



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
31 May 2017

English only

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## Human Rights Council

Thirty-fifth session

6-23 June 2017

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

**Joint written statement\* submitted by the International  
Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial  
Discrimination (EAFORD), the Arab Organization for  
Human Rights, non-governmental organizations in special  
consultative status, the International Educational  
Development, Inc., the World Peace Council, non-  
governmental organizations on the roster**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 May 2017]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.17-08758(E)



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## **Internally Displaced Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq\***

### Background and legal implications

The unfolding of violent conflicts and the subsequent social and economic hardships force millions of people to leave their homes and seek safety and stability elsewhere. While the number of refugees is constantly rising, the statistics concerning internally displaced persons appear to be even more worrisome.

Internally displaced people (hereinafter IDPs) flee their homes to escape *inter alia* war, violence, starvation, economic hardship and lack of medical facilities and supplies but, unlike refugees, they do not cross borders and, therefore, remain under the protection of their own government – even though the government is often the reason of their displacement.

Consequently, according to the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, it is not the international community but national authorities that “have the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons within their jurisdiction” (Principle 3(1)).

However, IDPs are often forced to live in dire conditions and the pace of forced displacement and uprooting has dramatically increased over the last three years. By the end of 2014, a record-breaking 38 million people had become displaced within their own country as a result of violence and an astonishing 11 million of them were newly uprooted during 2014 – equal to 30,000 people a day.

During 2016, Iraqis and Syrians faced the largest waves of internal displacement of the last years, and the increasing degree of violence in the two countries is further deteriorating the conditions of IDPs.

### **Syrian Arab Republic**

Besides the huge exodus of refugees, the Syrian conflict has provoked massive waves of displacement within the country. Internally displaced people flee from violence, human rights violations and armed conflict, but, as they do not leave the country, they remain under the legal protection of the Syrian government. As such, IDPs enjoy the same rights as all other citizens.

However, remaining within the Syrian borders entails the same degree of suffering and difficulties faced when trying to seek refugee elsewhere, and the wave of displacement caused by the six-year-long conflict has reached unprecedented magnitude. To date, 6.3 million people, including 2.8 million children are displaced inside the country, and the pace of displacement is of 50 Syrian families forced to move every hour of every day, with an average of 6,150 people displaced per day in 2016: according to UN sources, this may be the biggest internally displaced population in the world.

IDPs are just as vulnerable as migrants and asylum seekers: in fact, they are often forced to flee their places at short notice or after destructive aerial attacks, thus leaving behind many of their belongings. 1.1 million IDPs live in camps, informal settlements and makeshift shelters, the majority find refuge with host families and neighbouring communities, and 20% has no shelter at all. Shelters and camps often lack the basic infrastructures and amenities, and are extremely overcrowded, to the point that three or more families are frequently forced to share the same dwelling. According to UN statistics, 57% of collective centres are without sufficient water, 50% lack sufficient sanitation facilities, and 54% are

over-crowded. Many IDPs face protracted displacement as the frontlines of the combat shift, and as their financial resources become depleted and are forced to move into cheaper, poorer quality and more crowded accommodation.<sup>1</sup>

IDPs face incredible challenges and barriers in accessing cash, food, essential items and livelihood opportunities, especially because hosting communities as well often struggle with economic hardships. Security issues and vulnerability increase with every displacement, and two direct attacks to IDPs camps were registered in 2016. On 5 May, two rockets struck a civilian IDP settlement in Idleb, killing 26 people and wounding 23 others, and on 14 April, ISIS destroyed the IDP settlement near the border with Turkey in Aleppo. Luckily, there were no casualties as the settlement had been evacuated not long before, but all tents were burned and damaged.

Collecting accurate data and statistics on the actual number of people internally displaced poses several challenges: 4.5 million Syrians are estimated to be stuck in out-of-reach areas, and some governorates in the north east of the country are extremely hard to enter because of the presence of terrorist groups. In addition, secondary and tertiary displacements are harder to track, and it is almost impossible to know the exact number of people in besieged areas who have had their homes destroyed but are unable to flee. The growing pace and magnitude of displacement as well as the volatility of the conflict's frontlines represent additional barriers that may prevent from obtaining accurate information; as such, all data concerning IDPs may be not completely reliable.

