

## **World Refugee Day: hundreds of thousands of Iraqis returned home while others still remain displaced**

UNHCR, Baghdad, 20 June 2010: On World Refugee day, the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees (UNHCR) in Iraq pays tribute to the thousands of refugees in Iraq as well as to the hundreds of thousands of displaced Iraqis in and outside of their country. The theme of World Refugee day this year is Home.

For many of the 40,000 refugees on Iraqi soil, home is a tent in one of 13 camps and settlements. Together with the Iraqi Authorities, UNHCR cares for Palestinians, Iranians, Turks and other refugees providing basic services and international protection. UNHCR and partners are working on resettling the 620 Palestinian refugees in Al Waleed camp to third countries in 2010.

With the help of the Government of Iraq and with international support, some 500,000 Iraqis from neighbouring countries and from inside Iraq have come back to their homes in the past two and a half years. "That is very encouraging," said Daniel Endres, UNHCR Representative in Iraq. "UNHCR has been helping many families to restart their lives in their communities. Through the Diyala Return Initiative for instance, we have rehabilitated over 3,200 shelter units since last year". The Diyala Return Initiative was launched in September 2009, and is led by the Government of Iraq which is partnering with 10 international actors to facilitate the reintegration of returnees in the Diyala Governorate.

In the past year, UNHCR has rehabilitated or constructed over 10,000 shelter units in Iraq, allowing 65,000 people to again have a roof over their heads. In 2010, UNHCR will rehabilitate or reconstruct some 25,000 additional shelters for returnees, if sufficient funding is provided.

UNHCR is also assisting Iraqis through its 15 Protection and Assistance Centres and 40 mobile teams. The Centres provide free legal services to returnees whether refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs), among other protection activities.

Despite the returns, 1,5 million Iraqis still remain displaced in the country. "The main challenges for them remain the lack of housing and livelihood as well as access to basic social services in their areas of origin" says Daniel Endres. In addition, insecurity in some parts of Iraq deters return.

Out of the 1,5 million IDPs, 500,000 people live in very poor conditions squatting in settlements or public buildings throughout the country. "These people are in a desperate situation" says Endres. "We all have to do more to provide them with minimum decent living conditions". This vulnerable group is a priority for UNHCR which is helping families with shelter material and other relief items, especially in Baghdad.

UNHCR calls on donors to increase their contributions in order to make the returns a realistic and sustainable option for Iraqi returnees, and to meet the basic needs for the IDPs and refugees in Iraq. UNHCR's budget for its operation in Iraq for 2010 amounts to 264 million US Dollars. To date the agency has only received 75 million US Dollars for its operation inside Iraq.

*For further information, please contact:*

*In Amman: Helene Caux, [caux@unhcr.org](mailto:caux@unhcr.org), Tel: +962 79 796 01 033*