

29 December 2008

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## Challenges of forced displacement within Iraq

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*More than 2.8 million people were estimated to have been internally displaced in Iraq as of November 2008. Approximately 1.6 million were thought to have been displaced by sectarian and generalised violence since the Al Askari mosque bombing of February 2006, and approximately 190,000 more had been displaced by military operations and generalised violence from 2003 to 2005. An estimated 1.2 million were displaced by the policies of the former government of Saddam Hussein. In addition, it is estimated that more than two million Iraqis have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.*

*The magnitude of the population displacements inside Iraq and in the region have prompted UNHCR to refer to the Iraqi displacement crisis as the “largest population movement since 1948 in the Middle East”. Five years after the fall of the former government, the unprecedented violence and rate of displacement of early 2007 has abated somewhat. It has left in its wake several million displaced, and close to 200,000 deaths by conservative estimates. Military operations and ongoing sectarian violence still continue to cause displacement, as witnessed in 2008 in large areas of Baghdad, Basra, Diyala, and Mosul.*

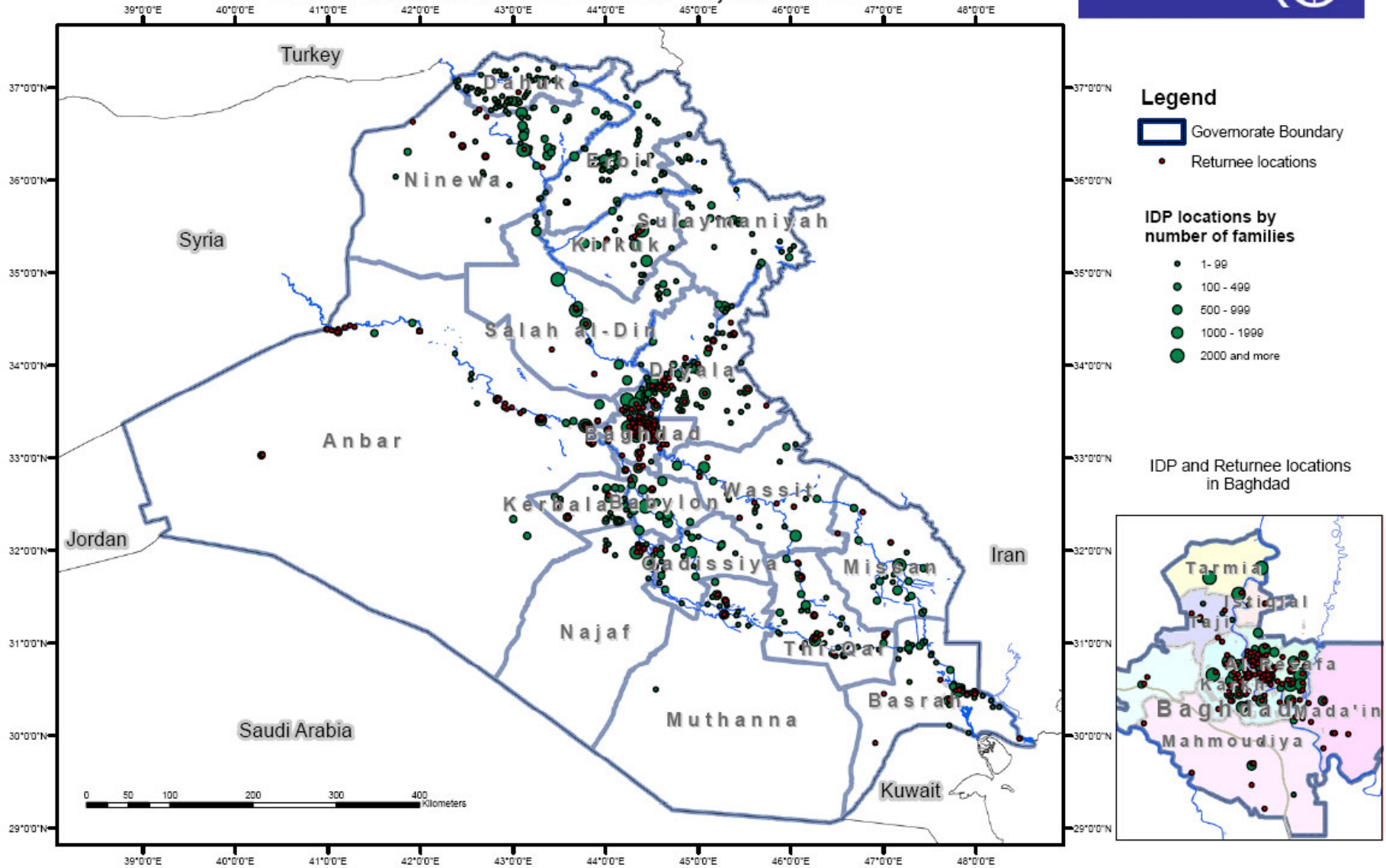
*The humanitarian situation remains dire for displaced and non-displaced alike with inadequate access to protection, shelter, food, clean water, health and employment opportunities. Though the humanitarian crisis was recognised in March 2007 by the United Nations and the international community, the humanitarian situation still remains precarious for millions of Iraqis. Limited by insecurity and lack of humanitarian space, international efforts to assist the internally displaced have been significant yet insufficient in view of the immensity of the crisis. The humanitarian community continues to face operational limitations and the blurring of the lines between civil and military roles.*

*Recent improvements in security, albeit far from irreversible, may signal a new chapter to the Iraqi crisis. A small but growing number of people have returned, mainly in Baghdad. However insecurity remains as extensive as between 2004 and 2005, and both the UN and NGOs have cautioned against premature returns of forcibly displaced people, despite pressure from the governments of Iraq and the United States. The humanitarian community has repeatedly warned that large scale return remains premature in view of the prevailing humanitarian situation.*

*The Iraqi government and international community must address the physical security, protection, and basic needs of returnees and the millions more still displaced, and also the legacy of years of violence and “sectarian cleansing”.*



# IOM IRAQ – ATLAS IDP AND RETURNEE LOCATIONS, JUNE 2008



Data source: IDP and Returnee Monitoring database. Date 30 th June 2008

Source: IOM  
More maps are available on <http://www.internal-displacement.org/>

## Background

In March 2007, the UN acknowledged the situation in Iraq as a humanitarian emergency (UNSC, 7 March 2007; UN News, 16 March 2007). Military operations and increasing levels of generalised violence following years of sanctions and war had led to a continuing deterioration in the living conditions of Iraqis. This humanitarian crisis continues in November 2008. Five years after the US-led invasion in March 2003, Iraq remains deeply divided and violent, with over 2.8 million internally displaced people (IDPs) within its borders and over two million refugees in neighbouring countries and elsewhere. Public health, water and sanitation infrastructure, services and supplies remain precarious and do not meet the basic needs of the Iraqi population (OCHA, February 2008; Brookings, August 2008).

