The Honorable John F. Kerry  
U.S. Department of State  
Washington, DC 20520  

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to express our grave concerns about the deepening human rights and humanitarian crisis in Iraq. Together, we call for a stronger response from the United States, including a clear, long-term strategy for addressing what could become a protracted situation.

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), an estimated 1.2 million people have been displaced by fighting in western and northern Iraq this year. Seeking safety in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and other areas across the country, this new wave of internally displaced people compounds the challenge of assisting more than a million Iraqis who remain displaced from previous years of violence and other vulnerable populations including 212,000 registered Syrian refugees in Iraq. Also contributing to the crisis are reports of targeted killings and other abuses by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other armed groups, reports of human rights violations by the Iraqi Security Forces and associated groups, and reports of some IDPs being prevented from reaching safer areas, including cases of discrimination against certain minority groups.

The Government of Iraq (GOI) has an obligation to do all that it can to support displaced and vulnerable populations within its borders and resolve issues that impede or prevent the delivery of that assistance. The U.S. can play an influential role in pressing the GOI to live up to that obligation in the near-term, including support for Iraqi civil society organizations that reach underserved areas and encouraging better cooperation with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), while helping the GOI develop more capable, publicly accountable institutions over time. As one United Nations official put it: “The situation is reaching a critical point. As bad as Syria is, the crisis here is growing by day and exceeding the capabilities of the government. Effectively there is no centralized government over all of Iraq now, and in past years, they were already relatively weak (‘A Reignited War Drives Iraqis From Their Homes in Huge Numbers,’ The New York Times, June 29, 2014.)”

Displaced Iraqis—who have primarily sought refuge in the KRI, but are found in locations across the country—face a number of acute needs which are compounded by the extreme heat during the summer months and fuel shortages. With many of the IDPs living in schools, mosques, monasteries, abandoned buildings and other precarious dwellings, the need for safe shelter options is paramount. Cash assistance for basic necessities is also critical as the resources that families fled with dwindle. Furthermore, in the KRI, there is an urgent need to mitigate the impact that large numbers of displaced Iraqis and Syrian refugees are having on host communities, public services, and government structures. Baghdad’s withholding of government salaries and resources related to its ongoing dispute between the KRG has only made the situation worse.

In recent weeks, there have been some positive developments. UN OCHA is officially taking the lead in coordinating actors on the ground. Thanks to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s unprecedented $500 million contribution, the United Nation’s $312 million Strategic Response Plan (SRP) is overfunded. According to UN officials, the funds will be shared by the UNHCR and other UN agencies to assist and protect IDPs inside Iraq, and must be spent by the end of winter. While these developments are welcome, the U.S. and other humanitarian donors remain essential to monitor and respond to assistance gaps and protection challenges, such as helping vulnerable populations in hard-to-reach areas, and to formulate a clear, long-term strategy for Iraq’s peace and development.
Recognizing these challenges and opportunities, we are writing to urge you and the U.S. administration to undertake the necessary diplomatic and assistance efforts to respond to the scale, suffering, and dangers represented by this growing crisis.

In particular, we recommend a stronger long-term U.S. response that includes:

- A scale-up of immediate, direct humanitarian engagement in Iraq, including the KRI, to ensure that the U.S. government play a much greater role in addressing the urgent humanitarian and protection needs of vulnerable Iraqis, including those displaced by the escalation in hostilities in Anbar and northwestern Iraq.
- Ongoing consultations with key stakeholders and monitoring implementation of the UN’s SRP to identify assistance gaps and protection challenges – including delays and problems with access – and ensuring appropriate bi-lateral efforts to address those unmet needs.
- A comprehensive approach to assist Iraqis displaced during different waves of violence, including in Anbar earlier in this year and those who have remained displaced since the war.
- Support to help families and communities hosting displaced people in the KRI.
- Encouragement of the KRG to allow all Iraqis fleeing violence safety in the KRI regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or religious background.
- More robust, longer-term engagement in Iraq’s peace and development through a continued presence of the USAID Mission and support for U.N. work in Iraq. This should include ongoing support for good governance, education, civil society, and conflict management programming. Many of these critical programs could be linked to humanitarian programs designed to help displaced individuals in Iraq.

By taking the actions above and coordinating diplomacy and assistance with the United Nations and allies, we strongly believe that the U.S. government can deliver more effectively on its commitment to assist and protect vulnerable Iraqis, to help other vulnerable populations in Iraq, and to further the long-term development of Iraq and the KRI. We thank you for your dedicated attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Baptists
Alliance for Peacebuilding
Amnesty International USA
Catholic Relief Services
Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce
Church of the Brethren, Office of Public Witness
Church World Service
Community of Christ
EPIC: Education for Peace in Iraq Center
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ
Heartland Alliance International
Human Rights Watch
International Medical Corps
International Orthodox Christian Charities
International Rescue Committee
Iraqi Research Foundation for Analysis and Development
Jubilee Campaign
Life for Relief and Development
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
Mercy Corps
National Council of Churches, USA
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Open Doors USA
Pax Christi International
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Peace Action
The Peace Alliance
Refugees International
Relief International
Save the Children
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Student Peace Alliance
Veterans for Common Sense
Zakat Foundation of America

Cc: Ambassador Samantha Power, United States Mission to the United Nations
Susan Rice, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, White House
Anne C. Richard, Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration, Department of State
Dr. Rajiv Shah, USAID Administrator, Department of State
Nancy E. Lindborg, Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance, USAID

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