



Update on IDP and USAID Mission Activities in Iraq

Denise Herbol , USAID Iraq Deputy Mission Director
Washington, DC
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MR. DUCKWORTH: Good morning, everyone. How are you today? We are lucky to have with us USAID Iraq Deputy Mission Director Denise Herbol. She will start with an opening statement and then we'll open it up for questions and answers. When you open -- ask your questions, if you could please introduce yourself and give your affiliation, we'd appreciate that.

All right, thank you.

MS. HERBOL: Thank you for coming this morning. All right. And as was said, my name's Denise Herbol and I'm the Deputy Director for USAID in Iraq.

I've been with USAID for 26 years. Prior to Iraq, I served in countries such as the Congo, India, Ghana, Belize, Albania, Uganda, Ukraine and Colombia. I don't go to the easy spots. What I do like is going to places where we make a difference. I've been in Iraq since August 2007 and have traveled to 14 of our PRTs and embedded PRTs in Iraq. And each trip has reaffirmed my knowledge that our team is implementing one of the most dynamic, challenging, and fulfilling programs in USAID.

USAID is a major contributor to the U.S. Government's development and humanitarian effort in Iraq. We work closely with coalition forces, Department of State, Department of Defense, NGOs, international organizations, and most importantly, the Iraqi Government. Our efforts directly support Iraq's transition to a stable, democratic, and prosperous state through the promotion of democracy, rule of law, and sustainable economic development that responds to the Iraqis' needs.

USAID provides humanitarian assistance in Iraq to internally displaced persons – IDPs – and the communities that host them. IDPs are Iraqis that have been displaced within Iraq, as opposed to refugees who are Iraqis that have been displaced to other countries such as Jordan or Syria. The Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration – State PRM – provides assistance on Iraq refugees and can provide answers to your questions on them.

There are approximately 2.7 million displaced persons in Iraq. This includes 1.5 million people who were displaced prior to the Samarra bombing in February 2006, which touched off widespread sectarian violence, and the 1.2 million individuals that were displaced prior to that date. An estimated 80 percent of Iraqi IDPs live in rented housing or with host families, while the remaining 20 percent found shelter in public buildings or other informal settlements. Most IDPs do not live in tented camps.

Since 2003, USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance – OFDA – has contributed \$270 million in humanitarian assistance, targeting more than 80 million IDPs and 17 of the 18 governorates as well as host communities. We work through the United Nations, NGOs, and other international organizations that implement our programs. In Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Basra, Diyala, Erbil, Karbala, Qadisiya, Salah ad Din and Sulaymaniyah governorates, USAID funded the provision of emergency relief and water purification units to help 108,000 conflict-afflicted Iraqis. In six districts in the Anbar Governorate, our implementing partners distributed safe drinking water to 30,000 people, including 21,000 IDPs. Across Babil, Najaf, Muthana, Karbala and Thi Qar governorates, USAID has supported mobile medical teams to provide emergency health assistance to 50,000 beneficiaries, 80 percent of whom are IDPs.

Working through our implementing partners, USAID provides relief to IDPs and host communities in the areas of health, emergency relief supplies, shelter and settlements, income generation, psycho-social activities, and clean water and sanitation. Despite ongoing insecurity in Sadr City, humanitarian organizations were able to implement emergency activities to provide food, water, and health care. Some of our projects are multi-sectoral, such as expanding a school and upgrading the water supply and sanitation facilities to accommodate IDP children, while simultaneously providing employment opportunities to IDPs and supporting the host community through school improvements.

Although significant improvements must be made to central services and across the social services, IDPs have varying degrees of access to water, sanitation, education, and health care. The homes of many are basic, and many live in crowded, spartan quarters with few amenities, as is typical for many urban and Iraqi poor. IDPs often work as day or migrant laborers or farm local land. For some IDPs, the long-term nature of their displacement may require that they are supported in efforts to either fully integrate into the local communities where they currently live, or be resettled in other areas where they will be accepted and given full residential rights. In either case, policy-level engagement at the provincial level will be required to intervene on their behalf.

USAID also provides advisors to the Ministry of Displacement and Migration – MODM – which has the primary responsibility for managing Iraqi IDPs for the GOI. Some of this assistance includes information management coordination, as well as developing the capacity of ministerial staff. As a result of these interventions, MODM has significantly improved its data collection and registration process of IDPs, so much so that there seems to be a perception that there's an increase in displacements in Iraq. This is not the case. There are fewer and fewer reports of displacements. These numbers simply reflect the vast improvement in MODM's capacity to reach out and register IDPs.

The MODM prepared a budget request and justification that included targeted assistance to Iraqi families through stipends and funding for transport. In response, the Iraqi Council of Ministers has provided them \$195 million for IDP assistance. Capacity-building assistance provided to MODM by USAID enabled the ministry to determine its needs and formulate and submit a budget reflecting those needs, thereby ensuring the Iraqi Government is meeting this critical Iraqi need using Iraqi money.

