



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

OVERVIEW

Country: Iraq

Planning Year: 2006

2006 COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

IRAQ

Part I: OVERVIEW (Revision September 2005)

1. Protection and socio-economic operational environment

Events during the last four decades had a serious negative impact on the overall situation in Iraq and led to the displacement of large parts of its population. Although there is no accurate figure for Iraqis living abroad, it has been estimated that there are approximately one million Iraqis in the region (including over 90,000 registered with UNHCR) and further a field (over 300,000 refugees/persons with complementary form of protection). In addition, there are 1.2 million persons internally displaced. The operation also deals with some 46,000 refugees and over 1,700 asylum seekers (Iranian, Turkish, Syrian and Palestinian) who sought refuge in Iraq under the former regime and stateless persons. The number of stateless persons estimated ranges from half a million to two million persons. UNHCR's Iraq operation supports the Iraqi government, Iraqi refugees and IDPs in the context of return and reintegration, while continues to protect other refugees and stateless persons in Iraq under its mandate.

Overall, the situation in Iraq continues to be fluid. The Transitional National Assembly's main task during 2005 will be to debate and approve a Permanent Constitution, paving the way for new elections in December 2005 and a new Government in 2006. While there are national laws and regulations guaranteeing the rights of Iraqi citizens, refugees and foreigners, their provisions need to be compatible with international law, standards and principles. To enhance the overall protection regime, it will be vital that Iraq accedes to the 1951 Convention / 1967 Protocol, the two Statelessness Conventions and other relevant human rights treaties. The Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM), UNHCR's main counterpart and, in general, supportive of UNHCR, was only created in August 2003 and still needs some time to turn into an efficient and effective Ministry, taking care of the protection and assistance of the different persons of concern. In addition, a number of factors such as the unclear political process, the presence of armed insurgency, human rights violations by non-state actors against parts of the Iraqi population, could lead to a further deterioration of the situation, thereby causing further displacement both inside and outside Iraq and hamper returns from abroad. However, there are also political developments in Iraq (elections, drafting of a constitution and a referendum planned in October 2005) may open new chances to find durable solutions for the many Iraqis displaced inside and outside Iraq as well as for refugees in Iraq.

The Iraqi population as a whole is affected by the declining economy which is a result of years of wars and economic sanctions and the ongoing insecurity in a large part of the country. Despite its vast oil wealth and abundant water resources, Iraq's ranking in the

UN Human Development Index has dropped from 76 in 1991 to 127 in 2001.¹ According to WFP, approximately 25 percent of the Iraqi population is highly dependent on the Public Distribution System (PDS) and approximately 11 percent of the households in Iraq, or roughly 2.6 million people, are poor and food-insecure despite the PDS. Estimates for a national unemployment rate range wildly but, according to unverified statistics from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, unemployment stands at 60 percent.² Main reasons for the high unemployment are general insecurity with many businesses and public offices not working regularly and reconstruction faltering, loss of employment due to ‘Debaathification’³ and the disbanding of the Iraqi Army.⁴ Apart from the damaged and illegally occupied property, UN-Habitat estimates that there are currently 1.4 million households (or estimate 8.4 million people), who live in poor housing conditions or do not have adequate housing.⁵ A survey undertaken by UN-Habitat in the three Northern Governorates of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah revealed that there is an additional need for 130,000 new homes to assist those who currently live in overcrowded accommodation, illegally occupy public buildings or other private homes, or live in tents or makeshift accommodation.⁶ This situation, combined with other obstacles for return such as disputes on land and housing rights, the limited capacity of national and local authorities, as well as the lack of reconciliation mechanisms, has led UNHCR to only facilitate on a case-by-case basis, not promote voluntary repatriation, and advise governments not to forcibly return Iraqis. However, since the end of the 2003 war in Iraq some 230,000 persons returned spontaneously according to the Ministry of Trade’s records.

