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Resettlement of Iraqi Refugees in the European Union
Discussion Paper from the German Delegation

The humanitarian consequences of the security situation in Iraq give rise to growing concern. More than 4.6 million Iraqis have been uprooted so far. The UNHCR considers it the most significant displacement in the Middle East since 1948. Violence against the Iraqi population, including acts of terrorism, politically or religiously motivated, or sectarian attacks and forced displacements continues. The number of persons who are displaced within Iraq has now risen to 2.7 million. More than 2.2 million Iraqis are living in the neighbouring countries, most of them in Syria and Jordan. The reception capacities in the safer regions of Iraq and in the neighbouring countries which receive the persons who flee from conflict and violence with solidarity and assistance, are exhausted. Often, the refugees are lacking the most basic provisions.

So far, the European Union has concentrated its activities on humanitarian assistance for the refugees in the region. For 2007 and 2008 the European Community has provided humanitarian aid to refugees and internally displaced persons of € 50 million and - as announced at the GAERC last week - another € 60 million as part of the general assistance to Iraq and the neighbouring countries. This adds to the considerable financial assistance given by the Member States. Member States also contribute significantly to alleviate the plight of the refugees by hosting large numbers of asylum seekers and refugees who apply for asylum on their territory.

However, in the light of the ongoing widespread insecurity, violence and violation of human rights in Iraq and the dire situation of the refugees the European Union should go further than giving financial assistance in the region and granting protection to those refugees who reach the territory of the European Union.

In a situation in which refugees have no chance to return to their country or regions of origin in the foreseeable future and in which local integration in the host countries in the region is not a realistic option, the European Union should give a clear political signal of solidarity and more active humanitarian assistance towards refugees and receive refugees from the region who have some prospects in Europe.

Individual Member States are already engaged in the resettlement of Iraqi refugees.

Germany sees the urgent need for rapid action by the European Union. In the preamble to the Lisbon Treaty the European Union commits itself to the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe. In this spirit, the European Union should receive vulnerable persons who are in need of protection, such as members of religious and ethnic minorities and others, on a voluntary basis. Germany therefore proposes a common effort within the European Union encouraging Member States willing to participate to resettle vulnerable persons in need of protection who fled to the neighbouring countries or are displaced within Iraq.

In implementing the resettlement Member States should cooperate with the UNCHR, which registers, identifies and submits Iraqi refugees for resettlement, as well as with other relevant organisations represented in the region. The principle of family unity should be applied as far as possible and the persons who are received should be given a status according to national law which takes into consideration the rights of refugees under Directive 2004/83.