

Humanitarian situation of refugees from Iraq

European Parliament resolution on refugees from Iraq

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the right of refugees to international protection,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Iraq,
 - having regard to the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 (the Refugee Convention) and to the UN Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1967,
 - having regard to the urgent appeal by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) of 7 February 2007 to increase international support for those countries hosting refugees fleeing Iraq, as well as to the UNHCR Return Advisory and Position on International Protection Needs of Iraqis outside Iraq of 18 December 2006 and to the UNHCR document of 8 January 2007 entitled 'Supplementary Appeal – Iraq Situation Response',
 - having regard to the Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement issued by the UN Secretary General's Special Representative on Internally Displaced Persons on 11 February 1998,
 - having regard to Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004 on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third-country nationals or stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection and the content of the protection granted¹ (the Qualification Directive),
 - having regard to Rule 115(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas violence and criminal activities in Iraq include armed robberies, kidnappings for ransom, harassment, the killing of persons involved in the political process or reconstruction activities, ethnic cleansing, sabotage attacks against civilian infrastructure such as electricity or oil pipelines and full-scale attacks involving indiscriminate bombs and/or other explosives against civilians, and whereas, as a result, hundreds of thousands of people are being forcibly displaced within the country and abroad, primarily to Jordan and Syria but also to Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Iran and further afield, in an upheaval unprecedented in the Middle East,
- B. whereas many groups continue to suffer persecution in Iraq, particularly professionals, women, Iraqis employed by foreign contractors, the UN or other international organisations including non-governmental organisations, and ethnic and religious minorities, such as Christians, Jews and Mandeans; whereas internally displaced persons (IDPs) are frequently victims of human rights violations originating from ethno-religious

¹ OJ L 304, 30.9.2004, p. 12.

differences, or of a political and criminal order; whereas the security of third-country nationals, stateless persons and particularly the approximately 34 000 Palestinian refugees and thousands of refugees from Turkey, Iran and Syria in Iraq has drastically deteriorated,

- C. whereas the United Nations estimates that 1,8 million Iraqis are displaced within Iraq and up to 2 million Iraqis have fled the country,
 - D. whereas 50 000 people try to leave Iraq every month and whereas the neighbouring countries have restricted access for refugees to seek asylum, forcing many to return to Iraq or remain trapped at the borders,
 - E. whereas the refugees receive sparse humanitarian assistance from UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross, but conditions for refugees and other displaced Iraqis are increasingly appalling, with limited supplies of water, food, fuel and medicines, and whereas humanitarian organisations are appealing for adequate funding to respond to the increased needs inside Iraq and in its neighbouring countries,
 - F. whereas several countries hosting Iraqi refugees are restricting entry, as well as imposing restrictive stay requirements, such as reducing the temporary protection regime (TPR) and/or making the renewal of their visas so difficult that most Iraqis quickly lose their legal status,
 - G. whereas the attitude of most Member States to accepting Iraqi refugees has been equally restrictive, with the exception of Sweden,
 - H. whereas, under customary international law, there is a legal obligation not to return refugees to persecution or serious harm, and to allow asylum seekers fleeing widespread human rights abuses and generalised violence to enter the relevant country, at least temporarily, in order to be screened for refugee status,
 - I. whereas Egypt, although not a border country, has been hosting a considerable number of refugees, and whereas Syria, which hosts a high proportion of the Iraqi refugees, no longer recognises the TPR, which was implemented until now without restrictions,
1. Urges Iraq's bordering countries to abide by their legal duty immediately to admit refugees, particularly those stranded at their borders and belonging to specially targeted minorities such as stateless Palestinians or religious and ethnic minorities;
 2. Welcomes the recent UNHCR appeal to mobilise additional international support in order to fund its work for uprooted Iraqis within their country and in neighbouring States and for foreign refugees in Iraq; calls on the EU and the Member States and other international donors to respond to the UNHCR appeal in support of the programmes for Iraqi refugees and IDPs in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and Iran, as well as Egypt; considers it as an extreme emergency and urges that a significant part of the EU budget earmarked for programmes with Iraq be allocated for this purpose;
 3. Considers that the support of the international community is vital in easing the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees and IDPs or those fleeing the country, and therefore asks the Commission and the Member States to support the UNHCR's protection efforts focused on minimum protection from detention and *refoulement* and non-

penalisation for illegal entry; as well as access to education, adequate housing, basic health care facilities and other basic services for those inside and outside Iraq;

4. Calls on the many donor countries which have been reluctant to face up to a regional Iraqi refugee crisis to take into consideration the fact that the Iraqi authorities and the governments affected in the neighbourhood appear unable to fully cope with the crisis and to reconsider the necessity of providing financial assistance to help those host countries in order to share the burden of this refugee problem by offering third-country resettlement opportunities to those refugees;
5. Welcomes the holding of an international conference on addressing the humanitarian needs of refugees and IDPs inside Iraq and in neighbouring countries in Geneva on 17 April 2007; urges the Council, the Commission, the authorities in the region and the international community to fully participate in that conference and provide appropriate financial support;
6. Asks the Member States and the international community, as a demonstration of international burden-sharing, to contribute to the resettlement of Iraqi refugees and stateless persons, including the Palestinian refugees from Iraq stranded in the region;
7. Calls on Member States, while recognising the efforts deployed by the Swedish Government swiftly and fairly to determine the claims of Iraqi asylum-seekers, in accordance with the above-mentioned UNHCR Return Advisory and Position of 18 December 2006, and to fulfil their obligations under international and Community law to grant refugee status or subsidiary protection to those who are at risk of persecution or serious harm;
8. Recognises also the efforts made by non-border countries of the region such as Egypt to assist Iraqi refugees; asks this country to pursue its efforts in favour of the Iraqi refugees by keeping its border open and improving conditions for them; asks countries hosting Iraqis to respect their fundamental rights and ensure their access to basic services such as health and education;
9. Recognises the contribution of the regional Kurdish government in assisting Christian communities that are internally displaced;
10. Calls on the Iraqi Government, local regional and religious authorities and the Multi-National Coalition Forces in Iraq to take immediate steps to improve security for all the refugees and IDPs in Iraq and end discriminatory practices;
11. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the Secretary-General of the Arab League, the Director-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the governments and parliaments of Iraq, Iran, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey and the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the Palestinian National Authority.