

**Iraqi Refugees in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon: A Brief Summary of
Recent Reports on the Challenges Faced by the Refugees**

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Tempe, Arizona

August 2009

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The following is a compilation of reports that have been briefed, summarized,
and/or excerpted for research and review purposes.

Summary

Prior to the 2003 invasion there were over one million Christians in Iraq. Under Saddam Hussein's regime, Islamic fundamentalists were kept at bay and, for the most part, Christianity was spreading. After the invasion and the falter of the rebuilding process, Iraqi Christians began to be persecuted, blackmailed, intimidated, kidnapped, raped, tortured, and even murdered. Christian churches were bombed and lay leaders and members of the clergy killed in the wake of sectarian violence. Some believe that Christians are looked upon as the enemy, a threat to fundamentalist Islam, or simply an easy target for extortion.

It is estimated that approximately 5 million Iraqis fled their homes to escape persecution. About 2.5 million were internally displaced while another 2.5 million became refugees in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and other countries. Approximately 500,000 were said to be Iraqi Christians who felt they would never have a safe home to return to.

As refugees, the Iraqi people are still facing various forms of persecution and suffering from the traumatic stress of being displaced. Most cannot legally find employment. Some are female headed families who have lost their husbands and fathers. Major humanitarian budget shortfalls are anticipated and necessary services will be curtailed very soon. For most Iraqis, their savings have run out; they are destitute and afraid to return home to Iraq.

Iraqi Refugees in Syria

As of February 2008, The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had only registered 161,613 of the 1.5 million refugees in Syria. Most of these refugees were in or around Damascus while others were spread out a bit further.

Prior to October 2007, Syria did not require a visa for Iraqis to enter the country and after October 2007 the number of refugees dropped sharply. Syria was desirable due to their acceptance of Iraqi refugees and their close proximity to Iraq; however, the sheer number of refugees was staggering and underestimated by the U.N. and the world.

Iraqi refugees have no legal right to work in Syria and have to resort to under the table income, humanitarian aid, and their own savings.

Syria is comfortable in working with the U.N. but very cautious with NGO's.

Source: Iraqi Refugees in Syria by International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), April 2008, Maryanne Loughry, RSM, Ph.D. and Julianne Duncan, Ph.D.

Failed Responsibility: Iraqi Refugees in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon

Refugee Crisis not due to U.S. invasion, but due to slow and faltering rebuilding program. Soon violence escalated and civilians became targets of insurgent groups and sectarian militias.

The International Crisis group says that a total of 5 million Iraqis are displaced. Approximately 2.5 million have fled the country and another 2.5 million are internally displaced.

Source: Failed Responsibility: Iraqi Refugees in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon by The International Crisis Group (ICG), Middle East Report, July 10, 2008

A Loving Embrace – Iraqi Christians Find Shelter in Jordan

Fast becoming Jordan's new poor, many Iraqi Christian refugees once formed the staple of Iraq's professional middle class. But as their savings salvaged from Iraq run out, many are losing hope for a better future. And compounding their poverty, some refugees suffer symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder and many are emotionally and psychologically scarred from the violence they experienced in Iraq.

Jordan has not signed the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, which guarantees asylum-seekers the chance to apply for "refugee" status – a status that grants many of the rights of citizenship to its holder. Instead, Jordanian authorities treat what could very well be bona fide refugees as "guests" or "temporary visitors."

The stress under which these refugees must live takes a heavy toll on relationships, eating away at the fabric of the family. Heads of households feel ashamed that they cannot provide for their families; distraught men sometimes become violent toward their wives and children.

Source: A Loving Embrace: Iraqi Christians Find Shelter in Jordan by Diane Handal, March 2008, ONE Magazine, <http://www.cnewa.org/mag-article-bodypg-us.aspx?articleID=3313>

Jordan – Syria: UNHCR Funding Shortfall for Iraqi Refugees

The UNHCR may be forced to cut back services in Syria and Jordan starting in January 2010, despite the 5 million dollar donation made by Saudi Arabia on June 28, 2009.

The UNHCR is currently only operating with 38% of its needed \$400 million budget to meet current minimum services.

The World Refugee Survey 2009 reported that of the remaining 1.2 million in Syria, only 209,200 are actually registered. Jordan has approximately 405,000 refugees with only 65,000 registered as of January 2009.

Due to the lack of funding and humanitarian aid drastic cuts in current services will have to be made. Examples of those affected would be female headed households that currently get some cash support, psycho-social services for those impacted by psychological trauma, vocational skills training, personal hygiene supplies, and those in outlying areas of Damascus due to the curtailment of UNHCR staff visits.

