

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

17-18 April, 2007
Palais des Nations, Geneva

Conference Secretariat Note

1. The *International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons inside Iraq and in Neighbouring Countries* was held in Geneva in the Assembly Hall of the Palais des Nations, on 17 and 18 April 2007. The Conference was convened at ministerial level and brought together all concerned Governments as well as other parties interested in addressing the humanitarian situation of displaced Iraqis. A total of 216 delegations participated: 104 States and 2 entities with observer status, 32 intergovernmental and international organizations, 11 United Nations organizations and 67 non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The official conference documents were *Humanitarian Needs of Persons Displaced within Iraq and across the Country's Borders: an International Response* (HCR/ICI/2007/2) and the Conference Agenda (HCR/ICI/2007/1/Rev.1): both were made available in English, French and Arabic.

2. The Conference was chaired by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. António Guterres.

Objectives

3. The principal objectives of the Conference were to sensitize the international community to the immediate and foreseeable humanitarian needs of refugees and displaced persons within and outside Iraq, as well as to the burden carried by refugee-hosting States, and to promote concrete actions to address these needs. Delegations were encouraged to make commitments to assist the displaced, as well as the Governments of Iraq and of the neighbouring countries hosting displaced Iraqis. Such commitments included increasing resettlement opportunities for the most vulnerable groups; providing bilateral support to host countries; and funding humanitarian programmes.

Proceedings

4. The Conference proceedings were organized in four parts: Opening Ceremony; International Perspectives; Perspectives from the Region; and the General Debate. The High Commissioner closed the Conference with a summing up of the main conclusions and recommendations.

(i) Opening Ceremony

5. The Opening Ceremony commenced with words of welcome by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This was followed by a video address by the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon, which was introduced by the, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze.

6. The Secretary-General urged States to focus attention on the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and the difficulty for neighbouring States to sustain large numbers of displaced Iraqis and provide basic services, such as health and education. He urged neighbouring countries to keep borders open, uphold the principle of *non-refoulement* and maintain a “protection space” for Iraqis; and he encouraged States further afield to provide asylum and other forms of protection to Iraqis and increase resettlement opportunities. The Secretary-General called for recognition of the particular vulnerability of Palestinian refugees inside Iraq. In closing, he reiterated the United Nations’ commitment to humanitarian assistance; reconstruction of the country and the Iraq Compact so as to build a framework for Iraq’s economic revival.

7. The opening ceremony ended with a short film on the situation of displaced Iraqis, providing individual testimonies on the humanitarian situation within Iraq and in the neighbouring region.

(ii) International Perspective

8. The International Perspective segment of the Conference aimed to put the spotlight on the international dimension of the humanitarian crisis. The segment commenced with a statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, describing the current Iraqi humanitarian crisis within the context of Iraq’s history of exile. The High Commissioner reminded the Conference that in 2003, a total of 300,000 Iraqis from countries in the region had returned to Iraq. Subsequent to an escalation of conflict in the country, as well as an increase in sectarian violence, voluntary repatriation declined significantly, particularly after March 2006 when fresh population displacement occurred. The High Commissioner observed that 1 in 8 Iraqis had been driven from their homes. He also made reference to the killing of over 600 Palestinians over the past four years in Iraq, as well as to the 15,000 Palestinian refugees remaining in the country. He urged States to grant protection to those who had sought refuge on their territories and welcomed the demonstration of the Islamic tradition of hospitality by host States in the region. The High Commissioner observed that the optimal solution for the majority of Iraqi refugees would be voluntary return, but he stressed that this must occur in dignity and safety, and only once conditions allow. He welcomed the Iraqi authorities’ willingness to support Iraqis abroad as well as to cooperate with host Governments. The High Commissioner ended his address by expressing the hope that sustained dialogue and a comprehensive and coordinated response to the humanitarian crisis would be achieved.

9. Statements by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. John Holmes; the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Ashraf Qazi; and the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Angelo Gnaedinger, closed this segment of the Conference.

(iii) Perspectives from the Region

10. The segment entitled “Perspectives from the Region” enabled States and organizations in the immediate and nearby region to present their views. Statements were delivered by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, His Excellency, Mr. Hoshyar Zebari; His Excellency, Ambassador Saad Alfarargi of the League of Arab States; the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, His Excellency, Mr. Fayssal Mekdad; the Secretary-General of the Ministry of the Interior of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, His Excellency, Mr. Mukhaimar AlMukhaimer; the Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab Affairs of Egypt, His Excellency, Ambassador Hani Khallaf; the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations Office at Geneva, His Excellency, Ambassador Gebran Soufan; the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations Office at Geneva, His Excellency, Ambassador Ali Reza Moaiyeri; the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations Office at Geneva, His Excellency, Ambassador Ahmeet Uzumcu; and the Secretary-General of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Mr. Markku Niskala.

11. Neighbouring States, which have been hosting large numbers of Iraqis, outlined the strain this has had on their national infrastructures, their economies and their ability to provide services. The Government of Iraq recognized the humanitarian needs of internally displaced and refugees inside Iraq and undertook to mitigate the burden this has had on host communities. Iraqi Foreign Minister Zebari introduced an initiative, worth \$25 million in its first phase, to help address the needs and improve the conditions of Iraqi people who are internally and externally displaced. This includes financial contributions in key sectors of education and health, as well as supporting the efforts of UNHCR in host countries. Mr. Zebari also emphasized the Government of Iraq’s commitment to provide displaced Iraqis with appropriate documentation to facilitate travel and to help in ensuring access to essential services. States in the immediate region recognized the vulnerability of Palestinian refugees and welcomed the Government of Iraq’s reassurances to enhance their protection.

(iv) General Debate

12. The ensuing General Debate provided Governments, United Nations and intergovernmental organizations with the opportunity to comment on the humanitarian dimension of the situation in Iraq and the challenges facing host countries. Two statements coordinated by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and the NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI) were made on behalf of the NGOs in attendance, reflecting their views on the situation in Iraq, as well as in neighbouring countries. The President of the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, Mr. Said Hakki, was invited to make a short statement at the end of the General Debate.

13. The Conference did not have a negotiated outcome in the form of a declaration. At the close of the Conference, the High Commissioner delivered a summing-up statement with the main findings and recommendations of the Conference.