

Foreword

by António Guterres

Alarmed about the worsening humanitarian situation resulting from the continued conflict and sectarian violence inside Iraq, in early 2007 UNHCR undertook a series of consultations with the United Nations Secretary-General, the Iraqi authorities and a number of interested States, to determine how best to alert the international community to the plight of displaced persons and refugees inside Iraq, as well as Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries and further afield. I was concerned that one of the largest forced population movements in the region since 1948 was going largely unnoticed and placing a heavy burden on the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan in particular, as well as on Lebanon, Egypt and Iran.

This is why my Office took the initiative to convene the International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons inside Iraq and in Neighbouring Countries in Geneva on 17–18 April 2007. Attended by more than 200 delegations from over 100 nations, members of the UN family, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movements

and over 60 non-governmental organisations, the meeting examined the humanitarian plight of some two million internally displaced persons inside Iraq and 2.2 million refugees abroad and underscored the urgency of meeting their growing needs.

The conference identified targeted responses to specific problems, such as the need to find solutions without delay for the particularly vulnerable, including the estimated 15,000 Palestinian refugees who believed that they had found safety inside Iraq. It also helped to assure host countries, particularly Syria and Jordan, of the readiness of the international community to work with them in protecting and assisting Iraqi refugees.

Iraq's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Hoshiyar al-Zebari, made a number of welcome commitments to provide relief to Iraqi displaced, including, in coordination with host governments, to Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries. The conference welcomed the approval of the Strategic Framework for Humanitarian Action in Iraq, devised by the United Nations and partners, as it provides

a mechanism to expand and better coordinate humanitarian assistance activities inside Iraq, and encouraged the United Nations to move forward with its implementation.

The conference was, of course, only a first step in what should now become a comprehensive international effort to protect and assist Iraqis in need, in accordance with the basic principles of international refugee and humanitarian law, and to help host countries shoulder their burden. In follow-up to the conference, my Office is already expanding its activities in the areas of refugee registration and resettlement, is working closely with UN and NGO partners to increase the United Nations' humanitarian relief activities inside Iraq, and will continue to advocate for further engagement by the international community. I believe this effort was successful in drawing the international community's attention to the humanitarian dimension of the crisis. The plight of uprooted Iraqis should no longer remain in the shadows.

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