General Situation

Since 2003 Middle East region witnesses the biggest exodus from Iraq to its neighbouring countries especially Syria. Other countries get Iraqi refugees are Jordan Lebanon Egypt Turkey and Iran.

Syria was the most affected country because entrance of Arabs to this country is easy. Syria doesn’t ask for visa for Arabs and allocates residency permits for one year easily. In addition they permit Iraqi children to their schools without any restriction.

Syrian authorities are estimating the number of the registered Iraqi refugees around to 1.4 millions but because of the poor registration and daily new incomers averaged per 2000 per day the number is rumoured that is more than 2 millions.

Most of the refugees are Sunni Arabs from Baghdad and other Sunni areas Turcomans and Assyrian Christians.

A substantial number of the refugees fled in the first three years are rich and capable enough to survive by their own income. They have generated some businesses in Syria and contributed financially to the country’s economy.

But on the other hand the prices of real estate doubled food and basic commodities has risen dramatically. In Syria the government subsidizes the basic commodities like fuel bread etc.

At least half of the refugees are new incomers since 2006 after the deterioration of security in Iraq and the sectarian fights between the Shias and Sunnis.

The Iraqi refugees are centered mainly in Damascus city (Massakeh-Marzeh) and outskirts of the city (Sayyed Zeinab Jaramanah Qudsayyah El Tal Saydnayah) which host 79%.

Other located in Hasakeh Tartus Deir el Zor Aleppo and other cities.

Following figures related with the basic problems refugees are facing have been taken from Syrian authorities and UN organization. Additional assessment has been completed on the field (Damascus and Aleppo) in order to access the situation of the families and do interviews about their current problems.

Economic Problems

The cost of living in Syria increased rapidly and that created reaction from the local people. The prices of food and basic commodities had doubled. The demand for bread rose by 35%. The real estate prices rose 40% and the rents doubled. The use of public transportation and private vehicles rose by 20%. Consumption of potable water rose by 21%.

Iraqi refugees have become a competitive element in labor market in all fields. The fact that Iraqis are not subject to social security and they work on cheaper salaries the unemployment rate of the Syrians increased to 18%.

The owners of private businesses numbered in hundreds. Regarding the economic capacity of the refugees they are in desperate position because of the increase of rents and commodities they are not able to stand on their own means. Most of them had sold all their properties and belongings when they flee to Syria and their economic resources have expired. Only young men in the families are able to find jobs for a salary around 100-150 USD. Comparing the rent of a house in a poor neighbourhood of Damascus reaches to an average of 300 USD most of the families are sharing the same apartments by splitting in rooms. Two or three Iraqi refugee families share the same apartment with two or three rooms. Because of the low salaries and lack of own economic means they survive with the assistance of their Syrian neighbours or Money send by their relatives from Iraq or other countries. Average number of a family is around five mostly children.

80% of the refugees have survived by Money they brought from Iraq but now expired. More than 34% of the refugee families don’t have the means to survive economically for more than one month.
Health Problems/A numerous number of Iraqi refugees are suffering chronic diseases that require long term and expensive treatment. UNHCR has set three primary care medical posts for the new incomers and is planning to include 10 more. Every year more than 30,000 Iraqi refugees are applying for long term treatment to Syrian hospitals and 3000 of them are hospitalised. Among the refugees are thousands of physically disabled children. The percentage of children among the refugees is around 34% and they need vaccination and psychological treatment. There are around 12,000 survived of heavy tortured and they are in desperate psychological position. Refugees don’t have social security and insurance so they have to pay for the medical treatment. There are more than 13,000 refugees unable to get their basic medicine such as diabetics, epileptics etc. to continue their healthy life. Syrian state hospitals and the Syrian Red Crescent have a quota for free treatment but because economic burdens they need to increase their capacities and get medical assistance through international organizations and NGO’s.

Educational Problems/ More than 76% of the refugees children aren’t continuing their education since 2-3 years in Syria. Only 32,000 Iraqi refugee children are registered to Syrian schools. In order to involve more children UNHCR Works to establish ten schools for the refugees and restore around a hundred schools. But the problem is not the premises only. Families don’t have the basic means to survive aren’t able to register their children to schools. An average of 280 USD expenditure needed for the families to register their children to primary schools. Expenses for their clothes feeding and school materials needs contribution. Because of the refugee influx the number of students in classrooms in the public schools has doubled. Each classroom in schools where Iraqi children involved have between 40-50. Syrian schools don’t have the capacity to involve more Iraqi students too. Because of the residence permit laws of Syria Iraqi families registering their children to schools get the rights for longer permit. Families doesn’t register their children loose this opportunity too. When visiting Iraqi refugee families in suburbs of Damascus we eyewitnessed that an average of two children in each family lacks of school registration. Most of them are girls under 18 years old.

Social problems/ Most of the families fled to Syria don’t have a breadwinner like the father or a young man in the family. Women aren’t used to professions and works in Iraq and don’t have any special skills to get a job in Syria. Some families depend on divorced or widowed women. In order to survive women and young girls have to be involved to jobs too. Even in the presence of a male member the salaries are so low and women must contribute to the family economy. Unfortunatley the dire conditions pushed some family members to work in prostitution or encouraged their families to do so for breadwinning. Reports on Syrian Media and Gulf TV stations about prostitution of young females of Iraqi refugees are increasing. Syrian security authorities had unfortunately detained girls below the age of 12 being badly manipulated by their parents or by organised Iraqi gangs.
Dropping out from schools which rose 80% the lack of cultural and entertainment centers gardens and playgrounds and tightness of apartments motivated children to go to the streets which may expose them to many dangers.

