

**Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs**

**UN OFFICIALS CALL FOR IMPROVED SECURITY AND ACCESS  
TO REACH IRAQIS IN NEED**

(Amman/New York/Geneva, 4 April 2008): Two senior UN humanitarian officials today called for an immediate cessation of violence and greater efforts to enable the safe passage for relief personnel and supplies to millions of Iraqis in need of food, clean water and other essential goods.

“In any armed conflict, people need access to life-saving assistance and aid workers need safe access to deliver that assistance. Unfortunately, in Iraq today access is often hindered by ongoing hostilities and restrictions on freedom of movement. Aid workers must be able to reach people in need with timely, life-saving assistance,” said John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Mr. Holmes, who travelled to Amman to discuss the humanitarian situation in Iraq with relevant officials, said that humanitarian needs have risen significantly during the last two years. The effects of violence and tension, combined with the deterioration of basic services, have further contributed to the impoverishment of Iraqis who have suffered from decades of conflict, sanctions and oppression.

Mr. Holmes, who was unable to go to Iraq for security reasons, said that it remained a UN priority to address the most acute needs of all who could be reached, while taking into account the safety of humanitarian aid workers, whether they are UN, international NGOs, or Iraqi NGOs and civil society.

“We must make the most of any localised security improvements and pockets of stability to expand our humanitarian efforts,” he said. “We are scaling up the emergency response wherever conditions allow, and hope that the \$265 million appeal launched in February will be fully funded by donors.”

In Basra, for example, the UN and NGOs were able to begin relief operations even before the hostilities of the past two weeks had ended. As conditions in Basra continue to stabilize and freedom of movement expands throughout the city, the UN and NGOs are increasing emergency operations to reach thousands of families, as well as several hospitals, with water, medical supplies and food baskets.

The UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, David Shearer, recently returned from a joint humanitarian assessment mission to the governorate of Basra with Iraqi officials. According to Mr. Shearer families can finally restock essential supplies, and aid operations by government, UN agencies and NGOs are able to reach more people.

“While we are no longer facing a humanitarian crisis in Basra,” Shearer said, “some families still need support. The UN’s priority now is to support Basra’s local government in redoubling its own assistance efforts for the most vulnerable families.”

Shearer added that the Iraqi government is working diligently to expand its own humanitarian operations in Basra. Among other efforts, the government plans to distribute Public Distribution System food rations as soon as possible, which will further ease the suffering of the population.

Shearer stressed that limited humanitarian access in Sadr City in Baghdad continues to pose serious problems for the delivery of aid to several of the city’s poorest areas.

Both Mr. Holmes and Mr. Shearer reiterated the need to work together with the Government of Iraq as well as neighbouring countries to respond quickly and appropriately to the urgent needs of the Iraqi people.

“The international humanitarian community remains committed to responding to the humanitarian crisis inside Iraq as well as the displacement crisis it has prompted throughout the region. We are doing all we can to meet the needs of millions of suffering Iraqis, both those inside the country and beyond its borders, by strengthening our overall humanitarian coordination and response,” Mr. Holmes said.

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