Security has improved dramatically throughout Iraq and is gradually improving areas that have experienced military operations in recent months. Areas such as Sadr City and Mosul have experienced a limited amount of temporary displacement in spite of these military operations. I have personally traveled to both locations over the past month and can speak to that.

Although we have not seen any indication of mass returns at this point in time, IDPs are slowly returning from provinces where they have been displaced to their home of origin. Most of the returns are in the Baghdad area. According to a recent estimate by MODM, over 4,000 IDP families returned to Sadr City due to improvements in security. During the recent fighting, approximately 187 people left Sadr City and were sheltered at the Al-Sha'ab Stadium, which I did visit. All have since returned back to Sadr City and that camp has closed.

Since its inception, USAID's microfinance program has disbursed over \$170 million in loans to over 75,000 beneficiaries. The average size of a loan is \$2,000. And we have had a 99 percent repayment. The programs I've described above provide the building blocks for the Iraqi people as they move forward in peaceful pursuit of a democratic future. And as security continues to improve, the Iraqis will be able to find a solution to the displacement issues they face. USAID's development and assistance programs will continue to assist in building the foundation vital to Iraq's stability, long-term prosperity and growth.

Thank you.

MR. DUCKWORTH: Now, we'll open up for questions.

QUESTION: In addition to the 270 million in micro-loans, it says 70 –

QUESTION: 170.

QUESTION: 170, sorry. Now, those are a thousand per person. Like, could you – I'm sorry, can you just, you know, that was just a lot to – it was great, but a lot to digest.

MS. HERBOL: Sure.

QUESTION: Could you just kind of boil it down to what you're doing to help these IDPs in addition to these micro-loans?

MS. HERBOL: Our partners go to affected communities. They provide –

QUESTION: When you say partners.

MS. HERBOL: We have five implementing partners in the country.

QUESTION: Iraqi?

MS. HERBOL: No. They're international NGOs.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR. STAHL: Mostly Iraqi staff, but –

MS. HERBOL: Right. In fact, USAID has over 3,000 partners and they are staffed throughout the country. The bulk of those are Iraqis who work for those organizations.

QUESTION: Okay. Okay. So you have international NGOs that go in there and work with them and try to find them housing?

MS. HERBOL: Now -- in some cases, let's take Sadr City, for instance. They will work on – if a house was damaged during the fighting, they'll work helping them to renovate the house. In the case of one of our programs, the CAP project, people – sorry, the Marla Ruzicka Project, victims – innocent mortar victims are provided not cash, but – let's say you lost your home, they'll replace the home. Let's say you lost your business, they'll help you to replace your business. A child may have been injured and need plastic surgery; they'll help take the child out and get the surgery they need.

MR. STAHL: Can I – maybe I'll add a little. My name is Tom Stahl, by the way, I'm the director of the Iraq office here in Washington, providing support out to the field. As Denise was explaining for the IDPs, these partners provide kind of a basket of services. When they first are – first of all, it's to help identify them, find them and then, depending on what they need, they might need blankets or cooking pots, you know, some immediate things, help them to get registered locally for the public distribution system, so they start to get a food ration, and then they work in the communities where they're based. There aren't – I think Denise said there aren't sort of camps of IDPs or refugees that you might see in some countries.

MS. HERBOL: Right.

MR. STAHL: They're in the communities, but they need water, they need health care. So those are the kind of things that the – our partners do. They make sure. They might help drill wells in a community, provide some addition to the school so it can handle the influx, that sort of thing. And then as Denise was mentioning, really working with the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, which within the Iraqi Government is the key office that's supposed to help these people.

MS. HERBOL: Right.

MR. STAHL: And so – try to build up their thing –

MS. HERBOL: Capacity.

MR. STAHL: And they've done a good job. I think made a lot of –

MS. HERBOL: Well, and that's a success story. The Ministry of Displacement and Migration, when I first got there in August, was considered by the Iraqi Government a very weak ministry. Our partners, USAID, myself, have spent a significant amount of time working on developing the capacity of the minister and his staff to run the ministry, to reach out. And in fact, the increased number of registrations that we're seeing is attributed to the fact that they have been able to turn things around. So while there was this thought that there were more displacements, in fact, it was just they were registering more of the IDPs out in the community.

QUESTION: And then, sorry. In addition to this 170 million, can you just – I'm sorry if you said this at the top before I came in – but do you have a figure for the total amount of money that you've spent?

MS. HERBOL: On IDPs?

QUESTION: On IDPs.

MS. HERBOL: Yeah. We have spent, since 2003, \$270 million through the OFDA program.

This year's budget – do you know the numbers this year, because I'm not sure I know the total number this year?

