

HUMANITARIANS FEAR FOR THE 750,000 CIVILIANS IN WESTERN MOSUL

(Baghdad, 24 January 2017): 100 days after military operations to retake Mosul started, humanitarian partners are expressing deep concern about the plight of the estimated 750,000 civilians who are currently living in the western sections of the city where fighting is expected to start in coming weeks.

"We are relieved that so many people in the eastern sections of Mosul have been able to stay in their homes. We hope that everything is done to protect the hundreds of thousands of people who are across the river in the west. We know that they are at extreme risk and we fear for their lives," said Lise Grande, Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq.

In the contingency plan prepared prior to the onset of the Mosul campaign, humanitarian partners warned that as many as one million civilians may be impacted by the fighting in a worst case scenario. To date, 180,000 people have fled the eastern sections of the city; more than 550,000 civilians have stayed in their homes.

Humanitarian partners have been working as quickly as possible to provide direct life-saving assistance. Nearly 600,000 people have received food, 745,000 people have benefitted from water and sanitation support and 370,000 people have sought medical care. Eighty-five per cent of the people displaced from Mosul are staying in 13 displacement camps and emergency sites constructed by the Government and partners. Ten of these camps are already full of which four are being extended. Seven more are under construction.

"The reports from inside western Mosul are distressing. Humanitarian partners are unable to access these areas but all the evidence points to a sharply deteriorating situation. The prices of basic food and supplies are soaring. Water and electricity are intermittent in neighbourhoods and many families without income are eating only once a day. Others are being forced to burn furniture to stay warm," said Ms. Grande.

"We don't know what will happen in western Mosul but we cannot rule out the possibility of siege-like conditions or a mass exodus. To date, nearly half of all the casualties from Mosul are civilians. It's terrifying to think of the risks families are facing," said Ms. Grande. "They can be killed by booby-traps and in cross-fire and could be used as human shields."

The Iraqi Security Forces have adopted a humanitarian concept of operations putting civilian protection at the centre of their battle plan. Humanitarian partners welcome this approach and renew their collective call on all parties to the conflict to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and ensure they have access to life-saving assistance.

"The world's attention is fixed on the military campaign in Iraq. But once this is over, there will still be a humanitarian crisis. As many as three million Iraqis, maybe even four million depending on what happens in Mosul, Hawiga and Tel Afar may be displaced from their homes as a result of the conflict. These families will need to make crucial choices about how to rebuild and re-establish their lives. And we will need to be here to help them. We hope and trust that the international community will not walk away after Mosul. It would be a mistake — a very big one — if this were to happen. "

Signees:

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Bana Kaloti, Regional Director-Middle East, UNOPS
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Dina Zorba, Country Representative, UN Women
Erfan Ali, Head of Iraq Programme, UN-Habitat
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