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**Needs to Be Covered**/ After meeting with Syrian officials on site assessment and researches on UN activities we recommend the following emergency respond for the Iraqi refugees in Syria….

- a. Food contribution to refugees families on monthly basis..(150 USD per month).
- b. Cash contribution for rent and electricity health etc(200 per month)
- c. Start up Kits(400 per family. Usually they lack of beds and furniture)
- d. Educational support for children including educational materials and clothes(350 per year)
- e. Psychological treatment centers for the young children
- f. Women informal training centers
- g. Temporary school premises(Prefabricated) for the refugee children in poor neighborhoods of big cities
- h. Monthly salaries for Iraqi teachers involved to the education in Syria(300 USD per month)
- i. Financial support for small businesses for male members of the refugees
- j. Temporary health facilities for primary health response
- k. Counselling and legal offices for the refugees
- l. Sanitation packages on monthly basis(50 USD)
- m. Provision of medicine for chronic patients(Diabetics etc)
- n. Establishment of care centers for victims of war and displacement especially for the elderly people and orphans.
- o. Training of Syrian human resources to deal with refugees victims of atrocities and lack of security

**Interviews with Beneficiary Refugees/**

- **a. Nurhan Salah** …..She fled with her family from Baghdad to Damascus. Lives in an apartment with two rooms and a hall in Jumeyde street Jaramanah Damascus and they share with the family of Salma Ali Ismail from Kirkuk. They are a family of four members. The family lost all property which looted in Baghdad. Now the father who has heart disease works for a salary of 100 USD. His son Omar and daughter are young and they dont attend the school because of economic burden. They share the rent of 300 USD with the family of Salma Ali Ismail. Salma Ali Ismail is a lady of 60 years old. Other two family members are his son and daughter. Gangs killed her other two daughters in Kirkuk and she just sold her belongings and run to Syria to survive. Now all economic resources expired and they live with subsidies their neighbours provide.

- **b. Reca Abbas Muhammed**…..She is from Samarra. Her husband has been killed. She took her ill epileptic son his wife and two grandchildren and run to Syria.. They pay 200 for the rent of one room and a hall apartment. They dont have any bed or other premises and sleep on the ground on tiny beds. No one Works in the family. They came three months before and upto now their relatives from Iraq send them a small amount of Money to assist them survive. The little girls Kamar and Aisha dont go to school. The epileptic son needs 50 USD per month form medicine. They are in desperate position dont know what to do. They live in Jaramanah
c.Khalel Salah Osman...........Shia militias have threatened to kill their son in the school in Baghdad because his name was Omar. They left him alive after taking as ransom the car of the family. Then he took his son and daughter and fled to Syria with very small amount of Money in December 2006. Now he shares an apartment with the family of his bigger son. Only the big son Works for a salary of 150 USD. They pay rent of 300 USD. Their daughter 17 years old tears because gangs killed her boyfriend. She wants to go to school and be a lawyer but the family doesn’t have Money to afford it.

IBC Set Up In Syria.........International Blue Crescent Humanitarian relief and Development Foundation has run for the assistance of Iraqi refugees in Syria by the middle of June 2007. After bureaucratic clearance with Syrian authorities IBC has signed cooperation protocols with two prominent Iraqi NGO’s based in Damascus and dealing with to solve the problems of the Iraqi refugees in Syria. These are Al Amal and ITC organizations.

IBC shares the Office of ITC in Damascus and Works to establish its own Office in few months. The Office adress is El MEZZAH AL AKRAM MOSQUA ASASA APT NO 10 ROOM 5 DAMASCUS and the mobile number 0947909572 or 00905332914028. Mr Aziz Civelek is the Project coordinator Mr Ersad Salihi (0932994929) the Field Manager and Ms Seyma Kamil (0999614855) the field officer. Temporary warehouses for the preparation of the packages will be distributed to refugees is arranged.

For any Project and cooperation in Syria you can contact Mr Muzaffer Baca (Vice President) of IBC from 90 216 3694386 /87 or 90 532 2344229

IBC Current Activities in Syria...IBC has completed its assessment of 500 beneficiaries refugees in Damascus, Aleppo and other cities by on site visits or cooperation with partner NGO’s and Syrian authorities. The list of them with their basic needs is completed.

Distribution of startup kits and cash donation of 200 USD per month for 100 families is started. The cash donation for these 100 families will continue for four months. On the other hand campaign for food distribution for all 500 families ans startup kits and cash donation for the remaining 400 families continues. The total number of the refugees will be covered will be around 2500. Families benefiting are mostly around Damascus and the rest in Tartus and Aleppo. IBC staff in the field is working on the assessment of around 2000 school children from Iraq in order to register them and provide their basic need too.

We are ready to provide you details of our projects on the other hand after completion of our set up we are intending to deal with the following activities...

a. Establishment of psychosocial treatment centers for children in Damascus suburbs
b. Support for small businesses for the male refugees
c. Informal training centers for refugees women.

With my best regards

Muzaffer Baca
Vice President
International Blue Crescent