

Strengthen humanitarian assistance to the region

The United States should increase funding to international organizations and non-governmental organizations providing essential humanitarian aid to refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and other equally vulnerable Iraqis in Iraq and neighboring countries; and offer additional bilateral assistance to refugee-hosting countries to help their national systems expand to accommodate refugee needs and ease the strain on local communities. Inside Iraq, emergency assistance must target IDPs and other vulnerable populations who are in equal need of assistance.

Displaced Iraqis in Iraq and neighboring countries are in immediate and urgent need of the most basic humanitarian assistance. The United States should significantly increase humanitarian assistance to countries hosting Iraqi refugees, and continue to press the Iraq government and other countries to also respond generously to these needs.

The United States should provide strong support to non-governmental organizations assisting vulnerable Iraqis and should fund **at least 50 percent** of amounts requested in appeals from international organizations providing humanitarian support to Iraqis. Additional bilateral assistance should also be provided to countries hosting Iraqi refugees to ease the strain on their national systems. Resources are also needed to provide refugee-like benefits to Iraqis who have worked for the U.S. government and their families admitted as special immigrants.

To meet the humanitarian needs of Iraqis and sufficiently provide for other global humanitarian emergencies, Congress should approve additional funding for key humanitarian assistance programs in the FY 08 Supplemental as follows:

- ◆ **\$345 million for Migration and Refugee Assistance:** This recommendation reflects additional worldwide refugee needs and includes another **\$125 million** for humanitarian assistance for displaced Iraqis above funding provided in the FY2008 Omnibus appropriations bill. It also includes **\$48 million** to cover the MRA-related costs associated with the Special Immigrant Visa program which helps many Iraqis who are at risk because they helped the coalition effort.
- ◆ **\$335 million for International Disaster Assistance:** An additional \$335 million for this account would help the United States better address the global humanitarian needs of victims of natural and man-made disasters, and allow for a recommended total FY2008 appropriation (Omnibus and Supplemental) of **\$185 million** for the emergency humanitarian assistance needs of highly vulnerable Iraqis.
- ◆ **Up to \$1.02 billion in Economic Support Funds:** This request addresses the unique needs of the Iraqi displacement crisis. At least **\$120 million** is needed to support USAID's Community Action Program. The United States should also provide **\$900 million** in increased bilateral assistance to Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt to mitigate the impact of the Iraqi urban refugee populations on these countries' infrastructure, services and local communities.
- ◆ **\$78 million for Office of Refugee Resettlement:** This funding is needed so ORR can provide refugee-like benefits to Iraqi recipients of Special Immigrant Visas and their families, as well as essential support for victims of torture.

Increase support for relief, reconciliation, recovery and community-based development in Iraq

The United States should continue and increase support for reconciliation, recovery, and community-based development work in Iraq that promotes citizen/government interaction and local economic development. Such programs should also improve stability in Iraq to enable the voluntary, safe return of displaced persons.

While immediate humanitarian assistance is crucial to desperate Iraqis, it will not revitalize an Iraqi society that has suffered under decades of war and oppression. To accomplish meaningful, enduring development in Iraq that meets the long-term needs of the Iraqi people, the United States should support programs that emphasize peaceful conflict resolution, promote accountable institutions, and welcome societal participation in governance. A comprehensive strategy is necessary in which community-based development programs can increase economic opportunities for Iraqis and assist Iraqis who voluntarily return to Iraq to reclaim their homes and live in safety and dignity.

The Iraq Community Action Program (CAP) is one such program. CAP empowers local Iraqi community leaders to identify, prioritize, and invest in social infrastructure improvements such as rehabilitating schools, constructing clinics, and improving community marketplaces. These improvements are made using local Iraqi employees and materials, which in turn provides thousands of local jobs and contributes to the revitalization of Iraq's economy. This program goes beyond bricks and mortar to respond to communities' needs for training in conflict management, information and communication technology, civic involvement, business development, and youth engagement.

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All members of Congress should increase support for reconciliation, recovery and community-based development programs in Iraq, including providing at least \$120 million for CAP in the 2008 Supplemental Appropriations bills.