Guided by its mandate, UNHCR will continue to work in close partnership with the national, regional and local authorities, in particular with MoDM, the UN Country Team, international organizations, national and international NGOs as well as with community-based organizations and other civil society actors to pursue protection, assistance and solutions for the four major populations of concern in Iraq. UNHCR’s Representative is the Task Manager of UN Cluster F (IDPs, Refugees and Durable Solutions). It is hoped that the ongoing political process with the establishment of a government will lead to a stabilization of the situation and improvement in the North and South, which will allow for the gradual return of international staff to these parts or be there on a mission basis. Until such return will be possible, UNHCR will continue to remain inventive in ensuring that through the provision of training, coaching and guidance to UNHCR national staff, MoDM and NGO partners, the protection needs of persons of concern will be addressed.

¹ UNDP, *UN Human Development Index*, <http://www.iq.undp.org/economy.html>.

² IRIN, IRAQ: Unemployment caused by insecurity and vice-versa, 29 November 2004, http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=44392&SelectRegion=Iraq_Crisis&SelectCountry=IRAQ.

³ CPA Order No. 1, 16 May 2003, http://www.iraqcoalition.org/regulations/20030516_CPAORD_1_De-Ba_athification_of_Iraqi_Society_.pdf.

⁴ CPA Order No. 2, 23 May 2003, http://www.iraqcoalition.org/regulations/20030823_CPAORD_2_Dissolution_of_Entities_with_Annex_A_.pdf.

⁵ For calculation purposes, the UN Agencies take the number six as average family size.

⁶ UN-Habitat is currently undertaking this type of survey also in other parts of the country.

UNHCR's 2006 programme will be governed by the following considerations:

- Due to the particular vulnerability of refugees, IDPs and returnees resulting from an insufficient national legal framework, lack of social networks in areas of displacement or upon return after years in exile, difficulties to enroll children in schools due to the lack of documentation, transfer school/university degrees from abroad, language problems, etc., UNHCR's protection and assistance is crucial to ensure the well-being of its persons of concern.
- It is UNHCR's aim to further build the capacity of the national authorities (in particular of the MoDM) and civil society actors, to enable them to gradually take over the provision of protection and assistance for refugees and other persons of concern. It will further advocate for the establishment of a legal framework dealing with refugees and asylum-seekers that is compatible with international principles and standards (accession to 1951 Convention/1967 Protocol, review of national legislation, etc.) and capacitating national bodies to deal with asylum-seekers and refugees (e.g. to deal with asylum claims). UNHCR will assist the Government in operationalising the new legislation and all its institutions.
- While individual assistance will continue to be provided to vulnerable refugees (e.g. education grants, medical assistance, rental subsidies), UNHCR aims at further assisting in the refugees' self-help efforts. A durable solutions strategy will be developed in close coordination with other concerned UNHCR offices, particularly in neighbouring countries.
- On the basis of an expanded returnee monitoring mechanism, UNHCR will continue to address obstacles to return and to plan its programmes for the sustainable reintegration of returnees where security situations allow. Assistance programmes will use a community-based approach (including a reconciliation component) in order to avoid the preferential treatment of returnees as compared to the local communities, thereby promoting their successful reintegration. It will also be ensured that refugees, IDPs and returnees have access to objective information through the issuance of assessment reports and receive individual information, legal advice and representation through the network of Legal Aid and Information Centres.
- Within the framework of a *National Policy on Displacement Challenges and Durable Solutions*, to be developed by the national authorities, and the *Strategic Plan on Assistance and Durable Solutions for IDPs in Iraq*, UNHCR will continue to assist vulnerable IDPs in displacement in the three Northern Governorates, to advocate for the rights of IDPs and to seek to find durable solutions throughout Iraq, and to support MoDM to gradually take over this responsibility.
- While the Transitional Administrative Law provides for the recovery of nationality of persons that were deprived of their nationality, UNHCR will continue to monitor the

reacquisition of nationality, advocate for Iraq's accession to the two Statelessness Conventions and provide expert and legal advice to stateless persons.

- The resolution of property disputes as well as compensation will remain a major issue in 2006. UNHCR will continue to support the Iraqi Property Claims Commission (IPCC) with expert and legal advice as well as technical assistance.

2. Operational goals and potential for durable solutions

2.1 Operational goals

The operational goals for the Operation are derived from the global goals of UNHCR, goals of the *Agenda for Protection* as well as from the specific goals that have been set by CASWANAME for the region.

