

# Quarterly Report

## (SYRIA)

PERIOD COVERED = **JULY – SEPTEMBER 2009**

---

## DRC SYRIA

### BACKGROUND AND CONFLICT

#### Description of conflict

The US led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent civil conflict have caused the displacement of about 4,5 million of Iraqi civilians: 2,5 million have fled in other regions of Iraq and 2 million have travelled abroad being more or less welcomed in neighbouring countries, mainly Syria (1.5 million), Jordan (0.5 million), Lebanon and Egypt.

#### Displacement situation

Syria has been for a while a country of asylum for Iraqis with the 1<sup>st</sup> flow of Shias fleeing the Saddam's persecution in the 90s. After having closed the border with Iraq in the 90s, Syria has been facing since 2003 its most serious influx of refugees. The Iraqi flow was divided into several phases with a 1<sup>st</sup> wave of wealthy Iraqis followed by the arrival of Sunnis after Falluja siege (2004). The Samarra bombing in February 2006 has initiated a wide sectarian violence in Iraq which has been pushing on the roads to Syria most of the Iraqi communities and sects' members (Shias, Christians, Yazidis...). Since October 2007, Syria has changed its policy regarding Iraqis and imposed visas restrictions only allowing entrance to business men and placing lots of its "Iraqi guests" in an illegal status.

Since early 2008, the mixed Iraqi refugee population of Syria (estimated at 1.5 million people) has been facing illegality and lack of resources (due to the long displacement) which put at risk its ability to live decently and with dignity in a country already affected by unemployment, and poverty. The Iraqi crisis has put an additional stress on inflation and the job market. Criminality has emerged. Prostitution of young Iraqi women in need of cash support has become as one of the reasons explaining the resentment of locals against Iraqis.

### DRC'S PRESENCE

#### DRC history

Given the humanitarian crisis, DRC has decided to carry out a pre-assessment mission in March 2007 when a team came, and took the 1<sup>st</sup> contacts with the relevant Syrian authorities (mainly the Syrian Arab Red Crescent) and other stakeholders.

Since July 2007, DRC is effectively present in Damascus and has been looking for authorisations to operate. Since summer 2007, DRC (like 7 other INGOs) has received accreditation from the Prime Minister office, as a preliminary step before operating.

Donors were contacted and submitted proposals. A Memorandum of Understanding between the SARC and INGOs was drafted in September 2007.

	<p>After a protracting negotiation period, DRC only signed its MoU with the SARC on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2008. During the 8 months of 2008 operations, DRC implemented a program consisting of Community services, school rehabilitation and livelihood support.</p>
<p><b>Brief narrative description of current DRC programme</b></p>	<p>DRC 2009 programme has been designed to consolidate its 2008 intervention focusing on the 3 following sectors: <u>community services</u> (legal/social counselling, recreational/ social activities, literacy courses, after-school program, skills development...) delivered via 5 community centres ; <u>education</u> (school construction / rehabilitation, remedial classes and awareness-raising activities) ; <u>livelihood support</u> (combining training, tool kits, cash support...). In 2009, DRC has been expanding geographically and targeting as well the Iraqi refugee population located outside Damascus (Homs, Quneitra and Daraa).</p>
<p><b>Strategic objective of programme</b></p>	<p>Protection and promotion of durable solutions for the Iraqi refugees and population affected by the displacement of Iraqis in Syria.</p>
<p><b>Immediate objectives of programme</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that immediate subsistence needs are met among the Iraqi refugees and other vulnerable population,</li> <li>• Enable the refugee population to cope with displacement issues and promote their co-existence with the hosting communities,</li> <li>• Promote access to formal education for the refugees and support a safe and positive learning environment,</li> <li>• Strengthen the capacity of authorities and local stakeholders to address and protect fundamental rights of displacement affected groups.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Target group(s)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Centres: 40,000 individual beneficiaries (mainly Iraqis),</li> <li>• School rehabilitation/expansion: 15,000 children (Syrian and Iraqis),</li> <li>• Livelihood support: 300 individuals,</li> </ul>
<p><b>Main sector(s) /type(s) of intervention</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community services: information / counselling, social / recreational / educational activities, skills development...</li> <li>• Education: school rehabilitation/expansion, quality education,</li> <li>• Livelihood support: vocational training, business management training, social support and any other assistance.</li> </ul>

<b>List of donors</b>	<p>3 donors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ UNHCR,</li> <li>○ DANIDA (Danish Government),</li> <li>○ UNICEF</li> </ul> <p>and potentially SIDA (Swedish agency), SDC (Swiss agency), ECHO...</p>
-----------------------	--