The humanitarian crisis follows 15 years of UN-led sanctions, and the growing instability and violence that arose following the invasion in March 2003. The policies of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and subsequent Iraqi governments exacerbated and reinforced sectarian divides within Iraqi society (ICG, 27 February 2006). These included the marginalisation of the Sunni community in the drafting of the constitution in October 2005, and the exclusion of the Sunni community in the January 2005 elections following the gains of Shi'ia Kurdish block (ICG, 27 February 2006). The sectarian violence between Sunni and Shi'ia militias which followed the February 2006 bombing of the Al Askari Shi'ia shrine in Samara marked an unprecedentedly bloody period in which civilians were the main victims. The militant

groups' strategy to redraw the map of Iraq's communities was represented in the struggle for many previously mixed neighbourhoods of Baghdad which entailed systematic displacement along sectarian lines.

The sectarian violence of 2006 and 2007 was unprecedented and engendered massive displacement not simply as an accidental by-product of the conflict but equally as a way of consolidating territorial and political control for various sectarian groups, affiliated to political actors and even with the involvement of state institutions (Brookings, August 2008). The US State Department commented that the term civil war "accurately describes key elements of the Iraqi conflict, including the hardening of ethno-sectarian identities, a sea change in the character of violence, ethno-sectarian mobilisation, and population displacements" (USDoS, 2 February 2006).

The Iraqi government adopted a number of initiatives to curb the violence, with mixed results. In February 2007, a new security plan was initiated which entailed an increase in US forces under the surge policy (UNSC, 7 March 2007). The operation contributed to a significant reduction in violence, and encouraged and benefited from a series of realignments of Sunni insurgent groups as "Awakening Councils", as well as the unilateral ceasefire of Muqtada al Sadr's Shi'ia militia in August 2007 (ICG, April 2008). Nonetheless the violence left a society fragmented along sectarian lines, and despite continued improvements in security, the level of violence by early 2008 remained as high as in 2004 and 2005 (ICG, April 2008).

The sectarian violence and displacement have not ended, and the reduction in violence has not entailed national reconciliation but rather attempts to accommodate Shi'ia, Sunni and Kurdish parties and actors (ICG, April 2008). Attempts to modify the “de-Baathification” law of 2003, an amnesty law passed in February 2008, and the integration of Sunni Arabs into political and security structures have all had mixed results. The provincial elections to be held in January 2009, precursors to the parliamentary elections planned for late 2009, remain an important opportunity to ensure a more representative political forum. This may facilitate the resolution of issues regarding the devolution of federal power to regional authorities, the distribution of gas and oil and the management of “disputed areas” such as Kirkuk, all of which remain crucial for some semblance of national consensus, stability, and eventual reconciliation on which sustainable futures for displaced people and other Iraqis depend.

In late November, the Iraqi parliament voted in favour of the draft status of force agreement between the Iraqi government and the US according to which US forces shall withdraw from Iraqi cities by the end of June 2009 and from the entire country by 1 January 2012, three years after the expiry of their mandate under the UN Security Council's Resolutions 1546, 1637 and 1723 (BBC, 27 November 2008). The agreement underlines the government's continued reliance on the support of the multinational force in Iraq (MNF-I) and is a reminder of the fragility of the current situation. The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have been progressively assuming control over provinces which were under the MNF-I authority, and the

government is now in charge of security throughout the country's mostly Shi'ia south (UNAMI, November 2008).

### **Figures, causes and patterns of displacement**

By 2008, an estimated 4.3 million Iraqis – 15 per cent of the population – remained forcibly displaced, internally or in other countries. Forced displacement in Iraq is commonly divided into several periods: displacement under the Baath government; from the March 2003 invasion until the February 2006 Samara bombing; and since then. It is common for the international community to distinguish between “old” displacement and “new” displacement since February 2006 (IOM, 24 March 2007).

By combining displacement figures for these periods, over 2.8 million people were believed to be internally displaced in Iraq as of June 2008, according to estimates from the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). This includes an estimated 1,212,000 displaced before 2006, and 1,596,000 since. MoDM figures are based on registration of IDPs in 15 central and southern provinces, while KRG undertakes registration in the northern provinces of Dahuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah (IOM, 30 June 2008). UNHCR and IOM undertake their own monitoring of population movements. Other organisations have published their own estimates, such as the Iraqi Red Crescent Society which in June 2008 estimated that 2.1 million people were internally displaced (IRCO, June 2008).

These figures should be approached with caution. The lack of security and fluctuation in the displacement situation prevents access and regular monitoring, and political parties have interests in putting out their own estimates of IDPs (Brookings, 18 October 2006; NCCI, 25 March 2007). Registration remains voluntary, and contingent on documentation which may be unavailable to victims of displacement. Multiple patterns of displacement also complicate the figures (Brookings, 18 October 2006). Evaluating figures on “old” displacement is also problematic; some observers suggest that the figures are outdated, hard to validate, and highly politicised (particularly with regards to the northern provinces) (Interview conducted by IDMC, November 2008). The current pre-2003 figures are based on data gathered in 2005 by the UN Office for Project Services and UNHCR in three northern provinces, and IOM implementing partners in 15 central and southern provinces (IDP WG, February 2008).

Monitoring and assessments undertaken by the humanitarian community, MoDM and KRG are mainly based on the “new” displacement figures. It is estimated that of the 1.6 million people internally displaced, 60 per cent originate from Baghdad. The majority (58 per cent) are Shi’ia Arab, followed by Sunni Arab (30 per cent), along with small but significant numbers from Iraq’s minorities such as the Shabaks, Christians Assyrians, Chaldeans, Armenians, Faeeli Kurds, Yazidis, and Sabeian Mandeans (IRIN, 3 July 2008).

There are an estimated 1.5 to two million Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries and elsewhere, including between one and 1.5 million in Syria and up to 500,000 in Jordan. These figures have also proved

difficult to validate. Many refugees have not registered with either UNHCR or the governments concerned, and no conclusive survey has been undertaken to date (Interview conducted by IDMC, November 2008). There are also about 42,000 refugees located in Iraq, principally of Palestinian, Turkish and Iranian origin (UNHCR, November 2008).

### *Displacement before 2003*

Forced displacement is not a new phenomenon in Iraq. The former government adopted policies of forced displacement against Kurds in northern Iraq, Shi’ia communities in the south and political opponents which caused the displacement of over 1.1 million people.

The policies of the former government included systematic displacement to alter the ethnic composition of regions. The UN estimated around 805,000 individuals had been displaced in the northern Kurdish region, the majority between 1974 and 1991 (UNHCR, August 2004; UN HABITAT, January 2001). In addition more than 343,000 people were displaced, mainly in the mid 1990s, in the predominately Shi’ia southern provinces (Cluster F, 11 February 2007). Though it has not been possible to evaluate the status of these people, over one million reportedly remain displaced (IDP WG, November 2008).

