

Address by Queen Noor of Jordan

Annual Consultations with NGOs 25 June 2008

Good morning,

It is an honor for me to be among you today. Your tireless work under challenging circumstances on behalf of refugees throughout the world is truly heroic, and I applaud every one of you.

The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, in this, its 60th year, applies nowhere more strongly than to Refugees, whose need for freedom, dignity and security is magnified a thousand-fold by their exile.

As you know first-hand, the world is experiencing a **global refugee crisis of staggering proportions**. An astounding 67 million people throughout the world have been forced to leave their homes - equivalent to a population larger than most countries.

((This population is at record levels and increasing. Environmental disasters are joining political, ethnic and economic conflict as the main causes of displacement - particularly as we experience changing global climate trends. Last year, half of all Internally Displaced Persons were victims of natural disasters.))

These forced migrations have a **multi-dimensional effect** on the people themselves, the places they've left, and the places they move to. And the choices that leaders make regarding them carry long term consequences.

For 35 years I have **lived and worked in** one of the world's major conflict regions, home to over **10** million refugees and displaced inhabitants. I have **witnessed** the anguish of those uprooted from their lives and, like you, committed myself to support them. When I married my husband His Majesty King Hussein, every day included some action to achieve the just and peaceful return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland. Today, up to 6 million displaced Palestinians continue to hold out hope of returning to their own land.

With a variety of Governments, UN and International organizations, our Jordanian Red Crescent Society and as a board member of RI since 2001, I have also worked with the displaced of Afghanistan in Pakistan, the Iraqis in Jordan,

IDPs in Columbia, and Somalis and others seeking safe haven during the first Gulf War.

((I have seen **many sides** of this terrible pandemic, which have also included **positive contributions** and enrichment of host communities, for example by Palestinians, displaced Iraqis in Jordan. And I have been heartened and moved by the compassion and sacrifice of my fellow Jordanians and others in our region who have over the past 60 years reached out to help, even when struggling themselves with limited resources .

On the other hand, these are far outweighed by))

The humanitarian tragedy - the devastating impact on individuals, families and entire communities that all of these refugee flows reflect. The destruction of lives and hopes, the psychosocial trauma, the economic, social and political marginalization of the displaced. The pressure on scarce resources and the resulting instability that these influxes can create in host countries.

The Iraqi displacement offers a case study of all these challenges. The first is **scale**: Iraq presents the **fastest growing refugee crisis in the world**. Since the conflict began, almost 5 million people -- 1 in 5 Iraqis - have been displaced. History shows that these mass migrations pose a serious threat to regional stability, as in Palestine, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan and West Africa. This danger is more evident than ever in the Middle East. Syria, Jordan and their neighbors are simply not equipped to meet the needs of all those arriving.

The second is **sufficient aid to host countries**: 80% of refugees end up in neighboring countries within their own region - primarily Syria and Jordan in this case. Syria is struggling with the impact of 1.5 million Iraqis. Jordan's population has increased by 10%, putting an **enormous strain on already stretched public services, limited resources, and fragile infrastructure**. Asylum countries **struggle to provide adequate care**, and many have started imposing drastic entry restrictions, with some **even deporting Iraqis back to Iraq**.

All this emphasizes the third challenge: **stepping up resettlement, to share responsibility for refugees' well-being**. But in 2007, fewer than 1% of the world's refugees were resettled - including just 1,608 Iraqis accepted by the United States, significantly less than its promise of 7,000. This year's commitment of 12,000 by end September has only reached 4,700. Overall, **less than 1% of Iraqi refugees are in industrialized countries**.

After a brief decline, **violence in Iraq has increased** this year. We all must support the Iraqi government in providing **a secure environment that will allow their citizens to voluntarily return home** as soon as possible. Until

then, given their central role in the Iraq conflict as well as resources available, the U.S., Great Britain and other Western countries have a moral duty to **dramatically increase resettlement**. This will help assure the Iraqis' "right to life, liberty and security of person" enshrined in the Human Rights Declaration.

The scale and duration of this humanitarian emergency **requires a renewed commitment of international support** to fund the UNHCR, its NGO partners and other organizations in their critical relief work. Yet the UNHCR **now faces a dire funding shortfall** that threatens to curtail its programs through the end of the year, despite new Iraqi funding and nearly \$200 million from the U.S. **We can not let this happen**. Donors must increase their support commensurate to this growing crisis.

Finally, the majority of Iraqi displaced have settled in Damascus, Amman and Cairo - large urban centers - reflecting a **global trend of increasing numbers of refugees and the displaced struggling to survive among the underclass in cities** in the developing world. ((We see this with Afghans in Pakistan, Burmese refugees in Thailand, and Zimbabweans and others in the cities of South Africa.))

RI is highlighting this trend and, as Joel Charney our VP will no doubt emphasize here, - the pressing need for the international community, for UNHCR and its partners, to creatively address this particularly challenging, developing phenomenon.

It is difficult in the urban context for aid organizations to identify and reach the displaced, requiring us to rethink traditional approaches to delivering services. In Jordan, prior to last year, most assistance organizations were able to identify and serve only **a few beneficiaries**, as Iraqi refugees remained housebound - unable to work, uncertain of their legal status, and fearful of deportation.

The Noor Al Hussein Foundation, the regional NGO that I established more than 20 years ago, **has partnered with the American NGO International Relief and Development (IRD) and the Jordanian Red Crescent** to implement programs funded by UNHCR and the U.S. State Department, that provide healthcare services to thousands of Iraqis living in Jordan.

Healthcare is a preeminent need for Iraqi refugees, who suffer disproportionately from psycho-social and medical problems. But the fears that kept them housebound also kept Amman's refugee clinics **operating below capacity**. Our program trained 200 **Iraqi volunteers** to provide basic health education, screening, and referrals in refugee communities. In less than a year, this team visited over 60,000 displaced Iraqis, generating 26,000 visits to clinics operated by NHF and the Jordanian Red Crescent. Together with other UNHCR

programs, we have dramatically increased healthcare for Iraqis, solving some of the urban challenges they face.

We are fortunate in the Middle East that so many NGOs want to work in our region and are expressing genuine interest in helping the displaced Iraqi community. Unfortunately in some cases access is restricted due to security concerns. To overcome this, we must develop **programs and models that encourage these governments to have confidence** in aid organizations and perceive the real value they offer to local beneficiaries.

Partnering with credible local organizations is one effective way of encouraging communities to welcome NGOs, and to be more effective in your work. Syria, for example, is now letting more organizations work there after positive experiences with initial aid programs.

The Noor Al Hussein Foundation and Jordanian Red Crescent partnerships.

These are all difficult challenges which **require a greater level of cooperation, communication, and sharing of best practices between donors, aid providers and host governments**. I wish you the best of luck over the next three days in your deliberations.

You are an amazing group of people. I admire your strength and perseverance in the face of enormous challenges. The global community needs and honors your vital work. May God be with you all.