

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: MDE 14/042/2007 (Public)  
News Service No: 181  
24 September 2007

**Embargo Date: 24 September 2007 00:01 GMT**

### **Iraq: Refugee crisis unfolds amid global apathy**

The international community is failing to address adequately Iraq's spiralling refugee crisis leaving the main host countries of Syria and Jordan shouldering too much of the responsibility, Amnesty International said in a report published today. As a result, these two countries are now tightening border controls, and so cutting off the main escape routes for people fleeing from sectarian and other violence in Iraq.

The report, *Millions in flight: the Iraqi refugee crisis*, commends the Syrian and Jordanian governments for largely keeping their borders open to date but accuses other states of doing too little to help them cope with the huge demands they face in meeting the needs of the almost 2 million Iraqi refugees whom they now host.

"The desperate humanitarian situation of displaced Iraqis, including the refugees and those who remain within Iraq, has been largely ignored by the world," said Malcolm Smart, Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty International. "A deepening humanitarian crisis and greater political instability across the wider region are looming, unless the international community meets its obligation to shoulder a fair share of the responsibility for protecting and assisting Iraqi refugees."

At least four million Iraqis are now displaced and their numbers continue to rise at an estimated rate of 2,000 people per day, making this the world's fastest growing displacement crisis. Syria now hosts 1.4 million Iraqi refugees and Jordan an estimated 500,000 or more, while 2.2 million people are displaced but still remain within Iraq itself.

"We are very concerned that the new visa requirements being introduced by Syria and Jordan will prevent Iraqis receiving the protection they need. We urge both governments to keep their borders open to those fleeing for their lives," said Malcolm Smart. "However, other states must do more to assist these two countries by providing increased financial, technical and in-kind bilateral assistance to enable them to meet the health, schooling and other needs of the refugees, and by accepting greater number of especially vulnerable refugees for resettlement."

Amnesty International is also calling for on-going assistance from the international community to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as national and international humanitarian organizations to enable them to continue to provide and expand their current work to protect and assist Iraqis in need.

"The modest steps taken by the international community do not measure up to the magnitude of the crisis," said Malcolm Smart. "Moreover, some states are taking negative measures, such as forcibly returning rejected asylum seekers to Iraq, cutting off assistance to those denied asylum and even revoking the refugee status of some Iraqis."

The report criticises the slow pace of resettlement of those considered most vulnerable among the Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria, including victims of torture and other grave abuses. It notes that between 2003, when the US-led invasion toppled Saddam Hussain, and 2006, the number of Iraqi refugees resettled in third countries fell by more than a half despite rising political violence. According to UNHCR, 1,425 Iraqi refugees were resettled in third countries in 2003 but only 404 in 2006.

"The international community must accept a shared responsibility by resettling Iraqis from Jordan and Syria, particularly the most vulnerable, in a more expedient manner with a view to increasing the overall resettlement quotas in third countries," said Malcolm Smart. "In particular, having regard to their direct involvement in the conflict, the states that make up the US-led Multi-National Force need to do more to alleviate the plight of those who have been forced from their homes by the violence, including those still in Iraq and the refugees in Syria, Jordan and other countries."

In addition to the report released today Amnesty International will be publishing next week a report looking at the situation of Palestinians in Iraq.

Public Document

\*\*\*\*\*

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566  
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>