



Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

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Iraqi Refugee Women and Youth: Sick and Suffering U.S. and International Community Must Support Health Sector Appeal

New York, NY, September 24, 2007—The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children today called on the United States and the international community to respond quickly and fully to the United Nations interagency appeal for \$85 million dollars to provide desperately needed health care for Iraqi refugees in Jordan, Syria and Egypt.

On a recent trip to Jordan, the Women's Commission saw firsthand the urgent need for this assistance. Iraqi refugees have limited or no access to even basic health services. The cost of accessing health care is beyond the means of most refugees. At the time of our visit in June, there were only two clinics providing free or subsidized medical care to the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees in Jordan.

The barriers to affordable health care have dire implications for Iraqi refugees. They are not getting the treatment they need for chronic conditions like heart disease, high blood pressure or cancer and women and girls are not receiving critical reproductive health services. The longer this endures, the greater the number of lives at risk.

"The health situation for Iraqi refugees is unconscionable and women and children are in particular need given the vulnerability of their situation," said Carolyn Makinson, Executive Director. "Iraqi women and children have suffered terrible trauma and violence – we have a responsibility to care for their health. The international community must act now to alleviate this situation."

Iraqi women and girls' health needs particular attention. In Iraq, women and girls have been targets of sexual violence, including rape. They are now suffering the double burden of the trauma they experienced and forced displacement from their homes. According to the refugees the Women's Commission met with in Jordan, the stresses and pressures of refugee life are also causing a rise in domestic violence. And because refugees cannot legally work in Jordan, women and girls remain vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse. For all these reasons, women and girls must have easy and regular access to medical attention and psychological and social support services for survivors of rape and abuse.

In addition to fully supporting this new health appeal and an earlier education appeal, the U.S. government and international community must also develop a more comprehensive assistance strategy for Iraqi refugees that reflects the magnitude of the refugee crisis. This should include significantly increased humanitarian assistance for refugees, greater support for refugee receiving countries, and robust resettlement programs for highly vulnerable Iraqis.

"Iraqi refugees are becoming more vulnerable by the day," Makinson said. "The time to act is now."

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**For more information, to arrange an interview or to view B-roll footage, please contact
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The Women's Commission was established in 1989 to address the particular needs of refugee and displaced women and children. The Women's Commission is affiliated with and is legally part of the International Rescue