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|                     |
|---------------------|
| Basic facts         |
| News                |
| Protecting refugees |
| Donors/Partners     |
| Publications        |
| Statistics          |
| Research/Evaluation |
| Executive Committee |
| Administration      |
| Special events      |
| How you can help    |

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You are in: News

Today's date: Monday, 17 March 2003

## UNHCR News Stories

### Halt return of all rejected Iraqi asylum seekers, advises UNHCR



An Iraqi asylum-seeker at Germany's Federal Office for the Recognition of Foreign Refugees. © UNHCR/A.Hollmann

GENEVA, March 11 (UNHCR) – In view of current tensions in Iraq, the UN refugee agency today asked governments to refrain from sending rejected Iraqi asylum seekers back home against their will, irrespective of their areas of origin in Iraq.

In addition, the agency has recommended that all Iraqis outside their homeland should be granted temporary protection for an initial period of three months.

In the past, various forms of temporary protection were granted by governments, such as during the 1999 crisis in Yugoslavia, the Balkan wars of the early 1990s, and Central America's civil conflicts.

Last year, more than 51,000 Iraqis claimed asylum worldwide, making them the largest single group of asylum seekers in industrialised countries. The United Kingdom saw the highest number of Iraqi asylum seekers, with 14,900 claims, followed by Germany with 10,400, Sweden with 5,400, Austria with 4,600 and Greece with 2,600.

Every year, thousands of Iraqis also approach UNHCR's offices in countries surrounding Iraq to seek the refugee agency's protection and assistance. There are some 400,000 recognised Iraqi refugees worldwide, more than half of whom live in Iran.

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Side 2 af 2

While the UN refugee agency hopes that a conflict can be avoided in Iraq, it has stockpiled in regional warehouses tents, plastic tarpaulins, blankets, mattresses, stoves, lanterns, kitchen sets and other items sufficient to assist more than 200,000 people. The International Federation of the Red Cross, which recently signed a framework agreement with UNHCR, together with the national Red Crescent societies in the Iraq region, has additional supplies.

The UN refugee agency recently appealed for \$60 million to fund its initial preparedness effort in the event of a war in Iraq, but has so far received only \$16.6 million. The agency has already spent more than \$25 million to purchase supplies and field additional staff by borrowing funds that must be repaid.

Story date: 11 Mar 2003

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