

## WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY 2013

19 August 2013

World Humanitarian Day pays tribute to humanitarian workers who provide critical assistance and relief to millions of people around the world. Most importantly, World Humanitarian Day seeks to raise awareness on global humanitarian crises while highlighting international cooperation efforts which are essential to effectively meet today's many humanitarian challenges.

### THE PLIGHT OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

#### INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN IRAQ

Internally displaced persons, or IDPs, are among the world's most vulnerable people. Unlike refugees, IDPs have not crossed an international border to find sanctuary but have remained inside their home countries. Even if they have fled for similar reasons as refugees (due to armed conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations, etc.), IDPs legally remain under the protection of their own government. As citizens, they retain all of their rights and protection under both human rights and international humanitarian law.

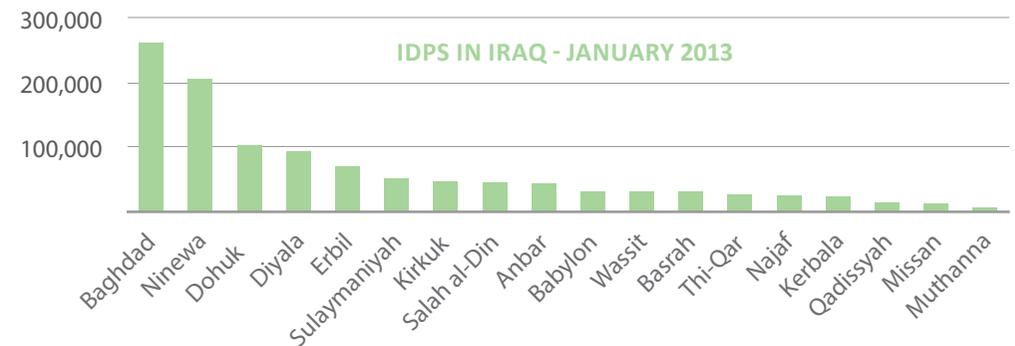
#### WHY HIGHLIGHT THE IDP ISSUE ON WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY?

Iraq has a significant number of IDPs. The largest displacement of people occurred in Iraq between 2006 and 2008 due to a wave of heightened sectarian violence that forced people to leave their homes to seek safety. According to the latest Government statistics, **as of January 2013 there were 1,131,810 registered IDPs in Iraq.** They live in rented accommodation, IDP settlements on public land, or in public buildings.

Despite the efforts of the government and the international community the majority of IDPs face extremely harsh living conditions with limited access to utilities, inadequate sanitation, and limited education and employment opportunities. **Baghdad hosts the largest number of IDPs; more than 191,000 IDPs live in some 123 informal settlements.**

IDPs are among Iraq's most vulnerable populations, and represent one of the most urgent humanitarian issues that the Government of Iraq and the international humanitarian community need to address. Recent data and reports from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other UN agencies indicate that there has been a renewed wave of displacements in 2013. With the deteriorating security situation causing violence and unrest in some parts of the country, the UN is concerned that Iraq faces the prospect of a sharp rise in the number of IDPs and a decline in the already dire conditions under which these vulnerable communities live.

#### NUMBER OF IDPS IN IRAQ BY GOVERNORATE - JANUARY 2013



#### A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN IDP IN IRAQ

IDPs live with the constant risk of eviction by authorities. They are often traumatized and frightened, having fled violence and threats to their families. They struggle to buy the daily food that they need to sustain themselves, and their dwellings are often inadequate to fully protect them from the heat or winter rains. They are also among those who are not able to take full advantage of basic services, including health services, due to limited access and resources.

Women and girls within the IDP population are the most adversely affected. Unforgiving economic and social conditions in their places of refuge create specific protection challenges for them. They are at greater risk of gender-based violence, and domestic violence is commonly reported among IDP women and girls. Children in IDP communities can be forced into early marriage, removed from school, denied education and, in some instances, made to engage in child labour.

