



Humanitarian situation in Iraq

by Rianne ten Veen



Increasing violence is severely constraining the humanitarian space and making it next to impossible to deliver emergency relief to many vulnerable groups in the worst-affected areas of central Iraq.

The good news is that the first quarter of 2007 has witnessed vigorous joint efforts by the UN Country Team (UNCT) in Iraq, the Humanitarian Coordinator and NGOs to address the neglected humanitarian side of the crisis in Iraq. These concerted efforts have been accentuated by the new UN Secretary General, Mr Ban Ki Moon, who declared that there is a humanitarian crisis in Iraq and that there is need to sustain the UN existence and humanitarian activities in Iraq.

However, the situation is getting worse and there is not enough media coverage to expose what is really going on. What is being reported is only a tiny fraction of the horrors taking place, especially in Baghdad.

The humanitarian needs arising from the heightened sectarian, political and criminal violence are being compounded by poor or non-existent basic services, loss of livelihoods and rampant inflation. According to a recent report by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), 54% of Iraqis now live on less than \$1 per day, including 15% who are forced to live on 0.50 USD per day – and this at a time when annual inflation rate jumped to an estimated 70% in July 2006.

Islamic Relief is continuing its efforts to support those in need but this is becoming increasingly difficult. With different players playing different roles, it is hard to tell who the genuine aid workers are. Our staff are at increasing risk of being mistaken for other actors. International workers, journalists and aid workers are still targeted and kidnapped. We face a constant dilemma: giving more details on what humanitarian work we do could help our fundraising with the public and our donors but it could make it impossible to continue our work. A complete media 'black-out'

would greatly hurt us and hamper the sustainability of our efforts.

And even when implementing our work, we face numerous difficulties. For example, continual mass displacement of our beneficiaries makes it difficult to sustain our support. Due to the security situation beneficiaries are becoming increasingly scared to even tell us their new address. Three orphans that donors were sponsoring via Islamic Relief were recently killed in separate barbaric incidents. Drivers regularly refuse to go to emergency-affected areas. Our staff are queried when doing their work and they risk their lives passing through checkpoints and exposing themselves to bomb blasts.

Hopefully, Iraq will return on the radar screen of donors and peace will come quickly. For now it's only thanks to the grace of God that we're able to continue.

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