaced have to face many challenges and have a spectrum of unmet needs, but the overall civilian population of Iraq has been even more neglected by assistance programs. According to a UN official working on Iraq, “27 million Iraqis have been forgotten since 2003.” The CAP is the first step taken by the UN system to address this issue, and seeks through its proposals to look at vulnerability, and much less at status. More steps are needed, and must be taken in parallel to the assistance being delivered to the displaced.</p> <p>One immediate example comes to mind. Most Iraqis are supposed to benefit from the PDS, and many do not get their food rations, or only a fraction of it because of insecurity and corruption. One priority for the UN should be to assist the government to reform and strengthen this program. Training a few officials from the Ministry of Trade is not enough; the system must be redesigned and rethought for today’s realities.</p> <p>Funding Humanitarian Needs in Iraq</p> <p>The CAP is fairly modest, and even if fully funded will only address a fraction of the needs of vulnerable Iraqis. Yet the support of donors to the CAP is essential for many reasons. First, the need is great. Second, it is the first time since 2003 that the UN is offering a common, concrete plan of action for responding to these needs. Third, the CAP is separate from the other reconstruction-related funds for Iraq, and as such, is an important symbol of the international community’s recognition of the existence of a humanitarian crisis in Iraq. Fourth, the CAP can serve as a tool to pressure the Government of Iraq into better addressing the humanitarian needs of its people.</p> <p>Some donors have expressed concern that the CAP represents international substitution for tasks that are more properly the responsibility of the Iraqi government. On the contrary, the CAP forces the Iraqi Government to acknowledge the situation and work with the international community to address it. Other appeals should be immediately funded as well. Through a network of local staff and organizations, IOM can respond to any urgent situation, anywhere in Iraq. Yet, the organization has received commitments for only 25% of its 85 million dollar appeal for two years.</p> <p>Some donors are reluctant to fund remote-control programming and argue that the risk is too high to engage in humanitarian work in Iraq. They believe that the lack of access of international humanitarian agencies has made it very difficult to assess</p>
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needs adequately. Similar issues arise in many difficult contexts in the world. In countries like Somalia, Chechnya and Afghanistan, the international community has to work remotely as well. Many UN agencies and international organizations have been operating inside Iraq for years, sometimes decades. They have often been working with the same staff, and have developed strong, reliable local networks. They can vouch for the way their funds are spent, and report on the impact of their programming. The situation might not be ideal, but in the current context, it is the only way to reach vulnerable Iraqis.

With remote-control programming an issue for donors, local NGOs that are working in Iraq are in a bind. They are unable to get funding unless referred by an international agency, but donors are bound by internal regulations that keep them from funding local agencies directly, as there is an assumption that they do not have the capacity to

manage funds and report on their use. These assumptions are often false, especially in the Iraqi context, where there is significant local capacity. But since donor regulations are unlikely to change, creative ways of engaging local civil society must be sought out.

To tackle this problem, OCHA established an Emergency Response Fund (ERF), with a ceiling set at 20 million dollars. Its goal is to serve as an emergency pool of funding for immediate programming and is managed by a technical committee consisting of two UN agencies, two donors and two NGOs. NGOs, including local organizations within certain budgetary limits, can access the fund. As of March 2008, the fund was almost empty. OCHA's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) contributed 5 million dollars to it. Donors should ensure that the fund is at its ceiling at all times, as it would allow for much more flexibility and increased capacity in responding quickly to emergency needs.



Sunni children displaced from Baghdad sit in the street next to their temporary home in the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq in March 2007.

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CONCLUSION

The needs of the displaced, the returnees and Iraqi civilians in general continue to increase, as conflict has been affecting them for years now. The Government of Iraq is as fragmented as the country, and unable and unwilling to provide adequate assistance to those in need, offering a golden opportunity for various armed groups to fill the gap. The UN is finally acknowledging the need to shift its approach from a political support mandate in a reconstruction environment to a humanitarian emergency mode, and recognizing an obligation to assist the people of Iraq, not only its government. Donors need to follow the UN lead and fully support humanitarian efforts in Iraq. Failure to address humanitarian needs would have dramatic impacts on security inside Iraq and reinforce the control armed groups now have over the enclaves they claim as their own.

The security situation in Iraq is fragile at best. The numbers of newly displaced Iraqis have decreased in the past few months, but they could rise again in many areas of the country where conflict is still raging or

latent. Returns, largely motivated by a lack of resources and assistance in the places of displacement, have taken place on a small scale, but have proven to be unsustainable, as many returnees ended up having to flee again. While it is everyone's hope that Iraqi refugees and internally displaced will be able to return to their homes in the future, the necessary conditions for such returns to take place in safety and in dignity do not exist.

While the overall climate in Iraq remains bleak, the hope that does exist lies in the efforts of its citizens. Throughout the country, ordinary people have organized and created organizations and networks to assist their communities and fellow Iraqis who are most in need. Operating in extremely dangerous environments, under-funded and often isolated, Iraqi organizations are providing lifesaving assistance in many parts of the country. The international community — donors, the UN and international agencies — need to continue their efforts to reach out to these groups and provide them with the funds and support they need to continue their work. Ultimately, only Iraqis can save Iraq.

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