

## **5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Iraq invasion: EU not doing enough on major refugee crisis**

Brussels (18 March) – As the world marks five years since the invasion of Iraq, the millions of Iraqis displaced inside the country and abroad remain in dire circumstances. The EU and its Member States are not doing enough to support and protect them. In a panel discussion organised tomorrow in Brussels, an Iraqi refugee, the director of the Iraqi Youth League and several other international experts will address the role of the EU in the Iraqi displacement crisis.

“The EU and its Member States cannot continue to ignore one of the world’s major displacement crises” said the group of eight NGOs sponsoring this event. “They are not living up to their responsibility to assist Iraqi asylum seekers, host countries in the region and Iraqis inside the country”. These remarks are based on new research about the treatment of Iraqi asylum claims in Europe, the conditions of Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries and the human rights situation in Iraq.

Inside Iraq an estimated 6 million people are still in need of urgent humanitarian assistance as a result of the conflict. Approximately 2 million of those displaced abroad are hosted by Syria and Jordan, but the strain on their resources is now leading these governments to restrict access to their territory. Most of those allowed to stay live in a legal limbo - they have neither received refugee status nor been granted legal residence or extended visas. The number of Iraqi asylum claims in the EU is incomparably smaller (some 100,000 since 2003), but their treatment varies significantly from one Member State to another, producing an unfair situation whereby the same group of people receive different levels of protection depending on where they are within the EU. Additionally, only 7 EU Member States currently offer resettlement programmes to vulnerable refugees in third countries.

In light of the problems above, the eight NGOs call on the EU and Member States to:

- ensure effective protection to asylum seekers, wherever they apply in the EU;
- ensure no one is forcibly returned to Iraq and access to legal status and basic services for those whose asylum claims have been rejected;
- expand the resettlement programmes to accommodate more Iraqi refugees from third countries, in particular vulnerable groups such as women, children and torture survivors;
- provide financial and technical assistance to host countries in the region through the UN agencies and NGOs working with the refugee communities;
- allocate significant funds for emergency response and rehabilitation inside Iraq, including through redirecting funds from the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI).

The panel discussion on the EU’s role in the Iraqi displacement crisis will take place tomorrow, 19 March, at 10:30am at the Brussels think tank, The Centre. Participants - available for interviews before and after the event - include Taher Alwan, an Iraqi refugee in Belgium; Majeed F. Mutar, Director of an Iraqi humanitarian NGO; and experts from the sponsoring NGOs who have just returned from field missions in Iraq, Jordan and Syria. The NGOs organizing the panel discussion are: Amnesty International; European Council on Refugees and Exiles; International Catholic Migration Commission; International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims; International Rescue Committee; Islamic Relief Worldwide; Mercy Corps; and Norwegian Refugee Council.

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