

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Iraq: US, UK and other states must protect Iraqi refugees**

Amnesty International today called on the international community to provide effective protection and assistance to nearly two million people fleeing Iraq, in what the UN's top refugee official Antonio Guterres recently called a "humanitarian disaster".

"The international community must urgently offer technical and financial contributions to help countries hosting people fleeing Iraq," said Malcolm Smart, Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme. "The US and UK, as leading members of the Multinational Force (MNF), and the Iraqi government, should do much more to ensure that durable protection is afforded to these refugees as well as to the 1.7 million internally displaced people inside Iraq."

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said on Wednesday that there were over 1.7 million Iraqis now internally displaced, including some 500,000 who have become displaced since the bombing of a Shi'a holy shrine in the city of Samarra in February 2006. The UNHCR also said that since 2003, up to two million Iraqis have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Of these, some 700,000 currently reside in Jordan and approximately one million in Syria.

Geographically positioned to provide a significant degree of primary support to Iraqi refugee flows, Jordan and Syria have been instrumental in providing a large level of assistance to date. Amnesty International believes that they must continue to do this, along with other countries in the region and beyond, including by continuing to allow entry through their borders to those seeking protection, in accordance with their obligations under international law.

However, the international community must do much more to help and offer urgently-needed assistance. Amnesty International further believes that alternatives such as third-country resettlement should be considered as options in a true "responsibility-sharing approach". In addition, the 1.7 million people internally displaced within Iraq are urgently in need of assistance. Both the Iraqi government and the MNF must take all possible steps to ensure their protection.

Many countries hosting Iraqi nationals have not forcibly returned them to Iraq. In the interest of continued protection, host countries such as the US should not return rejected asylum seekers to Iraq. The US bears a particular responsibility to protect those who have been displaced as a result of the ongoing conflict in Iraq. In addition, the US needs to make a proactive effort to resettle more Iraqis quickly and safely than it has up to this point.

"US policy and military action helped create the dreadful situation that now prevails in Iraq, yet up until

now very few Iraqis displaced as a result of war have been allowed to take refuge in the US," said Malcolm Smart. "The US authorities must stand up their obligations on this issue and help lead the effort to provide long term durable solutions for Iraqi refugees."

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