

March 4, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

We, the undersigned 43 U.S. organizations, represent concerned Americans and thousands of individuals who are committed to providing the people of Iraq with effective humanitarian and development assistance. At this critical juncture, the United States must continue to strongly engage Iraqis in the recovery, rebuilding and renewal of their country.

We ask you to ensure that the U.S. government delivers more effectively on its commitment to assist and protect vulnerable Iraqis, and to further the long-term development of Iraq, by mandating civilian agencies to take the lead in formulating and implementing an effective humanitarian and development strategy.

Decades of conflict and neglect have taken a heavy toll on Iraqi society, basic services and economic development. Millions of Iraqis remain displaced and millions more are vulnerable. While we welcome improvements in security and humanitarian conditions, these gains are fragile and reversible, and some areas in Iraq remain very dangerous. As a result, many displaced Iraqis are unable to return to their homes safely, voluntarily and sustainably.

For years, the U.S. non-profit community has engaged in a community-based effort – funded mainly by USAID – to improve conditions in Iraq through time-tested, long-term development techniques. These programs succeed because they build upon the strengths of communities, and because they have an inherently Iraqi face. While these efforts have not been spotlighted as much as military and for-profit reconstruction efforts, they are among the few U.S.-sponsored development programs in Iraq that have largely accomplished their goal. In Hard Lessons, Special Investigator General for Iraq Reconstruction, Stuart Bowen, says that “through interventions large and small, in places from community halls to main street businesses, [community-based economic development programs] continued to reinforce democratic processes, build capacity, and spur commerce in more than a hundred neighborhoods across Iraq.”

We applaud your commitment to strengthen humanitarian and development assistance in Iraq and the region. To maximize the effectiveness of this assistance and improve Iraq’s long-term prospects, **we urge you to ask Secretary Clinton to lead an inter-agency effort to develop a comprehensive strategy – with clear objectives and measurable indicators of success – for our continued humanitarian, recovery and development response in Iraq and for helping the many Iraqi refugees and their host communities in neighboring countries and to report publicly on progress toward these goals.** Thorough consultations would include the Government of Iraq, regional countries, the United Nations, major donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and most importantly, vulnerable Iraqis.

This strategy must include:

- **Goals that allow for measurement of progress toward humanitarian and development objectives**—and should take into account the long-term nature of the development progress. There should be clear plans to transition programs from immediate humanitarian assistance to recovery and then longer term development programs. Community-based programming should be leveraged to build local capacity and promote ownership by Iraqis.
- **Assistance inside Iraq, with an emphasis on creating the type of economic, social, humanitarian and governance conditions that would allow for the safe, voluntary and sustainable return of the displaced.** There needs to be robust progress on providing basic services such as water and sanitation, education, and healthcare. Economic recovery is vital for creating jobs and stability. Special attention needs to be paid to especially vulnerable Iraqis including internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, returnees, women, children and youth, people with disabilities, and religious and ethnic minorities. The U.S. government would work with the Iraqi government to enable it to spend more of its resources on vulnerable Iraqis inside Iraq and in the region.
- **Aid for Iraqi refugees in neighboring countries and for the communities hosting them.**
- **A commitment to resettlement in the United States for the most vulnerable Iraqi refugees.** Refugee resettlement is an essential tool to protect the most vulnerable Iraqi refugees and to share the burden of hosting them. In that regard, we urge you to commit to accepting 50% of the Iraqi refugees who UNHCR identifies as in need of resettlement. We would also recommend that the federal agencies involved in the resettlement process, including the Department of State, Department of Homeland Security and the Office of Refugee Resettlement are well-coordinated and adequately funded to ensure a smooth and efficient resettlement process.
- **An adequate budget to support the formulation and implementation** of the strategy.

The task of responding to the humanitarian and development challenges in Iraq is daunting. Yet we are confident that strong executive leadership, in partnership with the Congress, can ensure that the U.S. meets its responsibility to Iraq's civilians, and in doing so ensure a better future for Iraq and the region. As agencies that have been working in and around Iraq for many years, we stand ready to assist you and your administration in developing and implementing a comprehensive response for Iraqi humanitarian relief, recovery and development.

Sincerely,



1. 3D Security Initiative



2. Alliance of Baptists



3. American's Development Foundation



4. Arab American and Chaldean Council



5. The Center for Victims of Torture



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE
Immigration and Refugee Program

6. Church World Service

7. Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict



8. Catholic Relief Services 

9. Chaldean Federation of America



10. Chaldean Assyrian Syriac Council of America

11. Church of the Brethren Witness



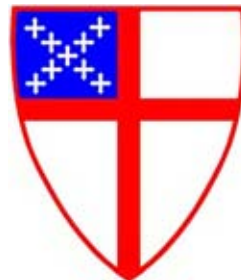
12. CHF International



13. EPIC: Promoting a Free & Secure Iraq



14. The Episcopal Church



15. Ethiopian Community Development Council



16. Friends Committee on National Legislation



17. Global Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ



18. Kurdish Human Rights Watch



19. Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights



20. Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society



21. International Medical Corps



22. International Relief and Development



23. International Rescue Committee



24. Jubilee Campaign USA



25. Life for Relief and Development



26. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service





27. Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns



28. Mennonite Central Committee, Washington Office



29. Mercy Corps



30. National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA



31. NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby



32. North American Dominican Justice Promoters



33. Pax Christi USA: National Catholic Peace Movement



34. Peace Action & Peace Action Education Fund



35. Presbyterian Church (USA), Washington Office

36. Refugees International



37. Relief International



38. Save the Children US





39. United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

40. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)

41. Veterans for Common Sense



42. Women's Refugee Commission



43. Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations



44. World Relief **WORLD RELIEF**

CC: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton
Secretary of Defense Robert Gates
General Jim Jones