1. Help strengthen the capacity of national, regional and local institutions, particularly the relevant Ministries, through capacity-building programmes in order to enhance the capacity to protect and assist refugees and other persons of concern.

UNHCR efforts will be geared towards strengthening the capacities of MoDM, its main national stakeholder in the provision of protection and assistance to IDPs, refugees, stateless persons and returnees. Being a new ministry and facing major displacement challenges in Iraq, UNHCR will continue its efforts to help build the institution and capacity of MoDM, at both the central and the regional level, through the provision of trainings, expertise, secondment of staff, etc. This includes also the assistance and advice for the development of a *National Strategy on Displacement Challenges and Durable Solutions* by the MoDM and other stakeholders and the creation of a protection regime for groups of concern. Equally, UNHCR will continue to support the IPCC as well as other stakeholders involved in the provision of protection and assistance to groups of concern, such as national NGOs, academic institutions, etc. UNHCR will also aim at facilitating the establishment/enhancing the capacities of refugee/IDP committees for them to identify and address issues of their concern.

2. Coordinate the voluntary, safe and orderly return of refugees and asylum-seekers to Iraq as well as provide assistance to Iraqi refugees and IDPs in the process of return and reintegration.

Despite the fact that UNHCR does not consider present conditions in Iraq to be conducive to returns in safety and dignity, it does not stand in the way of truly voluntary returns and assists returnees with the process of return and reintegration. Means to do so are the provision of information on political, security, economic and social conditions in areas of return (e.g. Governorate Assessment Report, information leaflets on various issues of concern), allowing the returnees to make a well-informed decision to return. UNHCR further facilitates the return movement by providing transport assistance, transit facilities, basic health care and distribution of NFIs to vulnerable groups. Through its

expanded returnee monitoring mechanism, UNHCR assesses the conditions upon return, including potential obstacles to return and reintegration. This information also provides the basis to design and implement targeted reintegration assistance (including a reconciliation component) which benefits both the returnees as well as the local community as a whole. Individual returnees benefit from the assistance and legal advice/representation provided by UNHCR's network of independent Legal Aid and Information Centres. UNHCR further advises host governments about the conditions in Iraq, including obstacles to return and reintegration, e.g. through the provision of updated return advisories and an updated Country of Origin Information Paper. Furthermore, UNHCR liaises closely with the host and Iraqi authorities to ensure that returns take place in an orderly and phased manner taking into consideration the already limited absorption capacities and the risk to create further tensions and displacement.

3. Promote accession to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol through the provision of technical advice and operational support, including on the revision of legislation related to the status of refugees otherwise promoting the creation of a national protection regime in accordance with international refugee law and human rights law standards.

Iraq is not yet a party to the 1951 Convention/1967 Protocol. The Ministry of Displacement and Migration has repeatedly expressed its intention to sign the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and UNHCR will pursue this goal also with the new administration to be in place in early 2006. UNHCR will support all actors (MoDM, regional authorities, NGOs, other civil society actors) to build a space for the protection of refugees and other persons of concern inside Iraq. UNHCR will provide advice and expertise for the review of existing/drafting of new refugee legislation and capacitating national institutions to effectively process asylum claims in accordance with international standards. Given the fact that refugees in general are particularly exposed to harassment, arrest and detention due to their perceived support for the previous government and/or the insurgency. UNHCR will aim at enhancing their acceptance in Iraqi society through awareness-raising activities.

4. Provide protection and assistance to refugees and pursue durable solutions through registration, refugee status determination and assessment which solutions might be the most appropriate for the different groups of refugees and other persons of concern.

UNHCR in Iraq will undertake registration and RSD for asylum-seekers through either national or international staff (depending on the security situation) until the Iraqi authorities will be capable to take over this responsibility, with UNHCR playing an advisory and monitoring role. As an interim step, joint UNHCR-MoDM registration exercises and RSD processes will be organized.