Displacement in the centre and north of the country followed government “Arabisation” campaigns to neutralise Kurdish aspirations to independence and to strengthen control over large oil reserves principally in and around Kirkuk. Before and also after the 1991 Gulf War, the government forced tens of thousands

of non-Arabs from Kirkuk and surrounding areas, resettling Arabs in their place. Turkmen and Assyrians were also forced to flee or to deny their ethnicity (HRW, August 2004). Land and houses belonging to the evicted Kurds were offered as incentives to encourage Arabs to move to the region (RI, 21 November 2003; UNCHR, 26 February 1999).

The end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 saw an intensification of the atrocities committed against the Kurds. In the course of the “Al-Anfal” campaign, over 100,000 were killed, and up to 4,000 Kurdish villages were deliberately destroyed by the government, resulting in massive forced displacements. Most were relocated into “collective settlements” within the three northern provinces and others into detention camps (USCR, 2000; Dammers, 1998; HRW, August 2004).

After the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq was divided into two areas: northern Iraq, comprising the provinces of Dahuk, Arbil and Sulaymaniyah, was put under Kurdish administrative control, supported by a no-fly zone, and separated by the “green line” from the rest of the country. Fighting between the two main Kurdish parties, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) for control of northern Iraq and also in areas south of the “green line” caused the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people in the early 1990s (UNHCR, August 2004; UNCT, March 2005). Incursions and shelling from neighbouring Turkey and Iran, both countries opposed to the creation of a Kurdish state, also caused internal displacement in the north (UNHCR June 2000; USCR 2001).

In southern Iraq, displacement first occurred with the draining of the central marshes to facilitate movement of military units during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. During the 1990s, the Iraqi regime initiated a campaign against Marsh Arabs who were accused by the authorities of supporting a 1991 Shi'ia uprising. The campaign involved the use of chemical weapons, shelling and burning of villages, and large-scale projects to drain the marshes (Fawcett and Tanner, October 2002; USCR, 2001). Between 100,000 and 200,000 people of an estimated population of 250,000 were estimated to be displaced (UNHCR, August 2004; UNOHCI, 30 June 2003). Many thousands more were displaced from the border with Iran during the Iran-Iraq war, of whom 80,000 people were still displaced within Basra province in 2004 (UNCT, August 2004). Political and religious persecution was a further cause of displacement in the south and in Baghdad (UNHCR, August 2004; IRIN, 21 May 2004). In 1998, at least 25,000 people were reportedly expelled from Baghdad (Fawcett and Tanner, October 2002).

#### *Displacement due to military operations from 2003-2006*

During the first months of the invasion, thousands of people were displaced by air strikes and urban warfare in Anbar, Thi'Qar, Basra and Baghdad. Across the country, small numbers of people living in areas considered strategically important were forcibly displaced by US led coalition forces (UNCT, August 2004).

Following the fall of Saddam Hussein, MNF-I and Iraqi operations against armed insurgents remained the main source of displacement until 2006, particularly in

predominantly Sunni western areas. It is estimated that 190,000 people were displaced between 2003 and the end of 2005 (IOM, January 2008; Cluster F, 2007).

In 2004, fighting between US-led forces and insurgents caused displacement in the cities of Fallujah, Al Najaf, Kufa, Ramadi, Karabala, Tal Afar and Samarra (UNSC, 3 September 2004; IRIN, 26 July 2004, 23 August 2004 and 4 January 2005; DPA, 20 August 2004; UNAMI, 25 April 2004; UNCT, August 2004). In November 2004, almost the entire population of Fallujah fled – an estimated 200,000 people (UNAMI, 13 November 2004; IRIN, 8 November 2004). 70,000 people had already been forced to flee Fallujah in April 2004.

In the following years, MNF-I and Iraqi forces launched regular offensives in cities and towns in Anbar province, including Husbaya, Hit, Rawa, Haditha, Fallujah, Ramadi and Al Qa'im. Most of these urban areas already hosted displaced populations from previous military operations (UNAMI, 27 February 2005; IRIN, 4 July 2006). During the same period, people were displaced by military operations in other parts of the country including in Tal Afar, Karabala, Samarra, Mosul and Kirkuk as well as in areas of Salah al din, Nineveh, Babil, Missan and Diyala (UNAMI, 31 August 2005, 18 May 2005, 27 February 2005; NCCI, 17 May 2006).

Military operations have been accompanied by restrictions in freedom of movement and humanitarian access, disproportionate use of force, destruction of civilian property and facilities. Many instances of displacement caused by operations across the country have been un-

reported by the media. Resulting displacements have tended to be temporary, but research suggests that people displaced by military operations have been much more likely to be displaced repeatedly (Brookings, 18 October 2006). In many cases ongoing insecurity or a lack of compensation or reconstruction have prolonged displacement. In 2007, three years after the siege, Fallujah remained severely damaged with over 2,000 people still displaced (IRIN, 15 January 2007).

*Displacement due to sectarian violence and other causes since 2006*

Between February 2006 and December 2007, close to 1.6 million people were estimated to have been displaced by sectarian violence. Those at most risk were Sunni and Shi'ia in locations dominated by the other group, as well as families in Sunni/Shi'ia mixed marriages (HRW, November 2006). In assessments conducted in 2006 and 2007, IDPs reported a range of triggers for displacement including abductions, assassinations of individuals close to them or family members, and threats communicated by telephone, graffiti on buildings, leaflets distributed in their communities, and rumours. Most people stated that attacks specifically targeted them on the basis of their religion or sect (IOM, 2 February 2007; Brookings, 18 October 2006).

Sectarian violence and displacement is widely reported to have started with the bombing of the Al-Askari shrine in Samara at the end of February 2006, which marked a shift in the conflict towards a struggle between Iraqi groups for political and economic power (RFE/RL, 29 November 2006). Some comment that the

Office of Muqtada al-Sadr and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution on the Shi'ite side and the Association of Muslim Scholars and the Islamic Party on the Sunni side were the main drivers of sectarian displacement (Brookings, 18 October 2006). In 2006, 80 per cent of sectarian violence occurred within a 55-kilometre radius of Baghdad (UNSC, 11 December 2006). There was already evidence during 2005 of growing numbers fleeing Baghdad's mixed neighbourhoods to places where their community predominated (New York Times, 20 November 2005; IDMC Report, 23 May 2006). The most volatile neighbourhoods included Dora, Hurriyah, Al Adhamiyah, Khadimiyah, Ghazaliyah, Amariya and Qadisiyah (UNAMI, 16 January 2007). Other affected parts of the country include Ba'quba in Diyala Province; Samarra in Salah al Din Province; Abu Ghraib in Anbar Province, and north Babil, Mosul and Basra in the south.

