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July 3, 2008

The Honorable John Negroponte
Deputy Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Thank you so much for meeting with me and my colleagues* to discuss our proposals for doing more to help displaced Iraqis. Approximately five million Iraqis are displaced—about 20% of Iraq's population. Despite some signs that security and governance are improving in Iraq, most of the displaced aren't yet confident enough of the changes to go home. The longer they remain displaced, the more vulnerable they become as their resources run out. There is an urgent need for a comprehensive program to protect displaced Iraqis, and the United States must take the lead in launching that effort. Bold American action is the only way to stimulate a more robust international and regional response.

More assertive American leadership will ease human suffering among displaced Iraqis, reduce strains on host countries, inspire other countries to offer more help, and demonstrate American compassion for innocent victims of sectarian and political violence in Iraq. By tradition the United States has stood in the forefront of nations around the world in caring for those displaced by war and turmoil. Those who suffer as a consequence of violence in Iraq demand our special attention.

To make the case differently, we face two problems – first, the urgency of dealing with Iraqis whose association with us or whose domestic vulnerability has or will drive them beyond Iraq's borders. We must act here. The second is the broader issue of displacement in Iraq which is at heart an Iraqi responsibility but where we have an important interest.

As agreed, I am writing to recap our proposal for bolder American leadership in resolving the humanitarian and security strains of displacement. Our program has two parts, increased resettlement opportunities for the most vulnerable refugees and increased assistance to countries hosting over two million Iraqi refugees.

Increased Resettlement

While the U.S. seems on the way to achieving its goal of resettling 12,000 Iraqi refugees here in the current fiscal year, the needs are much greater. *We ask the U.S. to reconsider resettling 105,500 Iraqis in fiscal 2009 and, if necessary, for the next few years.*

Here is how we calculated that resettlement need:

1. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that 88,000 Iraqi refugees need immediate protection through resettlement next year. The U.S. generally resettles 50% of all refugees resettled in the world each year, bringing in the U.S. share to**44,000**
2. Palestinian refugees living in desperate conditions on the Iraqi – Syrian border need immediate protection through resettlement..... **3,000**
3. The most recently available figures show that the State Department is currently processing 7,000 petitions to bring families averaging three people each to the U.S. to join with Iraqis who have already resettled in the U.S.....**21,000**
4. The Iraqi Refugees in Crisis Act calls for admitting 5,000 Iraqis who worked for the U.S. a year for five years. Most of these have left or are in the process of leaving the country and face an urgent need of assistance and protection as their resources run out. Therefore, we propose that this group be resettled within two years. Assuming that each brings 2 family members, we estimate that this group totals 75,000 for a yearly take of**37, 500**

We realize that it is difficult to process resettlement applications in Syria, which hosts the largest number of Iraqi refugees, and in Iraq. Therefore, we urge the Department to consider imaginative solutions to this problem, including those already proposed by Foreign Service Officers, such as processing Iraqis at a U.S. base in the region or even further away. In the past the U.S. has moved large numbers of refugees to Guam or even to the continental U.S. for processing.

The U.S. is legitimately concerned about a “brain drain” of educated Iraqis needed to rebuild their country. However, this group of people has already left—or is in the process of leaving--the country. Helping them and their families find security and safety would increase their allegiance to the U.S. cause in Iraq and the chances of eventual return.

Increased Assistance to Host Countries

Even the proposed 9-fold increase in resettlement won't help more than a fraction of the five million displaced Iraqis. Most refugees will remain in Syria, Jordan, and other sanctuary countries, where they are facing increased food and fuel prices. They are also placing burdens on local school and medical facilities, if they can get access. *We recommend that the U.S. commit \$1.35 billion a year to help meet the basic needs of Iraqis in sanctuary countries as long as the refugee population stays at the current level.*

Ambassador Foley has testified that cost of offsetting increased spending on social services for Iraqis in host countries comes annually to\$900 million.

The annual cost of supporting the UN, other international organizations and the non-government organizations they contract with is between \$800 million and \$900 million a year, according to U.S. estimates. To show leadership that will encourage other contributions, we are asking the U.S. to pay half of this, or up to\$450 million.

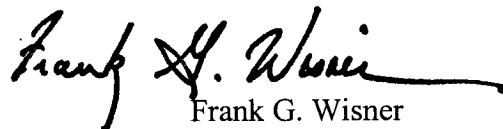
We realize that our proposal will require more money than currently appropriated. As I mentioned in our meeting, we are prepared to work with you to secure the funding necessary to respond to the growing needs of displaced Iraqis.

As we discussed in our meeting, the 2.7 million Iraqis displaced within their country also need protection, including food aid and laws that guarantee property restitution or compensation. The Iraqi government is responsible for assisting its internally displaced population.

I know that our proposal is daunting, but so is the problem. The current U.S. resettlement and assistance goals are a good start, but they don't go far enough. The U.S. has an opportunity to help resolve a difficult humanitarian problem that threatens the stability of an entire region. Dealing successfully with the Iraqi displacement challenge will demonstrate America's dedication to protecting the most vulnerable and our commitment to peace and security in the region. It is a moment for America to lead by vision and example..

Thanks again to you, Under Secretary Dobriansky, Ambassador Foley, and the rest of your team for meeting with us and for considering a more comprehensive approach to the Iraqi displacement problem. We all hope for a stable Iraq that will attract its citizens home. But today, as Ambassador Foley reported at our meeting, "the situation is becoming more precarious" for many Iraqi refugees. They need assistance and protection now, and our program must expand to meet their needs.

Sincerely,


Frank G. Wisner

* Representatives from the following organizations joined me at the meeting and helped develop this proposal: the Episcopal Church, the International Rescue Committee, the List Project to Resettle Iraqi Allies, Refugee Council USA, Refugees International, and U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.