As part of its durable solutions strategy (see 2.2 Durable Solutions strategy), UNHCR will, *inter alia*, identify the wishes of refugees in Iraq as regards voluntary return to their country of origin/habitual residence and will assess the conditions for a return in safety and dignity. It is expected that a number of Syrian refugees, Iranian Arab and Kurdish

refugees and Turkish refugees may opt for voluntary return. UNHCR will aim at reactivating the reciprocal return agreement concluded between Iraq and Iran in 2001. While a number of Iranian refugees from Ahwaz areas returned in 2002, the agreement was suspended in late 2002. A draft tripartite agreement providing for the return of Turkish refugees and involving the Turkish, Iraqi authorities as well as UNHCR, has been drafted but not yet finally agreed upon.

5. To design and implement at all levels of protection and assistance gender- and age mainstreaming activities as well as environment- sensitive activities and strategies.

UNHCR ensures that women, children and elderly persons are fully involved in the decision-making process, the design and implementation of its programmes, and that their special needs are duly taken into consideration. All projects are designed to adequately protect the environment.

6. Strengthen UNHCR's preparedness and response capacity to assist Iraq in responding to emergencies.

UNHCR will continue to play a crucial role in the Working Group on IDPs and Durable Solutions to undertake contingency planning and advocate for the upholding of humanitarian and human rights standards in cases of armed conflict causing the displacement of populations in Iraq. Through the Emergency Working Group, UNHCR is closely involved in the operational emergency response. UNHCR will further strengthen the Iraqi authorities' capacity to deal with emergencies, e.g. through the provision of Situational Emergency Trainings to senior Iraqi officials. An emphasis is given to enhance the MoDM's capacity to play a coordination role during emergencies, in particular on the ground.

7. Build effective partnerships through participatory planning involving all stakeholders, comprehensive assessment of needs, and formulation of strategies that utilize the full range of resources available.

Due to the particular security situation in Iraq (withdrawal of most international humanitarian staff, remote management), the international community established a collaborative approach (Cluster system) and included both international and national NGOs at the policy development and project implementation level (e.g. through the IDP Working Group or as IPs). UNHCR invited other UN agencies, NGOs and other agencies to all its trainings and workshops for the MoDM which always included a coordination component to build new and strengthen existing partnerships.

In addition, the following three goals will be pursued:

8. Guided by the UN Strategic Plan for IDPs, coordinate orderly and sustainable return and reintegration programmes for internally displaced persons where conditions permit. Identify alternative solutions for those unable or unwilling to return.

9. Provide technical assistance on statelessness and work with the authorities on the drafting and enactment of a new nationality law.

10. Provide legal and technical advice on property issues and help to strengthen the capacity of the IPCC and its regional efforts.

2.2 Durable Solutions strategy

UNHCR continues to develop a durable solutions strategy for the different refugee caseloads in Iraq. The strategy will take into consideration the wishes and intentions of the refugees and the different options for durable solutions (voluntary repatriation, creation of environment to allow the building of self-reliance/local integration, and resettlement). Given the fact that several refugee caseloads involve a regional dimension, UNHCR will work closely with its offices in the region and seek durable solutions in a comprehensive manner.

Iranian Kurdish Refugees

UNHCR aims at applying a comprehensive approach towards finding durable solutions for the Iranian Kurds in Iraq (Al-Tash Camp, Governorate of Sulaymaniyah) that would include voluntary return to Iran, relocation to the three Northern Governorates as well as resettlement to third countries. UNHCR Iraq will coordinate closely with Jordan office concerning the Iranian Kurd refugees in the No-Man's-Land on the Iraqi/Jordanian border.

Palestinian refugees

In view of the lack of voluntary repatriation and resettlement prospects for Palestinian refugees in Iraq, UNHCR will aim at enhancing their protection situation and further the self-reliance with the objective to allow for their (temporary) integration until a more durable solution will be feasible. Given the number of Palestinian refugees that fled towards the Jordanian border in the wake of the April 2003 war, UNHCR needs to address the issue in a coordinated and comprehensive manner as a one-sided approach may negatively affect the chances for finding solutions both in Iraq and Jordan.

