



EUROPEAN COUNCIL
ON REFUGEES AND EXILES

CONSEIL EUROPEEN
SUR LES REFUGIES
ET LES EXILES

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Europe must extend solidarity to Iraqi Refugees in the EU

(Brussels, 15 February 2007) **While Europe's attention is focussed on the plight of Iraqi refugees in the Middle East, little attention is paid to the suffering of thousands of Iraqis on our doorstep, says the European Council on Refugees and Exiles.**

Today, the European Parliament adopted a motion calling for help for the 1.8 million refugees in Iraq's neighbouring countries and noting that persecution and high levels of violence and crime are still forcing Iraqis to flee.

ECRE Secretary General Bjarte Vandvik said,

"Anyone who watches TV and sees what is happening in Iraq would not want any of their family or friends to be sent there. As Europeans we should show solidarity to Iraqis who come here in search of safety and allow them a dignified standard of living,"

Earlier this week Sweden, which hosts some 90,000 Iraqis and where more than 9,000 Iraqis claimed asylum last year, called on other European countries to share the responsibility. The subject was discussed by European interior ministers at today's Justice and Home Affairs Council.

ECRE is calling on European countries to follow the recommendations of the European Parliament and show solidarity with countries in the region, in particular by offering resettlement places to some of the 20,000 most vulnerable Iraqis in the region.

"When European states go as far as sending soldiers to fight for security, democracy and human rights in Iraq, it would be a paradox if the same states then denied protection to the people of Iraq who flee the country because they feel insecure and threatened," Vandvik continued.

Germany, which holds the EU Presidency has revoked the refugee status of some 18,000 Iraqis since 2004, merely tolerating their presence and leaving them no means to support themselves. In Denmark and the UK, Iraqis who have been refused asylum are similarly destitute, while on Monday the UK deported 38 Iraqis to Northern Iraq.

ECRE urges EU Member States to follow Sweden's humane and responsible approach by:

- deciding Iraqi asylum claims quickly, fairly and generously;
- maintaining or granting a legal status with entitlement to housing, health, employment, and education for all Iraqi nationals whose asylum claims have been rejected up to the time of their departure;
- to refrain from forcibly returning any Iraqi citizens, at least until there is an effective and sustainable infrastructure in Iraq to uphold the rule of law and safeguard human rights and until the country is in a stable enough position to absorb those people who have already returned.

For further comment/background and interviews:

ECRE Secretary General, Bjarte Vandvik
+32 2234 3801 or +32 478695696
Email: bvandvik@ecre.org

ECRE EU Representative, Richard Williams:
Tel: +32 2234 3802 or +32 495 241316
Email: rwilliams@ecre.org

Note for editors:

1. The European Council on Refugees and Exiles represents 80 refugee assisting NGOs in 30 European countries, and is concerned with the needs of all individuals seeking refuge and protection within Europe.

2. The text of the draft resolution will be made available at:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/default_en.htm