

DECLASSIFIED

RESTRICTED



From the Secretary of State

Rt Hon Tony Blair MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

DFID Department for
International
Development

1 Palace Street, London SW1E 5HE

Telephone: 020
E-mail:

24th January 2007

At our last meeting of DOP(I) before Christmas I raised the issue of increasing humanitarian needs in Iraq, and promised to write with further details.

The picture is one of increasing vulnerability over the last year, largely caused by people fleeing the ongoing sectarian violence. UNHCR estimates that the total number of people displaced in Iraq since the Samarra bombing in February 2006 has now reached 492,000. The figure is growing by about 10,000 per week. While it is not easy to gauge precise numbers (international organisations do not have good access, and Iraqi Government monitoring systems are not absolutely reliable) humanitarian agencies and NGOs are all agreed that the trend is showing a steep increase compared to previous years. Displacement is causing a de facto geographical separation along sectarian lines, as different ethnic groups move to areas in which they will be the majority.

There is clearly a strong political dynamic to the humanitarian situation, and it is essential that we address both the causes and the symptoms. Our focus on supporting the Iraqi government's national reconciliation agenda is therefore vital. We should press the Iraqi government to address displacement issues as part of reconciliation, and to do more itself to provide basic services to meet humanitarian needs. The picture is unpalatable for the Iraqi government, which is already facing major challenges, and indeed for the coalition (hence the largely silent nature of the humanitarian crisis so far). However, ignoring this situation could have long term implications for political and social cohesion in Iraq, exacerbating internal conflict.

Increasing numbers of Iraqi refugees are arriving in neighbouring countries, including Jordan and Syria. With UNHCR estimates of 700,000 now living in Jordan alone there are reports that the Jordanian population is becoming less and less tolerant of the influx, with increased pressure on local services. In Syria, the Iraqi population is close to 1,000,000 million, unlike Jordan we are not aware of any incentives to restrict access by the Syrian authorities. We will continue to monitor the situation closely

DECLASSIFIED

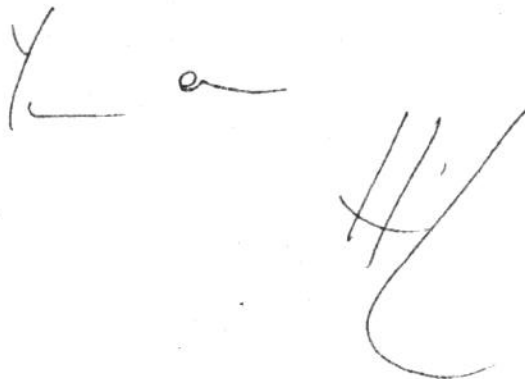
DECLASSIFIED

It is clear that while not letting the Iraqi government off the hook, we must also continue to respond to humanitarian needs in Iraq. This will not be easy; most IDPs are living with extended family in areas with poor services. Shelter is a particular problem, but health and water/sanitation needs are also increasing. The security situation makes it difficult for humanitarian agencies to operate, but there are options for support through the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, and some UN agencies.

Donors are starting to mobilise resources in response. Japan has recently contributed \$10m to UNHCR/IOM, and the EC has provided 10m euros specifically for IDPs via the UN Trust Fund. ECHO is also considering re-engaging, and the UN is revising its assistance strategy to put greater emphasis on basic needs.

In light of the situation I have decided to make available £4 million from within the DFID programme to be channelled through ICRC. The ICRC's main focus is on protection and emergency assistance activities. This includes provision of urgently needed medical supplies, such as war-wounded kits to hospitals dealing with mass-casualties, improving health facilities (including physical rehabilitation and training for staff), restoring and upgrading water and sanitation infrastructure and organising training for health professionals and engineers. The ICRC is also assisting displaced persons in supplying food, water and shelter and working in close support of the Iraqi Red Crescent Society by strengthening its capacity to respond (including first aid training and equipment for their ambulance service). Our total humanitarian contribution stands at over £120 million since 2003. DFID will continue to monitor the situation, keeping in close touch with international partners. I will keep you informed of our plans.

I am copying this letter to DOP(I) colleagues.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Hilary Benn', written in a cursive style.

HILARY BENN

DECLASSIFIED