Syrian refugees

Due to the deteriorated security situation in Iraq, a majority of the Syrian refugees expressed their wish to return to Syria provided that their safety and dignity upon return was secured through the issuance of a general amnesty and formal guarantees by the Syrian authorities and the return be facilitated by UNHCR. Even if these benchmarks were met, some refugees might be in need of resettlement. The use of group resettlement might be considered given the fact that the Syrian refugees share similar profiles and protection needs. Their prospect for local integration is very slim given the refugees' (perceived) affiliation with the former Baath party.

Turkish Refugees

The majority of the Turkish refugees in Northern Iraq expressed the wish to return to Turkey provided that the Turkish authorities issue a comprehensive amnesty and that their rights will be guaranteed upon return. A draft Tripartite Agreement providing for the return of Turkish refugees from Iraq to Turkey, and involving the Turkish, Iraqi authorities as well as UNHCR, has not yet been finally agreed upon. UNHCR will undertake an effort to revive the negotiations regarding this agreement which will hopefully allow for the voluntary repatriation.

Iranian refugees (Ahwazis)

In 2002, a number of Ahwazis voluntarily returned under the 2001 reciprocal agreement between the Iraqi and the Iranian authorities, which was suspended later in 2002. UNHCR will undertake a survey to assess the intentions of the Ahwazi refugees. Based on this survey, it will plan for durable solutions, which would likely involve voluntary repatriation and local integration (or at least creating an environment allowing self-reliance). Currently, it is estimated that there are some 2,500 Ahwazi refugees in the country.

Iraqi Returnees (Former Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons)

While it is estimated that over 400,000 IDPs have either returned spontaneously or settled in their places of choice, the total number of IDPs remains at 1.2 million by mid June 2005, not least because many returnees from abroad ended up in internal displacement or were fresh displaced resulting from periodic fighting, particularly in places such as Fallujah, Najaf, Ramadi, Mosul, Al-Qaim and now Tal Afar. Since 2003, some 250,000 refugees have returned to Iraq, majority of whom (230,000) have returned spontaneously and some 20,000 returned with UNHCR's assistance. Although estimate number of returns in 2005 is not available at this stage, over 3,000 have returned with UNHCR assistance in 2005.

UNHCR conducted returnee monitoring in 2004/2005. Returnee monitoring projects and technical evaluations by private companies covering areas impacted by returned refugees and IDPs confirmed that many returnees repatriate to a displacement situation inside Iraq; that the issuance of legal documentation remains problematic and that housing, employment, prevailing poverty and security remain the fundamental challenges. Durable solutions for the returned refugees and IDPs will continue to be pursued under the framework of the *National Strategy on Displacement Challenges and Durable Solutions*.

Although accurate number of spontaneous returnees in 2005 is not available, returnee monitoring, which feeds into the drafting of assessment reports and the development of responses, needs to continue.

The table below indicates the programme outcomes, outputs and partners for 2005-2007.

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| <p>Enhance national capacity to protect and deliver assistance to refugees, IDPs and returnees through policy, legal advice and technical assistance</p> | <p>International Protection Standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National and local authorities receive technical and legal advice relating to nationality legislation and property restitution ▪ UNCT Strategic Plan on “Assistance and Durable Solutions for IDPs in Iraq” to be revised and shared with Iraqi counterparts every six months to reflect policy changes ▪ Tripartite agreements or letters of exchange between UNHCR, MoDM and host countries on voluntary repatriation to articulate legal safeguards and guarantees for both assisted and spontaneous returnees <p>National Strategy on Displacement Challenges and Durable Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Technical advise provided in the development and articulation of a national strategy ▪ Technical support to coordinate a National Conference on Displacement Challenges and Durable Solutions <p><i>Partners: UN Cluster F (incl. IDP Working Group), MoDM and other line ministries (national and local), IPCC, civil society organizations, Governments of countries of asylum, IDP Committees</i></p> |
| <p>Humanitarian assistance provided to refugee, IDP and returnee populations</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emergency assistance to refugees inside Iraq, IDPs and returnees ▪ Ensuring basic humanitarian needs of refugees, IDPs and returnees are met ▪ Ensuring humanitarian access to populations of concern through advocacy <p><i>Partners: UN agencies, NGOs, MoDM and other line ministries Governments of countries of asylum</i></p> |
| <p>Durable solutions identified and implemented for refugee, IDP, returnee populations and stateless persons</p> | <p>Creating conditions to enable sustainable return and relocation in safety and dignity by providing support in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Return, rehabilitation, reintegration, reconstruction activities (4Rs approach) ▪ Facilitating access to social services ▪ Promoting employment generation activities ▪ Community-based reconciliation efforts ▪ Establishing an adequate legislative framework to enable the return, relocation and reintegration ▪ Developing property restitution framework <p><i>Partners: UN agencies, NGOs, civil society, MoDM, MoT, MoFA (national and local), Governments of countries of asylum, local communities</i></p> |