## REALITIES THAT MAKE LIFE DIFFICULT FOR IDPS IN IRAQ

### *A volatile security and political environment*

During the first six months of 2013, approximately 3,200 Iraqis were killed in acts of terrorism, a figure that surpasses the total death toll for the entire year of 2012 and represents some of the worst violence Iraq has seen since 2008. The volatile security situation and ongoing sectarian tension continue to trigger new displacements and prevent the return of IDPs to their homes.

### *Forced evictions*

Many IDPs have lost their homes or shelter due to eviction. The ongoing threat of eviction is a constant source of anxiety for IDPs in informal settlements. According to the UN's Protection Sub-Working Group<sup>1</sup> the issuance of eviction orders increased in the first half of 2013, possibly owing to activation of the investment law and the development of urban Baghdad.

### *Urbanization*

Urbanization places additional pressure on IDPs as they are forced to relocate from government-owned land into urban areas to make way for new housing or other development projects. In Iraq, urbanization has triggered multiple waves of displacement.

### *Sub-standard living conditions and opportunities*

Depletion of personal resources, high living costs, and a dearth of opportunities to be self-reliant make it extremely difficult for IDPs to find durable solutions. The most destitute IDPs have no option but to live in illegal, substandard settlements where they are at constant risk of being evicted. Those dwelling in illegal structures lack access, or have extremely inadequate access, to basic services such as water, sanitation, and electricity. Access to medical facilities is also poor. Settlements are often overcrowded and have limited or no privacy. As a result, children and the elderly are at risk of serious health problems.

### *Limited education and literacy access*

IDPs have limited access to education, and major service delivery gaps exist in different regions of Iraq, particularly concerning the provision of basic literacy skills to youth and adult populations. **Illiteracy is estimated at around 30%, and particularly affects girls and women**, while high drop-out rates in primary school prevent the acquisition of relevant competences needed for sustainable and decent employment.

### *Food insecurity*

A large majority of IDPs are reliant on food assistance from the government through the Public Distribution System (PDS). Food insecurity among the most vulnerable Iraqis has been affected by inefficiencies in the PDS

supply chain, where supply of food is invariably delayed and/or incomplete. Furthermore, as the PDS system is tied to the place of habitual residence, **almost a third of all displaced persons struggle to transfer their PDS cards to their place of displacement**. This can mean that they lose their access to food rations. Food prices have been rising in Iraq since 2007. The UN's latest joint needs assessment conducted in February 2013 revealed that rations are distributed irregularly and IDPs heavily depend on the purchase of food in the market. **In 2012, 59% of IDPs still named food as one of their primary pressing needs.**

### *Vulnerable to natural disasters*

Shelter continues to be one of the most urgent challenges facing IDPs, and in Iraq, climate extremes can be deadly. In May 2013 flooding caused displacement in the Maysan governorate where up to 200 families were affected. Those in imminent danger from rising flood water were evacuated, and many dwellings were destroyed.

### *Registration & documentation challenges*

Lack of documentation frequently leads to difficulties for IDPs when they go to register with authorities. A significant number of individuals have been excluded from receiving government assistance because eligibility criteria linked to registration with the Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD) is related to the date of displacement. Some IDPs

are reluctant to register with the authorities as they are concerned for their personal security. Unregistered IDPs may be unable to rent or purchase property, vote, obtain land title, register their children in schools, receive necessary medical treatment, or access other services.

### *Left out of the democratic process*

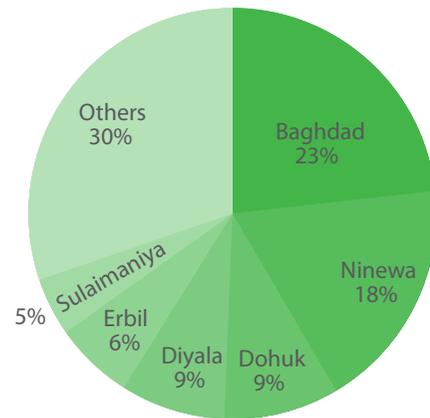
Internal displacement should not equal political disenfranchisement. Many of the displaced have fled sectarian violence and are poor and illiterate. Some have no access to television, radio, or other media. These factors may affect their ability to participate in electoral processes. They may lack access to electoral information, misunderstand the registration process, or be reluctant to engage with authorities. For most IDPs, simply surviving on a daily basis is their main priority and many feel that elections can wait until they can guarantee food and shelter for their families.

