



# Canadian Council for Refugees Conseil canadien pour les réfugiés

## Iraqi Refugee Crisis: Call for Increased Canadian Response

We call on the Canadian government to:

1. Provide increased bilateral and multilateral support to Syria, Jordan and other neighbouring countries in the region that are hosting over two million Iraqi refugees.
2. Urge the governments in the region to keep their borders open to Iraqi refugees seeking asylum.
3. Increase overall resettlement targets (for both government- assisted and privately sponsored refugees) so that there can be a significant increase in numbers of Iraqi refugees resettled to Canada, without reducing the number of refugees resettled from other regions.
4. Expedite the processing of Iraqi refugees being resettled to Canada, including the security checks.
5. Educate the Canadian public about the needs of Iraqi refugees and promote the involvement of Canadians in the private sponsorship of Iraqi refugees.
6. Respond positively to UNHCR referrals for resettlement of Palestinian refugees in the border camps between Iraq and Syria.
7. Press other countries not to forcibly return Iraqis to their country of origin.
8. Allocate additional resources to the Damascus mission to ensure that the processing of refugees is not negatively affected by the expediting of family class applications.

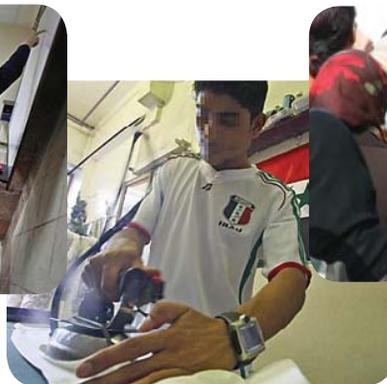


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Many organizations have endorsed this call for action. For more information, see:

<http://ccrweb.ca/iraq.htm>

# Iraqi Refugee Crisis: Call for Increased Canadian Response

## Backgrounder

- > An estimated 2.7 million Iraqis are internally displaced within their own country.
- > A further 2.2 million Iraqis have fled the country as refugees.
- > 95% of Iraqi refugees are still in the Middle East.
- > There are 1.2 – 1.4 million Iraqi refugees in Syria and 500,000 – 750,000 in Jordan.
- > Few Iraqis are arriving as asylum seekers in Canada: only 292 in 2007.
- > Iraqis inside and outside their country make up the biggest single group of displaced people worldwide.
- > Iraqis represent the largest urban refugee group UNHCR has ever assisted.

## Need for support in the region

- > The vast majority of Iraqi refugees are in Syria and Jordan.
- > Most don't have the right to work and are rapidly using up their savings.
- > Available housing is becoming overcrowded and prices are increasing prohibitively.
- > Access to healthcare is limited and often only available to those refugees who can pay.
- > A significant proportion of Iraqi refugees, including the children, have been exposed to violence and are suffering the physical and/or psychological consequences.
- > Many refugee children are not able to go to school.
- > Some children are being forced to work to help support their families. Women and children are being forced to engage in prostitution.
- > The arrival of so many Iraqi refugees has put severe pressure on the education systems, health services and infrastructure of the countries in the region, especially Syria and Jordan.



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## Closing of Borders

- > Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have kept their borders closed to Iraqi refugees.
- > Jordan has restricted entry to limited numbers of Iraqis and may be preparing to impose new visa requirements.
- > Syria used to keep its borders open, but introduced new visa restrictions in 2007.



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## Forced Returns

- > Some countries, including the UK, Netherlands, Greece, Poland, Lebanon, Jordan and the Czech Republic have forcibly returned Iraqis, directly or indirectly, to Iraq, despite the generalized situation of violence.
- > The UNHCR advises against forcibly returning any Iraqis from Central or Southern Iraq.
- > Canada has temporarily suspended removals to Iraq because of the situation of generalized risk.

## Resettlement to Canada

- > Canada resettled approximately 900 Iraqis in 2007 and committed to 1,800 to 2,000 in 2008. These numbers are quite small given the scale of the crisis.
- > There are significant numbers of Iraqi Canadians, of diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds, living in communities across Canada, who are deeply concerned about the situation of displaced Iraqis in general and specifically about family members in distress.
- > Many Canadians have demonstrated their eagerness to resettle Iraqi refugees to Canada through the private sponsorship program.
- > The Canadian government acknowledges that resettlement is important in relieving the pressure on neighbouring countries, but the numbers fall well below the need and Canada's capacity to respond.
- > Australia, with a much smaller population than Canada, has resettled many more Iraqi refugees. From 2003 to 2005, Canada resettled less than one-third as many as Australia.
- > UNHCR encourages Canada to increase resettlement numbers of Iraqi refugees including by strategically using the private sponsorship program.

## Processing of Iraqi Refugees for Resettlement

- > The refugees referred to Canada for resettlement have been women at risk, victims of severe violence or trauma or persons with medical needs. These refugees should be resettled more quickly than has been the case to date, in order to respond to the protection needs of the refugees and alleviate the pressures on countries of first asylum.
- > Security checks have been a factor in lengthy processing times. Canada has been urged by the UNHCR to expedite its security checks, which often take longer than for other resettlement countries.



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## Palestinians

- > Approximately 2,300 Palestinians are stranded in the Al Waleed and Al Tanf camps on the border between Iraq and Syria.
- > Conditions are extremely grim in the desert camps. Refugees lack security and medical care.
- > According to the Canadian government: "Canada remains particularly concerned about the situation of Palestinians, in Baghdad and stranded in border regions. This group, although a comparatively small part of the larger refugee outflow, is especially at risk and should be allowed to seek asylum and access to international protection. We urge states to work together to find both temporary and durable solutions for them."
- > Despite urgent calls from the UNHCR for resettlement for these refugees, the response from resettlement countries has been inadequate.
- > Canada has resettled a small group of Palestinians displaced from Iraq.



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