



**Danish Refugee Council**

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# **Quarterly Report**

**(SYRIA)**

<b>PERIOD COVERED = OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2008</b>
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## 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.

In early 2008, the mixed Iraqi refugee population of Syria (estimated at 1.5 million people) is 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>and since then under revision by the relevant local authorities.</p> <p>The version of the MoU presented by SARC on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2008 has been completed with an annex outlining the operational modalities, which give more flexibility to INGOs especially with regard to the financial management. After a long negotiation period, DRC has signed its MoU with the SARC on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2008.</p>
<b>Brief narrative description of current DRC programme</b>	<p>In Syria, DRC intervenes at the community level, assisting Iraqi refugees either through socio-economical services (recreational, social, psycho-social activities, vocational training, skills development...) delivered via community centres, or by renovating the Syrian educational facilities welcoming Iraqi children.</p> <p>The programme intends to be inclusive (of hosting population) and based upon the community mobilisation. Depending on authorisations, DRC wishes to define a community profiling.</p>
<b>Strategic objective of programme</b>	<p>Protection and promotion of durable solutions for the Iraqi refugees and population affected by the displacement of Iraqis in Syria.</p>
<b>Immediate objectives of programme</b>	<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>
<b>Target group(s)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerable Iraqi refugees = 33,244 people targeted among which, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 29,404 benefiting from community services,</li> <li>○ 3,840 from NFIs distribution,</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Host community members (proportion to be defined),</li> <li>• 6,825 children (both Syrian and Iraqi),</li> </ul>
<b>Main sector(s) /type(s) of intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Community services: information/counselling, social/educational activities, income generation, and quick-impact projects.</li> <li>○ Relief: NFI distribution,</li> <li>○ Education: school rehabilitation</li> </ul>

<b>List of donors</b>	<p>2 main donors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ DANIDA (Danish Government),</li> <li>○ UNHCR,</li> </ul> <p>and potentially UNICEF, ECHO, SIDA...</p>
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## 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>The positive political climate developed in 2008 by Syria with its neighbours and the westerners has been jeopardized by the Gaza armed conflict in December. The war has been seen in Syria as an aggression of Palestinian territory and civilians and provoked a huge emotion within the Syrian population where the Palestinian cause has always been well defended. The peace negotiations with Israel have been put on hold until further notice due to Syria and to Turkey.</p> <p>Regarding the Iraqi displacement, figures are as vague as before and official estimates unchanged: 1.5 million Iraqi refugees according to the Syrian government. Deportations of refugees are very scarce so far, even though negative rumours of changes in the Syrian policy are disseminated and make refugees more vulnerable.</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 and Sweden. This has led other Palestinian residing to Syria to join the camp of Al-Tanf with the hope to being resettled. UNHCR is embarrassed by that situation and wishes to close the camp as soon as possible.</p> <p>In terms of return to Iraq, the number of UNHCR assisted Iraqi returnee families is decreasing. 650 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. This was as well confirmed by the latest enrolment figure of Iraqi children in the Syrian schools provided by the MoE (33,000 children for 2008/2009 vs. 50,000 children in 2007/2008).</p>
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<b>Main internal achievements and challenges during the past quarter</b>	<p>The last quarter of 2008 has been very challenging for the whole programme. DRC management is covering now 8 community centres located in the same 4 main areas. The 2 newly established centres were fully equipped and staffs were recruited. In addition to regular activities (literacy courses, social and recreational activities, information/counselling...), DRC developed lately skills development activities targeting about 200 people in sewing/hairdressing and handicraft. The UNHCR psycho social team of Iraqi volunteers has been taken over in September by DRC and capacitated in late 2008. Cases are discussed in group sessions with the whole team.</p>
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Time was very much constraining and delivery of 200 tool kits through proper procurement requirements has been very challenging. The purchasing of trucks (QIPs) and medical equipment (Capacity Building) has been slow down and postponed up to early 2009 due to the SARC bureaucracy. Coordination with other actors (UNICEF/SARC and UNHCR) still remains the main obstacle for a smooth organisation and delivery of services.

The rehabilitation project was going quite smoothly when an accident in Zainab Fawaz school caused on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November the death of one child and the injury of another. The works were stopped for one month and an assessment was carried out by DRC in the schools in cooperation with the MoE and other Education actors (mainly UNICEF). Security measures were immediately taken and awareness was raised among all actors (including the MoE). The works resumed in early December and were completed on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 2009.

As for the Community services, procuring according to DRC guidelines has been an issue for the schools' project team. But all the schools were supplied in late 2008 with needed equipment (benches and heaters). All contracts were signed by the 31/12/2008 but some delivery took place in January 2009 due to manufacturing deadlines. Another challenge has been the financial management of the project: the team only agreed on the final version of the cost estimation at the end of it.

As a 3<sup>rd</sup> component, the vocational training scheme was postponed up to late 2008 and only started in November 2008 again due to a late SARC approval. It targeted 164 beneficiaries who followed 9 different 2-3 months courses. 2 private institutes were tested (UNRWA-DTC and New Horizon) and only UNRWA satisfied DRC expectations. The partnership with UNRWA was endorsed by SARC and supported by UNHCR as donor. It is seen very successful due to the following features: high quality training, appreciated social follow up, delivery of tool kits for the best candidates and mixed beneficiary population (between Palestinians, Palestinian-Iraqis and Iraqis).

The scheme will be ending on the 31/01/2009 but the common wish is to replicate such project/partnership during the coming year. As for the 2 other components, the tool kits procurement has been very challenging for the VT team who benefited a sort of on-the-job training, and should better manage such issues in 2009.

**Main funding developments during the past quarter**

In link with the CAP 2008 for Syria, the last quarter of 2008 has been also dedicated to fundraising activities for 2009 programme. DRC has got involved voluntarily in 90% of the working groups established for the CAP purpose (Education, PSS/Community services, Livelihood, Protection, SGBV...). This involvement has helped position DRC among the donor community for 2009. UNHCR and DANIDA have been approached as the same main donors.

But long discussions with UNICEF (for the "soft/quality education) took place as well.

DRC has finally been contacted by UNDP/ILO to attend the Livelihood CAP WG, which led DRC to be the only INGO potentially partner of UNDP/ILO for the CAP should funds be made available.

In parallel, SIDA has contacted DRC in early December 2008 as part of the

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discussions taking place between DRC and SIDA HQs.

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