The challenge for Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) is to ensure that the country's estimated one million IDPs are either registered to vote in next year's parliamentary elections or, if they are yet to turn 18, that they understand their right to vote when they come of age.

## IRAQI IDP STATISTICS

### IDPS PER GOVERNORATE AS OF JANUARY 2013

According to UNHCR most IDPs are located in Baghdad governorate, but there are also significant numbers in northern Iraq, mainly in the Kurdistan Region.



### THE NEWLY DISPLACED

Between 1 January and 27 July 2013, approximately 289 families (1,638 individuals) were forced to flee their homes in Baghdad, Anbar, Diyala, and Salah-Al-Din governorates and other parts of Iraq.

### TOTAL NEW DISPLACEMENTS FROM JANUARY – JULY 2013

Governorate		Numbers	
From	To	Families	Persons
Baghdad	Anbar	34	166
Diyala	Diyala	239	1,366
Diyala	Suleimaniyah	3	15
Baghdad	Salah-Al-Din	13	91
<b>Total Displaced</b>		<b>289</b>	<b>1,638</b>

Statistics on recent displacement in the central governorates were verified by UNHCR and its partner organization, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) through the Protection,

Assistance, and Reintegration Centre (PARC) network. When IRC Baghdad receives an initial report of potential displacement, the information is disseminated to PARC offices in the concerned governorates and preliminary interviews are conducted with displaced families. Subsequent needs assessments are jointly conducted by UNHCR and IRC, and information is shared with governorate authorities.

### Snapshot of the experience of the newly-displaced in Anbar, 2013

UNHCR has identified 34 families who fled Baghdad in 2013 citing the security situation and recent escalation of tensions as the reason for their departure. Some of the families reported receiving specific death threats of a sectarian nature. All of these families required nationality certificates and residency cards, medical assistance and cards, food and non-food items, transfer of their PDS card, and assistance to find affordable accommodation. Some are temporarily residing with relatives.

Registration with the MoMD in Anbar has also proven to be a complicated process. Newly displaced families need to present documentation to prove their new status, as well as letters from the Directorate of Police and the Governorate Council. The newly elected Council has indicated it is not ready to provide such documentation as it establishes itself in the wake of recent Governorate Council Elections (GCE). This has held up the registration process for many of these families.

For the humanitarian community, meeting the basic needs of the newly displaced in the current security climate brings a myriad of challenges. All displaced families are assessed to be in need of food and core-relief item kits, while some require legal assistance.

### ASSISTANCE AND INTERVENTIONS

The UN in Iraq implements a variety of projects for IDP communities in close coordination with implementing partners. Improving living conditions for IDPs residing in informal settlements is of utmost importance and fostering self-reliance and livelihoods remains a priority. The UN facilitates solutions in coordination with Iraqi authorities and NGO and local partners.

**UNHCR**, through its Protection Network, assesses and monitors the protection situation of IDPs and returnees residing in settlements and private accommodation and provides necessary assistance. **In 2013, over 2,190 beneficiaries received legal assistance, while nearly 2,600 legal cases were opened in the eight central governorates.** The mobile teams also provided over 6,000 persons of concern with verbal and written administrative and legal advice. UNHCR and its partners also provide technical expertise to NGOs via empowerment projects, support to the survivors of gender based violence, and community mobilization and service coordination projects. UNHCR and its partners implement projects to rehabilitate IDP settlement houses, construct

shelter for IDP returnees, construct water and sanitation systems, assist with land allocation, and respond to a variety of other needs. Through enhanced coordination and advocacy with the MoMD, the Ministry of Human Rights, and the Baghdad Provincial Council, UNHCR and its implementing partners continue to advocate on halting evictions while seeking alternative solutions for those at risk of eviction.