MR. STAHL: No, I don't. We hope to get more from the supplemental –

MS. HERBOL: The supplemental. We don't have final numbers yet. So we're trying to figure out.

QUESTION: What's – can you talk a little more generally? I'm assuming that these are people that have been displaced by violence in the country. Can you talk about what you're seeing? Is the ultimate goal to have these people get back to where they were before the war, before the violence displaced them? Is that part of your mission? And whose mission would that be part of? And do you see – from you being on the ground, conditions in place where that could actually be the case soon?

MS. HERBOL: A couple of questions there. Okay, let's start with – the Ministry of Migration is the one, along with the Government of Iraq, who are going to ultimately determine how returns are going to take place. There are a lot of people in Jordan and in Syria. We have not seen any massive returns from those locations yet. And we do not believe that at this point in time that conditions are ready yet for massive returns. However, the ministry is working, developing their budget, getting the supplemental money, preparing the way for returns.

Within Iraq itself, there have been some small movements of people from one province back to their home location. These are voluntary. They're very small. We don't have really actually any statistical data, because it's not been anything that's been high-profile return that you could point –

QUESTION: Just piecemeal?

MS. HERBOL: Just piecemeal. And in all those cases, those were people returning back to empty homes. We have yet to see anybody returning back to a location where there's been somebody sitting in their home and the conflict arise from that. That is something that the Government knows that they have to address and work on, and they will be over this next year working on policies for that very purpose.

Recently, they just passed the national policy on IDPs by the Council of Ministers so that's the – you know, several pieces of legislation now have been moved forward. The basic law (inaudible) for IDPs (inaudible) has received its first reading in the Council of Representatives. It has two more readings to go. Once that's passed, it will be another stepping stone towards developing final policy for returning IDPs.

It's not our role to tell the Government of Iraq what they should do. It's our role to provide support to the IDP's as the process moves forward.

QUESTION: Do you think based on what you see on the ground that they could begin to move – I mean, you said that infrastructure maybe isn't in place right now within the ministry to do it. But based on the situation on the ground, do you think that they could start moving people back if they had the capability to do so at this point without large-scale conflicts erupting again?

MS. HERBOL: I don't want to guess. I will say that the government is focused on housing and building more housing because – is identified as a lack of housing, in general, in Iraq. So that is one area – and that's a longer term thing. It takes a while to build housing. Again, I think the stability, the peace that we have seen – I have traveled extensively throughout Iraq. I walked five hours through Sadr City the other day. I was walking four hours up in the Nineveh Plain through the religious and minority camps up there. Trudged around Adamiyah for a bunch of hours with some guys, you know, and felt pretty secure in doing it. I think that as peace and stability continues, you'll see that that will be a precursor to returns.

QUESTION: And when do you think that might happen?

MS. HERBOL: I don't have a crystal ball.

QUESTION: And then you mentioned also that the conditions weren't right for a massive return from Syria and Jordan. I know that may be a little bit outside of your IDP focus, but I was curious why you said that.

MS. HERBOL: Because it is this statement that the UN does make that the conditions aren't yet ready on the ground. And again, I believe it has to do with things that we've talked about. There's not a lot of housing yet. There really – that's something that has to be addressed. Policies need to be in place. Property rights laws need to be addressed yet. So these things need to be completed, I believe, before there will be massive returns.

QUESTION: And before the IDPs return, did you get any guarantees from the ministry that the returns will not be based on confessional grounds?

MS. HERBOL: On –

QUESTION: On religious grounds.

MS. HERBOL: The government is fully supportive of people returning to their home communities. They have made those statements. I believe that that was stated up in Stockholm.

MR. STAHL: National policy –

MS. HERBOL: And the national policy itself says that, you know, that people are free to return to their own home locations.

QUESTION: Because we went with – in Kurdistan, twice actually, with the Secretary, and every time we saw that people – there was a kind of ethnic cleansing – especially in Kurdistan.

MS. HERBOL: I have not traveled to the KRG. It's one of the few places I have not been to. So I really can't answer that. But I – again, the national policy itself is very clear that people are free to return to their home locations and to support religious rights.

QUESTION: Well, they're free to. They're free to. But I guess what we're asking is, do you still see the kind of religious discrimination against people returning – of ethnic minorities returning to their homes, because they left because of ethnic cleansing.

MS. HERBOL: I have not seen that. No. And I have not heard that, no.

QUESTION: You haven't heard anything about ethnic cleansing?

MS. HERBOL: No, I mean about that that is a policy that people are concerned about not letting people back to their homes. The Minister is very committed to making sure that all religions are respected and that their rights of return are respected.

QUESTION: Do you know how many from the – those people that would like to apply to resettle in America or to –

MS. HERBOL: No. I'm sorry, I don't know that. That would be a question for the refugee program.

MR. STAHL: Yeah. We can get with PRM afterwards.

QUESTION: Okay. Thanks very much.

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