Intra-communal violence has also prompted forced displacement, with clashes reported between some Sunni tribes and among Shi'ia rival militia groups in southern Iraq (UNSC, 5 December 2006). Professionals and intellectuals and also Iraqis associated with the coalition forces have been targeted and forced to flee (IRIN, 1 May 2006; UNAMI, 16 January 2007; Cluster F, 5 March 2007; MRI, February 2007). Refugees, particularly Palestinians, and minority groups including members of the Christian Chaldean and Assyrian sects, Yazidis, Shabak, Turkmen, Sa-bean-Mandean, and Roma communities have also faced persecution and displacement. Many of them have sought refuge in Kurdish regions (UNHCR, January 2007; IRIN, 16 September

2007). At the same time, Arab residents have been forcibly displaced from northern areas. At least 2,000 families fled Kirkuk in the latter half of 2007 (IRIN, 16 September 2007).

MNF-I military operations also continued to cause displacement, as did Turkish and Iranian incursions into Iraq to disrupt the activity of Kurdish rebels there. Approximately 200 families (1,500 people) were said to have been temporarily displaced in mid-2006 by Iranian forces shelling (IRIN, 2 May 2006). In late 2007 and early 2008 Turkish forces repeatedly attacked bases of the Kurdish PKK, and in December 2007, between 300 and 700 families fled their homes in the Sangasar sub-district of Sulaymaniah Province and from Doli Shahidan in Erbil Province, 100 kilometres inside Iraq (UNHCR, 18 December 2007; IRIN, 29 February 2008).

#### *Relative decline in rates of displacement 2007-2008*

Rates of displacement substantially declined by autumn 2007. Though the sectarian violence and displacement abated, it left a pronounced sectarian divide, most visibly in Baghdad. The partitioning by MNF-I and ISF of certain areas of Baghdad with concrete barriers helped to reduce violence but reinforced sectarian divides. Though some barriers have since been removed, others have been erected while many neighbourhoods remain ethnically homogeneous.

Sectarian and ethnic tensions, fuelled by disputes over provincial borders, have nevertheless continued to cause displacement. Hundreds of families were reportedly displaced in Kirkuk due to ethnic tensions (IOM, September 2008). In Oc-

tober 2008, some 2,000 Christian families fled Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, following sectarian violence and intimidation (UNHCR, 11 November 2008).

The MNF-I and ISF have conducted large-scale counter-insurgency operations in Basra, in the Sadr City area of Baghdad, Amarah, Baquba, Diyala, and Mosul. These operations, particularly in Basra and Baghdad, were marked by heavy fighting in densely populated urban areas, curfews, roadblocks and access difficulties for humanitarian agencies (IRIN, 30 March 2008). Military operations and ongoing violence in heavily populated civilian areas have featured a lack of respect for the principles of proportionality and distinction, they have put civilians at risk and in certain instances led to mass displacement. In April and May 2008 operations against the Mahdi militia in Sadr City led to the temporary displacement of approximately 4,700 families (IOM, June 2008).

Furthermore, there continues to be prolonged and multiple displacement due to insecurity, lack of adequate housing, and access to basic services and employment opportunities. The evolving situation has also entailed risks of new patterns of displacement emerging such as displacement of returnees or secondary displacement of occupants of private and public properties. IDPs in private and public properties increasingly face secondary displacement through evictions (IOM, October 2008). Sometimes these eviction orders only affect a small group of families, in other cases such as in the former military camp of Taji in Baghdad close to 1,000 IDP families (estimated 7,000 individuals) are under threat of eviction (IDP WG, 27 June 2008).

### **Protection and assistance needs of IDPs**

Despite the decline in violence, the UN and the humanitarian community continue to report human rights abuses against civilians by militias, criminal gangs, and security and military forces (UNAMI, April 2008; UNAMI, December 2008). Perpetrators of human rights abuses continue to enjoy impunity. (UNAMI, December 2008). Kidnappings, assassinations and generalised criminality and violence are still witnessed by IDPs and host communities daily in the Iraqi capital and in provinces such as Diyala, Salah Al-Din, Missan, Wassit and Najaf (UNAMI, April 2008; IDP WG, November 2008). Military operations have added to the generalised violence as well as inter-ethnic fighting in Kirkuk, Ninewa and Mosul (IDP WG, 27 June 2008). There have also been repeated reports in 2007 and 2008 of forced recruitment of IDPs by armed groups and militias (IDP WG, 27 June 2008; RI, April 2008; IDP WG, November 2008).

Many Iraqis have been forced to flee to areas where public services are limited, overstretched or non-existent. Host communities, extended family and tribes have generally taken in displaced people, often offering help for the displaced in need (IOM, December 2008). However the lack of infrastructure and resources has raised potential tensions between IDPs and host communities (Cluster F, 11 February 2007; IDP WG, November 2008). As displacement has continued, host communities have increasingly found it a burden to share limited resources and means of livelihood. Tense relations have been reported in the provinces of Al-Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala,

Kerbala, Kirkuk, Missan, Najaf and Ninewa (UNHCR, September 2008; IOM December 2008). In certain provinces where IDPs are not of the same ethnic and sectarian group as the host community tensions have arisen, and IDPs face discrimination in access to services. In diverse Kirkuk, strong inter-community tensions have led to reports of harassment and persecution, for example of Yazidi and other displaced minorities there (IOM, June 2008).

#### *Freedom of movement and registration*

The freedom of movement of displaced communities has remained restricted. While there was no formal prohibition of movement prior to 2007, movement was limited and made hazardous by numerous military and illegal checkpoints, especially in and around Baghdad. Restrictions were gradually imposed as the security conditions in Iraq worsened (Cluster F, 11 February 2007, 5 March 2007). Dilapidated infrastructure and security measures including checkpoints, curfews, permission requirements, and security fences or walls continue to restrict movement throughout the country (IDP WG, November 2008).

While most provincial authorities allow IDPs to enter, various restrictions bar them from registering on security, economic and demographic grounds. These restrictions limit their capacity to rent or purchase property and access essential basic services and specific welfare assistance for IDPs (IOM, January 2008; UNHCR, August 2008). In northern provinces, refusals usually relate to lack of a sponsor, while in south and central Iraq, IDPs faced difficulties to prove their place of origin or pass security checks

(UNHCR, August 2008). Registration has been tightly restricted in areas with high levels of sectarian tensions, such as Kirkuk. In Babylon and Kerbala, only IDPs with origins or relatives in the province may enter. In Basrah, Missan, and Wassit, IDPs can enter but are not allowed to register and remain unless they have been displaced from dangerous areas in Iraq (IOM, 30 June 2008; UNHCR, August 2008). IDPs have also reported that they have not been registered due to sectarian, ethnic, or tribal bias. The number of unregistered IDPs is unknown but certainly significant; in Kerbala alone, between 5,000 and 7,000 families were believed unregistered in mid-2008 (UNHCR, September 2008).

For many displaced people, the lack of legal documentation presents problems of registering as well as accessing services and legal rights. A varying selection of documents are required for registration in each province, including the original residence card, the PDS card to access the public food distribution system, the national ID, and a letter of approval from city council members, the mayor, local police, and/or MoDM (IOM, 30 June 2008; UNHCR, September 2008). Many IDPs face problems to replace lost documents due to lengthy procedures and requirements, high associated costs as well as security risks in travelling to places of issuance (UNHCR, August 2008).

