

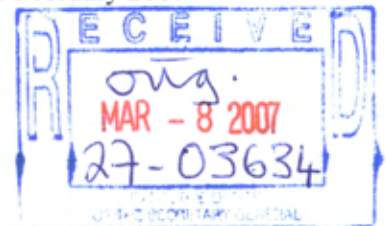
NATIONS UNIES
LE HAUT COMMISSAIRE
POUR LES RÉFUGIÉS



UNITED NATIONS
THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR REFUGEES

Case postale 2500
1211 Genève 2
Suisse

26 February 2007



Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

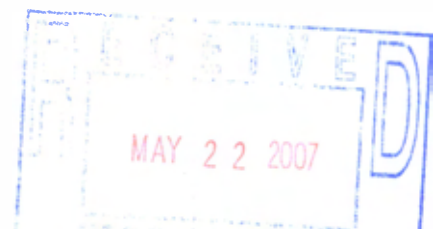
I am writing to you with regard to the difficult situation of refugees and internally displaced persons inside Iraq and in neighbouring countries, which is of deep concern to my Office and to the United Nations. Last year, your predecessor, Mr. Kofi Annan, asked UNHCR to play a stronger role in addressing the humanitarian needs arising as a result of the displacement in Iraq and to convene an international conference in Geneva on Iraqi refugees.

In addition to large-scale internal displacement within the country, which could reach 2.7 million people during this year, the violence and conflict inside Iraq have also spurred movements of Iraqis and non-Iraqis into neighbouring and other States. The hospitality of the Syrian Arab Republic (over 1 million) and Jordan (over 700,000), which have borne the brunt of refugee arrivals, is becoming strained to the breaking point. Other countries receiving refugees include Egypt (over 100,000), the Islamic Republic of Iran (over 50,000), Lebanon (20,000-40,000) and Turkey (some 5,100).

While international attention remains focused on the high level of violence inside Iraq, the broader humanitarian consequences of the situation have yet to be fully appreciated or adequately addressed. That is why I welcome your Decision No. 2007/4 on Iraq, deriving from the Policy Committee meeting of 19 January 2007. In this regard, I held consultations with sister UN agencies and other main partners on Iraq in order to exchange views on the next steps.

Furthermore, during recent missions to the United States of America, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, I noted a readiness to participate in the above-mentioned conference focusing on the humanitarian needs of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons.

Mr. Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General of the United Nations
New York





Further to these consultations and others with the Secretariat, the “International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons inside Iraq and in Neighbouring Countries” will be convened in Geneva on 17 and 18 April. You will find in annex a Concept Paper regarding the conference which UNHCR dispatched last week to UN Member States and accredited observers in Geneva, as well as all concerned UN agencies.

The broad aims would be to sensitize the international community to the humanitarian dimension of the situation and to the immediate and foreseeable need for protection and assistance; to seek commitments to address the problems identified in a resolute way; and to identify targeted responses to specific problems, such as the need to find durable solutions speedily for groups most at risk. I trust you share my conviction that more robust international cooperation and responsibility-sharing – beyond just funding – need to be galvanized to address the humanitarian consequences of the situation.

Invitation letters are in the process of being prepared and will be dispatched at the end of this week. I would be very grateful for your support for this initiative, and it would be a great impetus for the success of the conference if you would deliver the opening statement during the morning of 17 April.

Yours sincerely,

with my warmest personal regard

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'António Guterres', with a stylized flourish at the end.

António Guterres



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

**International Conference on Addressing the
Humanitarian Needs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons
inside Iraq and in Neighbouring Countries**

Concept Paper

The rationale

1. International attention is riveted on the high level of violence and conflict inside Iraq, but the broader humanitarian consequences of the situation – such as increasing displacement inside Iraq to neighbouring countries and outside the region – have yet to be fully appreciated and adequately addressed.

Iraq

2. At the beginning of 2007, some 1.8 million *Iraqi citizens* had been displaced within the country. UNHCR estimates that an additional 40,000-50,000 Iraqis flee their homes every month to other parts of the country, meaning that the number of *internally displaced persons* (IDPs) could reach 2.7 million during 2007. Displacement affects all strata of society: rich and poor, workers and intellectuals, men, women and children, and all religious groups.
3. *Refugees* living inside Iraq – such as Palestinians – are particularly vulnerable. Their precarious situation is a source of concern. In the current environment and for the foreseeable future, local integration inside Iraq is considered to be neither feasible nor viable.

