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As Mosul Displacement Continues, UNHCR Steps Up Assistance

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As fighting intensifies in the more densely-populated urban areas of Mosul, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is preparing for possible large-scale movements and is ready to provide further shelter and protection assistance to displaced Iraqis, inside and outside camps.

Some 47,730 Iraqis have been displaced since the beginning of the offensive in Mosul on 17 October 2016, according to inter-agency data as of 11 November. Numbers have approximately doubled in the last week and are expected to continue to rise as the fighting continues. Several significant population movements from Mosul were recorded in the last week, especially around Gogjali and the city's eastern neighbourhoods.

UNHCR and humanitarian partners are providing life-saving protection and assistance to newly-displaced families, making sure they have adequate shelter, and basic household items including mattresses, stoves, kitchen sets, hygiene sets and jerrycans. Overall, more than 3,500 packages of emergency relief items have been distributed by UNHCR and its partners since the start of the offensive.

UNHCR is also increasing its protection monitoring and psychosocial and legal assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) through mobile teams to ensure timely interventions when concerns are identified. People with specific needs or vulnerabilities are being identified quickly to ensure they receive specialized support. Reports of a disproportionate number of female-headed households have raised concerns about family separation. More than 50 unaccompanied or separated children have been identified for appropriate assistance; and 443 vulnerable families have been referred for cash assistance.

In terms of shelter, UNHCR already has six camps open, with a capacity to host 54,408 people. UNHCR is planning for a total of 11 camps, should land be made available, with a capacity for 120,000 people, and it is also actively engaged in identifying further land for emergency sites. This is part of a broader response with the government of Iraq and other humanitarian partners who are also reinforcing camp capacity and preparing for other shelter options to support a total of 700,000 internally displaced Iraqis if needed.

On 5 November, UNHCR opened a new site at Hasansham, hosting more than 10,000 people. All of the newly arrived IDPs have received emergency relief items. A final section of the camp, with 240 tents, is due to open this week. New arrivals in the last few days from eastern Mosul are currently being sheltered at the nearby Khazer M1 camp of the Iraqi Government, where UNHCR is providing emergency relief items. Another UNHCR camp, Zelikan, is currently hosting 2,270 individuals, or 456 families.

UNHCR already has 30,000 tents in country, with more procured, while land is currently available to pitch 20,000 tents.

In Iraq, as temperatures have begun to sharply drop at night, UNHCR and its partners have also begun distributing essential winter items to 1.2 million recently-displaced Iraqis including for families who have fled the Mosul offensive.

UNHCR is stressing that residents of Mosul seeking sanctuary must not be prevented from fleeing and that they should have access to safe areas including the emergency camps. Likewise, civilians must not be forced to return to unsafe areas. UNHCR is also appealing for more international funding to assist those likely to be displaced in coming months. UNHCR's Mosul Emergency Response Appeal -- of USD 196.2 million -- is now 57 per cent funded. Underfunding will severely limit the agency's capacity to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable families during winter - particularly for heating.

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