



IOM International Organization for Migration
المنظمة الدولية للهجرة

Greater Protection Needed for Migrants

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IRAQ - Greater Protection Needed for Migrants - The plight of migrants lured to Iraq by the promise of a well-paid job and left stranded without work, money or documents in warehouses at Baghdad's airport or camped out on roadsides, has highlighted again the need for greater protection of migrant workers.

An IOM assessment last week of a group of Bangladeshi, Indian, Nepalese and Sri Lankan migrants camped out near roadsides close to the airport, found nearly 60 men in a desperate situation. Some of the migrants had no shelter at all, covering themselves with whatever they could find lying around. Others were living in tents or containers but all were without running water or electricity. Food was being provided on an ad hoc basis by the US military and Iraqis living nearby.

"We are very worried about these men who need humanitarian help. Winter is fast approaching and they cannot be left to stay out in the open like this without proper facilities," says IOM's Chief of Mission for Iraq, Rafiq Tschannen.

All the migrants had borrowed money or sold off land, businesses or homes to pay up to US\$ 3,000 to middlemen to work in Iraq that would pay much greater salaries than they could ever hope to earn at home.

Upon arrival, however, there were no jobs and for some of them, their passports were also taken away by the recruiters. Although some in the group have found other work by themselves, mainly as cleaners or doing other service labour, most of the men have now been in Iraq for four months without a job or income.

There is a possibility that there may be more migrants in a similar plight at this site alone that IOM is unaware of, while a reported 1,000 migrants from various nationalities, predominantly South Asian and contracted by a catering company, are being kept in three warehouses in a secured area around the airport without their passports.

During the assessment at the roadside camp last week, some of the migrants begged IOM to help them return home while others felt that they couldn't go back until they could pay off the debts they had incurred to get to Iraq. Their lack of papers puts them in a very difficult and vulnerable situation.

Some Nepalese migrants have managed to go home either through assistance from family back home or by borrowing money from fellow Nepalese migrants with jobs in Iraq, thereby increasing their debts.

IOM will soon be providing voluntarily return and reintegration assistance to eight Nepalese migrants. However, the Organization is urgently seeking funds to help another 11 migrants and potentially hundreds more.

Since 2007, the Organization has been assisting migrants who became victims of human trafficking in Iraq or who ended up in exploitative situations with their voluntary return home along with medical or reintegration support when needed.

The higher wages being paid for migrant labour in Iraq where insecurity and violence has led to a shortage of a stable pool of workers among nationals has attracted workers from Asia as well as some African countries to Iraq. However, the need for migrant labour has encouraged human smuggling and trafficking as well as the abuse of migrants by recruitment companies.

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