## MAIN DEVELOPMENTS DURING THE PAST QUARTER

<b>Main external developments and challenges faced during the past quarter – in terms of politics, displacement situation and security</b>	<p>No major event has marked the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2009 in Syria. The tensions between western countries and Iran with regard to the nuclear issue have increasingly affected the regional political climate. This goes against the recent warming of diplomatic relationships between Syria and the rest of the world. Dispute with Iran like conflicts in Palestine or Iraq have positioned Syria at the centre of potential resolutions and its regional importance is obviously growing. Terrorist acts, mainly in places accommodating Iraqi displaced, is the major security concern of the Syrian government. Several attempts of bomb suicide were apparently stopped by the intelligence but the threats are more acute.</p> <p>This could explain tougher restrictions on visa issuance by the government for all foreigners. Immigration policy is extremely volatile and varies with political security trends.</p> <p>Regarding the Iraqi displacement, figures are still as vague as before and official estimates unchanged: 1.5 million Iraqi refugees according to the Syrian government. Deportations of refugees arrested due to criminal and illegal works are now more frequently reported by UNHCR and make refugees more vulnerable. In late September 2009, UNHCR has officially registered about 215,000 Iraqi refugees among which 27,000 newly registered in 2009.</p> <p>The situation of the Palestinian refugees (coming from Iraq) is still very precarious. Among the 2,700 individuals gathered in the 3 camps located in the No man's land between Iraq and Syria, resettlement has started in Chile, Australia, Canada, Finland, Italy and Sweden. This has led other Palestinian residing in Syria to join the camp of Al-Tanf with the hope to being resettled. UNHCR is embarrassed by that situation and intends to close the camps (at least Al Hole camp) by the end of 2009.</p> <p>In terms of return to Iraq, the number of UNHCR assisted Iraqi returnee families is not significant. About 980 individuals only were supported since October 2008. However, the return trend seems to become much more significant even though quantifying it is still very challenging. From its relations with the Iraqi community, DRC has noticed that Iraqis are going back and forth between Syria and Iraq but rare are those who choose to settle down in Iraq.</p> <p>A few months ago, the international community was expecting a significant return to Iraq which has not happened yet due to resurging violence in Iraq. The donors have now realised that the Iraqi displacement in Syria will not be</p>
--	---

solved in the short-term and agree that support to Iraqis in Syria should be maintained for the coming 1 to 2 years.

**Main internal achievements and challenges during the past quarter**

The third 2009 quarter has been dedicated to implementation of activities agreed earlier with donors, slightly slowed down during the Ramadan period. The community services unit kept facilitating the access to information for refugees in the 5 Damascus centres and the provision of social/recreational activities to an average beneficiary population of about 2,000 people a month. DRC piloted in the community centres a psycho-social support oriented project called the “Family Support Group” with the support and lead of a DRC psychologist expert consultant, Dr. Barakat.

The community services’ team was reinforced in early September and initial plans, temporarily put aside when security tensions occurred in the centre of Sayeda Zeinab, were re-activated. Homs was visited again and centre’s establishment activities were resumed with the support of SARC. Our local counterpart requested to DRC in July to shift the location of the 2<sup>nd</sup> community centre from Deir Ezzor (to be taken over by the Danish Red Cross) to Daraa. DRC compromised and satisfied SARC requirement.

In Education, DRC reviewed in September its agreement with UNHCR and

included school extension/rehabilitation/equipment as well as non formal education activities like remedial classes, extra-curricular activities and vocational training for adolescent out-of-school.

The engineering team finalised the maintenance-rehabilitation of 18 schools located in Sayeda Zeinab (11), Homs, (4) and Quneitra (3) before the beginning of the school year (by the 7<sup>th</sup> of September), offering new studying conditions to about 14,000 children. Extension works (building additional classrooms and toilet blocks) started during summer and will be completed by end of 2009.

In parallel, UNICEF-funded quality education activities started in July with remedial classes and extra-curricular activities supporting more than 300 children. ThTraining of teachers/social counsellors (40) were prepared and first sessions took place in September 2009. The education survey is still on hold upon the Ministry of Education's request. UNHCR-funded similar soft education activities were organised during September for a start planned in October 2009.

Finally, DRC intensified discussions with UNRWA about the vocational training project for out-of-school adolescents. Information was diffused and referral of cases organised. Interviews with candidates started in late September.

**Main funding developments during the past quarter**

As mentioned above, the UNHCR-funded education project was reviewed and its budget was 50% increased in order to cover additional rehabilitation works and non-formal education activities. .

Meanwhile, a project proposal submitted ECHO direct emergency assistance and livelihood support to Iraqis was rejected.

The training project for women at risk has received a verbal approval in September from the Swiss agency (SDC) but still expects the SIDA co-funding acceptance. DANIDA was as well submitted a 2010-2011 proposal for activities located outside Damascus.