**IOM** manages a community revitalization programme that aims to create stable conditions for sustainable economic and social inclusion of vulnerable individuals in communities with significant populations of IDPs and returnees. The programme is a comprehensive community based initiative that empowers local communities to take the lead in their own development.

**UN-HABITAT** is developing a mechanism with the government to improve land tenure systems and urban planning. The agency will assist the government to provide an estimated 2 million housing units and corresponding services.

**WFP** administers a 'Cash for Work' programme to complement the work of the government in meeting the humanitarian needs of IDP communities in Baghdad, Diyala, and Ninewa governorates.

**WHO** supports the Ministry of Health and relevant governorate level health departments

to improve the quality of health care services located in communities where the majority of IDPs are located.

**UNESCO** works towards improving the education and livelihood conditions of vulnerable IDPs through sustainable educational services delivered in partnership with local NGOs and national authorities. The programme provides illiterate adults with the skills they need to access greater employment opportunities and enhance their social mobility, and serves to empower vulnerable individuals by promoting their full integration into host communities whenever possible.

The **UN Electoral Assistance Team** is supporting registration of displaced and absentee voters, a complex process that requires better coordination among many national and local authorities. This process is an essential part of preparations for the 2014 Parliamentary Elections in Iraq, where an additional 1.2 million Iraqi IDPs will be eligible to vote. In the recent GCE, the IHEC used mobile registration centres to reach IDPs "off the grid" and established both voter registration update and polling centres in the Kurdistan Region, open solely for IDPs. The IHEC public outreach department produced materials targeting IDPs, and encouraged governorate electoral offices to develop local campaigns. The IHEC is also working to improve the voter registry.

## HOW SHOULD DISPLACEMENT BE ADDRESSED IN IRAQ?

### *Coordinated, long-term solutions*

While the UN works to address the scale and complexity of the internal displacement situation in Iraq, efforts by the government and the international community need to be strengthened and coordinated. A key challenge is sourcing adequate funding to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance and protection to implement sustainable solutions for IDPs. Equal attention should be given to the needs of host communities. More concerted efforts are essential to resolving the social, economic, and security factors that hinder the identification of permanent solutions for IDPs. Long-lasting solutions might include returning Iraqis to their places of origin, local integration in the place of displacement, and rebuilding lives elsewhere. Long-term solutions are prerequisites to peacebuilding in Iraq.

### *Policies and plans*

The National Policy on Displacement of 2008 remains a key document that guides the government in providing protection and assistance to IDPs. A Comprehensive Plan on Displacement was further developed in 2011, outlining concrete steps to ensure full coordination amongst ministries for the timely provision of services and durable solutions; however, the plan was not fully implemented. Following further deliberations, the MoMD initiated the first stage of their revised plan in April 2012 aimed at expanding assistance

to IDPs to accelerate return, settlement/relocation, and local integration. The strategy focused heavily on the provision of financial grants and enhanced reintegration through an improved protection environment; however, access to services for those who return remains limited. In April 2013, upon request from MoMD, UNHCR agreed to support the development of stage II of the plan, which includes an evaluation of stage I results. A new UN coordination group on IDPs has been formed to address the IDP issue with the government. A concept note has been drafted on 'developing a strategic action plan for durable solutions for the IDP population' that will address internal displacement in Iraq in a more holistic, systematic and pragmatic way.

### *Iraq at a turning point*

Iraq is at a critical juncture in time. The government and international community need to reflect seriously on how internal displacement should be addressed. A far more vigilant approach is required to ensure that the IDP situation does not become protracted and overshadowed by the Syrian emergency and more political turmoil in Iraq. The UN, in coordination with its key partners, will continue to explore how government policies on displacement and co-existence programmes can be further enhanced and developed.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>THE PROTECTION SUB-WORKING GROUP ON IDPS IS CHAIRED BY UNHCR, AND ITS MEMBERSHIP INCLUDES UN AGENCIES AS WELL AS LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL NGOS.