United Nations Nations Unies

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, VALERIE AMOS

Statement to the Security Council on Iraq
New York, 14 May 2015

As delivered

Madam President,

Since my last briefing to the Security Council in November 2014, the number of Iraqis requiring humanitarian assistance has grown to over 8.2 million people, an increase of 3 million in five months. This includes some 2.8 million people that have been internally displaced since the conflict began in Anbar Governorate in January 2014. Half of the displaced are children. All 18 governorates in Iraq have been affected. Iraq also continues to host some 250,000 refugees from Syria.

Conflict, targeted attacks on civilians, and intimidation – often along ethnic and sectarian lines – continue to plague the country. New displacement continues unabated, with the displacement of an estimated 120,000 people from Ramadi in Anbar Governorate last month -- a stark example of the fragile situation in Iraq.

As the duration and scale of the Iraq crisis increases, so does its urgency. Families can no longer afford to sustain themselves. The resources of host communities have been drained. Public services and infrastructure are overloaded. Poverty and unemployment have increased and the cost of living has soared. Newly displaced families are finding it increasingly difficult to find safe areas of the country where people can host them in their time of need.

I am also extremely concerned about the wellbeing of the millions of Iraqis who live in areas outside government control, including under ISIL control. Next month will mark one year since the attack on Mosul and the spread of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in the country. Reports indicate deteriorating conditions in these areas, including diminishing access to clean water, medical care, and food. Most of these areas, however, remain largely out of the reach of humanitarian organisations. People are becoming more and more cut off from the rest of the country, with reports that many are now not allowed to freely leave these areas or communicate with those on the outside.

I have reported to this Council on many occasions, on the flagrant violations of human rights which persist in conflict situations. Iraq is no different.

The mission of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is to mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors.
Women and girls continue to experience horrific acts of sexual violence, physical abuse, and enslavement. Many of the estimated 1,500 women and children who were abducted by ISIL last year remain under their control. The few women and girls who have managed to escape in the last few months tell appalling stories of systematic rape, physical abuse, forced marriage, and human trafficking. Communities have welcomed these women and girls upon their return, but are struggling to cope with the magnitude of suffering that their mothers, sisters and daughters have endured.

An entire generation of Iraqi children has been put at risk by the conflict. They have been forcibly recruited into armed groups, used as suicide bombers, and exposed to profound levels of violence that will affect them for the rest of their lives.

I am also concerned by reports that other parties to the conflict are violating international law. Restrictions on the freedom of movement of civilians by security forces and armed groups are growing worse, limiting the ability of civilians to flee conflict and enter safer territory or to return home after areas have been retaken. In April this year, security or civilian authorities in seven governorates restricted the entry of IDPs fleeing conflict in Ramadi. These acts are fuelling tensions between communities and deepening fissures that will require significant mediation over time to overcome.

The crisis in Iraq has also had a significant impact on the availability of basic services, food, and shelter. Nearly 7 million people – or 20 per cent of the population – are unable to access essential health services, water and sanitation services due to the conflict. At least half of these are estimated to be women and 18 per cent are children under the age of five. Dozens of hospitals and pharmacies have been damaged or are closed. The Fallujah General Hospital has been damaged over 30 times. Maternal and neonatal services are nearly non-existent in the worst hit areas. Water and sanitation needs are particularly acute in non-camp situations, where over 90 per cent of IDPs live. The risk of diseases due to poor sanitation and limited access to health services is a major concern particularly as cholera is endemic and measles is present.

Food insecurity has increased by 60 per cent in six months. 4.4 million people now require food assistance. The Government’s public food distribution system is operating but the coverage is uneven. Reduced planting and limited access to agricultural areas still under ISIL control mean that the prospects for future harvests are bleak.

Over 1 million displaced Iraqis need shelter, particularly in the central and southern areas of the country, with more than 28 per cent of all IDPs living in public institutions, including schools and mosques, and some in unsafe buildings.

Madam President,

The UN and its partners have continued to scale up operations to respond to needs. Nearly 1 million displaced people have been provided with non-food items such as blankets, plastic sheeting and jerry cans. Some 368,000 people have received help with shelter including though the 30 camps built by the government, United Nations and other partners since July 2014. Another 13 camps are under construction.
On 7 April, Iraq celebrated one year of being polio-free. The United Nations continues to support the Iraq Ministry of Health in maintaining its polio-free status through regular vaccination campaigns targeting over 5 million children under the age of five. The UN is also 3 million people through the provision of essential drugs and medical equipment.

Madam President,

Despite this support we face immense challenges in providing assistance in Iraq. Access remains a key challenge. On 28 April, the Iraqi Government sent a request to the United Nations asking for urgent humanitarian assistance to be sent to areas in Haditha District in Anbar Governorate which is cut off by ISIL forces. People are short of food, water and medicines. A UN convoy has not been able to reach the 26,400 people trapped in the area due to insecurity.

We are working to expand humanitarian access and now have a team of access and negotiation experts on the ground. With the support of key Member States and other influential actors inside and outside Iraq, we hope to increase our reach to these areas.

Other challenges are emerging in areas of return. Those who wish to return home are afraid for their safety so the number of returnees remains limited. Ongoing security operations, the widespread presence of improvised explosive devices, and lack of public services have also dissuaded return. Returns must continue to be voluntary and when the conditions are right.

Funding shortfalls are also restricting our ability to scale up even further. Increasing needs have exhausted the generous contributions to last year's appeal. This year only 11 per cent of the US$1.2 billion required for the year has been received. Last week, health services in the Arbat IDP Camp in Sulaimaniyah were interrupted due to lack of funding. In April, food distributions were scaled back in Dahuk Governorate – the area with the highest number of IDPs – to half rations for those living outside camps. The food pipeline is due to break fully in June.

A new Humanitarian Response Plan will be released in Brussels on 4 June, and I hope donors will give generously.

The humanitarian outlook in Iraq remains deeply worrying. The number of people in need of assistance has grown seven-fold in just under a year. This number is likely to increase further before the end of the year, as conflict continues and as fear of sectarian-motivated retaliation spreads through newly accessible areas.

We must do more to protect Iraqi civilians from these rising levels of violence. We must work to expand the assistance provided to affected people in all parts of the country. Addressing humanitarian needs in Iraq requires collective action. However, humanitarian assistance alone will not bring a solution to the crisis in Iraq. The ongoing political and security conflicts must be resolved in order to end the displacement and the suffering of one-quarter of the country's people.

Thank you very much.