ACCESS TO SAFETY FOR IDPS

Recommended points for HCT advocacy

Protection concerns

- There has been a significant wave of new displacement from Ramadi in Anbar governorate between 1 and 23 April 2015. 17,489 families (about 104,934 people) have fled from Ramadi and the surrounding areas in Anbar Governorate.

- Protection and checkpoint monitoring conducted by UN Protection Cluster partners revealed that many Ramadi IDPs have faced serious difficulty in reaching places of safety. Procedures for admission to different Governorates often changed on a daily basis. At crucial checkpoints, such as those into the Baghdad, Wassit and Suleimaniyah governorates, the authorities introduced security screening practices that allowed families to enter only if they had a sponsor. There were also reports of families being asked to pay money to obtain a sponsor. At least 100 families had to return to Ramadi, where their homes were damaged, at a time when the IS controlled a significant part of the city.

- The Prime Minister announced on 18 April 2015 that the sponsorship requirement for entry to Baghdad would be lifted the next day. However, in practice, IDPs from Anbar were still required to have a sponsor to enter Baghdad.

- The Babylon Governorate refused to admit men aged 15-50. This requirement undoubtedly caused family separation.

- The conditions for IDPs forced to wait at checkpoints were initially unacceptable, but have since improved (e.g: at Bzaibiz bridge), but groups of IDPs built up at other checkpoints (e.g: the Kulaju checkpoint in Diyala) where suitable facilities had not been established.

Advocacy points for the Government of Iraq

- While it is acknowledged that the authorities may need to impose short term restrictions on freedom of movement and access to safety during the current conflict for security reasons, international legal standards provide that these restrictions must be temporary, clearly specified in law, and applied in a non-discriminatory manner.

- If the authorities establish procedures for security screening at checkpoints, these procedures should be applied consistently and without discrimination; and IDPs should receive clear information about the nature of the procedures. Any security screening should

be carried out at a safe location, as far away as possible from any ongoing conflict, and facilities should be provided at checkpoints in order to protect life and avoid unnecessary suffering. Special provisions should also be made to expedite the security screening of any vulnerable individuals identified - including young children, the elderly, and any sick, disabled or traumatized individuals - on humanitarian grounds. Family unity should also be protected.

- The sponsorship mechanisms put in place for those IDPs who have fled Ramadi have seriously limited the right of access to safety, and have created opportunities for financial exploitation. If sponsorship continues to be used as a tool for security screening, it should not serve as a stand-alone reason for refusing access to safety.

- If the intention of the security screening is to separate combatants from the civilian population, then the authorities should apply internationally recognized standards, which the HCT is ready to share.

- If IDPs are denied safe access in a particular Governorate due to lack of absorption capacity, the authorities should identify another safe location and provide the necessary transport for movement to the alternative location.

National Protection Cluster, Iraq
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