

WINTERIZATION ASSISTANCE IS AN URGENT PRIORITY

(Erbil, 20 October 2014): The United Nations is calling for greater winter preparedness across Iraq.

“Efforts are well underway to prepare for winter, but much more is needed,” Neill Wright, acting Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, said. “Hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons are in urgent need of protection, shelter and other essential household items.”

With heavy rains and sub-zero temperatures fast approaching, shelter is a critical concern. As winter nears, approximately 800,000 people are in urgent need of shelter assistance, and at least 940,000 lack essential household and other life-sustaining items.

While some displaced families have settled with friends and family, hundreds of thousands more have been forced to shelter in unfinished buildings, public spaces and informal settlements.

“We are particularly concerned about those displaced living in the open,” Wright said.

According to the most recent assessment in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where temperatures in the winter can range between +5 and – 16 degrees Celsius, some 80,000 internally displaced families are in urgent need of winterization assistance.

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the lead UN agency for shelter, currently has the capacity and resources to respond to the needs of just 30,000 families - less than half of the overall requirements.

“The authorities and the humanitarian actors need more resources urgently to ensure wider coverage,” Wright stressed.

The winterization activities include the distribution of core relief items, including blankets, quilts, kerosene, heating stoves, jerry cans, as well as thermal floor mats and insulation to make tents warmer and more resistant to the harsh winter conditions, especially in the northern highlands.

An estimated 1.8 million people have been displaced across Iraq since January 2014 due to ongoing violence. This makes it one of the most complex humanitarian crises in the world today. The internal displacement is in addition to the more than 215,000 Syrian refugees hosted in the country, as well as an estimated one million Iraqis previously internally displaced over the past decade.

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