## **Iraq**

Intensification of the conflict, terrorism and counter-terrorism, widespread sectarian tensions, rise of the militias, political and social disintegration and sweeping violence are provoking a humanitarian crisis in Iraq – a crisis that is forcing millions of civilians to flee their homes. In 2016 alone, more than one million people were internally displaced – thus bringing the number of IDPs registered since 2014 to 3.2 million.

Following the United States of America-led invasion of 2003, Iraqis have faced a growing number of cases of internal displacement caused by indiscriminate attacks on their houses and properties. The situation has further deteriorated in the recent years due to the advance of the Islamic State and the subsequent liberation campaigns conducted by the government with the support of U.S. forces.

To date, over 650,000 people remain strained in inadequate shelter arrangements such as informal settlements, unfinished and abandoned buildings, public and school buildings and religious sites where living conditions are below all international standards.

Furthermore, while 8% of all displaced Iraqis (about 260,000 people) live in one of 45 camps established over the past two years, approximately 3.4 million displaced people and host communities need some form of basic assistance – in particular those located in areas bordering internal conflict areas.

While the whole country is facing issues related to forced displacement, the operation in Mosul has provoked an even larger wave of internal displacement. Since the beginning of the campaign for the “liberation” of Mosul in October 2016, over 400,000 people have been forcibly displaced: hundreds of civilians flee the city daily, leaving behind all their belongings. Those who have remained in Mosul face challenges linked to the dire living standards, the lack of water and the poor hygienic conditions. Shortage of water – in particular drinking water is one of the main concerns in the city. In eastern Mosul, humanitarian workers continue to bring 2.3 million litres of water per day, but the amount is not sufficient to cover the needs of the thousands of civilians trapped in the besieged city. Both in Eastern and Western Mosul, people face chronic shortage of clean water, and thousands are forced to drink untreated – and therefore highly dangerous – water. As a consequence, the number of children affected by water-borne diseases is dramatically rising. The shortage of water has been further exacerbated by attacks on the Badush water treatment plant – the biggest functioning plant in Western Mosul – committed by ISIS.

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<sup>1</sup> 2017 Humanitarian needs overview, Syrian Arab Republic, UNOCHA Report, December 2016, [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/2017\\_syria\\_hno\\_2.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/2017_syria_hno_2.pdf)

The growing number of people fleeing the city is dramatically increasing the caseload of humanitarian workers working in the IDPs camps. According to recent information, over 250,000 people (54,000 families)<sup>2</sup> are currently hosted in camps and emergency sites, while thousands of other civilians are sheltered in host communities and informal sites.

While humanitarian workers continue to work tirelessly to provide water, food and basic supplies to the thousands of people living in the camps, the intensification of the shelling in Mosul is putting the life of millions at risk and is putting a strain on the capacity of camps and shelters.

**Recommendations:**

We, NGOs Signatories to this statement recommend to the United Nations and its relevant bodies to:

- Constructively work alongside with the Iraqi and Syrian government on political, technical and financial issues related to the protection, dignified return and integration of IDPs;
- Call on the Iraqi and Syrian government to ensure the safety and security of IDPs, particularly at locations of return, and, in particular, where landmines and unexploded ordnance remain;
- Pressure the Iraqi and Syrian government to find adequate solutions for the most vulnerable groups of people who are still accommodated in collective centres, tented camps or other makeshift accommodation; and
- Call on the Iraqi and Syrian government – as well as on all actors involved in the conflict – to cease the hostilities, to halt the violence and to allow the safe return of internally displaced persons.

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\*Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ), The Arab Lawyers Association- UK, Human Rights Defenders (HRD), The Brussels Tribunal, Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, Association of Humanitarian Lawyers (AHL), The Iraqi Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), Association of Human Rights Defenders in Iraq (AHRD), Alliance to Renew Co-operation among Humankind, General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW), Organisation for Justice & Democracy in Iraq (OJDI), Women Will Association (WWA), The Iraqi Centre for Human Rights, The International League of Iraqi Academics (ILIA), Organization for Widows and Orphans (OWO), International Anti-Occupation Network (IAON), NGOs without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

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<sup>2</sup> OCHA report, Mosul Humanitarian Response, available at <http://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-mosul-humanitarian-response-situation-report-no-28-2-9-april-2017>