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The UN refugee agency cautions against European deportations to Iraq

News Stories, 08 June 2010



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An Iraqi refugee plays with his daughter at a reception centre in Europe.

GENEVA, June 8 (UNHCR) – The UN refugee agency on Tuesday stressed its concern that Iraqi asylum applicants in Europe should continue to receive international protection amid fears that some countries may send Iraqi citizens back home.

"UNHCR understands that four governments – the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom – are arranging an enforced removal of Iraqi citizens to Baghdad, Iraq later this week," UNHCR's chief spokesperson, Melissa Fleming, told journalists in Geneva, while adding that the agency had not received confirmed information of the number and profile of those individuals and whether some had requested protection

"Our position and advice to governments is that Iraqi asylum applicants originating from Iraq's governorates of Baghdad, Diyala, Ninewa and Salah-al-Din, as well as from Kirkuk province, should continue to benefit from international protection in the form of refugee status under the 1951 Refugee Convention or another form of protection depending on the circumstances of the case," she stressed.

Fleming said UNHCR's position reflected the volatile security situation and the still high level of prevailing violence, security incidents and human rights violations taking place in these parts of Iraq. UNHCR considers that serious – including indiscriminate – threats to life, physical integrity or freedom resulting from violence or events seriously disturbing public order are valid reasons for

international protection.

"UNHCR appreciates that the international protection needs of Iraqis are assessed by asylum authorities in Europe and elsewhere on an individual basis. We urge those authorities to ensure that the situation in Iraq as a whole, including the important level of lawlessness, is factored into their assessments," Fleming told a press briefing.

While some have proposed that returned Iraqis could reside in other parts of the country from where they originate, UNHCR's position is that no internal flight alternative exists in Iraq because of the continuing levels of violence in Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah Al-Din, and in view of access and residency restrictions in various governorates as well as the hardship faced by returnees in ensuring even survival in areas of relocation.

The continued insurgency in Iraq and the violence there has led to large-scale internal and external displacement of the Iraqi population, with most refugees living in Syria and Jordan. UNHCR is concerned about the signal that forced returns from Europe could give to other host countries, particularly those neighbouring Iraq.

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