



The Rt Hon Tony Blair MP
Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

Friday 13 April 2007

Dear Prime Minister,

On 17th and 18th April 2007, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, is convening an international conference to highlight the plight of the growing numbers of Iraqi refugees and Internally Displaced People in the Middle East and to call on UN member states to do more to help. We believe that because of the UK's involvement in the Iraq conflict, the UK should be playing a leading role in addressing this humanitarian crisis.

The movement of refugees into neighbouring countries, and the equally serious problem of internal displacement within Iraq, has been growing steadily as sectarian and political violence in Iraq has increased. UNHCR estimates that 40,000-50,000 people a month are now fleeing their homes in Iraq, adding to the estimated two million Iraqi refugees in the region, most of them in Syria and Jordan whose governments are struggling to meet their needs. The situation is so bad that countries in the region are threatening to close their borders and to turn away people fleeing violence and persecution. As well as putting individual lives at risk, this would be a serious threat to the international refugee protection system, as well as the fundamental human right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution.

We urge you to address the humanitarian dimensions of the displacement crisis in and around Iraq and ask you that you take a number of actions.

Firstly, whilst the extra £6m in emergency relief announced by the Department for International Development on March 22nd is welcome, far more is needed. We ask you to put in place a much more substantial package of support to the region, both directly and through UNHCR, which alone has appealed for 60 million dollars of assistance in 2007.

Secondly, the UK has done nothing to allow Iraqi refugees displaced by conflict the chance to resettle in the UK – including people who have shown great loyalty and service to the UK in Iraq. We are aware of a significant number of former employees of the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign Office, and the Department for International Development who have fled from Iraq in fear for their lives and who are now stranded in Syria or Jordan. We attach a letter written to you from three such former employees

of your government, Loay Mohammed al-Tahar, Akram Moaiy'd Kalaf and Issa Jafer al-Saed. As these men explain in their letter, they are being turned away from the gates of the British Embassy in Damascus, and have concluded that the British government has washed its hands of any responsibility for their safety and welfare.

To address these issues, we ask that you take a lead in Europe by immediately announcing a programme to resettle in the UK some of the Iraqi refugees currently living in the most difficult conditions in countries neighbouring Iraq. The United States has announced that it will resettle 7,000 refugees and we believe your government should put together its own resettlement programme.

Thirdly, at a time when the international community is calling on Iraq's neighbours to keep their borders open to asylum seekers, we believe it sends a contradictory signal for your government to be deporting Iraqis to their homeland. The forcible removal of Iraqis, even to those parts of Iraq which the UK considers to be safe, is a serious misallocation of resources and priorities in view of the current Iraqi refugee crisis. Sweden, for example, has suspended forcible returns to Iraq for the time being and we ask you to consider a similar gesture until the security situation improves markedly. It also concerns us that Iraqis who are refused asylum in the UK are left in legal limbo and many live in destitution. We believe that all Iraqis living here should be given some form of status in the UK, allowing them to work or to receive a decent level of state support.

The refugee crisis will not be solved by the UK alone, but your government is well placed to take a lead in Europe and the world. We urge you to use this week's Geneva conference to signal a change of heart in your approach to Iraqi refugees, by announcing a more generous, more principled, more coherent, and more far-sighted set of UK policies.

Yours sincerely



Kate Allen
Director of Amnesty International UK



Anna Reisenberger
Acting Chief Executive of
the Refugee Council



Tom Porteous
London Director of Human Rights Watch

Cc The Rt Hon Dr John Reid MP, Secretary of State for the Home Department
The Rt Hon Margaret Beckett MP, Secretary of State for the Foreign &
Commonwealth Affairs
The Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for International Department