#### *Lack of Adequate Shelter*

There has been an overall reduction in the standard of living of all Iraqis since 2003 despite attempts at reconstruction and rehabilitation (UNDP, 2005; OCHA, February 2008). For the majority of IDPs shelter, food and employment remain es-

sential priorities (IOM, September 2008; IDP WG, November 2008). Shelter remains a high priority for all Iraqis with many existing structures extremely dilapidated, structurally unsafe and without access to basic services; conservative figures estimate that over 1.27 million housing units are needed (OCHA, 13 February 2008).

62 per cent of IDPs live in rented housing, 15 per cent with host families, 18 per cent in collective town settlements, tents or former military camps, and 5 per cent in public buildings. Those renting accommodation often endure overcrowded conditions in substandard rental property, but with the substantial increase in rents and a lack of regular income or savings many face eviction and secondary displacement. IDPs in public buildings or on public land live under the threat of eviction by local authorities (IDP WG, 27 June 2008 and November 2008). OCHA estimated in February 2008 that 14,000 internally displaced families were living in public buildings and a further 45,000 in “camp-like settlements” with inadequate access to basic services (OCHA, 13 February 2008); while according to UNHCR’s calculations based on various sources, up to 250,000 individuals were living on public property in September (UNHCR, September 2008).

#### *Limits to access to food*

Food security has improved but remains difficult. Most IDPs, like many other Iraqis, rely on the public distribution system (PDS) for food. Recent assessments indicate a major improvement in food security, with some 930,000 people without adequate access to food in 2007 compared to around four million in 2005;

however around six million people remain dependent on food rations (WFP, November 2008). There has however been a continuing lack of access to food distributions due to insecurity, political manipulation of supplies, limited resources, and logistical difficulties (IDP WG, November 2008; WFP, November 2008). 49 per cent of assessed IDPs only received their PDS rations intermittently in 2008, while 21 per cent reported no access (IOM, 30 June 2008). Of IDPs who did not receive food assistance, 41 per cent had received food assistance from other sources, mostly humanitarian organisation or religious charities (IOM, 30 June 2008).

Displaced people also face problems in accessing food rations in their place of displacement due to difficulties in registering and transferring their ration card (IDP WG, 27 June 2008). Transferring a ration card normally requires a displaced person to complete paperwork in the original registration place, which is unfeasible for displaced people who have fled their homes at short notice. Local authorities in a number of provinces have attempted to ease this requirement by implementing temporary transfer procedures; however these procedures have been slow to take effect (UNHCR, January 2007). In Dohuk, where 93 per cent of IDPs do not have access to PDS rations, temporary procedures were only enacted in August 2008 (IDP WG, November 2008).

#### *Health care*

Substandard living conditions, the stress of long periods of displacement, financial problems, insufficient diet, lack of potable water, and poor sanitation are con-

stant sources of health complications for IDPs. The lack of water and sanitation reportedly affect IDPs in all parts of Iraq. Access to essential health care remain a major problem for conflict-affected communities, and its provision has deteriorated greatly due to the exodus of qualified professionals, a severe shortage of medication and equipment, and damage to medical facilities (IDP WG, 27 June 2008; Cluster F, 11 February 2007). Access in November 2008 was reportedly worst in Kirkuk, where 74 per cent of IDPs surveyed did not have adequate access, followed by Diyala (30 per cent), Salah al-Din (25 per cent), and Muthanna (21 per cent) (IDP WG, November 2008).

#### *Livelihoods*

Unemployment particularly affects IDPs, as they leave behind their sources of income and move to areas where their skills might not be marketable (IOM, 30 June 2008; Cluster F, 11 February 2007). Most IDPs have experienced great difficulties finding work (IDP WG November 2008). Those IDPs who do locate work often hold ill-paid and temporary day-labour jobs (IDP WG, June 2008). IOM monitoring surveys in May 2008 identified that between 20 and 30 per cent of IDP families had no members employed (IDP WG, 27 June 2008). In the three northern provinces where employees usually require Kurdish speakers, 66 per cent of IDP families assessed do not have any members employed (RI, March 2007; IOM, 30 June 2008).

Financial assistance is provided by local authorities to displaced people in a number of areas; however, distribution has been ad hoc, insufficient, and uneven among displaced communities. By July

2008, according to the government, some 140,000 families had received around \$120 to cover a six-month period. The government committed in July 2008 to target an additional 80,000 families in central and south Iraq and 35,000 families in KRG (GoI, July 2008).

#### *Displaced women and children*

Women and children represent over 70 per cent of the displaced population (IOM, January 2008). Thousands of women and children have been killed, maimed or injured; a large number of children have lost one or both parents, while the violence has left a notably high number of widows (UN SR, April 2008). Female heads of household, women and children show the highest indicators of socio-economic vulnerability amongst the displaced. Attaining employment has been even more difficult for women and widows, especially in increasingly conservative areas (IDP WG, 27 June 2008); a significant number of women have no sources of income (IDP WG, November 2008).

Economic hardship has taken its toll on displaced children. Reports note that children are increasingly forced to work to support themselves or their families. Internally displaced children live in sub-standard conditions, without proper access to education and health care services, and there is a lack of support available to children with disabilities or suffering from trauma. Absenteeism from schools among IDP children is reportedly high due to financial difficulties and problems accessing and registering in schools. Schools also lack sufficient resources and staff to accommodate the influx of children, while IDPs in the north encounter difficulties finding Arabic-

language schools (IDP WG, March 2008 and November 2008).

Sexual and gender-based violence, including against children, has been widespread. This has involved discrimination, intimidation, beatings, mutilations and “honour killings” (UNAMI, March 2008). Among the displaced, early marriages, domestic violence and also prostitution, including of children, has been reported (IDP WG, June 2008; IDP WG, March 2008). Displaced women living in camp or camp-like situations are more likely to be exposed to sexual assault and abductions (IOM, 11 January 2008).

The lack of access of children and pregnant women to primary health and nutritional support has led to increased morbidity as well as child and maternal mortality for displaced and non-displaced alike. Among the displaced, there has been a reported rise in the incidence of unattended births and miscarriages (IOM, 11 January 2008). The mental health of conflict victims including IDPs, and especially women and children, represents another major issue. In 2007, 70 per cent of displaced mothers consulted by IMC reported that their children suffered from psychosocial distress (IOM, 30 June 2008; IMC, January 2007).

### **Prospects for return**

In November 2008, the UN reported that the improving security situation and a lack of access to basic services and assistance in areas of displacement had prompted increasing numbers of internally displaced persons to return in June (12,000), July (18,000) and August (36,000) (UN SC, November 2008). For IOM, UNHCR, and MoDM, a returnee is

someone who has returned to his original neighbourhood or home; someone who has returned to the same city or village, but is not able to return to their original neighbourhood or home, is considered secondarily displaced (IOM, August 2008). As of the end of September, based on MoDM’s returnee registration, IOM, UNHCR assessments, and other sources, almost 184,000 people had returned, including 167,000 from inside Iraq, and 17,000 from outside. Over 100,000 of them were reported to have returned to Baghdad (IDP WG, November 2008).

