

**Brice Hortefeux
Minister of Immigration, Integration,
National Identity and Co-Development
EU Presidency**

Brussels, 21 November 2008

Subject:

Resettlement of Palestinian refugees from Border Camps: Time to act!

Dear Minister,

In the week of 9 November a delegation of representatives from NGOs from all over the world conducted a mission to the region (Syria and Iraq). The delegation visited the Al Tanf, Al Hol and Al Waleed camps on the borders of Syria and Jordan. The representatives of the NGOs spoke to the men, women and children living in the three camps and saw with their own eyes the desperate situation they live in. The 940 Palestinians living in the Al Tanf camp (located in the desert in the no-man's land between Iraq and Syria) cannot return to Iraq and are not allowed to enter Syria either. The Al Hol camp in Syria houses approximately 340 refugees who have been staying in the camp for more than two years. Syria will not provide the conditions for these refugees to locally integrate and they too cannot return to Iraq. The NGO mission also visited Al Waleed camp, which is located just inside Iraq, near the Syrian border. Approximately 1750 people have been living in that camp for 2 years, they are mostly Palestinians from Iraq who tried to flee into Syria but were not given access. There are no possibilities to work in those camps and access to health care and education is very limited. Living conditions especially in the Al Waleed and the Al Tanf camp are very harsh. Since neither local integration nor return in safety and dignity is possible now or in the near future, it is the NGO mission's conclusion that resettlement is the only option for the Palestinian refugees in these three camps.

The first week of November a EU fact-finding mission to Syria and Jordan took place to assess the needs of the refugee population stranded there, following the conclusion of the JHA Council on 28 September 2008. The fact-finding mission also visited the Al Tanf camp. The EU now has first-hand knowledge of the extremely difficult circumstances the Iraqi refugees are living in Syria and Jordan.

On the occasion of the JHA Council on 27 November 2008, the undersigned NGOs call upon all 27 EU Member States to join forces and help resolve this situation of the Iraqi Palestinians by resettling them to Europe, based on their urgent protection needs. If each Member State would share the responsibility equally this would amount to resettling a mere 10 families each. This modest act would provide a durable solution for the Palestinians in the Al Hol, Al Tanf and Al Waleed camps.

The Member States should also strive to provide resettlement as a durable solution to Iraqi refugees in the region, particularly the most vulnerable amongst them.

Europe cannot stand back and just watch, it must act now.

Yours sincerely,



Amnesty International EU Office



Danish Refugee Council



Dutch Council for Refugees



European Council On Refugees and Exiles



Finnish Red Cross



Flemish Refugee Action



International Catholic Migration Commission



International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims



International Rescue Committee – Belgium and the United Kingdom

Attachments:

- *From fast death to slow death: Palestinian refugees from Iraq trapped on the Syria-Iraq border*, Summary report of an International NGO Delegation, November 20, 2008
- Joint NGO-letter to JHA Council, 28 July 2008