Mr. Erik K. Gustafson  
Chair, Iraq Crisis NGO Working Group  
Executive Director, EPIIC: Education for Peace in Iraq Center  
900 2nd Street, NE, Suite 216  
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Mr. Gustafson:

Thank you for your July 30 letter reflecting the concerns of many organizations regarding the deepening human rights and humanitarian crisis in Iraq.

While the United States cannot and should not intervene every time there is a crisis in the world, we are acting now both to protect our own personnel in Iraq and because innocent people are facing violence on a horrific scale. In response to a request from the Government of Iraq, and because we have the unique capabilities to help, we are acting carefully and responsibly to avert a massacre. We have begun conducting humanitarian airdrops of food and water to help these desperate men, women, and children survive. We are also consulting with other countries and the UN which have called for action to address this humanitarian crisis.

The stakes for Iraq’s future could not be clearer. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant’s (ISIL) campaign of terror against the innocent, including Yezidi and Christian minorities, and its gross targeted acts of violence bear all the warning signs of genocide. With a humanitarian crisis unfolding, and the numbers of starving and sick growing daily, there is no time to waste. The United States is committed to helping the people of Iraq as they confront the security and humanitarian challenges stemming from their fight against ISIL.

To take full advantage of our support and unify the country for this fight, the leaders of Iraq must move swiftly to form a fully inclusive government that takes into account the rights, aspirations, and legitimate concerns of its people. We regularly engage with the highest levels of the Iraqi government and the UN to address the complex challenges that a humanitarian crisis of this dimension involves. On August 3, our Ambassador to Iraq Steve Beecroft met with the new President of Iraq Fuad Massum and Gyorgy Busztin, Deputy UN Special Representative to Iraq, to discuss a coordinated approach to the humanitarian situation. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Iraq Brett McGurk meets regularly with political and religious leaders across the spectrum of ideologies and beliefs to better understand the challenges they face and how the United States might provide the best assistance.

To date, in FY 2014, the State Department’s Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) has provided approximately $136 million to partners, both international and non-governmental organizations providing humanitarian assistance to Iraqis both inside Iraq and
throughout the region. These funds have supported education, shelter, health and mental health care protection, livelihoods, and conflict prevention programming in addition to providing life-saving humanitarian assistance. As the crisis has escalated, the United States has committed an additional $14 million in humanitarian assistance to international organization partners working to meet the urgent needs of Iraqi internally displaced persons (IDPs) and conflict victims. This new humanitarian assistance, distributed according to the greatest need, will provide immediate relief by supplying food, shelter, water, sanitation, and medicine for Iraq’s rapidly growing population of internally displaced Iraqis.

The Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID/OFDA) has programmed $2.25 million to several international NGOs working in northern Iraq. These activities will provide humanitarian assistance to IDPs in the form of emergency water sanitation and hygiene support (WASH), shelter materials, and other emergency relief items. USAID/OFDA recently provided $250,000 to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) to enhance the effective coordination of humanitarian assistance for conflict-affected populations. OCHA works to establish information analysis and reporting, support UN humanitarian country team needs through technical assistance, and deploy coordination staff to governorates hosting numerous IDPs in order to support financial prioritization and advocacy efforts. USAID/OFDA also provided $1 million to UNICEF to support IDPs in Iraq’s Kurdistan Region with emergency relief item distributions, child protection activities, and WASH assistance.

USAID has also adjusted the activities of its existing development project in Iraq to respond to the current situation with a focus on assisting IDPs and other vulnerable groups throughout the country, including the Ninewa Plains. PRM and USAID’s implementing partners are working through the UN, local Iraqi and international NGOs, community groups, and religious leaders to provide humanitarian assistance to IDPs. Our partners provide information on benefits and compensation available to IDPs and work to ensure IDPs register with both the Government of Iraq and international aid agencies. They also work with local and provincial governments throughout the country to help coordinate a response to the influx of IDPs. USAID’s workforce development project will help IDPs and other vulnerable groups to find day labor jobs through its mobile phone job matching service, which allows job seekers to search for jobs using text messages on their cell phones.

Thank you for your work on this crucial issue and for your strong advocacy for the most vulnerable. We look forward to continuing work with your team as we endeavor to end suffering and bring hope to the people of Iraq.

Sincerely,

John F. Kerry