Though the rate of return has been increasing, these figures nevertheless represent less than six per cent of all IDPs in Iraq. Iraqis have returned to their homes because of improved security conditions, but also difficulties in their place of displacement (Brookings, August 2008). Returnees are principally of Arab Shi’ia and Arab Sunni sectarian origin. In April 2008, a few Christian returnees were assessed, but no Sabaeen-Mandaeans or Yazidis had been reported to be among the returnees by June 2008 (IDP WG, 23 June 2008).

The Iraqi and US governments have strongly advocated for the return of refugees and IDPs (IDMC, October 2008). The Iraqi government has been implementing a number of measures to encourage returns, and assist and support IDPs wishing to return to their place of origin (IOM, October 2008). These include the establishment of facilitation centres to help returnees register, receive assistance, and to resolve property issues they encounter upon returning (GoI, July 2008). Returnees can receive around \$850 (1,000,000 ID) provided that their displacement status will be written off upon

return. Rent assistance worth around \$250 (300,000 ID) per month for six months shall also be provided to registered IDPs in Baghdad who vacate the premises of returnees (GoI, July 2008). However, only two facilitation centres have been established, both in Baghdad, and few returnees and evicted IDPs are reported to have actually received this financial assistance (IOM, November 2008). Other measures include helping Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries with free airline tickets, free shipment of belongings, and compensation for damaged property.

In contrast, members of the humanitarian community remain acutely concerned about the apparent manipulation for political purposes of the question of returns of IDPs and refugees (NCCI, January 2008). The United Nations, including UNHCR, and NGOs have repeatedly warned of the dangers of premature return and the disastrous consequences for both the displaced and for the stability of Iraq (UNHCR, September 2008; RI, July 2008). Failure of the government to take heed of these warnings will affect sustainability of returns, and put at risk the fragile gains acquired to date. UNHCR does not encourage returns to Iraq at the moment, due to the fragile security situation, though they do provide some assistance including cash grants to those voluntarily returning (UNHCR, 23 September 2008). IOM, following a request of the Iraqi government in late 2007, has also worked closely with MoDM to facilitate voluntary returns. (IOM, November 2008)

Insecurity and the lack of adequate housing and services continue to hinder sustainable returns. The former government's widespread destruction of

villages in the southern marshland areas, and the lack of public services and infrastructure there, have prevented return and reintegration in these areas (AMAR, December 2006). Others remain displaced because they have not been able to reclaim property and land confiscated under the former government, or because their homes were destroyed in fighting and military operations after 2003. Others cannot return due to secondary occupants in public and private properties, whose eviction without appropriate mechanisms will probably lead to secondary displacement (IOM, October 2008). Reports of evictions that have taken place in Baghdad and other provinces suggests that this has already taken place. (IOM, September 2008)

The current extent of secondary displacement of returnees is not known. UNHCR has reported that many returning refugees have become internally displaced because of the lack of shelter, property disputes and employment opportunities as well as insecurity (UNHCR, January 2007 and February 2008). More recently some returnees have experienced continued or secondary displacement due to loss of property, occupied housing, insecurity, and the ethnic or religious make up of the return area (IDP WG, November 2008). Of those returnees who have been able to return to their original area, 14 per cent were not able to return to their original homes as these were destroyed or occupied (IDP WG, November 2008). As returnees are reported to have mostly returned to neighbourhoods under control of members of the sect to which they belong, these figures may not reflect the overall risk of secondary displacement (UNHCR, February 2008).

*Protection challenges for returnees*

Continuing insecurity, destroyed or occupied housing, and the ethnic or religious make-up of return areas are among the leading obstacles to the return of refugees and IDPs. Despite improvement in security within areas of return, targeted attacks, criminality and generalised violence continues to occur (IDP WG, November 2008). There is evidence of returnees being threatened, kidnapped or in a number of cases killed when returning to areas now predominately of another ethnicity (IOM, November 2008). 40 per cent of assessed returnees did not always feel safe, due to general insecurity, continued insurgent activity in their area, sectarian violence and detention campaigns (IOM, August 2008).

Access to basic services such as the PDS food rations, health care, water and sanitation facilities and employment remain central to the sustainability of return process (IOM, August 2008). Approximately 58 per cent of returnees assessed report irregular access to PDS food rations, while 44 per cent report no access to health care due to a lack of health facilities and medications (IOM, August 2008; IDP WG, November 2008). The majority of returnees lost their property, jobs and other livelihoods during displacement. Returnees to urban areas, such as Sadr City, have frequently come home to find their sources of livelihoods destroyed during military operations (IOM, August 2008). Of returnees assessed less than half of returnee heads of households have found employment, while almost no female heads of households have employment (IDP WG, November 2008).

Many returnee children have had their education interrupted due to sectarian discrimination, inaccessibility of schools, or being forced to work to help support their family (IOM, August 2008). The sufficiency of government assistance, and bureaucratic difficulties in accessing it, are continuing concerns for returnees. 68 per cent of returnees surveyed who had registered for the government's grant had not yet received it, while 46 per cent had not registered for the grant (IOM, August 2008).

*Problems of secondary occupancy*

Though the numbers are unclear, anecdotal evidence suggests that "secondary occupation" of private and public properties remains extensive. In September, MoDM reported that 3,491 properties were illegally occupied, including houses, flats, other buildings and land (MoDM, 8 September 2008). IOM surveys reveal that 26 per cent of IDPs surveyed stated their property had been occupied, controlled, or claimed by private citizens, compared to 15 per cent who said it had been destroyed. 40 per cent did not know the status of their property (IOM, 30 June 2008). In the prevailing situation a peaceful "chain return" of IDPs to occupied private houses is not thought to be likely: IDPs occupying houses in safe areas will not leave them until their place of origin becomes safe. Surveyed families reported having been threatened by secondary occupiers when they checked on their properties. In areas controlled by another sect, they will not be able to ask the authorities to help recover their homes (UNHCR, February 2008).

The government has implemented a number of important measures to facilitate restitution of returnees' property.

These mechanisms nevertheless remain fraught with difficulties, and it is not yet clear if they will meet the needs of returnees or of IDPs living in private and public property. In September, the government began addressing restitution of private property through Prime Minister's Order 101 and the accompanying Council of Ministers' Order 262, according to which secondary occupants are evicted and compensation awarded to returning owners for damages incurred. All evicted registered IDPs are offered \$250 per month for six months to rent other property, while those who refuse to leave face the risk of prosecution under anti-terrorism legislation (IOM, October 2008; IDP WG, November 2008). The orders exclude businesses and other non-residential property, and do not assist returnees who were forced to sell property under threat, or were renting property before they were displaced. In addition these measures do not address the situation of returnees who were displaced prior to 2006 or after January 2008, or of returnees and secondary occupants who were not registered as IDPs during displacement (Interview conducted by IDMC November 2008).