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| <p>Surveys, assessments and mapping for improved understanding of the beneficiaries, their intentions, needs and locations</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Profiling of uprooted populations, including updating of existing profiles inside and outside of Iraq ▪ Intentions surveys ▪ Returnee monitoring expanded and refined to effectively identify protection and assistance needs ▪ Needs assessments in areas of displacement ▪ Situation report on districts of return / relocation ▪ Preparation of accurate and reliable Country of Origin Information Reports and Eligibility Guidelines <p><i>Partners: UN agencies, MoDM and other line ministries (national and local authorities), NGOs, community leaders, civil society organisations (in particular women's groups), Governments of countries of asylum, refugee/IDP leaders</i></p> |
| <p>Information, management tools and dissemination</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Technical assistance to authorities in establishing databases for purposes of registration, claims/property registry, assistance and planning of populations of concern. ▪ Mass information campaigns targeting populations of concern on rights, obligations, services available and property restitution ▪ Awareness campaigns for host communities ▪ Information and Legal Aid Centres established in Iraq for populations of concern providing guidance, information and legal advice and representation <p><i>Partners: UN agencies, MoDM and other line ministries (national and local authorities), NGOs, community leaders, civil society organisations (in particular women's groups), Governments of countries of asylum, refugee/IDP leaders, media</i></p> |
| <p>Monitoring and evaluation of assistance programmes</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes both at agency level (for trust fund and bilateral funding) and through external actors <p><i>Partners: UN, NGOs, local communities, MoDM, MoPDC, Consultant firms</i></p> |

During the course of 2005, UNHCR will organize a formal round-table discussion focusing on 2006 needs in order to formulate a more detailed plan of action.

From the initial consultations with the partners and the Iraqi authorities, UNHCR makes the following basic planning assumptions by area:

a) Northern Iraq

- UNHCR international staff will gradually return to Northern Iraq during 2006, where conditions allow.

- Repatriation of Iraqi refugees to Northern Iraq will continue, albeit on a limited scale. UNHCR will continue to provide return transport assistance, transit facilities, provision of basic health care, and distribution of Non-Food-Items to vulnerable groups. If the security situation and other relevant reintegration factors improve significantly, UNHCR might envisage promoting the return to selected areas.
- The focus of the 2006 programme will also include the provision of technical support such as returnee and IDP monitoring, determination of the IDPs' intentions, production of updated Governorate Assessment Reports, advice with regard to property issues, human rights and legal aid centres, as well as support of regional and local consultations to develop the various policy components.
- (Re)integration of returning Iraqi refugees and IDPs in their places of origin/habitual residence or places of choice will continue to be implemented using a community-based approach. More emphasis will be placed on enabling access to income-generation and vocational skills training activities, alongside with community-based interventions (shelter, water, health, education, access roads, electricity), that will continue to be implemented with concerted efforts of local authorities, NGOs and other UN agencies.
- The Turkish and Iranian refugees, as well as Syrian, Turkish and Iranian asylum-seekers will continue to be assisted in Northern Iraq, in parallel with seeking durable solutions for them. The projects designed for the refugees will take into account immediate and recurrent needs such as water, sanitation and health. The project will also aim to address the livelihoods of the refugees, through enabling access to vocational skills training and income-generation opportunities that would be useful in the Iraqi context and upon return to the country of origin.