Source: Jordan - Syria: UNHCR Funding Shortfall for Iraqi Refugees by Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), July 6, 2009 <http://irinnews.orgReport.aspx?ReportId=85144>

Iraq: Iraqi Refugees Face Urban Challenges

The UNHCR says that reaching Iraqi refugees in cities such as Damascus and Aleppo in Syria, Amman in Jordan and Beirut in Lebanon is extremely difficult and refugees may be missing out on vital assistance.

The vulnerabilities cited by UNHCR include poverty, prostitution, physical and mental disabilities, and female-headed households whose main breadwinner has been killed in Iraq.

The urban setting poses further challenges. For refugees these include high living costs - most of their money goes on shelter, says UNHCR; traveling long

distances to reach registration centers, and problems accessing health and education services.

The urban setting has positive effects too. It allows for better integration into the community and the chance to find work in the informal sector.

Source: Iraq: Iraqi Refugees Face Urban Challenges by Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), August 4, 2009 <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=85564>

Iraqi Refugees: Women's Rights and Security Critical to Returns

Iraqi women will resist returning home, even if conditions improve in Iraq, if there is no focus on securing their rights as women and assuring their personal security and their families' well being. Reducing support to displaced families could force returns to insecure areas without adequate services and trigger additional instability in Iraq.

Not one woman interviewed by Refugees International indicated her intention to return. Some women said they won't return because they are members of targeted minority groups, or because of injuries they suffered. Many widows told RI that they fear returning to homes where their husbands were killed, and where they now have no means of economic survival.

Others feared kidnappings or murders of surviving children, particularly their sons. A displaced woman living in a tent in very poor conditions in northern Iraq told RI, "This tent is more comfortable than a palace in Baghdad; my family is safe here."

Source: Iraqi Refugees: Women's Rights and Security Critical to Returns by Refugees International (RI), July 15, 2009 <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/policy/field-report/iraqi-refugees-womens-rights-and-security-critical-returns>

Saving the Christians of Iraq

Iraqi Christian refugees find themselves in a particularly difficult position in the refugee camps because they have been targeted as Christians. They are reluctant to identify themselves, so they can't get work and their children can't go to school. The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) has been working with Iraqi Christian children to make sure they don't fall behind in their education.

Whether Iraq will establish an autonomous area administered by Christians, or direct its police and courts to make Christian safety a priority, remains to be seen. What is clear is that Iraqi refugees -- especially the 500,000 Christians -- are not going home anytime soon.

Source: Saving the Christians of Iraq, by Deal W. Hudson, August 26, 2008, Inside Catholic

http://www.catholic.org/international/international_story.php?id=29016

Christians Besieged in Iraq

In many cases the motivation behind attacks on Christians is religious - to drive the minority out of Iraq. But very often criminal groups or bandits pretend to belong to a jihadist group in order to mask their true motive - which is money.

Christians are regarded as having money and they are known to sacrifice everything to pay ransom demands - partly because, unlike Shia or Sunni, they do not have powerful tribal or militia links to protect them, so they are a soft target.

Nobody knows how many of Iraq's Christians have now fled. Before the war there were estimated to be about 800,000 and Chaldeans were the largest Christian community in Iraq.

It is thought about half the Christian population of Iraq has moved - the majority to Syria, fewer to Jordan and some to northern Iraq. Of the 1.5 million Iraqi refugees in Syria it is estimated that around 20% are Christian, but firm figures are hard to come by. That means, as a proportion, Christians are massively over-represented in the Iraqi refugee population.

Source: Christians Besieged in Iraq by Frances Harrison, March 13, 2008, The BBC

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7295145.stm

Staying to Help in Iraq

Actress Angelina Jolie visited Iraq in early 2008 as a UNHCR goodwill ambassador. The following are excerpts from her article:

We still don't know exactly how many Iraqis have fled their homes, where they've all gone, or how they're managing to survive. Here is what we do know: More than 2 million people are refugees inside their own country -- without homes, jobs and, to a terrible degree, without medicine, food or clean water. Ethnic cleansing and other acts of unspeakable violence have driven them into a vast and very dangerous no-man's land. Many of the survivors huddle in mosques, in abandoned buildings with no electricity, in tents or in one-room huts made of straw and mud. Fifty-eight percent of these internally displaced people are younger than 12 years old.

An additional 2.5 million Iraqis have sought refuge outside Iraq, mainly in Syria and Jordan. But those host countries have reached their limits. Overwhelmed by the refugees they already have, these countries have essentially closed their borders until the international community provides support.

