

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WEB FEATURE

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Iraq: Refugee crisis unfolds amid global apathy

“The truth is, I am someone who loves his country. I was forced to leave Iraq because of the bad security situation. In addition, there are no services, no electricity, no water, no security. I and my family and many other families were forced to leave. However, if the situation became only 50 per cent better tomorrow I would return.”

Interview with an Iraqi survivor of an abduction and torture, interviewed by Amnesty International in June 2007 in Syria

Amnesty International said in a report published today that the international community has not responded adequately to Iraq's spiralling refugee crisis and is leaving the main host countries, Syria and Jordan, to shoulder too much of the responsibility.

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

According to UNHCR, at least four million Iraqis are now displaced and their numbers are continuing 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 half million or more, while 2.2 million are displaced but still remain within Iraq.

"The desperate humanitarian situation of displaced Iraqis, including 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."

The report calls on states in the international community, in particular those who have participated in the US-led invasion of Iraq to assist Jordan and Syria by providing increased financial, technical and in-kind bilateral assistance to enable them to meet the health, schooling and other needs of the refugees. It also 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, and calls for urgent steps to develop more generous refugee resettlement programmes.

It also includes recommendations addressed to the members of the international community, highlighting the need to live up to their responsibility sharing obligations and to cease practices that further call the safety of Iraqis into question 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.