

**25 September 2008**

***ECRE position on  
Initial EU response to the huge refugee resettlement needs***

ECRE welcomes the Conclusions of the Justice and Home Affairs Council of 25 September 2008 on the reception of Iraqis in the Member States of the European Union.

Currently, more than 3,000 Palestinian refugees are living in makeshift camps in Syria and in Iraq, near the border with Syria. The conditions in these camps are extremely difficult. Danger is everywhere, especially for children, and the health situation has become increasingly dire.

In a letter co-signed by ECRE and 13 other leading refugee-assisting organisations and sent to French Minister Hortefeux on 28 July 2008, the EU is urged to resettle this group given the pressing humanitarian situation. We therefore welcome the Council's decision to support a fact-finding mission to Syria and Jordan in order to assess the needs of the refugee population stranded in these camps to be carried out as soon as possible. The fact-finding mission should also look at the needs of other vulnerable populations in Iraq who equally need and deserve the assistance of the European Union.

Currently, Denmark, The Netherlands, Sweden and Iceland have already taken some action to relieve the situation of these refugees. Given that in some cases resettlement is the only solution to offer to refugees who cannot return to their countries because they would face persecution, ECRE calls on more EU countries to resettle this group of refugees in order to address this particularly grave situation.

At present, nine European countries<sup>1</sup> have active resettlement programmes, providing protection to refugees and offering them the chance to rebuild their lives in safety. ECRE especially calls on Member States that currently do not have active resettlement programmes to take part in the fact-finding mission.

The European share of global resettlement of refugees remains modest, with less than 5% of total refugees resettlement each year. ECRE therefore urges more EU Member States to take the necessary steps to undertake resettlement activities, and thus contribute to a greater sharing of the global responsibility.

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<sup>1</sup> Denmark, Finland, UK, Ireland, Portugal (the programme was announced in 2007), Sweden, Iceland, Netherlands and Norway