



PRESS RELEASE **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**
**On World Refugee Day the UN¹ Calls for Improved Conditions for Iraqi
Communities Affected by Displacement**

Baghdad, 18 June: United Nations Organisations working in Iraq today observe World Refugee Day on 20 June and call for a focus on the communities hit hardest by displacement and violence to restore jobs and services and create conditions for voluntary, dignified and sustainable return.

Since the height of Iraq's civil unrest in February 2006, more than 1.6 million people are estimated to have been internally displaced. Today they constitute the world's third largest internally displaced population. In addition, Iraq generously hosts some 40,000 refugees, mainly Palestinians, Iranian and Turkish Kurds.

"Many internally displaced and returnees in Iraq do not have access to adequate shelter, safe water, and health care" said Daniel Endres, Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Iraq.

Since 2003, a third of the internally displaced in Iraq, monitored by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) fled their homes due to direct threats to their lives, while 40% were forced to flee on account of their ethnic, religious or political affiliation and background. Of those that have returned, 40% came back to partially or completely destroyed homes with only 17% having regular access to safe drinking water while 59% of returnees cannot afford fuel and 35% are unemployed.

"We have witnessed overall improvement in the security conditions in Iraq, which led to a considerable return movement in 2008 and a further increase of returns in 2009" said Dr. Naeema Al-Gasseer Acting Humanitarian / Resident Coordinator for Iraq. "To encourage and protect return, families need to be reassured that basic essential services like jobs, schools, housing and healthcare await them when they come back. We are stepping up our efforts to ensure that these services are available in the most vulnerable parts of Iraq" she added .

The UN continues to support the Government of Iraq to create the necessary facilities and conditions for the reintegration of returning Iraqis through the provision of basic services to the most vulnerable. In neighbouring countries, where there are approximately 1.5 million refugees, the UN has been working closely with host governments to ensure that refugees have access to essential social services and have assisted through the establishment of return centres, making available adequate serviced land, rehabilitation of shelters, provision of information on return and displacement, water and sanitation projects, immediate health care, education services and food assistance to the most needy.

The UN expresses its appreciation to Iraq's neighbours for continuing to host Iraqi refugees, most of whom are located in Jordan and Syria and for the support and access to services that have been provided to them so far.

On this day, the UN also draws donors' attention to the importance of continued financial support to ensure access to essential services for vulnerable communities eroded by displacement as well as those hosting the displaced. Ongoing support is needed for the protection, return and reintegration of Iraq's internally displaced and refugees.

For more information please contact

Maha Sidky, UNHCR, +962-6-5100-493, +962-79-690-8197, sidky@unhcr.org

Muna Fadhil, IOM, +962-6-565-9600 ext. 1005, mfadhil@iom.int

Juliette Touma , Office of the HC/ RC, +962-6-550-4738, +962-77-67-29707, toumaj@un.org

Data source : UNHCR, IOM and WFP

¹ IOM, UNHCR, UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, UNOPS, OCHA, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHABITAT