

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
WEEKLY MEETING

Summary Note

30 May 2007
Geneva

I Iraq, Jordan and Syria - Update on the Situation of Iraqi Children

Mr. Sikander Khan, Deputy Representative (UNICEF)

Mr. Khan briefed on the situation of Iraqi children in Iraq, Jordan and Syria based on the report 'Immediate Needs for Iraqi Children in Iraq and Neighbouring Countries', which was launched on 23 May 2007.

Mr. Khan started by pointing out that although reconstruction and development in Iraq have been at the centre of preoccupations, the needs of children have yet to be better addressed. Four years after the start of the conflict, Iraq's children face an enormous challenge. Since 2003, nearly 15 per cent of Iraq's total population has fled their homes – 50 per cent of them children. Out of an estimated 4 million displaced Iraqis, approximately 1.9 million have sought refuge inside Iraq (around 700,000 in 2006 alone) and 2.2 million have crossed the border into neighboring countries, according to the UNHCR. More than 750,000 Iraqis have sought safety in Jordan and over 1.25 million in Syria. One of the most important questions now is how to address the needs of displaced Iraqi children in Jordan and Syria.

UNICEF is currently maintaining a strong capacity to conduct operations impacting Iraqi children in Iraq, by working through colleagues inside the country. It provides health, education, water and sanitation services, as well as protection to the most vulnerable. One of the first priorities for UNICEF, however, will be to advocate for a direct presence inside the country. Mr. Khan further stressed that there has been very good cooperation between UNICEF and other humanitarian agencies, and that this was a very valuable aspect. He also underlined that UNICEF was only a small part of the puzzle, and that there were many different funding initiatives, including by the Iraqi Government.

Presenting the document entitled "Immediate Needs for Iraqi Children in Iraq and Neighbouring Countries" (launched on 23 May 2007), Mr. Khan explained that this appeal was a step towards improving UNICEF's capacities to address the needs of children both inside Iraq and in Jordan and Syria. It details the funding needs for such operations for the next six months.

Responding to a question on the long-term perspective, Mr. Khan said that the first step had to be to push for a presence inside the country, after which the response could be fine-tuned to focus more on long-term impacts.

II Lebanon – Update on the Humanitarian Situation

Mr. Matthias Burchard, Head of UNRWA Representative Office, Geneva

Mr. Burchard briefed participants on the current humanitarian situation in Northern Lebanon and on UNRWA's response. Explaining the background to the situation, Mr. Burchard pointed out that there are 31,478 registered Palestinian refugees in the Nahr El Bared camp, but that UNRWA estimated the numbers of those actually living in the camp at around 27,000.

The majority of families (an estimated 21,000 persons) from the besieged northern Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr el-Bared have fled mostly to Beddawi camp in Tripoli. However, thousands remain trapped inside the camp under extremely difficult humanitarian conditions. According to UNRWA figures, 5,466 refugee families have left the camp since fighting began (according to a situation report on 29 May 2007). Hundreds of heavily armed soldiers, backed by tanks, armoured personnel carriers and machine gun-mounted jeeps, were still surrounding the camp. Mr. Burchard also said that there had been unconfirmed media reports that civilians may have been used as human shields. The camp area is still too dangerous for humanitarian personnel to enter, and there is therefore still no reliable overall casualty tolls. Local NGOs reported that there are around 35 civilian casualties and 84 injured. In addition, Mr. Burchard pointed to that fact that property damage is expected to be considerable.

Explaining UNRWA's role in these camps, Mr. Burchard said that the agency was not administering them, but that the camps were under the control of camp committees. UNRWA's role is to provide services within the camps.

Mr. Burchard then went on to brief about UNRWA's response to the situation. In neighbouring camps, about 2,500 people are being housed temporarily in UNRWA schools and women's centers. Despite an attack on its convoy, the Agency continues to provide food and medical supplies as well as water, although operations in Nahr el-Bared camp have stopped. Since 25 May 2007, UNRWA trucks loaded with 4000 bundles of bread, 58,000 litres of water and 2000 food parcels have been waiting confirmation of secure passage to enter the camp. UNRWA is also providing mattresses, covers, pillows, hygiene kits, and food in Beddawi camp.

Mr. Burchard pointed out that UNRWA is working in close cooperation with other UN Agencies, the ICRC, the Lebanese government, the Lebanese Red Cross, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, the PLO, local and international NGOs and other parties. Mr. Burchard also expressed thanks to all the colleagues from other agencies working on the ground.

Regarding the evolution of the situation and the response in the near future, Mr. Burchard said that UNRWA has applied for CERF funding. However, future needs are difficult to predict, since they depend on how the situation evolves. During the discussion, it was pointed out that the UN country team in Beirut is currently preparing a flash appeal to respond to this emergency.

Participants

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