Khazir Camp

IOM provides relief to displaced Iraqis
I would like to leave Iraq and go somewhere else, to any peaceful country. The troubles started here a long time ago, back in the late seventies, and since then we have only had short peaceful intervals,” said Faisal, father of 14, who recently fled from Salah Al-Din to Khazir Transit Camp.

“20 days ago, my house was completely destroyed,” he said. “All I have today is what IOM has given us: these mattresses, blankets, pillows, and a cooking stove among some other supplies.”

Holding his youngest son in his arms, Faisal added with resignation, “I would like to go back to my city and rebuild my home, but I am afraid that we will not have peace for a long time. I want my kids to have normal lives, not like mine. I am almost 50, and for most of my life, all we have had here has been war.”

An IOM monitoring team paid a visit to Khazir Transit Camp, a 40-minute drive away from Erbil. The team met with Faisal and other camp residents from Mosul, Salah Al-Din, and other surrounding areas that have been subjected to violence.
Over the past three weeks, IOM has provided essential aid packages to 400 families, an estimated 2,400 people, and conducted a follow-up visit in order to further assess the needs of the people who will soon move to other permanent camps.

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“The capacity of this camp is very limited. There is space for only 600 families, and these families will be relocated to other places,” said Vian Rasheed Younis, who is in charge of the Erbil Refugee Council (ERC) under the Governor’s Office.

“The Refugee Council is now also becoming a Displaced Council too. I cannot tell you yet how many displaced in the Erbil governorate we have right now because registration is underway, but when the fighting broke out in Mosul, we received 100,000 displaced individuals in only one day.”

Residents of Khazir Camp need electricity, a regular water system, roads, and sanitary facilities. There is much work to be done in order to provide the very basics of facilities.

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“To build proper infrastructure for the camps takes just as much funding and time as it does to build infrastructure for any city or village. Just last year, the Erbil governorate spent $10 million to build infrastructure in Syrian refugee camps, but now the budget is very low, explained Ms. Younis. She also added that the people of Erbil are just as overwhelmed as the ERC with the recent wave of families.
Ms. Younis is concerned with what tomorrow will bring. “I am afraid that again we might have roads completely blocked with people fleeing from the conflict. We need support from the international community. Everybody is helping, but it is still not enough. We need much, much more.”

As she left to attend another meeting, Ms. Younis told IOM, “Thank you, IOM, for being one of the quickest responders. You gave us crucial aid during the most critical stage, especially in the first few days of the crisis, when we were swamped with people who were even staying in city parks and on the streets. You provided them with NFIs and invaluable aid.”

For the 150 IOM staff members working in the 5 satellite offices under the Erbil Hub, which covers the northern part of the country, the past few weeks have been very gruelling. They have had to provide for the thousands seeking safe shelter in Iraqi Kurdistan. Apart from their regular duties in implementing programs such as Syrian refugee livelihood programmes, the Community Revitalization Program for vulnerable Iraqis, and several more, IOM team members have been faced with the urgent needs of displaced people from the Mosul area, who need immediate relief.

“Over the past few weeks, we have taken on responsibilities
that have encompassed much more than just jobs,” said Jameel Majid, an IOM staff member from Erbil.

“Just a week ago, displaced people were fleeing the military operation in the Al-Hamdaniyah district, close to Mosul. Overnight, the streets of the Ainkawa neighborhood in Erbil became flooded with children and elderly people who needed our help. My two sons, Firas and Fadi, decided to help us, and together they volunteered the entire weekend to assist us in delivering relief packages. They have their own jobs and careers, but they wanted to help the displaced. And it is not just my two sons. All the people of Erbil are trying to help as much as they can.”

Mohamed and Behija Zuber have five children. They had a home near the airport in Mosul until a few weeks ago. “Our home has been totally destroyed by crossfire from both sides,” Behija said.

Among their five children is their adopted son, Adnan, who lost his entire family in a terrorist attack back in 2004. “He was our neighbor,” said Behija. “Since he lost his parents and siblings, we invited him to move in with us.”

“Talking to the residents of Khazir Camp and learning about the dire situations of those who have just recently fled military operation makes it clear why IOM staff are passionate about providing aid and tirelessly working around the clock to make sure that the displaced are receiving emergency relief.

“The only things we have now are the tent, the items that IOM provides, and this burning sun over our heads.”