

Humanitarian agencies are pushed to their limits; as many as 320,000 additional civilians may flee western Mosul

(Baghdad, 19 March 2017): “The humanitarian operation in western Mosul is far larger and far more complex than in the east” said Lise Grande, the Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq. “The main difference is that tens of thousands of families stayed in their homes in the east---in the west, tens of thousands are fleeing.”

The Government of Iraq is reporting that 180,000 civilians have fled western Mosul since mid-February, when military operations to retake the western districts of the city began. Humanitarian agencies are bracing for the possibility that an additional 300,000-320,000 civilians may flee in coming weeks.

Humanitarian agencies are deeply worried that civilians are at grave risk in western Mosul. “The use of explosives in the densely populated Old City is likely to cause extensive damage, said Ms. Grande. “People fleeing are telling us that it’s very difficult to enter or leave the Old City. Families are at risk of being shot if they leave and they are at risk if they stay,” said Ms. Grande. “It’s horrible. Hundreds of thousands of civilians are trapped and they are in terrible danger.”

The main supply route into western Mosul has been cut since mid-November. Families fleeing the city are reporting that shelves are empty and that the only food available is what they already have at home. Water and electricity supplies have been cut and medicines are running out. “The situation is very dramatic,” said Ms. Grande. “We fear it will get far worse in the days and weeks ahead.”

Under the leadership of the Government of Iraq, a massive national effort is underway to address the crisis. Civilians fleeing the western districts in the city are being accommodated in 17 camps and emergency sites near the city. The Government and partners are rushing to construct and expand 10 of these. “Every day, more space is becoming available,” said Ms. Grande. “It’s a race against time. So far, families are receiving support and being sheltered. But if the number of people leaving the city increases faster than we can construct new plots, the situation could deteriorate very quickly.”

Since 17 October, over 330,000 people have been displaced by the Mosul crisis, over 70,000 of whom have returned to their homes. Humanitarian agencies have been working around the clock to provide life-saving support to more than 1.3 million people from eastern and western Mosul including families who have stayed in their homes, and those who have fled.

“We’ve been planning and preparing for the Mosul operation for months. But the truth is that the crisis is pushing all of us to our limits. We’re going to be doing the best we can to ensure the people who need assistance receive it.” said Ms. Grande.

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