The fate of secondary occupants in public and private properties facing evictions is of increasing concern. Though parliament postponed evictions from public properties in early 2008 until other housing arrangements could be made for IDPs, evictions have since been reported throughout Iraq. Eviction procedures and compensation provided in these instances have reportedly been inconsistently applied and influenced by partisan and sectarian politics; compensation offered has been insufficient to meet the needs of returnees and evicted IDPs. In some prov-

inces such as Muthana and Basrah, the local authorities have ordered all IDPs to vacate public properties. In other areas, only certain properties are designated for eviction (IDP WG, November 2008). Baghdad and Basrah have the highest reported cases of evictions, while northern provinces under KRG there seem to have been fewer evictions but also different compensation schemes (IDP WG, November 2008; Interview conducted by IDMC November 2008). Some of these evictions affect only small number of IDPs whilst others may affect several thousand. NGOs and the UN continue to advocate with Iraqi authorities on the protection of those facing secondary displacement, as well as on the simplification of compensation procedures (UNAMI, November 2008).

### **National and international responses**

Many years of violence have left a society fragmented, marked by sectarianism, underdevelopment and humanitarian crisis. Limited by insecurity and lack of humanitarian space, international efforts to assist the internally displaced have failed to meet the immensity of the crisis. The NGO Coordinating Committee in Iraq (NCCI) reports that humanitarian efforts continue to be constrained by lack of funds, and bureaucratic and politicised funding (Brookings, August 2008; Interview conducted by IDMC, November 2008). The phased withdrawal of the MNF-I, the integration of the Awakening Councils, the increasing role of ISF, the looming questions over Kirkuk and other disputed territories, and provincial elections to take place in 2009, are among several pending issues. The sectarian divisions in Baghdad and the issues of re-

turn also reflect ongoing political tensions and competing political agendas.

*Inadequate and limited capacity of government response*

The government's ability to provide for the welfare of its population, let alone those forcibly displaced, has until recently fallen short due to continued insecurity, lack of institutional capacity, corruption and bureaucratic hurdles, and the politicisation of key line ministries (RI, April 2008; Brookings, August 2008). Until quite recently the government has been criticised for lacking the political will to address the potential consequences of continued displacement and unsustainable returns (Brookings, August 2008). In late 2007 and 2008, the government took several steps to address the needs of returnees and IDPs. The government continues to advocate for the return of IDPs and refugees, and for UN agencies and NGOs to assume a more proactive role. This stance is reportedly strongly supported by the United States which has wanted to show that the "surge" has worked and that the country has stabilised. The Iraqi and United States governments have been criticised for providing a less than accurate image of the situation in Iraq to justify such returns including that of the humanitarian community (RI, April 2008)

In mid-2008, the Council of Ministers approved a budget of almost \$200 million for returnees, which aims to provide for transportation costs of returnees, reconstruction and return grants, and payments to IDPs as well as secondary occupants of property. This budget is limited in light of the scale and severity of the crisis, and the overall 2008 government

budget of over \$70 billion indicates Iraq's capacity to devote further resources. The Iraqi Parliamentary Committee on Displacement and Migration has appealed for \$4 billion to be allocated for the needs of displaced and refugees in the budget of 2009 (IRIN, September 2008). Though enhancing financial allocation remains essential, additional funds must be matched by improved structural capacities and a firm intent to respond effectively and impartially.

The Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) is mandated to address IDP and refugee issues, while a number of other ministries play a relevant part, including the Ministries of Trade, the Interior, Health, and Education. There are serious concerns over the capacity of MoDM and other ministries, and a US General Accounting Office assessment revealed that efforts to build their capacity had not been successful due to a lack of capable, trained and experienced staff, corruption, insecurity and partisan influence (Brookings, August 2008). It has nevertheless extended its presence through branch offices in most provinces, and enhanced local and national registration procedures. MoDM has also played an important role in coordinating a number of humanitarian responses to military operations and involvement in intra-governmental responses to issues of displacement. In July 2008, the National Policy on Displacement was adopted, outlining the basic rights of the displaced and returnee population, and the obligations of the government and the humanitarian community in providing services and durable solutions (MoDM, July 2008). The policy was launched at the First National Conference to Address Displacement held in July 2008 which

brought together Iraqi officials, national and international NGOs and UN agencies.

The government has also undertaken important steps to address property disputes, but the absence of national reconciliation continues to mitigate the sustainability of these processes. To date these mechanisms have showed modest results which reflect the difficulty of addressing property issues with limited institutional capacity in such a politically charged, fragmented and insecure environment. As of October 2008, only two returnee centres had been established. In one, out of 227 claims for return of property which led to 208 eviction orders and over 100 actual evictions, no claims for assistance were reportedly received from those evicted (IDP WG, November 2008). The Commission on the Resolution of Real Property Disputes established in 2003 to resolve property claims arising from appropriation and confiscation by the former government, had by 2008 received over 152,000 claims and made decisions on 65,000, but only 988 decisions had actually been enforced (CRRPD, October 2008).

#### *United Nations response*

The UN has launched a number of initiatives to review and improve operations in Iraq since it withdrew international staff following the August 2003 bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad. The UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) has since operated from Amman, and has maintained an extremely low profile inside Iraq. Until 2007, UNAMI was heavily criticised for placing excessive emphasis on reconstruction and development at the expense of an effective response to the deteriorating humanitarian crisis (FIC, January 2007; UNSC 1546).

The scale of the crisis was recognised in Security Council Resolution 1770, and in December 2007 the UN established a number of Sector Outcome Teams (SOTs) designed to be more inclusive and consistent with humanitarian, development and reconstruction efforts. Based in Amman, the SOTs are chaired by UN agencies, which coordinate with government ministries through representatives in Baghdad. Questions of displacement are mainstreamed in SOTs, such as in the housing and shelter and protection sectors. In addition the IDP Working Group brings together UNHCR, IOM, other UN agencies and NGOs on questions of displacement. IOM and UNHCR are among the leading organisations addressing the situation of internal displacement through monitoring, needs assessments, provision of humanitarian assistance and protection, and building the capacity of MoDM. UNHCR also addresses the concerns of over 41,000 non-Iraqi refugees, primarily located in the KRG area, Baghdad and Al Anbar (UNHCR, September 2008).