Neighbouring countries

4. In addition to large-scale internal displacement, the situation has led to a steady, significant outflow of Iraqis and non-Iraqis into neighbouring States, particularly the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan, as well as further afield. Palestinians in Iraq are often denied entry, and there are hundreds stranded at the borders of neighbouring States.
5. Since March 2003, UNHCR has been advocating for recognition of the international protection needs of Iraqis outside their country, and hence a suspension of forced returns. Given the persistent conflict and generalized violence, UNHCR considers Iraqis who are outside their country, and who are unwilling or unable to return due to the prevailing circumstances, to be persons in need of international protection.
6. The hospitality of countries like the Syrian Arab Republic (over 1 million), Jordan (over 700,000), Egypt (over 100,000), the Islamic Republic of Iran (over 50,000), Lebanon (20,000-40,000) and Turkey (some 5,100), which have been bearing the burden of receiving massive numbers of Iraqi refugees, is becoming strained. Security and socio-economic considerations are contributing to a growing concern about continuing to receive those fleeing Iraq.

7. Humanitarian needs (notably in health, nutrition and education, and the requirements of women-headed households and other groups with specific needs) are increasing rapidly and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Various reports from United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governmental sources already underscore the appalling living conditions of a high percentage of the refugees. Large numbers are poor and reside in low-income areas, stretching available services. As IDP and refugee flight continues, the coping mechanisms of Iraqis as well as those of the communities hosting them have reached their limits. There is also a likelihood that onward movements outside the immediate region will increase. The international community is only now recognizing the full extent of the plight of the millions of displaced persons in Iraq and abroad.
8. UNHCR has assessed the situation and, in early January 2007, launched a US\$ 60 million appeal for protection and relief activities, as part of a broader United Nations response to the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and the resulting displacement. In this context, UNHCR is presently improving its response capacity in the region by significantly increasing the number of staff on the ground and expanding protection and assistance activities. Yet, UNHCR's programme is only part of what should be a massive, generous and multi-faceted humanitarian response by the international community in support of countries hosting Iraqi refugees – the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan in particular - to help them cope with this situation.

The conference

9. More robust international cooperation and responsibility sharing – beyond just funding – need to be galvanized to address the humanitarian consequences, lest Iraq and the region be further destabilized, leading to even more displacement and severe human suffering. Toward this end, and in pursuit of its humanitarian and non-political mandate, UNHCR will convene an “International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons inside Iraq and in Neighbouring Countries.”

Objectives

10. The conference will seek to achieve the following three broad objectives:

- Sensitize the international community to the humanitarian dimension of the situation, as well as foreseeable needs for protection and assistance.
- Seek commitments to address the problems identified in a resolute way. This could entail: additional responsibility-sharing with refugee-hosting States, through financial support or capacity-building; funding for IDP and refugee protection and assistance programmes; and improvements in the quality of protection, including through the upholding of the principle of *non-refoulement*, registration, attendance to the needs of vulnerable groups, and the provision of resettlement opportunities.

- Identify more targeted responses to specific problems, such as the need to find durable solutions speedily for groups most at risk.

Participation

11. The conference will be convened at the ministerial level and will bring together the Iraqi authorities and those of neighbouring countries, major refugee-hosting States, major donor countries, resettlement countries, concerned regional governmental organizations, local, national, regional and international NGOs, as well as United Nations and other partners, international scholars and experts, as well as other representatives of civil society.

Venue and date

12. The conference will be held in Geneva at the Palais des Nations, in Room XVIII, on 17 April 2007 and the morning of 18 April. Invitations and a provisional agenda will be issued in due course.

Documentation for the conference

13. Documents containing a succinct but comprehensive description of the problems resulting from displacement that affect Iraqi IDPs as well as Iraqi and non-Iraqi refugees in the region will be made available to participants of the conference.

Language

14. The debates in the plenary will take place in Arabic, English and French. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided. Documents will be made available in Arabic, English and French.

UNHCR

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