My visit left me even more deeply convinced that we not only have a moral obligation to help displaced Iraqi families, but also a serious, long-term, national security interest in ending this crisis.

Today's humanitarian crisis in Iraq -- and the potential consequences for our national security -- are great. Can the United States afford to gamble that 4 million or more poor and displaced people, in the heart of Middle East, won't explode in violent desperation, sending the whole region into further disorder?

It seems to me that now is the moment to address the humanitarian side of this situation. Without the right support, we could miss an opportunity to do some of the good we always stated we intended to do.

Source: Staying to Help in Iraq by Angelina Jolie, February 28, 2008, The Washington Post

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/27/AR2008022702217_pf.html

Social Work Researchers Studying Relief Efforts for Iraqi Refugees

Despite its small size and fragile economy, Jordan hosts about half a million forced migrants and refugees who have fled Iraq.

“This humanitarian crisis – both inside and outside of Iraq – has long-term consequences for Iraq and neighboring countries,” says Scott Harding, a Professor at the University of Connecticut doing research in Jordan since 2006.

Kathryn Libal, another research Professor from University of Connecticut says, “We thought that some of the established humanitarian organizations would have a much more visible presence there. We thought they’d be providing a lot of services to a lot of refugees, but that wasn’t the case. There were few refugee camps, because most of the people were urban refugees. A significant number were doctors and medical

professionals, which will have a long-term effect on the health and well-being of people living in Iraq.”

Iraqi refugees do not have legal refugee status in their host countries, Libal says: “Life is difficult for them. Most will not be granted permission to permanently resettle to the United States or other resettlement countries, and they can’t work legally.”

Harding says that under pressure from the NGOs and the U.S., during the past year, the Jordanian government has begun allowing Iraqi children to attend public school. But even though the children are now eligible, for a variety of reasons school attendance is uneven.

There’s still a fear of being visible, again linked to the issue of not having legal status.

Source: Social Work Researchers Studying Relief Efforts for Iraqi Refugees by Sherry Fisher, March 23, 2009, University of Connecticut, published in the “Advance”

<http://www.advance.uconn.edu/2009/090323/09032308.htm>

UNHCR Hails Lebanon Move to Legalize Iraqi Refugees

In early 2008 Lebanon moved to regularize the status of Iraqi refugees residing illegally in the country, a decision the top U.N. refugee agency said would benefit thousands of Iraqis and help release hundreds in detention.

Lebanon gave foreigners, including Iraqis, who entered Lebanon illegally or who have stayed beyond their visa limit a three-month grace period to legalize their status.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) says there are an estimated 50,000 Iraqis in Lebanon, 77.5 percent of whom entered illegally, according to a survey by the Danish Refugee Council conducted in late 2007.

Source: UNHCR Hails Lebanon Move to Legalize Iraqi Refugees by Yara Bayoumy, February 21, 2008, Reuters <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL21812333>

Messengers of Peace Report Summary - Jordan

Since 2003, the civilian population of Iraq has been subjected to unprecedented levels of violence and terror. In particular, Iraq's minority communities that are caught between warring factions, many of which are witnessing and suffering from violence and crime. By February of 2007, the UNHCR and other NGO's working in Jordan had estimated the number of Iraqi refugees to be over 1 million.

Jordan has adopted a semi-protectionist policy towards Iraqi forced migrants. The Jordanian government lets them in, but deprives them of refugee status. Although the border with Iraq had always been open, it soon closed and Iraqi people could then only enter on a temporary visa that only allowed them to stay for 6 months. Jordan is not a signer of the 1951 Geneva (U.N.) Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, but has allowed the U.N.H.C.R. to operate in Jordan since 1991.

Jordan has adopted several social measures against Iraqi migrants, including those registered as asylum seekers. These measures inhibit their ability to seek employment, make it extremely difficult to get education for their children, and deny them basic medical, or financial aid for medical treatment, except for fee for service well above that of which a Jordanian citizen would pay.

The motives behind Jordan's response is their experience with dealing with the Palestinian refugees in 1948 and again in 1967 during the Israeli – Palestinian conflicts that left Jordan to deal with 1.6 million Palestinian refugees. Jordan's resources are very limited and over 30% of its labor force is unemployed.