UNAMI and UN agencies have redeployed international representatives in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, and Erbil, and continue to look to expand their presence in Iraq, both in established locations and in new locations including Kirkuk, Najaf, and Ramadi (UN SC, November 2008; UNHCR, November 2008). The deployment of UN staff remains nevertheless limited and controversial. The UN Staff Association has come out strongly against deployment of personnel to Iraq, and UNAMI's ability to undertake meaningful humanitarian work inside Iraq has also been impaired by wide-ranging security guidelines and a mandate defined under Security Council Resolutions 1546 and 1770 which entails full reliance on

MNF-I for mobility and security (Brookings, August 2008; NCCI, January 2008). Reliance on MNF-I compromises the UN's neutrality and ability to regain the trust of the Iraqi community. Arguably, it has however facilitated access to both the Iraqi government and MNF-I, and enabled the UN to advocate on behalf of IDPs, and for humanitarian access during military operations such as in Sadr City in March and April 2008 (Interviews conducted by IDMC, November 2008). Though some have applauded the restructuring of the UN response, critics have questioned the inclusiveness of its coordination mechanisms and its ability to accurately assess the situation in Iraq; they continue to warn that its reliance on MNF-I risks undermining NGOs' humanitarian activities (Interviews conducted by IDMC, October 2008). The UN has also been criticised for being overly influenced by the government and donor states in describing the situation in Iraq (Interviews conducted by IDMC, October 2008).

In February 2008, the launch of a Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) underlined the UN's recognition of the need for a comprehensive approach to the situation. The CAP was designed to enable the UN to extend its operations through local partners, and it also represented an attempt to address the needs of all Iraqis based on vulnerability as opposed to status in response to a perceived over-emphasis on the needs of IDPs. As of November, only 72 per cent of the \$271 million requested in the CAP was funded (OCHA, December 2008). Donor responses to the CAP as well as other appeals may reflect continued reluctance to fund what is perceived as the financial burden of the US and increasingly the

Iraqi government (Cohen, Fall 2008). The appeal does not however address refugees which shall be included in a regional CAP in December 2008, and it remains separate from funds such as the Iraqi reconstruction fund of \$1.2 billion and other bilateral assistance. Within the donor community, the US government has been the largest single contributor of humanitarian assistance to Iraqis since 2003, giving more than \$500 million in total through international programmes. In contrast, according to the Congressional Research Service, it spends \$2.4 billion per week on the war effort in Iraq (Brookings, August 2008).

#### *NGOs and other non-state actors*

National and international NGOs play a significant role in responding to humanitarian needs throughout Iraq. NGOs have often delivered assistance to IDPs at considerable risk to staff, and continue to face ongoing challenges in a diminished "humanitarian space" (NCCI, February 2007). From 2003 to 2007, over 93 aid workers, national and expatriate, were reported killed (NCCI, January 2008). Since 2004 international staff of most INGOs have relocated to KRG and neighbouring countries, and run the operations directly through national staff or in partnership with national NGOs. There are at present approximately 100 INGOs directly or indirectly operating to varying degrees in Iraq, including INGOs closely affiliated with the MNF-I. In certain locations in southern and central Iraq, some INGOs are tentatively re-deploying international staff on a short-term basis (NCCI, November 2008). Apart from localised exceptions, NGOs continue to operate with a low profile on security grounds.

The scale of assistance fails to reflect the humanitarian needs faced by IDPs in Iraq. In response, some propose that the international community should simultaneously enhance the role of Iraqi government through consultation, advocacy, and capacity building while helping humanitarian actors to provide basic needs and “bridge the gap” until government ministries are capable of delivering sufficient assistance (IMC, May 2008); others remain apprehensive given the government’s perceived partiality and the persistent sectarian divide (Interviews conducted by IDMC, October 2008; RI April 2008). NGOs have nevertheless persistently advocated for the development of a more creative and adaptable operational response and coordination system, as well as more flexible funding structures to address the humanitarian crisis (NCCI, January 2008; FIC, July 2007; Turlan and Mofarah, November 2006).

Over 3,000 national NGOs of various affiliations are believed to be active; though only 50 are partners to international organisations, and many unaffiliated NGOs are providing vital humanitarian assistance with limited means (NCCI, November 2008). Mosques and Islamic charities, churches and informal community groups have organised assistance for displaced families as well as communities forced to remain in areas of conflict (Brookings, 18 October 2006). As of September 2008, 25 per cent of displaced families, surveyed received assistance from religious institutions, 54 per cent from host community and relatives, and 44 per cent from the Iraqi Red Crescent and other humanitarian organisations. 38 per cent reported having not received assistance (IDP WG, November 2008).

Gaps in assistance to IDPs and others have led to an increasing role for sectarian parties (RI, April 2008; FIC, January 2007). Sunni and Shi’ia militias have provided compensation or assistance to displaced communities by providing “re-settlement” assistance in areas which they have taken control of (ICG, April 2008). Institutions established by militias or their political wings have sought to mitigate effects of violence and provide assistance as an integral part of their programmes, though some have also channelled and redistributed resources expropriated from other communities (ICG, April 2008). Sadrist Martyr offices throughout Iraq provide extensive assistance to Shi’ia displaced and non-displaced alike; while the Sunni Islamic Party also widely distributes assistance and relief and supports local NGOs (RI, April 2008).

#### *Ensuring “humanitarian space”*

Multi-national and Iraqi forces have also engaged in civil humanitarian, relief and reconstruction efforts intended to support “hearts and minds” objectives, sometimes in the aftermath of military operations which caused displacement. US-led Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) provide an important part of the MNF-I counter-insurgency strategy through assistance, development and reconciliation initiatives (PRT Update, November 2008). These combine with the Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP) which, though intended for short-term and small-scale urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction, has also entailed large-scale projects, as well as compensation for victims of military operations. As of January 2008, the US Congress has allocated in excess of \$4.5 billion to the CERP and

PRTs (NCCI, January 2008; Washington Post, November 2008). While they have arguably provided important assistance, these programmes have been criticised for their overt political objectives and lack of transparency and accountability (NCCI, January 2008; Washington Post, November 2008).

USAID and OFDA have also provided funding to the UN, international organisations and NGOs for provision of humanitarian assistance and capacity building of Iraqi ministries. This has also included assistance provided by large humanitarian agencies or private contractors “embedded” with the multinational forces or under armed protection (NCCI, January 2008). The assistance they provide may come at the cost of losing meaningful access to communities in need (NCCI, January 2008). This and the low visibility of the humanitarian and protection efforts of national and other international NGOs has led to mispercep-

tions of humanitarian organisations and the role of the UN (FIC, July 2007). This blurring of military and humanitarian roles has made it very difficult for the international community to establish impartiality and independence (FIC, July 2007; NCCI, January 2008; RI, April 2008).

The Iraqi government and the international and humanitarian communities face numerous challenges. The sustainability of the lull in violence remains far from clear yet it offers an opportunity for the humanitarian community to reaffirm its humanitarian credentials in the unfortunate eventuality that the situation deteriorates. There is an increasing need for a reaffirmation of humanitarian principles as a basis of a new compact between civil society, militias and political non-state actors, MNF-I, ISF and the Iraqi government, to attempt to improve humanitarian access and respond adequately to the needs of displaced and non-displaced people alike.

*Note: This is a summary of the IDMC's Internal Displacement profile. The full profile is available online [here](#).*

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## About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

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