

CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES PROVIDES ASSISTANCE TO IRAQI REFUGEES

The Iraqi refugee crisis remains one of the fastest growing global humanitarian crises.

Upwards of 2 million Iraqis are now refugees throughout the region and more than 2 million are displaced within Iraq itself. Most of this displacement has occurred since the Iraq war began in 2003. Because Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Iraqi refugees in these countries are not afforded the protection and basic human rights that refugees claim in most countries. Thus, most Iraqi refugees cannot legally work, and lack access to human rights protection, basic social services, and education. Their depleted savings after several years in exile and prohibitions against legal employment have combined to drive many Iraqis into destitution. Many also suffer from debilitating illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, kidney problems and cancer, but lack access to affordable or adequate health care. Neither are the mental health and psychosocial needs of Iraqi refugees traumatized by war and civil strife being adequately addressed.

This long-term crisis will not be resolved unless the U.S. plays a leadership role in providing assistance to these vulnerable refugees. Bold and generous action by the U.S. is a prerequisite for a more robust international response.



The increasingly desperate situation confronting millions of displaced Iraqis demands a robust humanitarian response from the international community, and from the Iraqi government itself. The U.S. and other countries should actively work to mitigate the strain on regional host countries in order to lessen growing tensions between local and refugee populations. The U.S. should provide substantial assistance to U.N. agencies, the ICRC and NGOs to meet the immediate needs of vulnerable refugees. In turn, the U.S. should urge other countries to participate in a sustained and generous international response, both in terms of financing and

providing resettlement. Addressing the crisis is not a just a matter of compassion; it is a fundamental security issue for Iraq, for the countries in the region, and for the U.S. Therefore, the U.S. must continue to work with the Iraqi government to see that it creates conditions for the safe, sustainable return of its citizens.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Funding:

- Generously support U.N. agencies, international organizations and NGOs as they provide humanitarian assistance to displaced Iraqis by providing no less than 50% of the U.N. appeals.
- Support continued assistance for global refugee programs through the annual appropriations process, including a significant allocation to meet the needs of Iraqi refugees.
- Provide bilateral economic support funds to the governments of Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt to ease the burden placed on host governments with large refugee populations.

Resettlement:

- Encourage the U.S. to resettle at least 40,000 Iraqis in FY09 and expedite the processing of referrals.

Legislation:

- Support H.R.578, the Iraqi Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement, and Security Act of 2009, sponsored by Rep. Alcee Hastings and Rep. John Dingell.

Administration:

- Urge the Obama administration to develop a comprehensive and coordinated approach to assisting the millions of displaced Iraqis.