The following is a summary of the assessment made by Messengers of Peace, conducted by Father Khalil Jaar:

1. The majority of Iraqis in Jordan do not have legal status as refugees or residents.
2. They can not legally work, send their children to school, get reasonable medical treatment, or even show their documents for fear of retribution.
3. Christians are the primary victims and are targeted and are systematically targeted and persecuted.
4. 90% of Iraqis in Jordan are without a residence permit so they are subject to a fine of 1.5 Jordanian Dinar per day (\$2.12 U.S.).
5. Many Iraqis that are working illegally are working under appalling conditions.
6. School age children being denied access to an education are just sitting at home or worse yet, turning to the streets for money.
7. Since access to public hospital care is denied, their limited finances make it impossible to seek medical care in the private facilities.
8. Rent is the Iraqis greatest expense. Many families will often share the same home to offset the cost of rent. Most can not afford utilities and do without water and electricity. Some families limit themselves to 1 meal per day of rice and bread just trying to survive.

9. Many children are presenting symptoms of psychological trauma including nightmares and speech difficulties since witnessing and or experiencing violence as well as their on-going suffering.

Messengers of Peace took on the responsibility of helping Iraqi refugees of different religious backgrounds without discrimination. Through trust building methods, they were able to provide a venue by which to make refugees feel safe, enabling them to assess the families needs and find ways to help them.

Projects of Messengers of Peace:

1. Supplied 1600 refugees with food supplies and social needs for a 6 month period.
2. Supplied 300 Iraqi refugee families with heaters, heaters, and petrol envelopes (10 Jordanian Dinars). This was a one-time deal but the needs continue.
3. Supplying the needs of 2000 Iraqi refugee families in over 16 of the most vulnerable areas.

The main groups affected by our project were those with low socio-economical ecology with different levels of need ranging from broken families to those who live in severe poverty. The program included 75% Christians, as they are rejected by the Moslem NGO, and 25% Moslems.

Source: Messengers of Peace Report by Father Khalil Jaar, Messengers of Peace – Jordan, February 26, 2008

Iraqi Refugees Relief Ministry – Syria 2008

2009 finds the many Iraqi Christian families still stranded in Damascus, Aleppo and other Syrian cities. Families that have fled their homeland because a child had

been kidnapped and killed and they wanted the rest of their children to be safe.... A widowed mother with her children who left after the husband/father was killed as he drove by as a car bomb exploded (wrong place at the wrong time)...The mother of a priest who was murdered as he stepped out of his parish church.

Such families who had very regular middle to upper-middle class lifestyles, with homes, cars, jobs and a comfortable lifestyle have to run leaving behind whatever belongings they had not spent in attempts to pay huge ransoms to release kidnapped children, or pay for safe passage, etc. Now they live in host countries as refugees searching for help from churches and other organizations. They are not allowed to work officially. They are often exploited by landlords, neighbors, police, etc.

In spite of this all, the many families we have visited and talked to over the past months continue to thank the Lord for His faithfulness. Many have come to know Him personally during their hardship. They have expressed feeling blessed to be included in this project and are glad that it has been extended. The food packages and other Non Food items they have received were of significance in their lives.

The Mosul Situation

In September 2008 violence against Christian families in Mosul started, killing 13 persons in the first week alone and forcing many families out of their homes. Violence against Christians took many forms: kidnapping; terrorizing and vandalism; home demolition; and of course killing. Most families moved to the small Christian villages surrounding the city. As the situation worsened and it became clear that the violence was deliberate and long term, a large influx of refugee families arrived in Syria. Many families fled arriving in Damascus and Aleppo with nothing.

By the grace of God, the churches in our program were able to receive and aid many of those families upon their arrival. The local churches in Syria were able to help the families with food packages, blankets, medication, and of course spiritual and psychological support and counseling. Many of the refugees wrote their stories and testimonies for us so that we can share them with the world.

There were different reports about the numbers of families evicted, but in general most agree that at least there were 6000 families in the early stages. Some families tried returning, but were not allowed, and some who did found that their homes have been destroyed or taken over, so all is lost to these families.

Source: Norwegian Mission to the East, Manara International, Iraqi Refugees Relief Ministry – Syria 2008

UNHCR Global Report 2008 – Middle East Summary

There was some improvement in the situation in Iraq with many parts of the country seeing a notable reduction in the number of security incidents. Furthermore, there was a rise in the number of people returning to their home areas, especially among internally displaced persons (IDP's). Anticipating more such returns, UNHCR has developed an individual case management mechanism to respond to the returnees protection and assistance needs. However, the security situation in Iraq remains fragile and is not conducive to large scale returns.

Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – Middle East Summary, UNHCR Fundraising Reports, June 1, 2009