

Luís Filipe Marques Amado  
President of the  
Council of Ministers of the European Union

Brussels, 31 October 2007  
Our ref. B711

Dear Dr. Amado,

**Subject: The Iraqi refugee crisis and Palestinian refugees in Iraq**

We understand that Iraq will be a significant point of discussion at the 9<sup>th</sup> Euromed meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs on 5-6 November. Amnesty International would therefore like to draw to your attention the worsening humanitarian situation of Iraqi refugees in the region and of Palestinian refugees in Iraq.

**Iraqi Refugees**

Two million Iraqis have become refugees and 2.2 million are now classified as internally displaced people as a result of the war in Iraq. The overriding burden of responsibility for those displaced is being borne by Syria and Jordan resulting in an increasingly critical situation which can no longer be ignored. Syria and Jordan are now taking extreme measures to restrict the entry of Iraqi refugees.

The conclusion of an Amnesty International report *Millions in flight: the Iraqi refugee crisis* (AI Index: MDE 14/041/2007) released in September is that there is a high degree of apathy on the part of the international community to protect those who have been displaced. At the same time negative measures are being taken, including by EU member states, which are counter to the effective protection of people fleeing Iraq, such as forcible return and cutting-off assistance to rejected asylum seekers, or even withdrawal of refugee status while they remain in their territory.

Amnesty International is therefore deeply concerned that without increased and long-term commitments from the international community, the lives of the displaced Iraqi population will become increasingly desperate as they struggle to meet their daily needs, including housing, food, employment and health care. There is a risk too that if unaddressed, the crisis situation could implode, further destabilising the region and resulting in further human rights abuses.

We call on all EU member states in particular those involved in the multinational force in Iraq to:

- provide necessary financial, technical, and in-kind bilateral assistance to Jordan, Syria and other states hosting Iraqi refugees in the region, in order to provide vital services;
- share the responsibility by resettling Iraqis from Jordan and Syria in an expedient manner, giving priority to the most vulnerable cases in accordance with UNHCR guidelines on the resettlement of Iraqi refugees. This should go far beyond token numbers and should constitute a significant part of the solution to the current crisis; and
- immediately cease all forcible returns to any part of Iraq, including the Kurdish-controlled north. Any return of failed asylum-seekers should only take place when the situation in the

whole of Iraq has stabilised and there are adequate conditions for a stable and durable peace.

### **Palestinian refugees in Iraq**

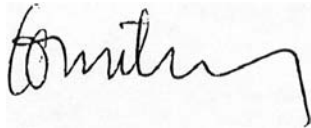
The plight of Palestinian refugees in Iraq is rarely reported in the media but they remain a group at particularly high risk from the continued violence. They have been targeted by armed militia groups affiliated to Shi'a religious parties because of their ethnicity and because they are reputed to have received preferential treatment under the former Ba'ath regime headed by Saddam Hussain. As Iraq plunged into chaos and the sectarian strife between Shi'a and Sunni intensified, Palestinians became more vulnerable because, unlike Iraqi Shi'a and Sunni communities, they do not have an armed group or militia to protect them from the violence.

The 15,000 or so Palestinians who are still in Iraq, including those in camps near the border with Syria, are in legal limbo. They are recognized as refugees by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). However, virtually no country in the region or beyond is willing to accept them for resettlement and appeals by UNHCR are falling on deaf ears.

Amnesty International calls on all EU member states, in particular those involved in the multinational force in Iraq, to provide urgently needed humanitarian assistance and to work towards finding a durable solution for Palestinian refugees in Iraq, including through resettlement in third countries as soon as possible. For further information please consult an Amnesty International report *Iraq: Human rights abuses against Palestinian refugees* (AI Index: MDE 14/030/2007) released last month.

We look forward to hearing from you on the outcome of your deliberations,

Yours sincerely,



Dick Oosting  
Director,  
Amnesty International EU Office



Lucília José Justino  
Vice- Chair,  
Amnesty International Portugal