b) Central Iraq

- Special efforts will be applied to ensure monitoring of the situation of returnees and secondary displacements in the Centre (Governorates of Salah Al-Din and Diyala in particular) – UNHCR will actively utilize local Iraqi NGOs as a way to capacitate them and delegate more implementing authority to them – but also to produce/update Governorate Assessment Reports as well as to provide information, legal advice and representation to the various persons of concern.
- Provision of protection and assistance to refugees; Iranian Kurds in Al-Tash Camp (pending relocation and camp closure), Palestinians as well as a small number of Syrians in Baghdad.
- If security allows, UNHCR, through its partners, will continue to verify the number and eligibility of Iranian refugees in Al-Tash Camp or in Northern Iraq for resettlement. UNHCR will also assess the possibilities for relocation and local settlement elsewhere in Iraq, including in Al-Anbar Governorate, and the return to

Iran of those who wish to do so, with the ultimate goal of closing the camp. In the meantime, UNHCR will assist those hosted in the camp by ensuring steady operation of the basic services and facilities.

- UNHCR will continue to monitor the protection situation of Syrian refugees in Baghdad and continue to pursue durable solutions for them.
- The MoDM will be capacitated to provide protection and assistance to the Palestinian refugees in Iraq, in particularly those that have been evicted and are still in need of accommodation. Consequently, there is a need to intensify collaboration with the MoDM in order to find a long-term housing solution for the Palestinian refugees. International and national NGOs will be involved in developing income-generating projects and exploring job-employment opportunities for Palestinian refugees to become more self-reliant.
- Given the security situation in Central Iraq and the increasing capacity of Iraqi NGOs, it is expected that they will play a more active role and will be delegated with more implementing authority to implement UNHCR-funded projects.

c) Southern Iraq

- UNHCR will assist MoDM to expand its presence beyond its offices in the three Lower South Governorates of Basrah, Missan and Thi Qar and also cover the Governorates of Wasit, Karbala, Najaf and Qadisiya (Upper South). Equally, MoDM's operational capacity in terms of staffing, coordination and communication needs to be enhanced. In addition, efforts will be made to enhance the capacity of local NGOs and other civil society organizations to assume a bigger role in assisting returnees, refugees and other persons of concern.
- Facilitation of voluntary repatriation of Iraqi refugees and others of concern will continue. UNHCR will provide return transport assistance, transit facilities, provision of basic health care, and distribution of NFIs to vulnerable groups. Depending on the security situation and other relevant reintegration factors, UNHCR might envisage promoting the return to certain Governorates in the South.
- Efforts will continue to monitor the situation of returnees in the South, but also to produce/update Governorate Assessment Reports as well as to provide information, legal advice and representation to the various persons of concern. In addition, IDPs' intentions will be determined to have a solid base for the development of the *National Policy*.
- Rebuilding livelihoods of returnees and their communities will continue to be a need to ensure their sustainable reintegration (community-based approach) and reconciliation. There is also a great need to enhance the absorption capacity of the host communities to receive returnees. This will help reducing tensions between the host communities and the returnees due to the competition over already meager

resources. All UNHCR multi-sectoral assistance will be pursued through a collaborative approach with all other stakeholders.

- Shelter needs are pressing all over Iraq, particularly in the rural areas; yet fulfilling this need is a task far beyond UNHCR's capacity. Therefore, UNHCR foresees the provision of shelter materials to the most vulnerable beneficiaries, either to construct traditional houses or to extend already existing houses to accommodate additional families. UNHCR intends to lobby for the inclusion of returnees in shelter assistance plans by UN sister agencies, NGOs or the Iraqi Government.
- The unemployment rate in Southern Iraq is high among all Iraqis. Thus, it constitutes one of the main obstacles in realizing the full reintegration of returnees. There is a great need to improve the skills of returnees and provide them with training and tools to re-cultivate and resume traditional coping mechanisms.
- A considerable number of returnee households are headed by women. To avoid exploitation, skills training and engagement in gainful family-friendly employment would be needed. UNHCR intends to incorporate in its 2006 activities a more focused gender-approach to ensure that the needs of returnee women are fully met and to facilitate their reintegration in their communities.