Improve U.S. admissions and resettlement of vulnerable refugees from Iraq

In order to preserve human rights protection space in neighboring countries, the United States should be a global leader in resettling displaced Iraqis in an expedient manner, giving priority to the most vulnerable cases in accordance with UNHCR guidelines. The United States should commit to a coordinated multi-year effort to increase the number of Iraqis resettled far beyond the token numbers resettled in 2006 and 2007. As the United States increases its resettlement of Iraqi refugees, it will have a greater opportunity to encourage other nations to respect the fundamental rights of displaced Iraqis and to provide them with assistance. In addition—but not in place of this broader effort—the U.S. should fulfill its obligation to Iraqis displaced as a result of their U.S. ties, primarily through swift implementation of legislation by Senators Lugar, Kennedy, and Cardin. Finally, the United States must ensure that sufficient funding is provided to address the unique health concerns of those affected by violence, torture and trauma.

More than 4 million Iraqis are displaced within Iraq and in neighboring countries. While Iraqis have fled to many countries including Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, Iran and Gulf States, the vast majority reside in Syria and Jordan. A survey conducted by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees found that 16 percent of Iraqi refugees in Syria reported being tortured, 23 percent being kidnapped, and 80 percent having witnessed a shooting. The United States should provide assistance and resettlement options to such vulnerable individuals. To aid victims of torture, who have unique mental health needs and require rehabilitation to rebuild their lives, Congress should increase funding for the torture victims fund of the Office of Refugee Resettlement so treatment centers can train additional clinicians and build capacity to meet increasing demand. Congress should also allocate increased funds to assist unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs), who are especially vulnerable without stable parents or guardians to care for them.

The willingness of Syria and Jordan to jointly host close to 2 million Iraqi refugees is commendable and stands in contrast to the United States and European Union. Unfortunately, the lack of significant efforts by the international community, including the United States, to share the responsibility of protecting and assisting Iraqi refugees has resulted in Syria and Jordan implementing strict visa restrictions for Iraqis wishing to enter. By taking leadership to alleviate this crisis, the United States can reinvigorate these countries to once again provide for displaced Iraqis.

From March 2003 through March 2008, the United States has only resettled 4,701 Iraqi refugees. In comparison, Sweden, with a population of only 9 million, accepted more than 18,000 Iraqis in fiscal year 2007. That year, the United States accepted only 1,608 Iraqis, despite the State Department's stated FY2007 goal to resettle 7,000 Iraqi refugees. The State Department's goal for FY2008 is 12,000, and halfway through the year only 2,627 Iraqis have been resettled. The United States has been slow to increase its capacity to interview refugees in the region. In the meantime, Sweden and other countries have ceased admitting Iraqis due to a lack of international burden sharing. Without a coordinated and comprehensive longer-term resettlement plan, admission numbers will continue to trickle and displaced Iraqis displaced will be left with limited or no safe options for the future.

On January 28, 2008, Congress unanimously passed and President Bush signed into law the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act as part of the Defense Authorization bill. This act directs the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security to allow Iraqis to apply within Iraq to the U.S. refugee admissions program, and provides 5,000 Iraqis subject to danger due to their employment with the U.S. government, along with their families, Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) to the United States. However, meaningful implementation of this bill remains outstanding, as Iraqis grow increasingly desperate. There are already 700 Iraqis on a waiting list to receive SIVs, and the Department of Homeland Security has not yet issued guidance on implementation of the SIV provisions. In the meantime, tens of thousands of Iraqis whom the legislation is intended to help – remain in danger in their country. Also, it is now virtually impossible for Iraqis - even those fleeing death threats - to leave Iraq. Internal flight is also a difficult option for Iraqis, as many of Iraq's governorates have closed their borders to those from other parts of Iraq. It is essential that the in-country processing program, called for in the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act, be set up as soon as possible.

Members of the Senate and House of Representatives should utilize their oversight authority to mandate quarterly reporting on the State Department's implementation of the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act – specifically the number of admitted Iraqis – to ensure they meet their goal of 12,000 Iraqi refugees and 5,000 SIV recipients in FY2008.

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Iraq ACTION DAYS participating organizations: InterAction, Refugee Council USA, Education for Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC), International Rescue Committee, 3D Security Initiative, Amnesty International USA, Chaldean Federation of America, Chaldean Assyrian Syriac Council of America, Church World Service, Center for Victims of Torture, The Episcopal Church, Human Rights First, International Medical Corps, Mandaeen Associations Union, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, Mercy Corps, NETWORK: a national Catholic Social Justice Lobby, North American Dominican Justice and Peace Promoters, Open Society Policy Center, Oxfam America, Refugees International, Veterans for Common Sense, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, and World Relief.