THOUSANDS OF CIVILIANS ARE TRAPPED IN IRAQ AND IN DESPERATE NEED OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

(Baghdad/Erbil, 20 February 2016): The United Nations is deeply worried about thousands of civilians who are trapped in Fallujah and in Sinjar district. “Urgent steps need to be taken to alleviate the suffering of people struggling to survive in Iraq. As humanitarians, we have a common responsibility to save lives. We ask the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to uphold their obligations under humanitarian law and redouble their efforts to facilitate the evacuation and relocation of civilians to safer areas with food, water and medical care,” said Lise Grande, the UN’s Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq.

Although the UN is unable to access civilians in Fallujah city in Anbar Governorate, which remains under the control of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), information from key informants indicates that conditions are deteriorating rapidly. “We are receiving reports of hunger and shortages of medicines and essential supplies. We know that people are trying to leave the city but are prevented from doing so; we fear that the situation is becoming desperate,” said Ms. Grande.

“We are also profoundly worried about the situation in Ninewa Governorate, where more than 520 people, including an estimated 250 children, have been stranded for three months between military frontlines east of Sinjar Mountain,” said Ms. Grande. “It’s the middle of winter and these people are unable to access food, water, shelter and medical assistance. Ensuring that civilians are safe is one of our highest priorities. We call on all parties to do whatever is necessary to ensure that civilians are protected; allowing these families to cross into Government-controlled areas would dramatically improve their situation. This is about saving civilian lives,” said Ms. Grande.

More than three million people have been forced to flee their homes in Iraq since January 2014. The United Nations estimates that an additional three million people are living under ISIL control in Iraq. More than 500,000 civilians have returned to their homes following military campaigns to bring areas under Government control.

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